

CHARTER

SAN LUIS VALLEY REGIONAL HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

STEERING COMMITTEE

I. Background and Purpose

The Rio Grande Water Conservation District (District) developed the San Luis Valley Regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) on behalf of the six counties that comprise the San Luis Valley floor (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache) and the principal municipalities along the Rio Grande (Alamosa, Monte Vista, Del Norte and South Fork) in cooperation with the State of Colorado Department of Natural Resources (State) (HCP Permittees). The HCP was completed pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act, and is intended to provide regulatory coverage to certain agriculture, infrastructure, and conservation activities (covered activities). One of the primary goals of the HCP and its implementation is to provide for the long-term conservation of the southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo (covered species) and the riparian habitat that they require for survival.

The HCP identifies several implementation measures that are intended to reduce impacts of the covered activities on riparian habitat while improving the capacity of the Valley to sustain the complementary goals of sustainable agricultural production and riparian habitat conservation. The designation and operation of the San Luis Valley Regional Habitat Conservation Plan Steering Committee (“Steering Committee”) is one of these measures.

II. Steering Committee Purpose and Goals

The primary purpose of the Steering Committee is to provide a forum that includes resource experts, stakeholder interests, community leaders, and decision makers where habitat management information can be shared, habitat issues can be addressed, and partnerships can be built. The Steering Committee will play an advisory role, and will provide recommendations to the HCP Permittees on matters pertaining to HCP implementation, but will not have direct implementation responsibility and will not have authority over the actions of individual participants or HCP Permittees..

III. Steering Committee Representation and Membership

Representation

The membership of the Steering Committee is intended to represent a cross-section of the government entities charged with implementing the HCP and the community stakeholders affected by the HCP:

- A. Voting Members:
 1. Rio Grande Water Conservation District
 2. State of Colorado – Department of Natural Resources
 3. Alamosa County
 4. Conejos County

5. Costilla County
6. Mineral County
7. Rio Grande County
8. Saguache County
9. City of Alamosa
10. City of Monte Vista
11. Town of Del Norte
12. Town of South Fork

B. Non-Voting Members:

1. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Refuges and Ecological Services
2. Bureau of Land Management
3. Natural Resources Conservation Service
4. Agricultural industry
5. Conservation organizations
6. Water user associations
7. General public

IV. Membership

Each representative entity will nominate an individual to represent them on the Steering Committee. Nominations must be accepted by HCP Administrator (HCPA), and new members will be approved by a vote of the other Steering Committee members. Members or their designated representative(s) commit to active participation and will strive to attend all meetings. Members are encouraged to use their existing professional and social networks to promote and improve the successful implementation of the HCP.

V. Parameters and Assumptions

- A. The Steering Committee will play an advisory role, and will provide recommendations to the HCP Permittees on matters pertaining to HCP implementation
- B. Responsibility for the implementation or enforcement of HCP commitments ultimately lies with the HCP Permittees
- C. One individual may be designated to represent more than one entity; likewise, each entity may also have more than one representative
- D. Participation in the Steering Committee by HCP Permittees does not diminish the autonomy of each entity; likewise, non-participation by a Permittee shall not affect the validity of the HCP to the other participating entities

VI. Operating Principles

- A. The Steering Committee will meet two times per year, and may schedule additional meetings or field trips on an as-needed basis
- B. Meetings will be open to the general public, and will include opportunities for public comment
- C. The Steering Committee will operate for the 30-year term of the HCP and associated Incidental Take Permits, or longer if they are extended.

- D. Members of the Steering Committee shall be required to disclose their direct or indirect interest in leases, permits, contracts, or claims that involve lands or resources administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, or other HCP Permittees, or in any litigation related thereto.
- E. The meetings and records of the Steering Committee shall be handled in accordance with Colorado's Sunshine Law (§ 24-6-402, C.R.S.) and Public Open Records laws (§ 24-72-203, C.R.S.), and shall be available for public inspection and copying.

VII. Steering Committee Responsibilities

A. HCP Administration

- 1. Assist the District with the preparation of an annual report on the progress and status of the HCP. This report will be submitted to the Service
- 2. Pursue grant funding or partnerships to assist in the administration of the HCP or to assist conservation efforts that are consistent with the purposes of the HCP

B. Monitoring

- 1. Provide recommendations to the District regarding habitat monitoring methods and protocols, and adapt those methods as improved technology or scientific information becomes available
- 2. Review habitat monitoring results and provide recommendations on habitat suitability indicators, trends, and adaptive management responses
- 3. Seek opportunities to improve the accuracy and effectiveness and reduce the cost of habitat monitoring methods.

C. Outreach and Education

- 1. Provide recommendations to the District on outreach and education efforts
- 2. Initiate individual outreach discussions with landowners or others to facilitate on-the-ground implementation of the HCP

D. Federal Land Management Recommendations

- 1. On behalf of the Permittees, provide recommendations to federal land management agencies on measures to improve riparian habitat on federal lands
- 2. Works with federal land management agencies to establish and maintain reference sites for habitat monitoring

E. Conservation Coordination

- 1. Seek opportunities to promote voluntary land conservation in riparian habitat areas that would benefit HCP implementation
- 2. Seek opportunities to coordinate the needs of landowners with private land trusts, NRCS programs, or other resources to facilitate mutually beneficial conservation and restoration projects
- 3. Provide community support to conservation efforts that are consistent with HCP implementation goals