



RESOURCE CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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Breaking News: Painted Sky RC&D Council, Inc. Joins the National Recovery Effort, Receives \$1 Million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Funding for Fish Passage Project on the Gunnison River

January 27, 2010. Delta, Colorado. On Wednesday, Painted Sky RC&D Council, Inc. received notification of an award of nearly \$400,000 in ARRA funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), for construction of a fish passage at the Hartland Dam near Delta. This is the second award of ARRA funds for this project from the USFWS, bringing the total ARRA funding for the project to approximately \$1 million.

Hartland Dam is located on the Gunnison River, northeast of Delta (see Map, below). Earlier stimulus funds awarded to Painted Sky in 2009 effectively served as seed funding to leverage a significant award from the State of Colorado, making this long-standing conservation priority a reality at last.

Modifications to the Hartland Dam have been sought for years. Although the project has been discussed since 1999, a sustained and coordinated push for funding the project did not begin until 2008. Painted Sky RC&D Council, driven by their mission of promoting and balancing natural resources and economic development, has been instrumental in bringing stakeholders together and securing funds from multiple sources to complete the project.

In early 2009, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) funded the majority of the conceptual design phase, with some financial support from Delta County. Painted Sky hired Tetra Tech, an international engineering firm with an office in Breckenridge, Colorado, to complete the conceptual design and generate an initial cost estimate. The conceptual design phase was completed in December, 2009, and cost a total of \$22,100.

On Tuesday, January 26, Painted Sky Executive Director Mr. Michael Drake and NRCS Coordinator Mr. Paul Van Ryzin traveled to Denver to defend Painted Sky's proposal before the Colorado Water Conservation Board. Mr. Drake spoke before the Board, answering questions about Painted Sky and the RC&D Program. He described the program as a "public-private partnership" that helps stimulate job and business growth in rural communities, while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

The Water Board then voted unanimously to approve Painted Sky's request of \$560,000 in State funds, for the Hartland Dam Fish Passage Project. This decision was the trigger for the additional ARRA funding from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which was confirmed on Wednesday. USFWS's award of \$400,000 was added on top of the \$600,000 in ARRA funds obligated by USFWS to Painted Sky late last year. USFWS has also contributed \$200,000 of non-ARRA program funds, to assist Painted Sky with completing a final design based on the conceptual design. In total, Painted Sky has secured \$1.76 million for the project.

Modifying the dam structure will deliver benefits to fish, the ditch company, boaters and private landowners. First, three Colorado native fish "species of concern" will be able to expand their range upstream of the dam. The dam has blocked these species—the flannelmouth sucker, the bluehead sucker and the roundtail chub—from habitat upstream of the dam, making this project the top priority for Region 6 of the USFWS. The Service's Fisheries Biologist Mr. Bob Burdick writes: "Upstream passage for these native fish species will reconnect riverine habitat that has been fragmented by the dam, to establish and maintain sufficient connectivity between populations upstream and downstream of the dam." Passage at the Hartland Dam will open up to 230 river miles, not including tributaries to the Gunnison, to the three target species of concern, allowing them to freely travel to upstream river reaches that have been blocked since the dam was constructed in the 1880's.

Secondly, planned modifications to the dam will ensure Hartland Ditch Company, which owns the dam, uninterrupted access to their full senior water decree.

The third winners in the dam modification project are recreational boaters and private landowners adjacent to the dam. After the project completion in the spring of 2011, boaters will be able to pass the dam more safely without portaging around the dam and trespassing on private property. The design concept developed to date would allow rafters, kayakers, and other river travelers to easily navigate through fish passage

structure. Painted Sky and local business development partners anticipate increased tourism-related business development, after this dangerous obstruction to river travel is removed.

With the addition of ARRA funding, Painted Sky joins the national effort to put America back to work with this exciting “shovel-ready” conservation project.

