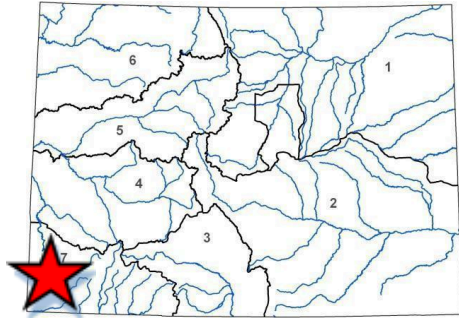




## Water Plan Grant Program



LOCATION	
County:	Montezuma
Basin:	Southwest

DETAILS	
Total Project Cost:	\$3,339,439.00
Water Plan Grant Request:	\$758,419.00
Recommended Amount:	\$0
Match Commitment:	\$2,581,020.00
Grant to Match Ratio:	23/77
Project Type:	Design & Construction
Primary Project Category:	Agriculture
Measurable Result:	8,650 linear feet of pipe improved

The High Desert Conservation District (HDCD, as fiscal agent for the Lower Wilson Ditch Association), is seeking Colorado Water Plan grant funding for the Wilson Ditch Piping Project in McElmo Canyon southwest of Cortez at the head of Sleeping Ute mountain.

Built in 1904, the Lower Wilson Ditch is approximately 5.2 miles long and carries water rights dating back to 1888. The applicant requests funding to upgrade a 1.6 mile section of the open, earthen ditch to pipe.

Currently, the ditch experiences frequent slides, washouts, rockfalls, and excessive vegetative growth, which can cause breaches and service interruptions. Piping the 1.6-mile section would improve water delivery to the 48 member-farmers by eliminating seepage and evaporation and increasing public safety by preventing ditch overtopping and failures.

The project aims to help sustain agricultural production for the Lower Wilson Ditch Association and has potential to add service for the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

Specifically, the project would install 8,650 linear feet of pipe, new diversion and sluice structures, and a Parshall flume to measure diversions. The applicant estimates that they would eliminate seepage losses of approximately 268 acre-feet per year.

The piping project would advance aspects of the Colorado Water Plan by upgrading aging infrastructure and helping agricultural producers with a share in the ditch to more efficiently divert water.

Grant dollars would be used to help fund project design, construction, and environmental compliance. Matching funds have been secured from Reclamation's WaterSMART program and the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The Southwest Basins Roundtable and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (a shareholder in the ditch) provided letters of support for the project.

### Funding Recommendation:

Staff does not recommend High Desert Conservation District be awarded a Water Plan Grant for the Wilson Ditch Piping Project. This application was not as competitive because it did not adequately demonstrate how the maintenance of aging infrastructure was taking an innovative approach or how it would result in multiple public benefits.

**Lower Wilson Ditch Association, LLC • P.O. Box 1073 • Cortez, CO 81321**

September 8, 2025

Colorado Water Conservation Board  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 718  
Denver, CO 80203

Re: Wilson Ditch Piping Project/Colorado Water Plan-Agricultural Projects Grant Application

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We today received word that CWCB staff is not recommending our Wilson Ditch Piping Project to the CWCB board for funding. “Disappointed” does not adequately describe our reaction to this decision, coming, as it does, after three years of effort that yielded over \$2.5M in federal funding for this project – federal funds that will now be left on the table rather than benefiting the farmers and ranchers in one of Colorado’s poorest counties.

“Perplexed” might also be apt, given the stated rationale for staff’s decision. The use of heat-welded HDPE piping for the project would not only have been “innovative,” it might well have been unprecedented for an application of this nature. And as for “multiple public benefits,” we submit that our presentation clearly identified myriad such benefits, not just to our 48 member-irrigators, but also to all the farmers and ranchers in McElmo Canyon, to the riparian environment of McElmo Creek, and to the greater San Juan River and Colorado River ecosystems, thanks in no small part to the 280 AF in annual water savings that would have resulted from the project, as the supporting letters we presented from the Ute Mountain Ute tribe and from the Southwest Basins Roundtable clearly attest.

I will curb my disappointment long enough, however, to close on a personal note. Laura Spann, your Regional Water Plan Grant Manager for the Rio Grande and Southwest, has been a pleasure to work with throughout this multi-year process.

We’re only sorry it all went for naught.

With best regards,

Chuck Greaves

President, Lower Wilson Ditch Association, LLC

cc: Neva Connolly, High Desert Conservation District