

## HCWCD NEWS

### **HCWCD Purchases Thorne Ranch as Part of Water Infrastructure Improvements Project**

On September 25, 2026, Huerfano County Water Conservancy District (HCWCD) purchased the Thorne Ranch near Gardner from Huerfano County as part of a water infrastructure improvements project that involves a Congressionally Directed Spending grant of \$1.576-million through USDA Rural Development.

Thorne Ranch, its water rights and the water infrastructure will become part of HCWCD's long-term plan to keep Huerfano County water in Huerfano County and to provide water resources for the citizens of Huerfano County. HCWCD already has in effect the Huerfano Basin Regional Augmentation Plan (HBRAP), adjudicated in 2016. The District will now undertake engineering to determine how the Thorne Ranch water rights and water infrastructure can be used to expand augmentation uses in both the Huerfano and Cucharas River basins.

As part of the Thorne Ranch transaction, Huerfano County gained ownership of augmentation certificates totaling 15 annual-acre-feet of augmentation water. Huerfano County previously leased augmentation water as a participant in the HBRAP. That augmentation is needed to replace the out-of-priority depletions of wells in Gardner that are used for the Gardner Public Improvement District and Gardner bulk water station. Augmentation is also needed to replace the use of river water by the County Road & Bridge Department.

The number of current participants in the HBRAP, which number fourteen, range from municipal to commercial businesses, homeowner associations, private ranches, livestock, wildlife, a fire protection district, and recreational users.

Huerfano County Commissioners, both Congressman Jeff Hurd and Cong. Lauren Boebert, as well as Cathy Garcia, Southern Colorado Regional Director, supported congressional funding of this project, recognizing the importance of developing storage options at Thorne Ranch and increasing available water supplies. HCWCD has been working with USDA Rural Development to implement the water infrastructure improvement project – Jennifer Garcia, Community Programs Specialist in Las Animas, and Sallie Clark, the State Director – along with other state-level staff. The project will enable HCWCD to continue to offer augmentation to facilitate water use for individual water users throughout Huerfano County.

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