

# Protecting Colorado's Legendary Rio Grande River

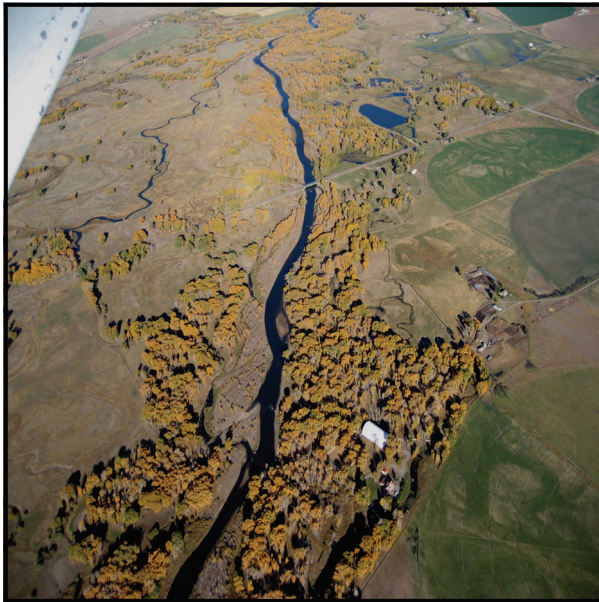


October 2007, Vol. III

## *The Rio Grande Initiative*

### *Our Purpose:*

***To protect as much private land as possible along the Rio Grande corridor in Colorado, through voluntary, incentive based means, in partnership with landowners, communities, agencies and conservation organizations – while we have the chance!***



A bird's eye view of the river, near Monte Vista, October 2007

### *TNC Joins the Initiative*

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has an impressive track record in the San Luis Valley—and we are pleased that they are now joining the *Rio Grande Initiative* along with RiGHT and DU. We welcome them to the partnership and appreciate their shared commitment to the Rio Grande. In fact, TNC completed the very first conservation easement on the river in 1986, protecting the beautiful La Garita Ranch in Mineral County.

TNC's participation means added capacity through the work of SLV Project Director, Paul Robertson, and the capable Colorado TNC staff. They bring scientific analysis, marketing and fundraising expertise, and the organization's international reputation and credibility to the entire effort. Together we will surely accomplish even more important conservation!

### *RiGHT Submits Great Outdoors Colorado "Legacy Grant"*

In August, the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) submitted a Legacy Grant to the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust (GOCO). Legacy Grants are awarded only every few years to fund major open space projects. We were proud to be invited to submit an application, which requests a \$7.3 million grant to protect six important river corridor ranches, in partnership with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy.

This phase of the Initiative includes properties from Mineral to Conejos County. In all, 5,682 acres and nearly 20 river miles stand to be protected. Conservation values include scenic view sheds and open space, wildlife habitat and wetlands, and the preservation of agricultural productivity and flood plain function. The targeted ranches are strategically located adjacent to Rio Grande National Forest and Bureau of Land Management lands, a State Wildlife Area, and within the newly designated Rio Grande Natural Area. We are grateful for the invitation to submit this vital project to GOCO and for the broad community support in the San Luis Valley. We look forward to the Board's final funding decision in early December.

For more information, please contact us: Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust  
P.O. Box 189 Monte Vista, CO, 81144 (719) 852-4015 · [right@fone.net](mailto:right@fone.net) · [www.riograndelandtrust.org](http://www.riograndelandtrust.org)



## *One River, Five Counties*

Within the San Luis Valley, the Rio Grande flows through Mineral, Rio Grande and Alamosa County and comprises the border between Conejos and Costilla Counties. Here is a brief look at those counties.

- Mineral—4% private land. Only 12 properties of 80 acres or more still exist along the river.
- Rio Grande—40% private land, with intense development pressure along the river spreading east from South Fork. In 2005, the 1,990 acre Hanna Ranch sold for development.
- Alamosa County—68% private land. 16,000 acres of intact private land remain along the river.
- Conejos County—34% private land. Only nine landowners own intact private land along the river, with an average parcel size of 1,110 acres.
- Costilla County—99% private land, there are currently no intact 80 acre or larger properties along the river.



The former Hanna Ranch near South Fork, owned by Land Properties & being subdivided, October 2007.

### *We've Got Wet Feet - and that's Good!*

by Rio de la Vista

Everyone who has been drawn into the beauty of the river corridor has experienced the inevitable wet feet. Tromping around the sloughs and oxbows and wetlands along the Rio Grande, and getting your shoes soaked, is a great way to see wildlife and connect with the fact that these wetlands are essentially “sponges.”

Wetland sponges along the river provide many vital functions. They absorb water diverted for agricultural use and then release it slowly as return flows, thus keeping more water in the river throughout the summer months. This helps sustain agriculture, wildlife, and meeting the Rio Grande Compact obligations. They are also critical for flood protection, serving to absorb high waters that can flood freely across open lands, rather than all of it flowing down the river channel in a short time period.

If this multi-functional sponge becomes too fragmented, too impacted by additional roads and houses and/or the water use patterns are changed too much, agriculture and wildlife will suffer, floods will have more severe consequences, and we won't be getting our feet as wet, which would be a bad thing!

*We are five years  
ahead of time  
in protecting the  
Rio Grande...  
if we hurry!*

*-local landowner*

### *More Thank You's:*

RiGHT would like to thank and acknowledge those organizations that believe in, and have provided additional funding for, the *Rio Grande Initiative* through planning or direct land protection grants since our Spring 2007 Newsletter:

- The Nature Conservancy of Colorado
- Rio Grande Water Conservation District

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