

Hermosa Creek Workgroup Meeting #4 Summary July 1, 2008

Facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton reviewed the meeting agenda and presented the meeting summary for Meeting 3 on June 3, 2008. Both were approved with no changes.

Marsha said the Hermosa Creek Initial Information Sheet is being revised and will be posted on the Web site, ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection, before the next meeting. The maps of the Hermosa Creek Watershed created by David Hofmann and presented to the Hermosa Creek Workgroup ("Hermosa Workgroup") at Meeting #3 are available on the Web site. A document prepared by the San Juan Public Lands Center ("SJPLC") that consolidates and displays information gathered from public meetings regarding the revised San Juan Public Lands Resource Management Plan will also be posted on the Web site.

Marsha presented a handout with information from the San Juan National Forest ("SJNF") showing the number of service days by each recreational permittee in the Hermosa Creek Watershed, and a handout showing Colorado Water Conservation Board ("CWCB") In-Stream Flows on Hermosa Creek.

Requests for information: In response to a request by the Hermosa Workgroup for more data concerning the number and types of recreational users on Hermosa Creek, Marsha said acquiring more detailed information would take a great deal of time and money. The question before the group is how much data it needs in order to move forward.

David Eckelberry of the La Plata County Assessor's Office said he tracks possessory interests on public lands, and some of those users are not listed on the handout showing SJNF permittees. Therefore, some information may be slipping through the cracks. He said he could provide data from the Assessor's Office to flesh out the picture.

The Hermosa Workgroup reached consensus to move forward now to identify values and then decide whether more data is needed. David Eckelberry will provide the information he can access from the Assessor's Office.

The Hermosa Workgroup had also requested a discussion on the topics of water availability, gauging, water rights, the effect of the Animas-La Plata Water Project on Hermosa Creek, and alternative water sources in the Hermosa Creek Watershed. Marsha agreed these are key questions but asked whether they could wait until later in the process.

The Workgroup decided that the discussion could wait until later in the process, but noted that if the Workgroup should decide that it is desirable to install another

gauge on Hermosa Creek just below the National Forest boundary, that process would probably require at least a year to complete, and it would be even longer before enough data is collected to prove valuable.

Representatives from the CWCB said some updated data on stream flows could be developed by comparing current readings from an existing gauge at Durango to readings taken there between 1920 and 1980, when the old gauge at the National Forest boundary was removed, and correlating that information with readings from the old gauge at the forest boundary. If the Workgroup eventually decides that an In-Stream Flow (“ISF”) is a tool to be used to protect Hermosa Creek’s values, a new gauge at the National Forest boundary would be very valuable, although it is not mandated when implementing the ISF.

Review of Hermosa Creek Initial information Sheet and further discussion of Hermosa Creek’s values: After Marsha made note of changes and additions to the Initial Information Sheet and Hermosa Creek Area Values Sheet that had already been suggested, the group offered further additions and corrections:

Hermosa Creek Area Values Sheet

- Add the fact that the Hermosa drainage contains almost no private property. It is rare for such a large watershed to be publicly owned.
- Add the area’s biodiversity, as it is a large block of roadless, unfragmented land, providing ecological continuity and integrity.
- Add the fact that the area represents many major life zones.
- Remove moose from the list of terrestrial wildlife and wildlife habitat, as they are not present except when occasionally crossing through.
- Add river otters (habitat), coyote, beaver and bobcats to the list of terrestrial wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- Remove fish species from the list of terrestrial wildlife and put them under another category, as fish are not terrestrial.
- Under “Other”, add large areas of intact old-growth and healthy ponderosa pine forest.
- The draft states that each recreational value in italics was listed as an “Outstandingly Remarkable Value” in the draft revised San Juan Public Lands Resource Management Plan. However, the only Outstandingly Remarkable Values identified by the SJPLC were recreation and native Colorado River cutthroat trout habitat.
- To the statement that Hermosa Creek was the first drainage outside a wilderness area to be designated an Outstanding Water of the State of Colorado, add that it was the first drainage outside a wilderness area *or a national park*.

Hermosa Creek Initial Information Sheet

- Under “Additional Values identified by the RPW Steering Committee”, add “other wild trout populations and sculpin” to the list of fish species (to be verified by CDOW presentation at next meeting).
- Under “Reasonably Foreseeable Economic Development”, add language noting that a timber sale has already taken place in the area but the timber

- has not yet been harvested.
- Under “Potential Water Diversion and Storage Locations”, language is already to be added explaining the purpose and definition of the State Water Supply Initiative (“SWSI”). To that language should be added a statement that part of SWSI’s mission is evaluating non-consumptive uses.

Concerns

- Add the potential implications of the proposed land swap involving a private inholding of 160 acres in the Hermosa Creek Watershed. The SJNF is now preparing an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposal, under which the Tamarron resort would receive 265 acres of National Forest land adjoining its north boundary in exchange for two 160-acre parcels, one near Mitchell Lakes, the other near the Hermosa Creek trailhead. The group’s concern is not the land swap itself, but rather what could happen if the land swap does not go through. If the 160-acre parcel near Hermosa Creek were to be developed, it would threaten many of the values the Hermosa Workgroup is trying to protect, including habitat for the native Colorado River cutthroat trout.
 - Add the large number of invasive plant species encroaching on the area.

Exploration of consensus on values to focus on: Of all the values identified in the Hermosa Creek Watershed, which should the group focus on? Deciding which values are to be the group’s focus is not stating that certain values are more important than others, just deciding which ones will be the focus of efforts toward protection and preservation.

The Hermosa Workgroup reached a tentative consensus that the Hermosa Creek Watershed as a whole is outstanding, not just certain of its component parts. The group would like to work toward an umbrella values statement to the effect that:

The Hermosa Creek Area is valuable because it contains a large, intact (unfragmented) natural watershed and water system representing a diverse set of altitudes, ecosystems and wildlife; and because it exists in close proximity to a major population center and supports a variety of multiple uses including recreation and grazing.

This extremely tentative draft statement will be e-mailed to Workgroup members who were unable to attend the meeting. It will be worked on and revised in coming meetings.

Next meeting: The next meeting of the Hermosa Workgroup will be Tuesday, Aug. 5, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at La Plata Electric. Jim White of the CDOW will discuss the native Colorado River cutthroat trout and other topics. In addition, work will continue on the umbrella values statement. Beginning in September, meetings will be held in the Recreation Center for at least the next four months.