

MANCOS RIVER PROJECT

Ranchers Find Help for Irrigation Improvements from Unexpected Source

COLLABORATING STAKEHOLDERS

- Private ranch owners and agricultural producers
- Mancos Conservation District
- Colorado Water Trust
- Sante Fe Watershed Group
- Colorado Division of Mining, Reclamation and Safety
- San Juan Citizens Alliance
- Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
- Mesa Verde National Park
- Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife
- Mancos Water Conservancy District
- San Juan National Forest
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Fort Lewis College
- Colorado Rural Water Association
- Town of Mancos
- Mountain Studies Institute



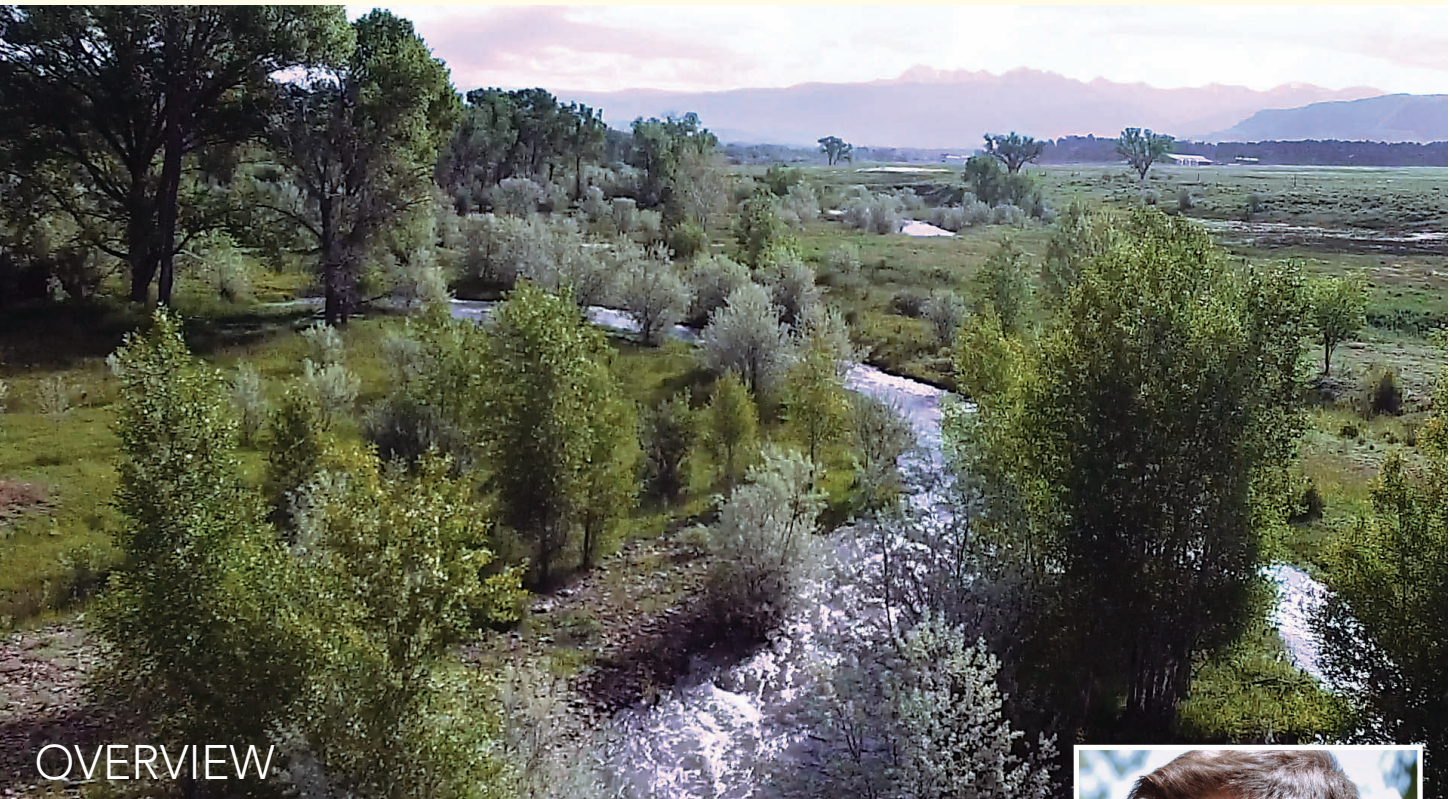
“As Colorado’s population continues to grow, farmland is being converted to development and agricultural water is being sold or rented to municipalities. It is imperative that we work with others to preserve agricultural irrigation water and that farmers and ranchers get involved in water planning.”

-- Greg Peterson, Executive Director

Learn More

To see a six-minute video of the Mancos Watershed Project, a fact sheet on this project and other resources, visit www.coagwater.org/stream-management

For more resources on funding for agricultural infrastructure improvements, contact Greg Peterson with the Colorado Ag Water Alliance at coagwater@gmail.com



OVERVIEW

Ditch and diversion structure improvements have enabled ranchers in Southwest Colorado, mostly cow-calf producers, to expend less labor to access the same amount of water to irrigate their pastures. Looking back at development of the Mancos Watershed Plan in 2011, the ranchers are strong proponents of the process which involved working with other stakeholders, including those with very different points-of-view and motivations.

“Ranchers involved in the project were skeptical at first of the help proposed by the watershed plan and the different values and perspectives of those involved in the project. But as they saw the opportunities to improve their irrigation system, while also improving the environmental health of the river, they agreed to work together on the project.”



—Gretchen Rank,
Director of the Mancos
Conservation District.



“Now I go to each headgate once a week, instead of daily, and that is mostly a five-minute maintenance check.”
—Ben Wolcott, Wolcott Ranch, Mancos, Colo.

PROJECT PLAN & IMPLEMENTATION

The Mancos Conservation District’s mission is to promote long-term, sustainable use and protection of the Mancos River Watershed. The district is dedicated to integrated watershed management to improve water distribution, on-farm irrigation systems, noxious weed control, rehabilitation of disturbed areas and restoration of the riparian health and river channel. Over its 70-year history, the district has collaborated with a diverse group of stakeholders to provide educational, financial and technical assistance to meet these conservation goals. The district has taken a leading role in watershed planning and projects in the Mancos Watershed since its inception in 1948.

The Mancos Valley Watershed Group began in 2006 and is a collaboration of Mancos Valley landowners, community partners, nonprofits and federal, state and local agencies involved in the watershed. The partnership began with the development of the Mancos Source Water Protection Plan in 2009. In 2011, with the support of the Colorado Nonpoint Source Program, the Mancos Conservation District worked with the Mancos Valley Watershed Group to develop the Mancos Watershed Plan. The Mancos Conservation District has worked with multiple partners to implement projects identified within these plans. With support from the Colorado Water Conservation Board, Southwest Basin Roundtable, Colorado State Conservation Board, National Resource Conservation Service, Southwestern Water Conservation District, Trout Unlimited and local irrigators, the Mancos Valley Watershed Group designed and implemented 11 diversion improvements and helped fund two additional diversions for implementation in 2020. These projects are testaments to the Mancos Conservation District’s commitment to secure and improve irrigators’ access to decreed water, all the while improving fish passage, channel stability and riparian habitat.

Recent droughts and fire have led the Mancos Valley Watershed Group to identify drought and climate-resilient strategies for a holistic approach to river health. The Mancos Conservation District continues to build relationships with partners and landowners as part of its commitment to identifying and completing integrated, multi-purpose projects in the watershed and to working with landowners one-on-one to improve their stream habitat.



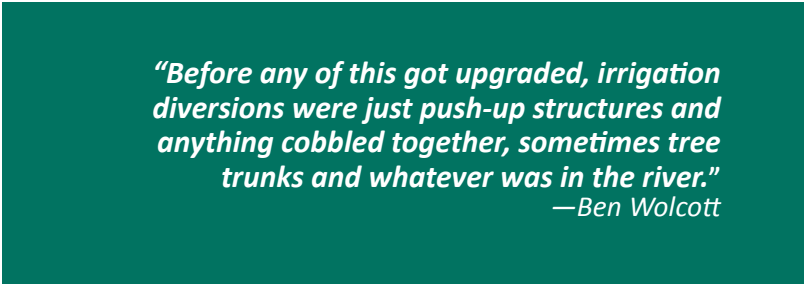
“Over my 60 years, I’ve seen the river channel deepen, which makes it harder to dam up diversions. It was helpful when the Mancos Conservation District came to us and asked if it could help make those diversions more efficient.”
—Ryan Brown, Reddert Ranch, Mancos, Colo.



“(Prior to project improvement of piping) there was a lot of seepage and evaporation. Now there’s more (water) going down the river due to increased efficiency.”
—Tom Weaver, Ratliff Homestead, Mancos, Colo.



This before and after photo shows how the project installed permanent diversion structures for ranchers to be able to use their irrigation water at consistent levels, regardless of the amount of water in the stream.



*“Before any of this got upgraded, irrigation diversions were just push-up structures and anything cobbled together, sometimes tree trunks and whatever was in the river.”
—Ben Wolcott*



Even during low flows, the improvements provide places for fish to survive and enable irrigation water to flow.



*“Most years we didn’t even get any water, but now with the new diversion structures and screens we have in place in front of piped ditches, we’ve seen leaps and bounds in (improved) efficiency. The diversions can handle high water really well and then still divert water under low flows.”
—Ben Wolcott, Wolcott Ranch, Mancos, Colo*



PROJECT IMPROVEMENTS

- Improved 11 ditch diversion structures that divert water off the Mancos River and its tributaries
- Piped 16 open ditches with plans for two additional ditches in the next three years
- Improved 11 fisheries by connecting to multiple tributaries, providing bank stabilization and riparian cover, removing invasive species and establishing a long-term monitoring program

PROJECT FUNDING

Funding awarded between 2006-2019 when the watershed plan was developed and projects implemented	
\$3,535,677	Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP cost share dollars NRCS
\$55,000	Rapid Watershed Grant Colorado
\$450,565	Water Conservation Board
\$531,300	Colorado State Conservation Board - Salinity Control Program
\$434,200	Colorado State Conservation Board - District Conservation Technician Program
\$5,000	Trout Unlimited
\$169,500	Southwestern Water Conservation District
\$49,500	River Edge West Colorado
\$160,900	Department of Public Health and Environment
* Additional Bureau of Reclamation Salinity Control Program dollars were award directly to ditch companies.	