

RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS LAND TRUST

2003 ANNUAL REPORT

THE RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS LAND TRUST

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Notes from the Staff Since I am writing this in March, I'll use and adapt the March weather analogy as in it came in like a lamb went out like a lion to sum up 2003. For the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT), the year 2003 came in like a lion and left like a raging bull.

The year started with the optimistic excitement that we were set to close on an easement in Rio Grande County and had been approached to potentially hold a conservation easement on a coveted 820-acre pristine ranch in Mineral County on the Rio Grande. The year ended in a frenzy of finalizing and successfully closing on the conservation easement in Mineral County.

2003 proved to be a year where we hit our stride closing on two conservation easements and fielding numerous inquiries from other landowners about preserving their land; holding four workshops; continuing our conservation inventory of all protected lands in the San Luis Valley; expanding our connections and relationships with other land trusts, like minded organizations and funders; hiring our first Development Director; interfacing with local government; creating a computerized ranking system to evaluate any proposed conservation easements; participating in writing the San Luis Valley Wetlands Focus Area Committee's five year plan; and diving into the complicated issues of protecting water in the San Luis Valley.

We have not been idle. The year 2004 promises to keep us on the run as well. This year we are on schedule to complete three conservation easements, representing 2,860 acres of land bringing our total to 4,900 acres under protection, hold three workshops, wrap up our Strategic Conservation Inventory and Plan, continue our water work and focus on fundraising.

Please join me in taking a more in depth look at our year in review and celebrating our successes.

Sincerely,
Nancy Butler, Administrative Director

Land Protection RiGHT successfully closed on two conservation easements. The first one, the Nelson Ranch, is located in Rio Grande County. This beautiful 450 acres ranch is nestled at the foot on the San Juan Mountains south of the town of Del Norte. The landowner has a hay operation on the property and perennial stream runs through the ranch, irrigating the hay meadows and creating riparian habitat. The property also borders U.S. Forest Service land making the ranch an important wildlife buffer area.

The second easement RiGHT closed on protects one of the private land jewels of the Rio Grande Basin, the Upper Wright's Ranch in Mineral County. This exemplary 820 acre ranch symbolizes all the best attributes in land conservation. Located on Highway 149 above the town of Creede, the ranch borders the Weminuche Wilderness Area, has 1 1/4 miles of the Rio Grande flowing through it along with other creeks, is an historic ranch that has deep ties to the hearts of Mineral County residents, is a working ranch, has habitat for three federally listed threatened and endangered species on it and is an important wildlife corridor and winter feeding ground for many species including big game like elk and moose and is the closest significant tract of agricultural land to the actual headwaters of the Rio Grande.

To protect this property RiGHT collaborated with The Conservation Fund and executed our first bargain sale (meaning some of the development right's value were purchased and some were donated by the landowner) by securing funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, the Brown Foundation, the San Luis Valley Habitat Partnership Program, Mineral County, the Rio Grande Conservation District and an anonymous donor. Kudos to all who made this happen.



The Upper Wright's Ranch in Mineral County

In addition, RiGHT responded to 10 inquiries from additional private landowners interested in preserving their land, representing 4,600 acres of prime ag land and open space.

Staff and Board Changes

In RiGHT's effort to strengthen our Board of Directors, we were pleased to welcome Scott Miller, a biologist for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, who has extensive experience working with private landowners to create wetlands on their property. Cathy McNeil, our esteemed founder and former President of the Board handed the presidential reins over to Pete Magee in 2004, but continues to serve on the Board. RiGHT hired its first Development Director, Michelle Le Blanc in July, who was brought on to build up the muscle of RiGHT's fundraising arm. To round out our cadre, Gigi Darricades of Darricades & Assoc., provided pro-bono legal advice for RiGHT to keep us on the straight and narrow.

Education

RiGHT's goal to promote sustainable ag and conservation through education was in full force in 2003. We co-sponsored three workshops and held three of our own. The first workshop, held at the Zapata Ranch in April was "Conservation Easements and Professional Service Providers", and was an overview of conservation easements, appraising them and water issues. In September and November RiGHT held the first two modules of our 4 part Holistic Management Training workshops, called, "Farming and Ranching for Prosperity and Posterity". These workshops, organized by Rio de la Vista, addressed sustainable agriculture and teaches farmers and ranchers decision making, financial management, grazing and land management skills to make their operations and lives more successful. In June RiGHT co-sponsored a river workshop with the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project and BLV Riparian Cadre to learn about proper functioning condition for rivers and streams. In August we collaborated with the SLV Association of Conservation Districts to present a Watershed Workgroup. The group spent a successful day fleshing out our water priorities in the Valley and how to bring more Farm Bill funding into the Valley to address those issues.

Board of Directors

Pete Magee - **President**
 Ralph Curtis - **Vice President**
 Karen Henderson - **Treasurer**
 Christine Canaly - **Secretary**
 Cathy McNeil
 Scott Miller

Staff & Consultants

Susan Pierce
*Land & Water Protection
 Coordinator*

Nancy Butler
Administrative Director

Michelle Le Blanc
Development Director

Rio de la Vista
Consultant

Gigi Darricades
Legal Consultant

SCIP

Our Strategic Conservation Inventory and Plan, otherwise known as SCIP, involved a lot of, well, planning in 2003. We held one public meeting in La Jara (we had another one in 2002) to ascertain public opinion on what they viewed was important to protect. We talked to land use administrators from all six counties on how the protection of private lands fits in with their local government policies and master plans. RiGHT worked with Agro Engineering to create a database which will evaluate parcels on a set of criteria and helps us determine where our financial resources should best be spent to protect which lands. THE SLV GIS/GPS Authority was an invaluable partner creating maps and compiling information to compose the big picture of land protection and the need for it in the Valley. Our final SCIP report is due out in April. This almost two year process, made possible from a grant from Great Outdoors Colorado, has been a rich experience mapping out the valley, working with other conservation groups, talking to citizens and local governments to help chart our course and make the biggest difference we can to protect our land and resources in the San Luis Valley.



Financials

2003 Profit and Loss Actual

Income	
Board Contributions	\$ 6,370
Designated Cons Eas Funds	\$ 14,057
Education Grants	\$ 8,500
Easement Endowment Inc.	\$ 19,357
Unrestricted Grants	\$ 2,450
Individuals/Membership	\$ 10,957
InKind Income	\$ 6,455
Interest Income	\$ 666
SCIP Grants	\$ 29,676
Special Events	\$ 1,615
Water Protection Grant	\$ 16,573
<u>Workshop Income</u>	<u>\$ 4,235</u>
Total Income	\$120,911

Expenses	
Admin Director	\$ 11,059
Development Director	\$ 2,317
Fundraising	\$ 1,631
Employer Tax Exp	\$ 1,599
Insurance	\$ 2,325
Land Protection Expenses	\$ 13,795
Land Protection Staff	\$ 6,385
Legal Expenses	\$ 10,280
Memberships with LT's	\$ 628
Newsletter	\$ 673
Postage	\$ 1,066
Printing	\$ 347
SCIP	\$ 29,957
Office Supplies	\$ 656
Staff Training	\$ 819
Telephone and Internet	\$ 2,098
Water Protection	\$ 6,023
<u>Workshop Ex</u>	<u>\$ 14,046</u>
Total	\$105,704

Water

RiGHT grew out of the Citizens for San Luis Valley Water and we continue to play a role in protecting the Valley's water for agriculture, wetlands and riparian habitat, which all depend on each other. Through an EPA grant, RiGHT funds the Coordinator for the San Luis Valley Wetlands Focus Area Committee, Rio de la Vista. The Committee and RiGHT worked hard in the summer to complete a 5 year action plan. We continue to promote the protection of water by tying the water rights to the land in conservation easements. We have also become part of the charge to bring a Farm Bill funding program to the SLV to reduce the economic impact of the drought.

"Conserving Our Land, Water and Way of Life in Colorado's Rio Grande Basin."