

Valley leaps Into Statewide Wetlands Programs

by Michael Blendon

The San Luis Valley is organizing to further protect and enhance its wetlands through a growing partnership called the "San Luis Valley Focus Group." This affiliation of private landowners, government agencies, water users and conservation organizations started meeting at the beginning of 1996 to start planning and generating project ideas to further protect, enhance and foster understanding of wetlands in the San Luis Valley Ecosystem.

The San Luis Valley Focus Group is local participant in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a continental effort to restore and perpetuate migratory bird populations. The state of Colorado is divided into seven other focus groups that are all doing the same thing determining needs and threats, and identifying projects and ways to fund them.

Currently the group is assisting the Colorado Division of Wildlife in preparation of a large funding proposal to the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund. Local project ideas, if they rank high enough in the state-wide list, will be included in the Colorado's Legacy

Project application called "The Wetlands Initiative."

The key to the groups success in securing project funds, either now or in the longer range, is successful communication with our partners. During the last nine months we have participants from a wide array of groups, for example the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, San Luis Lakes State Park, Citizens for San Luis Valley Water, three federal land management agencies, Saguache County, Costilla County, Alamosa County, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the Alamosa River Restoration Project, the Conejos Conservancy District, the San Luis Valley Trails and Recreation and the Audobon Society. The list of partners goes on but we know our partnership is not complete.

If you have any interest in wetlands, wildlife, and the sustainable use of valley water please give me a call and get involved. Whether you are interested in development of wildlife habitat on your private land, your community is con-

templating development of wetlands for wastewater treatment, you would like to develop ground water recharge wetlands or you have ideas for public education concerning wetlands there is a place for you, your ideas and needs in the San Luis Valley Focus Group.

The San Luis Valley is in the enviable position of having outstanding wetland resources, both on a local and continental scale. The boundless interest in pursuing wetland projects is reflected in the diversity and scale of the ideas being pursued by the San Luis Valley Focus Group. These ideas are also a reflection of the common goals of the water users of the San Luis Valley who have learned over the post-AWDI years that preservation of life in the San Luis Valley is dependent upon an intact hydrologic condition, including the presence of healthy wetlands that depend upon the sustainable use of ground and surface water...get involved!
For more information please contact Michael Blendon, Chairperson, San Luis Valley Focus Group, (719) 589-4021. Michael Blendon is manager of the Alamosa Wildlife Refuge.