

# Rio Grande River Watershed

Resources at work from October 1, 2010 - September 30, 2011

**The Rio Grande River Watershed totals 4,794,870 acres.**

It includes all and/or portions of Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Hinsdale, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache Counties.

NRCS natural resource specialists are staffed at the Alamosa, Center, La Jara, Monte Vista, and San Luis USDA Field Service Centers to provide assistance to watershed residents.

**NRCS Vision**  
**Productive Lands -  
Healthy Environment**

**NRCS Mission**  
**Helping People  
Help the Land**

[www.co.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov)

## The Colorado Watershed Approach

Instead of the traditional statewide approach in addressing priority resource issues like soil erosion, water quality, grazing lands, wildlife, and animal waste, NRCS looks to Colorado's ten watersheds to identify their particular local resource needs and priorities.

Watershed work groups meet annually to determine which natural resource concerns are most prevalent in their communities.

In turn, Colorado NRCS focuses its resources on addressing those concerns. Colorado's local conservation districts provide leadership in this effort to foster increased decision making at the local level.

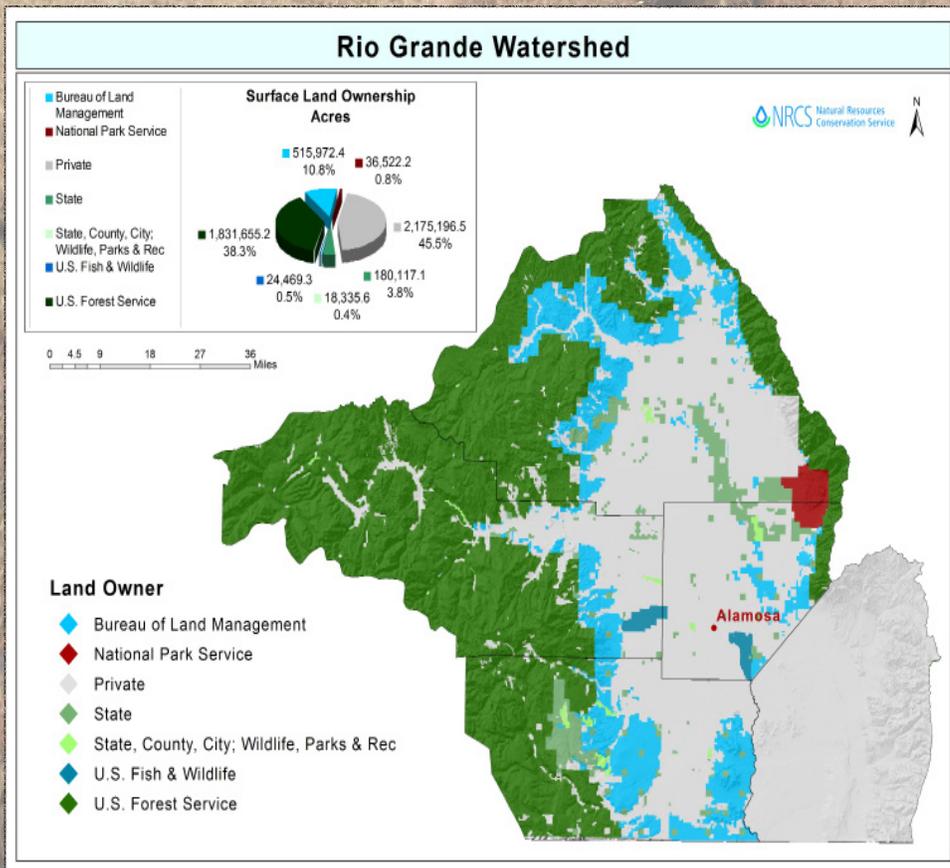
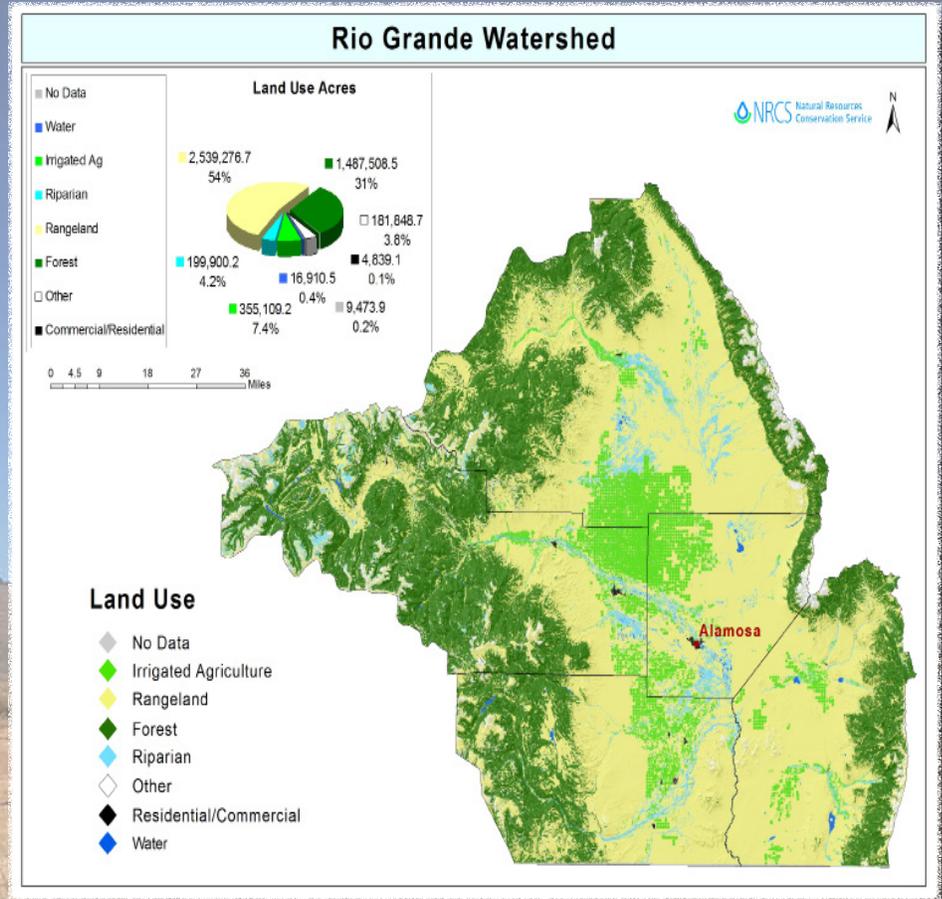
## High Priority Resource Concerns in the Rio Grande River Watershed

- Water Quantity
- Invasive Species
- Water Quality
- Rangeland Health
- Erosion



*Helping People  
Help the Land*

# Watershed Profile



## Fiscal Year 2011 Environmental Quality Incentives Program Summary

Rio Grande River	Applications Received	Contracts Approved	Dollars Approved	Acres Treated
Rio Grande - Acequias	39	24	\$107,312	1,594
Rio Grande - Cropland/Soil Management	16	14	\$407,351	2,367
Rio Grande - Cropland/Water Quality/Quantity	86	21	\$1,039,544	7,020
Rio Grande - Grazingland	18	12	\$328,834	45,286
Rio Grande - Riparian	10	1	\$84,649	15
Organic-Certified	4	3	\$59,443	174
Organic-Transition	1	1	\$25,556	125
CCPI-Rio Grande Plaza Project	6	6	194,300	1,195
CO Seasonal High Tunnels Pilot	2	1	\$5,010	40
<b>Totals</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>\$2,251,999</b>	<b>56,582</b>

### Farm Bill Program Activities Summary Rio Grande River

NRCS Program	Applications Received	Contracts Approved	Dollars Approved	Acres Treated
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)	18	14	\$827,140	3,159
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	21	17	\$244,284	17,648
Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)	18	18	\$1,457,000	1,970
Wetland Reserve Program WRP	2	2	\$1,357,600	463
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	15	4	\$101,364	16

### Farm Bill Program Activities Statewide Summary

#### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

*Contracts: 789  
Acres: 335,000  
Financial Assistance: \$26 Million*

#### **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program**

*Contracts: 19  
Acres: 3,461  
Financial Assistance: \$1 Million*

#### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program**

*Contracts: 12  
Acres: 15,656  
Financial Assistance: \$421,303*

#### **Grasslands Reserve Program**

*Easements: 3  
Acres: 6,185  
Financial Assistance: \$1.2 Million*

#### **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program**

*Properties/Entities: 33  
Acres: 9,467  
Financial Assistance: \$8.4 Million*

#### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

*Easements: 2  
Acres: 463  
Financial Assistance: \$1.4 Million*

#### **Conservation Stewardship Program**

*Applications: 331  
Acres: 800,859  
Financial Assistance: \$7.8 Million*

**Disclaimer: All data was retrieved from Protracts and funding manager's records for easements on October 4, 2011.**

# 2011 Conservation Success:

## Protecting Sage Grouse Habitat

### Issue:

Protecting strutting grounds and other habitat for the Gunnison and Greater Sage-grouse

### What NRCS Colorado is Doing:

Conservation easements are restrictions placed on a piece of property to protect its associated resources. The easement is voluntarily donated or sold by the landowner and constitutes a legally binding agreement that limits certain types of uses or prevents development from taking place on the land in perpetuity while the land remains in private hands.

Permanently protected privately-owned lands provide a multitude of public benefits, such as water supply protection; scenic views; flood control; fish and wildlife habitat; recreation (including hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching and other outdoor activities); aesthetics; carbon sequestration; dilution of waste water; erosion control; and agricultural crop production.

Along the Saguache Creek corridor and in Saguache County, a series of FRPP easements protect 13,681 acres. Properties in this area have a strong ranching tradition and have been used for agriculture since the valley's settlement in the mid-1800's.



Reddert Ranch in Montezuma County, Colorado.

Successful ranching relies on keeping a number of productive ranches in order to attract the goods and services required by those enterprises.

These easements play a vital role in Saguache County's agricultural economy as well as protecting riparian and other wildlife values. The easements are a haven for big game species with healthy populations of elk, mule deer, rocky mountain big horn sheep and pronghorn antelope. **Program used: FRPP**

## Natural Resource Benefits and Impacts

In 2011, conservation practices were applied by farmers and ranchers in Colorado through various NRCS programs. Conservation practices work to improve farmland, soil, water quality, air, plants, forestland, and wildlife habitat.

Through practices such as nutrient management, landowners were able to improve soil quality and plant health; and through irrigation water management, they were able to improve water quality delivery, thereby improving crop production on their working lands.

Many Farm Bill conservation practices apply to rangelands, such as prescribed grazing. Through installation of water developments, pasture division fences, wells and water pipelines, these practices focus on maintaining, enhancing, and restoring needed plant communities and habitat conditions.

Throughout fiscal year 2011, landowners worked with NRCS staff to develop a good, sound conservation plan to identify and address natural resource concerns on their land.

## Conservation Program Descriptions

### Environmental Quality Incentives

**Program (EQIP)** provides a voluntary conservation program for farmers, ranchers and owners of private, non-industrial forest land that promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible national goals. EQIP offers financial and technical help to assist eligible producers install or implement conservation practices on eligible agricultural land.

### Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program offering cost-share incentives to landowners to voluntarily develop and improve wildlife habitat on private lands.

### Agricultural Water Enhancement

**Program (AWEP)** A voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and

technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land for the purposes of conserving surface and ground water and improving water quality.

### Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to restore former wetlands, re-establish native wetland wildlife habitat and retire marginal land from agricultural production.

### Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property.

### Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The Conservation Stewardship Program

(CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities; and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities.

### Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners keep their productive farm and ranch land in agriculture. USDA provides matching funds to state, local, or tribal government entities and nongovernmental organizations with existing farm and ranch lands protection programs to purchase conservation easements.