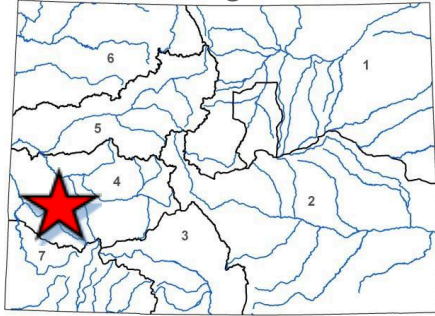




Water Plan Grant Program



LOCATION	
County:	Montrose
Basin:	Gunnison

DETAILS	
Total Project Cost:	\$2,162,850.00
Water Plan Grant Request:	\$1,412,850.00
Recommended Amount:	\$1,412,850.00
Match Commitment:	\$750,000.00
Grant to Match Ratio:	65/35
Project Type:	Other
Primary Project Category:	Agricultural Projects
Measurable Result:	450 acres under Conservation Easement

Colorado West Land Trust (CWLT), a Western Slope Colorado-based non-profit organization focused on conservation, is seeking Colorado Water Plan grant funding to support conservation of three farms as part of a "Buy-Protect-Sell" model in the Uncompahgre Valley.

This project would protect over 450 acres of land across three properties, 'River Farm,' 'Weeks Farm,' and 'Reaksecker Farm,' including 380 irrigated acres and 30 acres of riparian habitat. The conservation easement will protect critical water resources by tying water rights to the land, restoring riparian habitat along the Uncompahgre River, and supporting the next generation of farmers by selling conserved farms at agricultural value. The properties, owned by a multi-generational agricultural family, are at risk of fragmentation, development, and water severance due to the recent passing of the family's senior generation and subsequent sale of land.

This project arises out of the goals of the CWLT Water Protection Plan. The Water Protection Plan responds to the need to protect water resources and ecological health in the Colorado River Basin and Colorado West Slope. It aims to strategically integrate land and water conservation efforts while promoting sustainable resource management practices. The plan helps CWLT efficiently identify and protect critical, water-secure agricultural lands and wildlife habitats, supporting the community and providing long-term benefits. It seeks to increase the speed, size, and impact of conservation efforts by supporting farmers and ranchers, protecting natural habitats, and responding to lower water levels in rivers and streams. It's designed to ensure a resilient and thriving landscape for current and future generations.

This project advances the Colorado Water Plan by preventing "buy and dry" outcomes, preserving senior water rights, keeping land and water in productive agricultural use, and creating opportunities to restore riparian habitat. It aligns with Water Plan Grant criteria by addressing robust agriculture, resilient planning, thriving watersheds, and vibrant communities. This investment also supports the next generation of farmers by making conserved land available at agricultural value, fostering vibrant communities. The innovative "Buy-Protect-Sell" model is designed to be replicable, offering a long-term, scalable solution for water and farm security across Western Colorado. The CWCB awarded Colorado Open Lands a 2024 Water Plan Grant to investigate the feasibility of Buy-Protect-Sell and other financial tools for preserving agricultural land.

Grant dollars would be used to cover the costs associated with conservation easement acquisition and due diligence, including appraisals, environmental reports, title work, legal reviews, baseline reports, mineral reports, closing costs, stewardship fund contributions, and fees for tax credit applications and partner organizations.

Project supporters include Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association, Colorado Open Lands, Gunnison Basin Roundtable, and Trout Unlimited.

Funding Recommendation:

Staff recommends a Water Plan Grant award not to exceed \$1,412,850.00 to Mesa County Land Conservancy Inc. DBA Colorado West Land Trust for the From Risk to Resilience: A New Model for Farm and Water Security in the Gunnison River Basin project.