



COLORADO

Colorado Water
Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Colorado Ag Water Alliance
Name of Water Project	Del Monte Ditch Diversion and Headgate Improvements
Grant Request Amount	\$50,000.00
Primary Category	\$50,000.00
<i>Agricultural Projects</i>	
Total Applicant Match	\$15,883.20
<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>	\$8,683.20
<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>	\$7,200.00
Total Other Sources of Funding	\$50,000.00
<i>Chaffe County Common Ground</i>	\$50,000.00
Total Project Cost	\$115,883.20

Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: Colorado Ag Water Alliance
Mailing Address: 10440 W Fair Unit C Littleton CO 80127

Organization Contact: Abby Hutchinson
Position/Title: Email: hutchsalida@gmail.com
Phone:

Grant Management Contact: Abby Hutchinson
Position/Title: Email: hutchsalida@gmail.com
Phone:

Description of Grantee/Applicant

Association of agricultural organization focused on education and outreach. Our mission is to support and preserve irrigated agriculture

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 38.518552
Longitude -106.045092
Lat Long Flag
Water Source Poncha Creek
Basins Arkansas
Counties Chaffee
Districts

Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type Agricultural
Type of Water Project Construction / Implementation
Scheduled Start Date - Design 11/1/2025
Scheduled Start Date - Construction 11/1/2025
Description
Hutchinson Ranch is the applicant. Not CAWA

The Del Monte Ditch improvement project aims to repair and replace deteriorating irrigation infrastructure and address serious erosion issues on Poncha Creek. The ditch is only able to divert a portion of its water right and cannot irrigate all the acreage under the decree. The structure itself is unsafe. Historically, the ditch has created “push-up” dams on the creek to divert water. There is significant erosion of the creek around the point of diversion. This project will involve two components: (1) new headgate, wastegate, pipeline, and return structure for the ditch, and (2) the construction of a rock cross vane in Poncha Creek to reduce erosion and no longer need a push-up dam for diversions.

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)
700	Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)
104.00	Length of Pipe, Canal Built or Improved (linear feet)
	Efficiency Savings (dollars/year)
	Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)
100	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

The diversion structure on Poncha Creek has not functioned well since flooding in the 1970s destroyed the diversion. For decades the ranch has relied on an inadequate rock structure to divert water from the creek. This results in increased pressure on the waste gate (extra water return), which is failing and leading to increased erosion. With this system, we are only able to access 50% of our water right. The current infrastructure has also introduced sedimentation, further deteriorating the effectiveness of the Del Monte Ditch. Restoration of the Del Monte Ditch diversion and associated structures is vital for maintaining effective irrigation for both local ranches and preserving the environmental integrity of the area. Proper funding and execution of this project will sustain agricultural operations and improve water quality, benefiting all stakeholders involved.

This project supports the following goals in the Arkansas Basin Implementation Plan:

- Support projects within and outside the Arkansas Basin that will help meet the basin's agriculture water supply gap, maintain existing supplies, better manage vulnerable supplies, and maximize use of water users' entitlements
- Sustain a productive agricultural economy in the Arkansas Basin that sustains viable rural, agricultural-based communities
- Sustain recreational and environmental activities that depend on habitat and open space associated with farm and ranch land
- Support projects and programs within and outside the Arkansas Basin that protect E&R water supply needs, and collaborate with municipal and ag users to enhance E&R values
- Maintain or improve aquatic, riparian, and avian habitat (including wetlands) that would support environmental features and recreational opportunities
- Maintain, improve, or restore critical water supply watersheds that could affect Arkansas Basin water uses and E&R values

Agricultural Benefits

This ditch primarily irrigates the Hutchison Ranch, which is permanently protected as working lands and open space through conservation easements held by the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and Central Colorado Conservancy. The ditch runs 3.7 miles from Poncha Creek to the Hutchison Ranch irrigating 75 acres.

The harvested grass is exclusively fed to the ranch's cattle, which are then processed and sold as grass-fed natural beef. Currently, the Hutchison Ranch only utilizes 50% of its decreed water rights due to the deteriorated irrigation structure that results in significant sediment flow into the downstream ditch. Upon completion of our project, we expect to utilize 100% of our water rights, enabling us to return approximately 25 acres to hay production, which are currently not irrigated because the water does not reach these easternmost fields. Sales of cattle and beef remain the primary sources of revenue for the ranch.

Watershed Health and Fire Mitigation

The 700-acre Hutchinson Ranch, located between the towns of Poncha Springs and Salida, plays a critical role in regional forest health and wildfire risk reduction. Known locally as “the only green left between,” the ranch serves as a vital buffer of irrigated and managed open space in an increasingly developed corridor. Its landscape - comprising irrigated hay fields, actively grazed pastures, treated forestlands, and conserved riparian areas along the South Arkansas River - functions as a natural fire break between the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and residential neighborhoods. Through proactive land management practices, including forest thinning, riparian restoration, and rotational grazing, the Hutchinson Ranch enhances ecological resilience while reducing fuel loads and improving wildfire defensibility. Its strategic location along the Methodist/Poncha mountain front makes it a key asset in Chaffee County's wildfire mitigation strategy, helping to slow or stop the spread of wildfires and protect downstream communities.

We work with the Colorado State Forest Service and other agencies to mitigate forest fire potential by clearing and masticating Pinyon Juniper along the Methodist Mountain interface on our lands bordering public lands. This lessens the possibility of fire spreading to nearby housing developments and also improves wildlife habitat along an important wildlife corridor. We also work with local fire authorities and Fire Camp to thin fire fuels along our ditches and section of the South Arkansas River.

With regards to the Chaffee County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, we have collaborated with local forest agencies and nonprofit forest organizations to reduce fire fuels and protect the urban/wild interface. We have also provided a site for forest health work, training and education. The land directly irrigated by the Del Monte Ditch lies in the wildfire risk area of potential high loss, WUI high density, and higher treatment priority. Beyond the ranch itself, seepage from our irrigation water along the path of the Del Monte Ditch also creates wet green space through an additional conservation easement held by CCC and Lillian Bender, and between two residential neighborhoods - Little River Ranch and The Canyons.

Environmental and Recreational Benefits

The Hutchinson Ranch regularly hosts public events and nonprofit fundraisers on land immediately adjacent to fields irrigated by the ditch. These green, open spaces, made possible through consistent irrigation, provide a scenic and functional setting for community gatherings, enhancing the public's connection to working lands and rural heritage. The ranch hosts Guidestone Colorado and the Children's Discovery Ranch. Guidestone Colorado provides programs for the public to learn about agriculture and food systems, and also serves to connect aspiring and current farmers to agricultural properties. The Children's Discovery Ranch is a preschool and childcare program serving children and families in the area, connecting them to agriculture and the natural world.

Upon completion of the proposed project, additional recreational benefits will include reduced erosion in the Poncha Creek riparian corridor and improved instream flows. These outcomes will enhance the ecological health of Poncha Creek and, downstream, the South Arkansas and Arkansas Rivers. Both tributaries provide critical spawning and rearing habitat for fish species, supporting the health of local fisheries. Overall, less water should be diverted from the mainstem of the creek so there be more water regularly in the mainstem for a distance of several hundred feet, the distance between the diversion and trash gate water return.

Given the popularity of fly fishing in the South Arkansas and Arkansas Rivers, improvements to water quality and aquatic habitat directly benefit a key recreational economy in the region. The project thus supports both passive recreation—such as community events in irrigated fields—and active recreation, including fishing and wildlife viewing, by contributing to the overall health of the watershed.

The Hutchinson Ranch and Del Monte Ditch border the north end of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain range and together create vital wildlife corridors to facilitate safe movement for animals that traverse the landscape from

Bear Creek to Poncha Pass, connecting the Upper Arkansas River watershed with the San Luis Valley. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) game warden Tyler Kersey, the four mile stretch of the Del Monte Ditch is particularly crucial as a water source for wildlife during the months of late March through November. Not only does it provide essential hydration, but the surrounding vegetative corridor offers animals shelter and a habitat rich in food sources. This combination of water access and protective cover significantly enhances the survival and well-being of diverse wildlife populations in the area. The Hutchison Ranch has assisted on many levels of wildlife management with CPW and the University of Colorado - monitoring mountain lions, providing habitat for many species, and counting wildlife populations.

The Hutchinson Ranch and Del Monte Ditch are situated in the highest percentile area for Wildlife Habitat Value on the Chaffee County Planning for Wildlife Map. Conserving and protecting these wildlife corridors is essential to maintaining the natural balance and biodiversity of the region. Increasing the functionality and maintenance of the Del Monte will help sustain the health of ecosystems and support the wildlife that depend on them.

Related Studies

No Related Studies provided

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

NA