

VALUES STATEMENT

Piedra River – above highway 160

March 13th, 2012

The area being studied by the River Protection Workgroup for the Piedra river and watershed, located above highway 160, is quite distinctive and attracts a high volume of visitors including local and regional residents and tourists. This relatively remote area offers a unique blend of wide-open scenic alpine terrain and narrow, winding canyons.

There exists a rich and very alive history and culture of farming and ranching in the area. There is a strong desire amongst local residents to protect the relatively undeveloped character of the area and the sense of “real people, making a real living.”

At this time, there is a perception that there is a relatively healthy balance between protections and uses. There is a desire to maintain the current water rights in place, to allow for the continuation of productive farming and ranching activities. This is balanced with a desire to make sure there is enough available water to maintain and protect the significant natural and recreational values present. There is a value placed on keeping the main stem of the Piedra free from impoundments. A land use plan in place and numerous large-tract conservation easements are viewed as positive steps towards protecting values while allowing certain uses to continue.

Maintaining an accessible road for residents is important, though there is a perception that significant road improvements would increase visitation in a way that could threaten the natural and agricultural values.

The numerous non-commercial and commercial recreational opportunities are valued not only for their capacity to allow residents to make a living (commercial outfitting, lodging, boating, hunting, fishing) but because of access to the significant natural beauty, be it high up in the Weminuche Wilderness or in the tight canyons of a free-flowing river.

The natural values are numerous, including the presence of rare plant and animal communities and a wide diversity of flora and fauna. The geology of the area is unique and quite spectacular. The watershed is viewed as relatively healthy and intact. There is a wild-ness and mystique about this area that elicits a strong desire to protect its natural values.

Hinsdale County is a “right to farm and ranch” County. There are numerous opportunities for earning a living through farming, ranching, as well as commercial outfitting, boating, hunting and fishing, and the potential for reinvigorating forest product development. Again, striking a balance between maintaining these opportunities while balancing usage to protect the values that allow individuals to make a living is important.