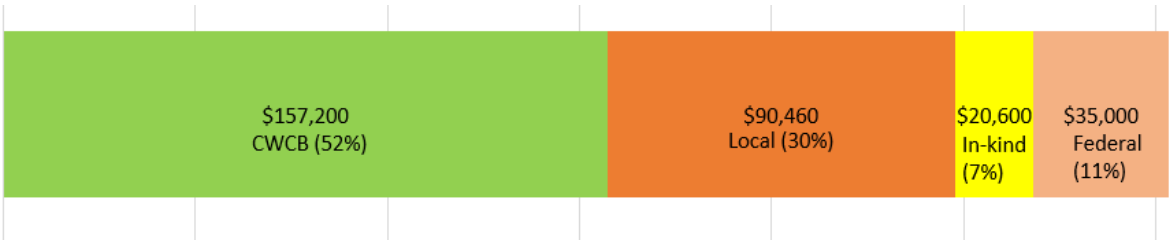
Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek Stream Management Plans

Geographic Description: Rio Grande Basin - Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek
Size: Approximately 340 river miles
Primary Contact: Daniel Boyes – Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project; daniel@riograndeheadwaters.org
Project Homepage: https://riograndeheadwaters.org/stream-management-plans
Planning Phase: Implement Priority Actions, Monitor Implementation Outcomes, Manage Adaptively
Status: Plan completed in 2020, currently implementing projects.

Project Goals:

- Maintain and build on the coalition of community partners engaged in stream management planning through frequent and robust stakeholder engagement throughout the project.
- Summarize and obtain information regarding the biological, hydrological, and geomorphological condition of identified stream reaches in the Rio Grande watershed.
- Define and prioritize environmental, recreational, and community values.
- Develop goals to improve flows and physical conditions needed to support values.
- Outline actions to achieve measurable progress towards maintaining or improving goals.
- Identify opportunities and constraints for implementation of projects, and additional data needed to inform project development.

Overview:
Agriculture accounts for 99% of the water used in the Rio Grande Basin; however, water is critical for the recreation and environmental values as well, with 11% of employment in the region tied to a water-dependent tourism industry. Upland forests, providing the source waters for the Rio Grande, have faced numerous disturbances in recent years, which pose cascading impacts on the rivers and their tributaries. Some riparian areas in the basin have degraded over time, impacting their ability to provide critical habitat, buffer ecosystems, and moderate hydrological function. Local stakeholders recognize the vital need to understand watershed conditions and to implement projects that address diverse issues and concerns. The Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek SMPs, along with other assessments currently underway (e.g., Upper Culebra Watershed Assessment, Comprehensive Willow Creek Watershed Planning Project), have made significant progress toward documenting the current condition of rivers in the Basin as well as their larger watersheds.

Approach:
The Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek Stream Management Plans were initiated by the Stream Management Planning subcommittee of the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable, which prioritized reaches and developed the scope of work. The effort is managed by the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP), which has a long history of working collaboratively with stakeholders in the region. The RGHRP conduced some of the river health analyses in-house with consultants hired for select components. The final deliverable for the Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek SMPs recommends 94 projects, including voluntary partnerships to retime flows for the benefit of recreation, the environment, and agriculture, stream restoration, irrigation infrastructure improvements, water quality improvement, recreation enhancement, and aquatic habitat restoration, among others.

Budget: $303,260