

SAN MIGUEL RIVER RANGER REPORT 2007

The fifteenth season of the River Ranger Program once 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, The Nature Conservancy, Town of Ophir, Telluride Foundation and private donations.

Resource monitoring and protection efforts continued. The river ranger secured funding to collect surface water samples monthly for 5 months to continue the follow up to previous five summers of air quality monitoring. The reason for the sampling is to determine how air pollution documented for the last several years is affecting Waterfall creek.

Monitoring of previously restored sites continues. Some native grasses and spruce trees have survived in revegetation areas. 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. New campgrounds built at RV Corner/Caddis Flats, Lower Beaver, and Ledges by the BLM consolidate recreation impacts, and provide additional toilets and boat ramps. Use at these areas increased this season.

River patrols documented commercial and private use patterns, sediment release, water levels, weather patterns, and wildlife sightings. In addition coordination of strainer removal by BLM rangers and local river guides was performed. Efforts were made to alert boaters to hazards via the local radio station and the email list of the local whitewater group. Weed removal at popular sites is ongoing.

Monthly monitoring of upper watershed tributary flow levels was continued. Information is shared with local government and other interested agencies. The watershed water quality monitoring program was continued, with the cooperatively owned YSI water quality meter. Water quality measurements were taken on a monthly basis at approximately 25-30 locations. The database was updated. 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. Funding was raised to update and reprint brochures for the summer. Watershed brochure boxes were maintained at most public access recreation sites, and

map/brochures provided to businesses and visitor information centers throughout the watershed.

Efforts continued to facilitate interagency cooperation in watershed management. The river ranger remained involved in watershed coalition activities. Educational efforts continued, with a watershed newsletter produced in June. This year the newsletter incorporated reports from various scientists involved in the production of the 05 watershed report card. The newsletter served as the report card update. 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 900 watershed citizens. It is also posted on the watershed coalition website at www.sanmiguelwatershed.org. Later this fall, all the previous watershed newsletters since the project began in 1995 will be posted on the Telluride Institute and Watershed Coalition websites.

During late 06, the river ranger attended CDOW's Riverwatch training. This statewide program is sponsored by CDOW and the Colorado Watershed Network. A local program was developed and initiated in January of 2007. Four locations on the Howard Fork of the San Miguel are being sampled to provide more information about the impacts of the mine adits and tailings in the valley on the Howard Fork and San Miguel, especially pertaining to pending tailings cleanup by the USFS. State labs test for metals and nutrients, and data is entered into a statewide database, available to the public at riverwatch@state.co.us.

In summary, progress continues toward better recreation and resource management. The cooperative funding provided for the last fifteen 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.