



DID YOU KNOW? Not only are riparian areas important for a variety of wildlife, they also: maintain water quality, provide water storage, mitigate flooding and erosion, and increase property values.



HCP Boundary Map and riparian habitat.

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF THE HCP!

HCP GOALS

1. Incidental Take Coverage
2. Species Conservation
3. Riparian Habitat Conservation
4. Landowner and Community Outreach
5. Interagency Coordination

“HOW CAN I HELP?”

- Educate yourself and others about the HCP. Attend HCP Steering Committee Meetings held in April and November
- Limit impacts to wetland and riparian habitat, and avoid impacts during the breeding season, May–August
- Consult with the HCP Coordinator or your Land Use Administrator before beginning projects to ensure they are covered. Development, construction, large-scale water projects, and activities with a federal nexus are not covered
- Contact the District to enroll your property in the [mitigation program](#).

For more information, visit the HCP webpage: www.rgwcd.org/hcp

HCP 101

WHAT IS THE HCP?

Riparian areas of the San Luis Valley are home to two Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed bird species— the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and the threatened western yellow-billed cuckoo (covered species). The San Luis Valley Regional Habitat Conservation Plan, or HCP, is a plan to conserve the covered species and their habitat while allowing for the continuation of ongoing and routine agricultural, community infrastructure, and riparian conservation and restoration activities (covered activities). Many of the covered activities have been conducted by Valley residents for over a century, and are crucial to the Valley’s economic and social well-being.

This conservation plan was finalized in 2012 and encompasses roughly 250 miles of riparian habitat, and provides regulatory protection for the State, six counties, municipalities, and landowners on more than 4,000 square miles of the Valley floor. It demonstrates lands can remain working while helping to conserve endangered species.

COVERED SPECIES and HABITAT

The flycatcher and cuckoo are neotropical migratory songbirds. They overwinter in Central and South America, and migrate to the San Luis Valley during their summer breeding season— May through August. Habitat for these species in the Valley consists of woody trees and shrubs, wetlands, and meadows along the Rio Grande River, Conejos River, and other stream corridors. Willow and cottonwood are the most common vegetation used for nesting, while wetlands and meadows provide foraging habitat for a variety of insects.

HCP NEED

The covered activities have the potential to “take”¹ the covered species or their habitat, which is illegal under the ESA. To continue conducting these activities, individuals would be required to obtain ESA coverage on a case-by-case basis and mitigate their impacts to the covered species. This standard approach is both costly and time-consuming.

As an alternative to individual ESA compliance, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (District) worked alongside the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and other partners to develop the HCP. This community-based approach provides ESA coverage to Valley residents and entities by mitigating impacts and promoting habitat conservation on a regional scale. If future riparian species become listed, the HCP may be modified to include them.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

An HCP is necessary to receive an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) from the FWS, which authorizes impacts to ESA-listed species and their habitat from covered activities provided certain conditions and assurances are met.

Each covered activity is analyzed to estimate the total habitat impacts expected over the life of the HCP. The District must secure mitigation acres to offset these impacts through the [HCP Mitigation Program](#), and ensure that these mitigation acres are greater than impact acres. To monitor impact estimates, the District coordinates a valley-wide habitat mapping effort every 10 years. The last mapping effort was completed in 2022.

¹“Take” under the ESA means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect; or attempt to engage in such conduct. Significant habitat modification is included under “harm”.