

Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project  
623 Fourth Street  
Alamosa, CO 81101  
(719) 589-2230



February 14, 2022

Douglas County Commissioner's Office  
Commissioner Abe Laydon  
Commissioner George Teal  
Commissioner Lora Thomas  
100 3rd Street  
Castle Rock, CO 80104

Re: Opposition to Renewable Water Resources Proposal

Dear Douglas County Commissioners,

On behalf of the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP), I am writing to urge you not to move forward with Renewable Water Resource's (RWR) request to spend COVID-relief funds to export water from the San Luis Valley (SLV). RWR's plan would negatively impact the environment, economy, and communities of the SLV, all of which rely on increasingly limited water resources. The RGHRP works with diverse stakeholders *to restore and conserve the historical functions and vitality of the Rio Grande Basin in Colorado for improved water quality, agricultural water use, riparian health, wildlife and aquatic species habitat, recreation, and community safety.* We strive to ensure each of our projects provide multiple benefits and are truly a win-win for communities and ecosystems. RWR's water export plan is not a win for the SLV for the following reasons.

RWR's plan to remove critical water resources from the over-appropriated SLV would have a ripple effect on the local environment and economy. Groundwater and surface water in the SLV are hydraulically connected. This means that RWR's plan to pump 22,000 AF annually from the confined aquifer in the north end of the SLV will cause impacts to the aquifers as well as streams and wetlands and that support fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. These aquatic-dependent ecosystems are already under stress from drought and existing groundwater withdrawals. Exporting water from the SLV would put fish and wildlife species at greater risk.

The water that RWR proposes to export from the SLV is currently supporting existing water rights and the environment. Because of this, their plan would require the "buy and dry" of irrigated agriculture, which is the primary economic driver of the SLV. We have seen the negative socio-economic and environmental effects of "buy and dry" in rural communities across the state. In addition, drying up farmland would further impact fish and wildlife habitats, as most wetlands in the SLV occur on private property and are supported by existing irrigation practices. Finally, RWR's plan would also hurt the SLV's growing recreation and tourism economies by impacting the water resources of the Great Sand Dunes National Park, Baca National Wildlife Refuge and

extensive public lands that draw over 600,000 visitors annually. RWR's one-time payment of \$50 million will not cover the long-term devastation to the local agriculture and recreation economies, which are water-dependent.

The communities of the SLV are connected and supported by rivers, streams, and aquifers. Because of our shared dependence on scarce water resources, SLV municipalities, farmers and ranchers, environmental organizations, and water entities are united in opposition to RWR's plan to export water from the Rio Grande basin. Further, RWR's proposal goes against local, regional and state planning efforts. For example, the recently updated Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) outlines goals and strategies for the basin centered around healthy watersheds, sustainable aquifers, and vibrant and resilient agriculture, recreation, and municipal economies. RWR's plan is contrary to the BIP's goals and further exacerbates the Basin's key challenge to balance surface and groundwater supply and demand. At the state level, RWR's proposal runs counter to the Colorado Water Plan, which condemns the practice of "buy and dry" and the significant impacts these practices have on rural communities.

The people of the SLV have a long history of coming together to protect our water resources, because it is the basis of our community, our economy, and our ecosystems. RWR's proposal will devastate the future of our human and ecological communities by exporting water, which is our lifeblood. We urge you to consider other strategies to secure water resources for your community that won't negatively impact another.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emma Reesor".

Emma Reesor  
Executive Director, RGHRP