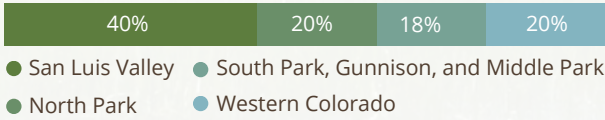


## Wetland Facts

Wet acres by basin in Western Colorado:

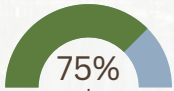


Wetlands filter water and improve water quality



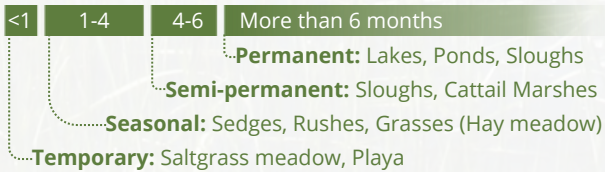
Wetlands are a natural buffer that help mitigate floods and maintain water tables

The SLV has lost over half it's wetlands since the 1980s



Three-quarters of seasonal wetlands are on private lands as native hay meadows

How long are wetlands wet?



## Wetlands 101

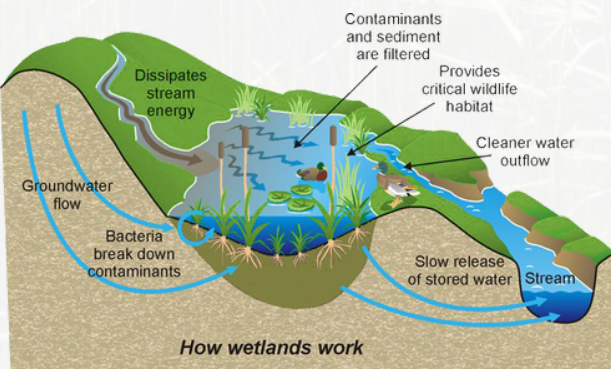
Wetland and riparian systems are vital life zones in our dry landscape. They are controlled by climate, flood events, wind, winter sheet ice, wildlife (think beavers), and geologic events such as the rise and fall of the historic Lake Alamosa. Wetlands are characterized based on how long they hold water, vegetation type, connection to surface and groundwater, or location. Wildlife are adapted to the seasonal fluctuations of wetlands and over 80% of wildlife uses riparian areas, which constitute 2% of the land in Colorado. Birds rely on wetlands in the San Luis Valley (SLV) during spring and fall migration, and year-round for breeding. **Less than half the original wetlands remain in the SLV**, having been impacted by development, changes in hydrology caused by irrigation and reservoirs, groundwater pumping, and climate change. Flood irrigation, often using backwater sloughs to water native hay meadows on private lands, is integral to the continued existence of many wetlands in the SLV. Native hay meadows often function as seasonal wetlands.

*The entire population of Rocky Mountain Greater Sandhill Cranes --about 20,000--migrates twice a year to the SLV, the most important waterfowl production area in Colorado. The SLV has seven Audubon Important Bird Areas, and is the southernmost significant waterbird production area in the Central Flyway migration corridor. Photo: Sandhill Cranes at Great Sand Dunes National Park, NPS, Patrick Myers*



In some instances, public land managers use wells with wildlife water rights to maintain wetland habitat during the winter. Wetlands are sustained on public and private lands by using water to grow wetland plants as a crop for livestock and wildlife. Many threatened and endangered species depend on these wetlands and habitats along river corridors for all aspects of their life cycle. With water resources becoming increasingly limited, it is crucial to conserve and restore wetland ecosystems that provide important plant and wildlife habitat, groundwater and aquifer recharge, and pollutant filtering. **Protecting wetlands and the agricultural practices that sustain them is key to the future resilience of the SLV in the face of drought and climate change.**

## How Wetlands Work



Source: [microbewiki.kenyon.edu](http://microbewiki.kenyon.edu)

## Projects

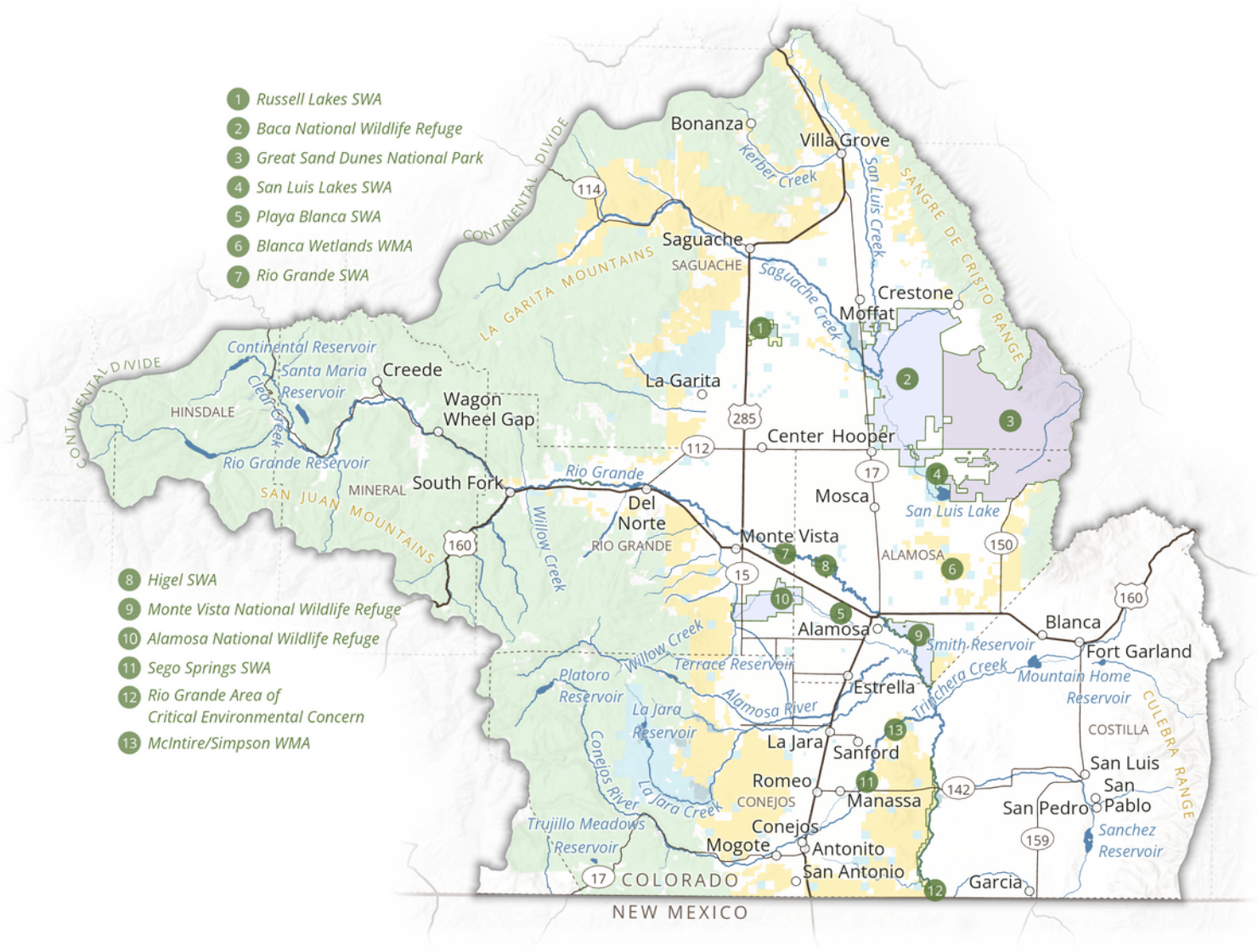
**By the numbers:** wetland and riparian conservation, restoration, and enhancement projects.



## Challenges

- Drought and climate change
- Limited water resources
- Changes in agriculture
- Changes to irrigation season
- Declining aquifer levels





- 1 Russell Lakes SWA
- 2 Baca National Wildlife Refuge
- 3 Great Sand Dunes National Park
- 4 San Luis Lakes SWA
- 5 Playa Blanca SWA
- 6 Blanca Wetlands WMA
- 7 Rio Grande SWA

- 8 Higel SWA
- 9 Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge
- 10 Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge
- 11 Sego Springs SWA
- 12 Rio Grande Area of Critical Environmental Concern
- 13 McIntire/Simpson WMA

Important Wetland Area	Bureau of Land Management
US Forest Service	US Fish and Wildlife Service
State	National Park Service
County, City, Local	Undetermined or Private
Bureau of Reclamation	



Map created: July 2023