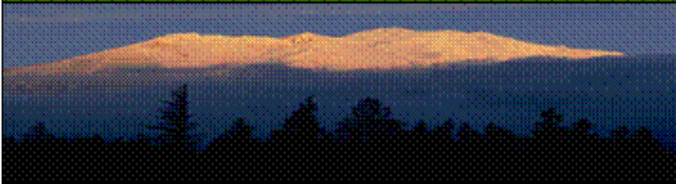
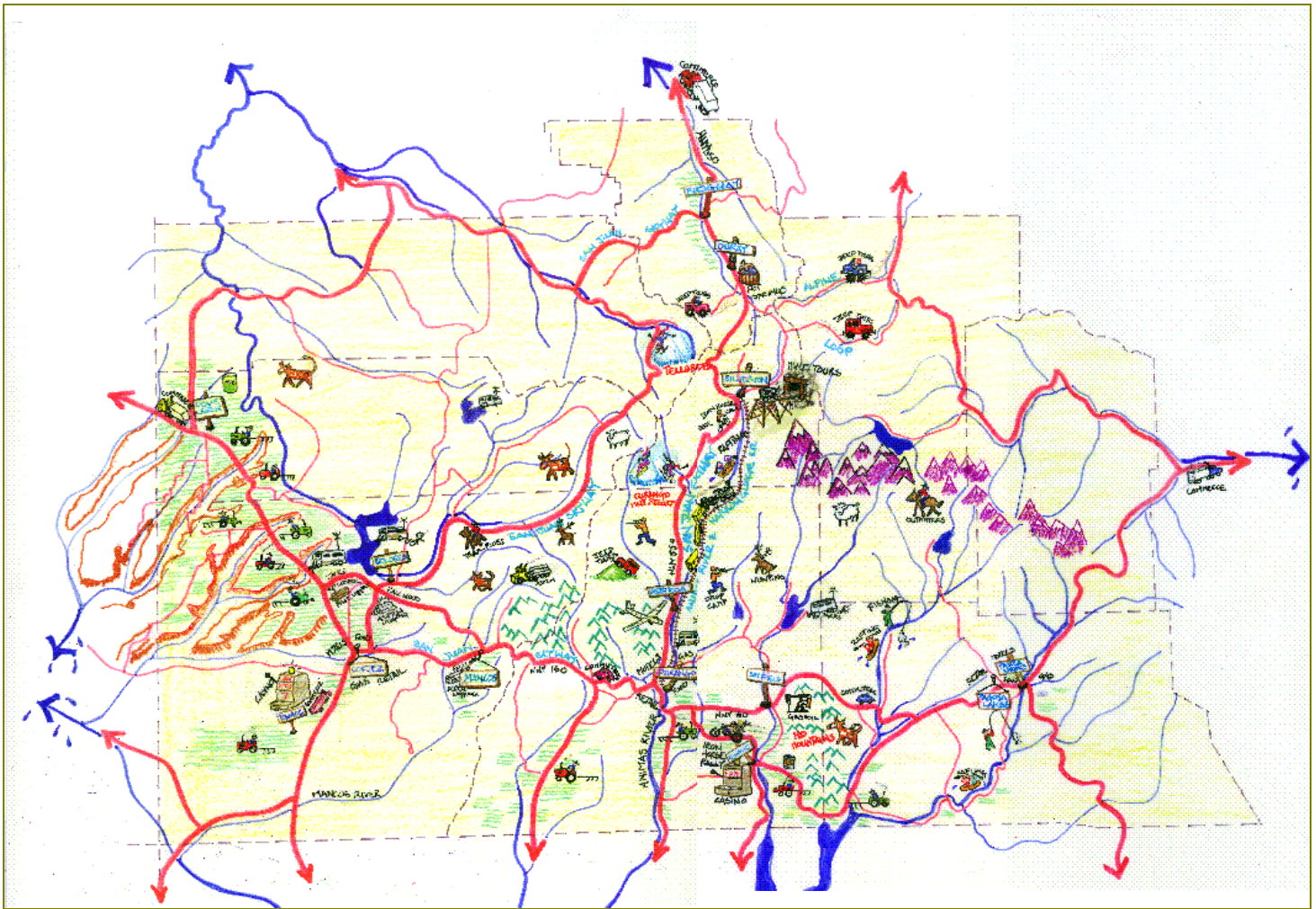


Cultural Descriptor



Recreation



Cultural Descriptor: Recreational Activities

A recreational activity is a predictable way in which people spend their leisure time. Recreational opportunities available, seasonality of activities, technologies involved and money and time required are aspects of the recreational descriptor. The frequency of local/non local uses . . . the preferences of local/non local users, and the location of the activities are also included.

Trends in Recreational Activities and Technologies

The recreational activities that the geography of the San Juan and Dolores River Basins support are fundamental to the evolution of the local economy, work routines and settlement patterns in the region. There is a long history of traditional recreational activities including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, horseback riding and driving. The 1960s saw changes in recreational technology (innovations in backpacking, skiing and climbing equipment) and land designations (the Wilderness Act) that facilitated new forms of “back-country recreation”. The 1970s, 80s and 90s saw a steady increase in the in the types and sophistication of mechanized and motorized recreational technologies such as RVs, mountain bikes, water craft, four-wheelers, snowmobiles, and other off-road vehicles.

Downhill Skiing: Downhill skiing has also undergone major transformation and development. There are three major categories of ski areas in Southwest Colorado: local (e.g. Hesperus, Chapman Hill, and Kendall Mountain), commercial without a resort component (Wolf Creek Ski Area), and ski area/resort complex (Durango Mountain Resort). Silverton Mountain represents a fourth category known as “Extreme Skiing” which involves challenging high speed skiing in remote backcountry areas.

Socially, local ski hills provide access to skiing that is convenient and affordable for all segments of the community. Strong cultural attachments can develop to these areas by people who “grew up learning to ski there.” People struggled for years to try and keep Stoner Ski Area operating, but were unable to generate enough revenue to meet ski lift safety standards. Wolf Creek Ski Area is commercially viable as a free standing ski area with secondary benefits accruing to Pagosa Springs. Recently Wolf Creek is the subject of ambitious and controversial plans for large scale adjacent resort development.

The social issues raised by the evolution of Durango Mountain Resort are related to the perception that it is a social and commercial enclave, and the effects of this emerging reality will have on Durango. Long range plans to develop much more extensive resort and residential facilities on the La Plata County/ San Juan County line raise land use, visual, environmental and affordable housing issues that are been the subject of intense community engagement. There is also concern about large scale resort development encroaching on public access to popular public land recreation areas. The proposed development adjacent to Wolf Creek Ski Area raises similar issues (See Settlement Patterns, Key Trends and Issues in La Plata County, Resort Development)

Competition Resulting form Growth in Diversity/Volume of Recreations Use: The ski industry in Southwest Colorado is an indicator of larger changes in the spectrum of evolution of traditional outdoor recreation, overlaid by tourism development, overlaid by destination resort development, overlaid by large scale amenity migration. All of these stages in the evolution in recreational use persist on the social and physical landscape. The dramatic increase in the types of recreational activities and technologies, combined with exponential increases in the volume of recreation on public lands present wide-ranging social, economic and land use challenges for public land managers and local communities. In addition to competition among the growing number recreation users for the use of public lands, additional challenges arise in integrating

recreational uses and values with traditional natural resource economies.

Dispersed Recreation Challenges:

Recreational activities that are highly concentrated (such as ski areas) and/or commercially organized (such as outfitter guides) and/or occur in specified locations (such as campgrounds) can be managed by the San Juan Public Lands Center through various forms of permitting. While working through these management structures can be difficult, addressing issues related to seemingly unstructured “dispersed recreation” present an ever-increasing challenge. Dispersed recreation is initiated by the user and can be pursued virtually anywhere on the public landscape subject to a fairly loose framework of signs, maps and posted instructions and/or restrictions.

Descriptive Analysis of Recreational Activities

This descriptive analysis begins with a look at the economic dynamics surrounding recreation on public lands by revisiting some of the economic inputs related to recreation. A cataloging of recreation lifestyles follows that highlights some of the different ways that people have integrated public lands recreation into their lifestyles and priorities.

Recent interviewing efforts and the 2005 Community Study Groups yielded a solid base of information regarding the activities and nature of organized recreation groups. These groups are a key component of the recreation community and to help land managers employ these groups effectively, this assessment provides some insights into the key functions of local recreation groups.

Land managers agree that user stewardship is key to a successful future on public lands, so recreation related stewardship efforts are summarized as well as future opportunities for stewardship from the perspective of local recreationists (2004 Recreation Interviews, 2005 Community Study Groups).

Each District in the San Juan Forest has unique characteristics and the qualitative character analysis near the end of this chapter provides some basic insights about fundamental strengths and differences. Playing on the strengths of each district will contribute to the success and efficiency of Forest management.

Finally, a list of the major recreation issues garnered from 2 years of interviews and Community Study Groups is provided to focus planning efforts.

Recreation on Public Lands and Regional Commerce

Outdoor Recreation Industry: The outdoor recreation industry has gained momentum in recent years. While tourists compose the majority of the market for guided outdoor recreation on public lands, skiing and the outdoor equipment industry are also fueled by local dollars. These industries are important to the regional economy and the fiscal well-being of the sales tax dependent local governments. In addition to providing raw economic input, the outdoor recreation industry allows some entrepreneurs and their employees to have a clear connection between the land and their livelihoods.

One hunting and pack trip owner/operator summed his appreciation of his profession as follows:

“I have a job for myself, my wife, and my kids where we can stay healthy and live well in the mountains all summer and fall.”

During the 2004 recreation interviews, an owner of a local motor sports retail store said

“I have to be the happiest man alive; my passion is my work and my work is my passion. I have fun myself and make a living facilitating other people’s fun.”

Skiing: The Silverton Mountain, Durango Mountain Resort, and Wolf Creek Ski Areas are big employers in this region. In winter 2003 Skiing (actual ski area operations and mountain related services) accounted for 3.4% of the total winter employment in La Plata County, ranking as the number one private sector job provider.

Skiing is not only a major industry offering jobs and fueling local businesses during otherwise lean winter months, but it is an important amenity to locals. For many families, a day or vacation trip to a ski area provides a chance to enjoy spending time together, an increasingly scarce opportunity given the increasingly rapid pace of family life. Skiing at a ski area can be an important introduction to the mountains for children. Going skiing in a ski town is somewhat equivalent to going golfing in other regions in that it offers an informal setting to visit with friends, colleagues, and clients.

Backdrop for developed, organized outdoor recreation: People play golf everywhere in the U.S., but golf with a view of the San Juans carries extra appeal because the courses have outstanding views of the mountains. The importance of public land as a back-drop to developed recreation is nicely encapsulated by the following excerpt from a local golf course’s marketing materials:

“Anyone can offer you a golf course. [This] golf club offers you the most scenic and rewarding nines you've ever played. Each nine is thoughtfully integrated into its environment ...”

Tourism: Outdoor recreation including skiing accounted for 31% of all travel into Colorado, including business travel¹, so it is clear that public lands play a major role in attracting tourist dollars.

According to the 2003 report entitled *America’s Scenic Byways, The Colorado Report*², the total vehicle miles traveled on the San Juan Skyway increased from around 700,000 daily vehicle miles traveled in 1990 to over 1.2 million daily vehicle miles traveled in 2002, a near doubling of traffic. The same report concludes that 54% of all travelers on the Skyway are traveling the highways just to drive the Skyway with no particular destination. While similar statistics are not available for other sections of scenic highway not designated as a Scenic Byway, like Wolf Creek Pass, these stretches of highway are experiencing the same surge in scenic driving. The survey found that “sightseeing” was the most common primary reason for driving the Skyway.

The San Juans fuel the tourist economy regardless of whether visitors actively engage in Forest recreation. For many, proximity and views are enough of a draw to bring them to our Towns to spend their vacation dollars.

Public Lands and Image Marketing

Most communities in the U.S. have some form of recreation that contributes to their identity:

- Minneapolis is a die-hard hockey town.
- Oceanside, CA is a quintessential surf town.
- Moab, UT and Fruita, CO have both become mountain biking destinations.

Just as the economy and history of a place forms the image of a place, so do recreational activities. Colorado as a whole attracts visitors with its image as a place for adventure and recreation. The 2003 Colorado Visitor Study by Longwoods International concludes that 70% of prospective visitors to Colorado agree that it is an exciting place and nearly 2 out of 3 say that Colorado has great recreation [See Figure RA-2].

¹ Colorado Visitors Study 2003, Longwoods International <http://www.state.co.us/oed/visitorstudy/Market.html>

² <http://www.santafetrailsenicandhistoricbyway.org/corcontents.html>

Pull-Factor for Migration

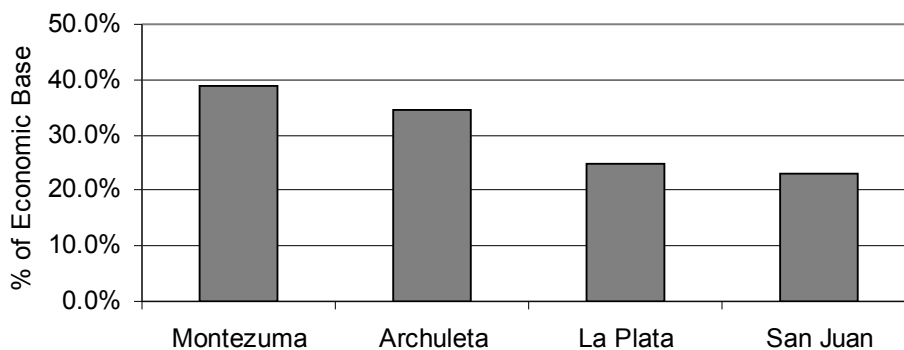
Many of the same attributes that attract people to visit the San Juans prompts some to move here altogether or to buy a vacation home.

As discussed in the *Work Routines* section of this document, vacation homes or second homes act are an economic driver, fueling regional economies with outside dollars both while they are built (construction, development, real estate, finance) and after they are built (maintenance, local spending of occupants).

Some migrate full time either as retirees or with the intent of earning income in Southwest Colorado. These permanent residents often funnel money into the community through their mailboxes by spending retirement savings, investment dividends, and other wealth accumulated previous to moving to Southwest Colorado. This spending contributes significantly to the base economy in view of the fact that the 3 most populated counties encompassed by the San Juan Forest and BLM lands are at least 25% fueled by income originating from households [See Figure RA-1]. The Colorado Demography Section’s base economic analyses title this basic income as “Households” which should not be confused with Household Income as used by the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure RA-1

% of Economic Base from Households

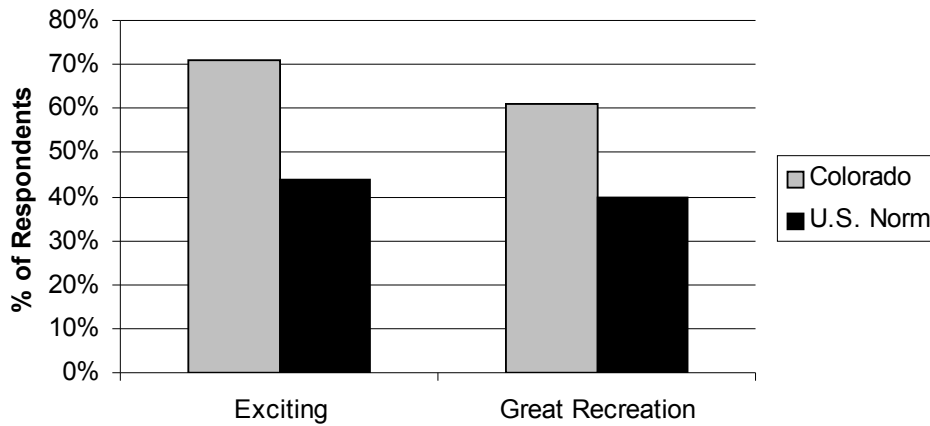


Realtors long ago recognized the importance of public lands in people’s decision to move and buy property and often market properties directly with appeal to public lands. This quote from a San Juan region realtor’s home page actually sites the acreage of the San Juan National Forest with specific reference to wilderness areas:

“Serene beauty, majestic mountain views and clean, sweet air. This is Pagosa Springs, Colorado. Pagosa Springs is a quaint Southwest Colorado mountain community surrounded by 3 million acres of National Forest and Wilderness..”

Figure RA-2

Visitor Perceptions of Colorado



Public Lands Recreation and Local Lifestyles:

The prior section *Recreation on Public Lands and Regional Commerce* describes a range of economic influences that San Juan public lands have upon the region, including the opening of relatively new markets (e.g. second homes, retirees, amenity migrants). This section qualitatively describes the way that recreation on public lands interfaces with everyday life in the San Juans.

In the same way that stories of adventure on the open seas dominate dinner table and beer hall conversation in a port town, adventure and natural events in the mountains and desert provide Southwestern Colorado residents and visitors an endless variety of topics for discussion. The appeal of outdoor adventure is contagious, and even those who do not recreate on the forest themselves are drawn into the excitement and interest surrounding the experience of others.

As cited above in Figure RA-2, over 2/3 of a random sample of prospective visitors to Colorado view it as an “Exciting” place. This excitement is real, and recreationists are mining this excitement and adventure out of the San Juans everyday of the week, 4 seasons out of the year. Nearly all residents identify themselves with some element of this excitement and adventure surrounding recreation on Public Lands.

There are many different ways that people interface public lands with their lifestyles in Southwest Colorado. Regardless of the intensity or frequency of participation in recreation on public lands, the importance of identifying the mountains or the desert with life in Southwest Colorado is almost universal. The Recreation Lifestyle Typology summarized in Matrix RA-1 lists some of the most common recreation lifestyles. The 2004 Forest-Wide Recreation Interviews are the data foundation for this typology.

Matrix RA-1 San Juan Recreation Lifestyle Typology

Recreation Lifestyle	Description
People who live to play	Whether they have lived in Southwest CO for decades or moved here recently, many people organize their lives and their resources to make recreating on public lands their #1 priority. Although this is not always the case, this hearty and generally young crowd tends to simplify their working and domestic lives to leave time, energy, and money to recreate in the mountains and desert. Many of these people work in the outdoor services and sales industry.

Outdoor Entrepreneurs	Public lands are an amazing catalyst for entrepreneurial efforts. In most towns in the San Juan region, there is an identifiable core community of recreation enthusiasts who have learned how to make a living by providing recreation services to visitors and selling vehicles, equipment, maps, and guides to locals and visitors alike. Even restaurants like The Explorers Club in Silverton have defined their business around outdoor recreation.
Weekenders	Weekenders are by far the most commonly encountered folks on the back-roads and trails of the San Juans and the desert. Some weekenders camp, but most local weekenders prefer day trips. Activities span the gamete from paragliding to gold panning. This group values the contrast to the hectic nature of working life.
Fitness people	For some, public lands are the ideal setting for a workout. Most people in the fitness crowd recreate in the most convenient locations that offer the right conditions for their fitness activities. The majority of fitness recreation happens near population centers and major roads.
Western lifestyle recreationists	People who take their own horses or other pack animals on public land have committed to a unique lifestyle. Keeping livestock requires land and a significant time investment. For western lifestyle recreationists, taking livestock into the mountains is part of a larger lifestyle to which they have committed. "Horse properties" are highly marketable on the Southwest CO real estate scene. This lifestyle embodies the deep historic connection of agricultural roots and public lands.
Sunday drivers	The vast majority of people driving Missionary Ridge, Boggy Draw, or First Fork roads on a Saturday or Sunday are likely on a family outing. This set of recreationists does not purchase thousands of dollars worth of specialized gear or engage in advanced planning. They want a simple outing into the forest with family and friends and have uncomplicated expectations relative to most enthusiasts.
Conservation-minded recreationists	This set of recreationists tends to be less focused on a particular activity (mountain biking, skiing, etc.) and more focused on conservation ethics. Their presence in public discourse is probably more noticeable than their presence on forest roads or trails. This set is more identified by how they see the forest and desert than by what they do on it.
Armchair recreationists	Some people identify themselves with and have an interest in a certain type of recreation (e.g. extreme skiing) without spending much time actually doing the activity. For some, the proximity to the place where the activity is happening is enough to identify with the activity and maintain interest in it. Recreation on public lands adds to the excitement and allure of the entire community, including those that do not actually participate.
Mountain and Scenic Desert homeowners	Property buyers pay a premium for mountain and desert vistas, and even more for adjacency to public lands. While these homeowners may or may not actively engage in recreation on public lands, they are clearly inspired by the proximity to recreation possibilities. The potential for developing houses on the patchwork of mining claims throughout the San Juans has just recently come to light and will likely yield somewhat of a high altitude building boom.

Recreation Networks and Information Flow

Organized Recreation Groups

During the 2004 recreation interviews Rural Planning Institute and two other Office of Community Services interviewers contacted and interviewed representatives of all of the functioning outdoor recreation organized groups. The 83 interviews included groups from all three districts spanning the full spectrum of recreational activities on the San Juan.

Even though the groups represent the full diversity of recreational activities, they often serve similar functions to their members and to the recreation community as a whole. Matrix RA-2 summarizes the various functions served by organized recreation groups in the San Juans.

Matrix RA-2 Recreation Group Functions

Recreation Group Functions	Description
Trail/road maintenance	Many local recreation groups maintain trails and/or roads by adopting them through the San Juan Mountains Association
Snow grooming	While snowmobile clubs and cross country ski clubs serve other functions as well, grooming winter trails is generally top priority.
Organizing to ensure future of recreational activities on public lands	One of the functions served by recreation groups is to provide a central source of information regarding the influence of public lands policy and regulations on the type of recreation the group advocates. Groups also take pride in advocating and teaching environmental ethics and user etiquette to promote a good image of their user group.
Organize group activities	Using websites, email, and U.S. mail, several area recreation groups organize multiple events annually. The Seniors Outdoors group in the Durango area has several organized activities per week.
Provide recreation information	Some recreation groups provide specific insights and maps to help their members decide when and where to go recreate, and the level of difficulty that should be expected.
Communication liaison between public lands agencies and forest users	The leadership in area recreation groups tends to keep in touch with key agency contacts and can provide an efficient conduit for communication between land managers and recreationists.

Information Flow

Knowing how information is exchanged is an important component of understanding how to communicate with recreation users. Several insights into the basic flow of information emerged from the 2004 Recreation Interviews and the 2005 Study Groups:

- **Organized recreation groups:** These groups are formed to provide one or more of the functions outlined in Matrix RA-2, which includes providing a range of information concerning where and when to recreate, the difficulty of various routes, Forest Service and BLM policies and activities, and even safety. They also organize events and regular meetings so that members can visit and plan outings.
- **Outdoor sports retail and service establishments:** For many, the first place to go when seeking information about where to recreate in an unfamiliar area are local equipment supply shops. Whether backpacking or snowmobiling, when looking for information, a retailer is a good place to start. The shopkeepers recreate, so they know where to go and are highly accustomed to being asked for information.
- **Public Lands Websites and Offices:** Area recreationists took note of recent improvements in the tracking of road openings and closures on the SJPLC website. Many interviewees (2004 Recreation Interviews) suggested that an improved or interactive online map system would be used widely if developed. Many people go directly to the public lands center, but some interviewees suggested that a downtown kiosk or public presence would be good for visitors (2004 Recreation Interviews).
- **Word of Mouth:** By far, the most pervasive and powerful form of communication is word of mouth among acquaintances. Because recreation is so important to San Juan area residents, and outdoor experiences are common topic of conversation, most people get their ideas about where to go and what to do from other recreationists.
- **Tourist Marketing:** As discussed above, public lands is a big seller for vacation destinations. Local chambers of commerce and even local governments market public lands scenery, attractions, and amenities by website, flyer, and mailing list.
- **Guidebooks and Maps:** Even the most veteran outdoor enthusiasts use guidebooks from time to time. Several map companies have emerged in recent years as well offering trail ratings and other information beyond what a USGS Quad or USFS/BLM Maps offer. Several interviewees (2004 Recreation Interviews) noted specific errors on commercial maps regarding public-private ownership, and allowed uses.
- **Commercial Outfitters:** In some outdoor sports, like river running and hunting, the outfitters who are in the forest day in and day out year after year are an important source of knowledge for other locals and agency staff. Outfitters also introduce new users to the Forest and educate their clients about ethics and etiquette.
- **Directional and Information Signs:** Last but not least, signage is probably the most frequently used mode of communication about public lands. Most people want more signage of all types on the Forest ranging from ethics information and interpretive placards at trailheads to allowed uses signs on routes. A smaller set of interviewees (2004 Study Group) and study group members (2005 Study Groups) prefer no expansion of forest signage and an even more limited group would prefer less signage than is currently on the forest.

Stewardship and Recreation

Public land stewardship is alive and well in Southwestern Colorado and a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and expectations exist for further developing stewardship efforts. This section discusses recreation oriented stewardship today and opportunities for the future.

Existing Recreation Stewardship

Who: Recreation groups are composed of many stewards and facilitate a variety of stewardship activities. Commercial outfitters care a great deal about keeping the forest litter free and keeping the roads and trails in tact, and the river channels open and are important stewards on the Forest. Individuals also contribute by picking up litter, trail repair, and communicating with other users about user etiquette and land ethics. Local governments can also be active stewards, providing access, information, meeting venues, and other resources.

What: Most of the organized stewardship activity is focused on route repair and maintenance, route creation, clean-up, and resource restoration. Local groups like Trails 2000, Back Country Horsemen, Four Corners Trail Riders, Kokopelli Bike Club, Seniors Outdoors, Creepers Jeepers, San Juan Trail Riders and others do summer trail maintenance and many routes and trails have been formally adopted. The San Juan Sledders, Silverton Snowmobile Club, and Wolf Creek Trailblazers have grooming programs, while Pine River Nordic Club and Friends of Chicken Creek groom trails specifically for cross country skiing. Anyone who has participated in a day of trail maintenance knows of the gratification garnered from this tangible public service that keeps volunteers showing up early on Saturday mornings ready to work all day.

Communication and education are an important form of stewardship. Recreation groups, outfitters, and other outdoor oriented businesses generally try to promote good land ethics and user etiquette to their members or customers. One on one or group to group confrontations or communication about land ethics or etiquette are rare and isolated on the Forest. Usually, if an individual disagrees with the way an individual or group is behaving, they quietly resent it but choose to avoid confrontation.

Where: The Dolores and the Columbine seem to have more organized stewardship involvement than the Pagosa District, where outfitters play a significant role in trail maintenance. Most stewardship efforts are aimed at popular, particularly important or desirable routes that are in obvious need of maintenance, but volunteer efforts have created several new routes as well. Even stream clean-up efforts tend to be along travel routes, like Lime Creek. The highest concentration of stewardship efforts are on single track trails near Durango organized by Trails 2000 and in groomed areas during the winter months.

Opportunities for Expanding Stewardship

The 2005 Study Groups and the 2004 Recreation Interviews indicated that the willingness to volunteer far exceeds the organized opportunities to do so. People value their recreation very highly and care deeply about the places they frequent and this motivates them to want to help care for these places. Several ideas for future stewardship emerged in the 2004 Recreation Interviews and 2005 Study Groups:

- Use volunteers to educate users about land ethics and user etiquette.
- As long as there are trails, there will be trail maintenance. Most users recognize that agencies lack resources to maintain all of the trails. This type of stewardship has already resulted in successes, has momentum, and has tremendous potential for expansion given the right leadership.
- Several interviewees in the 2004 Recreation Interviews believed that to avoid unintentional disincentives, the process of obtaining permission to maintain trails should be quick and easy.
- In the 2005 Study Groups, participants repeatedly cited the possibility for employing volunteer power to restore areas damaged by recreation and other activities in the past.
- While many Study Group members and interviewees (2004 Recreation Interviews) cited the need for enforcement, few expressed willingness to engage in stewardship enforcement. People generally feel awkward about confronting other users about federal land use regulations.

Characterizing Recreation: Dolores, Pagosa, and Columbine Districts

Summarizing the strengths and major recreation characteristics of the 3 districts in the San Juan can help managers develop strategies to maximize the recreation resources and play on the strengths of each district. Five characteristics were used to conduct a recreation character assessment each of the 3 districts in the San Juan.

The characteristics are best defined in question form:

Terrain and Access: What are the major features in each district for recreation on the forest and how is the terrain accessed?

Local Preferences: While preferences are as diverse as the people in Southwest Colorado, what local recreation preferences are uniquely identifiable to each district?

Strongest Recreation Asset: Looking at the San Juan Forest and BLM lands in each district, what is the strongest asset?

Recreation Economy: What is the most obvious way in which recreation on public lands interacts with the local economies in each district?

#1 Challenge: Given the recreation patterns in each district, what is the #1 recreation management challenge for land managers?

Matrix RA-3: Recreation Profile-Dolores District

Recreation Profile of Dolores District

Terrain and Access: The Dolores District has the widest variety of terrain and climate zones of all 3 districts ranging from the high peaks in the La Platas to the desert country down river of McPhee reservoir. The most extensive and signature country in the Dolores District is the foothills and mesas terrain stepping off of the La Plata, Rico, and Wilson mountains. Due to the long history of grazing and logging on these relatively flat mesas and foothills, road access to this area is extensive and well-developed.

Local Preferences: Because of the recent roots in traditional uses of the forest and the long established and extensive network of access roads on the Dolores District, people on the west end of the San Juan forest have a noticeably strong multiple use ethic. "There's something for everyone out there" was a commonly stated phrase in the 2005 Dolores District Study Groups. While many recognized current and future problems with multiple use, most would prefer to avoid a high degree use segregation. Most people favor limiting motorized travel to established routes. With the exception of fairly wide spread concern about gas well development, the vast majority of Dolores District residents are tolerant and even supportive of traditional uses on the Forest.

Strongest Recreation Asset: Diversity of terrain and access offers a wide variety of opportunities and disperses uses to many different areas.

Recreation Economy: Mesa Verde and hunting season are the largest attractors of visitors to the area. The proximity to the mountains goes hand in hand with the agricultural lifestyles that many recent immigrants have come to Cortez, Mancos Dolores, and other places on the Dolores District to enjoy. Since the Dolores District includes the edge of the desert extending for hundreds of miles to the South and West, many people drive from the desert to the mountains and higher ground in the Dolores District to enjoy trails, rivers, streams, lakes and other features not as common in the desert.

#1 Challenge Because of the vast number of travel routes in the Dolores District, designating routes and defining travel access will be a major challenge in future years.

Matrix RA-4: Recreation Profile-Pagosa District

Recreation Profile of Pagosa District

Terrain and Access: The Pagosa District is the only district to have 2 wilderness areas in addition to the Piedra Area, which is managed like a wilderness area. The access opportunities to the Wilderness in the Pagosa district are more numerous and geographically dispersed than in the Columbine District where access is limited to a few key roads, trailheads, and the narrow gauge train. Urban interface BLM and Forest land are close to Town, but are not highly developed for recreation.

Local Preferences: Agricultural roots are important in Pagosa and many elements of the agricultural lifestyle relate to living near public lands. While some opportunities exist for recreation right near Pagosa, many residents expressed the desire for more urban interface recreational opportunities. Scenery is very important to locals and to the local economy. Pagosa residents like to recreate in the wintertime, but tend to concentrate in the Wolf Creek Pass area where the access is easy and snow conditions are good.

Strongest Recreation Asset: Diverse opportunities for wilderness access; wildlife habitat.

Recreation Economy: Full, unobstructed views of the San Juans is not uncommon from any of the thousands of home sites already platted around Pagosa Springs. With up to 200 building permits per year, the Archuleta County development industry is alive and well. Wolf Creek ski area plays an important role in the otherwise quiet winter months while hunting season gets area cash registers ringing in the fall.

#1 Challenge: Because of the diverse wilderness access and outstanding wildlife habitat in general, hunting season gets a large turnout in Pagosa. Managing hunting season impacts is the #1 concern.

Matrix RA-5: Recreation Profile-Columbine District

Recreation Profile of Columbine District

Terrain and Access: The Columbine offers vehicle access to more high elevation terrain than either of the other two districts via mining roads, timber roads, and highways. The Columbine offers almost limitless possibilities for Highway access recreation along Hwy 550. The Columbine is also known for its wild country and big peaks. The scenery and the strong presence of mountain adventurers of all types reflects the proximity of some of the highest, most impressive, rugged mountains in Colorado.

Local Preferences: The most dominant preferences in the Columbine are for high quality recreation opportunities in the urban interface and spectacular mountain day trip opportunities. The easily accessible features of the Forest Service and BLM lands near Durango, Bayfield, Vallecito and other population centers are used frequently by the fitness minded population in La Plata County. However, easy access to high elevation entices recreationists out of the foothills and into the mountains for alpine day trips.

Strongest Recreation Asset: Easy road access to high elevation trailheads and road-heads offering an almost limitless range of recreational opportunities.

Recreation Economy: Durango has the longest history and most experience with tourism of any town in the region. Public lands use reflects this commitment to tourism with the narrow gauge train, two ski areas, well-promoted world class mountain biking trails, and the designation of The San Juan Skyway and Alpine Loop as scenic byways.

#1 Challenge: Because the Columbine and the communities within it are increasingly popular for visitors and recent or future migrants, managing dispersed recreation areas has become increasingly important.

San Juan Plan Revision Applications: Recreational Activities

This section consists of a descriptive list of recreation related issues for consideration in the Plan Revisions as cited by interviewees in the 2004 Recreation Interviews and participants in the 2005 Community Study Groups:

Underserved User Groups

For a variety of reasons, many user groups feel that opportunities for their preferred form of recreation are too few or declining. Some of the user groups that expressed concern for the availability of opportunities include:

- Motorcyclists in the Columbine Districts say that their opportunities for single-track motorcycle touring are too limited and that they either have to drive an hour West into the Dolores district or head south into New Mexico.
- Wintertime skiers, hikers, snowshoers who seek easy access wintertime solitude in safe terrain feel that their opportunities are threatened by the continual expansion of snowmobiling on the Forest.
- Horse packers also stated that because of the inadequacy of trailhead parking for trailers, trail conditions, and the presence of pets or mountain bikers, their options for easier access day trips are limited to just a few trailheads.
- Recreationists in Pagosa Springs pointed to the need to develop more trail and river based recreation opportunities near town.

Motorized vs. Non-motorized Conflict

Conflict arising from the disruption of user experience has been reported in three main contexts:

1. Busy multi-use trail systems (like the Hermosa drainage and the complex of trails throughout it).
2. Mountain passes during winter are the site of the most commonly sited conflict in both the 2004 Recreation Interviews and the 2005 Study Groups. The conflict, reported mostly by skiers and snowshoers, is based on the noise, pollution, speed of snowmobiles. Other conflict is based on the amount of fresh snow consumed by snowmobiles that would otherwise be available for backcountry skiing.
3. Many other users cited motorized use related resource damage as disrupting their experience on public lands.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is not widespread in the San Juan Forest, but it does occur in certain popular, easily accessible areas during busy times of year. Places where participants frequently cited overcrowding as a problem in the 2005 Study Groups include:

- Hermosa Creek Area
- Molas Pass
- Wolf Creek Pass
- Boggy Draw
- La Plata Canyon
- Williams Reservoir Area
- First Fork Road, Piedra River (during hunting season)
- Junction Creek / Colorado Trail
- Various high use areas in Weminuche Wilderness (Chicago Basin in summer and several other areas during hunting season)

Two important considerations should be employed when evaluating overcrowding:

1. Overcrowding is subjective. One person who has expectations to see others or is more tolerant of encounters with other users might not experience overcrowding while another person on the same trail at the same time may feel that there are too many users.
2. Overcrowding and user conflict can be difficult to distinguish. Motorcycles have always been allowed on the Hermosa Creek trail, but only recently have there been enough motorcycles for many people to begin perceiving motorized use as potentially incompatible with hiking or biking. This suggests that some user conflict could be eliminated by managing to reduce overcrowding.

Stressful Trailheads

Many of the conflicts specifically cited by interviewees (2004 Recreation Interviews) and 2005 Study Group participants occurred at a busy trailhead or within a short distance of the trailhead. Reports of loud snowmobiles emitting pollution, aggressive dogs, and unfriendly people at trailheads have disrupted many users' experience. Many reports of problems at trailheads occur in the wintertime, when snow limits parking to just a handful of pull-outs along paved, plowed roads. Several interviewees and Study Group participants suggested that in the wintertime there should be separate trailheads for snowmobilers and non-motorized users.

Multi-Use vs. Segregated Uses

In all three districts, interviewees (2004 Recreation Interviews) and 2005 Study Group participants had a whole range of opinions regarding whether to segregate uses or to try to make multi-use work for everyone. Some people are 100% multiple use proponents and feel that multi-use is the only feasible management strategy. Some multi-use advocates say that, as a society, we need to learn to work together and be courteous and there is no better place to practice than on public lands, owned equally by all. Others have a vision for a forest where uses are segregated from one another based on user compatibility, terrain, and resource protection.

Most people fall somewhere in the middle, identifying a few key areas where use segregation would solve problems. Because of the limited terrain available in snowy months, further segregation of snowmobiling from other non-motorized uses was the most common plea for segregation. Many non-motorized winter users suggested identifying "snowmobile play areas" where snowmobiles can go anywhere and other areas where snowmobiles are not allowed off roads or are not allowed at all.

Trail and Road Maintenance

It is difficult to discern whether expectations for trail conditions are rising or trails and roads are deteriorating, but many complaints about the conditions of trails and roads permeate the comments from the 2005 Study Groups and the 2004 Recreation Interview notes. While many individuals see trail maintenance as the job of Forest Service and BLM, others recognize the importance of volunteer efforts in maintaining trails.

Signage

Most people want more signage of all types on the Forest ranging from ethics information and interpretive placards at trailheads to allowed uses signs on routes. A smaller set of interviewees (2004 Study Group) and study group members (2005 Study Groups) prefer no expansion of forest signage and an even more limited group would prefer less signage than is currently on the forest.

Interface of Traditional Uses with Recreation Use

Recreation users in the San Juan National Forest are generally tolerant of interfacing with traditional uses, with the exception of gas drilling.

- **Grazing:** Many longtime recreationists that participated in the 2005 Study Groups have noticed improvement in grazing management and practices over the past couple decades. A handful of recreationists still resent encounters with cows and fences on the forest, but most users are willing to encounter grazing activities on the Forest so long as resource damage is minimized.
- **Timbering:** Recent wildfires and improved science have peaked awareness of the need for some level timber removal in the forest. Cautious recreationists and conservationists maintain that timber removal must be for restorative purposes and should not result in additional roads.
- **Mineral Development:** Concern for and opposition of additional drilling was prevalent in the 2005 Study Groups and 2004 Recreation Interviews. Those that understand the legal framework surrounding mineral development say that there should not be any additional leases in most areas. Most of the comments relating to gas drilling focus on La Plata County with specific emphasis on the roadless area in the HD mountains, Urban interface areas, areas containing archeological resources, and important wildlife areas. Rural property owners in La Plata County have joined with wildlife habitat advocates to formally oppose oil and gas development in some parts of the San Juan National Forest. While some on the Dolores District advocated a policy of no additional gas drilling, there was relatively less concern voiced about gas drilling, probably due to the fact that there are fewer instances of drilling occurring on private property and a generally higher tolerance for multiple use management.

Information Gaps

Since public land planning processes occur locally, input from the visiting population is very limited. This will likely require some form of surveying. Secondary sources such as the CO State Parks SCORP and other state level visitor studies may be helpful as well.