

**Hermosa Creek Workgroup
Meeting #7 Summary
Oct. 7, 2008**

Facilitator Marsha Porter-Norton reviewed the meeting agenda and presented the summary for Meeting 6 on Sept. 2, 2008. Both were approved with no changes.

Hermosa Creek Information Sheet: Version 2 of the information sheet was distributed, with some changes, most of them additions. Marsha said the sheet is still a living document and will be posted on the Web site shortly.

Review of past studies: Thurman Wilson, assistant manager for planning for the San Juan Public Lands Center, presented a handout summarizing a study of the Hermosa Area that was done in 1972 and '73 by a 14-member local citizens' advisory group with the assistance of the Forest Service. The group recommended that the Hermosa Study Area be managed on a priority basis for high quality water production, wildlife habitat management, and back country recreation. Timber and range resources will be managed to maintain them in a healthy condition. Cattle grazing is presently compatible and permitted numbers are not in excess of grazing capacity.

The advisory group cited six conflicts that were cause for concern:

- . Damage caused by sheep grazing along the Cape of Good Hope and Highline Trail;
- . Water-quality degradation if roads were constructed on steep slopes on the west side of Hermosa Creek;
- . Competition between wildlife and domestic livestock for forage;
- . Conflicts between recreation and timber harvest and livestock grazing;
- . Conflicts between trail-bike riding and hikers and horseback riders;
- &
- . Concerns about the use of aircraft for hunting.

Thurman noted that sheep are no longer grazing along the Cape of Good Hope and Highline Trail. He said he did not know the details about using

aircraft for hunting.

Further direction for the Hermosa Creek Area was provided in the 1983 San Juan Forest Plan and the 1992 Plan Revision.

Thurman said a University of Colorado Wilderness Study Group also recommended circa 1980 that much of the Hermosa Area continue to be unroaded but not necessarily designated as wilderness, which seems to be a common sentiment.

Old letters from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) found in the files stated that the Hermosa Area contains one of the largest and most productive elk herds in Colorado.

Continued discussion on Question 2: Are there any values not being sufficiently protected now? Why or why not?

The Hermosa Workgroup continued discussion on this question. Some general discussion comments were:

- * The increasing number of users could affect all the values present in the Hermosa Area. Day use has increased, but overnight use has decreased, particularly during hunting season. Day use occurs on narrower corridors and is less dispersed. It might be good to try to encourage dispersal of users; on the other hand, that could be detrimental to wildlife. It may not be that there are fewer hunters. Bow-hunting seems to be on the rise. Rifle hunters may be just spread out over more seasons.
- * Sedimentation is a concern in certain areas. Some is natural, but the sources need to be investigated. Sediment can affect fish reproduction because fish eggs need oxygen and water flowing across them when they settle into the gravel. If the spaces are filled with sediment, reproduction will not be good.
- * Road work for timber harvesting could be contributing to sedimentation. Much of the land within the watershed boundary is within a roadless area, so new road construction or timber harvesting is not occurring. But there is one heavily roaded area near Hotel Draw that probably contributes considerable sediment to the creek. Recreation (hikers, horses, etc.) also causes sedimentation. The exact causes are hard to pin down. There is no standard for sediment included in the Outstanding Water of the State of Colorado designation carried by Hermosa Creek.

It was suggested that old roads could be brought up to standard to handle more users, while new roads could be built to a higher standard, to reduce erosion and sedimentation. However, special-interest groups such as the Jeep club and mountain-bikers may prefer rough roads.

- * Motorized use is affecting the natural quiet of the area. Motorized and wheeled vehicles both create continuous tracks that funnel water and cause erosion. Wheeled vehicles can threaten safety. Hikers with children have to keep their kids close to them because of speedy mountain-bikers coming around curves. Some of the recreational user conflicts will be addressed in the San Juan National Forest's travel-management plan for the Hermosa Creek Area, which will be worked on in late 2009.
- * Areas of deadfall should not be cleaned up because they are important for wildlife. On the other hand, deadfall can be a problem for kayakers.

The Hermosa Workgroup began developing a set of broad issues, threatened values, and potential tools as follows:

Issues

- . Recreation conflicts and carrying capacity
- . Sedimentation
- . Possible development (roads, water, mining, private land, expansion of Durango Mountain Resort)

Threatened Values

- . Water quantity/volume and flows for cutthroat trout
- . Water quality
- . Wildlife
- . Solitude and quiet
- . Safety
- . Agricultural uses and sustainability. Some grazing allotments are vacant. Some may have been permanently closed, but some could be filled.

Protections exist for these values, but are they adequate in terms of permanency, reliability, degree of protection, and extent of protection?

Potential Tools

- . Greater dispersing of users

- . Limiting user numbers without eliminating uses
- . Instream flow rights to protect water
- . Road and trail standards and rehabilitation
- . Information about and monitoring of user numbers. (The Forest Service doesn't have the resources to obtain the data, but perhaps clubs and interest groups could help.)
- . Weed control
- . Wild and Scenic River designation
- . Wilderness designation
- . Alternative designations such as National Conservation Area, National Resource Area, or Research Natural Area
- . Language in the San Juan National Forest Plan Revision
- . DOW regulations regarding fishing
- . Inventory of sediment sources
- . A new tool/standard for sediment, to be developed by the group

By the next meeting Marsha hopes to have a grid that will present the values, issues and potential tools in an organized fashion.

Next meeting: The next meeting of the Hermosa Workgroup will be Monday, Nov. 3, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at the Durango Recreation Center. Because the November meeting would normally fall on Tuesday, Nov. 4, which is Election Day, members agreed to move the meeting to Monday. On the agenda will be a presentation by members of the Colorado Water Conservation Board regarding a comparative stream flow analysis estimating flows in Hermosa Creek based on flows in the Animas River. This analysis has been e-mailed to Hermosa Workgroup members as an Excel document. If there are questions, direct them to Marsha before the November meeting. The CWCB members will also talk about the instream flow program. There will be further discussion of the discussion questions.