

Piedra River Workgroup
Overview of consensus items, proposals, research opportunities, and
potential committee work (as of January 2013)

Consensus items

What is consensus?

- *Includes steps so that all views are heard and considered.
- *Recognizes that differences of opinion are natural/expected.
- *Group makes a good faith effort to reach a decision that everyone can support.
- *Consensus does not mean everyone agrees with the decision but they can support it. (Meeting #2, Nov.1)

Mission: An overall goal of the group is to get as much consensus as possible for the recommendations that will go into a final report. The final report will be distributed and reviewed by the community, public land officials, special interest groups and lawmakers. (Meeting #11, August 21)

1. The group had general consensus that it should focus on preserving the health of the Piedra River watershed as a whole. (Meeting #4, Jan. 17)
2. The group had general consensus for no major impoundments on the Piedra River main stem. (Meeting #5, Feb. 21)
3. The group had general consensus that agricultural diversion structures and decreed water rights were a value that should be protected. Also, the group acknowledged the importance of protecting the ability of landowners, farmers and ranchers to irrigate land. (Meeting #5, Feb. 21) (Meeting #10, July 17) (Meeting #11, August 21)
4. The group noted that there was not consensus yet on whether there was a need for more protection and whether current protections were adequate or not. (Meeting #8, May 8)
5. The group had consensus that the best way to move forward was to focus on values of the various rivers and compare them to protections in place, rather than focusing on threats. It was agreed that moving in that direction was a good way forward for the group to find solutions.(Meeting #10, July 17)
6. The group agreed that encouraging cooperation with water right holders and water districts to help maintain minimum flows in the stream and avoid dewatering was a worth while effort. That willingness to work together on

the goal should be put in the final report. There is discussion at the state level on how to modify water laws to make them more flexible to achieve these sort of options.

(Meeting #14, Dec. 11)

7. The group agreed to move forward on: discussion of the Piedra Area expansion idea, discussion of no new major impoundments, and discussion of removal of Wild and Scenic suitability. The agreement does not preclude any other ideas that have been discussed or may come up, and allows for wiggle room so as to not box the group in on one set of ideas.

(Meeting #15, Jan. 15)

Various proposals made by the Piedra River Workgroup

(Note: The group was asked to keep in mind that various proposals have different jurisdictions, which also may overlap. Existing laws and regulations within the state, federal, counties, city, and the Southern Ute tribe have to be considered with the proposals.)

1. Expand Piedra Area into adjacent Colorado Roadless Area in exchange for dropping Wild and Scenic suitability status on the Piedra main stem.

(Meeting #6, March 13) (Meeting #12, Sept. 18)

2. Negotiate an agreement to end federal funding for major impoundments outlined in Statewide Water Supply Initiative for dam sites on the Piedra River. (Meeting #12, Sept. 18)

2. Develop a plan to improve irrigation techniques as a way to conserve water. Many ranches and farms use flood irrigation or sprinklers, and it was noted that more efficient methods, such as piping and drip irrigation would help keep the river flowing, especially during drier years. For example, a portion of the East Fork has a tendency to dry up completely during the agricultural season due to water demand and drought conditions.

a. State money is available for improved irrigation systems.

b. Irrigators report that there is not much incentive to conserve excess water under current Colorado water law. If there was a compensation program there would be more incentives to shut water off, or lease it, rather than let it run under the 'use it or lose it' water law standard.

(Meeting #7, April 17)

3. The group discussed exploring the possibility of increasing instream flow rights as a way to: 1. Preempt future water development. 2. Prevent streams from drying up. 3. To better guarantee healthy flows into the future.

Instream flows are an in-channel appropriation of non-consumptive water between two specific points and are appropriated by the Colorado Water Conservation Board for the purpose of protecting the natural environment to a reasonable degree.

(Meeting #8, May 8)

4. It was suggested that using additional methodologies for determining appropriate instream flow levels be used. The current R2Cross method was established in the 1970s and there have been advances in river and fishery science since then. A recommendation may be to look at newer methodologies for determining instream flows.

(Meeting #11, August 21) (Meeting #15, Jan. 15)

5. A proposal was discussed by the group to better monitor water quality. It was suggested that the group could develop a monitoring program that studies agricultural runoff, a potential source of pollution. A volunteer program to install fencing that protects riparian areas from cattle grazing was also an idea with general support. (Meeting #13, Oct. 15)

6. The group discussed the potential for a leasing program that earmarks water saved from more efficient irrigation techniques to be used for increasing instream flows where needed. It was suggested that the group figure out a way that gives irrigators some sort of water credit or incentive if they put more water in the stream as a result of improved irrigation efficiency. Under current water law saving water through more efficient irrigation can cause a risk to agricultural water credits.

A lease program could be flexible and adjusted according to various factors and be used to help increase low flows every once in a while or even every few years. Any plan has to protect historic uses of water while providing incentives for more efficient irrigation structures and techniques.

(Meeting #13 October 15) (Meeting #14, Dec. 11)

7. Forest Service supervisor Mark Stiles encouraged organizing with private landowners on the East Fork to secure funding for river protection measures that benefit them. Federal assistance could be used as positive incentive to partner with private landowners, for example a cost-share program for improving irrigation efficiency that protects water rights while also improving water quality and the fishery.

(Meeting #14, Dec. 11)

8. Proposal by representative of San Juan Citizen's Alliance to consider advocating for a Wild and Scenic River designation on the Piedra River. In the spirit of the process, an effort should be made toward exploring that opportunity in a manner that is agreeable to all the players.

Piedra workgroup identified research opportunities and potential committee work

1. It was recommended that the group obtain studies showing current uses on the forest compared to past years. The group also thought it would be helpful to determine what the carrying capacity for the Piedra region in order to protect current uses and the environment long term.

(Meeting #11, August 21)

2. In general the group over time has shown interest in finding out the specific protections of the numerous conservation easements within the Piedra Focus Area. Some of this information has been obtained, but it was suggested that more be found out.

3. The group requested information from water conservation districts on monitoring return flows from agricultural uses. (Meeting #13, October 15)

4. The group suggested forming an advisory committee that could tackle the idea of expanding the Piedra Area into adjacent Colorado Roadless Areas in exchange for dropping suitability status for Wild and Scenic.

The idea of negotiating limits on federal funding for major impoundments on the Piedra was also to be researched and discussed in the committee.

Hunter education was also a topic suggested for an advisory committee.

(Meeting 12, Sept. 18)

5. The group discussed forming a more permanent advisory committee made up of local stakeholders that would help to inform the forest service of local needs and concerns regarding land management and water issues. (Meeting #14, December 11)