



Grant Program

The Grant Program awards grants to worthy projects. Each of these projects helps the District fulfill its statutory mission by assisting residents to put water to beneficial use, in watershed management, water quality improvements, increasing water use efficiency, eradicating water-robbing tamarisk and other worthy endeavors.

A town's municipal water supply needs to be enlarged. A ditch company's diversion structure can't function after it was washed out in a flood. A farmer wants to install an efficient irrigation system, but can't afford the entire cost. Invasive tamarisk trees are literally sucking a stream dry. A leaky irrigation ditch is losing water through its dirt bottom.

All of these are problems in search of a remedy, and they affect people across the West Slope where they feel it most: at their faucet, in their fields and in their wallets.

Seeing a need to solve these and other water-related problems on a local level, the Colorado River Water Conservation District instituted a Grant Program in 1998 to help address localized problems through contributions of matching grants.

The Colorado River District is well-known for its instrumental role in larger water projects that benefit Western Colorado, such as construction of Wolford Mountain Reservoir, the enlargement of Elkhead Reservoir, its partnership in Eagle Park Reservoir and its role in establishing Green Mountain and Ruedi Reservoirs as compensation to the West Slope for the

loss of water through transmountain diversions. The Grant Program fills the niche of providing funding to localized projects where many of the District's constituents feel the benefits on a personal level.

Since its inception, the Grant Program has awarded over \$1 million in grants to worthy projects throughout the District's 15-county region. Each of these projects helps the District fulfill its statutory mission by assisting residents to put water to beneficial use, in watershed management, water quality improvements, increasing water use efficiency, eradicating water-robbing tamarisk and other worthy endeavors.

The Monitor Ditch Diversion on the North Fork of the Gunnison River is a good example of a complex problem solved with the help of a CRWCD grant. Stream channel conditions and an aging diversion structure necessitated that "push-up" dams be constructed in the river every year to allow the ditch to get its full water decree. Impacts from bulldozers working in the river to build these dam structures included an over-diversion of water, capture of fish in the canal and inadequate flows for recreational boating and fishing below the diversion structure.

The North Fork River Improvement Association received a \$15,000 grant from the Colorado River District which, in conjunction with other grants and in-kind and cash donations, was used to remedy this situation. A new concrete diversion was constructed, the stream channel was stabilized, vegetation was planted on the stream bank to prevent erosion and stream habitat was improved to create a “global solution” for this troubled stretch of the river.

Now, the Monitor Ditch receives its full water right, higher flows are in the river, fishing has improved, and boaters can once again navigate this river reach.

Shavano Conservation District Portable Drip Irrigation Project The Uncompahgre Valley is a productive agricultural area of Western Colorado capable of growing high-value crops. Soils in the Uncompahgre Valley, however, are high in salts and selenium, which are easily transported from the soil to local waterways by inefficient irrigation practices resulting in impaired water quality. Many farmers use the practice of furrow irrigation to grow crops such as onions, which is cost-effective but results in a higher transport of salt and selenium than more efficient irrigation techniques.

The Shavano Conservation District and local National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) agents came up with an idea to encourage local farmers to use more efficient irrigation tech-

niques to improve local water quality, reduce sedimentation and use less water. The concept was to purchase a portable drip irrigation system to allow farmers to become acquainted with more technologically advanced irrigation techniques without having to risk a large amount of money on a system that had been untested in this area. A CRWCD grant helped get this project off the ground by purchasing the equipment for a demonstration project.

Now in its third year, the mobile drip irrigation project is a great success. Each year a different farmer uses the equipment to see how well the system works in various soil types and can experiment with different crops. The project has shown that a more efficient irrigation system not only results in lower water use and improved water quality, but the crop yield is larger and the quality of the produce coming to market is higher.

“We’re very pleased with the system and the results we’re getting,” said Fred Miller, Irrigation Water Management Specialist at the NRCS and Shavano Conservation District.

“The impact of growers adopting drip irrigation in the Valley would be huge,” noted project applicant John Murray. “Increasing profits for local farmers is also a concern. If they become more competitive, more of them may be able to stay in farming. This in turn will keep open spaces from being converted into subdivi-

sions and minifarms.” On being able to secure a Colorado River District grant to help achieve the drip irrigation system’s successes, Fred Miller said, “We were fortunate. I suppose there’s a lot of money out there, but it’s hard to find it.”

Many federal grants can come with cumbersome stipulations and involve a great deal of paperwork. “We’ve been very pleased with what this grant’s done for us and what it’s done for the producers, said Miller.”

The Colorado River Water Conservation District’s grant program operates on an annual cycle and accepts applications each year from November through the end of January. More information on the grant program can be found on the District’s website at www.crwcd.org/grantprogram. To serve as a funding source for larger water projects, a second arm of the grant program is being implemented to provide larger amounts of funding for projects that will have an even greater impact on development of critical, new water supplies and water storage projects.



A 2004 CRWCD grant funded this portable drip irrigation system in Montrose County.

The Grant Program improves water quality within the district by encouraging local farmers to use more efficient irrigation techniques to improve water quality, reduce sedimentation and use less water.

