



**Colorado Water Conservation Board**

**Water Plan**

**Water Project Summary**

Name of Applicant	Colorado Open Lands	
Name of Water Project	Charting a New Course for Water Smart Land Conservation in the South Platte River Basin	
Grant Request Amount		<b>\$268,788.88</b>
Primary Category		\$268,788.88
	<i>Conservation &amp; Land Use Planning</i>	
Total Applicant Match		<b>\$0.00</b>
	<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>	
	<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>	
Total Other Sources of Funding		<b>\$588,550.02</b>
	<i>Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO)</i>	\$298,000.00
	<i>Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Innovation Grant</i>	\$258,200.00
	<i>CWCB - Small Grant</i>	\$32,350.02
Total Project Cost		<b>\$857,338.90</b>

**Applicant & Grantee Information**

Name of Grantee: Colorado Open Lands		
Mailing Address: 1546 Cole Boulevard Lakewood CO 80401		
FEIN: 840,866,211		
Organization Contact: Carmen Farmer		
Position/Title: Senior Conservation Project Manager	Email: cfarmer@coloradoopenlands.org	
Phone: 970-829-1014		
Organization Contact - Alternate: Dirk Rasmussen		
Position/Title:	Email: drasmussen@coloradoopenlands.org	
Phone: (970) 368-2613		
Grant Management Contact: Carmen Farmer		
Position/Title: Senior Conservation Project Manager	Email: cfarmer@coloradoopenlands.org	
Phone: 970-829-1014		

**Description of Grantee/Applicant**

Colorado Open Lands is one of Colorado's most impactful non-profit land conservation organizations. We are committed to protecting land and water forever.

**Type of Eligible Entity**

- Public (Government)
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- Public (District)
- Public (Municipality)
- Ditch Company
- Private Incorporated
- Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- 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.*
- 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 38.061120  
 Longitude 103.275490  
 Lat Long Flag  
 Water Source  
 Basins South Platte  
 Counties Boulder; Broomfield; Larimer; Weld; Adams; Morgan; Sedgwick; Washington; Logan  
 Districts 4-Big Thompson River; 1-South Platte: Greeley to Balzac; 2-South Platte: Denver Gage to Greeley; 3-Cache La Poudre River; 6-Boulder Creek; 5-St. Vrain Creek; 64-South Platte: Balzac to Stateline

### Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type  
 Type of Water Project Planning  
 Scheduled Start Date - Design 5/1/2024  
 Scheduled Start Date - Construction  
 Description  
 Colorado Open Lands (COL) proposes to engage in holistic planning the South Platte River Basin through the lens of water threats and opportunities. The South Platte River Basin contains the state's best farmland and largest farm economies but is also home to the most rapidly growing county and has the highest water rights values in the state. Traditional conservation easements alone are simply not enough to change the trajectory of

this rapid conversion of irrigated farmland. Additionally, COL's water-focused work in this region has had 4x the conservation easement price tag, relative to our other work, making it imperative that we focus on properties where we can maximize conservation impact. For this planning effort, COL will partner with Colorado West Land Trust (CWLT) to learn from each other's water-focused work across the continental divide and COL will bring together traditionally competing interests in the South Platte Basin (municipal water developers, water conservancy districts serving irrigators, and farmland seekers) with the Colorado Water Trust, to explore new strategies and financing tools that will leverage these interests into collective investment into farmland and water rights that meets multiple users while keeping the economy and ecology of the region intact.

### 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)  
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

No additional measurable results provided

### Water Project Justification

Colorado Open Lands (COL) is developing new financial strategies that will accelerate opportunities to conserve Colorado's most valuable irrigated farmland and make it available to the next generation of young farmers. Irrigated agriculture in Colorado's Northern Front Range faces unprecedented challenges as Colorado's population swells. To accommodate the growth, farms are being dried up and irrigation water is being converted to municipal and industrial uses. Northern Front Range farms are served by the South Platte River Basin, which provides irrigation water for 830,000 acres of farm ground.

The South Platte Basin is one of the United States' most productive breadbaskets. However, its rural economies are beset by multiple challenges. Climate change is driving greater environmental variability, and therefore more financial risk for farmers. State population trends are seeing well-capitalized developers make offers far above agricultural value for farmland. Water stress is driving water utilities to purchase farms solely for their water rights, known as "buy and dry". The Basin's younger generation of Beginning Farmers are willing to inherit the region's agricultural engine and adapt it to meet modern challenges. However, rapidly rising land values prevent many from owning farmland, let alone having the freedom to experiment with climate-smart agricultural practices that will improve long-term economic resilience.

The Colorado Water Plan predicts that 50% of those acres could be dried up and converted by 2050. Developers and water providers have a competitive advantage over both producers and conservation organizations in terms of access to capital when farms are put on the market. Part of this advantage is due to the scale of land and water prices on the Northern Front Range, which are the highest in the Mountain West. Traditional conservation grant funding cannot approach these values and producers cannot secure financing to purchase irrigated farms without conservation. If the status quo is not altered, this will have devastating consequences on the rural communities that depend on this foundation of farm ground for their economies. The Northern Front Range is

home to Colorado’s best soils and contains one of the top 10 producing counties in the country, in Weld County. For that agricultural economy to flourish, it is entirely dependent upon the availability of irrigation water and a pool of next-generation producers.

The recent update to the Colorado Water Plan identifies Collaborative Water Sharing Projects as an important tool to maintain agricultural productivity that also benefits municipal, environmental, and recreational users. Section 2.3 calls for the expansion of the scale of CWSAs in size or amount of water involved, building, and fostering relationships with different interests.

Colorado Open Lands is developing new financial strategies that will accelerate opportunities to conserve Colorado’s most valuable irrigated farmland and make it available to the next generation of young farmers. The core of this financial strategy is the innovative stacking of multiple conservation tools into one financial vehicle: state and federal conservation easement tax incentives, monetization of outcomes from conservation practices and water leasing opportunities, and interests from Beginning Farmers. These tools and interests have never been combined into one strategy, and doing so not only layers the revenue generation needed to allow conservation to “compete” with development dollars, but also results in stacked conservation and agricultural outcomes: permanent protection as agriculture, climate-smart practices, increased stream flows, and affordable farmland available at fair market value. Through the development of a landscape plan, development of a blended funding model, deployment of the “Buy-Protect-Sell” model, Colorado Open Lands intends to scale up the conservation of irrigated lands in the South Platte Basin and ultimately throughout the State.

#### Related Studies

- Saving water to save the farm (2018)
- ATM status report (2016)
- Little Thompson Farm Completion Report
- 2023 Colorado Water Plan Update
- South Platte Basin Roundtable Implementation Plan

#### Taxpayer Bill of Rights

Not Applicable