

WILD AND SCENIC ELIGIBILITY ANALYSIS FOR RECREATION  
San Juan Forest and BLM

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I. Region of comparison:

*“The interdisciplinary team must identify the area of consideration that will serve as the basis for meaningful comparative analysis. This area of consideration is not fixed; it may be a national forest, grassland, prairie, or comparable administrative unit, a portion of a state, or an appropriately scaled physiographic or hydrologic unit. Once the area of consideration is identified, a river’s values can then be analyzed in comparison with other rivers.”* (FSH 1909.12-80)

For this resource, we used the following area of consideration:

SW Colorado

Southern Rocky Mountains Province

Colorado Plateau Province

other (explain): The Upper Animas is unique to the US based on the recreational use. Whitewater use was evaluated nationally. Other uses were evaluated based on Southwest Colorado

II. Analysis procedure:

*“There are a variety of methods to determine that certain river-related values are so unique, rare, or exemplary as to make them outstandingly remarkable. The determination that a river area contains outstanding values is a professional judgment on the part of an interdisciplinary team, based on objective, scientific analysis.”* (FSH 1909.12-80)

*In order to be assessed as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale. A river-related value would be a conspicuous example of that value from among a number of similar examples that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary.* (FSH 1909.12-80)

*“The following eligibility criteria are offered to foster greater consistency within the agency and with other federal river-administering agencies. They are intended to set minimum thresholds to establish outstandingly remarkable values and are illustrative*

*and not all-inclusive. These criteria may be modified to make them more meaningful in the area of comparison, and additional criteria may be included”.*( FSH 1909.12-80)

*“Recreation. Recreational opportunities are, or have the potential to be, popular enough to attract visitors from throughout or beyond the region of comparison or are unique or rare within the region. River-related opportunities include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, interpretation, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, hunting, and boating. The river may provide settings for national or regional usage or competitive events.”* (FSH 1909.12-80)

The analysis for Wild and Scenic River designation due to a recreation ORV was done by consulting many different resources. Input from district recreation and special uses staff was taken into consideration as a first cut at determining outstandingly remarkable values on each district. Further data was gathered from guidebooks for rafting, fishing and general recreation. These books focused on either the southwest US or Colorado as the areas of interest. On an international scale, the Animas, Dolores and Piedra rivers are listed among the best rafting vacations in the world at Riversearch.com. A number of commercial experts in fishing and rafting were also contacted in Durango, Pagosa Springs and Dolores. These experts understand the resources in the area, the types of people that visit as well as the importance of different rivers to their industry. As a confirmation to these observations, we verified that the rivers with rafting ORVs were listed in the American Whitewater nationwide whitewater river inventory.

The Durango-Silverton train was also contacted due to the fact that this is a major recreational draw to the area.

Rivers chosen as eligible for Wild and Scenic Rivers had exceptional experiences in recreation, which included fishing, boating, photography and competitive events. These rivers were also areas that were considered destinations for visitors from outside Colorado and/or the southwestern United States.

### III. Justification for each ORV

**Bull Canyon (WSA, Pothole pools):** The wilderness study area offers outstanding recreation in an undeveloped setting. The pothole pools are a river-related feature.

**Spring Creek (WSA, hiking, swimming).** The wilderness study area offers outstanding recreation in an undeveloped setting. This tributary to the Dolores is an important stopping point for rafters to hike and enjoy swimming in the pothole pools.

**Leach Creek (WSA, hiking, swimming)** The wilderness study area offers outstanding recreation in an undeveloped setting. This tributary to the Dolores is an important stopping point for rafters to hike and enjoy the riparian vegetation, and the pothole pools.

**Dolores River above Dolores (fishing, rafting):** This section of the Dolores River contains populations of brown, rainbow, brook and cutthroat trout. People come from outside the state and the country to fish this section of the Dolores, with guided fishing trips occurring from June through October. This section of the Dolores River is also listed as an excellent fishing area in the Fisher's Guide to Colorado (Bartholomew, 1998). It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006

**Dolores River McPhee dam to La Sal Creek (boating):** This section of the river is listed as one of the most popular and beautiful rafting areas in southwest Colorado. It contains Class II, III and IV rapids. The river is in a wild and deep canyon that combines red sandstone cliffs with coniferous forests (Anderson and Hopkins, 1982). It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006

**West Dolores (fishing):** High use. Visitors from outside Southwest Colorado.

**Piedra River (class IV and V rafting, fishing, box canyons):**

This was recommended because of the quality rafting of class IV and V waters through two box canyons. This river offers exceptionally beautiful and varied wild trout fishing for large fish combined with a long and interesting class IV whitewater run. It is listed at Riversearch.com as one of the best rafting vacations in the world. It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006

**Animas River, Deer Park Creek (e.g., Silverton) to Animas Forks (Alpine Loop):**

This section of the Animas River is viewed by over 150,000 visitors annually to the designated Alpine Loop Back Country Byway primarily through 4WD touring and for visiting historical mining structures. There are seventeen commercial 4WD touring operators that utilize the Alpine Loop with permits from the BLM and Forest Service.

**Animas River Bakers Bridge to Deer Park Creek (e.g. Silverton) (Upper Animas) (rafting, train, competitive events):**

We believe the following activities show that this river segment has Recreational opportunities popular enough to attract visitors from beyond the region of comparison. The fact that international competitions choose the Animas instead of other rivers in southwest Colorado shows that it is unique within the region. The Durango and Silverton Narrow-gauge Railroad (D&SRG) is a unique recreation opportunity in that it combines the historic aspects of the steam powered train, with the dramatic setting of the

Animas River Canyon. It draws over 200,000 visitors annually and is the primary economic engine for both Durango and Silverton during the summer months. This is a one-of-a-kind opportunity not duplicated by the Cumbres and Toltec Railroad or the diesel train that accesses the rim of the Grand Canyon. Many train riders are from across the US and from other countries, but numbers of non-Colorado or non-US visitors have not been compiled by D&SRG.

Seventeen Commercial Outfitter and Guide Operators with FS permits utilize the Upper Animas River corridor including guided white water boating, fishing, hiking, backpacking, hunting and horse packing. Both private recreationists and commercial outfitters' clients are drawn to the Upper Animas from all over the US and internationally due to the unique and rare opportunities the area offers. The free flowing Upper Animas River provides the highest commercial whitewater put-in point elevation (over 9,300 feet) in Colorado. The Class V (violent rapids, extremely difficult hazards) rated whitewater is also one of just a few rivers in Colorado that provides this type of extreme whitewater for commercial passengers. This section is listed as one of the best rafting vacations in the world at Riversearch.com. It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006

Several books are available that denote the popularity and public demand for this type of recreation use available on the Upper Animas River. Just a few include; "The Floater's Guide to Colorado", by Doug Wheat, "Rivers of the Southwest" by Fletcher Anderson and Ann Hopkins, and "Colorado Rivers and Creeks" by Dave Eckardt and Gordon Banks.

The following are permitted recreational and competitive events:

National white water events: Red Bull Divide and Conquer Race was held in 2004 and 2005. This event had contestants from all over the world.

Adventure Extreme Race was held in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and will be held in 2006. This event also had contestants from all over the world.

Regional Recreation events: Big Brothers Big Sisters Fishing Derby was held in 2004 and 2005 and will be held in 2006. This event is a regional event (western states) held on the upper Animas at Cascade Creek

**Cinnamon Creek (Alpine Loop):** There are seventeen commercial 4WD touring operators that utilize the Alpine Loop with permits from the BLM and Forest Service.

**Hermosa Creek (Mountain Bike Trail national draw, fishing, backpacking, motorized trail in backcountry, rafting):** Hermosa Creek Trail is utilized by five outfitters primarily for hunting and mountain biking. It is one of the most popular mountain bike trails in SW Colorado due to the trail paralleling the Hermosa Creek drainage for 23 miles. It has also become popular with horse back riders and OHV users for the because of the easy access to the lower trailhead from Durango. Hermosa Creek is now also being utilized by extreme kayakers that put in at the Upper Hermosa Creek Trailhead located west of Purgatory Ski Area (DMR). It is rated Class IV and V and

recommended for expert kayakers only. It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006

**Mineral Creek (Skyway):** Visitors driving the San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway are treated to views of narrow gorges with cascades, broad meadows with beaver ponds, and rare iron fens. The Skyway attracts national and international visitors.

**Needle Creek (access to Chicago Basin):** As the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad travels the Animas river corridor from Durango to Silverton, there are two stops, Needleton and Elk Park, that allow passengers to enter and exit the Weminuche Wilderness. The Weminuche, the largest Wilderness in the State of Colorado provides 500,000 acres of congressionally designated lands to “secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.” The ability to access a wilderness by riding on a steam powered, narrow gauge train is a unique and rare experience. The trail with the highest use is the Needle Creek trail. It parallels Needle Creek from the train to Chicago Basin. Backpackers from around the world enjoy the trail adjacent to Needle Creek as they flock to this alpine cirque as a scenic base camp from which they can climb three 14,000 foot peaks. Recreation use along Needle Creek is about 9,000 visitor use days annually.

**Pine River above Vallecito (high trail use):** The Weminuche Wilderness is the largest Wilderness area in Colorado, and draws visitors from across the nation and around the world. The Pine River Trail is one of half a dozen main access routes into the Wilderness, and gets heavy use all summer and fall. The trail follows the river, and for much of the length of this segment, the lush meadows of the River’s floodplain are flanked by the sheer walls of glacier-carved granite

**Vallecito Creek (high trail use, class V kayak):** The Vallecito Creek is popular with extreme kayakers due to its difficulty (Class V+) and the sheer walled granite canyon, which provides extremely narrow slots. It is recommended for crazy, expert kayakers only. According to Andy Corra of Four Corners River Sports in Durango it has been called the “best mile of boating in Colorado”. It has crystal clear water flowing through an incredible gorge with some of the highest quality drops to be found. It is also nationally significant for whitewater recreation, and is listed in the Nationwide Whitewater Inventory, American Whitewater, 2006