U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mountain-Prairie Region

FACT SHEET

Recovery Act Funding Supports Youth Conservation Corps at Alamosa-Monte Vista-Baca National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex was awarded Recovery Act funding to support 15 students' participation in the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) this summer. The students were divided into three crews and each was assigned a college student to supervise their work on three refuges. An elementary school teacher with experience managing high school students and working with volunteers coordinates the crews.

The students' YCC experience has included the following activities to date:

Orientation and Training
The first week was spent helping the students become comfortable with each other. Orientation included a variety of team building activities, and also required that the students conduct background research on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our partnering organizations, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Forest Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management. Training activities focused on safety, and included the following: learning to use tools; purchasing personal gear; obtaining first aid training; and gaining a basic understanding of official paperwork, government computer systems, and Refuge tours.

Projects on the San Luis Valley Wildlife Refuge Complex
The crews spend the majority of their time working on projects throughout the refuges. In Alamosa, crews removed debris from around the headquarters, eliminated unnecessary barbed wire fencing, and drained a pond to remove non-native tench and carp. In Monte Vista, crews set siphon tubes for irrigation in approximately 105 different locations on the barley fields. This is the first time in approximately five years that the fields have been irrigated. On the Baca site, crews removed several miles of barbed wire fencing. This is especially important at the Baca site because the elk, while smart enough to use open gates on fence lines, get caught in the fencing when spooked by predators or humans.

The crews have also completed many other important projects, including the following: establishing GPS site locations for bluebird boxes; painting, concrete work, and plumbing; and dismantling and rebuilding a trailer, which saved the refuge over $3,000.

Supporting Partnerships
The students have also had the opportunity to work with several Federal, state, and local partners of the refuge during the program. The partnering experience has included the following projects to date:

- **The Natural Resources Conservation Service** (NRCS) helps land owners take care of their property by providing educational services and labor. This summer, the crews worked with NRCS staff members and local landowners to combat erosion by transplanting willow trees along a riverbank. The crews also helped to remove non-native tamarisk plants and installed ladders in stock tanks, saving animals that may have otherwise drowned in the tanks. In mid-July, the crews contributed to a multi-million dollar river restoration project by working with the Southwest Conservation Crew on Kerber Creek in Saguache County.
- **Colorado Division of Wildlife** (CDOW) monitors the wildlife in Colorado for recreational use and safety. The YCC crews supported CDOW by building fences around fish hatchery ponds to keep salamanders and other amphibians out of the ponds. The crews also learned how to clean the tanks of endangered boreal toads.
- The mission of the **United States Forest Service** (USFS) is to care for the land and serve the people. This summer, the crews were able to assist USFS with both parts of this mission. The crews helped serve the people by refurbishing demolished campsites and improving existing water bars on hiking trails (water bars are cuts in a trail that help to divert water from the trail). The crews also took care of the land by joining the "Pulling for Colorado" program and doing manual weed control in three areas of the San Luis Valley.
- **National Park Service** (NPS) sets aside land to preserve, protect, and share the legacies and history of our country. The YCC crew supported the mission of NPS by helping the Great Sand Dunes restore vegetation to areas of the park that experience a high volume of human traffic.

Education and Life Skills
The students have benefited from numerous educational opportunities throughout the summer, including presentations given by partnering organizations, Wildlife Refuge staff members, and Adams State College professors on the following topics: minimizing erosion through transplanting; removing barbed wire fences; controlling populations of non-native plant, fish, amphibian, and bird species; using GPS technology; practicing fire safety; participating in river restoration efforts (this presentation was delivered while the crews were floating the Rio Grande!); building fences; retrieving trucks from the mud; and locating job opportunities with natural resource agencies.