

LOWER DOLORES WORKING GROUP FACT SHEET

Meeting #4

March 16, 2009

Archaeology, geology, and Wild and Scenic Rivers

Archaeology and geology

Presenter: Vince MacMillan

Field archaeologist, Dolores Public Lands Office

Archaeology:

- Archaeological resources in the Lower Dolores River Valley date back about 12,000 years. These resources include rare pre-historic rock shelters, rock-art panels, prehistoric cliff dwellings and quarries used for stone tools. Also present in the valley are historic Euro- and Native American sites, including historic ranches, uranium mines, and Native American sweat lodges and hogans left from the uranium-mining era.
- Primary threats to these cultural resources are impacts from recreational users and from cattle-grazing. Cows tend to group inside rock shelters and will trample a looted hole, compacting layers and causing further damage. At some sites, all the surface artifacts listed in site documents from 10 years ago have now vanished, taken by visitors.



David Graf/ColoradoDivision of Wildlife

The Pyramid formation

Fact
Only about 3.6 percent of the Lower Dolores River corridor managed by the BLM has been surveyed for cultural resources.

- Needed: funding to survey and find sites that are being damaged; and further education and outreach, e.g., through interpretive panels and site stewards at river put-ins.

Geology:

Geology in the Lower Dolores River corridor spans 100 million years. The rock layers range from Wingate sandstone at the bottom, dating from the Early Jurassic Period about 200 million years ago, to Dakota sandstone at the top, which is approximately 100 million years old.

Background on Wild and Scenic Rivers

Presenter:

Steve Beverlin

Manager, Dolores Public Lands Office

The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides for the preservation and protection of “certain selected rivers” that possess “outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. . .” In 1975, a total of 194 river miles of the Dolores River from McPhee to the Colorado-Utah border, with a few spots excluded, was identified for study for possible Wild and Scenic River (WSR) designation. The 2007 Draft Revised Resource Management Plan for the San Juan Public Lands found 109 miles of the Lower Dolores, and some tributaries, from McPhee to Bedrock to be preliminarily “suitable” for WSR status, meaning they meet the criteria for WSR eligibility and are judged to be “manageable” as WSRs.

Lower Dolores
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Types of Wild and Scenic River

There are three categories of WSR, based on the type and degree of human development associated with the stream and stream corridor:

- **Recreational:** the type most impacted by human activity. It is readily accessible by roads or railroads and may have had some impoundment or diversion in the past.
- **Scenic:** largely primitive and undeveloped, with no impoundments.
- **Wild:** the most natural WSR. The water is unpolluted and the shoreline is primitive. Generally there are only trails in the corridor, not roads.

Livestock-grazing and historic buildings can occur in all three categories. Most multiple-use activities are allowed under the “scenic” and “recreational” categories. “Wild” rivers, however, must remain primitive and undeveloped.

Working Group discussions and thoughts

- Major concerns and issues about WSR status for the Dolores were the **types of uses that would be allowed** and what **impacts** there might be to any **private property** in the area.
- Of great concern was what effect a WSR designation would have on **existing water rights**. Designation of a WSR by Congress generally carries with it a **federal reserved water right**. However, some Working Group members said it is theoretically possible to have a WSR without a federal reserved water right.
- It was asked **how much water is actually needed** to protect the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the river.
- There was discussion of whether a special designation would **bring much-needed protection to the resources** or would draw so many more people into the corridor that they would **cause further damage**. Some members stated that, because of increasing population in the West, more people will come regardless, increasing the need for greater protection.
- A common theme was the need to **continue to allow historic uses** while providing protection for the resources.
- Some individuals said that there was **no reason to seek WSR status** since the same uses (e.g., grazing and recreation) that occur now could continue after the designation. Others said places like the Lower Dolores are getting rarer and rarer, and WSR status can **prevent other federal entities from doing something to damage the area**, such as building impoundments.
- The Working Group would like **more information** on the possible impacts of WSR designation, the legalities involved in federal reserved water rights, and instream flows. Presenters may be brought to speak to the group on such topics.

NO decisions or recommendations were made at this meeting.

The Lower Dolores Management Plan Working Group is working to provide recommendations for updating the Dolores Public Lands Office (Forest Service/BLM) 1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan. The Working Group includes diverse stakeholders with many perspectives and interests in the Lower Dolores River Valley. Its goals are to gather information, identify values worthy of protection in the planning area, formulate ideas for protection of the values, and make recommendations to the Dolores Public Lands Office. The Working Group will meet until Fall 2009.

Presentations, documents, meeting summaries, agendas and other information related to the Lower Dolores Working Group process are posted at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drd/>.