



March 5, 2019

Western Rivers Conservancy Program Director Receives National Land Protection Award

ALAMOSA, Colorado—For his significant contributions in establishing two new conservation areas in the San Luis Valley, Dieter Erdmann of Western Rivers Conservancy was awarded a prestigious national land protection award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The service's Division of Realty honored Erdmann with its 2018 National Land Protection Award for his role in Western Rivers Conservancy's efforts to establish both the San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area and the San Luis Valley Conservation Area.

"We are pleased to honor Mr. Erdmann's tireless work to ensure that the San Luis Valley continues to support some of Colorado's most important fish and wildlife resources while providing public access to cherished open spaces and the Rio Grande," said Eric Alvarez, U.S. Fish and Wildlife's chief of real estate. "His contributions were essential in supporting the funding, ownership and management outcomes of these important wildlife and conservation areas."

Together, the protected areas encompass hundreds of thousands of acres of river frontage, uplands, meadows, wetlands and other open space areas that are crucial to fish and wildlife.

"The Rio Grande and its tributaries are the lifeblood of the San Luis Valley and its communities," Erdmann said. "It's an honor to partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local organizations to support voluntary conservation efforts that will benefit fish, wildlife and valley residents alike."

Erdmann, WRC's Interior West program director in Denver, has been working to protect open spaces in Colorado for over two decades. His father, Richard Erdmann of The Conservation Fund, won the same award a decade ago.

Erdmann led WRC's efforts first to establish the San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area, a 17,019-acre addition to the Sangre de Cristo Conservation Area. After WRC purchased the property, Erdmann crafted a transaction and long-term property management strategy in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Costilla County. Today the property is protected by a conservation easement held by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, owned by Costilla County, and managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

The new state wildlife area conserves a large block of important habitat and 4.5 miles of the Rio Grande. It also provides Costilla County residents with access to public lands and outdoor experiences, including hunting and fishing, in an area where public access was, until this effort, nearly nonexistent.

Immediately across the river, WRC acquired the 1,168-acre Olguin Ranch in 2016 and worked with the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust to permanently conserve the property in 2018. As part of that project, Western Rivers Conservancy donated a smaller conservation easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that established the San Luis Valley Conservation Area, the 567th unit of the USFWS's National Wildlife Refuge System. The Fish and Wildlife Service is now poised to protect up to 530,000 acres in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico through additional voluntary conservation easements.

The Colorado congressional delegation has been instrumental in delivering support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for both conservation and recreational-access projects throughout Colorado. LWCF funding was critical to creating the San Luis Hills State Wildlife Area, in addition to three other Western Rivers Conservancy projects in the valley.

Western Rivers Conservancy's efforts in the San Luis Valley are part of a broad partnership the organization has spearheaded between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the LOR Foundation, Colorado Open Lands and others.

###

ABOUT

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 Yampa, John Day, Gunnison, Salmon, Hoh, Snake and Madison Rivers. To learn more, please visit www.westernrivers.org.

The **US Fish and Wildlife Service's** [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) now encompasses 567 national wildlife refuges and 38 wetlands management districts across 150 million acres. Refuges are critical to the local communities that surround them, serving as centers for recreation, economic growth, and landscape health and resiliency. Each state and U.S. territory has at least one national wildlife refuge, and there is a refuge within an hour's drive of most major cities. www.fws.gov

Learn more about the [San Luis Valley Conservation Area](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Western Rivers Conservancy

Dieter Erdmann, Interior West Program Director

303-645-4953

derdmann@westernrivers.org

Western Rivers Conservancy

Willis Yarberry, Director of Lands

406-459-8056

wyarberry@westernrivers.org