



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)** [www.fws.gov/southwest/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/)

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## **Service Approves Vermejo Park Ranch CCAA and Will Issue an Enhancement of Survival Permit for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout**

America's fish, wildlife and plant resources belong to all of us, and ensuring the health of imperiled species is a shared responsibility. To that end the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species.

Vermejo Park Ranch applied for an enhancement of survival permit pursuant to Section 10(a) (1) (A) of the Endangered Species Act for the Rio Grande cutthroat trout (RGCT) (*Oncorhynchus clarkii virginalis*) in Taos County, New Mexico, and Costilla County, Colorado. The permit application included a draft Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) between the Service and Vermejo Park Ranch, along with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife who are partners in conservation with Vermejo. An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by the Service which analyzed the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the CCAA on the quality of the human environment and other natural resources.

The Service has made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) through the EA and will publish a Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register* as well as authorize the issuance of an enhancement of survival permit to Vermejo Park Ranch for implementation of the CCAA.

The goal of the CCAA is to facilitate and promote the management of the RGCT on non-Federal lands by providing assurances that no additional conservation measures or additional land, water, or resource restrictions beyond those voluntarily agreed to and described in the CCAA, will be required for the RGCT should it become listed in the future. The CCAA was initiated in order to facilitate conservation and restoration of the Rio Grande cutthroat trout on private lands in New Mexico. Incidental take under the enhancement of survival permit is limited to agricultural, recreational, and other related activities and is not expected to nullify the conservation benefits anticipated to accrue under the CCAA.

The Rio Grande cutthroat trout is native to the Rio Grande, Pecos River, and Canadian River basins in New Mexico and Colorado. It is the southernmost subspecies of cutthroat trout. Because of nonnative species introductions, Rio Grande cutthroat trout are now restricted to streams that are narrow and small compared to the larger streams they once occupied; these populations occupy approximately 10 percent of historical habitat. Rio Grande cutthroat trout face a variety of imminent threats including: fragmentation and isolation, small population size, presence of nonnative trout, whirling disease, poor habitat conditions, fire, drought, and the effects of climate change. Because of the range contraction and the imminent threats, the Rio Grande cutthroat trout became a candidate species on May 14, 2008, indicating that listing of the Rio Grande cutthroat trout was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions.

Electronic copies of the final CCAA and final EA will be available on the Service's New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office website, <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/NewMexico/VRCCAA.cfm>. See the *Federal Register* notice for alternative ways to obtain or view these and other documents associated with this action.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

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