

Colorado State Conservation Board 2007 Matching Grants Project:
Delta Conservation District: Vandiford Ditch project

What natural resource problem(s) did the project address?

The Vandiford Ditch Diversion on the North Fork of the Gunnison River supplies irrigation water to farmers near Hotchkiss on Colorado's western slope. Historically, a gravel "push up" dam diverted water from the river to meet the decree of the water rights holders. An in-stream gravel mine situated near the diversion, coupled with the long-term acts of pushing up gravel dams, resulted in gradual lowering of the river bed and need for higher dams every year. The ditch intake did not have a headgate, so during periods of low flow, the entire river flow was often diverted into the ditch and carried to a measuring flume where excess water was dumped back into the river. This practice has seriously damaged fish habitat by drying up sections of the river and by the increased sedimentation caused by pushing up a gravel dam each year.

The CSCB Matching Grant provided for the reconstruction of the diversion with a headgate. The project was coupled with a project by the North Fork River Improvement Association to retire the in-stream gravel mine and place 79 acres of river corridor in the vicinity of the ditch intake in a wildlife conservation easement. This easement is now in place. **The reconstruction of the ditch diversion and completion of the conservation easement is expected to improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, make more efficient use of irrigation water, and improve recreational opportunity in that portion of the river. Four similar projects conducted on the river over the last eight years have shown positive water quality and wildlife results.** Stream stabilization projects are also underway above and below the diversion, and long term results of the project will be monitored.

What was achieved?

- **Ditch intake relocated, headwall and headgate constructed**
- **First 100 feet of ditch piped** enabling use of river gradient and existing bedrock to divert water flow towards headgate
- **Existing gravel dam sections removed, banks reshaped and sloped and rock veins installed** to protect stream banks from erosion and promote streamside vegetation growth.
- **Project partners** included 3 local landowners, CO Watershed Protection Fund, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, North Fork River Improvement Association., Vandiford Ditch Co., Curry family, United Companies.

