

# **WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Proposal**

CFDA Number 15.554  
Funding Opportunity Funding Opportunity **R14AS00038**

## **Rio Chama Watershed Partnership**

*A Proposal to Enhance and Expand a Watershed Group Comprised of  
Agency and Local-Area Stakeholders, Working Collaboratively to Improve  
Water Resource Conditions in the Rio Chama River Basin,  
Rio Arriba County, New Mexico.*

### **Submitted to:**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Rio Chama Watershed Partnership**

The Rio Chama is the largest tributary of the upper Rio Grande Basin, the primary source of municipal and irrigation water in the populous Albuquerque-Middle Rio Grande region. Local traditional agriculture, whitewater boating, angling and hydropower production also depend upon the health and resiliency of the Rio Chama. Three large reservoirs, with conservation capacity of ~750,000 acre-feet regulate flow in the river.

For water quality purposes, the New Mexico Environment Department divides the basin into two sections, both of which have impairments related to sediment loading. In the upper Chama the NMED has identified forestry and wastewater issues; in the lower Chama grazing and water regulation issues have been identified.

The Rio Chama Watershed Partnership is an expansion of Rio Grande Restoration's three-year old "Rio Chama Flow Project" which, under leadership of an interdisciplinary science team, has collected substantial environmental data, built a systems dynamics model of the hydrology of the Rio Chama between El Vado and Abiquiu Reservoirs, and fashioned environmental flow management alternatives in a Flow Ecology Workshop.

To govern the planning and implementation of improved water management, RGR has organized an Advisory Council of 20 stakeholders (federal land and water management agencies, state water and watershed managers, public utilities, tourism trade groups, environmental organizations, sportsmen and private land owners). The Advisory Council identified a number of other stakeholders, particularly traditional land grants and acequias, schools, soil and water districts and tribes, as well as additional issues of local importance, including impacts of energy development, land use and climate change.

Through this funding proposal to the Cooperative Watershed Management Program, RGR proposes to broaden the membership of this watershed group, expand its geographic scope- to the entire lower Rio Chama Basin and rename it the Rio Chama Watershed Partnership.

It is requesting \$50,000 in WaterSMART funding, over two years to reach out to additional stakeholders and organize still-broader participation, incorporate the advisory council as the "Rio Chama Watershed Partnership" and prepare a holistic Watershed Implementation Plan, through an iterative, collaborative workshop process.

Two Priority Managed Elements of The Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Collaborative of which the Rio Chama is a part, are "Riparian, Riverine and Wetland Systems" and "Water for Society" (Storage and Delivery, Flow, Water Quality). These conform closely with the objectives of the Rio Chama Flow Project.

The **Lower Rio Chama Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan** seeks synergies with existing Watershed Restoration Action Strategies and similar holistic planning efforts, creating strong momentum for implementation of priority projects throughout the basin.

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**I. BACKGROUND: Rio Chama Watershed (HUC Code 13020102)**

The Rio Chama, a snowmelt runoff-driven major tributary to the Rio Grande, flows eastward from the Southern San Juan Mountains for 130 linear miles, joining the Rio Grande near Espanola, New Mexico. The watershed ranges in elevation from over 12,000 feet in its mountain headwaters to less than 5,600 feet at its confluence with the Rio Grande. The Rio Chama Basin drains 3,144 square miles, and includes 10 perennial tributaries. Annual bi-modal precipitation (winter snows, summer monsoons) varies widely, year-to-year and by elevation, ranging from under 12 inches to over 35 inches, per year. The Lower Rio Chama Basin lies almost entirely with Rio Arriba County, NM.

**Rio Chama Watershed, New Mexico**

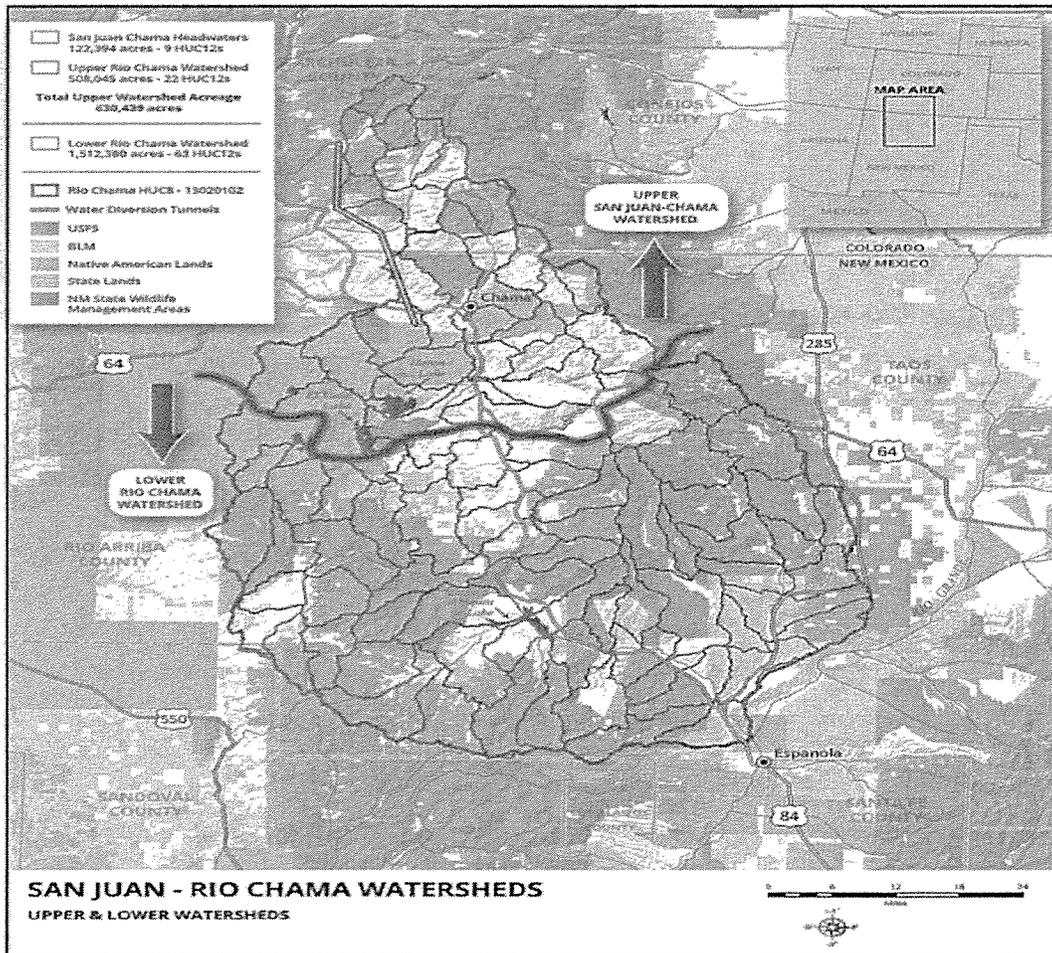


Figure 1- Map of Rio Chama and contributing watersheds within the San Juan River Basin. Service Area under this proposal covers lands lying South of the purple line, Heron Reservoir to Rio Grande confluence. Courtesy Chama Peak Land Alliance

A 30-mile segment of the Rio Chama is protected as a National Wild & Scenic River.

Lower Rio Chama landscapes are predominantly rural and agricultural, within a matrix of pinon-juniper and ponderosa woodlands. Traditional *Hispanic* communities are organized around small irrigated farms, surrounded by larger grazing tracts. Agriculture dominates the local economy, but recreational tourism is growing rapidly.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of Rio Arriba County lands are owned by United States Forest Service and BLM, following the conversion of Spanish and Mexican community grants to public control and management, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Lower Rio Chama Water Supply and Storage:**

The Rio Chama is the largest tributary to the Rio Grande, supplying about 200,000 acre-feet of runoff, annually. Since 1974, these “native” flows have been augmented by nearly 100,000 additional acre-feet of water imported from the San Juan River Basin. The combined stream flows are regulated by three federal storage reservoirs:

- **El Vado Dam** (180 kaf), constructed by Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) in 1936, this project is now managed by the US Bureau of Reclamation to serve irrigation on the mainstem Middle Rio Grande.
- **Abiquiu Dam** (180kaf), constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1963, was initially authorized for flood control. Since re-authorization in 1972, it provides 180,00 acre-feet of contract storage for the Albuquerque Drinking Water Utility (ABCWUA).
- **Heron Dam** (400 kaf), constructed by Reclamation in 1974, to store a firm yield of about 100,000 acre feet per year of water imported from the San Juan River Basin, and contracted to users in the middle Rio Grande Basin, near Albuquerque.

**Rio Chama Reservoirs**



Figure 2- Schematic of Rio Chama and mainstem Rio Grande reservoirs, including trans-basin diversions from San Juan River tributaries. Courtesy US Bureau of Reclamation

### **Water Use and Water Rights in Rio Chama Basin:**

The New Mexico Office of the State Engineer reports an average irrigated acreage of 25,370 acres for which 128,675 acre-feet may be diverted from the Chama and its tributaries.<sup>1</sup> Chama Basin water rights are held by a large number of small holders, almost all of them *parciantes* (shareholders) on Spanish-era acequias. Acequia water use varies with available streamflow from year to year. Municipal and domestic wells, some inter-connected to streams, supply an additional 10,000 acre-feet of water.

Two discrete irrigation sections serve water users within the Chama Basin:

- **Acequias Nortenios** (AN), serving ~10,000 acres upstream of El Vado Reservoir, the majority of which have 1920's-era priority dates.
- **Rio Chama Acequia Association** (RCAA), serving ~20,000 acres downstream of Abiquiu, the majority of which have 18<sup>th</sup> century priority dates.

Water diversion by means of primitive push-up dams requires frequent maintenance to divert water to hand-dug and –maintained *acequias* (community ditches) and the ancient tradition of flood-irrigating pastures and farms endures. By modern standards, Chama Valley irrigation practices are inefficient, but these systems have the singular virtue of supporting riparian habitats in the valley and are a valued tradition in Basin communities.

Competition for water between the local irrigation sections is a fact of life in the Lower Chama. In addition there are persistent tensions between large institutional water providers (MRGCD, ABCWUA) and the local irrigators, who are required to pass-through the majority of streamflows to downstream users in the MRGCD and ABCWUA service areas.

### **Water Quality in the Chama Basin:**

The Chama Basin has experienced a long history of intensive livestock grazing. More recently, housing subdivision development and energy exploration/production have disturbed additional land within the watershed. These disturbances have raised the turbidity in throughout mainstem Rio Chama, an important trout fishery. Discharges of insufficiently treated wastewater from the Town of Chama has cited for additional water impairment of water quality standards. The important brown trout fishery has been impacted by these discharges.

The New Mexico Environment Department/Surface Water Quality Bureau has delineated the Rio Chama into an Upper Reach (above El Vado Reservoir) and Lower Reach (below El Vado. Two rounds of watershed planning have been completed, 1999 and 2003<sup>2</sup>.

**Upper Rio Chama:** In 2003, five exceedences of New Mexico water quality standards

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<sup>1</sup> NM Interstate Stream Commission, “Regional Water Plan-Rio Chama Watershed” (2005) 5-9.

<sup>2</sup> In 2012-13, NMED/SWQB again conducted an intensive Water Quality Monitoring Study of 32 sites; at this writing the data have not been published.

for temperature were documented on Upper Rio Chama tributaries, along with “several exceedences” for chronic aluminum, one for turbidity and one for stream bottom deposits. A TMDL addresses these impairments<sup>3</sup>. It is apparent that the top priority stream is the Rio Chamita, where TMDLs for temperature, ammonia, total phosphorus, fecal coliform and chronic aluminum have been established.

**Lower Rio Chama:** In 2003, three exceedences of water quality standards for turbidity were documented on Lower Chama tributaries, plus one each for temperature and dissolved oxygen. Recently, a local watershed planning effort was initiated on the Rio Nutrias, where a CWA section 319 watershed planning project was awarded in early 2013.

The New Mexico Environment Department has prepared Watershed Restoration Action Strategies (WRAS) for both reaches. With the Rio Nutrias Watershed Plan nearing completion, the implementation of watershed restoration strategies will become a central feature in the work of the Lower Chama Watershed Partnership.

**Outstanding Watershed Issues in the Lower Rio Chama:**

- **Range Conditions-** Livestock production has long been a culturally important feature of local economy. The Basin’s characteristically thin topsoils have been eroded during their long history of intensive livestock grazing, as evidenced by the severe gullying observed in the Ghost Ranch area and bare soils in the Rio Nutrias.
- **Energy Development-** A natural gas play in the Mancos Shale Formation, underlying large portions of the basin has led BLM to propose offering leases in the Rio Chiquito and Rio Cebolla (in areas which lie within the Wild and Scenic River corridor) as early as October, 2014. Many residents oppose such projects because of risks to aquifer quality from hydraulic fracturing.
- **Drought and Climate Change-** Historically wide variations in winter precipitation have made hydrologic drought, such as the region is currently experiencing, an increasingly common challenge for Basin residents. Climate change projections suggest that average snowpacks may decline by as much a 20% in the near-term.<sup>4</sup>
- **Ag Water Conservation-** On average, more than five acre-feet per acre are diverted to produce pasture, alfalfa and gardens, whose average consumptive use is about 2.2 acre-feet. This 40% irrigation efficiency is attributable to poorly engineered diversion/delivery works and ubiquitous flood irrigation practices.
- **Wildfire Risk-** A history of fire-suppression and steady encroachment of non-native vegetation suggests an increasing risk of large wildfires, such as have occurred nearby, in the Upper Rio Grande, with impacts to critical water supplies and implications for the entire hydrologic regime.
- **Flood Protection-** The US Army Corps of Engineers has determined the safe

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<sup>3</sup> NMED SWQB, “Total maximum daily loads for the Rio Chama”. 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Llewellyn et al., “Upper Rio Grande Climate Risk Assessment” US Bureau of Reclamation. 2013.

channel capacity below Abiquiu Dam to be 1700 cfs, far less than the historic 1% flood. One result of this restriction is that Oke Owingeh Pueblo is unable to meet its objective for overbank flooding to support tribal river restoration projects.

- **Village of Chama NPDES Permit-** Discharges chronically out of compliance for total coliform, other constituents. State funding for FY 2014 of \$8.5 million was appropriated for plant upgrades in this year's State Legislative Session.
- **River Channel Disturbance-** Hydrologic alteration has resulted in river channel degradation and water table declines, as "sediment starved" dam releases scour the riverbed below. The extent and health of riparian areas have been progressively reduced, as the river and floodplain are no longer hydrologically connected. The process has also entailed losses in breeding habitat of aquatic invertebrates, the food base for fish and wildlife, as well impacts to terrestrial ecology<sup>5</sup>.
- **Environmental Flow Needs-** Reservoir releases at El Vado and Abiquiu are calibrated to water demands in the Middle Rio Grande, near Albuquerque. Precipitous ramp-up/ramp-down rates and periods of near-zero flows have demonstrably affected a variety of local resources, including irrigation, river recreation, fisheries and hydroelectric power production.
- **User Group Conflicts-** An historic, but informal and temporary agreement was reached between Chama acequia sections in Fall, 2013, relieving a long-standing competition. If Partnership recruitment goals are met, all water user groups will be sitting at the same table.

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **About the Applicant:**

Rio Grande Restoration was established in 1994, with a mission of restoring the ecological health of the Rio Grande. It is chartered as a New Mexico not-for-profit corporation, with federal 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status. Its Board of Directors is comprised of experts in hydrology, law and river management. Under the leadership of its Executive Director, Steve Harris, the organization has been active in a number of water policy, riparian restoration and public education projects.

With the support of New Mexico's wilderness guiding community, Rio Grande Restoration has long been involved in on-the-ground management of the Rio Chama and future development of the economic and ecological values it supports.

It consulted with Santa Fe National Forest, BLM-Taos and Albuquerque District of US Army Corps of Engineers in crafting the Rio Chama Management Plan<sup>6</sup>, which addresses recreation, fisheries, land use and stream flow objectives of these agencies. With citizen volunteers, it implemented a 320-acre riparian restoration project at Archuleta Ranch, at river mile 5.

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<sup>5</sup> Rio Grande Restoration, "Rio Chama Flow-Ecology Relationships". (in press) 2014.

<sup>6</sup> USDA Forest Service et al, "Rio Chama Management Plan". November, 1990.

In 2010, with support from the New Mexico Environment Department's River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, it launched the Rio Chama Flow Optimization Project, which created a systems dynamic model of Chama hydrology and a set of scientifically-determined stream flow: ecology relationships. In implementing the recommendations that resulted from this process, Rio Grande Restoration created an interdisciplinary Project Implementation Team of aquatic biologists, riparian ecologists, fluvial Geomorphologist and hydrologists, and a stakeholders' Advisory Council to review and govern the project.

### **Rio Grande Restoration Watershed Group Resolution:**

On July 1, 2012, Rio Grande Restoration's Board of Directors enacted the following resolution:

*"Be it resolved by unanimous consent of the Directors of Rio Grande Restoration (a New Mexico not-for-profit corporation) that:*

- 1. The corporation authorizes its Executive Director, Steve Harris, to enter into a cooperative agreement with the United States Bureau of Reclamation, under Reclamation's "Cooperative Watershed Management Program", to establish a watershed group in support of our "Rio Chama Flow Project";*
- 2. We authorize expenditure of \$15,000 in existing funding to support RGR participation in this agreement;*
- 3. The Executive Director is directed to work with Reclamation to meet established deadlines for entering into a cooperative agreement.*

*Approved this 1<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2012*

*Signed: Francisco Guevara. President of the Board, Rio Grande Restoration, Inc. "*

### **Rio Chama Flow Project Past Accomplishments:**

The initial phase of the Rio Chama Flow Optimization Project has created an adaptive management program to improve reservoir operations so as to optimize sediment transport, channel dynamics, ecological function and economic vitality in the 30 mile Wild and Scenic Rio Chama, values that have been diminished by land and water management activities in the last half-century.

Utilizing baseline data collected over the past three years, the Project created collaboratively-determined, adaptively-managed flow regimes, to improve river basin ecology while enhancing management performance in providing:

- water storage and delivery for irrigators, tribes and municipalities,
- compliance with Rio Grande Compact and environmental mandates and

- the needs of river-oriented recreation (fishing, boating). Accordingly, the Project Implementation Team has: acquired ecosystem data, established environmental flow hypotheses, built a partnership with stakeholders, integrated a range of desired outcomes and synthesized an idealized hydrograph incorporating the hydrologic elements necessary to achieve these outcomes.

Rio Grande Restoration now seeks support from Reclamation’s Cooperative Watershed Management Program to extend the geographic scope of the Chama Flow Project concepts to watershed compartments downstream of Abiquiu Reservoir and to identify and address additional concerns of agencies and residents with environmental conditions in the Lower Rio Chama.

**Rio Grande Restoration’s Watershed Governance Objective:**

Despite a centuries-long reliance on the Rio Chama, rural residents have had little opportunity to engage in the design of Rio Chama’s highly-engineered ”plumbing system”, which was built to serve the water supply needs of distant communities, or participate in other natural resource management decisions.

Recruiting further participation is critical to the Project’s governance approach, which is inspired by the Zuni Pueblo model for natural resources management, composed of equal parts applied science and local knowledge.

In beginning to address landscape needs in our home watershed, we have engaged some of the key agencies possessing water management authority in the initial phase of the Project (Confirmed Participants) and propose organizing a still broader range of partners over the next two years (Identified Stakeholders), as below:

**PRESENT RIO CHAMA FLOW PROJECT ADVISORY COUNCIL** (Figure 3)

<b><u>Confirmed Participants</u></b>	<b><u>Identified Stakeholders</u></b>
NM Interstate Stream Commission*	Individual Residents
NM Environment Department*	Albuquerque Water Utility
US Bureau of Reclamation-Albuquerque Area Office*	MRG Conservancy District
US Army Corps of Engineers-Albuquerque District*	Ohkay Owinge Pueblo
US Bureau of Land Management-Taos Field Office*	Santa Clara Pueblo
US Forest Service-Santa Fe National Forest*	San Ildefonso Pueblo
Los Alamos County Utilities Department*	City and County of Santa Fe
University of New Mexico-Geography, Engineering	Rio Chama Acequia Assoc.
Ghost Ranch	Acequias Nortenos
El Vado Ranch	Christ in Desert Monastery
NM River Outfitters Association	NM Dep’t of Game and Fish
Adobe Whitewater Club	US Fish and Wildlife Service
NM Trout Unlimited	Jicarilla Apache Tribe
Upper Chama/E. Rio Arriba SWCD	Piedra Lumbre Land Grant
River Source	Wildlife Center

Chama Peak Land Alliance

Rio Arriba County

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\*Signed Agreements and/or contracts are in place.

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**Coordination with other Groups:**

We intend to coordinate with related efforts in the Upper Rio Chama Watershed by accepting an invitation to participate in the San Juan-Chama Partnership's Advisory Group. Likewise, we have invited the San Juan-Chama Partnership to membership in our Advisory Council and Project Implementation Team. To further advance the scope, the groups are planning a joint meeting at the end of Year 1 to connect our planning efforts at the watershed scale for the entire Rio Chama Watershed.

**Eligibility of Flow Project Advisory Council to Act as a Watershed Group:** The Project Advisory Council is presently a watershed group, within the meaning of Section 6001 of the Cooperative Watershed Management Act of 2009 (PL 111-11 [42 USC 10364]), by virtue of the facts that:

- It was first established upon the award of an NM Environment Department "River Ecosystem Restoration grant (\$189,000) in June, 2011.
- It is a cooperative, grassroots entity addressing water quality and water availability issues in the Rio Chama Basin.
- Has the participation of stakeholders, in such user categories as: hydroelectric production (Los Alamos County Utilities), livestock grazing (Ghost Ranch), recreational tourism (NM River Outfitters), irrigated agricultural production (Christ in Desert Monastery) and environment (Trout Unlimited).
- Has participation from Federal authorities (Reclamation, Corps of Engineers, BLM).
- Has participation from State authorities (Environment Department, State Engineer/ISC).

**Move Toward Watershed Restoration Goals, by:**

- Creating an independent "Partnership" identity.
- Establishing a set of restoration goals, utilizing inclusive consensus decision-making processes.
- Recruiting such other critical stakeholder perspectives as: the five land grant communities (grazers), the 17 acequia associations, the two Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the M & I water purveyor (Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority), irrigation water purveyor (Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District), and tribal government (Ohkay Owinge Pueblo).

### **III. PROJECT PLAN OF ACTION**

**Specific Objectives:**

1. Rename Chama Flow Project Advisory Council as the "Rio Chama Partnership".
2. Develop a mission statement, establish governing principles and incorporate the Partnership.

3. Engage the broadest possible range of local and institutional stakeholders (identified above).
4. Develop a holistic Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan for the Rio Chama.

### **Proposed Activities:**

**Task 1- Organize Local Water User Interests.** Rio Grande Restoration and the stakeholders it has already engaged in the present Advisory Council will recruit (indeed are already in process of recruiting) local land and water user interest groups to engage with the Partnership.

Acequia and Land Grant organizations are vitally concerned with water issues, but have seldom been consulted in water resources development decision-making. Representatives of the approximately 20 ditch associations utilizing Rio Chama water, five large land grant organizations and four tribes bordering on the river, as well as institutional water providers will be recruited as members in the Partnership. Attendees at the first public meeting following award will be tasked with writing a **mission statement** and statement of principles for the Partnership.

**Task 2- Engage General Public.** Consulting in effective and appropriate ways with individual stakeholders over projects identified by the Partnership is also critically important. The Partnership will conduct a series of community and interest group public meetings, and will publish and distribute educational materials (brochure and newsletters) aimed at residents of local communities. We anticipate that a number of individual residents will want to engage, with existing and newly recruited stakeholders, in the planning process.

**Task 3-Develop a Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan (WRIP).**

The key outcome of this project is a comprehensive plan for implementation of actions that will address a full range of water quality and water quantity issues identified by all of the resource users in the Lower Chama. Issues in the issues are inevitably related to headwaters issues, but are distinct from them (e.g. Upper Basin has forestry issues not shared with Lower Basin; Lower Basin has rangeland issues not shared with Upper Basin). Ultimately, these parallel planning processes will be integrated and Basin-wide priorities set.

The WRIP will be written through an iterative, facilitated workshop process that emphasizes collaborative goal setting by all actors within the basin. In a series of meetings at which all stakeholders are invited, participants will:

1. Identify important issues.
2. Suggest a range of actions to resolve issues
3. Prioritize actions
4. Integrate priority actions into an implementation framework.

An RGR staffer (project coordinator) will draft group decisions into a document that will

be accepted by participant/partners. The WRIP will be integrated into plan, encompassing the entire 630,000-acre Rio Chama watershed.

**Task 4-Incorporate Partnership’s Governance Framework.** In Year 2, as outreach and recruitment efforts mature, Rio Grande Restoration will incorporate the Lower Rio Chama Partnership under the laws of New Mexico and invite general membership to support our work in accomplishing the watershed restoration projects selected by participants in the Partnership.

**Task 5- Activate Citizen Science.** Local interest in and support for ecological restoration in the Lower Chama Basin will be enhanced through hands-on watershed activities undertaken by students and community volunteers.

The Partnership will take advantage of existing efforts to monitor conditions at an increasing number of sites. For example: students at Escalante High School in Tierra Amarilla now conduct water quality monitoring at one site below El Vado Dam; the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, a consortium of secondary school science programs has conducted its first amphibian survey on the Wild and Scenic River; the Wildlife Center in Espanola is beginning to develop a wetland below Abiquiu Dam. Using these programs as models, education and monitoring activities can be expanded to schools and civic groups in other communities. (may be considered a subset of Task 3 Outreach)

**Project Timeline:**

<b>TASK</b>	<b>Description/Status</b>	<b>DEADLINE</b>
Gather Baseline Data	Completed-Phase 1	November, 2013
Hypotheses	Completed-Phase 1	November, 2013
Recruit Partners	Coordinator	Ongoing
Outreach to Public	Coordinator	Ongoing
Citizen Science Program	With school programs	September, 2016
Formulate Mission, Principles	First Meeting	November, 2014
Identify Critical Needs	Second Meeting	January, 2015
Identify Implementation Projects	Third Meeting	March, 2015
Draft Project WRIP (Plan)	Coordinator, partners	August, 2015
Prioritize, finalize Plan	Fourth Meeting	November, 2015
Integrate with SJCP Plan	with other groups	January, 2016
Initiate Implementation	Coordinator	May, 2016
WRIP Deliverable	To Reclamation	August, 2016

**IV. Environmental and Regulatory Compliance**

Since the overall project’s deliverables consist of producing a Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan and a fully functional governance structure, its activities will be

predominantly administrative. The current phase of the Project involves some scientific monitoring, field studies and visits, none of which require even minor alterations of the environment, access to private lands or other approvals:

1. Neither Rio Chama watershed planning nor the organizing tasks detailed in this proposal require any surface disturbance activities.
2. Endangered Species populations and habitats are not known to be present in the Project area.
3. There are several identifiable wetlands in vicinity of study sites (< five acres), but the effect on these of any future implementation would be intentionally restorative, not destructive, of designated wetlands.
4. Although the Lower Chama Basin contains a number of archaeological sites, none have been identified as being within the study area.
5. Any future recommendations of the Advisory Council were to be implemented, such as modifying irrigation infrastructure or performing land treatments these would be undertaken with other, later-approved funding sources than the present Cooperative Watershed Management Program proposal.

We are aware that if WRIP recommended flow regimes or land treatments are implemented, a National Environmental Policy Act review may be required. Should the Project move to an Implementation Phase; we are certainly prepared to assist the Department of Interior in conducting the appropriate level of environmental review.

## **V. Funding Plan and Budget Proposal**

The Rio Chama Partnership recognizes a need for significant funding in order to achieve the desired outcome, holistic planning with full participation of stakeholders. Although we are aware that no cost-share is required under this FOA, we want to make clear that the project contemplates from existing partners which, together with the present CWMP request will permit a budget adequate to achieve the goal of meaningful improvements in watershed function. These are:

- 1) Rio Grande Restoration whose board has committed \$15,000 to the Partnership.
- 2) National Landscape Conservation System, a Bureau of Land Management program, which has already expended funds on Phase 1 data collection and tentatively approved an additional \$50,000 over for two out-years. (Verification letter not available at the deadline).
- 3) New Mexico Environment Department, University of New Mexico, Trout Unlimited, NM Interstate Stream Commission and other existing partners have provided funding and/or in-kind services during Phase 1. Some level of support is anticipated in next phase.

**BUDGET PROPOSAL**

(NOTE: None of these expenditures will be made prior to award of Reclamation funding. There are no Indirect Costs.)

<b>BUDGET ITEM</b>	<b>BASIS</b>	<b>Non-Fed</b>	<b>RECLAMATION</b>	<b>TOTAL COST</b>
<b>A. SALARY</b>				
Project Coordinator	\$34,000 annual	\$10,000	\$24,000	\$34,000
<b>B. FRINGE BENEFITS</b>				
Project Coordinator	23.6% of gross		\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
<b>C. TRAVEL</b>				
	8640 mi. @ \$.54	\$ 4,666		\$ 4,666
<b>D. EQUIPMENT</b>				
				0
<b>E. SUPPLIES</b>				
				0
<b>F. CONTRACTUAL</b>				
Facilitator	6 da@\$1000/day	\$ 1,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 6,000
Educators	12 da @ \$500	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$10,000
Publications	3@ \$1500	\$ 1,500	\$ 3,000	\$ 4,500
<b>G. COMPLIANCE</b>				
	1% of project cost	\$ 850		\$ 850
<b>H. REPORTING</b>				
	125 hrs @ \$40/hr.	\$5,000	\$ 5,000	
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</b>		<b>\$28,016</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>\$78,016</b>

**BUDGET NARRATIVE**

This section provides explanation and justification of expenditures in the preceding table.

NOTE: **No indirect costs** will be assessed by this project.

**A. SALARY:** This item represents the 50% FTE of Project Manager Steve Harris' salary to compile, write the Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan and conduct outreach and is based on either; a. his work plan for the first 12 months following an award under this FOA or b. RGR's hiring of a half-time planner/coordinator at this level.

**B. FRINGE BENEFITS:** This item represents an estimate of federal and state withholding taxes, including SSA and Medicare, on the salary described above.

C. TRAVEL: Based on travel by private vehicle at current reimbursement rates. It anticipates 6 round trips per month from Rio Grande Restoration's office to the Chama Valley, at an average of 120 miles per trip.

D. and E. EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES: No charge is offered for Equipment; none is anticipated. Supplies (not estimated) will be covered by Rio Grande Restoration's normal Operating Budget, as necessary.

F. CONTRACTUAL: The "Facilitator" item represents the cost of a professional facilitator, Melinda Harm-Benson, who would conduct the estimated 5 public meetings necessary to negotiate the Watershed Restoration Implementation Plan, between time of award and September, 2016.

The "Educators" item was submitted by River Source of Santa Fe, based on contact with Escalante High School and other potential partnering groups in Service Area.

The "Publications" item was based on a cost estimate offered by Andrew Dennison Communications, the Project's current Communications Contractor. This is considered to be a firm cost for one brochure and two newsletters.

G. COMPLIANCE: This item is compliant with the FOA's prescription that no less than 1% of Project costs be assigned to environmental compliance.

H. REPORTING: This item is based on the Project Manager's estimate of hours involved for 8 quarters of Project invoicing, grant reporting, tax compliance, reconciliation and the production of meeting minutes and correspondence, at RGR accountant's usual and accustomed rates.

## **VI. Evaluation Criteria**

**A. Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope:** The existing Advisory Council, which was organized by Rio Grande Restoration to address resource management issues in a 30 mile reach between El Vado and Abiquiu Reservoirs, held its organizational meeting on March 22, 2012 and has met on three other occasions, most recently on November 13, 2013.

The group's current membership includes: public land management agencies (Santa Fe National Forest and Bureau of Land Management) federal water management agencies (Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers), state resource managers (NM Environment Department and Interstate Stream Commission) and the Los Alamos County Utilities Department, which generates hydropower at both reservoirs. All have signed Participation Agreements.

University of New Mexico's Department of Civil Engineering is committed to modeling hydrologic systems, as independently funded. Also collaborating in Project activities are: Truchas Chapter of Trout Unlimited, New Mexico River Outfitters Association, Adobe Whitewater Club and land owners El Vado Ranch, Ghost Ranch and Christ in the Desert Monastery.

Rio Grande Restoration is also reaching out to the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and Ohkay Owinge Pueblo, which have manifested interest, but have not yet formally affiliated with the Project. Rio Grande Restoration has been invited to address the Rio Chama Acequia and Piedra Lumbre Land Grant associations about affiliating with the Project in the next few months.

**B. Critical Watershed Needs/Issues:** The Chama Flow Project's mission of creating a decision support tool to optimize water delivery, river ecosystem health, recreational angling and boating and hydropower clearly implicates a broad range of issues in water resource management. RGR expects certain other issues will emerge as we expand the dialogue with local stakeholders<sup>7</sup>:

- Energy Development-BLM may offer up to 50 O & G leases in October, 2014.
- Agricultural Water Conservation-no formal conservation plan has been promulgated by any agency or entity in the region.
- Wastewater Treatment-Village of Chama treatment plan will be designed during project period.
- Erosion and Sedimentation-Seasonal and AUM provisions of public land grazing permits are due for renegotiation near term.
- Drought and Climate Change-Conservation and efficiencies could help address Reclamation's future scenarios of decreased precipitation.
- Wildfire Risk Reduction-primarily an upper basin
- Flood Risk Reduction- Several opportunities to integrate riparian restoration and flood attenuation objectives.
- Water supply security-primarily lower basin and San Juan-Chama Project issue.
- User conflict resolution-If our recruitment of water user groups is successful, competing irrigation sections will be at the table to negotiate the WRIP.

The governance framework we have outlined for long-term implementation of an adaptive watershed management program will empower the Partnership to work collaboratively in defining and prioritizing such issues, as well as potential projects to address these locally-identified concerns.

**C. Implementation and Results:** In its existing and proposed phases, the overarching goal of the project is to enhance the ecological health of the Rio Chama Basin. Our existing Project Work Plan is creating a physical model that could be used by Reclamation as a decision support tool for reservoir storage and release alternatives (including in the Navajo and Blanco Rivers, source of San Juan Chama interbasin transfer project). Implementation of Project recommendations will depend upon acceptance by the participants in the Partnership; ideally this will include all those who rely upon the system.

Our planning effort proposed takes cognizance of previously prepared plans, several of which RGR has participated in. Note also that all preparing agencies are project partners:

Upper Chama Watershed Action Strategy (NMED)-2003

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<sup>7</sup> These critical issues are more fully described on pp. 7 and 8, above.

Lower Chama Watershed Action Strategy	“	-2005
Rio Nutrias Watershed Implementation Strategy	“	-2014
Rio Chama Regional Water Plan (NMISC)-		-2003
Rio Chama Management Plan (BLM-Taos)		-1990

Most of the above plans are mandated to be updated over the near-term. Partnership will be a powerful and committed participant, folding the WRIP into successor documents.

That the Project Implementation Team has completed all Phase one monitoring and organizing tasks on schedule is offered as *de facto* evidence of our readiness to proceed under this Proposal.

**D. Watershed Group Nexus with an LCC:** The Southern Rockies Landscape Conservation Collaborative has described several Priority Managed Elements for the broader Southern Rocky Mountain region of which the Rio Chama Basin is a part. Two of these priorities are “Riparian, Riverine and Wetland Systems” and “Water for Society” (Storage and Delivery, Flow, Water Quality) conforms closely to the mission of the Rio Chama Flow Project.

Two Project partners (Reclamation and Office of the State Engineer) already provide a nexus to the SRLCC and we see a role emerging, in the near-term, for the Project itself to assist SRLCC in applying eco-hydrologic science in the region.

### Attachment A-Supporting Documents

*Current and Past Letters of Support, Participation Agreements are included, as .pdf's attached to the electronic version of this Proposal.*

### Attachment B- Project Implementation Team Capsule CVs

Project performance has been and will continue to be guided a team of top physical and social scientists that have substantial professional experience in the project area. Together they possess sufficient expertise to permit the Chama Flow Project to analyze necessary data, design, monitor, adapt and vett with stakeholders a program of improvements to the Rio Chama Basin. Reclamation and Corps and other agency personnel also participate in the Implementation Team.

A. Steve Harris, Project Manager/Outreach Coordinator. Mr. Harris is the Executive Director of Rio Grande Restoration, with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism/Sociology from the University of Oklahoma. He was a project co-manager of the Archuleta Ranch Riparian Restoration Project (at Mile 6-Rio Chama). He has been closely involved in the formulation of New Mexico environmental flow policy, including drafting the Strategic Water Reserve statute, organizing an ongoing study of hydrologic alterations to New Mexico rivers and several collaborative river management efforts involving a diversity of stakeholders. He has contracted to perform field studies with the US Army Corps of Engineers, NM Environment Department and NM Interstate Stream Commission. His

grassroots organizing experience includes directing the Alliance For Rio Grande Heritage, for which he was also the fiscal agent.

B. Mike Harvey, Fluvial Geomorphologist, Tetra Tech, Inc. Dr. Harvey is a senior fluvial geomorphologist with 35 years of experience in applying the principles and tools of fluvial geomorphology to river and habitat restoration for both warm-and cold-water fish species, riparian restoration and river engineering in a wide range of settings including low gradient, sand-bed and higher gradient, gravel-cobble bed systems. He has extensive experience with hydrologic (HEC-HMS), one-and two-dimensional hydraulic (HEC-RAS, FLO2D, SRH2D) and sediment transport (HEC-RAS v.4, HEC-6T, SAM) models and their application to river and habitat restoration. He has a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the Rio Chama based on recently completed multi-disciplinary studies between the Rio Gallina confluence and Abiquiu reservoir as well as extensive reconnaissance of the reach between El Vado Dam and the Rio Gallina. Harvey will provide technical expertise with hydrology, hydraulics, sediment transport and geomorphology and their relationships to habitat formation and maintenance.

C. Todd Caplan, Riparian Ecologist, GeoSystems Analysis, Inc. Mr. Caplan is a senior vegetation ecologist with sixteen years experience performing ecological assessments and developing comprehensive watershed management and habitat restoration plans. He specializes in vegetation assessments & mapping, quantifying riparian habitat characteristics, developing revegetation and habitat enhancement prescriptions, and writing comprehensive restoration management and monitoring documents. Over the past five years, he has collaborated with interdisciplinary scientific teams to analyze the impacts of flow management on floodplain plant community composition and riparian plant recruitment on various reaches of the Rio Grande. His most recent efforts involved collaboration with Dr. Harvey to evaluate impacts of flow management on the Rio Chama riparian corridor between Christ in the Desert Monastery and Ohkay Owinghe Pueblo. Caplan will provide technical expertise with riparian ecology and with facilitating workshops focused on defining biological management objectives.

D. Mark Stone, Professor of Civil Engineering, UNM. Dr. Stone is an assistant professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of New Mexico. He holds a B.S. degree in biological systems engineering from the University of Nebraska and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in civil engineering from Washington State University. Dr. Stone's research interests include ecohydraulics, ecohydrology, stream restoration, and ecological flows. He has been involved with dozens of field, laboratory, and computational research projects covering topics such as fish passage through dams and culverts, vegetation response to floods, design guidance for stream restoration projects, climate change impacts, and water availability in developing countries. He will provide assistance with modeling the Optimized Hydrograph.

E. Greg Gustina, Fish Biologist, BLM. Mr. Gustina works as a Fisheries Biologist for the Taos Field Office of the BLM. The BLM manages the upper portion of the Wild and Scenic Rio Chama in the project reach. Previously, he worked as a Wetland Ecologist for the USGS, assessing mining impacts on macroinvertebrate communities, and Army

Corps of Engineers where he developed watershed scale vegetation and geomorphology maps. He earned a B.A. in Biology from the University of Colorado and a M.S. in Aquatic Ecology from the University of Vermont. As a member of the implementation team, Mr. Gustina will represent the BLM, acting as a liason between the agency and grantees, and providing support for data collection and analysis.



SUSANA MARTINEZ  
Governor  
JOHN A. SANCHEZ  
Lieutenant Governor

NEW MEXICO  
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

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RYAN FLYNN  
Cabinet Secretary  
BUTCH TONGATE  
Deputy Secretary

June 2, 2014

Bureau of Reclamation Financial Assistance Services  
Attn: Michelle Maher  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear Ms. Maher:

Please accept this letter of commitment to participate in Rio Grande Restoration's proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation for the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program to establish the Lower Rio Chama Watershed Partnership. This project would expand the scope of the existing Rio Chama Flow Project Advisory Council and enhance its work to optimize watershed conditions in the 30 mile Wild and Scenic Rio Chama.

Over the past two years, the New Mexico Environment Department/ Surface Water Quality Bureau (NMED/SWQB) has been participating in the Rio Chama Flow Project because of its activities to restore watershed conditions of the Rio Chama basin. We will continue to support Rio Grande Restoration's work by participating in the Lower Rio Chama Partnership.

Funding from the Cooperative Watershed Management Program will help Rio Grande Restoration and local communities refine and develop support for the Rio Chama Flow Project by increasing community participation in natural resources decision-making and improving the condition of its water resources.

Through this project NMED/SWQB anticipates that such issues as environmental flow, floodplain ecology, climate change, and the associated health of the local communities can be successfully addressed. We also believe that the following activities should be included in a watershed plan for the region:

- *Water quality [including implementation of nonpoint source Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL)s]*
- *Riparian restoration*
- *Wildlife habitat improvements*
- *Agricultural land management*
- *Drought resiliency*

Ms. Maher  
Page 2  
June 2, 2014

NMED/SWQB is very supportive of this Project and will: 1) participate as a key stakeholder in watershed planning efforts; and 2) provide monitoring data, education and information about prior and existing projects within the watershed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the information below if you have questions about our support of this project. Thank you!

Sincerely,



Abraham Franklin, Program Manager  
Watershed Protection Section  
Surface Water Quality Bureau  
Phone: 505-827-2793  
[abraham.franklin@state.nm.us](mailto:abraham.franklin@state.nm.us)

# NEW MEXICO INTERSTATE STREAM COMMISSION

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

JIM DUNLAP, Chairman, Farmington  
SCOTT A. VERHRNES, Secretary  
BUFORD HARRIS, Mesilla  
BLANE SANCHEZ, Isleta  
PHELPS ANDERSON, Roswell  
MARK SANCHEZ, Albuquerque  
JAMES WILCOX, Carlsbad  
RANDAL CROWDER, Clovis



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SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87504-5102  
(505) 827-6160  
FAX: (505) 827-6188

June 5, 2014

Michelle Maher, US Bureau of Reclamation  
Mail Code: 84-27852  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225

**SUBJECT: Support and Commitment for Rio Chama Basin Flow Optimization Project – 2014  
WaterSmart Cooperative Watershed Management Program**

Dear Ms. Maher:

This is a letter of support for Rio Grande Restoration's (RGR) grant proposal to the United States Bureau of Reclamation's (BOR) WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program. I am writing to you as the Rio Grande Bureau Chief for the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC), a state agency whose charge it is to investigate, protect, conserve, and develop New Mexico's waters including both interstate and intrastate stream systems. Over the past two years, we have been participating in the Rio Chama Flow Project and plan to continue to support the work subject to Commission approval.

Funding from the Cooperative Watershed Management Program will help RGR and local stakeholders to continue the work that has been accomplished. We support the effort to increase local participation and empower local communities to contribute to the improvement of the natural resources of the Rio Chama Basin.

I believe that through such local involvement, Rio Chama Basin stakeholders can assist water and resources managers resulting in positive changes overall.

If you have questions regarding this letter please call or email Anders Lundahl at 505-383-4047 or (anders.lundahl@state.nm.us)

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rolf Schmidt-Petersen".

Sincerely,  
Rolf Schmidt-Petersen  
Rio Grande Bureau Chief  
NM Interstate Stream Commission

cc: Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration  
Kim Abeyta-Martinez  
Nabil Shafike, NMISC  
Grace Haggerty, NMISC  
Anders Lundahl, NMISC  
RG Files (SF and Abq)

June 2, 2014

Michelle Maher, Bureau of Reclamation  
Mail Code: 84-27852  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear Ms. Maher:

As the manager of Reclamation's Albuquerque Area Office (AAO), I would like to express my support for Rio Grande Restoration's grant proposal to Reclamation's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program to enable it to continue its laudable work on the Rio Chama Flow Project.

Since 2010, Rio Grande Restoration has coordinated a multi-party project, the Rio Chama Flow Project, which has worked to identify and foster testing and adaptive management of flow regimes on the Wild and Scenic reach of the Rio Chama that have the potential to enhance its ecosystem and river function. Funding for this project has come from several sources, including the State of New Mexico, as well as donated time from professionals who care about the Rio Chama. The effort has also involved most of the water management agencies in New Mexico's Middle Rio Grande system, including AAO, through its advisory council. This project has truly been a cooperative watershed management project!

Our office has an interest in this project since we manage and operate the two upstream-most dams on the Rio Chama, Heron and El Vado, from which flows to the Wild and Scenic Reach of the Rio Chama are released. In addition, the AAO operates the San Juan-Chama Project, which diverts water from the Colorado River system into Heron Reservoir, and in so doing provides water that can increase the water-management flexibility in this reach. Over the past three years, AAO has actively participated in the Rio Chama Flow Project to support its vision for improving the watershed and ecology in the Rio Chama basin by optimizing the use of water within existing constraints.

Funding from the Cooperative Watershed Management Program will help RGR extend the Rio Chama Flow Project by increasing participation and creating a strong grassroots partnership to help improve the condition of this valuable natural resource. I believe that, through local input and involvement in the management of this critical resource, stakeholders can assist water managers to best use the available water, to help create greater ecological resiliency in the Rio Chama watershed.

I am confident that Rio Grande Restoration's work in the Rio Chama watershed will result in positive changes in the river system that we help to manage.

Sincerely,



Mike A. Hamman  
Area Manager

# Chama Peak Land Alliance



May 27, 2014

Bureau of Reclamation  
Attn: Michelle Maher  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear Ms. Maher:

Please accept this letter of support and commitment from the Chama Peak Land Alliance for the Rio Grande Restoration's proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation for the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program to expand the Rio Chama Flow Project south to the Rio Grande.

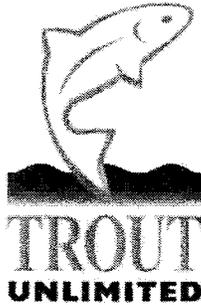
The Chama Peak Land Alliance represents conservation minded private landowners in both the lower and upper portions of the Rio Chama Watershed and will engage as an advisor for the Rio Chama Flow Project to provide a private landowner perspective on watershed issues as well as to connect these efforts with our own in the upper portions of the watershed. We commit to in-kind staff time for meetings and will also work with the Rio Chama Flow Project at the end of Year 1 to stitch our planning efforts together for the entire Rio Chama Watershed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments about our commitment at the information below.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Monique DiGiorgio.

Monique DiGiorgio  
Representative, Chama Peak Land Alliance  
970-335-8174 | [chamapeak@gmail.com](mailto:chamapeak@gmail.com)



June 4, 2014

Bureau of Reclamation Financial Assistance Services  
Attn: Michelle Maher  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, Colorado 80225

Dear Ms. Maher:

Please accept this letter of commitment to participate in Rio Grande Restoration's proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation for the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program to establish the Lower Rio Chama Watershed Partnership. This project would expand the scope of the existing Rio Chama Flow Project Advisory Council, optimizing ecological function in the 30 mile Wild and Scenic Rio Chama.

Over the past two years, Trout Unlimited has participated in the Rio Chama Flow Project because of its commitment to restoring a more natural hydrograph and resilient ecosystem in the Rio Chama basin. We will continue to support Rio Grande Restoration's work by contributing human and, where possible, material resources to the Lower Rio Chama Partnership.

Funding from the Cooperative Watershed Management Program will help RGR and local communities continue the Chama Flow Project by increasing community participation in natural resources decision-making and improving the condition of its river's ecology.

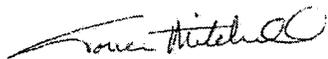
Through this project I am confident that issues affecting the health of the local communities – climate change, instream flows, floodplain ecology, to name a few - can be successfully addressed. I also believe that the following activities should be included in a watershed plan for the region:

- *Agricultural land management*
- *Riparian restoration*
- *Wildlife habitat improvements*
- *Energy development*
- *Wild trout habitat*

In this project, Trout Unlimited will participate as a key stakeholder in watershed planning efforts. We will provide technical support to monitoring, education, and other project priorities. We would also be proud to support the formation of the watershed partnership in the best interests of the Rio Chama and all who depend on it.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the information below if you have questions about Trout Unlimited's support of this project.

Sincerely,



Toner Mitchell  
Trout Unlimited  
New Mexico Public Lands Coordinator  
142 Rio Seco  
Santa Fe, NM 87501  
(505) 231-8860  
tmitchell@tu.org



NEW MEXICO  
River Outfitters Association

PO Box 70  
Embudo NM 87531

June 4, 2014

Bureau of Reclamation Financial Assistance Services  
Attn: Michelle Maher  
P.O. Box 25007  
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Maher:

This is a letter of commitment by the New Mexico River Outfitters Association to participate in the expanding the Rio Chama Flow Project into the Rio Chama Watershed Partnership, in the area between El Vado Reservoir and the confluence with the Rio Grande.

NMROA, an association of river outfitters and guides, has participated in Chama Flow Project's Recreational Management consultations with non-commercial river runners and fishermen. We anticipate continuing to serve on the project's Advisory Council.

Our members believe that this project benefits us by restoring aquatic and riparian ecology, providing a more natural river for river touring and restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat and ecological values desired by our guests.

We commend Rio Grande Restoration for its commitment to the health of the Rio Chama watershed and support its funding proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss our role in this worthy project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Miller".

Steve Miller, President