

# River Protection Workgroup



Involving the public in protecting the natural values of selected streams while allowing water development to continue

Jan 27, 2010

The Honorable John Salazar  
326 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Salazar:

We are writing you regarding the collaborative community process that's been going on for the past two years on how to best manage the Hermosa Creek watershed north of Durango. This is one part of a broader multi-year process to achieve consensus about management of river basins across the San Juan National Forest by involving the public in protecting the natural values of selected streams while allowing water development to continue. The primary issue that brought this group together was the San Juan National Forest management plan's preliminary decision that a number of river segments are suitable for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

This effort was launched in April 2008, with the goal of bringing all interests into a discussion about the human and natural values in the Hermosa Creek watershed, and consider how those values might best be managed and protected. Many days and evenings of dialogue among a broad array of stakeholders have been conducted by the Hermosa Workgroup. These discussions were open to anyone who wanted to be included, and community members of all interests participated. This group has come to a consensus on how best to proceed at this time, and would greatly appreciate your involvement in a legislative solution. The principal elements of this consensus and potential legislation are as follows:

- In response to strong local sentiment for protecting the watershed, it was agreed to pursue legislative protection of the lands in the watershed separate from Hermosa Creek itself. This protection would include:
  - o A Special Management Area (SMA, or similar designation) of roughly 150,000 acres, the boundary for which would follow the exact boundary of the Hermosa Creek Watershed.
  - o A Hermosa Creek Wilderness of roughly 50,000 acres within the SMA, encompassing qualifying lands on the west side of Hermosa Creek. The eastern boundary of this wilderness would be set back from the Creek ¼ mile to avoid the effective prevention of most water development on the Creek with a boundary at or near the water's edge (this is consistent with the first item in this list).
  - o The inventoried roadless area within the SMA, but outside of the wilderness area, would be managed to remain unroaded, although some motorized use would be allowed.
  - o The San Juan National Forest would be directed to prepare a management plan for the SMA, including a comprehensive travel management plan.

**Contacts:**

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or

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[ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection](http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection)

- Motorized and mechanized use would be permitted only on roads and trails that are designated in the area's management plan.
- The entire SMA would be withdrawn from the mineral entry and leasing, with two exceptions. This would allow for limited infill claim filing and development, subject to standards and restrictions of federal and state laws and regulations, as well as the SMA's management plan. The two exceptions are:
  - An area totaling approximately 300-400 acres at the extreme northern boundary of the SMA where current mining activity is being conducted.
  - An area of approximately 1000 acres on the southwestern boundary of the SMA, surrounding a number of patented claims.
- The management of the portion of the SMA that lies outside both the wilderness and roadless area would be determined by the area's management plan, with fewer statutory restrictions than the other two. This "zone" would still be subject to the designated roads and trails provision described above, and to the mineral withdrawal (with the exceptions described above).
- Logging may be allowed in previously logged areas, though with restrictions based on impacts to water quality, the State of Colorado's Outstanding Waters designation, and other SMA resources.

Potential water protections on Hermosa Creek, including a possible Wild and Scenic River designation, will be discussed at a later time once four additional basin Public Workgroups are concluded for the Animas River, San Juan River -- East and West Forks, Vallecito Creek /Pine River, and the Piedra River. A number of issues that were identified during the Hermosa Creek Workgroup process will be incorporated into these discussions.

The Hermosa Workgroup has produced a report on the discussion process and the conclusions outlined above, which will be provided to you. This proposal was crafted in a cooperative manner, with good-faith discussions, over a period of two years. We believe it reflects the spectrum of human and natural values brought forth in these discussions, and incorporates the goals and opinions of stakeholders in the process. We ask that you consider the good work conducted to reach this point, and respectfully request that you and your staff initiate a legislative process to bring this vision to statutory reality.

Thank you for considering this proposal and the process that led to it. We stand ready to assist you in any way in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Marsha E. Porter-Norton  
Facilitator, River Protection Workgroup

On behalf of the **Hermosa Creek Drafting Committee** (Meghan Maloney, San Juan Citizen's Alliance; Steve Fearn, Southwestern Water Conservation District; Chuck Wanner, Five Rivers Chapter of Trout Unlimited; Jeff Widen, The Wilderness Society; Bruce Whitehead, Southwestern Water Conservation District; Mely Whiting, Trout Unlimited; Ed Zink, Hermosa Ditch Company) and advisors Thurman Wilson, volunteer (former USFS); and Dave Baker, San Juan Public Lands Center

In collaboration with the **Hermosa Creek Workgroup**