



# News Release

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**August 8, 2018**

## **Partnership Conserves 91 Acres and Creates New Recreational Access to the Rio Grande Near Creede**

**CREEDE, Colorado**—Western Rivers Conservancy and the Rio Grande National Forest have successfully conserved 91 acres along the Rio Grande, upstream of Creede near the former Freemon General Store.

WRC transferred the property to the national forest late last month. The lands are now open to the public and will be managed by the U.S. Forest Service for conservation and recreational access.

“Adding these lands to the public trust is a big win,” said Martha Williamson, Divide District ranger. “This stretch of the Rio Grande needed improved public access, and this project delivers exactly that.”

The effort creates new walk-in access to a scenic stretch of the Rio Grande known for its trout fishing, just off the Silver Thread Scenic Byway. It also creates the only legal resting spot for boaters along an otherwise private, eight-mile stretch of the river. This new public land will be managed for day-use access to the river.

As the only public access along this section, the forest service asks the public to respect the adjacent private property. The property abuts the Weminuche Wilderness Area, which is managed in part by the Rio Grande National Forest.

WRC purchased the property in 2016 to conserve the wet-meadows, montane grassland and mixed conifer forest on the ranch while improving access to the Rio Grande.

“The Rio Grande is one of the West’s great natural treasures, and we are proud that we can help reconnect the people of Colorado such an important stream, while notching another important win for the fish and wildlife of the San Luis Valley,” said Dieter Erdmann, WRC’s Interior West program director.

While recreational opportunities can be found along the upper Rio Grande, some stretches, particularly a reach of the river known as “the oxbows,” where the property is located, are difficult or impossible to access due to private property.

Transfer of the property to the national forest improves access for anglers and others and ensures that boaters have a half-mile refuge where they can pull over and put their feet on the banks of the Rio Grande without trespassing.

Funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund made conservation of the Freemon property possible. LWCF was established by Congress in 1964 as a bipartisan effort to safeguard the nation's most important natural areas and to ensure recreational access for all Americans, including anglers, hikers, hunters, boaters, birders and others.

“This project received critical funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund thanks to support from Senator Gardner and Senator Bennet, along with Representative Tipton and others in the Colorado Congressional Delegation,” said Erdmann.

Mineral County was an important supporter of the project, as was The Conservation Alliance, a nonprofit that engages businesses to fund and partner with organizations to protect wild places for their habitat and recreation values.

Conservation of the property was also made possible with support from the San Luis Valley Conservation Fund, which was created in 2015 by WRC, the LOR Foundation, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust and Colorado Open Lands. The fund is a collaborative effort to bolster local conservation efforts in the San Luis Valley and to preserve the region's rich cultural heritage, all while enhancing livability for valley communities.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT PARTNERS

**Western Rivers Conservancy** acquires lands along rivers throughout the West to conserve critical habitat and to create or improve public access for compatible use and enjoyment. By cooperating with local agencies and organizations and by applying decades of land acquisition experience, WRC secures the health of whole ecosystems. WRC has protected hundreds of miles of stream frontage on great western rivers, including the Rio Grande, Yampa, John Day, Gunnison, Salmon, Snake, North Umpqua, Klamath and Madison Rivers. To learn more, visit [www.westernrivers.org](http://www.westernrivers.org).

**Rio Grande National Forest** is 1.82 million acres located in southwestern Colorado and remains one of the true undiscovered jewels of Colorado. The RGNF is composed of a myriad of ecosystems ranging from high elevation desert at 7600 feet above sea level to rocky crags at over 14,300 feet in the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Recreational pursuits include outdoor activities of camping, hiking, skiing, backpacking, fishing, boating and canoeing, rafting, observing nature, photography and bicycling. To learn more, visit [www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande](http://www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande)

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