

River Protection Workgroup for the Animas River Kicks off Next Week

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The new ***River Protection Workgroup for the Animas River*** is schedule to begin Thursday, June 23rd from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m .at the Kendall Mountain Recreation Center. Everyone is invited to participate. The purpose of this meeting is to kick off a local Workgroup that will make recommendations about how to protect values on the Animas River upstream of Baker's Bridge including several tributaries while allowing for suitable water development to continue. The Workgroup is advisory in nature and will conclude in late Spring 2011 after 11 to 12 meetings. This is part of an overall regional effort spearheaded by the River Protection Workgroup Steering Committee.

The ***River Protection Workgroup for the Animas River (Workgroup)*** will follow a three-phased process. In the beginning, members will be review basic information about water and land protection tools through a detailed "*Information Sheet*" for the Animas River. This step is to ensure everyone is operating from the same base of information. Then, values for the river will be discussed at length - both human and natural. The Workgroup will develop a values statement and review current protections in place. Next, the Workgroup will look to the future and decide if additional protections are needed. If so, brainstorming will occur about what those additional protections might be bearing in mind that there is private land in the area of study with associated rights and also that the USFS/BLM manages the Public Lands.

The River Protection Workgroup, the regional coalition sponsoring this effort, has devised a number of principles that will be used. A ground rule will be used: *Please be respectful of all opinions, even if you do not agree with them.* There is not an appointed membership to this Workgroup as anyone with an interest has a seat at the table and is considered a stakeholder. Consensus will be the decision making method. If any additional recommendations for protections are made by the Workgroup, they will be crafted to meet the needs of a diversity of interests. There are no pre-set "done deals" or decisions that have been made.

This regional effort is funded by a variety of sources including the Southwestern Water Conservation District; San Juan Citizens Alliance; Colorado Water Conservation Board; The Wilderness Society; Trout Unlimited – Five Rivers Chapter; the National Forest Foundation; and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

Through this effort, Workgroups across the region are being conducted from 2008 to 2012 for five rivers/stream segments. The Hermosa Creek; Vallecito Creek/Pine River and San Juan River – East/West Forks have concluded. The Piedra Workgroup will start in August, 2011. After each of the Workgroups have concluded, a “Regional Discussion” will take place and will focus on developing a regional approach(es) using the outputs and recommendations of the five Workgroups to develop an overall plan.

This new Workgroup is not the same as the Animas River Stakeholders or the Animas River Partnership although anyone participating in those groups is welcome and encouraged to attend.

A Web site documents the process including handouts, meeting minutes, maps, meeting notices, etc. Also at the Web site, users can access a glossary of terms and agencies; a handout on river and watershed protection tools; an information sheet on the River Protection Workgroup. The Web Site is: <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection/>. For more information, contact the Southwestern Water Conservation District, 970-247-1302 or water@frontier.net; the local representative on the RPW Steering Committee, Steve Fearn, 946-9243; or Dan Randolph at the San Juan Citizens Alliance at 259-3583 or the Workgroup facilitator, Marsha Porter-Norton, 759-3110 or porternorton@bresnan.net

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