

# Lower Gunnison Project (funded in part by RCPP) Update On-Farm Activities

August 5, 2016

Dear LGP RCPP Partners,

We hope this email finds you all well. As promised, below is a summary update of on-farm activities to date. If you have any questions regarding the update, please contact Dave Kanzer or Sonja Chavez at the CO River District (contact information can be found below).

## **GENERAL UPDATE**

- A. Alternative Funding Agreement (AFA):** The Co River District was informed this week that the National Agreements Team is finishing up the AFA. We are in the process of submitting updated federal forms and have been told that the AFA will be ready for signature and execution very soon. Upon execution, many on-farm activities may commence via an abbreviated and customized project ranking and screening process.
- B. Agricultural Irrigation Efficiency Research:** Dr. Perry Cabot (CSU / CO Water Institute), on behalf of No Chico Brush (NCB), continues to monitor six existing on-farm irrigation efficiency research sites in the Gunnison Basin and has added additional targeted research sites in the North Fork (Rogers Mesa area). Three summer field technicians are assisting Dr. Cabot with data collection and other equipment maintenance tasks this summer. The research is supported by two grants awarded to NCB (Agricultural Transfer Method and Water Supply Reserve Account grants). An interim summary report has been created and is available upon request.
- C. On-Farm LGP EQIP District Conservation Technician (DCT) Support:** The CO Department of Agriculture (CDA), CO Water Conservation Board (CWCB), and our local Conservation Districts (Delta and Shavano) have worked collaboratively to secure funding under the DCT Program to hire two Conservation Technicians (currently the scope of activities for these planners and irrigation water management specialists are being defined by the Districts) to provide staff support for implementation of LGP RCPP projects in the four focus areas. Thanks to the generous efforts of the CWCB, this program is doubling available NRCS State funding (50-50%).

However, in addition to concerns regarding, available office space, computers, phones and vehicle access for these proposed DCTs, we are still working with the State Conservationist, Clint Evans, and his associates to seek clarification from the Office of General Council (OGC) to obtain a legal opinion to determine if providing these additional funding items would be interpreted as improperly augmenting the RCPP budget. At this time, we are still waiting for the OGC decision regarding if and how to proceed to provide the Districts with important staffing assistance.

## **D. On-farm Education and Outreach:**

- 1. Meaker Farms Hosts Potential Funders:** “Do you believe in Gremlins?” Randy Meaker was forced to ask a group of interested folks from the Nature Conservancy (TNC) and PepsiCo on July 21<sup>st</sup>. They had just flew into Montrose in order to gain a better understanding and familiarity of how irrigation water is delivered, how on-farm irrigation systems work (e.g. gated pipe, overhead sprinkler, big-guns), and the bigger role water use efficiency plays in the Lower Gunnison and Colorado River Basins. Most unfortunately, the tour of the state-of-the-art irrigation demonstration site was hampered by an untimely ‘lightning strike gremlin’ that caused a pump station fault that prevented a full experience of the new high pressure big-gun irrigation system. Nevertheless, the group was able to see the Meakers’ high efficiency center

pivot sprinkler systems at work and to see a demonstration of a “skipper big gun”. Thanks to Randy and Debbie Meaker for providing a great venue (and a delicious lunch) for an important conversation about local water and agricultural issues in the basin.

This farm has hosted many such events and provides an excellent ‘Discovery Farm’ locale for those interested in learning about advances in agricultural water use efficiency and locally adapted agricultural practices, in which the LGP is helping to invest and expand.

For more information and to set up additional custom tours of these types of Discovery Farms and Enterprises in the LGP area please let us know if we can help facilitate such hands-on visits.

- 2. Gunnison Basin Water Website Development Project:** A preliminary draft outline for the Agricultural Site Map/Content has been developed with input from the webpage development steering committee. The purpose of the task is to provide an example of an internal sub-topic webpage for the website developer. Examples of information included on the agricultural sub-page include: a) Summary of Ag water use in the Gunnison Basin, b) Difference between water conservation and efficiency, c) off-farm and near-farm efficiency, d) on-farm efficiency, e) soil health, f) local studies and research, and g) funding opportunities, application, contacts (e.g. LGP RCPP). The steering committee is actively seeking input on this project. Please let us know if you have information to share and/or if you have time and energy to devote to this important effort.

- E. Planning:** As previously reported (see July 24<sup>th</sup> LGP update), an irrigation water needs assessment was completed (Olsson, 2016) for the Jessie Ditch Company located in the North Fork focus area. While preliminary results favorably indicate that an integrated water use efficiency project (piped and pressurized delivery and application systems) is feasible for the Jessie Ditch service area on Rogers Mesa, near Hotchkiss) meeting the objectives of the LGP, discussions are on-going with the Jessie Ditch company shareholders as well as with the Fire Mountain Canal Company on how to best proceed. This private lateral is served by the Fire Mountain Canal (a Reclamation project) that diverts water from the North Fork River and from Leroux Creek. The Fire Mountain Canal ‘reconfiguration project’ is located ‘upstream’ of the Jessie and other related delivery laterals and as such, it could provide pressurized water delivery. This estimated \$4.6 million project is jointly funded by USBR Salinity Control program (FOA) and the LGP RCPP. When completed (estimated to be in early 2018), it is hoped that it will benefit not only a potentially upgraded and piped Jessie Ditch system and associated growers, but that it could also provide upgraded service to others in the area by providing regulated and more secure water supplies. To meet these objectives, additional technical experts from the Irrigation Training and Research Center are studying ways to optimize the larger system and to better integrate supplies and demands. Scoping is occurring now and input is being sought.

### **Upcoming Activities**

- F.** Finalize RCPP-EQIP on-farm ranking criteria;
- G.** Solicit on-farm projects, to be screened, reviewed and ranked by LGP Partners pursuant to accepted criteria to ensure they meet LGP objectives and within budgeted amounts;
- H.** Review and refine proposed 2017 On-, near- and Off-farm projects, environmental objectives and draft budget for upcoming final RCPP application (due 9/19/16)

**I. Hire conservation technicians and/or obtain other staff support for local CDs and NRCS**