

Hermosa Creek Workgroup

Meeting #3 Summary

June 3, 2008

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

Marsha announced that the Tools document has been sent via e-mail to members of the Hermosa Creek Workgroup (“Hermosa Workgroup”) and will also be available on the Web site, ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection. The Tools document is a draft, and Hermosa Workgroup members are welcome to suggest changes.

Review of Hermosa Creek Initial information Sheet and beginning discussion of Hermosa Creek’s values: Hermosa Workgroup members suggested changes and additions to the Initial Information Sheet and Values as follows:

Values

- The Hermosa Workgroup asked which values are the official Outstandingly Remarkable Values (“ORVs”) identified by the San Juan National Forest. San Juan Public Lands Center (“SJPLC”) Manager Mark Stiles said both recreation and the potential for native Colorado River cutthroat trout habitat have been identified as ORVs, but the bulk of the discussion is based on the potential meta-population of Colorado cutthroat trout. Much of that potential habitat lies in the tributaries of Hermosa Creek, whereas much of the recreation occurs on the mainstem.
- Add “Hermosa Creek’s natural flow variation”. It is beneficial to maintain a natural flow regime in the Animas River as well.
- Add “the sense of remoteness in the Hermosa area”.
- Add “elk habitat”.
- Hermosa Creek was the first drainage outside a wilderness area to be designated an Outstanding Water of the State of Colorado.

Concerns

- Under “Recreational use”, the sheet states that no ATVs are allowed. This is incorrect. ATV use is allowed on portions of the main trail. **Discussion:** Thurman Wilson, SJPLC Assistant Manager for Planning, clarified that some motorized trails may be allowed in roadless areas. It was suggested that a map be provided showing the motorized trails in the Hermosa Creek area. The San Juan National Forest visitors map does provide this information, but it can be added as a layer to the maps provided to the Hermosa Workgroup. The question was raised of whether the Hermosa Workgroup was straying from the topic by discussing motorized uses. It

was stated that motorized uses may affect water and that the roadless area could be one tool for protection. However, the Hermosa Workgroup will not delve into the motorized issue except as it affects water.

- “Horseback riding” should be added to “Recreational use”.
- Fish and other aquatic species are a benchmark, an indicator of how healthy the ecosystem is.
- Within the table on Colorado Water Conservation Board (“CWCB”) Instream Flows, add dates to those listings. The CWCB can provide that information.
- Add “carrying capacity” to concerns. There is a maximum number of people the wilderness can sustain. Every value can be over-used. Some protections might actually attract more people.
- Water-rights development could be a Concern, Value and Opportunity. How will this evolve? How does it play into the proposed Hermosa land exchange involving 160 acres of private land in the area?
- The Initial Information Sheet mentions a “G2” tree community under “Additional Values identified by the RPW Steering Committee”. This was explained. A G2 community is one identified by its rarity, on a scale of G1-G5, with G1 being the rarest. In the case of Hermosa Creek, the white fir - Colorado blue spruce – narrowleaf cottonwood/Rocky Mountain maple community represents a rare confluence of those tree species. The confluence is what is rare, not the individual species themselves.
- Newer stream flow data is needed. Under “Stream Flow Data”, the Initial Information Sheet cites information from a gauge for the years 1920 to 1980. That gauge below the National Forest boundary no longer exists. More recent information is needed. Gauges can be costly, but the Dolores River Dialogue just secured a gauge for the lower Dolores River.
- Is there the potential for a dam on the lower portion of Hermosa Creek? The answer is that there are no plans or water rights for a dam on Hermosa Creek.
- Information on grazing allotments should list their proximity to water.
- Under “Uses Which Require Special Permits”, a statement should be added noting that there are no unallocated special permits available (those granted by the USFS).
- The paragraph about “Potential Water Diversion and Storage Locations” is to be replaced with a more detailed graph.

Opportunities

- Conduct a logging erosion study. The Animas River was running orange recently. Study logging as a possible source point. Trails could be a source point as well. Ascertain why erosion is occurring.
- Conduct a survey on recreational use with the intent of finding out how many user-days the river itself is experiencing, not the trails. How much recreational use is taking place on the river, through kayakers, fishermen, etc.? **Discussion:** The SJPLC does not have such data. A survey could

be difficult to conduct. Fishermen can be hard to see and count. A survey could be put on sites such as www.mountainbuzz.com, a boaters' Web site. The number of recreational users is linked to the concern about carrying capacity. The River Protection Workgroup Steering Committee will consider how to acquire the data.

- A major agenda item for a future meeting should involve water rights and how much water is available in Hermosa Creek. How does the Animas-La Plata Project affect Hermosa Creek? Could a potential federal reserved water right affect the situation? What are alternative water sources?

Discussion of maps: Maps of the Hermosa Creek Watershed were presented via Power Point. These can be converted into PDFs and made available on the Web site.

Next meeting: The next meeting of the Hermosa Workgroup will be Tuesday, July 1, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., at a location to be announced.

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