

## Agricultural Statistics



The Rio Grande Basin contains about **523,000 irrigated acres**



The main crops grown in the Basin are **alfalfa, potatoes, grains, and grass hay**



The Basin generates **39%** of Colorado's agricultural economy, about **\$485 million** annually



Flood irrigation is **~40-60% efficient** for crops, while sprinkler irrigation is **~80-95%**; both provide important system benefits

## Water Sources

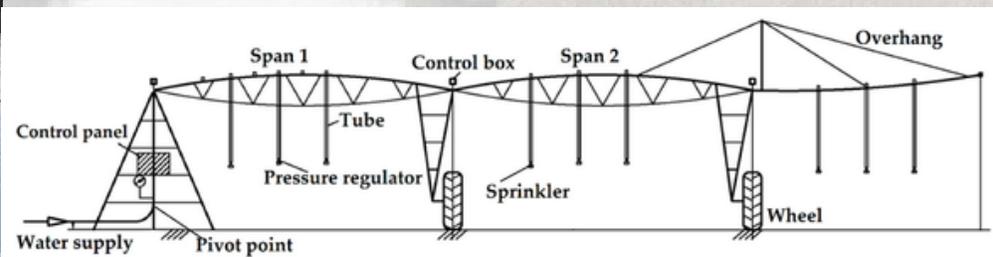
**Groundwater** is the water stored in underground aquifers. The Basin has alluvial, confined and unconfined aquifers. Groundwater use depends on restoring and maintaining sustainable aquifer levels; without improvement through reduced pumping and natural recharge, pumping may be limited or stopped altogether.

**Surface water** is the water in the streams and rivers of the Basin that flows primarily from mountain snowpack through spring and summer snowmelt, as well as rainfall runoff. Surface water use depends on how much water is available in the streams and a water user's position within the water rights priority system.

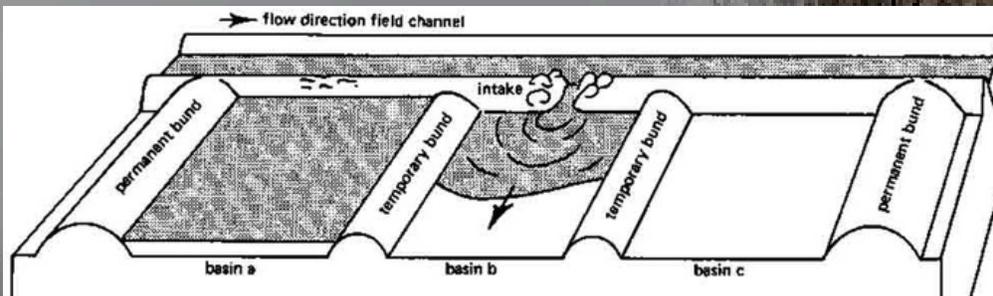
## Irrigation 101

Irrigation in the Rio Grande Basin is essential to the San Luis Valley's agricultural economy, cultural heritage, and Colorado as a whole. Since the Valley's settlement to today, irrigation has enabled productive farmland, supported rural communities, and sustained working landscapes that also provide important wildlife habitat. Irrigated fields, ditches, and return flows help support wetlands and migratory birds, making irrigation vital beyond agriculture alone.

There are two primary irrigation methods used in the Basin: surface (flood) irrigation and sprinkler irrigation, both of which may use either surface water or groundwater pumped from wells.



**Center pivot irrigation systems** (above) are the most common sprinkler method in the Basin.



**Surface (flood) irrigation** (above) is the Basin's original irrigation method and continues to be widely used today.

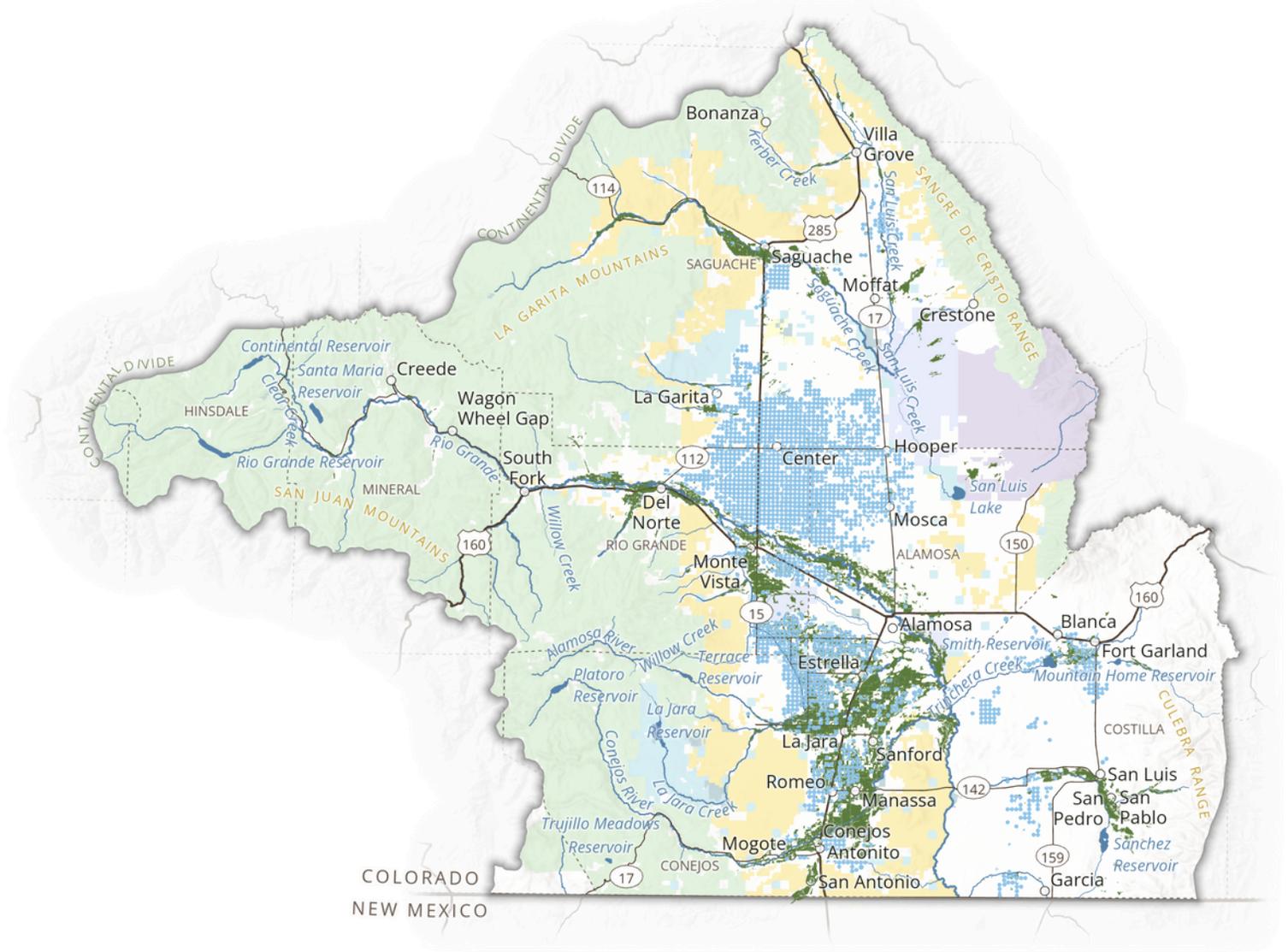


With technological advances and declining water availability, sprinkler irrigation has become more prevalent in the basin for improved efficiency and crop productivity.



The irrigation season in the Rio Grande Basin typically runs from April 1 through November 1. During this period, farmers may divert and use water when their water rights are in priority.





- US Forest Service
- State
- County, City, Local
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- Undetermined or Private
- Flood Irrigation
- Sprinkler Irrigation



Map created: November 2023