

## **San Juan River Workgroup**

Meeting 2 Summary

March 25, 2010

Final - 4 pages

**Meeting summary:** The meeting summary for February was approved with no changes.

**Review of workgroup process and purpose:** Marsha briefly recapped the group's purpose, goals and process. She said this will be a consensus-building process that takes into consideration everybody's views. It is not about voting or packing the room. This is a recommending group only, not a decision-making group. At the end of the process, she will produce a report, with the group's guidance, containing the group's recommendations. The report will go to the public lands managers and elected officials and may result in actions such as new legislation. The San Juan River Workgroup process is part of a larger, regional discussion about Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs) that involves four other workgroups, one of which has concluded its process. There will be a regional discussion of some of the thornier issues related to water protection after all the workgroups have finished their efforts.

Marsha said anyone who has information to bring to the table or sees incorrect information being presented should inform her.

Steve Fearn of the Southwestern Water Conservation District (SWCD) board said the River Protection Workgroup, which is overseeing the individual rivers' workgroups, was formed as a result of concerns about the WSR suitability of various streams in the area as determined by the San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC). Steve said the identification of a large number of stream segments in Southwest Colorado as suitable for WSR status poses real concerns for water-development interests and owners of water rights because there are some conflicts between WSR designation and Colorado water law. There is only one WSR in Colorado, the Poudre, and Steve believes there is good reason for that. He said there may be one or more stream segments in Southwest Colorado where WSR designation would make sense, and that option is still on the table, but representatives of water-development interests would like to come up with solutions for water protection that allow everybody to win.

Chuck Wanner of Trout Unlimited said it is important to deal with these issues on a community basis and seek solutions the community can support. He worked on the WSR designation of the Poudre River and believes the results have been good. There, the parties took into account existing water rights and created a water right from some of the water that was remaining. Chuck said there are many tools available besides WSR status to protect rivers, and it is also possible for the workgroup to decide to do nothing and just keep the status quo.

Marsha said more information will be provided about WSRs and the Wild and Scenic

Rivers Act. She will send group members an e-mail link to the WSR Act. Also, the National Park Service web site has good information on the act. The group also agreed to invite Roy Smith of the state BLM office, an expert on WSRs, to come give a presentation.

Mark Stiles, manager of the SJPLC and supervisor of the San Juan National Forest, agreed that the specter of WSR designation has prompted this process. However, he said this is not a WSR group, it's a rivers group. Mark explained that the Forest Service and BLM are obligated by law to analyze streams within their boundaries to ascertain their WSR eligibility or suitability.

Mark briefly explained the difference between WSR eligibility and suitability. Eligibility is an inventory-level look at the streams in the area; it is not a decision. It is based on whether a stream segment has one or more Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs), is free-flowing, and meets state standards for water quality. Suitability involves a decision on whether WSR status is an appropriate way to protect the ORVs. The agency will manage suitable streams to protect their ORVs until Congress makes a decision on whether that stream segment should gain WSR status or be taken off the list.

Marsha said she has been asked why land-protection measures such as wilderness designation have been included on the list of tools for the group to consider. She said, while the purpose of the group is to decide on water protection, sometimes that can be done through protection of the watershed.

**Ground rules:** The group came to consensus on ground rules for the process as follows (more rules can be added later if needed):

- Respectfully listen to others' opinions.
- One conversation at a time.
- Identify and get information with factual data.
- Seek to understand and then to be understood.
- Speak up and say what is on your mind.

**Discussion of values:** Marsha reviewed the values on the Initial Information Sheet and asked for additions or corrections. Under "recreation," suggested additions were: camping, photography, recreational geology (gold prospecting and rock-hounding), plain air painting, birding, visiting hot springs, and mushrooming.

In relation to the value of "fish", Buck Skillen of Trout Unlimited added that the native fish (suckers) are not game fish, but it is important to protect them because if they continue to decline in number, they could be listed as endangered.

The list of terrestrial wildlife includes a number of species identified as "USFS sensitive". Mark said these are species that are being watched to see whether their numbers are declining. They aren't yet listed as federally endangered, and the goal is to prevent them

from being listed. Listing occurs under the Endangered Species Act, and species can be classified as threatened or endangered, the most serious listing. If a species is listed, public-lands agencies must consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about any actions proposed on public lands that could adversely affect the species. Mark said the black swift, a USFS sensitive species in the San Juan River watershed, has a very limited nesting habitat, nesting only behind certain types of waterfalls. A large portion of their nesting habitat is in Colorado, and much of that is in the San Juan drainage. On some other Southwest Colorado streams, the black swift is identified as an ORV.

Mike Reid of the Colorado Division of Wildlife suggested adding to the list of wildlife the river otter, which he said may have occupied the San Juan East and West Forks, and the boreal toad, which may be present in the higher elevations. Mike agreed to provide a list of state sensitive species to flesh out the list of terrestrial wildlife; however, it was noted that the list is not a list of every species present in the watershed.

In relation to the value of “geology“, Marsha noted that this was the key value that led to the West Fork being preliminarily suitable and the East Fork being eligible for WSR consideration. Glenn Raby said it isn't the geology itself but the exposure of the geology that makes the river corridors special.

The group suggested other values to be added to the list as follows:

- Mushrooming
- Flora in general
- Draba flower species and other USFS sensitive flora species
- Colorado National Heritage – East Fork species and plant communities
- Borns Lake – historic; Dutch Henry Born homesteaded; fish raising
- Water quality of raw water
- Grazing
- Hot springs
- Elwood Pass Road – original
- Private property
- Homesteading and mining
- Water rights
- Watershed
- Ecosystem
- Economic benefits
- Connectivity for wildlife; contiguous to Wilderness; movement
- West Fork is gateway to our community
- Wilderness values

- Wild area
- Scenic values
- Diverse ecosystem encompassing a range of elevations
- Life-zone diversity from ponderosa pine up to alpine
- Lack of invasives – healthy ecosystem
- Quiet – ability to get away from noise
- Public access (also the balance present between access and over-visitation)
- Timber and firewood

Marsha will write some of these elements into a draft values statement.

Scott Brinton of the Colorado Division of Water Resources said this area has one of the highest concentrations of stream gauges in the United States. Scott presented and described hydrographs based on information from the U.S. Geological Survey.

**Water quality:** Meghan Maloney of the SJCA will bring a two-page sheet with more information on water quality. More information also will be provided on the water-protection plan for the municipal water source that supplies Pagosa Springs.

**Next meeting and future schedule:** The next meeting will be Thursday, April 22, at the Ross Aragon Community Center cafeteria. Marsha will update the information sheet to reflect the group's corrections and send it out via e-mail. The group will continue to meet on the fourth Thursday of each month except November (because of Thanksgiving). The goal is to finish by the end of the year, but a few extra meetings can be added if needed.