

## 2004 SAN MIGUEL RIVER RANGER REPORT

The twelfth season of the River Ranger Program again focused on watershed resource and recreation monitoring, and environmental education. The river ranger works to mitigate recreation impacts on variously owned and managed lands of the watershed. Funding was provided this season by USFS, BLM, San Miguel County, Town of Telluride, Town of Mountain Village, Town of Ophir, Telluride Foundation and private donations.

Resource monitoring and protection efforts continued. The river ranger helped secure funding and operated an air quality gauging station in Waterfall Canyon, collecting precipitation samples to be analyzed at the Mountain Research Station in Nederland. This year, event sampling was performed, with rainfall being collected after each storm event to try to isolate where pollutants may be coming from. An isotope sampling project in the Howard Fork drainage was completed by an interagency team headed by EPA. Monitoring of previously restored sites continues. Some native grasses and spruce trees survived in revegetation areas. The campsite designation process continues. Boulders placed previously are effective in reducing garbage and resource impacts, while areas with vehicle access or bordering the highway continue to be relentlessly trashed.

River patrols documented use patterns, sediment release, water levels, weather patterns, and wildlife sightings. Monitoring of projects affecting the river channel continued. The river ranger acted as a coordinator for the Greenbucks program, leading regular cleanup/weed removal sessions throughout the upper watershed. Coordination with the San Miguel Weed Program continued.

Monthly monitoring of upper watershed tributary flow levels was continued. Information was shared with County Public Health and Environmental Staff, Town of Telluride staff, and other interested agencies. Biweekly monitoring of Howard Fork flow levels was continued for American Geological Consultants, a contractor for the Trust for Land Restoration, as part of an ongoing study of the water quality in the Howard Fork.

A watershed water quality monitoring program was initiated with the cooperative purchase of a YSI water quality meter. Water quality measurements were taken on a monthly basis at approximately 22 locations. A database was created. The photo documentation program was also continued, with ongoing emphasis on upstream tributaries, high country mining effects, and in channel river conditions.

Recreation use monitoring also continued, with a focus on inspecting and documenting commercial and private river use for BLM, and trail and high country use. River patrols were performed specifically to monitor weekend recreational and commercial use of popular stretches of river. In addition, extensive vehicle and hiking patrols emphasized educational contacts and distribution of the Leave No Trace/ San Miguel Watershed map/brochures. Watershed brochure boxes were maintained at most public access recreation sites,

and map/brochures provided to businesses and visitor information centers throughout the watershed. In addition, recreation monitoring was performed for the USFS and San Miguel County to document use on Ophir, Imogene, and Black Bear Passes, in an effort to determine amount and types of use, and off-road resource impacts.

Efforts continued to facilitate interagency cooperation in watershed management, and the river ranger remained involved in watershed coalition activities. Educational efforts continued, with a watershed newsletter produced in June. The newsletter is designed to help keep citizens, government agencies, and private groups informed about current watershed issues. It is distributed throughout the watershed, and beyond to partner agencies. It is mailed to approximately 700 watershed citizens. The river ranger also participated in Telluride Institute's Watershed Education Project on an advisory level

In summary, progress continues toward better recreation and resource management. The cooperative funding provided for the last twelve seasons allows the river ranger to work with watershed partners to better manage and protect the San Miguel Watershed, preserve its riparian ecosystems, promote responsible recreation, and mitigate resource damage in impacted areas. The funding is greatly appreciated, and the river ranger hopes to continue to work for our watershed in the future.