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News Release

BLM Colorado Rocky Mountain District

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Partners work together to acquire Shaw Reservoir for people and wildlife

ALAMOSA, Colo. — The Bureau of Land Management, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and The Conservation Fund have completed a multi-year partnership effort to acquire and manage Shaw Reservoir, located in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Rio Grande, with financial support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The ongoing partnership will provide increased reliability of water supply for San Luis Valley residents, additional water supply for management of wetlands in the San Luis Valley, and secure permanent water levels for a popular recreational fishing destination.

“Working with our partners has paid off for people and wildlife. This acquisition of water supplies will help us achieve our priority of creating and conserving resilient landscapes within the Blanca Wetlands Area,” said **San Luis Valley Acting Field Manager Dario Archuleta**. “With climate change, drought, and a limited irrigation season, Blanca Wetlands is one of the few places in the valley that offers wetland habitat year-round. As a result, Blanca Wetlands supports tremendous biodiversity, including 200 species of birds. We feel extremely privileged to be a part of restoring water to these wetlands, while also benefitting local water supplies and the recreation economy.”

The Conservancy District operates an augmentation program within five counties in the San Luis Valley to bolster water levels in the Rio Grande that have been drawn down due to domestic, commercial, and municipal wells. Additionally, the Conservancy District works with partners in the local and state water communities to address timely issues such as groundwater sustainability, compliance with the Rio Grande Compact, and water supply protection.

“The Conservancy District is thrilled to be part of this effort,” said **Heather Dutton, Conservancy District Manager**. “We intend to operate Shaw Reservoir, a pre-compact reservoir, in a way that strengthens our augmentation program, helps our agency partners steward the valley’s natural resources, enhances the ecological condition of local streams and rivers, and improves flatwater and in-stream recreation opportunities for the community.”

The Conservation Fund, a national non-profit with an office in Boulder, facilitated this transaction in which the Conservancy District purchased the privately-owned Shaw Reservoir Company and its assets, including the reservoir infrastructure and water rights. The Conservancy District will use the reservoir to store previously acquired water rights used to operate its augmentation program in the San Luis Valley.

“This complex deal is a win-win for many in the Upper Rio Grande basin. For the original Shaw Reservoir shareholders, the agency partners, the recreating public, and the wetlands-dependent wildlife—each is getting what it needs—all without causing further dry-up of irrigated lands,” said **Christine Quinlan, Associate Director for The Conservation Fund in Colorado**. The Conservation Fund’s mission is to create solutions

that make both environmental and economic sense. To date, the group has conserved more than 8.5 million acres nation-wide, including over 278,000 acres in Colorado.

The BLM purchased the Shaw Reservoir water rights and a perpetual easement for 333 acre-feet of storage space from the Conservancy District. BLM received funding for its \$1.35 million purchase from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, part of a \$6.4 million appropriation passed in 2016 to benefit the Blanca Wetlands Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The BLM intends to change the acquired water rights to allow their usage for irrigation of wetlands on the valley floor, including wetlands at the Blanca Wetlands Area, located 10 miles northeast of Alamosa.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has developed agreements with the Conservancy District and the BLM, which allow BLM's newly acquired water rights and the Conservancy District's existing water rights to be stored at Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Beaver Park Reservoir or other Colorado Parks and Wildlife controlled reservoirs. In exchange for the storage space in Colorado Parks and Wildlife reservoirs, the Conservancy District and BLM will maintain a conservation pool at Shaw Reservoir, which will stabilize the fish population and provide optimal conditions for recreational fishing. Further, the Conservancy District and BLM will work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to time the releases from Beaver Park and other Colorado Parks and Wildlife reservoirs to have multiple benefits. For example, releasing water for augmentation needs in the winter would increase instream flows and improve the habitat and health of downstream fish populations.

“In effecting our mission to protect, preserve, and enhance wildlife and wildlife habitats in the San Luis Valley, we relish opportunities to work with partners in the water community to generate projects such as this that meet multiple goals while strengthening our bonds with one another for the benefit of all,” said **Rick Basagoitia**, CPW's **San Luis Valley Area Wildlife Manager**.

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The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The agency's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.