

REGIONAL NEWS BRIEFS

COOPERATIVE PROJECT PROTECTS GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE HABITAT IN WESTERN CO



Special to the Mirror
MONTROSE-Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, the Bureau of Land Management, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife recently completed a collaborative effort to permanently protect 505 acres of property in San Miguel County that provides important habitat for the federally threatened Gunnison sage-grouse.

This prime piece of property was conveyed to CPW to promote ongoing conservation efforts in San Miguel County for the native bird.

“For many years, CPW together with the San Miguel Gunnison sage-grouse Working Group identified this important piece of habitat for the conservation of the bird,” said Renzo DelPiccolo, area wildlife manager for CPW in Montrose. “So when Tri-State worked cooperatively with BLM and the landowner to purchase this key property, we were thrilled.”

As part of its efforts to further sage-

grouse habitat protections during the re-building of a southwest Colorado transmission line, Tri-State acquired the parcel and then donated it to CPW to own and manage.

“This project was an excellent example of collaboration between the utility industry, the BLM and CPW to mitigate impacts to a federally threatened species while ensuring reliable power to our members,” said Karl Myers, Tri-State’s transmission siting, permitting and environmental manager. “Tri-State is grateful to our partners at Colorado Parks and Wildlife for their collaboration and engagement to help protect the areas that our members serve.”

The property adjoins the existing 2,500-acre Dan Noble State Wildlife Area, which also holds Miramonte Reservoir. In addition, the state wildlife area is bordered by more than 2,500 acres of property that is protected by conservation easements and stewardship trust programs to protect wildlife habitat, as well as lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Very little development will ever take place in the area.

“This helps to connect a landscape that provides habitat and migration corridors, not only for Gunnison sage-grouse, but for a wide variety of wildlife, including deer, elk, small mammals and birds,” DelPiccolo said.

The Miramonte Basin, where Dan Noble State Wildlife Area and the new mitigation

parcel are located, provides the core habitat for the majority of Gunnison sage-grouse in the San Miguel Basin. For several years, CPW has fitted birds with radio collars and biologists learned that sage grouse are reliant on the habitat in the area for breeding, nesting, brood-rearing and wintering.

“This parcel has everything that Gunnison sage-grouse need and is one of the most important areas for the bird in the entire San Miguel Basin. Grouse have demonstrated that they use this property for the entire year,” DelPiccolo said.

To protect Gunnison sage-grouse during the critical spring breeding season, the parcel will be closed to all activity from March 1 to May 15 every year.

CPW will build a wildlife-friendly fence around the property, but until that project is complete the parcel is closed to the public. When the fencing project is finished the area will be open to small- and big-game hunting during the regular seasons.

CPW biologists estimate that the population of Gunnison sage-grouse in the San Miguel Basin is about 240. CPW is working on habitat projects to boost the population of the bird.

In 2016, Tri-State’s Colowyo Mine in northwest Colorado was recognized by CPW as partner of the year for the power supplier’s collaborative efforts with the state to protect wildlife habitat.

