

Protecting Colorado's Legendary Rio Grande River



April 2008, Vol. IV

The Rio Grande Initiative

Our Purpose: *To protect 25,000 acres or more along the Rio Grande river corridor in Colorado, through voluntary, incentive based means, in partnership with landowners, communities, agencies and conservation organizations – while we have the chance!*

Great Outdoors Colorado Awards Legacy Grant of \$7.4 Million

On December 3, 2007, Governor Bill Ritter presented the Legacy grant awards from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), with the largest award of \$7.4 million to the *Rio Grande Initiative*. The grant aims to fund protection of six key ranches along the river and encompassing more than 5,600 acres and 22 river miles. Of the \$7.4 million, \$2.4 million was allocated from the Colorado Division of Wildlife's GOCO funds, confirming the importance of keeping high quality wildlife habitat on the river intact.



Wetlands along the Rio Grande Corridor in Alamosa County. Photo by Rio de la Vista

Colorado Water Conservation Board Awards \$1.5 Million in Matching Funds

On March 19th, 2008, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) voted unanimously to award \$1.5 million from the state's Water Supply Reserve Account to the *Rio Grande Initiative*, to match the GOCO Legacy grant mentioned above. Thanks to the support of the Rio Grande Basin Round Table, this award represents a new level of collaboration between the conservation and water interests in Colorado. These funds will help secure senior water rights along the Rio Grande through conservation easements. Mike Sullivan, Division of Water Resources, Division 3 Engineer, said in his letter of support, "The protection of the hydraulic characteristics of the alluvial corridor of the Rio Grande is important to providing for a functional river system. This protection includes continued operation of the irrigation systems along the river; systems which were in place when the Rio Grande Compact was negotiated and are thus a part of the underlying physical framework and assumptions of the Compact."

For more information, please contact us: Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust
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Rio Grande Basin at 170% of Average Snow Pack

The high country of the upper Rio Grande Basin is experiencing a year of exceptional snowfall. The snowpack reached a high in February at 170%, with snowfall of nearly 500” at Wolf Creek Pass. As the floor of the San Luis Valley receives a mere seven to nine inches of moisture a year, we depend on the high country snowpack to supply water for our rivers, agriculture, and aquifers.

Years like this emphasize the need to keep private land intact along the Rio Grande river. During the heavy snows, wildlife moves to lower elevations and is dependent upon the private lands along the river to overwinter. As the snow melts, intact lands and limited building in the flood plain provide important flood mitigation for the communities along the river. The extensive wetlands along the river serve as a “sponge” that absorb flood waters and release them slowly back into the river, sustaining summer flows for irrigation and providing vital wildlife habitat.

*Love Art?
Love the Rio Grande?
Come to RiGHT's
“Keep the Rio Grande Grand”
An Art Event
to benefit RiGHT
Saturday, August 16th—6 to 9 PM*

Join us for an elegant evening in South Fork, Colorado — where fine artists from the San Luis Valley and across the Southwest will offer their creations. Confirmed artists include: Jim Gilmore, Randy Pijoan, Rick Howell, Charles Ewing, Susan McCullough, Kristian Gosar, Dave Montgomery, Evelyn Martinez, Joe Zinn, and many more!

*See our website for more information:
www.riograndelandtrust.org*

10,700 Acres Protected To Date

In 2007 and thus far in 2008, six landowners have placed conservation easements on their river properties with RiGHT, Colorado Cattleman’s Agricultural Land Trust, Ducks Unlimited and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, protecting over 4,500 acres. The total amount of private land protected along the river includes nineteen different landowners and just over 10,700 acres. With the help of the newly awarded GOCO and CWCB grant funds, we have an opportunity to work with another six ranchers to conserve a further 5600 acres over the next several years.

In addition, the success of the *Rio Grande Initiative* is generating growing interest from even more landowners. To date, six more landowners, above and beyond those projects selected for the GOCO Legacy project, with approximately 2,000 acres of river corridor property, have expressed interest in protecting their land.

At the same time, fast-paced development pressure is still increasing along the Rio Grande. In 2007 alone, nearly 3,000 acres of traditional farms and ranches on the river sold to out-of-state developers, adding to our sense of urgency for the *Rio Grande Initiative’s* efforts.



A landowner’s guest enjoying a morning fishing the river.

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