

Isleta Reach Stewardship Association, Middle Rio Grande

**Phase 1b: Continue Watershed Group Development, Solidify Role, and Identify Specific
Restoration Activities and Projects**

Applicant Category: New Watershed Group

US Bureau of Reclamation

WaterSMART

Cooperative Watershed Management Program

Phase I Grant Proposal- Task Areas A , B and C

January 12, 2021

Submitted by:

**Audubon Southwest
400 Gold Ave SW; Suite 660
Albuquerque, NM 87102**

**Program Manager
Paul Tashjian
3757 Manchester DR BW
Albuquerque, NM 87107
Paul.Tashjian@audubon.org
505 217 4531**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... 2

2. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL 3

2.1 Executive Summary 3

2.2 Background Data 3

2.3 Project Location 5

2.4 Technical Project Description..... 5

 2.4.1 Applicant Category 5

 2.4.2 Eligibility of Applicant 6

 2.4.3 Goals 8

 2.4.4 Approach 9

3. EVALUATION CRITERIA..... 11

3.1 Evaluation Criterion A-Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope 11

 3.1.1 Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity 11

 3.1.2 Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope 14

3.2 Evaluation Criterion B-Addressing Critical Watershed Needs 16

 3.2.1 Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues 16

 3.2.2 Sub-criterion No. B2. Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues 17

3.3 Evaluation Criterion C-Implementation and Results..... 20

 3.3.1 Sub-criterion No. C1. Understanding of and Ability to Meet Program Requirements 20

 3.3.2 Sub-criterion No. C2. Building on Relevant Federal, State or Regional Planning Efforts 20

3.4 Evaluation Criterion D—Nexus To Department Of The Interior Initiatives..... 22

4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES COMPLIANCE 23

5. REQUIRED PERMITS OR APPROVALS 23

 6.1 Budget Proposal.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

 6.2 Budget Narrative**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

7. CITED REFERENCES 24

2. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

2.1 Executive Summary

January 12, 2021

Audubon Southwest (a regional office of National Audubon Society)
Bernalillo County, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Audubon Southwest (ASW; a regional office of the National Audubon Society; formerly Audubon New Mexico) was awarded a WaterSMART Cooperative Water Management Phase 1 grant in 2019: grant #R18AP00119, “Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group”. This grant’s primary deliverables were for the establishment of a watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande and the development of a conceptual restoration plan for the Reach. The Reach spans 48-miles of the Rio Grande, a small sub-basin located within the Rio Grande-Albuquerque Watershed (HUC8 13020203) in north central New Mexico, made up primarily of non-federal land (with the exception of the Sevilleita NWR). Working under this grant has been a very rewarding effort and ASW is making good progress in the development of a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the “Isleta Reach Stewardship Association”, or IRSA. We have developed a vibrant group of citizens and agency representatives (both state and federal) that are interested in the long-term health and water resource protection of the Reach and this group is growing with every meeting. We have collected a robust set of hydrologic, ecologic and social data and are on par for developing a strong strategic conceptual restoration plan for the Reach by the grant’s closure on September 30, 2021, focusing on Task A and Task B under Phase I’s goals. Audubon submits this proposal for 2 additional years of funding under Phase 1 of the Cooperative and Watershed Restoration Group program in order to; 1) further develop the watershed group, 2) further define and solidify its role in the Reach, and 3) to build on IRSA’s conceptual restoration plan through the planning and design of watershed management activities. The Rio Grande basin’s water supply is likely to decrease in this century. Optimization of the beneficial use of the water supply across competing uses including agriculture, urban areas, industrial and commercial users, and fish and wildlife is a critical issue for the watershed. IRSA envisions its future role as planning and implementing a wide-range of watershed improvements, such as mapping and controlling invasive species, implementing riparian and restoration activities benefiting listed and non-listed species, developing creative water conservation and leasing opportunities, and organizing citizen-led monitoring and restoration maintenance activities.

2.2 Background Data

The Isleta Reach is a 48-mile reach of the Rio Grande from the southern boundary of the Pueblo of Isleta to the San Acacia Diversion Dam. It is located within the Rio Grande-Albuquerque Watershed (HUC8 13020203) and spans Valencia and Socorro Counties in north central New Mexico. Agriculture is the primary land use surrounding the Isleta Reach. The largest communities are the Village of Los Lunas and the City of Belen. IRSA focus includes identifying restoration opportunities and priorities within the 13,000 acres of public and/or private lands within the Rio Grande floodway, including the river channel and the vegetated floodplain, along

the 48-mile river corridor, as well as opportunities within the approximately 30,000 acres of farmland and managed land outside the levees.

The Rio Grande is the major perennial source of surface water in the watershed and flows through the entire length of Isleta Reach. The main consumptive use of surface water in the Isleta Reach is irrigation. Other consumptive uses of surface water include evapotranspiration by riparian vegetation and recharge to the groundwater. Irrigation interests include the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) and a small, community ditch called the La Acequia Madre de La Joya. Irrigation water is diverted below the Isleta Diversion Dam and delivered through canals and laterals to irrigate approximately 26,500 acres of non-Pueblo farmland located outside the active floodplain. Non-consumed water is returned to the river via interior drains and waste-ways. The Rio Grande flows year-round in the Isleta Reach but is susceptible to intermittent drying from irrigation water withdrawals especially in times of severe drought and declining water supply. Major tributaries to the Rio Grande in the Isleta Reach include the Rio Puerco and Rio Salado, intermittent streams that are major sources of surface flow and sediment during summer monsoonal events.

Water for municipal, domestic, commercial and industrial use in the Isleta Reach is almost exclusively groundwater drawn from the Santa Fe Group aquifer system. Population trends in Valencia and Socorro County over the last decade are growing slowly but new industrial development, such as the Facebook data center, is increasing indicating that more dramatic growth is on the horizon. Groundwater levels in alluvial aquifer fluctuate seasonally but have declined overall over the last 50 years. The greatest declines are observed around population centers and away from the river. The Rio Grande and the groundwater aquifer are hydrologically connected, with the Rio Grande and irrigation canals and drains providing a source of groundwater recharge.

Native (meaning water originating from snowmelt and rainfall within the Rio Grande Basin) Rio Grande surface water within the basin is fully appropriated. The Middle Rio Grande is not adjudicated and aboriginal tribal water rights remain unquantified. New Mexico follows the prior-appropriation doctrine of “first in time, first in right,” but in the absence of adjudication, shortage sharing practices are increasingly important and can be one means to reduce conflict. That said, it is important that the diversity of interested and affected stakeholders, including effected communities and citizens, understand the water management challenges in their area and have a seat at the table where practices are under development.

The Isleta Reach includes a complexity of water ownership and management challenges that provide an essential management framework for any proposed alternative management strategies. Pueblo aboriginal water rights are the most senior and belong to the Pueblo government. Pre-1907 water rights are the most senior, non-Pueblo water rights and can be marketed through lease or sale through the NM State Engineer transfer process. The MRGCD has significant junior rights to native surface water under State Engineer Permit(s). MRGCD’s rights are non-transferable for non-irrigation uses but can be sold or leased to other farmers.

In addition to native Rio Grande water rights, the transbasin San Juan-Chama Project (SJCP) furnishes Colorado River water to the Rio Grande for municipal, irrigation and fish and wildlife benefits. Contracts for SJCP water are held by the MRGCD and two municipalities within the Isleta Reach, the Village of Los Lunas and City of Belen. The New Mexico State Engineer conjunctively manages surface and groundwater resources in the Middle Rio Grande to protect existing water rights and ensure compliance with the Rio Grande Compact. Groundwater pumping is permitted as long as groundwater users offset surface flow impacts by buying and transferring pre-1907 agricultural surface water rights.

The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande has been significantly modified by surface water diversions, groundwater pumping, flood control, channelization and land use changes. The frequency, timing, magnitude and duration of high and low flow events has been altered. Hydrologic alteration will likely increase with increasing temperatures, reduction in snow pack and more extreme drought events. Ecological implications include a simplified channel geomorphology, fragmentation and degradation of sensitive riparian and wetland ecosystems, a decline in the population of native fish and wildlife and increase in wildfires and invasive species. Water quality changes include concentration of salts, sediment and pollutants. Impacts on recreation and its associated tourism dollars include reductions in fishing, swimming, and boating/rafting areas, and reduced birding opportunities from riparian and wetland habitat loss. Federally listed fish and birds breed and spawn in the Isleta Reach and water operations in the Middle Rio Grande Project are subject to a Biological and Conference Opinion (USFWS 2016) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

Watershed restoration and protection efforts, including restoration of environmental flows or targeted use of supplemental water to restore habitat, have the potential to mitigate or prevent many of the negative effects. The success of watershed restoration and protection efforts depend on the involvement of a comprehensive, diverse array of landowners, and, in the program planning and implementation phase, water right users. IRSA serves as a consensus-based watershed group in the Isleta Reach representing the diverse range of affected stakeholders whose goal is to promote the sustainable use of water resources in the watershed.

2.3 Project Location

The Isleta Reach is a 48-mile reach of the Rio Grande from the southern boundary of the Pueblo of Isleta to the San Acacia Diversion Dam. It is located within the Rio Grande-Albuquerque Watershed (HUC8 13020203) and spans Valencia and Socorro Counties in north central New Mexico. IRSA focuses on identifying restoration opportunities both within the 13,000 acres of managed lands within the Rio Grande floodway, including the river channel and the vegetated floodplain, and within and associated-with the 26,563 acres of irrigated farmland of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy's Districts Belen Division.

2.4 Technical Project Description

2.4.1 Applicant Category

ASW is seeking funding to further develop a new watershed group, IRSA. IRSA is a newly formed (July, 2019) grassroots, non-regulatory entity that seeks to improve watershed health and

habitat quality along the Rio Grande corridor and associated agricultural lands through the Isleta Reach for future generations. IRSA recognizes the unique character of this river corridor and floodplain habitat quality. IRSA focuses on strategic restoration, water conservation, and community stewardship of this beautiful reach of the Rio Grande. IRSA is a new watershed group and is actively engaged in defining its role in the Reach as well as the scope of future activities. Through its inception, IRSA has developed its vision statement, operating rules, and is developing a conceptual restoration plan for the Reach.

IRSA's diverse group of stakeholders includes federal, state/ quasi-governmental entities, tribes, recreational interests, farmers, and citizens. IRSA envisions a future for the Isleta Reach that includes a healthy Rio Grande corridor where local communities are connected-to the Rio Grande and are actively engaged in the stewardship of its habitat in coordination with management agencies.

Water is the master variable in creating and maintaining habitat and the water quality required for a healthy Rio Grande ecosystem. At the heart of any successful watershed planning effort is the ability to keep sufficient water in the system. With increasing water shortages, habitat restoration solutions are becoming increasingly complicated. Since 2009, ASW has led the way in private, voluntary environmental water transactions, delivering precedent-setting water agreements on the Rio Grande that have established a path for balanced solutions that maintain freshwater flows at a level to sustain critical aquatic and riparian habitat.

The Isleta Reach contains significant land and water holdings of the Pueblo of Isleta, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico Game and Fish, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and private landowners. Many of these entities and landowners, individually or collectively, have already planned or implemented habitat restoration – and will continue to do so. Moreover, the Isleta Reach has been identified as an important focal area for endangered species habitat restoration in the Final Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Non-Federal Water Management and Maintenance Activities on the Middle Rio Grande (USFWS 2016). While IRSA does not assume responsibility for addressing proposed conservation measures identified in this Biological Opinion, it is predicted that science-based restoration efforts identified IRSA's conceptual restoration plan and proposed follow-up planning activities will be able to provide meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions towards improving habitat for federally listed species. Greater involvement and collaboration with civic organizations like the IRSA will identify innovative and long-lasting comprehensive solutions for watershed restoration in this reach.

2.4.2 Eligibility of Applicant

ASW is New Mexico and Arizona's regional office of the National Audubon Society, a non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for birds and other wildlife and the habitats they depend on for the benefit of humans and the earth's biodiversity. ASW's staff has more than 4 decades of experience in water policy and management, has led successful collaborative efforts to restore habitat on a 105-mile reach of the Rio Grande with farmers and federal agencies in the Rio Grande Project below Caballo Reservoir, and has

scientific expertise in water resources and environmental sustainability. ASW's comprehensive engagement with Middle Rio Grande conservation activities, agency coordination and community outreach render us uniquely qualified to further develop IRSA into an effective and engaged watershed group.

ASW's staff are engaged on many fronts with conservation efforts in the Middle Rio Grande including: 1) Steering Committee Chair and NGO Sectoral Committee lead for the WaterSMART New Mexico Rio Grande Basin Study, 2) Only NGO on Executive Committee for the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program, 3) lead programmatic support for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District's Pilot Water Leasing Program, 4) sole NGO engaged with environmental water leases in the Middle Rio Grande, 5) lead coordinator for restoration outreach days with Valle de Oro NWR, 6) lead support for NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Program in the Middle Rio Grande, and 7) conducts numerous outreach webinars on the avian ecology of the Rio Grande. These activities are in addition to being the lead for IRSA and the associated WaterSMART Grant # #R18AP00119.

Audubon has over 6,600 chapter members in New Mexico statewide, a large percentage of whom live in the Albuquerque metro area, which includes Valencia County. Hundreds of thousands of birds from hundreds of species depend on New Mexico's riparian forests and wetlands maintained by freshwater in the arid Middle Rio Grande. On the Rio Grande and in the Isleta Reach, healthy riparian habitat supports unique and iconic wildlife and bird species, including, but not limited to, the Southwest Willow Flycatcher, Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Bells' Vireo, and Greater Sandhill Crane. As such, ASW's work is significantly tied to the quality and quantity of water in the watershed. Development of and participation in the IRSA and associated watershed restoration planning efforts are compatible with the National Audubon Society and ASW's conservation goals and will contribute to achievement of conservation outcomes consistent with our mission.

In the 2016-2020 national strategic plan, the National Audubon Society identified water as a core priority, and focuses its work in landscapes where water scarcity and water quality are primarily limiting factors for survival of threatened and iconic birds in the Western Hemisphere. National Audubon Society's water strategy engages National Audubon Society's conservation, policy and science teams and its more-than-one-million network of members nationwide to advance balanced solutions to water use in the West to ensure that birds, ecosystems, people and economies thrive. This approach and philosophy is borne out in ASW's Rio Grande Conservation Initiative ("The Ribbon of Life Initiative"), a concise blueprint of conservation outcomes, objectives and strategies that ASW is pursuing on numerous fronts. This focused initiative aims to ensure a secure water future for the Rio Grande and the natural and human communities that depend upon it by working with partners, stakeholders and funders to implement "win-win" solutions. It has four major areas of focus: environmental water transactions; integrated basin water management; watershed planning and habitat restoration; and education and awareness. We at Audubon believe that people are at the heart of solutions to water scarcity and sustainable water management. Our work to change attitudes about how

we use, manage and value water is centered on building trusted relationships and collaborative partnerships to achieve conservation victories at scale.

2.4.3 Goals

Through an IRSA workshop held early (December 2019) after the formation of the group, IRSA members defined the goals of the nascent organization:

“The goal of IRSA is to increase dialogue and collaboration across a diverse set of stakeholders to restore aquatic and riparian habitat in the Isleta Reach. IRSA envisions a future for the Isleta Reach that includes a healthy Rio Grande corridor where people are connected-to the Rio Grande and are actively engaged in the stewardship of its habitat.”

This over-arching goals was further refined in subsequent meetings to include organizational goals, preliminary objectives and strategies for meeting objectives during the Grant #18AP00119 term as outlined below.

Organizational Goals

- Create and expand opportunities for people and communities to connect with and cherish the Rio Grande and its habitat in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande.
- Partner with agencies, local communities and funders to restore, monitor, maintain and protect diverse riverine and floodplain habitats and habitat associated with farmland and farm infrastructure.

Preliminary objectives to achieve these goals include:

- Build trust among the various stakeholders, who all come with different backgrounds, perspectives, values and interests;
- Conserve water and identify other innovative water strategies to increase the reliability and resiliency of the water supply in the Isleta Reach during times of water shortages;
- Improve water quality;
- Restore natural river processes;
- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire in the floodway
- Manage non-native, invasive species
- Increase community involvement in the monitoring and maintenance of restored habitat to ensure mid-term and long-term benefits from restoration efforts;
- Create a framework to secure future funding and implement selected management practices.

Strategy for Developing IRSA under Grant #18AP00119

- Develop a conceptual restoration plan for the Reach that highlights priorities, opportunities for challenges for the Reach on a sub-reach scale.
- Develop an outreach strategy for understanding community use and values of the river.
- Assist local communities in achieving their vision through identifying projects that improve priority qualities for the Rio Grande.
- Develop local capacity for stewardship of priority projects.

- Integrate IRSA priority activities with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District's Conservation Action Plan.

2.4.4 Approach

As part of this proposal under the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grant funding opportunity, ASW proposes to conduct activities under Task A ("Watershed Group Development"), Task B ("Watershed Restoration Planning"), and Task C ("Watershed Management Project Design"), within the two-year term of this planning grant. These activities will build on the accomplishments under Grant #18AP00119 and would position IRSA to be able to apply for a Watershed Management Program Phase II grant towards the end of the new Phase I grant period. Proposed objectives for this 2-year period are outlined below, including bi-annual activities and annual milestones.

Year 1, Months 1-6:

- 1) Continue to hold IRSA resource subject meetings: These meetings provide the core communication platform for IRSA members.
- 2) Begin to ID and visit potential pilot stewardship sites at existing restoration sites: It is envisioned that an important role IRSA will play in the Isleta Reach is the long-term stewardship of large-scale restoration projects implemented by federal and state agencies. During the first 6 month grant period, IRSA members will identify potential pilot sites for defining and testing stewardship activities.
- 3) Develop IRSA Steering Committee: In order to formalize IRSA's role in the Isleta Reach, a steering committee will be formed during the first 6 months of the grant period. This group will include broad constituent representation.
- 4) Continue to update IRSA's Facebook Page with information about the water resources and habitat of the Isleta Reach. Develop a website for IRSA that facilitates group functionality, dissemination of information and meeting schedules and agenda.

Year 1, Months 6-12:

- 1) Continue to hold IRSA resource subject meetings: These meetings provide the core communication platform for IRSA members.
- 2) Continue to identify and visit potential pilot stewardship sites: In order to understand the range of stewardship needs in the reach, IRSA members will identify and visit potential stewardship sites.
- 3) Decide top 3 stewardship pilot sites and develop draft cooperative agreements with management agencies and draft stewardship plans for each: Within year 1, IRSA members will identify three pilot stewardship sites for test implementation during year 2 of the grant period. Draft stewardship plans will be developed for each site.
- 4) Hold (2) IRSA Steering Committee Meetings: These initial meeting will focus on steering committee operating plans and short-term goals.
- 5) Develop IRSA Steering Committee Operating Plan: Steering committee members will develop an operating plan that will define roles and responsibilities, decision making processes and meeting schedule for year 2 of the grant period.

Year 1 Milestones and associated task area:

- ✓ Hold 6 IRSA Resource Meetings (Tasks A, B and C)
- ✓ Update IRSA Facebook page (Task A)
- ✓ Develop IRSA website for membership functions (Task A)
- ✓ IRSA Steering Committee formed (Task A)
- ✓ IRSA Steering Committee Operating Plan (Task A)
- ✓ Identification of top 3 pilot stewardship sites (Tasks B/C)
- ✓ Draft cooperative agreements and stewardship plans for 3 pilot stewardship sites (Tasks B/C)

Year 1 cost: is \$49,983.08

Year 2, Months 1-6:

- 1) Continue to hold IRSA resource subject meetings
- 2) Begin to test of IRSA pilot stewardship activities at 3 sites: This effort will help define future stewardship scale and scope through the testing of a stewardship program at 3 sites in the Isleta Reach.
- 3) Develop Draft IRSA Stewardship Plan for 2025-27 (post-grant period): Using information developed through the pilot stewardship sites, IRSA will develop a draft stewardship plan for the post grant 5 year period.
- 4) Identify 2 potential new restoration projects: In addition to stewardship activities, it is envisioned that IRSA will identify and design new restoration projects within the Reach. These projects will address water conservation and habitat needs. IRSA will identify pilot sites during this 6 month period with the development of conceptual restoration designs for these sites within the grant period.
- 5) Hold IRSA Steering Committee Meeting to discuss IRSA structural functioning and role once the grant period is completed.

Year 2, Months 6-12:

- 1) Continue to hold IRSA resource subject meetings
- 2) Finalize test of IRSA Stewardship Pilot Program: IRSA will finalize the testing of stewardship activities at the 3 pilot sites.
- 3) Develop conceptual restoration designs for 2 potential new restoration projects: IRSA will develop conceptual restoration designs for new restoration projects that both address water conservation and habitat needs.
- 4) Hold IRSA Steering Committee Meeting; finalize IRSA's structural role in MRG for the 2025-30 time period.
- 5) Finalize IRSA Stewardship Plan for 2025-30: This plan will define IRSA's role, stewardship sites and activities post grant period.

Year 2 Milestones and associated task area:

- ✓ Hold 6 IRSA Resource Meetings (Tasks A, B and C)
- ✓ Hold IRSA Steering Committee meetings (Task A)
- ✓ Summary report of Stewardship Pilot Program (Tasks B and C)
- ✓ IRSA Stewardship Plan for 2025-2030 (Task B and C)

- ✓ IRSA Steering Committee plan for IRSA's functioning post grant period (Task A)
- ✓ Conceptual restoration designs for 2 new restoration sites (Task C)

Year 2 costs: is \$49,983.09

3. EVALUATION CRITERIA

3.1 Evaluation Criterion A-Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

3.1.1 Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity

The geographic focal area of the proposed watershed boundary encompasses approximately 13,000 acres of levee-bound land along 48-river miles as well as the associated farmlands and habitat outside the levees within the reach (approximately 30,000 acres). The USFWS Sevilleta NWR, the New Mexico Game and Fish (NMGF) and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) together own and manage more than half of the acreage within the levees. Private landowners and local governmental organizations (ie Valencia Soil and Water Conservancy District) manage farmlands and habitat outside the levees.

Participation in the IRSA is open to interested and affected stakeholders, and the public at large is encouraged to attend and participate in watershed meetings. IRSA's current membership has grown over the past 18 months since inception to include broad representation from this reach including:

IRSA Membership

- 1) The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (Letter of Support provided): MRGCD manages substantial water rights under state water permits and federal water contracts for use in the Isleta Reach and delivers water to an estimated 26,500 acres of irrigated non-Pueblo farmland adjacent to the floodway in the Isleta Reach. MRGCD also holds title to lands within the floodway and is responsible for maintaining and operating irrigation infrastructure which could be utilized to restore habitat. MRGCD also has major commitments under a 2016 Biological Opinion to develop habitat for federally listed species in the Isleta Reach.
- 2) Valencia County Soil and Water Conservation District (Letter of Support provided): Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District, a political subdivision of the state, is responsible for conserving the land and water of the landowners and residents of Valencia County.
- 3) Whitfield Wildlife Management Area (Letter of Support provided through VCSWCD): Whitfield WMA is a habitat complex managed by the VCSWCD within the heart of the Isleta Reach.
- 4) Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (Letter of Support provided): RGALT is a non-profit that established conservation agreements on private agricultural lands, many in Valencia and Socorro Counties.
- 5) Save Our Bosque Task Force (Letter of Support provided): Save our Bosque Task Force has secured hundreds of thousands in grant funding over the years through NAWCA and

- other federal and state funds, for wetland restoration, removal of invasive species, and conservation easements within Socorro County.
- 6) The US Bureau of Reclamation: USBR/Reclamation is engaged in many activities in the Isleta Reach. Representation includes engagement from the Rio Grande Basin Study, water managers and regulatory staff.
 - 7) The US Army Corps of Engineers: USACE manages the Isleta Reach for flood control and environmental concerns.
 - 8) The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (Letter of Support provide): NMISC is responsible for water deliveries to Texas under the Rio Grande Compact and, as such, has significant interests in water and floodplain management in the Isleta Reach. NMISC has previously restored habitat in the Isleta Reach and is a partner with Reclamation and MRGCD in meeting commitments under the 2016 Biological and Conference Opinion.
 - 9) The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Letter of support provided): NMDGF is responsible for conserving the state's wildlife and managing hunting and fishing licenses.
 - 10) La Joya and Bernardo Wildlife Management Areas (Letter of support provided through NMDGF): These wildlife management areas are managed by the NMDGF and include the Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex encompassing 5000 acres immediately adjacent to the floodway in Isleta Reach and 1000 acres within the floodway, as well as the La Joya WMA.
 - 11) The City of Albuquerque Biopark (Letter of Support provided): The City's Biopark has broad interest in the Middle Rio Grande conservation and is engaged in many activities to promote the recovery of endangered species.
 - 12) Sevilleta NWR (Letter of Support provided): Sevilleta NWR owns and manages significant acreage adjacent to the floodway and about 1400 acres within the floodway boundaries itself. A priority for the USFWS Sevilleta NWR is to increase the amount of suitable habitat for a wide range of species and to accelerate the recovery of these species while restoring diversity of the flora and fauna along the Rio Grande.
 - 13) Valle de Oro NWR: Valle do Oro NWR is a new 570 acre Refuge located just to the north of the Isleta Reach. Staff are engaged in activities in the conservation of the Isleta Reach.
 - 14) Pueblo of Isleta: The Pueblo of Isleta owns and manages more than 2000 acres of riparian bosque and river channel immediately upstream of the proposed watershed area and, as such, they are an integral player and potential collaborator in the watershed group and plan
 - 15) New Mexico State Forestry: NMSF is engaged in fire management projects, including invasive removal, within the Isleta Reach.
 - 16) Valencia County Fire Department: VCFD is engaged in fire management projects, including invasive removal, within the Isleta Reach.
 - 17) New Mexico Environment Department (Letter of Support provided): The NMED conducts riparian and wetland monitoring in the Isleta Reach.
 - 18) USFWS Ecologic Services program: The USFWS ES program manages consultations over endangered species in the Isleta Reach.
 - 19) USFWS Private Lands: The Private lands program constructs restoration projects and is currently looking for projects within the Isleta Reach.

- 20) Belen Marsh (Letter of Support provided): Belen Marsh is an important bird area in the Isleta Reach and has a small citizens group that is seeking conservation of this property.
- 21) Central New Mexico Audubon Chapter: CNMA is a vibrant group of birders that understand and enjoy the important habitat of the Isleta Reach.
- 22) Impact Outdoors New Mexico (Letter of Support provide): Impact Outdoors is a group of passionate conservationists who enjoy hunting and fishing in the Isleta Reach.
- 23) Ducks Unlimited: Local DU members are interested the conservation of duck habitat in the Isleta Reach.
- 24) New Mexico Natural Heritage: The UNM Natural Heritage Program has conducted spatial data mapping of the Isleta Reach
- 25) University of New Mexico Utton Center: The Utton Center has interest in water management and restoration of the Isleta Reach.
- 26) The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (Letter of Support provided); BEMP engages mid and high school students in the long term monitoring of habitat within the Middle Rio Grande.
- 27) Unaffiliated Community members: Last, but not least, is the ever-growing list of citizens from the Isleta Reach that are interested in the long-term wellbeing of their back yard. Currently IRSA has 8 active community members that have no organizational affiliation.

Meeting participation prior to COVID ranged between 15 and 35 participants. Starting in March of 2020, we held meetings on-line due to COVID practices. Participation in these on-line meetings have ranged between 28 and 40 participants. Despite the COVID limitation of large field meetings, IRSA has remained vibrant through this period, attesting to the desire for the watershed group and strong interest in its long term viability.

A primary purpose of IRSA is to understand and represent the interest of communities in the Isleta Reach. In order to better understand the diverse and complex communities within the Reach, we conducted an on-line survey of the Reach starting in May of 2020. This survey was designed through the consultation with an expert in survey design for understanding community natural resource priorities (Prof. Dr. Courtney G. Flint, Utah State University). The primary goals of the survey are to better understand how the local community views the importance of the Rio Grande, what kind of activities they use the Rio Grande for and what kind of management actions they feel should be prioritized by agencies. The survey was distributed through IRSA members, e-mail groups associated with Valencia County, and posted on IRSA's Facebook page (search "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association" on Facebook). To date we have received 144 respondents from a broad diversity of age groups and geographic locations within the Isleta Reach. A summary of the survey's finding will be presented in the conceptual restoration plan for Grant #18AP00119.

IRSA is the only watershed management group within this critical section of the Rio Grande in New Mexico. IRSA's broad representation from federal, state, local governments, tribes, and civic organizations is focused on water resource management and comprehensive restoration needs across the Isleta Reach. This new watershed group is a forum for exchange of information and dialogue between different levels of government, the agricultural community,

the Pueblo of Isleta, environmental groups, numerous recreational interests and civil society. Through the planning process, landowners and residents are learning about current and proposed federal, state and local land and water management, research and restoration in the Isleta Reach. In turn, IRSA membership provides meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions towards improving aquatic and riparian habitat for a wide range of species, including federally listed, and reducing conflict around water deliveries during times of shortage.

3.1.2 Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope

The geographic focus of the watershed group is the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande in Valencia and Socorro Counties, New Mexico. The Isleta Reach extends 48 river miles from the southern boundary of Isleta Pueblo to the San Acacia Diversion Dam (Figure 1). IRSA will focus on identifying restoration opportunities and priorities within the 13,000 acres of public and/or private lands within the Rio Grande floodway, including the river channel and the vegetated floodplain, along the 48-mile river corridor, as well opportunities within the approximately 30,000 acres of farmland and managed land outside the levees.

Land ownership along the Isleta Reach includes the Pueblo of Isleta, the MRGCD, NMDGF, federal and private property (Figure 1). Surrounding land uses include a mix of irrigated agriculture, residential and municipal developments and wildlife management areas. The Village of Los Lunas supports a population of approximately 10,000 and the City of Belen comprises nearly 7,000 residents. Smaller villages include Jarales, Casa Colorada, Los Trujillos, Los Chavez, Tome-Adelino, Valencia, Bosque Farms, and Peralta. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish owns and manages three wildlife management areas that collectively comprise the Ladd S. Gordon Waterbird Complex, including the Belen, Casa Colorada, Bernardo and La Joya Waterfowl Management Areas (WMA's). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service owns and manages refuge lands, located in the downstream end of the Isleta Reach just south of the La Joya WMA (Figure 1).

The Isleta Reach comprises the entire Belen Division of the MRGCD -- the largest of all four MRGCD Divisions. The principal crops include alfalfa and other hay crops grown to support the livestock and dairy industries. Most (>95%) of the farmland is flood irrigated with water diverted at the Isleta Diversion Dam and delivered through the MRGCD irrigation network. In 2015, the Belen Division delivered flood irrigation water to more than 26,500 acres of non-Pueblo farmland; more than twice the acreage irrigated in the downstream Socorro Division (GSA 2017).

One unique aspect of MRGCD irrigation infrastructure in the Isleta Reach is the relatively large number of irrigation return channels ("waste-ways") that return water from the irrigation drains to the Rio Grande at various points along the 48-mile reach. From a restoration perspective these return channels are strategically important because they provide important aquatic habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species and are being used to prevent river channel desiccation during prolonged periods of summer drought. With MRGCD as an active member of the IRSA, other creative approaches to utilizing these waste-ways to enhance riparian and aquatic habitat conditions are being explored.

In addition to the floodway, the Isleta Reach includes very important habitat management areas and opportunities within the roughly 30,000 acres of managed agricultural lands and associated historic Rio Grande bottomlands. These areas include State, Federal and locally managed wildlife management areas as well as many parcels of private lands that hold unique habitat value. As part of the conceptual restoration plan for Grant #18AP00119, IRSA is exploring habitat and water management needs within these lands as creative water management approaches to these areas and is expanding its partnership network to address these areas.

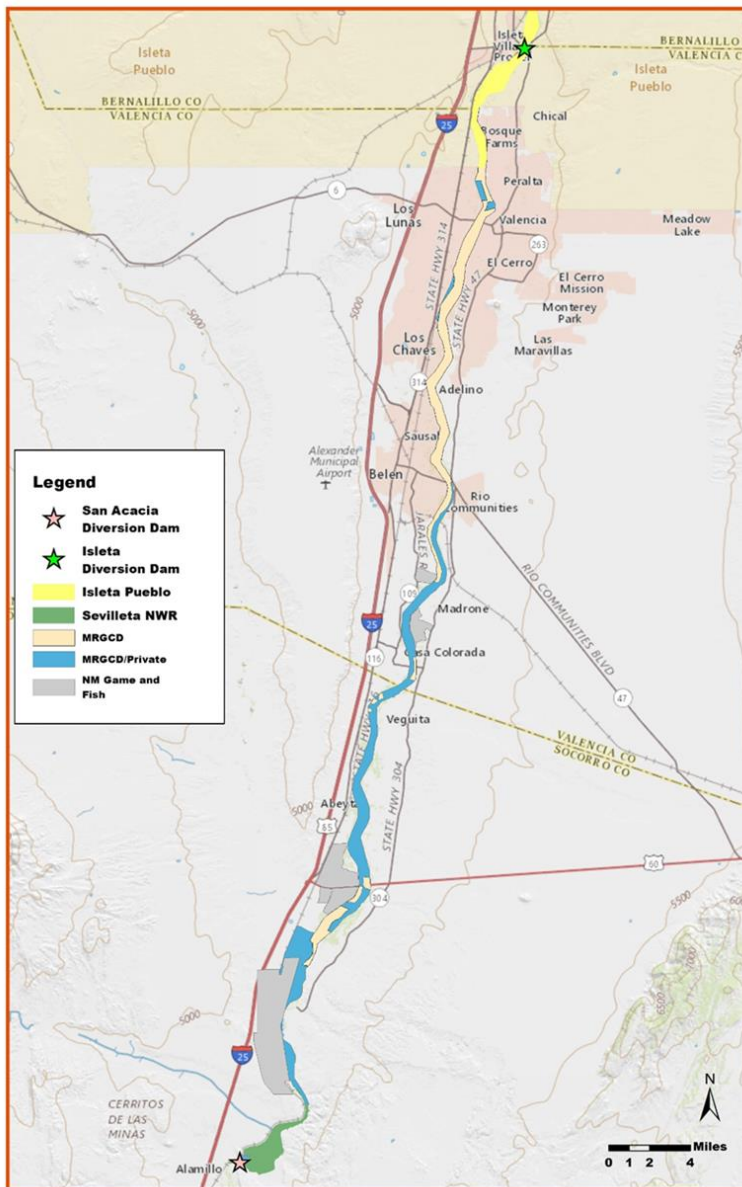


Figure 1. Isleta Reach Watershed Map.

3.2 Evaluation Criterion B-Addressing Critical Watershed Needs

3.2.1 Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande suffers from many of the same ills as other regulated rivers across the southwestern United States. Flood control and sediment retention dams, channelization projects, irrigation diversions and associated infrastructure have significantly altered the hydrology and geomorphic character of the Isleta Reach. These changes have promoted: reductions in both spatial extent and complexity of stream channel and riparian-wetland habitats; noxious plant invasions; river channel dewatering; alluvial groundwater declines, and; native species extirpations. Bosque wildfires, fueled by dense stands of invasive saltcedar and Russian olive trees, are increasingly common and often result in death of native riparian plant species. Once burned, these floodplain areas are re-colonized by non-native trees and also by herbaceous noxious weeds such as perennial pepperweed, Russian knapweed, hoary cress, Canada thistle and Ravenna grass (McKenna 2011).

The Isleta Reach has been the focus of several habitat restoration and rehabilitation efforts over the past 10-15 years. Several previous projects have focused on thinning non-native trees from the bosque, while others have concentrated on improving habitat for federally endangered species. For example, the Pueblo of Isleta, MRGCD, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the USFWS Sevilleta NWR have implemented non-native plant removal projects within the active floodplain in various segments of the project reach. Reclamation, MRGCD and the USACE jointly designed and constructed the 40-acre Los Lunas Habitat Restoration Project in the early 2000s to provide inundated channel and floodplain habitat to support the federally endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow (RGSM) and the Southwestern willow flycatcher (SWFL) (USBR 2017). A few years later the NMISC collaborated with the Reclamation to destabilize vegetated islands and lower elevated floodplain terraces along several miles of the Isleta Reach to expand low-velocity spawning and nursery habitat for the RGSM (SWCA 2007). More recently, the NMISC collaborated with Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to construct a 16-acre habitat restoration project on the USFWS Sevilleta NWR. Like the previously mentioned projects, this project emphasized creating low-velocity spawning and rearing habitat for the RGSM (GSA 2015).

The Isleta Reach will continue to be a focal area for both riverine and floodplain habitat restoration. Breeding territories for the federally listed Southwestern willow flycatcher are routinely identified along segments of the Isleta Reach. Long-term population monitoring data collected by USFWS has documented greater abundances of Rio Grande silvery minnows in the Isleta Reach than other MRG river segments in some years (USFWS 2016). However, long river segments in the Isleta Reach are prone to drying during prolonged summer drought periods, risking over-summer survival of these fish. As such, the Isleta Reach was identified as an important focal area for endangered species habitat restoration in the Final Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Non-Federal Water Management and Maintenance Activities on the Middle Rio Grande (USFWS 2016). While IRSA would not assume responsibility for addressing proposed conservation measures identified in this Biological Opinion, it is predictable that restoration stewardship efforts undertaken by IRSA could provide meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions towards

improving habitat for federally listed species. This is important because habitat restoration solutions are becoming increasingly complicated by frequent water shortages exacerbated by reduced mountain snowpack, earlier snowmelt runoff events, and increasingly frequent above average winter and summer temperatures. Climate models predict this trend will continue to worsen over the next century (Dettinger et al 2015; Llewellyn et al 2013) with strong implications not only for endangered species, but for a host of riparian-dependent wildlife species. For example, models recently utilized by Smith and Finch (2017) predict climate-mediated shifts in riparian plant species composition and structure along the Middle Rio Grande will further exacerbate habitat fragmentation and reduce breeding bird habitat for both listed and non-listed species.

Grant #18AP00119 has allowed for the formation of IRSA and exploration of what role IRSA should play in the role within the habitat and water management in the Isleta Reach. During the spring of 2020, IRSA held a special meeting focusing on progress to date and exploring ideas of what direction IRSA should take moving forward. The consensus of this meeting was that IRSA was playing a critical role in the Isleta Reach and it was greatly valued by all membership. Members expressed overwhelming support for IRSA continuing as a communication forum and expanding into more formalized stewardship and restoration project roles. It was decided at that time that IRSA was not ready to incorporate as a non-profit nor establish a more formal steering committee. Members expressed a desire for learning more about the water and habitat challenges of the reach and understanding the community interest in the Rio Grande. An early draft outline of the conceptual restoration plan was presented and was received favorably with critical suggestions for improvement. During this meeting we also completed the draft operating rules for IRSA and agreed to establish IRSA as a formal entity once we worked through the conceptual restoration plan.

IRSA envisions itself as an entity that will serve 3 primary purposes moving forward; 1) communication and education, 2) monitoring and maintenance of large restoration projects established by agencies within the Isleta Reach, 3) identification and implementation of new restoration projects and water management strategies that address underserved parts of the ecosystem. IRSA envisions planning and implementing a wide-range of watershed improvements, such as mapping and controlling invasive species, implementing riparian and riverine restoration benefiting listed and non-listed species, developing creative water conservation and leasing opportunities, and organizing citizen-led monitoring and restoration maintenance activities. IRSA has a strong foundation for being able to take its nascent momentum to this next step.

3.2.2 Sub-criterion No. B2. Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

3.2.2.1 Stakeholder Outreach and Partnership Building

The Rio Grande basin's water supply is likely to decrease in this century. Optimization of the beneficial use of the water supply across competing uses including agriculture, urban areas, industrial and commercial users, and fish and wildlife is a critical issue for the watershed. Constraints imposed by federal law, state law, and inter-state compact agreements can be

difficult to satisfy or resolve in a mutually beneficial way without all the necessary parties at the table.

By convening a diverse group of stakeholders and communities, IRSA provides a local focus to discuss concerns and issues, and identify best management practices and strategies to provide beneficial use of water for habitat restoration under supply limited conditions. Once COVID restrictions are lifted, IRSA will resume field trips to observe physical-hydrologic conditions in the river floodway, analysis of constraints and opportunities, identification of restoration needs and priorities and watershed planning activities will increase dialogue among sometimes adversarial parties, and, over time, a greater understanding and appreciation of stakeholders' different perspectives, values and interests. Currently these activities are occurring virtually, priming IRSA with critical spatially based information about the resources of the reach. The emphasis on scientific data, best management practices, and measurable management objectives facilitates this discussion of feasible strategies and defines probable outcomes that can be monitored and adapted as necessary. This collective identification of strategies to implement and fund restoration of fish and wildlife habitat will help resolve conflicts and foster collaboration.

One strategy ASW wants to continue to advance through IRSA is the implementation of market based, voluntary environmental water leases, a legal tool that enables water right holders to temporarily transfer water back to rivers, and riparian habitat to benefit the environment while providing an alternative revenue source for water right holders. Another strategy IRSA wants to assess is to utilize irrigation infrastructure to "irrigate" the floodway using drains and spillways to apply water to habitat especially during low water years.

Voluntary, market-based strategies and other innovative water strategies can increase the reliability and resiliency of the water supply in the Isleta Reach during times of water shortages. IRSA includes federal and state landowners in the Isleta Reach and members of the Middle Rio Grande ESA Collaborative, who have constructed habitat restoration projects in the Isleta Reach in the past and have plans to do more in the future. See Section 3.3.2 Sub-criterion No. C2 for more details of plans and constructed projects. IRSA will expand on and enhance these efforts and associated conservation outcomes through coordination of planning of habitat restoration projects throughout the Isleta Reach.

As previously described, there have been and will continue to be large scale restoration projects constructed within the floodway by the US Bureau of Reclamation, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. Many of these projects enjoy significant funding for design and construction but often lack long term monitoring and maintenance funds. IRSA sees themselves as a citizen's group that can fill this niche. IRSA proposed to identify 3 such sites, determine what types of activities are needed for long term vibrancy and test implementation of these activities.

Another focal area for IRSA is the advocacy of important habitat sites that fall outside the Rio Grande floodway and are often overlooked by endangered species focused restoration projects.

Such areas as the Whitfield Wildlife Management Area, the Belen Marsh, the New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranch provide critical grassland and wetland habitat within the Isleta Reach. IRSA is a voice for these areas and proposes to develop conceptual restoration plans for 2 projects associated with these types of locales during the new grant period.

3.2.2.2 Watershed Restoration Planning

IRSA is utilizing the funding under Grant #18AP00119 to develop a conceptual watershed restoration plan for the Isleta Reach. This restoration planning is following a structured, systematic procedure for identifying a broad range of restoration opportunities and constraints to guide identification of restoration priorities deemed appropriate for the group to pursue including:

Grant #18AP00119 Conceptual Restoration Plan process

Step 1: Develop a Comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS) of the Isleta Reach. Building this GIS will require reaching-out to a myriad of federal, state and local agencies and organizations to identify and acquire available data layers

Step 2: Canvas federal and state land management agencies regarding current and future restoration planning and implementation projects.

Step 3: Obtain, organize and review existing reports that characterize reach conditions and/or describe restoration opportunities, needs, and constraints.

Step 4: Organize and facilitate meetings with IRSA to present and discuss results of the information gathering from Steps 1 through 3 above. Using these data, facilitate a discussion to analyze, identify and document restoration needs and priorities of the group.

Step 5: Conduct a community survey of the Isleta Reach to better understand the local interest in the Rio Grande and associated farmland habitat.

Step 6: Finalize a conceptual restoration plan for the Isleta Reach that identifies critical habitat and water needs, discusses community interest in the habitat of the reach and points towards IRSA's future role in the reach as a community-based watershed organization.

Moving IRSA forward: Proposed planning and design activities

The above conceptual restoration plan will provide the critical framework for IRSA moving towards a formal watershed organization and fulfilling its vision of developing into a long-term stewardship association. Activities under this grant will include:

- 1) IRSA Steering Committee Operating Plan: This plan will provide a blue print for IRSA governance moving forward.
- 2) Draft stewardship plans for 3 pilot stewardship sites: This plan will provide a structure for the testing of stewardship activities at 3 large restoration sites within the Isleta Reach.
- 3) Conceptual restoration designs for 2 new restoration sites: Restoration designs will be created for 2 new restoration projects in the Isleta Reach.
- 4) IRSA Stewardship Plan for 2025-2030: This plan will build on the pilot stewardship and restoration design activities for developing structured activities for the 5 years post grant period.

3.3 Evaluation Criterion C-Implementation and Results

3.3.1 Sub-criterion No. C1. Understanding of and Ability to Meet Program Requirements

Audubon's response to sub-criterion No. C1 is provided in Section 2.4.4 of the Technical Project Description.

3.3.2 Sub-criterion No. C2. Building on Relevant Federal, State or Regional Planning Efforts

The proposed activities of the watershed group will complement or meet the goals of applicable Federal, state or regional water plans as described below.

Rio Grande Basin Study: In the summer of 2017, Reclamation launched the Rio Grande Basin Study in partnership with MRGCD. The Rio Grande Basin Study in New Mexico is focused on the Middle Rio Grande from the Colorado-New Mexico border to Elephant Butte Reservoir including the Isleta Reach. The basin has been fully allocated since 1907 and future potential conditions in the basin could result in decreased water supply and quality. The basin study will enhance existing models and data to evaluate infrastructure and operations. It will also develop strategies to improve water supply reliability and improve stakeholder collaboration and water management in an area of competing needs. Estimates of future water supply and demand will be considered in the Isleta Reach watershed restoration planning process as constraints on watershed restoration. Deliberations among IRSA stakeholders will identify adaptation and mitigation strategies for operations and infrastructure changes for consideration in the Basin study. ASW is engaged as the NGO Sectoral Committee lead and holds a seat on the Steering Committee. Through an understanding of the Basin Study, IRSA members will develop a greater appreciation and understanding of future potential water supply and quality in the basin.

Middle Rio Grande Drought Contingency Plan: In the fall of 2016, Reclamation entered into a cooperative agreement with MRGCD to develop a drought contingency plan to identify and prioritize actions to ensure a dependable water supply with the middle Rio Grande valley, including the Isleta Reach, while reducing exposure and vulnerability to prolonged water shortages. Policies and actions to manage drought will be considered in the Isleta Reach watershed restoration planning process as constraints or adaptive strategies for watershed restoration. IRSA and associated watershed restoration plan will contribute to greater appreciation and understanding of critical policies and recommended actions for managing drought on a basin-wide basis in coming years.

Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Habitat Restoration Efforts by Multiple Agencies and Stakeholders. The Isleta Reach is identified as an important focal area for endangered species habitat restoration by the Middle Rio Grande ESA Collaborative Program (Parametrix 2008). It has also been highlighted as an important reach in the Final Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Non-Federal Water Management and Maintenance Activities on the Middle Rio Grande (USFWS 2016). While IRSA would not assume responsibility for addressing proposed conservation measures identified in this Biological Opinion, it is predictable that restoration efforts undertaken by IRSA could provide meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions towards improving habitat for federally listed species. This is important because habitat restoration solutions are becoming increasingly complicated by frequent water shortages exacerbated by reduced mountain snowpack, earlier snowmelt runoff

events, and increasingly frequent above average winter and summer temperatures. ASW holds a seat on the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program.

MRGCD Conservation Program. In 2019, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District formed the MRGCD Conservation Action Committee. Audubon Southwest and the University of New Mexico's Utton Transboundary Resources Center at the University of New Mexico are on contract to provide assistance to this effort to develop innovative new farm and river conservation program. This comprehensive effort aims to increase the resilience of both the Middle Rio Grande ecosystem and the 65,000 acres of farmland it supports in the face of increasingly variable water supplies. This effort aims to benefit farmers by advancing efficient water delivery and use, thus increasing the dependability of water supply for sustainable agriculture, endangered species compliance and our rare Bosque and riverine habitat. A guiding principle for this effort is that sustaining healthy agriculture in the Middle Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico is crucial to maintaining a healthy Rio Grande ecosystem.

Middle Rio Grande Conservation Action Plan. The Middle Rio Grande Conservation Action Plan (MRGCAP) is an ecosystem-based conservation management plan for the riparian ecosystem of the Middle Rio Grande. It was initially a restoration framework for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District in 2015, in partnership with the Utton Transboundary Resources Center, New Mexico Natural Heritage, and Colorado State University's Natural Heritage Program. Since then, the MRGCAP evolved into a tool with a promising future to guide conservation management in the Middle Rio Grande for multiple agencies. The MRGCAP has already been embedded in riparian component of the NM Forest Action Plan, with other projects in the works. IRSA is engaged with a team of volunteers from multiple agencies is helping to update the status of the plan's five conservation targets to reflect the most recently available conditions in the MRG and is referencing this information in our conceptual restoration plan.

Unit A and Unit B Habitat Restoration, USFWS Sevilleta NWR: This is a collaborative restoration project between the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Reclamation to create spawning and rearing habitat for the federally listed Rio Grande Silvery Minnow and breeding habitat for the federally listed Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. IRSA incorporating these efforts into the conceptual restoration plan in order to complement and/or enhance the restoration work taking place on the USFWS Sevilleta NWR.

Isleta Pueblo Bosque Restoration Plan: The Pueblo of Isleta, Reclamation and MRGCD are in the process of developing a Bosque and Riverine Restoration Plan as part of the recent settlement agreement associated with the Isleta Diversion Dam. That restoration plan will focus specifically within the boundaries of the Pueblo of Isleta. IRSA includes the participation of the Pueblo of Isleta, and is taking into consideration ways to complement the restoration work taking place on the Pueblo of Isleta as we explore watershed restoration opportunities downstream of their boundary.

Region 12- 2017 Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan: Landscape-scale forest, watershed, and rangeland restoration in the Middle Rio Grande were identified as high priority strategies with medium effectiveness as a strategy to meet future water demands. Activities to improve watershed health included forest thinning/fuels reduction, invasive species treatment, stream and river restoration, rangeland health and grazing management and burn area rehabilitation. These are preliminary objectives for watershed restoration in the Isleta Reach.

Region 15 – 2016 Socorro-Sierra Regional Water Plan: Projects to manage watersheds to increase yield and improve water quality were identified as relevant strategies identified in the 2003 Regional Water Plan and the 2017 regional plan. Activities to improve watershed health included improvement of timber and riparian health and ecosystem restoration projects. Aquatic and riparian habitat restoration is the preliminary goal for watershed restoration in the Isleta Reach.

3.4 Evaluation Criterion D—Nexus To Department Of Interior Initiatives

The tasks and activities outlined in this proposal will support several Department of Interior initiatives as described below.

The development of the IRSA will benefit the Middle Rio Grande basin where Reclamation manages and operates the Middle Rio Grande Project and San Juan-Chama Project.

Reclamation facilities within the Middle Rio Grande Project include the Isleta and San Acacia Diversion Dams. Both the Middle Rio Grande and San Juan-Chama Reclamation projects benefit Pueblo farmland, non-Pueblo farmland, and municipal San Juan Chama Project contractors located within the Isleta Reach. Reclamation also leases San Juan Chama water for endangered fish and wildlife under their supplemental water program which water is released in the Isleta Reach for the benefit of endangered fish and birds. IRSA planning, stewardship and restoration projects provide meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions to Reclamation project water management and operations and greater appreciation and understanding of Reclamation projects and water management.

The development of IRSA benefits the USFWS Sevilleta NWR. The USFWS Sevilleta NWR owns 1400 acres of land in the geographic focal area that are managed for the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants as well as recreation including wildlife observation and hunting. The USFWS Sevilleta NWR has indicated their support for the watershed group and planning effort. USFWS Sevilleta NWR is concurrently planning and restoring aquatic and riparian habitat within the Isleta Reach. IRSA provides meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions to restoration efforts underway on USFWS Sevilleta NWR and greater appreciation and understanding of land and water management issues benefiting federal lands.

The development of IRSA positively impacts federally threatened or endangered aquatic or riparian species. Three federally endangered species--the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, the Rio Grande silvery minnow, and the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse--and one federally threatened species, the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, occupy the Isleta Reach. The Isleta Reach is designated critical habitat for both the minnow, and flycatcher. Breeding territories for the federally listed Southwestern Willow Flycatcher are routinely identified along segments of

the Isleta Reach. Isleta Reach was identified as an important focal area for endangered species habitat restoration in the Final Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Non-Federal Water Management and Maintenance Activities on the Middle Rio Grande (USFWS 2016). While IRSA does not assume responsibility for addressing proposed conservation measures identified in this Biological Opinion, restoration and stewardship efforts undertaken by IRSA will provide meaningful, multi-stakeholder contributions towards improving habitat for federally listed species.

The development of IRSA benefits the Pueblo of Isleta, whose reservation lands and 2000 acre bosque and river channel are located immediately upstream of the IRWRG watershed boundary. The Pueblo of Isleta is preparing a Bosque Restoration Plan which will inform the IRWRG' watershed restoration plan. By developing a watershed group, watershed restoration plan and forum to share perspectives, and information, non-tribal stakeholders will have increased awareness and understanding of Pueblo issues and concerns in water management and bosque restoration.

The development of IRSA benefits the WaterSMART New Mexico Rio Grande Basin Study. The basin study will enhance existing models and data to evaluate infrastructure and operations and will also develop strategies to improve water supply reliability and improve stakeholder collaboration and water management in an area of competing needs. Estimates of future water supply and demand will be considered in the Isleta Reach watershed restoration planning process as constraints on watershed restoration. ASW is engaged as the NGO Sectoral Committee lead and holds a seat on the Steering Committee. IRSA members will identify adaptation and mitigation strategies for operations and infrastructure changes for consideration in the Basin study.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES COMPLIANCE

No environmental and cultural resources compliance is anticipated under this proposal for Phase I planning.

5. REQUIRED PERMITS OR APPROVALS

No permits or approvals are anticipated under this proposal for Phase I planning.

6. PROJECT BUDGET

Total Costs:

The total cost of this two-year project is budgeted at \$99,964.17 in federal funding. Please see attached budget and budget narrative for more information.

7. CITED REFERENCES

- Dettinger, M., B. Udall and A. Georgakakos. 2015. Western water and climate change. Ecological Applications: Vol. 25 (8), pp. 2069-2093.
- GeoSystems Analysis (GSA). 2017. Assessment of Water Conservation Opportunities and Constraints on Irrigated Lands of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, New Mexico. Prepared for The World Wildlife Fund, Washington D.C. Prepared by GeoSystems Analysis, Inc. Albuquerque, NM. June 2017. Contract Agreement #CX26.
- GeoSystems Analysis (GSA). 2015. Habitat Restoration Analysis and Design, River Mile 130-99: Final Conceptual Design, Phase 1. Prepared for the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. Prepared by GeoSystems Analysis, Inc. Albuquerque, NM. November 2015. NMISC Work Order RG-15-2.
- Lindenmayer, D.B. and G.E. Likens. 2010. The science and application of ecological monitoring. Biological Conservation, Vol. 143. pp. 1317-1328.
- Llewellyn, D., S. Vaddey, J. Roach, and A. Pinson. 2013. Westwide climate risk assessment: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Upper Rio Grande Impact Assessment. Executive Summary. USBR, Washington, D.C., USA.
- McKenna, C. 2011. Technical Memorandum: 2011 Noxious Weed Survey. Prepared for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. Prepared by Parametrix. December 2011.
- Parametrix. 2008. Restoration Analysis and Recommendations for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, NM. Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program, Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 2008.
- Siegle and Ahlers. 2017. 2016 Monitoring report for the Los Lunas Habitat Restoration Project. USBR Denver Tech Services Center, Denver Colorado, March 2017.
- Smith, D. Max; Finch, Deborah M. 2017. Climate change and wildfire effects in aridland riparian ecosystems: An examination of current and future conditions. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRSRTR-364. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. 65 p.
- SWCA 2007. Middle Rio Grande Riverine Restoration Project Phase II: Environmental Assessment. Prepared for Bureau of Reclamation Albuquerque Area Office on behalf of the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. January 2007.
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2016. Final Biological and Conference Opinion for Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Non-Federal Water Management and Maintenance Activities on the Middle Rio Grande, New Mexico. Consultation Number 02ENNM00-2013-0033, Department of the Interior, New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, Albuquerque, New Mexico, December 2016.



Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program
Partner with Department of Biology, University of New Mexico
MSC03 2010, Castetter Hall
One University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program
From: Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program
Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

January 6, 2021

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. I am the Science and Research Director for the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP), a student-based citizen/community science program that has been involved in the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association's planning process. BEMP has been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and we are excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. We are glad to be a part of their efforts to improve community engagement in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande (MRG). We have actively been involved in monitoring restoration at six sites with several local school groups for 17 years and look forward to participating in IRSA's planning efforts in this reach.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into a group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the MRG contains incredible habitat and serves important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

Kim D. Eichhorst, Ph.D.
Science and Research Director, Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program
Research Lecturer III, Dept. of Biology, University of New Mexico

December 20, 2020

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

As concerns the Audubon Southwest's WaterSmart Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA), I recommend funding for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. IRSA membership would benefit greatly from having two additional years of Phase I Funding. This would allow for continuance in the development of their role in the Isleta Reach as well as the plan and design of watershed management activities.

In the last 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. ISRA was established as a communication platform between citizens and agencies to learn about the Isleta Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to an increased degree of citizen awareness and engagement. It will lead to a better understanding of citizen priorities and help to identify watershed management voids that can be filled.

Having served as a member of the IRSA since its inception in 2019, I became affiliated with this initiative due to my efforts to maintain the Belen Marsh. The Marsh is an important riparian conservation area located in Belen, New Mexico. I have been leading a 14-year effort to preserve this area as a natural habitat for wildlife as well as a conservation area for the community. The Isleta Reach which the Belen Marsh is a great part contains incredible habitat as well as serving as an important water delivery function for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Isleta Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water delivery and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement.

Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns regarding this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Eileen Beaulieu

Eileen Beaulieu

1173 Mesa Loop

Los Lunas NM 87031

505-249-7929

eluciard@comcast.net

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program
From: Impact Outdoors Matthew Monjaras founder/ ceo
Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. I have been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and am excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. I am (say something about yourself and affiliation if applicable)....

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. This effort is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

Impact Outdoors
Matthew Monjaras



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 1248
Socorro, New Mexico 87801



To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

December 15, 2020

Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA). I have been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and am excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. I am the Refuge Manager at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge manages about 6 miles of the Rio Grande in the Isleta Reach.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and riparian conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and to plan and design watershed management activities. Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

Kathy Granillo, Refuge Manager, 505-864-4021

GOVERNOR
Michelle Lujan Grisham



DIRECTOR AND SECRETARY
TO THE COMMISSION
Michael B. Sloane

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF GAME & FISH

One Wildlife Way, Santa Fe, NM 87507
Post Office Box 25112, Santa Fe, NM 87504
Tel: (505) 476-8000 | Fax: (505) 476-8123
For information call: (888) 248-6866

www.wildlife.state.nm.us

STATE GAME COMMISSION

SHARON SALAZAR HICKEY
Chair
Santa Fe
ROBERTA SALAZAR-HENRY
Vice-Chair
Las Cruces
JIMMY RAY BATES, SR.
Albuquerque
GAIL CRAMER
Mayhill
TIRZIO J. LOPEZ
Cebolla
DAVID SOULES
Las Cruces
JEREMY VESBACH
Placitas

January 6, 2021

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

From:
Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. I have been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and am excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. I am a Habitat Biologist with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and I collaborate with these multi-disciplinary partners for the long-term conservation of the fragile Middle Rio Grande ecosystems.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. This effort is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

Chuck Schultz
Northwest Regional Habitat Biologist
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
Albuquerque, NM



December 14th, 2020

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program
From: JT Jones, Heritage Farm Manager, ABQ BioPark, City of Albuquerque
Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. I have been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and am excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. As an educational organization engaging the public, our support for this association originated in the impacts of watershed management relating to agriculture and conservation. Our Heritage Farm seeks to educate our visitors on the benefits that conservation and agriculture working together provide. As an upstream participant within the watershed, this is of utmost importance to the dialogue considering both activities coincide along the riparian zones within the arid-west. As we focus on educating the public on the importance of conservation initiatives and their role, this project provides a close, easily accessible platform for engagement regarding the topic of water and its impact in our daily lives.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

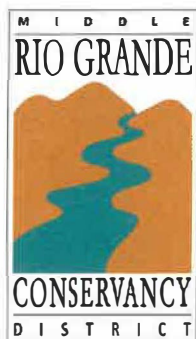
I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having two additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Sincerely,

JT Jones

Assistant Curator-Heritage Farm
ABQ BioPark
City of Albuquerque, Cultural Services Department

January 12, 2021



To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

From: Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD)

Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant Application

To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. The MRGCD has been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and is excited to have contributed to IRSA's evolution over these past 2 years.

The MRGCD is a primary water management agency, responsible for the delivery of water to over 26,500 acres of crop land in the Isleta Reach, and is also responsible for the associated maintenance of levees, drains, and outfalls to the river. Sustaining a robust agricultural tradition within the Rio Grande corridor serves as a corner stone for partnering with local communities and funders to restore, monitor, maintain and protect diverse riverine and floodplain habitats. Additionally, the MRGCD is the single largest landholder and manager of riparian lands in the reach. IRSA's mission and regional goals dovetail nicely with the management objectives of MRGCD, specifically in terms of restoration, habitat, recreation, and fire/fuels management.

The MRGCD is proud to be a partner of IRSA and looks forward to pursuing opportunities to improve community engagement and stewardship of the Rio Grande and surrounding agricultural land. Together with our partners, IRSA continues to develop consensus regarding optimization of resources to address a variety of projects such as floodplain inundation, and strategic outfall habitat enhancement, which serve to fulfill major commitments made by MRGCD, Reclamation, and New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission under the 2016 Biological Opinion.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This has been a rewarding effort and we are making good progress in developing a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both citizens from the watershed and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. This effort is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for

P.O. Box 581

87103-0581

1931 Second St. SW

Albuquerque, NM

87102-4515

505.247.0234

Fax # 505.243.7308

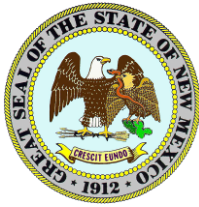
the Rio Grande and its farmers. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike A. Hamman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike A. Hamman P.E.
CEO and Chief Engineer,
Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

Howie C. Morales
Lt. Governor

NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

Harold Runnels Building
1190 Saint Francis Drive, PO Box 5469
Santa Fe, NM 87502-5469
Telephone (505) 827-2855
www.env.nm.gov



James C. Kenney
Cabinet Secretary

Jennifer J. Pruett
Deputy Secretary

US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

January 5, 2021

RE: Letter of Support for Audubon Society Southwest 2021 Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b Grant Proposal

To Whom It May Concern:

The New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau Wetlands Program supports Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant proposal for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA). IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119 "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". I have been a member of IRSA since its inception in 2019. During this time, I have witnessed the development of a stewardship plan that is all-inclusive of stakeholder's interests in this reach of the Middle Rio Grande, and by taking this representative approach, the evolution of a strong stewardship group over the past 2 years.

Among its planning activities, IRSA is acting as a communication platform among stakeholders about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies and others working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding Phase 1b for the continued support for IRSA and the important role that they provide as stewards of the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande and its associated wetlands and riparian zones. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains vital habitat for aquatic, wetland and riparian obligate species as well as infrastructure that provides important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande and its associated communities. Having a robust watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop accepted strategies for water and habitat conservation, design water management improvements that also serve the needs of wildlife, improve the natural river corridor and benefit communities, address drought and climate change, and restore the trust of local communities. Having 2 additional years of Phase 1b funding to continue the progress of IRSA's role in the Reach, to continue to develop and solidify outreach strategies to reach interested public and engage citizens, and to plan and design watershed management activities with the input of stakeholders, would greatly benefit New Mexico.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Thank you,

US BOR WaterSMART LOS
January 5, 2021
Page 2

Maryann McGraw

Maryann McGraw
Wetlands Program Coordinator
Surface Water Quality Bureau



December 20, 2020

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program
From: Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust
Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association. I have been a member of IRSA and am excited about IRSA evolution over these past 2 years. I am the Director of the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, a 501c3 organization, whose mission is protecting land and water for people and wildlife, forever. We accomplish our work through the use of voluntary conservation easements, a legally binding deed restriction that prevents the land from being developed and protects the conservation values. Our vision for New Mexico's Middle Rio Grande Valley is a landscape rich with vegetation and wildlife, water in the river and ditches, thriving farms and connected rural and urban communities.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group". This effort has resulted in a citizen group for the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande, now called the "Isleta Reach Stewardship Association", or IRSA. In the 18 months since its inception, IRSA has grown into an exciting group comprised of both community members from the watershed, conservation organizations, and agency staff working on projects in the watershed. IRSA is acting as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase I b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Establishing a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water managers develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that include community needs and concerns. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cecilia Rosacker".

Cecilia Rosacker



December 30, 2020

To: US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

From: Sarah Anderson, Save Our Bosque Task Force

Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 CWMP Grant

To whom it may concern:

The Save Our Bosque Task Force (Task Force) is submitting this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA). We have been an active member of IRSA since its inception in 2019 and support the goals of IRSA and the work being done as part of this project.

The Task Force acknowledges the extensive efforts over the past 18 months by Audubon to develop IRSA as a communication platform between citizens and agencies about the status of the Reach and upcoming agency activities. The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it is leading to citizen awareness and engagement with agency priorities, increasing collaboration between agencies working in the reach, fostering a better understanding of citizen priorities, and helping to identify watershed management voids that IRSA can fill.

I strongly recommend funding this Phase 1b for the development of IRSA as a new watershed group in the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande contains incredible habitat as well as serving important water delivery functions for the Rio Grande. Having a vibrant watershed group in the Reach will help water management agencies develop strategies for water and habitat conservation that have citizen engagement baked into them. IRSA's membership would greatly benefit from having 2 additional years of Phase 1 funding to continue the development of IRSA's role in the Reach, and plan and design watershed management activities.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding this letter of support for IRSA.

Sincerely,

Sarah Anderson

Program Director

Save Our Bosque Task Force

sarahlouise.sobtf@gmail.com

NEW MEXICO INTERSTATE STREAM COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEMBERS

MARK SANCHEZ, Chair
TANYA TRUJILLO, Vice-Chair
JOHN R. D'ANTONIO JR., P.E., Secretary
ARON BALOK, Commissioner
BIDTAH BECKER, Commissioner
GREGORY CARRASCO, Commissioner
PAULA GARCIA, Commissioner
MIKE HAMMAN, Commissioner
STACY TIMMONS, Commissioner



BATAAN MEMORIAL BUILDING, ROOM 101
POST OFFICE BOX 25102
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87504-5102
(505) 827-6160
FAX: (505) 827-6188

January 5, 2021

US Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resource and Planning Office
7201 West Mansfield Avenue
Denver, CO 80235

Subject: Letter of Support for Audubon Southwest's 2021 Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b Grant

Dear WaterSMART Program:

I am writing this letter of support for Audubon Southwest's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Phase 1b grant application for the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA). I have participated in the activities that began during the initial WaterSMART grant, which established the IRSA in 2019; and I remain involved with and supportive of the efforts of the principal investigators (PIs) and their team. The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission is part of the Office of the State Engineer and is responsible for interstate stream compact compliance for the State of New Mexico. With increasing demands on water resources especially along the Rio Grande, and loss of habitat due primarily to anthropogenic alteration coupled with climate change in the natural flow regime, the need to work cooperatively with multiple stakeholders to create long-lasting solutions is essential. Audubon Southwest has approached the challenges of managing for native species and their habitats with recognition of the importance of agriculture to the local economy, the role of federal and state agencies to support water operations and management, and the cultural significance of the Rio Grande. I personally have worked on the Rio Grande representing the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission since the early 2000's to establish and manage the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program. The ISC has conducted years of scientific investigations, habitat restoration, and designed and built two conservation hatcheries for the Rio Grande silvery minnow, one in the Isleta Reach. It is exciting for my agency to work with IRSA on conservation efforts for federal and state listed species as well as improve the overall health of the river system. We face immense challenges in the upcoming years as temperatures rise and snowpack volumes diminish. Furthering the efforts of IRSA using a WaterSMART grant will help provide innovative approaches to water and environmental management in the Middle Rio Grande.

IRSA was established in 2019 through Audubon's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant # R18AP00119, "Isleta Reach Watershed Restoration Group." I was

January 5, 2021

invited to participate in developing a citizen group that focuses on the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The group changed its name to the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA) to better reflect the intentions of its members and to acknowledge that the physical watershed extends beyond the focus area. IRSA members worked with the PIs to gather pertinent information about the Isleta Reach and conducted a series of meetings to discuss the current conditions and concerns of the river, listed species, riparian vegetation, agriculture, wildlife, and other related topics. The composition of IRSA allowed for interaction with citizens and professionals in the Isleta Reach to assist in initial development of a comprehensive plan specific to that section of the Middle Rio Grande. Because this reach is bounded by two irrigation diversion dams and is largely rural, though with a growing suburban and urban population, stakeholder interests are quite different than in the Albuquerque area, which has a large urban population. I believe the continuation of IRSA would be beneficial to the regional governments as well as state and federal agencies as a conduit for information exchange and better decision making through adaptive management.

I highly recommend funding Audubon Southwest for a WaterSMART Phase 1b grant to continue the work of IRSA as a watershed partnership group that focuses on the diverse and unique environments found in the Isleta Reach and that will include and benefit New Mexicans often not well represented in watershed groups, such as members from Native American and Hispanic communities. Water management agencies increasingly rely on watershed associations to partner with and help guide their activities in and along the river system. Therefore, I encourage the WaterSMART Program to approve Audubon Southwest's request for the next phase of funding under the grant to grow IRSA and lay the groundwork for a strong and effective Isleta Reach group.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this letter. I can be reached at (505) 553-2436 (mobile) and at grace.haggerty@state.nm.us.

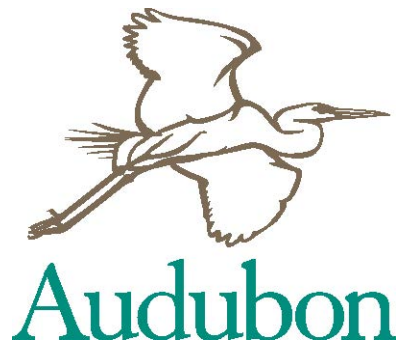
Sincerely,



Grace Haggerty
ESA Program Manager, Rio Grande Bureau
New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission

Cc: Page Pegram, Rio Grande Bureau Chief, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
Paul Tashjian, Director of Freshwater Conservation, Audubon New Mexico

APPENDIX B: OFFICIAL RESOLUTION



1/14/21

Official Resolution

The National Audubon Society, Inc. through its divisional unit Audubon Southwest, is authorized to commit to the financial and legal obligations associated with receipt of a financial assistance award under this FOA and verifies:

- The attached secretaries certificate identifies officials within the organization with legal authority to enter into an agreement
- The appropriate officials have reviewed and support the application submitted
- The organization has the capability to provide the amount of funding and in-kind contributions specified in the funding plan
- Audubon, specifically, Audubon Southwest will work with Reclamation to meet establish deadlines for entering into a grant or cooperative agreement



SECRETARY'S CERTIFICATE

The undersigned, the Assistant Secretary of **NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.**, a New York not-for-profit corporation, does hereby certify that on February 2, 2013, the Board of Directors of National Audubon Society adopted the following resolution in its entirety:

RESOLVED that, effective February 2, 2013, the following officials of the National Audubon Society, Inc., and their successors in such offices and designees, are authorized to enter into such contracts and to execute and deliver such instruments in the name of and on behalf of the Corporation as such officials reasonably believe to be in the best interest of the Corporation and consistent with the Corporation's mission, provided that this resolution shall not be construed to authorize any such official to act outside the scope of his or her general power and authority:

Name

David Yarnold,
President and Chief Executive Officer

Signature

Susan Lunden,
Chief Operating Officer

Mary Beth Henson,
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

Lorraine A. Sciarra,
Vice President, General Counsel and Assistant Secretary

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have executed this certificate and affixed the Corporation's seal on this 13th day of January, 2017.

Lorraine A. Sciarra
Assistant Secretary
National Audubon Society, Inc.

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		Quantity Type	TOTAL COST
	\$/Unit	Quantity		
Salaries and Wages				
Project Manager	\$42.00	1040	hours	\$43,680.00
Water Resource Associate	\$24.00	550	hours	\$13,200.00
Fringe Benefits				
Project Manager and Associate	30%	\$56,880.00	% of salary	\$17,064.00
Travel				
Staff Mileage YR 1	\$0.55	2400	miles	\$1,320.00
Staff Mileage YR 2	\$0.55	2400	miles	\$1,320.00
Meetings YR 1	\$50.00	6	meetings	\$300.00
Meetings YR 1	\$50.00	6	meetings	\$300.00
				\$0.00
Supplies and Materials				
Office supplies and materials	\$500.00	2	year	\$1,000.00
				\$0.00
Pass-Through Entities (sub-recipients)				
				\$0.00
Contractual/Construction				
Other				
Printing	\$10.00	250		\$2,500.00
				\$0.00
				\$0.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$80,684.00
Indirect Costs				
Fixed Carryforward	25%	\$78,184.00	base	\$19,280.17
TOTAL ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS				\$99,964.17

**Isleta Reach Stewardship Association, Middle Rio Grande
Continue Watershed Group Development, Solidify Role, and
Identify Specific Restoration Activities and Projects**

Budget narrative:

Salaries and Wages:

The primary project manager is Paul Tashjian, Director of Freshwater Conservation for Audubon Southwest. Mr. Tashjian's responsibilities include grant administration and reporting, watershed group development activities, watershed restoration planning activities, and coordination of volunteer community science activities. Paul will work 520 hours of project management annually (1040 hours for length of contract) at a rate of \$42.00/hour.

Audubon's Water Resource Associate Quantina Martine will assist with project planning and design including the identification of IRSA activities for pilot stewardship sites, field data collection at the sites and the development of conceptual restoration designs for 2 new restoration projects within the Isleta Reach. Quantina will work 225 hours on the project annually (550 hours for length of the contract) at a rate of \$24.00 per hour.

Budget calculations are shown in the attached budget proposal.

Fringe Benefits:

Fringe benefits include health, and life insurance, and retirement contribution. They are calculated proportionally to the number of hours each employee will spend on the project and their hourly rate. Please see the budget proposal for rates and calculations.

Travel:

The anticipated travel expense includes 24 local trips to Valencia County annually (48 trips for the length of contract), 100 miles roundtrip, for conducting 18 stakeholder meetings (including IRSA meetings and Steering Committee meetings), 30 field trips to the Isleta Reach to locate stewardship and restoration sites, monitor baseline conditions with watershed group members and meet with private landowners. We use the federal mileage reimbursement rate of \$0.555/mile to calculate costs. There are no trips out of the watershed area, therefore we do not include airfare, lodging, per diem, or miscellaneous travel costs.

Equipment:

No equipment will be purchased to implement this project.

Materials and Supplies:

Office supplies will be purchased for the project including easel pads, printer ink, paper and pens and are estimated to cost \$1000 total over the course of the two year project.

Meeting supplies including food and refreshments are estimated at \$50 per meeting for a total of 12 meetings.

Contractual:

NA

Environmental and Regulatory Compliance Costs:

ASW does not anticipate any environmental or regulatory compliance activities for this project.

Other expenses:

Printing and publications: ASW anticipates \$1250.00 per year for communication materials as needed to conduct outreach to a diverse set of stakeholders within the watershed, to provide print copies of the conceptual watershed restoration plan to new members of the watershed group, and for production of a multi-page color IRSA information summary for distribution to the general public.

Indirect Costs:

The National Audubon Society charges an indirect cost rate of 24.66%.

Total Costs:

Total cost is \$49,983.08 for year 1 and \$49,982.09 for year 2 for a total cost of \$99,964.17

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		Quantity Type	TOTAL COST
	\$/Unit	Quantity		
Salaries and Wages				
Project Manager	\$38.75	748	hours	\$28,985.00
				\$0.00
Fringe Benefits				
Project Manager	32%	\$28,985.00	% of salary	\$9,275.20
	0%			\$0.00
Travel				
Staff Mileage YR 1	\$0.55	560	miles	\$308.00
Staff Mileage YR 2	\$0.55	560	miles	\$308.00
Meetings YR 1	\$200.00	6	meetings	\$1,200.00
Meetings YR 1	\$200.00	6	meetings	\$1,200.00
				\$0.00
Supplies and Materials				
Office supplies and materials	\$500.00	2	year	\$1,000.00
				\$0.00
Pass-Through Entities (sub-recipients)				
				\$0.00
Contractual/Construction				
GeoSystems Analysis	\$34,270.00	1	LS	\$34,270.00
Central NM Audubon Society	\$2,000.00	1	LS	\$2,000.00
				\$0.00
Other				
Printing	\$10.00	100		\$1,000.00
				\$0.00
				\$0.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$79,546.20
Indirect Costs				
Fixed Carryforward	26%	\$70,276.20	base	\$18,011.79
TOTAL ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS				\$97,557.99

\$25,000 towards indirect