

SAN LUIS VALLEY REGIONAL HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Fact Sheet

July 2012

HCP Purpose and Background

The purpose of the San Luis Valley Regional Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is to provide for the long-term conservation of the southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo (covered species), while providing regulatory protection to the ongoing and routine agriculture, infrastructure, and conservation activities that are critical to the social and economic well-being of the San Luis Valley.

The HCP is needed for the following reasons:

- Riparian habitat (willow and cottonwood) in the San Luis Valley provides habitat for the covered species – the federally protected southwestern willow flycatcher (endangered) and the yellow-billed cuckoo (currently a candidate for federal listing).
- Impacts on the birds or their habitat (defined as “take”) are subject to regulation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and other federal laws.
- Landowners and local governments in the San Luis Valley are potentially liable for “take” of these species as they conduct otherwise lawful and routine agriculture, small community infrastructure, and conservation activities that have occurred for generations.

In 2004, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD) initiated the HCP process in partnership with the six counties of the San Luis Valley floor (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache); principal municipalities; and the State of Colorado.

HCP Coverage

- **Covered Activities:** The HCP provides regulatory protection to typical and routine activities related to routine agriculture, small community infrastructure, and riparian conservation and restoration. These include operation, maintenance, and construction of diversions, ditches, canals, roads, bridges, and utility lines; livestock grazing and agricultural practices; tamarisk and noxious weed control; floodplain maintenance near towns and cities, and stream restoration.
- **Activities *not* Covered:** The HCP does *not* provide regulatory protection to land development, large-scale water projects or impoundments, highway construction, energy development, or federal activities.
- **Plan Area:** The HCP covers nonfederal lands on the San Luis Valley floor.

Impacts and Mitigation

A HCP must identify impacts of the covered activities and measures to mitigate those impacts:

- **Impacts:** The HCP estimates about 270 acres of temporary habitat impacts in any given year from the covered activities and about 1 acre per year of permanent impacts.
- **Mitigation:** Mitigation credits will be obtained through conservation, enhancement, and management measures. Mitigation activities will focus on private and state lands with high-quality habitat, and mitigation credits will offset the impacts of the covered activities on an acre-for-acre basis.
- **Monitoring:** Habitat monitoring will ensure the habitat quality of mitigation lands is sufficient to offset impacts and will track long-term trends.

HCP Administration

The HCP will be administered by the RGWCD on behalf of the other units of government. A steering committee consisting of representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, and community organizations will oversee the HCP.

Environmental Assessment

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, a draft environmental assessment (EA) has also been prepared to address issuance of incidental take permits (a federal action) for covered activities in the HCP. The EA is also available at the websites listed below.

Contact Information and Document Availability

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The draft HCP, EA, a Notice of Availability for draft documents published in the Federal Register, and other information can be found at:

USFWS Website: <http://www.fws.gov/coloradoES/SLV-HCP.html>

RGWCD website: www.slvhcp.com