

San Juan Public Lands  
 Wild and Scenic Rivers  
 Draft Eligibility summary  
 1/10/06

DRAFT

updated 1/26/06

[updated Feb 28](#)

[Updated May 10, 2006](#)

In the table below, rivers and their outstandingly remarkable characteristics are discussed in their entirety. Wild/scenic/recreational classification segments can be seen on the map, or can be referenced on other draft documents. Streams where archeology was the only outstandingly remarkable value ~~are not listed below, because we expect very little discussion about whether they would be recommended as suitable.~~ [are listed separately below](#)

For the purposes of discussion at the January 11 Water Round Table, streams that the staff is most excited about are shown in bold face type. These are not necessarily those that would be selected in the Preferred Alternative. The streams in bold face are those recommended as suitable in previous studies, plus La Sal Creek, the Animas River below Silverton, Hermosa Creek and its tributaries, Vallecito Creek, and the East Fork of the Piedra in the Wilderness.

Ref No.	Stream Name	Eligibility description	Classification
1	Dolores River above McPhee	The San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway on Highway 145 parallels most of this stretch. This road follows the river because the river valleys are natural transportation corridors through the mountains. People are drawn by the dramatic aspen-covered valley hillsides (especially colorful in the fall), the stream-carved sandstone outcrops, the broad cottonwood-covered flood plain in the lower portion, and the views of rugged peaks in the upper section. The Dolores River is known throughout the region for its flyfishing, and draws people from across the nation. It is also known as an excellent rafting and kayaking river. There are at least 180 National Register eligible archeology sites in the Anasazi Archeological District many of which are river related human habitation. Ancient people chose to live near the river because it was a source of drinking water, irrigation water, and	1a rec 1b rec

		had fertile alluvial soils for growing crops	
2	<b>Dolores River McPhee Dam To Bedrock</b>	<p><b>Previous recommendation</b></p> <p>The mainstem of the Dolores River from below McPhee Reservoir is “one of the West’s most exquisite wilderness adventures” (1) and is popular with rafters, even though flows are regulated. There is competition among rafters to float the river when the flows are favorable.</p> <p>There are dramatic Cretaceous (dinosaur age) sandstone cliffs throughout the canyon, and in some areas (2b, 2c) the geology has confined the canyon to a unique linear and angular form, instead of the curves evident in other reaches.</p> <p>The Roundtailed chub, which inhabits much of this reach, is imperiled globally and rare within the state. The canyon contains numerous occurrences of prehistoric rock art and other archeology sites that are eligible for the National Register</p> <p>Sections below Disappointment (2d-2e) have unique New Mexico privet (dessert olive) communities. This plant community is known only from the major rivers in the Four Corners area. Other portions of the river corridor support Naturita milkvetch and Eastwoods monkey flower, which are are BLM sensitive species and state sensitive species. Descriptions from CNHP are as follows:</p> <p><i>“The canyon bottoms support a nearly continuous occurrence of the riparian plant association known as New Mexico privet foothills riparian shrubland, the globally imperiled riparian shrub community dominated by New Mexico privet (Forestiera pubescens...</i></p> <p><i>... an excellent occurrence of the globally imperiled New Mexico privet riparian shrub community.</i></p> <p><i>... A good occurrence of the Naturita milkvetch, considered to be vulnerable both globally and in Colorado</i></p> <p><i>...Hanging garden communities, imperiled to vulnerable on a global scale, contained small populations of the globally vulnerable, state rare Eastwood monkeyflower.” (2).</i></p>	<p>2a rec 2b wild 2c rec 2d rec 2e scen 2f wild 2g scen</p>

		The outstandingly remarkable values in the “Wilderness Study Area” include outstanding canyon scenery with sinuous curves incised hundreds of feet into the sandstone. This section contains outstanding primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities associated with the river, canyons, and mesas; and extremely diverse topography and geology that create outstanding scenic vistas and excellent solitude opportunities.	
3	Rio Lado	A small stream entering the Dolores from the east approximately 10 miles south of Rico. This stream is occupied by Colorado River Cutthroat Trout. The Forest Service has invested funds in stream improvements to protect this population.	scen
4	Taylor and Little Taylor	Taylor Creek enters the Dolores River from the north about 5 miles above the West Dolores. Its main tributary is Little Taylor Creek. These streams are occupied by Colorado River Cutthroat Trout.	Rec scen
5	<b>West Dolores</b>	<b>Previous recommendation</b>  West Dolores is a major tributary of the Dolores River about 12 miles northwest of the town of Dolores. 6a is in the Wilderness. Black swifts occupy waterfalls on tributaries in the river corridor. It is nationally known for fishing, <del>and has significant raft and kayak use.</del> It contains National Register eligible archeology sites.	6a wild 6b rec
6	Summit Canyon	<i>“A fair population of Naturita milkvetch (Astragalus naturitensis), a globally vulnerable plant. There is also an unranked occurrence of the canyon treefrog, rare in Colorado, although globally secure”. (2)</i>	scen
7	McIntyre Canyon	McIntyre Canyon is in the northern part of the study area just south of Gypsum Valley. <b><i>The water flow in McIntyre Canyon may only be ephemeral in response to rain events, which would preclude it from Wild and Scenic designation</i></b> It has unique hanging gardens with rare Eastwoods monkey flower ( <i>mimulus eastwoodiae</i> ), and the rare naturita milkvech ( <i>astragalus naturitensis</i> ) at the base of the sandstone cliffs. <i>“In alcoves of Navajo sandstone cliffs, are found hanging garden communities dominated by yellow columbine, and containing a small population of the rare Eastwood monkeyflower . It appears that the Eastwood’s monkeyflower requires more permanent water than the</i>	scen

		<i>more common columbine. In this and other sites, it grows in a deep horizontal crack that holds moisture, and on spongy, algae covered walls.” (2)</i>	
8	Bull Canyon	Bull Canyon is a tributary to the Dolores River in the northern (lower) portion of the study area. The lower portion of this stream is in the WSA, while the upper portion has some road crossings. The recreation values, in addition to the WSA, are unique pothole pools along the stream course. The canyon walls are outstanding geology, and the rare plants naturita milkvetch ( <i>Astragalus naturitensis</i> ) and Kachina Daisy ( <i>Erigeron kachinensis</i> ) live in the canyon bottom. Both species are BLM and State sensitive species. This is a significant stopping point for raft trips on the Dolores, and the rafters hike up Bull Canyon to enjoy the other values. There are 3 historic and prehistoric archeology sites. <a href="#">Canyon Tree Frog inhabits the area</a>	scen
9	Leach Creek	Leach Creek is in the WSA, which gives it a unique recreation experience. <a href="#">Important stopping point for rafters to to hike and enjoy the riparian vegetation and the pothole pools.</a> It also has prehistoric rock art.	wild
10	Coyote Wash	This stream is mostly in the WSA. The canyon side walls offer spectacular views of the geology. “ <i>Seeping alcoves in the sandstone canyon walls high above the wash are the sites of hanging garden communities that support several rare plants. Colorado’s largest population of the Kachina daisy is located here. It grows in horizontal crevices in seeping alcoves. This species is the most imperiled of all plants found in San Miguel and Montrose counties. Eastwood’s monkeyflower is also found in horizontal crevices on seeping canyon walls.</i> ”(2)	wild
11	<del>Wild Steer Canyon</del>	<del>Tributary to the Dolores River within the Wilderness Study Area. The unique geologic formation of sandstone Hoodoos adds to the outstanding scenic quality of the canyon</del> <a href="#">Montrose BLM will analyze</a>	wild
12	<del>La Sal Creek</del>	<del>“La Sal Creek carves a wild labyrinth through glaring white sandstone cliffs... accessible either by boat (from the Dolores River) or overland. (1)” It is a scenic box canyon with waterfalls from the tributaries. It has an excellent occurrence of a critically imperiled plant community consisting of box elder and river birch. “Only a few other small occurrences of this-</del>	<del>13a-ree 13b-wild</del>

		<i>community are known. A critically imperiled plant association consisting of box elder and river birch was first documented here in 1991. Since then, the same association has been looked for in many similar canyons, to no avail.”(2) It is inhabited by the red spotted toad and by the canyon tree frog, a BLM sensitive species. It has bluehead sucker and flannelmouth sucker, also BLM sensitive species: Montrose BLM will analyze</i>	
<b>11</b>	<b><u>Spring Canyon</u></b>	<u>Canyon Tree Frog</u> <u>Important stopping point for rafters to to hike and enjoy swimming in the pothole pools.</u>	
<b>13</b>	<b>Animas River Bakers Bridge to Silverton</b>	<p>The recreation ORVs in the section below Silverton are white water rafting, which is drawing national and international attention with competitive events, and riding the train through the narrow canyon perched above the roaring river surrounded by Wilderness. In addition to the historic ORV of the train, this section includes the historic Tacoma hydroelectric power plant and other cultural resource features. The scenic values include the view of the narrow canyon and the powerful river from the train, and the view of the train from the river. The narrow gauge train and the dramatic canyon it accesses draw people from around the world.</p> <p>Water Quality is naturally poor because of the geology, and has also been impaired by mining. This may have precluded this from being eligible for Wild and Scenic in the past. In 2001, however, the State adopted a water quality improvement plan by determining Total Maximum Daily Loads for the toxic metals, thus allowing eligible streams in the Upper Animas to qualify as Wild and Scenic</p>	13 rec
14	Animas River Silverton to Animas Forks	<del>The recreation ORVs in the section below Silverton are white water rafting, which is drawing national and international attention with competitive events, and riding the train through the narrow canyon perched above the roaring river surrounded by Wilderness. In addition to the historic ORV of the train, this section includes the historic Tacoma hydroelectric power plant and other archeological features. The scenic values include the view of the narrow canyon and the powerful river from the train, and the view of the train from the river. The narrow gauge train and the</del>	14 rec

~~dramatic canyon it accesses draw people from around the world.~~

The outstandingly remarkable Wildlife values in the section above Silverton are four occupied black swift nests. These birds nest behind or adjacent to waterfalls. In this segment, the waterfalls are actually on tributaries to the Animas, but occur on the valley sidewalls within the corridor ¼ mile on either side of the Animas, and are counted as attributes of the Animas River Wild and Scenic corridor. The black swift is a USFS Sensitive Species and on the Partner's in Flight national watch list as a priority species for conservation attention. Colorado is thought to host up to 20% of the world's breeding population.

The recreation ORV is the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway, a unique high country 4-wheel-drive opportunity that draws people nationwide. The roads follow the streams since the valleys provide the natural transportation corridors through the mountains.

The Archeological values include the many historic mining and milling structures, and the ghost town of Animas Forks, built at the confluence of the main branches of the Animas River, where water was used in the milling of the ore, and the alluvial valley provided one of the few building sites in the mountainous terrain.

The Scenic ORV is also based on the Alpine Loop with its stream-side roads, and the historic mining, and in addition includes views of the red mountains of the Silverton Caldera.

The Geology ORV is the stream canyons cutting through a complex of Tertiary Oligocene igneous intrusives (Tiy) and pyroclastics (ash flows, tuffs and lava flows) emplaced during the creation of the San Juan Volcanic field, a time of possibly the most violent volcanic explosions (caldera eruptions) of the last 4 billion years. Overlain on this "headwaters complex" is the more recent Silverton Caldera, with the dramatic and colorful Red Mountains. Geology has controlled the location of the rivers. The Animas River follows one of the "ring fractures" from the Silverton Caldera.

Water Quality is naturally poor because of the geology, and has also been impaired by mining. This may have precluded this from being eligible for Wild and Scenic

		in the past. In 2001, however, the State adopted a water quality improvement plan by determining Total Maximum Daily Loads for the toxic metals, thus allowing eligible streams in the Upper Animas to qualify as Wild and Scenic	
15	Cement Creek	From Silverton to about a mile above Gladstone. The Archeology encompasses many historic mining structures, including the last operating mine in San Juan County, and the abandoned Farview Townsite. This is also important geologically because of its historical association with precious-metal lode and placer mining and milling (which used stream water), and the development of railroad, mining and milling technology. The ecological ORV includes the unique iron fens, which have been identified as rare specimens of this type by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program	Rec
16	Cinnamon Creek	Begins near Cinnamon Pass, is one of the main links in the Alpine Loop Scenic Byway, a complex of high country jeep roads that draw recreationists from across the country. Both recreation and Scenery resources have identified this as an ORV. The ecological ORV is the excellent specimen of the altai cottongrass and thicket willowgrass communities unique to the alpine tundra.	Rec
17	Maggie Gulch	Maggie Gulch is home to a black swift colony at a waterfall. It has also been identified by CNHP as the site of <i>Eriophorum altaicum</i> (altai cotton-grass*)	scen
18	Mineral Creek	Mineral Creek is part of the San Juan Skyway Scenic Byway. US Highway 160 follows the Mineral Creek along most of its length, because the stream-carved valley is the natural transportation corridor through the mountains. Both Recreation and Scenery experts identified the Byway and the views it offers as an ORV. The Byway is a destination recreation experience for people through out the US.  The Chattanooga iron fen, which borders Mineral Creek, has been identified by CNHP as a unique wetland site. It is home to a rare moss, sphagnum balticum, that has not been found anywhere else in the continental US. This wetland may qualify as a world heritage site.	rec
19	Needle Creek	Provides an access corridor from the narrow gauge train to Chicago Basin in the Weminuche Wilderness. Backpackers from around the world enjoy the trail	wild

		adjacent to Needle Creek as they flock to this alpine cirque as a scenic base camp from which they can climb three 14,000 foot peaks. Utilizing the narrow gauge steam train as access to the Needle Creek trailhead adds to the recreation experience.	
20	South Fork Mineral Creek	South Fork Mineral Creek is a tributary to Mineral Creek about 3 miles northwest of Silverton. The wildlife ORV is a grouping of 4 occupied black swift colonies in waterfalls on the valley side walls, comprising about 4% of Colorado's total known breeding population. This is a dramatic U-shaped glacial valley with canyon sides that provide outstandingly remarkable scenery. There is an important ecological feature of the fen/wetland complex at the mouth.	rec
21	West Fork Animas River and California Gulch	West Fork of the Animas River and California Gulch is a segment that includes both named streams. It has an outstanding archeological feature in the Sound Democrat Mill, a historic mill that utilized stream water to concentrate ore. It has been stabilized and renovated. The Scenic value is the dramatic glacial valley above timberline, floored with meadows and rising to stark peaks. The CNHP has identified a important ecological community of altai cottongrass and clustered sedge, wetland plants that grow near the stream.	rec
22	West Virginia Gulch	West Virginia Gulch is a tributary to the Florida River in the Weminuche Wilderness. The Florida River is part of the Animas River Fourth level watershed. West Virginia Gulch is one of 12 sites on the Forest that contain genetically pure strains of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout, and thus have an ORV for fishery.	wild
23	<b>Big Bend Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Occupied by pure Colorado River Cutthroat trout. Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: Most of the tributaries to Hermosa Creek have waterfalls or steep sections near the bottom, which have prevented the upstream migration of brown and brook trout. The isolated sections are, therefore, potential locations for the reintroduction of Colorado River Cutthroat trout. Big Bend Creek, Clear Creek and East Fork Hermosa Creek are currently occupied by pure Colorado River Cutthroat trout. In addition, the close proximity of all these tributaries means that a	wild



		viable meta-population could exist, where fish from different streams can interbreed, and where a catastrophe in one drainage (landslide, fire, etc) would not eliminate that population. There is no other broad-based network of streams with these characteristics in southwest Colorado or the southern Rocky mountains to provide the potential for cutthroat reintroduction at this scale.	
24	<b>Big Lick Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	wild
25	<b>Clear Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Occupied by pure Colorado River Cutthroat trout. Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	scenic
26	<b>Corral Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	wild
27	<del><b>Corral Draw</b></del>	<del><b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)</del>	<del>seen</del>
28	<b>Deer Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	Wild
29	<b>East Fork Hermosa</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Occupied by pure Colorado River Cutthroat trout. Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	rec
30	<b>Elk Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek. (Bottom section to bend in section 25 only.)</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	wild
31	<b>Hermosa Creek mainstem and Grassy Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above) In addition, the mainstem of the Hermosa is a significant recreation corridor, nationally known for the Hermosa Trail, a superb mountain bike singletrack that sometimes is on the streambank and sometimes on the stream-carved valley side wall. Fishermen, backpackers and motorcyclists also use the Hermosa Trail, and it is one of the few remote areas that can be accessed by motorized trail.	Ree scenic
32	<b>South Fork Hermosa Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	wild
33	<b>West Cross Creek</b>	<b>Tributary to Hermosa Creek.</b> Site for reintroduction of cutthroat meta-population: (see above)	wild
34	<b>Los Pinos</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	

	<b>River above Vallecito Reservoir</b>	The Weminuche Wilderness is the largest Wilderness area in Colorado, and draws visitors from across the nation and around the world. The Pine River Trail is one of half a dozen main access routes into the Wilderness, and gets heavy use all summer and fall. The trail follows the river, and for much of the length of this segment, the lush meadows of the River's floodplain are flanked by the sheer walls of glacier-carved granite. The Granite Peak Guard Station is an archeological site.	
35	<b>Lake Creek</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	wild
36	<b>Flint Creek</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	Wild
37	<b>Sierra Vandra Creek</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	Wild
38	<b>Snowslide Canyon</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	Wild
39	<b>Rincon la Osa</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	Wild
40	<b>Rincon la Vaca</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b>	Wild
41	<b>Vallecito Creek</b>	Vallecito Creek is another major access corridor to the Weminuche Wilderness, and is heavily used. In contrast to the Pine River, the valley of Vallecito Creek is narrow and V-shaped. Kayaking in the narrow class V rapids is popular. There are few rivers in the region that combine the stream size and the confined valley that produce this type of whitewater experience.	wild
42	<b>Piedra River Highway 160 to the forks</b>	<b>Previous Recommendation</b> The mainstem of the Piedra River (which includes all the sections from Hwy 160 to where it forks to East and Middle Forks) offers an exceptional whitewater rafting opportunity, with class IV and V rapids. It is also a regional draw for fishermen. From Indian Creek through First Box, the wild, rugged canyon section also has outstanding scenic characteristics The geologic ORV here is the Headwaters Complex, a timespan revealed in the canyon and valley side walls from a sequence that rivals the Grand Canyon in its exposure of geologic history	42a rec 42b wild 42c rec 42d wild
43	<b>East Fork Piedra River</b>	Within the wilderness it has the ORVs of scenic waterfalls, black swift nesting colonies, and Colorado	43a rec 43b wild

		River Cutthroat. <b>Staff excited about Wilderness portion only.</b>	
44	<b>Middle Fork Piedra River</b>	<b>Previous recommendation</b>  There is a Black Swift colony nesting at a waterfall.	44a rec 44b wild
45	Williams Creek (minus the reservoir)	The lowest section of Williams Creek has unique geology, with island capstones and ice caves that are part of the history of the region. Williams Creek in the Wilderness has outstanding waterfalls.	45a wild 45b rec 45c rec 45d wild
46	Augustora Creek	Augustora Creek is one of several tributaries to the Navajo River that contain Colorado River Cutthroat trout. The other streams are on private land, and were not included in this study.	Wild
47	Fourmile Creek	Fourmile Creek has two occupied Black Swift nests. The black swift is a USFS Sensitive Species and on the Partner's in Flight national watch list as a priority species for conservation attention. Colorado is thought to host up to 20% of the world's breeding population. The black swift nests adjacent to waterfalls, and the 12 occupied colonies on San Juan Public Lands account for more than 10% of Colorado's breeding population.	wild
48	Turkey Creek	Turkey Creek has two occupied Black Swift nests (see above) The segment is entirely in the Wilderness	wild
49	Himes Creek	Occupied Colorado river Cutthroat habitat.	wild
50	West Fork San Juan River	The West Fork of the San Juan River below the wilderness has an occupied Black Swift nest. The River has carved through a complex of Tertiary Oligocene pyroclastics (ash flows, tuffs and lava flows) (Tev) emplaced during the creation of the San Juan Volcanic field, a time of possibly the most violent volcanic explosions (caldera eruptions) of the last 4 billion years; exposures of massive layers of pyroclastics and volcanoclastics are the best exposure of the San Juan Volcanic field in Colorado.	50a rec 50b wild
51	Beaver Creek	Beaver Creek, tributary to the West Fork San Juan River in the Weminuche Wilderness, has Colorado River Cutthroat trout	wild
52	Wolf Creek and Fall Creek	The segment called "Wolf Creek and Fall Creek" encompasses two black swift nest sites in the Wolf Creek corridor on tributaries of Wolf Creek (Camp Creek and an unnamed tributary), one nest site on Lake Creek and one nest site at Fall Creek. Treasure Falls is an outstanding scenic feature along Highway 160.	rec
53	East Fork	East Fork San Juan River has black swifts nesting in	rec

	San Juan River	the corridor at the falls of Waterfall Creek. This stream is the prime example in the San Juan Mountains of an alpine glaciated fluvial system, ranging from sculpted headwaters through glaciated valley to narrow outwash canyons. There are abundant post-glacial features, including braided stream system, terminal and lateral moraines, the dramatic “gateway” entrance to the glacial valley, hanging valleys, and waterfalls (where the black swifts nest). There is also a National Register eligible archeological site	
54	Quartz Creek	One of the forks of Quartz Creek in the Wilderness has an occupied black swift nest.	wild

The streams that are eligible, with the only ORV being Archeology, are as follows:

**DOLORES WATERSHED**

55	Beaver Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	REC
56	Boggy Draw and House Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	REC
57	Dry Canyon	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Wild
58	Ferris Canyon	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic
59	Five Pine Canyon (Doe )	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Wild
60	Long Draw	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Rec
61	Unnamed trib to Beaver	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Rec
62	Lost Canyon	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic
63	Mavreeso Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic
64	Nicholas Wash	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic
65	Rock Spring Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Wild
66	Spruce Water Canyon	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic

MANCOS WATERSHED

67	West Mancos River, Box Canyon to Echo Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	scenic
----	---	--	--------

PIEDRA WATERSHED

68	Devil Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Scenic, rec
----	-------------	--	-------------

PINE WATERSHED

69	Burns Canyon	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Rec
70	Spring Creek	“National Register” eligible cultural resource site(s)	Rec

(1) Colorado’s Canyon Country. A Guide to Hiking and Floating BLM Wildlands,  
Pearson, Mark, Westcliffe Publishers, Englewood, CO

(2) Colorado Natural Heritage Program reports 2000 and 2004