

VALUES STATEMENT

Animas River above Baker's Bridge

The area being studied by the River Protection Workgroup for the Animas River is very unique and serves as a regional hub and destination. There is a very notable and strong sense of community and camaraderie among the residents in the area, including regional or "basin" residents as well. And, there are distinct communities of stakeholders in this stretch of river including the Upper Animas reach and the residents of San Juan County. Then, there are those who care about the lower stretches which includes residents of La Plata County. And, many others have an interest including visitors and those who live downstream of this stretch but who still rely on the Animas River. *So, many people care about the future of river protections and water planning and development, and this diversity of values is reflected in this values statement.*

Mining and mineral extraction are valued for many reasons including local jobs, extraction of minerals for national uses, and because this industry is part of the very fabric and character of the area. Mining and heritage history is a very important part of the area and brings in current-day visitors experiencing niche tourism opportunities.

Tourism, in general, is a very important economic driving value. Visitors come here from all over the world for a variety of experiences including events, festivals and unique happenings that are tied to the beauty and character of the area including the wild lands. And, many of them enjoy the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. The railroad is a living celebration of the mining and transportation history of the entire region. It connects Durango and Silverton but also, the railroad itself is tied to the river since the train and Animas River share the same north/south corridor.

Recreation – both motorized and non-motorized – is valued because the possibilities for enjoying the mountains, scenery, plants and wildlife are abundant. Also, the ability for businesses and workers to earn a living from recreation, hunting, whitewater sports, fishing, and exploration (e.g., outfitting, guiding, and tours) is valued.

The natural values are renowned including the presence of several rare plant and animal communities. The "wildness" of the area is valued by many and there is a sense that much of the area is untouched, has a diversity of wildlife, and that human-made structures and influences are minimal. The fact that this stretch of river is free-flowing is valued. The presence of intact ecosystems that cover very diverse life zones is important as is the highly visible geologic record, including evidence of spectacular volcanics in the Silverton area.

Education and the arts are important as many seek these experiences through regional or local organizations – especially since the area is an outdoor learning lab and classroom of national significance.

Because the area is made up of both private and public lands, access to these public and private lands is valued as are future economic opportunities including hydropower and various types of natural resource development.

The health and vitality of the alpine forested lands and high-elevation tundra is critical for economic, ecological, aesthetic and tourism purposes. The health of the surrounding forested lands is important especially as forests across Colorado are undergoing transformation due to climate change, insects and wildfire.

Local residents value the area for the same reasons visitors and those who live downstream do. They desire to continue to be able to make a living in Silverton and in the surrounding counties. Earning a livelihood here is challenging and people want as many opportunities as possible. A sense of strong independence is valued by local

residents. Along with this, there is a desire for community and local solutions, and the protection of individual property rights. Local, creative problem solving is an ethic of the area.

The County Roads in the area are popular. Their use and continued maintenance is critical. The thoroughfare transportation corridors (highways) are necessary from a statewide and national view in terms of transporting people, goods and services north/south on the Western Slope. These local and state roads are key thoroughfares for multitudes of people recreating in various ways including locals and visitors enjoying the nationally-identified scenic routes.

A healthy watershed, good water quality and flows are important not only for Silverton and San Juan County but because this area is the headwaters serving so many downstream neighbors, farms, municipal water users, fisheries and interests reaching through the Animas Valley, through Durango, and eventually into New Mexico where the Animas River meets the San Juan. Also, the Upper Animas serves as the water supply for municipal and consumptive uses for the Town and County.

This area characterizes the ***best of the west***. A vast diversity of organizations, governments, and people deeply care about the upper Animas River for all kinds of reasons.

Approved by the Workgroup: 12/19/11