



COLORADO OPEN LANDS



# News Release

---

**May 2, 2019**

## Contact Information

**LOR Foundation**

Korena Wilson, Media  
Officer  
307-690-0550  
[korena@lorfoundation.org](mailto:korena@lorfoundation.org)

**Rio Grande Headwaters  
Land Trust**

Allen Law, Executive Director  
719-657-0800  
[allenl@riograndelandtrust.org](mailto:allenl@riograndelandtrust.org)

**Colorado Open Lands**

Judy Lopez, Conservation  
Project Manager  
719-580-5300  
[jlopez@coloradoopenlands.org](mailto:jlopez@coloradoopenlands.org)

**Western Rivers Conservancy**

Dieter Erdmann, Interior West  
Program Director  
303-645-4953  
[derdmann@westernrivers.org](mailto:derdmann@westernrivers.org)

## **San Luis Valley Conservation Fund awards \$500,000 to enhance conservation, community, and livability in San Luis Valley**

**Alamosa, CO** – The San Luis Valley Conservation Fund, a partnership between [Colorado Open Lands](#), [Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust](#), [Western Rivers Conservancy](#) and the [LOR Foundation](#), announced today its fourth and final round of grant awards for organizations working in Colorado's San Luis Valley.

A total of \$500,000 was awarded by the SLVCF this year to bolster conservation efforts within the valley and to help preserve the region's rich cultural heritage while enhancing livability for local communities.

Twelve organizations received grants that ranged from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

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 (SLVCCI), a four year, \$2-million re-granting program to increase the capacity of organizations throughout the valley, where land conservation, outdoor recreation, water rights, and a heritage of *acequia* agriculture are intimately linked.

A central focus for the partner organizations is the Rio Grande, which provides crucial habitat for 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, and they provide essential recreation opportunities for communities throughout the valley. 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.

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

Although the San Luis Valley Conservation Fund officially winds down this year, the program partners will continue their conservation efforts in the valley.

"This has been an incredible partnership, and the impacts of our effort will be felt forever," said Sue Doroff, president of Western Rivers Conservancy. "The Rio Grande is better off for fish and wildlife, public river access has been significantly improved, and some of the best conservation organizations in the valley are better equipped to do their work. As for Western Rivers Conservancy, we'll keep searching out those great properties and conservation-minded landowners so we can deliver more of these successes to the San Luis Valley."

"The San Luis Valley Conservation Fund was an extraordinary opportunity to make both a conservation and community impact here in the valley," said Allen Law, executive director of Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust. "With the support of the LOR Foundation, we not only protected rivers, we also added public access, helped young farmers and ranchers get their foot in the door, and supported local nonprofits who are doing amazing work."

"The San Luis Valley is a very special place and home to so much of the important culture and natural resources of Colorado. Colorado Open Lands is honored to play a role in supporting this wonderful landscape and its people," Said Tony Caligiuri, president and CEO of Colorado Open Lands.

"The San Luis Valley is such a stunning, unique, diverse place full of genuine people and communities," said Jake Caldwell, program officer for the LOR Foundation. "It's rewarding to be part of efforts like this that strengthen those qualities and help local organizations bring out the best in each other."

Over the course of this four-year partnership, the SLVCCI has awarded \$2 million in 71 grants to 32 organizations throughout the valley.

The project was funded by the LOR Foundation. LOR partners with rural communities in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

### **San Luis Valley Conservation and Connection Initiative Grants; April 2019**

In its final round of grants, the SLVCF awarded Initiative grants to the following organizations:

*Adams State University/Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center, Water Education Initiative of the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center at Adams State University - \$48,050*

The Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center aims to design and develop a Water Education

Initiative for the Rio Grande Basin at ASU. It will work with faculty and community experts to offer water education for students and to engage the university and SLV community in order to “grow the next generation of water leaders” and broaden public understanding of water concerns and conservation efforts.

*City of Alamosa, Alamosa Riparian Park Restoration and Recreation Project - \$40,000*

The City of Alamosa will make improvements to its outdoor recreation amenities on the Alamosa Riparian Park and the Alamosa City Ranch. These improvements will increase accessibility to the river corridor through Alamosa and reduce the environmental impacts of these activities. Through this project, the City also hopes to foster a culture of stewardship among trail and river users, local residents and visitors alike will experience health and wellness benefits, and the local economy will benefit.

*Colorado Rio Grande Restoration Foundation, 2019 Rio Grande Basin Stream Restoration Project - \$50,000*

CRGRF’s project will engage private landowners, the US Forest Service, local stakeholders, and engineers in developing and implementing projects to improve the function of the Rio Grande and Park Creek through streambank stabilization, riparian restoration, and outreach and education. These efforts will result in reduced erosion, improved water quality, and enhanced riparian, upland, and aquatic habitat.

*Colorado Rio Grande Restoration Foundation, Rio Grande Watershed Plans Implementation - \$22,000*

Diverse stakeholders across the Rio Grande Basin have gathered to complete multiple watershed and stream management plans in order to plan for environmental, recreational, and water supply needs for future generations. Awarded funds will support the capacity needed to implement the recommendations of the Rio Grande’s watershed plans through collaborative restoration projects, and will positively affect beneficiaries basin-wide, including agriculture, wetland and riparian ecosystems, wildlife, recreation, and the community as a whole.

*Conejos Clean Water, Preserving Community: Sustaining Community Engagement and Construction of Facilities Final - \$18,500*

Conejos Clean Water works to build public awareness and encourage advocacy and education around environmental, social, economic, and food justice issues in the Conejos Land Grant Region. Awarded funding will support capacity for programming, construction of a greenhouse and construction oversight and management.

*Costilla County, Rito Seco Park Trails - \$44,200*

Costilla County’s project will build the Cabins Trail and Park and Beaver Ponds segments of the Rito Seco Trail within the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt area. The Cabins Trail is a 1-mile loop providing for a short, easy hike from the park to see three cabin ruins and beaver ponds. The Rito Seco Trail segments are family-friendly and provide shade and creek access. New trails in Rito Seco Park can not only help spur the local economy but also bring benefits of health and wellness via new outdoor access for county residents.

*Costilla County Conservancy District, Upper Culebra Watershed Assessment Project - \$25,000*

The Costilla County Conservancy District will utilize grant funding as seed money for the Upper Culebra Watershed Assessment, and to engage stakeholders and subject matter experts in a process to develop the overall assessment goals and objectives for the Upper and Lower Culebra Watershed in Costilla County, Colorado.

*Eastern San Luis Valley Trails Coalition, Eastern San Luis Valley Trails System - \$40,000*

ESLVTC will use awarded funds to coordinate 2 trail projects, a Safe Routes to School Project, and a Baca Wildlife Refuge/Colorado College connecting trail. The SRTS Project brings together Coalition partners in the construction of .6 mile first phase of a 2.75 mile route; and the link between the Refuge and College to connects Campus buildings directly with Refuge Headquarters.

*San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, Valley Roots Food Hub San Luis Valley Regenerative Soil Health - \$9,750*

This project will finalize previous work to sustain the Regenerative Soil Farmer project at the Valley Roots Food Hub in building and marketing the SLV's fledgling soil health movement. The project will prioritize soil health in marketing, crop planning, beginning an educational campaign to teach about the benefits of soil health, and continuing building the Hub's capacity to support producers.

*San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition/Rio Grande Farm Park, If You Build It They Will Come, \$30,000*

With SLVCCI funding, RGFP will build its capacity to effectively implement its environmental education programming. SLVCCI funding will ensure that RGFP staff have the capacity to manage improvements coming to the Park. Additionally, funding will help to provide matching funds for construction of an onsite greenhouse.

*Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association, Sustaining the Acequia Culture for the Future - \$43,500*

The Sustaining the Acequia Culture for the Future will focus on the practices included in SdCAA's ongoing strategic planning, including maintaining capacity and developing new funding. The SdCAA will continue to work with member acequias including education, member development, training sessions for acequia producers, and collaborating to develop programs that ensure economic sustainability.

*Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association, Costilla County Community Partnership - \$15,000 (collaborative grant)*

The Costilla County Community Partnership is composed of four primary partners: the Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association, the Costilla County Conservancy District, the Costilla County Economic Development Council and the Costilla Conservation District. Funds received through this collaborative grant will be used to hire a grant writer to work collaboratively with each organization to further partner projects. This shared resource will maximize capacity and the partner organizations will benefit from a grant writer who is experienced in writing comprehensive proposals.

*Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, Cultural Connections Through Natural Resources- Documentary Video - \$5,000*

This project highlights the story of the early settlements of Manassa/Ephraim/Los Rincones/Los Cerritos. A video will show that it was through acceptance, cooperation and important traditional irrigation practices that led to settlements of longstanding communities in the San Luis Valley. The project will document the history and importance of water as a source of survival and connection, and aims to foster community, understanding, and improved communication among peoples of different cultural backgrounds.

*SLV GO!, Collective Impact Capacity - \$50,000*

Grant funds will support SLV GO!'s capacity, as the organization works throughout the San Luis Valley on a variety of partner projects in line with the mission and the goals of SLVCCI, restoration and outdoor recreation. SLV GO! has been serving as a backbone organization for partner organizations in the San Luis Valley for two years, providing support in trail planning, community development initiatives, health and wellness, and stewardship.

*SLV GO!, Collaborative Fundraising Grant - \$50,000*

SLV GO! has been working in collective fundraising since its inception in 2013. Grant funds will allow SLV GO! to support partner projects through a collaborative fundraising approach that will increase the amount of available money for conservation, stewardship, recreation, and health and wellness.

*Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Rito Seco Volunteer Trail Construction Project - \$9,000*

Grant funds will enable VOC to test and evaluate the effectiveness of several place-based volunteer engagement strategies in preparation and implementation of the Rito Seco project. VOC will undertake the Rito Seco trail project with intentional recruitment of local Spanish speakers, with options for stipend volunteering. The Rito Seco trail provides recreational amenities to residents and visitors of Costilla County and provides the opportunity for a short, easy walking loop with sunny southern exposure.