

Executive Summary

Grand Water and Sewer Service Agency
Subject: B2E Grant Proposal to Bureau of Reclamation

November 21, 2024

The Moab Wetlands Revitalization Project represents a collaborative effort between a diverse group of entities sharing common goals. The project would supplement water supplies feeding the Scott and Norma Matheson Preserve through development of a new diversion and pump station at the north end of the preserve. Design concepts and elements will work to complement efforts of the Matheson Wetland Enhancement Drought Mitigation Project (pursued under a separate application) to maximize positive impacts to the wetlands. With the Matheson Wetland Enhancement Drought Mitigation Project supplementing flows at the south end of the preserve and the Moab Wetlands Revitalization Project providing additional water on the north and east, development of both projects together will reestablish connectivity of the waterways and systems within the wetlands at a level far exceeding the sum of the projects taken on their own. This synergy will make great strides to improve a wetlands area that attracts over 200 species of wildlife.

Intervals between seasonal floods of this area have lengthened to a degree that the quality of much of the wetlands is substantially diminished. The frequency of the river reaching the flood stage required to naturally replenish the wetlands, based on available data from the United States Geological Study (USGS) Cisco gauge, has gone from historically exceeding the stage more than once every three years to lately having occurred only once in the last 28 years.

Though it may be impractical to replicate flood conditions, the new diversion and pump station will facilitate maintaining more of the area as active wetlands. The first phase of the project plans to redirect 2,500 gpm through the wetlands from outlets at strategic points that utilize existing water ways and flow patterns, with future phases slated to expand capacity. Along with bolstering habitat quality closer to historical levels through improving waterway connectivity, the additional flow through the wetlands back into the river will support growth of the native vegetation needed to limit potential for erosion and allow the wetlands to improve the water quality of flow to the river from other sources. It will also reverse concerning trends in areas of the wetlands regarding soil composition due to deposition of salts, mitigating the threats to the ecosystems sensitive to this balance.

The project has gained widespread support from a variety of local entities, including Grand Conservation District, Moab Irrigation Company, Grand County, State Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA), San Juan County, San Juan Spanish Valley Special Service District, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and The Nature Conservancy. These entities are supportive of the environmental improvements the project will achieve, and many of them are also optimistic that future phases may be able to improve conservation efforts throughout the valley. If a future expansion can allow for portions of the diverted flows to augment irrigation supplies currently used throughout the valley, additional water savings could be realized through changing land uses that would reduce total consumptive use in the valley.

The landscape of southeastern Utah draws visitors from around the world. While exploring the unique features of this area the harsh elements of rock, sand, and sun contrast sharply with the delicate balance of living systems continually striving to maintain their vitality. The Scott and Norma Matheson Preserve is just one of many ecosystems and habitats along the Upper Colorado River negatively impacted by the extensive droughts and changing conditions in the area, but represents a unique opportunity for impactful investment in improvements. Along with being the largest wetlands along the Colorado River in Utah, its joint management under The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Utah Division of Wildlife Services (DWR) ensures a level of continued vigilance protecting against threats to a project's long-term viability that efforts in more remote areas might not see. Managers can recognize flow issues, contamination, threats from invasive species, and other problems quickly and work to address items that might otherwise necessitate more costly mitigation measures later. The site's proximity to power and visitor accessibility are key assets. Positive aspects of the proposed project area could be listed at length, but there may be none as promising to the long term success of a project at the Preserve as the value this community places on its natural resources. The residents and governing bodies have a strong track record of treasuring the area's natural assets, which adds weight to the support each entity has expressed toward this effort.

Preliminary cost estimates total \$_ for the project.

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To: Whom it May Concern

November 20, 2024

Subject: Support of Grand Water and Sewer Service Agency's the Grand Water & Sewer Service Agency's application to the Bureau of Reclamation for funding for the proposed project to develop a diversion point in the Colorado River.

The Moab Area Watershed Partnership (MAWP) is a diverse group of stakeholders with a focus on water quality and quantity in the greater Moab area. The Grand Water and Sewer Service Agency (GWSSA) has been an important and valuable supporter and asset to the partnership for over a decade. To begin with, we would like to thank GWSSA for its previous efforts in supporting the MAWP and participation as a partner.

The environmental benefits of this project appear to be substantial. By enabling the flow of water over and through the Matheson Wetlands, the project will provide essential hydration for the diverse wildlife that inhabits the region, fostering biodiversity, and preserving the ecological health of this valuable area. In addition, this project will help recharge the natural springs critical to the wetlands' sustainability. Moreover, the implementation of this project has promising implications for water conservation efforts.

Utilizing the water source for irrigation and outdoor landscape purposes will contribute significantly to the conservation of the Valley Fill and Glen Canyon Group Aquifers, which are vital water resources for our community. Additionally, the potential to pump water to Kens Lake can create further opportunities for recreation and recharge at various locations within the Moab Valley, promoting a more sustainable water management strategy.

The MAWP specifically discussed GWSSA's Diversion Grant application at our November meeting. At the meeting the MAWP attendees agreed that this grant is an excellent opportunity to continue our important efforts that support our mission *"to develop and facilitate implementation of a holistic watershed plan that conserves and enhances water quality and quantity in the Mill Creek (including Pack Creek) and Castle Creek watersheds."* The MAWP encourages you to support this project with a grant from your agency.

Thank you for your consideration of GWSSA's grant application and taking the time to review this letter of endorsement. Please contact us if you have any further questions or would like to know more about what was discussed.