

News Release

May 14, 2018

21 Organizations across the San Luis Valley receive grants to enhance conservation, community and livability in the valley

Alamosa, CO – The San Luis Valley Conservation Fund (SLVCF), a partnership between Colorado Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, Western Rivers Conservancy and the LOR Foundation, announced its third round of grant awards for organizations working in Colorado’s San Luis Valley.

A total of \$540,000 was awarded by the SLVCF this week to bolster conservation efforts within the valley and to help preserve the region’s rich cultural heritage while enhancing livability for local communities.

A total of 21 organizations received grants that ranged from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

“There is great work being done by the organizations and communities in the San Luis Valley, and the most recent round of grants from the SLVCF will only strengthen that work, maintaining the rich culture and natural beauty of this region for future generations,” said Jake Caldwell, Program Officer at the LOR Foundation. “We are proud that we are able to make these grants to 21 different local organizations in partnership with Colorado Open Lands, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust and Western Rivers Conservancy.”

The SLVCF was established in 2015 through a grant from the LOR Foundation, the group’s collaborative funding partner. Part of that grant established the San Luis Valley Conservation and Connection Initiative, a \$2-million re-granting program to increase the capacity of organizations throughout the valley. To date the SLVCF has made strategic investments in land conservation, recreational improvements, youth engagement, and water rights protection, especially culturally important acequia ditch systems.

This is the SLVCF’s third round of grants, bringing the total awarded to San Luis Valley organizations to \$1.5 million. Through this year’s grants alone, the 21 organizations were also able to generate over \$1.6 million in project matching funds.

The partners’ efforts are focused on the Rio Grande and the open space surrounding and dependent upon the river and its tributaries. The Rio Grande provides crucial habitat for fish and wildlife, including pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, over 200 bird species and 95 percent of the Rocky Mountains’ greater sandhill crane population.

The Rio Grande and its tributaries sustain the working ranches and farms that form the base of the region's agricultural economy. They are also the primary source of water for the valley's historic acequias, a system of communal irrigation in the southern portion of the valley that predates Colorado's statehood and has connected local communities for generations.

The Rio Grande also provides some of the best recreation opportunities for people throughout the San Luis Valley.

With the support of the LOR Foundation, COL, RiGHT and WRC are working together to help preserve the valley's rich heritage, balancing agricultural needs with conservation and recreation along and around the Rio Grande.

San Luis Valley Conservation and Connection Initiative Grants

This month, the SLVCF awarded grants to the following organizations:

Alpine Achievers Initiative (AAI), Backyard to Backcountry Program (B2B) – \$30,000

B2B programs provide free, age-appropriate environmental education programming that promotes leadership, problem solving, teamwork, self-reliance and other life skills. AAI works with San Luis Valley schools to offer B2B programs while supporting existing organizations to enhance developed programs. B2B programs are offered during school, after school, on weekends, during breaks and over the summer.

Colorado Rio Grande Restoration Foundation, 2018 Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) - Capacity and Stream Management Plan Development – \$50,000

Diverse stakeholders across the Rio Grande Basin have gathered to complete stream management plans (SMP) on priority rivers in order to plan for environmental, recreational and waters supply needs for future generations. The award will support the SMP process and staff resources needed to complete a diverse range of projects that will improve the health of the Rio Grande and key tributaries.

Conejos Clean Water, Preserving Community: Sustaining Community Engagement and Construction of Facilities for Promotion –\$30,000

This project will sustain programs that CCW has developed to enhance livability and health of San Luis Valley communities, especially through outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities for valley youth and families; additional preservation of local communities and their rich cultural heritage; and conservation of valley land and water through sustainable natural resource management practices.

Conservation Legacy, San Luis Valley Youth Camping Conservation Stewardship Program – \$25,000

In 2018, the SCC-LV will offer six camping weeks, adding one week to each of the six four-week day crew sessions. Each session engages eight local youth working as a team with two adult crew leads to complete important local conservation projects.

Costilla County Conservancy District, Upper Culebra Watershed Planning Project – \$35,000

This project aims to engage stakeholders in an inclusive process to develop a scope of work and prepare an RFP for a watershed assessment of the Culebra Watershed. Stakeholders will determine the needs of the ecological conditions of the area, identify problems, and develop a list of prioritized objectives needed for the assessment.

Costilla County Economic Development Council, Inc., Funding for Project Coordinator – \$12,000
This award will fund the Project Coordinator position, which complements the work of the Hispano Farm Curriculum project by developing a signature exhibit at the Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center on acequias and the Hispano farm. The Coordinator will collaborate with public and private agencies and individuals to enhance collaborative partnerships for CCEDC projects and other projects such as Congreso de las Acequias.

Del Norte Trails Organization, Inc Continuation of Trail System Improvements and Availability – \$15,000
Funding will support trail design layout work and environmental surveys for multi-purpose trails in the Penitente Canyon Recreation Area.

Headwaters Alliance, Building a Model for Stewardship in Creede, Colorado – \$40,000
This project will foster stewardship in new audiences and increase the capacity of the Headwaters Alliance. It will enrich volunteer's experiences of the Upper Rio Grande watershed by providing them with stewardship opportunities and enhancing recreation. It will also help the Headwaters Alliance continue to grow by retaining its staff so that they will keep providing these opportunities.

Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative, RGWCEI Program Support and Partner Building – \$10,000
Funding will support the creation of a connection point between RGWCEI partners and community members, which will provide education and outreach activities, curriculum, and experiences that broaden their understanding of the various missions of these organizations. Through capacity building, RGWCEI will be better able to provide quality programming that impacts San Luis Valley community and enhances partnerships.

Rio Grande Watershed Emergency Action Coordination Team, Upper Rio Grande Infrastructure and Watershed Improvements – \$31,000
This overall project includes three site projects—restroom and watershed improvement at Rio Grande Campground; defined parking and hardened access routes for watering stock at the 30-Mile Stock Unloading area; and new restroom facility and trail restoration at the Ute Creek trailhead.

Running Rivers, Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Recreational Fisheries Survey– \$5,000
In partnership with CPW, this project will monitor remote populations of native Rio Grande Cutthroat trout, as well as gather and share information on connected recreational opportunities. These trout populations are managed specifically for recreation to the public and the information generated by this project will be a tremendous public resource available to all.

San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, Environmental and Regenerative Farming Education at the Rio Grande Farm Park – \$35,000
This award will support RGFP's initiative to enhance its environmental and regenerative farming educational offerings, which help visitors draw connections between the environment, recreation,

and conservation. Park staff will create construction documents for an Education Pavilion and work with many partners to ensure that the plan meets the needs of local youth, families, residents, and other community stakeholders.

San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, Valley Roots Food Hub Regenerative Soil Farmer Project – \$5,000

The project will build on the burgeoning soil health movement in the SLV. This phase will feature participating farmers in a soil health marketing campaign aimed at area restaurants, schools, and other retailers. This will be accomplished by going to participating farms, touring the land, documenting and interviewing the farmer, and constructing the results into an effective marketing campaign.

San Luis Valley Trout Unlimited, Upper Rio Grande Boat Ramp Improvement Projects – \$16,000

This project is one part of a larger effort to upgrade the recreational infrastructure in the Upper Rio Grande for the benefit of the public and the watershed. Through diverse stakeholders and a variety of funding sources, San Luis Valley Trout Unlimited will address needed improvements which were prioritized through the recent URG Watershed Assessment. Sustainability is core to this landscape scale collaboration.

San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, Rio Grande Basin Soil Moisture Probe Project – \$5,000

Funding will support a pilot project for farmers and ranchers to cost-share in the purchase or lease of soil moisture monitoring probes, in an effort to improve irrigation management and reduce water use. The project will pair soil mapping with soil moisture probes, gathering data and real-time weather information that will be available to producers through a web-based platform and smartphone application.

Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association, Developing Strategies for the Sustainability of the Traditional Acequia Culture – \$50,000

The Developing Strategies for the Sustainability of the Acequia Culture will be centered on the practices that were adopted through the Association's ongoing strategic planning process for 2018. This includes employment of the Association's Executive Director, identifying member acequias, and developing training sessions for acequia producers, as well as collaborating with partners to develop needed programs.

SLV Development Resource Group (DRG), San Luis Valley Great Outdoors Capacity – \$50,000

The SLVGO Coalition has become the backbone organization for trails and outdoor recreation in the San Luis Valley. The Coalition set the foundation for the work that the Executive Director is now doing in the SLV Communities. SLVGO has a common agenda for partner organizations established by the Master Plan and is working toward shared partner goals of collective impact.

Walk2Connect, Caminos del Valle Capacity Building – \$13,000

This project is an investment in capacity building and new program development alongside a diverse list of partners for the San Luis Valley's Caminos del Valle connection-focused walking community. The project will support development of meaningful walking events, walking leader training and community outreach throughout the Valley.

Town of Crestone, Eastern San Luis Valley Trails System (ESLVTS) – \$33,000

With this funding, the Town of Crestone will complete several goals, including: finalizing agreements for a trail between Camino Baca Grande and downtown Crestone; completing the BLM Loop Trail; completing an appraisal for a possible land acquisition; implementing RTCA Recommendations; building capacity and sustainability initiative; and partnering with Saguache County on a Safe Routes to School grant application.

Trout Unlimited, Jim Creek Rio Grande Cutthroat Habitat Restoration Project- Phase 2 – \$20,000

The Jim Creek Restoration project is a collaborative community based effort to restore critical habitat to an imperiled population of the native Rio Grande Cutthroat. The project creates opportunities to educate people about native trout and increases the conservation and recreational value of Jim Creek. The project helps ensure that people will be able enjoy native fish on their public lands.

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Sustaining and Growing Our Valley Organizations – \$30,000

As the San Luis Valley grows and evolves, its nonprofit organizations will be challenged to step up their community support. This project offers tools and techniques to sustain current operations and to position organizations for future growth. This will be done through a series of facilitated workshops followed by specific in-depth clinics designed to put the workshop tools to use.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust

Nancy Butler, Executive Director

719-657-0802

nancyb@riograndelandtrust.org

Colorado Open Lands

Judy Lopez, Conservation Project Manager

719-580-5300

jlopez@coloradoopenlands.org

Western Rivers Conservancy

Dieter Erdmann, Interior West Program Director

303-645-4953

derdmann@westernrivers.org

LOR Foundation

Korena Wilson, Media Officer

307-690-0550

korena@lorfoundation.org