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Greenbelt Trail Restoration Project Completed by Southwest Conservation Corps

In October 2011, Costilla County received funding from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) to restore portions of the 3-mile trail and to complete a park clean-up project in Rito Seco Park within the Sangre de Cristo Greenbelt Recreation Area. Over 8 days, a Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) camping crew, comprised of nine people including three crew leaders, collected 12 bags of trash, improved approximately 1-mile of trail, and cleaned two acres within the Rito Seco Park. The trail restoration project required the SCC crew to restore bridges, build rock walls and rock cairns, maintain switchbacks, and install proper drainage. This is just one of many projects identified as a result of the planning process to improve trails and recreational assets in the county.

The Greenbelt Recreation Area, located in the foothills of the Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, was deeded to Costilla County as part of the Sangre de Cristo Ranches Subdivision, which was approved in the 1970s. During the 1970s the Costilla County Commissioners constructed a 3-mile trail (the Greenbelt Trail) and picnic area and park (Rito Seco Park) within the Greenbelt Area. In 2006, an SCC day crew completed much needed maintenance work on the northern 1.5-mile section of trail and picnic area. SCC was not able to maintain the entire length of trail in 2006 due to other project commitments, nor were they able to post proper signage, or map the location of the trail. This has made it difficult for the public to utilize this trail as an outdoor recreation asset in the county.

In January 2011, Costilla County, in collaboration with National Park Service (NPS), Colorado Open Lands, and the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, began a planning process to start improving recreational parks and other areas in Costilla County. During community meetings held in San Luis and Fort Garland, the community identified the Greenbelt Trail and Rito Seco Park, one of a few existing open space areas in the county, as resources that could benefit from improvements to better serve the community. In response to suggestions and concerns, Costilla County requested and was approved financial assistance from GOCO to restore parts of the three mile trail and clean-up areas of the Rito Seco Park. The county continues to work with partners to identify additional strategies to maintain these resources for community enjoyment. Ideas such as park clean-up days, proper signage, and guided hikes are only a few possibilities.

Other projects and implementation strategies developed during the planning process to improve recreational assets in the county will eventually be integrated into the *Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan*. For more information on the Costilla County Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan, Contact Ben Doon at: ben.doon@costillacounty-co.gov or (719)672-9226.

