COLORADO
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Ducks Unlimited	
Name of Water Project	San Luis Creek Watershed Restoration Project	
Grant Request Amount		**$185,000.00**
Primary Category		$185,000.00
Watershed Health & Recreation		
Total Applicant Match		**$0.00**
Applicant Cash Match		$0.00
Applicant In-Kind Match		$0.00
Total Other Sources of Funding		**$185,486.00**
U.S. Fish and Wildlife		$185,486.00
Total Project Cost		**$370,486.00**

Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: Ducks Unlimited
Mailing Address: 2114 Midpoint Dr. Suite 1 Fort Collins CO 80525

Organization Contact: Katharine Cody
Position/Title: Biologist
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Organization Contact - Alternate: John Denton
Position/Title: Colorado Manager of Conservation Programs
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Grant Management Contact: Katharine Cody
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Phone: (970) 218-4167
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Grant Management Contact - Alternate: John Denton
Position/Title: Colorado Manager of Conservation Programs
Phone: (308) 258-4682
Email: jdenton@ducks.org

Description of Grantee/Applicant

Wetland conservation and restoration agency

Type of Eligible Entity

- ☐ Public (Government)
- ☐ Public (District)

- [ ] Public (Municipality)
- [ ] Ditch Company
- [ ] Private Incorporated
- [ ] Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- [x] Non-governmental Organization
- [ ] Covered Entity
- [ ] Other

Category of Water Project

- [ ] Agricultural Projects
  Developing communications materials that specifically work with and educate the agricultural community on headwater restoration, identifying the state of the science of this type of work to assist agricultural users among others.
- [ ] Conservation & Land Use Planning
  Activities and projects that implement long-term strategies for conservation, land use, and drought planning.
- [ ] Engagement & Innovation Activities
  Activities and projects that support water education, outreach, and innovation efforts. Please fill out the Supplemental Application on the website.
- [x] Watershed Restoration & Recreation
  Projects that promote watershed health, environmental health, and recreation.
- [ ] Water Storage & Supply
  Projects that facilitate the development of additional storage, artificial aquifer recharge, and dredging existing reservoirs to restore the reservoirs' full decreed capacity and Multi-beneficial projects and those projects identified in basin implementation plans to address the water supply and demand gap.

Location of Water Project

Latitude	38.343130
Longitude	-106.018680
Lat Long Flag	Other: Coordinates based on other boundaries or locations
Water Source	San Luis Creek
Basins	Rio Grande
Counties	Saguache
Districts	25-San Luis Creek

Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type	Environmental
Type of Water Project	Design / Engineering
Scheduled Start Date - Design	7/1/2025
Scheduled Start Date - Construction	

Description

The San Luis Creek Watershed Restoration Project (SLCWR) at the north end of the San Luis Valley (SLV) is requesting $185,000 in Water Plan funds to 1) identify and prioritize watershed restoration and enhancement projects on state and private land intersecting with the San Luis Creek and 2) deliver 60% engineering and design plans for the project area (Figure 1). This proposal is a product of over 25 years of local stakeholder conservation and watershed planning, including projects which will improve watershed health and resiliency. Projects will include stream and wet meadow restoration utilizing traditional and low-tech designs, upgrades to road and water delivery infrastructure, fencing and cattle management, and habitat improvements for imperiled

species, including The Gunnison Sage-Grouse (GUSG; federally threatened) and two species of native fish, Rio Grande Sucker (RGS; state endangered), and Rio Grande Chub (RCH; state concern).

Measurable Results

	New Storage Created (acre-feet)
	New Annual Water Supplies Developed or Conserved (acre-feet), Consumptive or Nonconsumptive
	Existing Storage Preserved or Enhanced (acre-feet)
	New Storage Created (acre-feet)
79,200	Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)
	Length of Pipe, Canal Built or Improved (linear feet)
	Efficiency Savings (dollars/year)
	Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)
	Area of Restored or Preserved Habitat (acres)
	Quantity of Water Shared through Alternative Transfer Mechanisms or water sharing agreement (acre-feet)
	Number of Coloradans Impacted by Incorporating Water-Saving Actions into Land Use Planning
	Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity

Other

15 miles of stream within the project area will directly benefit from the work in this proposal, including San Luis Creek and its tributaries; an additional 20 miles of San Luis Creek downstream of the project area will experience indirect benefits and receive improved water flow. We also feel that Coloradoans as a whole benefit when imperiled species benefit, as it helps filter funds into the community and imperiled species act as a catalyst for increased restoration work in areas where the human and wildlife needs intersect. Landowners on a minimum of three parcels will directly benefit, and we expect downstream users to see positive effects as well.

Water Project Justification

Both the Colorado Water Plan (CWP) and the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) describe the need to provide efficient use of Colorado's water while maintaining and sustaining watershed health and agriculture. This proposal is based on combining BIP objectives and identified needs with recommendations outlined in the plans and assessments listed in the 'Related Studies' section of this application. Upon funding of this planning and design application, full development and implementation of this restoration work will target recommendations and needs identified to improve irrigation of wetland and riparian areas along with farm and rangeland within the San Luis Creek watershed in the northern San Luis Valley (SLV), near Poncha Pass. This work will meet multiple actions stated in the CWP including Robust Agriculture, Thriving Watersheds, and Resilient Planning (Chapter 6, CWP) and multiple benefits for watershed resiliency, agriculture, and environmental water needs outlined in the Rio Grande BIP (pages 65-67; sections 4.3.1 Watershed Health and Ecosystem Functions, 4.3.2 Riparian Needs, 4.3.3 Wetland Needs, and 4.3.4 Habitat Needs for Sensitive Species; BIP Volume 2). Three of the five BIP goals will be directly met through activities in this proposal: 1) Healthy watersheds that provide critical ecosystem services, resiliency, improve water quality, and enhance local wildlife habitats, 2) Aquifers with sustainable supplies of groundwater, and 3) Vibrant and resilient agriculture, recreation, municipal, and industrial economies. These goals will be reached through restoration activities which improve watershed health across boundaries, improve wildlife habitat for sensitive species and water tables, and upgrade diversion structures to increase efficiency and effectiveness of irrigation on agricultural and public lands. Strategies employed to develop this project are those recommended in the BIP through outreach to local community members and collaboration amongst partners to meet outlined water management challenges by: 1) implementing diverse and multi-purpose projects, 2) addressing agricultural gaps through increased efficiency and upgrading water storage and other agricultural infrastructure supporting environmental and recreational attributes through habitat conservation and restoration, and 3) meeting potential future gaps (Pages 2-3, BIP Volume 1). Finally, this

project will address declining habitat conditions for wildlife species including the federally threatened and state species of concern [Gunnison Sage-Grouse (GUSG), state species of concern Rio Grande Sucker (RGS), state endangered Rio Grande Chub (RCH)], and many Tier 1 and 2 species listed in the Colorado State Wildlife Action Plan while improving the economic viability of agricultural lands.

Related Studies

The planning effort for this proposal utilized biological assessments completed by the USFS and BLM on land throughout the Poncha Pass area where headwater tributaries to San Luis Creek begin. Given the importance of San Luis Creek to a variety of wildlife, including big game and imperiled species, fish and wildlife conservation planning documents and state and federal conservation strategies were also consulted during planning. The unique collaborative relationships between landowners, agency personnel, and conservation organizations in the Poncha Pass area stems from the formation of the Poncha Pass GUSG Local Working Group (Working Group) in 1998 and this groups' collaborative conservation efforts that span 26 years. The Working Group was instrumental in helping to conserve and protect habitat in the project area, supported the translocation of birds from the Gunnison Basin, helped to promote land use regulations for Saguache County, edited and commented on the GUSG Rangewide Conservation Plan, GUSG federal listing decision and GUSG Recovery Plan, and promoted habitat restoration across agencies and organizations.

Additionally, restoration projects in this watershed will build upon 2022 agreements in the San Luis Creek watershed Sub-Districts to meet the sustainability goal related to the Groundwater Rules and Regulations (Rules). The San Luis Creek Sub-District (SD #4) bought 12 center pivot wells in the San Luis Creek watershed (downstream of the project area) and plan to retire the 1,600 acre/feet adjudicated to these wells to help meet sustainability requirements. Large-scale reduction in pumping in this watershed will have beneficial effects upstream and downstream of these retired circles which themselves will be re-vegetated with potential for stream restoration. Continued work throughout the entire watershed will improve the resiliency of this landscape during drought conditions, potential forest fires, and as the climate continues to change.

The following plans and assessments will guide planning and design of restoration work within the San Luis Creek watershed proposed in this application, and detailed explanations of the connection for each plan and assessment can be found in Appendix D:

1) Gunnison Sage-grouse Conservation Documents
2) The Rio Grand Chub Conservation Strategy (2021) and the Rio Grande Sucker Conservation Strategy (2021)
3) Biological Assessment for Canada Lynx, Wolverine, & Mexican Spotted Owl: Decker Fire Emergency Consultation
4) Poncha Pass Timber Salvage/Sanitation Project: Rio Grande National Forest, Saguache Ranger District and BLM, SLV Field Office Biological Assessment
5) Poncha Villa Landscape Vegetation Treatment Environmental Assessment
6) SLV Wetland and Wildlife Conservation Assessment
7) The SLV Aquatic Habitat Assessment (CWCB Water Plan Grant)

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

No Tax Bill of Rights provided