

SAN MIGUEL RIVER RANGER REPORT 2006

The fourteenth 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 4 months as a follow up to the last five summers of air quality monitoring. The reason for the sampling is to determine how the air pollution documented for the last several years is effecting the 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, Lower Beaver, and Ledges by the BLM consolidate recreation impacts, and provide additional toilets and boat ramps.

River patrols documented use patterns, sediment release, water levels, weather patterns, and wildlife sightings. In addition coordination or strainer removal by BLM rangers and local river guides was performed. Weed removal at popular sites continues.

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. 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. 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. Funding was raised to reprint enough 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. In addition, recreation monitoring was performed for the USFS and San Miguel County to document use on Ophir, 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.

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