

**COLORADO**Colorado Water  
Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

## Colorado Water Conservation Board

**Water Plan****Water Project Summary**

Name of Applicant	Blue Elements
Name of Water Project	Watershed Stewards Program
Grant Request Amount	<b>\$380,880.00</b>
Primary Category	\$380,880.00
<i>Engagement &amp; Innovation Activities</i>	
Total Applicant Match	<b>\$95,886.00</b>
<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>	\$47,943.00
<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>	\$47,943.00
Total Other Sources of Funding	<b>\$566,400.00</b>
<i>Serve Colorado/ AmeriCorps</i>	\$168,000.00
<i>GOCO</i>	\$62,400.00
<i>Serve Colorado/ AmeriCorps</i>	\$336,000.00
Total Project Cost	<b>\$1,043,166.00</b>

**Applicant & Grantee Information**

Name of Grantee: Blue Elements	
Mailing Address: 9996 W. US HWY 50 #1009 Salida CO 81201	
Organization Contact: Sheena O'Hara	
Position/Title: Program Director	Email: sheena@blueelements.org
Phone: 970-485-3746	
Organization Contact - Alternate: Emily Loubsky	
Position/Title:	Email: emily@blueelements.org
Phone: 719-214-0574	
Grant Management Contact: Sheena O'Hara	
Position/Title: Program Director	Email: sheena@blueelements.org
Phone: 970-485-3746	
Grant Management Contact - Alternate: Emily Loubsky	
Position/Title:	Email: emily@blueelements.org
Phone: 719-214-0574	

**Description of Grantee/Applicant**

Watershed Stewardship 501(c)3

**Type of Eligible Entity**

- ☐ Public (Government)
- ☐ 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	38.315900
Longitude	-105.592100
Lat Long Flag	County centroid: Coordinates based on centroid of county boundary
Water Source	Arkansas River, Gunnison River, Tomichi Creek, Rio Grande River and San Juan River
Basins	Arkansas; Southwest; Rio Grande; Gunnison
Counties	Archuleta; Chaffee; Gunnison; Lake; Rio Grande
Districts	20-Rio Grande; 11-Arkansas: Headwaters to Salida; 28-Tomichi Creek; 29-San Juan River Basin

### Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type

Type of Water Project                      Capacity Building

Scheduled Start Date - Design              1/1/2026

Scheduled Start Date - Construction

Description

The Watershed Stewards AmeriCorps Program is designed to foster a skilled and diverse incoming water workforce through professional pathway internship opportunities. These AmeriCorps members serve with capacity limited water-focused organizations. The Watershed Stewards Program has three elements:

Watershed Education Team

Watershed Stewardship Team

Water Quality Monitoring Team

Blue Elements has secured funding from Serve Colorado/AmeriCorps for the Watershed Stewards Program. This funds the AmeriCorps members' living allowance (pay) at a meager amount of \$1587 per month. At this rate it is difficult to attract and retain qualified individuals for these service opportunities, as the cost of living in the Arkansas Valley is prohibitively high. Funding from the Colorado Water Plan Grant is urgently needed to supplement that funding and will directly provide each member a housing allowance of \$600 per month. Additional funding in the amount of \$1000 per member will directly support a week-long technical training intensive in watershed health, facilitated by Western Colorado University and Coldharbour Institute.

This funding will support the recruitment, training, and retention of incoming water professionals over a three year period.

### 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  
 1,500 Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity

Other

Annually, at least 14 AmeriCorps members will serve at least 10 rural water-focused organizations, will provide 17,000 hours of service in support of watershed stewardship, and will participate in at least 2,000 hours of professional development. Members will provide water education to at least 1,500 youth and adults, complete at least 5 river restoration projects, and support water monitoring of over 15 sites.

### Water Project Justification

The Watershed Stewards Program directly addresses key elements outlined in the Colorado Water Plan and Arkansas, Gunnison, Rio Grande and Southwest Basin Implementation Plans.

Aligning with the water values guiding the Colorado Water Plan, the Watershed Stewards Program places 14 AmeriCorps members in internship positions supporting vibrant communities and recreation and tourism initiatives. Through educational outreach, youth and community engagement the program directly encourages an informed public. By engaging with schools which serve diverse populations, the Watershed Stewards Program acknowledges the need for embracing equity, diversity and inclusivity in education and engagement projects. The program empowers residents to participate in community stewardship events and engage with local watershed groups, thereby fostering collaboration across sectors and communities. Through water quality monitoring, the program provides informed guidance for water management decisions, involves residents in citizen science opportunities, and supports healthy watersheds, rivers, streams and wildlife.

The Watershed Stewards Program supports goals outlined across the Arkansas, Gunnison, Rio Grande and Southwest Basin Implementation Plans, including 1) Agricultural Goals, 2) Environment and Recreational goals,

3) Watershed Health goals and 4) Education, Outreach and Stewardship goals. The Program directly supports the roundtables' Public Education, Participation and Outreach (PEPO) missions through its focus on youth and community education and engagement.

Partnering with Western Colorado University and Coldharbour Institute, each AmeriCorps member will attend a week-long Watershed Health training intensive. The members will choose a module which will best serve their internship service, career paths and interests, choosing from topics such as Water Quality Sampling Techniques and Analysis Plans, Introduction to Wetland Delineation or Low Tech Process Based Restoration Design and Implementation. Additionally, Blue Elements will host an intensive in-house training on River Watch Water Quality monitoring principles and processes. These trainings will provide members with solid technical experiential training opportunities for greater success in their internships, as well as providing them with a more competitive edge as they enter the job market. Funding from the Colorado Water Plan Grant will directly support these training opportunities.

Funding from the Colorado Water Plan contributes to the long term success of the Watershed Stewards Program through the retention of qualified applicants by providing AmeriCorps members with a more reasonable wage allowance. AmeriCorps funding alone amounts to compensation of \$11.90/ hour, which is below Colorado's minimum wage of \$14.81/ hour. Funding from the Colorado Water Plan in the amount of \$600/member/month as housing stipend support brings the combined compensation to a more reasonable wage of \$16.40/ hour for these internships.

#### Related Studies

Critical findings from the American Water Works Association's (AWWA) State of the Water Industry '22 identify key workforce challenges within the water sector, ranking from the aging water workforce as the fourth most critical issue to talent attraction and retention as the eleventh. These findings underscore the urgent need to address workforce gaps and develop strategies for attracting and retaining talent in the water industry. The research indicates that issues such as staffing shortages, a lack of qualified candidates, limited educational opportunities, low pay, the need to advance diversity, and the challenge of attracting young professionals are prevalent concerns among industry participants (AWWA 2022, State of the Water Industry '22).

A primary objective of the Watershed Stewards Program is to eliminate the "barriers to entry" faced by underrepresented individuals when seeking professional opportunities in the water sector. The Watershed Stewards Program works to increase inclusivity and equity within the water field. The program does this by creating professional career pathway internships in the water field for diverse and historically excluded individuals, and by creating opportunities for previously excluded communities to engage in discourse, decision making, and stewardship of our water resources.

#### Taxpayer Bill of Rights

No Tax Bill of Rights provided