

The Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan
Recreational Uses and Public Lands Chapter

Adopted August 4, 2005
By the Routt County Planning Commission

2.2 Recreational Uses and Public Lands

2.2.1 Background.

Approximately 74% of the planning area is comprised of public land. These lands are managed by the USFS's Routt National Forest (71%), State of Colorado (1.5%), and the Bureau of Land Management (1.5%). Ninety five percent of this public land within the planning area is in the Routt National Forest (approximately 213,500 acres). With the majority of lands in the Valley in public ownership, this Plan integrates recommendations for private lands with public land management.

Recreational uses occur primarily on the public lands surrounding the RCR 129, Seedhouse Road (CR64) and CR 62 corridors. Included are the Routt National Forest and Mount Zirkel Wilderness as well as Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks. Other public lands in the planning area include about 1600 acres of land managed by the Colorado State Land Board and about 4,775 acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

Public lands support a variety of uses such as wildlife habitat, timber, grazing, mining and hunting. More recently, outdoor recreation opportunities have attracted increasing numbers of residents and visitors to the Valley. The growing popularity of the summer and winter trails (including the groomed multi-use trail network) and guest ranches also generates tourism activity in the Valley. Some guest ranches contract the services of other local guides and outfitters. Private guides and outfitters provide recreational services primarily on public lands. These businesses are permitted to provide services for a specified level of use of specific permitted areas on the National Forest. Additionally, hunting and fishing guides and outfitters require permits from the state outfitters registry.

Since the adoption of the Upper Elk River Valley Plan in 1999, there has been a noticeable increase in recreational users – especially snowmobilers. Reasons for this vary, but are mainly due to the quality and quantity of snow in North Routt, the growing popularity of snowmobiles, drought conditions in other parts of the state and country, use fees in other areas, and the vast, uncrowded areas accessible from North Routt trailheads. Problems have surfaced, because of the increase of users, such as:

- Impacts on the ability of the County Road system (CR's 129, 64 & 62) to handle the increase in users, and parking on county roads

- Trespass complaints
- Conflicts between snowmobilers and vehicles
- Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users
- Noise and odor complaints from residential neighborhoods (incompatible uses)
- Overcrowding at trailheads and trailhead proximity to residential neighborhoods
- Sanitary issues at trailheads and at the amenities that serve tourists and locals
- Shortage of amenities for recreational users, such as adequate overnight camping areas at or near trailheads

As the popularity of this area increases, these problems, if not addressed, will only get worse.

In 2003, Routt County Master Plan included a definition of “Residential Neighborhood” as *“An assembly of at least five (5) homes located on lots having an average lot size equivalent to the Mountain Residential Estate (MRE) zone district or higher. Such neighborhoods are not found in the A/F zone district, unless approved under the Land Preservation Subdivision Exemption, Minor Development Subdivision Exemption, or platted or recorded lots meeting this description recorded prior to the adoption of the Zoning Resolution.”* A map depicting such areas within the study area is shown on page 36. It was determined under the Master Plan that “Residential Neighborhoods” would be seen as different than other lands in rural Routt County. This difference could be an important factor in land use decisions.

Routt National Forest. The Routt National Forest supports many different uses and is one of the most popular recreational attractions in northwest Colorado. Forest Service officials have reported a dramatic increase in the use of the National Forest in recent years. The Mount Zirkel Wilderness covers a large percentage of the Forest in the planning area. No motorized or mechanized vehicles (such as bicycles) are allowed in the wilderness area but hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, fishing and llama trekking are all popular uses.

Generally, the areas outside of the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness in the Valley are managed to allow for a variety of uses such as logging, grazing and motorized recreation. Summer motorized sports such as all-terrain vehicles (ATV’s), 4x4’s, and motorcycles and snowmobiles are all popular. Mountain biking is also becoming increasingly common on Forest Service property in this part of the County.

State Parks. Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks support many water-based recreational activities and camping. Steamboat Lake State Park is a staging area for snowmobiling. In 2004, 370,676 people visited Steamboat Lake State Park (the Park) (up from over 250,000 in 1997). Recently the Park has constructed the "Poverty Bar Trail" (also known as the Placer Trail) which is a summer, non-motorized trail that connects the Park to Forest Service Road 410 near Hahn's Peak Village and the Quealy Trail which provides wintertime, multiple-use access to the National Forest. The park has "hardened" some campsites to prevent erosion and has constructed "camper cabins." Park planners do not intend to increase the number of sites in the near future. Park officials believe that these improvements will better accommodate year-round visitors to the Park and increase the Park's popularity as a trailhead for both winter time motorized and non-motorized users. The Park completed a new visitor's center and Park headquarters in 1998 in conformance with their master plan that was approved by the County.

2.2.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

As the primary economic generator in the Valley, the recreation and tourism industry is integral to the Valley's economy. With the growth of this industry, concerns about how to manage its impacts increase. Coalitions of residents and public land managers continue to address this concern. These discussions are occurring in the context of use management, environmental protection, and the economic environment for Routt County.

Routt National Forest. According to a USFS study for the Hahn's Peak area: "Recreational use on the Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears District continues to increase dramatically. Inquiries and applications for special use permits to conduct commercial activities currently exceed the District's capacity to properly respond to the applicants in a timely manner."

User days under existing USFS permits and applications for new permits have increased along with general public use. The majority of USFS permits in the Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears District are issued for the Upper Elk area. Opportunities for new permits are limited to keep commercial activities within acceptable environmental and social constraints. The USFS does not issue outfitter/guide permits in the District until it analyzes the current conditions for a given area.

According to USFS increased use from non-guided, public users have caused noticeable impacts on the Forest's natural resources and infrastructure. The USFS objective for public users is to disperse use from heavily used areas, especially within the Wilderness, to less used areas and trails by maintaining and signing alternative areas. Over the past decade the USFS has increased its effort to update and maintain signs on roads and trails to guide users and reduce the number of violations of travel management regulations.

Hunting season is one of the heaviest use periods for USFS lands in the Valley resulting in increased horse and ATV traffic. In addition, snowmobiling is an

increasingly popular activity. Adequate forest access and miles of trails groomed by local clubs and guides provide excellent conditions for this activity. More backcountry skiers are also coming to the Upper Elk area.

As recreation activities become more common, parking congestion at popular trailheads has become an issue with local residents, the USFS and County road crews. (See the section on "Transportation"). Conflicts between snowmobiles and non-motorized uses such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing have increased as the number of users grows.

Routt National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. The USFS completed a Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Routt National Forest in February 1998. The Draft of this Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement presented six different management alternatives addressing large land areas with designated prescriptive uses ranging from pristine wilderness to more intensely managed activities. Each of the alternatives had a different emphasis based upon the aggregate size, location and geographic configuration of each prescription type. After much public involvement, the Forest Service adopted one of these alternatives.

To address issues of local importance, the USFS has initiated studies to analyze the capacity and impacts of recreational activities. The USFS will consider the recommendations of this Plan in its effort to recognize local concerns.

USFS also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Routt County that requires each entity to inform the other regarding land use planning and decision making.

Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks. Visitation at Steamboat Lake State Park increased 48% between 1997 and 2004. The Master Plan for the Park outlines improvements and additions to Park facilities in the future as funding becomes available. Included among these planned improvements are more improved camping areas providing hookups for recreational vehicles. Short-term plans do not show an increase in the number of campsites.

2.2.3 Goals.

To maintain the open space and rural character of the Upper Elk River Valley; recognizing the shift in the Valley's economy from agriculture and mineral extraction to recreation and tourism, the Plan encourages responsible public and private land use management.

2.2.4 Policies.

- (1) Encourage and support the United States Forest Service and Steamboat Lake State Park to continue to seek the input of the local community as to future policies affecting the Upper Elk River portion of the National Forest.

- (2) Encourage and support USFS's and other agencies' efforts to enforce its regulations on National Forest lands especially during heavy use periods such as hunting season.
- (3) Discourage development of permanent commercial structures on National Forest lands.
- (4) Encourage alternate dispersed trailheads and access to recreational destination areas to relieve congestion while minimizing negative impacts to residential neighborhoods and the residential and natural environment.
- (5) The cumulative impacts of additional uses should be considered when determining their appropriateness.
- (6) Guided tour routes should be located and operated to avoid negative impacts on residential areas.
- (7) The extent of new commercial recreational uses shall be determined by the constraints upon them, including, but not limited to, parcel size, topography and geologic stability, wildlife, wildfire, access and impacts to the County Road system, proximity to incompatible uses, and the cumulative impacts of all applicable uses in the area.
- (8) Encourage continuing dialogue between the Routt National Forest and State Parks to communicate problems, opportunities, and concerns regarding each other's facilities.
- (9) Encourage a partnership with the Routt National Forest and other agencies in providing educational facilities, including trailhead kiosks and other similar signage that will inform visitors about proper use of public lands and trespass issues.
- (10) Encourage the Forest Service to continue to work with local recreation groups to designate non-motorized winter use areas.
- (11) Support Steamboat Lake State Park's effort to acquire buffer zones and/or place conservation easements on lands around the park.
- (12) New permitted recreational uses shall be located away from or have their impacts buffered from defined residential neighborhoods.
- (13) Routt County strongly opposes any attempts to modify the existing, free-flowing status of the Elk River.
- (14) Separate non-motorized from motorized uses to avoid conflicts. Use natural or cultural boundaries (roads) so that boundaries are clearly defined.

2.2.6 Existing Implementation Measures.

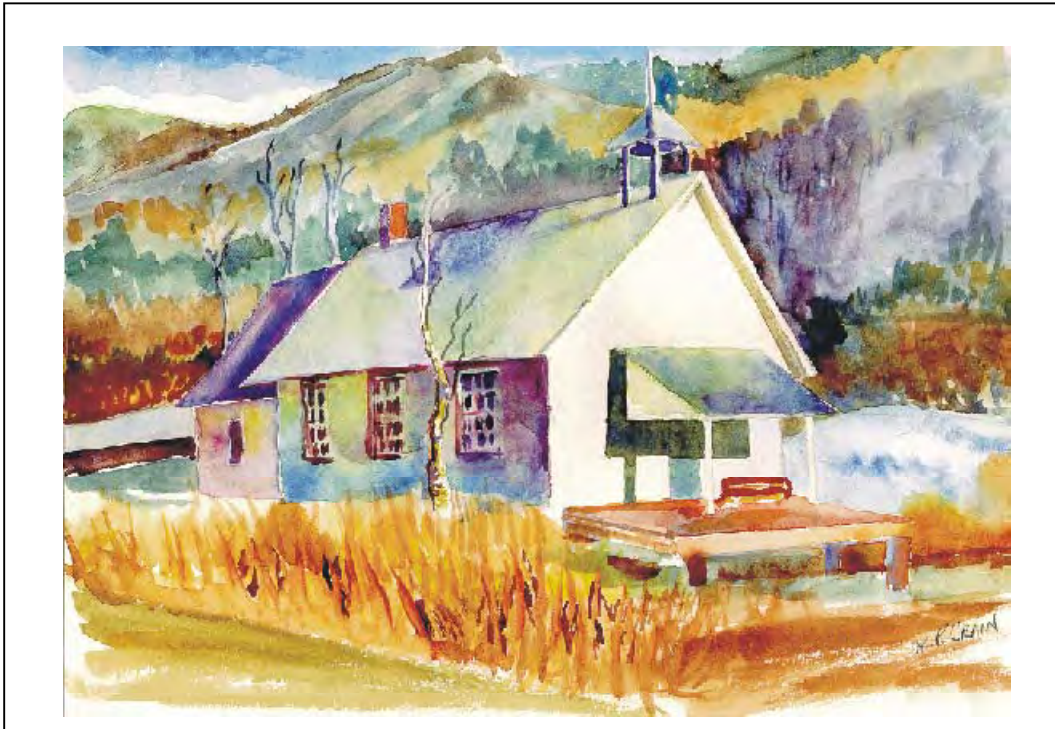
- (1) Implementation of these policies requires continued communication, coordination, and cooperation between Routt County and other public agencies that exercise control over use and development of public lands. Informal agreements between the County and these agencies are in operation now.
- (2) Intergovernmental agreements to formalize the relationship between the County and these agencies have not been approved.

2.2.6 Action Items.

- (1) Schedule regular public community meetings with the USFS, Steamboat Lake State Park, and other public lands management agencies to bring the community up-to-date with current issues and upcoming activities.
- (2) The County should continue referring planning petitions for private land development to the Forest Service for its input.
- (3) Continue partnership efforts between State Parks and the County in future planning efforts.
- (4) Encourage Steamboat Lake State Park to purchase fee title, acquire the development rights, or negotiate deed restrictions on lands adjoining Steamboat Lake State Park.
- (5) The County should work with Steamboat Lake State Park, the USFS, and recreational user groups to develop a master recreational signage and parking plan for the study area. Such plan should include directional, informational, and site signage for, but not be limited to, County roads, parking areas, trailheads and trails, and major public recreational destination areas.
- (6) Routt County encourages North Routt citizens and organizations to continue to work together to achieve goals. The Steamboat Lake Snow Club's Winter Use Parking Plan should continue to be updated as situations change, and be brought to the BCC, Sheriff, and Road and Bridge Department for continued implementation.
- (7) The County encourages the USFS to create a recreational users parking lot on public land that will not impact defined Residential Neighborhoods.

UPPER ELK RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY PLAN

ROUTT COUNTY, COLORADO



Adopted February 4, 1999

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

The *Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan* (the Plan) is a comprehensive, long-range plan that presents a community vision for the future of the Upper Elk River Valley Planning area (the Valley) within Routt County, Colorado. The Plan focuses on land use and other human activities, but it also takes into account the social, environmental and economic well being of the community. This Plan is considered an amendment to the *Routt County Master Plan*.

The Plan presents the vision for the future of the Valley and identifies general goals, specific policies, and follow-up action items for each of the key elements of this vision. These key elements include Agriculture; Housing and Development, Recreational Uses and Public Lands, Business; Industry and Commercial Uses; Wildlife and Natural Resources; Steamboat Lake Subdivision; Transportation; and Public Utilities and Services.

1.2 EVOLUTION OF THE PLAN

This version of the Plan integrates a previous Draft of the *Upper Elk River Valley Community Plan* (called the Blue Draft) with a subsequent planning effort. The Blue Draft, released in October 1997, forms the basis of most of the background information provided in Chapter 2 of this Plan. A second planning process was initiated in the

spring of 1998 by the Routt County Commissioners because of concerns expressed by some members of the community that the process needed improvement. As a result of these concerns, the Commissioners chose to hire an outside planning team to develop a public process and revised plan for the Upper Elk River Valley. The Commissioners also appointed a Steering Committee whose sole purpose was guide and monitor the public process while reporting back to their various constituent groups.

Through a series of interviews with a cross section of community members, meetings with the Steering Committee, and conversations with the Board of County Commissioners, the planning team observed that there was no commonly held belief about the need for or purpose of a plan for the Upper Elk River Valley. In response to this lack of consensus, the Planning Team designed a series of six community workshops. The well-attended workshops were a forum to elicit perspectives from the community about the future of the Valley, to explain the legal basis and effect of a master planning document and to evaluate the policies articulated in the Blue Draft. From this process, a consensus on a new list of policies and action items was reached.

Participants also agreed-to disagree about some of the points of view. In Section 3.0 of this Plan, the

agreed-to policies and action items are consolidated. There was absolutely no disagreement that the Upper Elk River Valley is a desirable place exactly the way it is today. Thus, much of the public process emphasized ways to preserve the existing character and mix of land uses.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

- Chapter One: Introduction - This Chapter provides the context and basis for developing this plan, the process by which the plan was developed, and recommendations for how the plan should be utilized.
- Chapter Two: The Community Plan: Goals and Policies Background and Issues - Descriptions of current conditions, opportunities and challenges associated with development in the Upper Elk River Valley are included. Goals and policies derived from the public workshop process are presented for seven elements. These elements are Agriculture; Housing and Development; Recreational Uses and Public Lands; Business, Industry and Commercial Uses; Wildlife and Natural Resources; Transportation; Public Infrastructure, Facilities and Services; and Steamboat Lake Subdivision. For each set of goals and policies, any existing known implementation tools are described and new implementation methods are recommended as action items. Each section also provides a description and matrix and summary of priority actions to implement the Upper Elk River

Valley Community Plan. Key components include developing intergovernmental agreements and joint planning with federal, state and County or District agencies, and modifications to the County's zoning and subdivision regulations.

1.4 PLAN BOUNDARIES

The Upper Elk River Community Plan boundaries have been defined to include the private lands along Routt county Road (RCR) 129 corridor and the adjacent public lands. The planning area corresponds to the North Routt Fire District boundaries and county tax areas 16 and 17. Although different areas within the boundaries of the planning area are experiencing different challenges, the level of pressure from growth is consistent throughout the planning area. Geographically, the area is roughly defined by the Sand Mountain divide on the west; the Continental Divide on the east; an east-west line passing above Columbine on the north and a line passing east-west below Big Creek on the south.

Over 220,000 acres or 74% of the area is public land, including those of the Routt National Forest, Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks, Colorado State Land Board (SLB) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Because such a large portion of the area is public lands, the recommendations for public lands can have influence beyond the set boundaries of the planning areas. For example, a recommendation for Forest Service land outside the planning area can generate impact within the planning area itself.

At the community workshops, the participants considered but rejected the concept of dividing the Plan Area into smaller, sub-regions. Participants concluded after extended debate that the issues facing the Upper Elk River Valley should not be compartmentalized based upon geography.

1.5 EFFECT OF THE PLAN

A master plan describes the common vision for growth of a community or area. By agreeing to and documenting the community's vision for the future, decision-makers can act more consistently, thereby avoiding arbitrary or politicized land use and zoning actions. Individual land use and zoning petitions must still be considered on their own merits.

A master plan should describe the desired community's preferred character of the future as well as identify specific, practical actions to achieve those ends. Additionally a master plan should offer mitigation measures for the impact of development.

Under Colorado law, a master-planning document is advisory only, unless plan elements have been adopted as regulatory provisions within zoning, subdivision, or other land use regulations. Presently, there are several County land use regulations that require compliance with the *Routt County Master Plan* as a condition of land use approval. For example, the County will not approve requests for special use permits, subdivision or Planned Unit

Developments (PUDs) unless the application conforms to the *Master Plan*. To get approval for a rezoning, the applicant must show that they have complied with one of three requirements. Two of the three require compliance with the *Master Plan*. This means that under the current regulatory scheme, and the status of an adopted Plan, none of the subsequent requests should be approved unless they conform to this Plan, the Countywide Master plan and the Zoning Resolution.

1.6 STATEMENT OF VALUES

The Upper Elk River Valley Statement of Values is a set of overall goals to pursue for the future growth and development of the area. The Vision statement is broad and long-term, establishing the framework for guiding more specific policies and actions by the County. The statement provides a snapshot of the important elements of the community and the character or attributes of these elements that are to be achieved.

The statement of values describes a community where:

- The western heritage is preserved and promoted in historic buildings, historic sites, historic open lands, historic towns and historic activities and events;
- The rural character is maintained in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and a clean, safe environment throughout the area;

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- There are opportunities for a variety of ages, cultures, incomes to live in the Valley;
 - Clean water and air are protected;
 - The natural environment is treasured and managed as a valued resource for its scenic beauty, wildlife habitat and multiple use opportunities;
 - The heritage and economic benefit of agriculture, outdoor recreation, tourism and natural resource industries are recognized and supported;
 - Existing public lands are sustained as a valuable multiple use resource;
 - Population growth and economic development including tourism and recreation are directed to designated areas in an orderly fashion with appropriate land uses, infrastructure and services;
 - The costs of providing infrastructure and services to new development is borne by the developers and owners;
 - Responsible, environmentally sensitive economic development is encouraged;
 - Developed recreational amenities are provided and maintained in good condition through cooperative efforts;
 - Public services are planned, coordinated and delivered efficiently and effectively through the cooperative efforts of County government; federal, state and local governments; and private entities;

- County government works closely in cooperation with State and Federal entities on issues impacting the community;
- Public lands management is integrated with local community planning efforts; and
- Private property rights are respected.

1.7 CHARACTER

The Elk River and its tributaries tie the community together. At its headwaters, mountain creeks in the Mount Zirkel Wilderness feed the Elk River. In the Wilderness and the National Forest, the Elk and its feeder streams provide a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. As it flows out of public lands and onto the Valley floor, the Elk River provides waters that irrigate the hay meadows along its course. A wild river, the Elk River and its tributaries provide riparian habitat that supports a number of native plant and animal species. The river's health is not only important to the wildlife it supports but also to the surrounding agricultural producers and residents.

The Upper Elk River Valley combines natural features with a wide mix of land uses. As the Valley opens up north of Big Creek, large ranches that feature open hay meadows and rangeland, agricultural outbuildings and dwellings dominate the landscape. Approaching Moon Hill to the north, agricultural lands temporarily give way to residential development on large-acre lots typified by Moon Hill Meadows and Moon Hill Highlands. To the west

on County Roads 52, 54 and 56, larger ranching operations lie on the valley floor while large lot (35 acres or more) developments are found in the surrounding hills.

To the north of Moon Hill lies the community of Clark, a commercial center in the Valley. The Clark Store is a community meeting place, post office, and supplier of goods. Surrounding Clark are several homes on smaller lots. Up RCR 129 a half-mile the Glen Eden Resort provides rental cabins as well as a local eating and drinking establishment.

Just north of Clark, Seedhouse Road (RCR 64) follows the river east from RCR 129, providing popular access to the Routt National Forest and the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness. Between RCR 129 and the National Forest boundary some residential development including small ranches and several smaller lot (1 to 5 acre) residential subdivisions are found. As Seedhouse Road proceeds into the National Forest, there are Forest Service camping areas and trailheads.

Routt County Road 62 connects Clark with RCR 129 near Hahn's Peak Village. The road provides access to ranches and several residential developments such as Captain's Cove and Red Creek. Additionally, the Steamboat Lake State Park Marina and the Dutch Creek Guest Ranch are located on RCR 62. Recreational access to the National Forest including the Sand Mountain area and Forest Road 42 is found across RCR 62 from Steamboat Lake Park.

Between Clark and Hahn's Peak lies Willow Creek Divide and the basin between Pearl Lake and Steamboat Lake. About 2100 acres of this area were platted into small lot subdivisions. Only a fraction of the lots have been developed because of inadequate water and wastewater facilities. Some of these lots have been combined and re-platted into larger lots, a process encouraged by the County. In addition, 219 lots (Steamboat Lake Subdivision Filings 1 and 2) are serviced by a central system.

Hahn's Peak Village, just across RCR 129 from Steamboat Lake State Park, is a small, historic mining village. Several businesses are on the edge of the village along the highway. These include an inn, a restaurant, a small market and an outfitter/sporting goods store.

Steamboat Lake State Park is on the Willow Creek drainage 10 miles north of Clark. Created in 1968, the lake offers boating, fishing, camping, hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing opportunities.

Continuing north on RCR 129, one encounters the small community of Columbine, the northern extent of the planning area. An historic mining village, Columbine now offers lodging facilities. Columbine also marks the end of winter road maintenance on RCR 129 before it continues north west to the Little Snake River Valley. Forest Road 550, just to the north of Columbine, is a take off point for National Forest based recreation such as motorcycling and snowmobiling.

2.0 THE COMMUNITY PLAN: BACKGROUND, GOALS, POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

This section includes **Policies and Action Items**. This is the most important section of the document and it is used in the planning process. It presents consensus goals, policies and implementation action items for eight key elements of the Plan:

1. Agriculture
2. Recreational Uses and Public Lands
3. Wildlife and Natural Resources
4. Business, Industry and Commercial Uses
5. Residential Housing and Development
6. Steamboat Lake Subdivision
7. Transportation
8. Public Facilities and Services.

2.1 AGRICULTURE

2.1.1 Background.

The Valley has a rich agricultural heritage. The Upper Elk's broad valleys, productive irrigated meadows and lush high mountain pastures have made it one of the county's most sought after ranching areas. Since the 1890's, the cattle and sheep grazing industries along with hay production have defined the cultural and physical landscape of the valley.

The establishment of the Routt National Forest and the passage of the Homestead Act in 1906 secured grazing land for livestock and were vital to the agriculture industry. Even today grazing allotments on public lands are

The County will use these goals and policies for its review of land use, zoning and subdivision proposals. Additionally, this section identifies regulatory and non-regulatory tools that are already in place under the heading "Existing Implementation Measures." This section is included to squarely address the question of whether the County is doing too much or too little to preserve and protect the Valley. Without an understanding of the existing tools, the question is unanswerable. Action Items identify follow-up work to be done by the community, agencies and the County to realize the Goals and Policies of the Plan.

an important supplement to many Upper Elk agricultural operations.

Approximately 20 commercial ranches exist in the Valley. Almost all are cattle or sheep ranches. A few raise and sell hay commercially, most of which are headquartered on the irrigated hay meadows south of Clark. Approximately 9,400 acres of irrigated hay meadow are located in the Valley. In addition, many agricultural operators have extensive grazing leases on Routt National Forest land. These ranches put up an estimated 10,000 tons of hay and manage in excess of 10,000 head of cattle. Total agricultural employment is difficult to assess but probably exceeds 100 people (including owner/operators). Presently, fourteen parcels between 500 and 1,000 acres in

size and nine over 1,000 acres exist in the Upper Elk planning area.¹

Ranching is a relatively small portion of Routt County's economy: about 2.4% in 1996. ² As stated above, the economic benefits of ranching and open land in Routt County go beyond the actual ranch income and effect other aspects of the county economy. According to *Recreation Value of Ranch Open Space*, "For nearly 8 out of 10 visitors, ranch open space significantly increases summer visits and willingness to pay." Also according to this study, "8 out of 10 [visitors] consider touring the countryside in Routt County viewing ranches, hay meadows, pastures, and livestock as part of their Steamboat vacation experience." In the same survey, nearly half of the respondents said they would not return to the area if ranch and open lands were converted to other uses.³

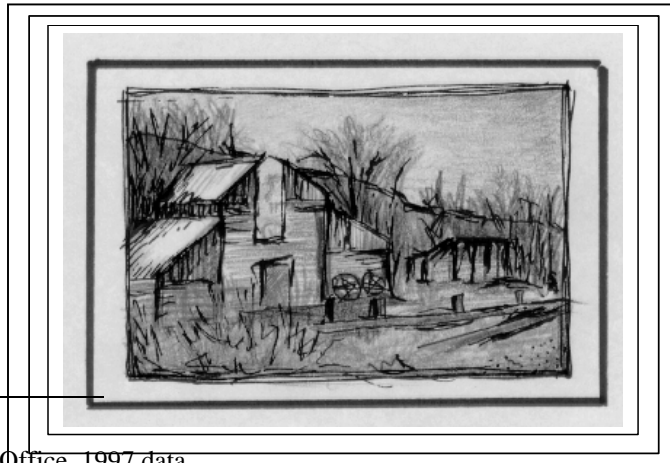
As such, guest ranches also contribute to maintaining open lands and the agricultural heritage of the area. These operations help educate visitors about western culture as well as the Upper Elk's

wildlife and natural resources. Further, guest ranches are important contributors to the local economy and provide employment opportunities to local residents.

2.1.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

Community Efforts. While plentiful viable ranch land can still be found in the Upper Elk, fewer ranches are able to remain self-sustaining enterprises as purely agricultural operations. The conservation and protection of agricultural land, natural areas and open lands has gained community consensus as one of the most important issues facing Routt County. In 1996, voters approved a program that allows the County to purchase development rights (PDR) on eligible parcels of land to preserve open lands and agricultural lands. The PDR Program is described in more detail below, under "County Efforts".

Some of the larger ranches in the Valley are still intact because property owners sought alternatives to subdividing their land for development. The primary tool used by ranch owners has been the conservation easement. Through a conservation easement, the rancher can pass on the ranch to heirs while reducing the inheritance tax burden.



¹ Routt County Assessors Office, 1997 data.

² Routt County/CSU Extension Office. Based on percentage of business income.

³ Prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics and the Routt County Extension Office(1994).

Conservation easements can also provide a source of cash when they are sold to land trusts, or they may provide a tax write-off when donated to qualifying organizations. By fall 1998, seven Valley property owners had placed conservation easements on their ranches, conserving about 7000 acres. Two of the seven parcels are guest ranch properties.

Several non-profit land conservation organizations have been active in the Upper Elk, working with Upper Elk ranchers and landowners to help preserve larger properties from development. These organizations include; the Yampa Valley Land Trust (Routt County community based) currently holding 1,458 acres under easement with 4,500 additional acres in active negotiation; the Nature Conservancy holding 540 acres in easement; and American Farmland Trust (national) holding approximately 3,000 acres in conservation easement. In 1994, American Farmland Trust, working with a small group of select landowners, published a report on its land protection efforts in the Upper Elk entitled *Upper Elk River Valley, Protecting the Land and Sustaining Community*. The report outlines a plan to maintain the rural working landscapes in the Upper Elk River Valley by defining strategies for the entities that could be involved, including the landowners, the community and the County. It also includes a proposed pact among landowners to work towards this goal. An objective of the plan is that as landowners become more familiar with

the process, they will get involved in the protection of the agricultural lands.

County Efforts. Routt County has initiated, or has been a partner in a number of programs over the past several years that are intended to help preserve agricultural land and open lands. One of the results of these efforts is the *Routt County Open Lands Plan* document that was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in 1995. Jointly funded by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the City of Steamboat Springs and Routt County, the *Open Lands Plan* outlines eight techniques for the community to pursue open lands protection using primarily voluntary, incentive based programs.

Of the techniques defined in the Open Lands Plan, several have been implemented in the county. These include:

- a Statement on the Importance of Agriculture and Open Lands adopted in 1995;
- a Routt County Right-to-Farm ordinance adopted in 1995;
- the Land Preservation Subdivision Exemption (LPS) regulations including the Open Lands Subdivision Exemption (OLS) and the Minor Development Subdivision Exemption (MDSE) regulations adopted in 1995.

Others, including exploring the feasibility of transferable development rights (TDR's), are in the working stages of development and implementation.

Conservation easements are already in use in Routt County.

Another technique is the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which was approved by voters in 1996. A one-mil increase in property tax has created a fund to purchase development rights from agricultural properties meeting certain criteria. An appointed board makes recommendations to the County Commissioners on the expenditure of funds.

State Parks Efforts. The State of Colorado Department of Parks has been instrumental in open space protection in the Valley. State Parks has successfully facilitated conservation easements and deed restrictions on two adjoining properties and participated in developing the Great Outdoors Colorado Legacy Program. The Legacy Program is a method for protecting lands on both the Yampa and Elk Rivers. To-date, State Parks' efforts have protected open space in Steamboat Lake State Park (80%) and in Pearl Lake (95%).⁴

Colorado State Land Board Lands. The State Land Board (SLB) controls about 1600 acres in the Valley. The lands were granted to the state from Federal ownership in the 1870's for the purpose of raising revenues for the state's school children. Currently, the SLB owns over 3 million surface acres of land and 4 million acres

of mineral rights in the state and over 60,000 acres in Routt County alone.

The Land Board Commissioners are required to manage about 300,000 acres of the school lands under a program known as the Stewardship Trust. While agricultural leases continue under the Stewardship Trust, designated lands are managed for their inherent natural qualities such as wildlife habitat. As of December 1998, the "Clark" SLB section was designated into the Stewardship Trust but the Moonhill SLB section was not. Keeping state school lands in rural classification or recommending these lands for the Stewardship Trust allow traditional, agricultural and outdoor recreational uses to continue.

Federal Efforts. There are several "inholdings" (lands totally surrounded by Federal ownership) within the Routt National Forest in the Valley. The Forest Service ("USFS") looks for opportunities to work with willing sellers to acquire these inholdings into the National Forest system through purchase, exchange, or donation. Competition for national level funding for acquisition of parcels is very high, and rural forests such as the Routt are not often successful. Most parcels must be obtained through some form of exchange of properties of equal appraised value. This can be a long involved process taking up to several years. To expedite opportunities to acquire inholdings, the USFS can work through private entities that agree to purchase properties and hold them until the necessary land trade or funding requirements can be met.

⁴ Colorado State Parks

2.1.3 Goal

Protect agricultural uses as an important component of the economy and for preserving the region's heritage and rural character.

2.1.4 Policies

1) Strengthen and support voluntary mechanisms that allow protection of agricultural and open lands.

2) Agricultural activities are encouraged and supported, and should be preserved and protected from nuisance complaints, trespass and other impacts from residential population, recreation and tourism.

3) If development occurs, promote the clustering of homesites to maximize the area retained in agricultural uses.

4) Encourage compliance with the enforcement of the state fencing laws as well as the County Right-to-Farm and Ranch Ordinance.

2.1.5 Existing implementation measures

1) Routt County Open Lands Plan

2) Land Preservation Subdivision Exemption (LPS) including:

a) Minor Development Subdivision Exemption (M.D.S.E.)

b) Open Lands Preservation Subdivision Exemption (OLS)

3) Zoning. The majority of the planning area is zoned for

agricultural use at the density of one dwelling unit per 35 acres. Conversion to higher density residential uses will require rezoning. The County rezoning process requires that any rezoning application conform to the County Master Plan. As an amendment to the Master Plan, this Plan must be considered in determining conformity with the Master Plan.

4) Purchase of Development Rights Program.

5) Conservation Easements.

6) State fence law.

7) Routt County Right-to-Farm and Ranch Ordinance.

2.1.6 Action Items

1) Revise the LPS regulations to better address the needs of property owners and refine the process.

2) Market and promote Conservation easements, the PDR program and LPS.

3) Work with non-profit land conservation organizations to protect agricultural lands.

4) Encourage public land managers to continue grazing permits that support private agricultural operators.

2.1.7 Locational Criteria

The Open Lands Plan applied to agricultural and open lands throughout Routt County. There are a number of productive agricultural operations in the Upper Elk River Valley.

2.1.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Revise the LPS regulations	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 1+
Market and promote Conservation easements, the PDR program and LPS.	Middle	\$ 10,000	County, local land conservation groups	Year 2+	Year 5+
Protect agricultural lands.	On-going	in-house	County, local land conservation groups	Year 3+	Year 3+
Continue grazing permits that support private agricultural operators.	Short	in-house	USFS	Year 1+	Year 1+

2.2 RECREATIONAL USES AND PUBLIC LANDS

2.2.1 Background.

Approximately 74% of the planning area is comprised of public land. These lands are managed by the USFS's Routt National Forest (71%), State of Colorado (1.5%), and the Bureau of Land Management (1.5%). Ninety five percent of this public land within the planning area is in the Routt National Forest (approximately 213,500 acres).⁵ With the majority of lands in the Valley in public ownership, this Plan integrates recommendations for private lands with public land management.

Recreational uses occur primarily on the public lands surrounding the RCR 129, Seedhouse Road and RCR 62 corridors. Included are the Routt

National Forest and Mount Zirkel Wilderness as well as Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks. Other public lands in the planning area include about 1600 acres of land managed by the Colorado State Land Board and about 4,775 acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

Public lands support a variety of uses such as wildlife habitat, timber, grazing, mining and hunting. More recently, outdoor recreation opportunities have attracted increasing numbers of residents and visitors to the Valley. The growing popularity of guest ranches also generates tourism activity in the Valley. Some guest ranches contract the services of other local guides and outfitters. Private guides and outfitters provide recreational services primarily on public lands. These businesses are permitted to

⁵ Routt County Geographic Information System, Routt County Assessors Office, 1997.

provide services for a specified level of use of specific permitted areas on the National Forest. Additionally, hunting and fishing guides and outfitters-require permits from the state outfitters registry.

Routt National Forest. The Routt National Forest supports many different uses and is one of the most popular recreational attractions in northwest Colorado. Forest Service officials have reported a dramatic increase in the use of the National Forest in recent years. The Mount Zirkel Wilderness covers a large percentage of the Forest in the planning area. No motorized or mechanized vehicles (such as bicycles) are allowed in the wilderness area but hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, fishing and llama trekking are all popular uses.

Generally, the areas outside of the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness in the Valley are managed to allow for a variety of uses such as logging, grazing and motorized recreation. Motorized sports such as all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), 4 x4's, motorcycles and snowmobiles are all popular. Mountain biking is also becoming increasingly common on Forest Service property in this part of the County.

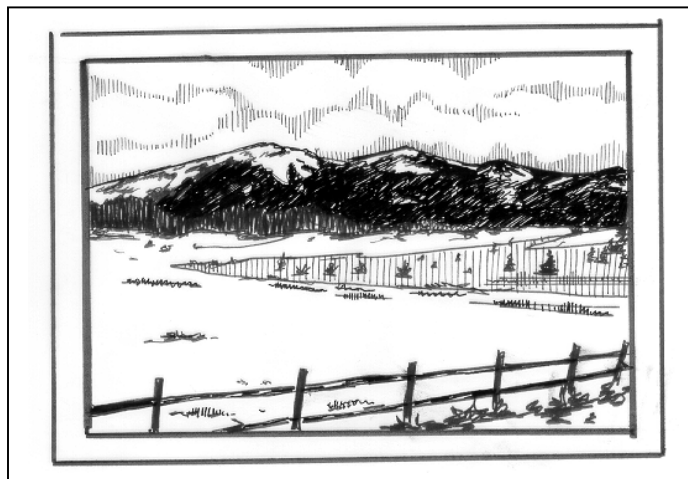
State Parks. Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks support many

water-based recreational activities and camping. Steamboat Lake State Park is a staging area for snowmobiling. In 1997, over 250,000 people visited Steamboat Lake State Park⁶. Recently the park has "hardened" some campsites to prevent erosion and has constructed "camper cabins". Park planners do not intend to increase the number of sites in the near future. Park officials believe that these improvements will better accommodate year 'round visitors to the Park. The Park completed a new visitors center and Park headquarters in 1998 in conformance with their master plan that was approved by the County.

2.2.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

As the primary economic generator in the Valley, the recreation and tourism industry is integral to the Valley's economy. With the growth of this industry, concerns about how to manage its impacts increase. Coalitions

of residents and public land managers are forming to address this concern. This discussion will occur in the context of the economic environment for Routt County.



Routt National Forest. According to a USFS

⁶ Steamboat Lake State Park

study for the Hahn's Peak area: "Recreational use on the Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears District continues to increase dramatically. Inquiries and applications for special use permits to conduct commercial activities currently exceed the District's capacity to properly respond to the applicants in a timely manner."⁷

User days under existing USFS permits and applications for new permits have increased along with general public use. The majority of USFS permits in the Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears District are issued for the Upper Elk area.⁸ Opportunities for new permits are limited to keep commercial activities within acceptable environmental and social constraints. The USFS does not issue outfitter/guide permits in the District until it analyzes the current conditions for a given area.

According to USFS increased use from non-guided, public users have caused noticeable impacts on the Forest's natural resources and infrastructure. The USFS objective for public users is to disperse use from heavily used areas, especially within the Wilderness, to less used areas and trails by maintaining and signing alternative areas. Over the past decade the USFS has increased its effort to update and

maintain signs on roads and trails to guide users and reduce the number of violations of travel management regulations.

Hunting season is one of the heaviest use periods for USFS lands in the Valley resulting in increased horse and ATV traffic. In addition, snowmobiling is an increasingly popular activity. Adequate forest access and miles of trails groomed by local clubs and guides provide excellent conditions for this activity. More backcountry skiers are also coming to the Upper Elk area.

As recreation activities become more common, parking congestion at popular trailheads has become an issue with local residents, the USFS and County road crews. (See the section on "Transportation"). Conflicts between snowmobiles and non-motorized uses such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing have increased as the number of users grows.

Routt National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. The USFS completed a Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Routt National Forest in February 1998. The Draft of this Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement presented six different management alternatives addressing large land areas with designated prescriptive uses ranging from pristine wilderness to more intensely managed activities. Each of the alternatives had a different emphasis based upon the aggregate size, location and geographic configuration of each prescription type.

⁷ Routt National Forest, Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District Introduction to Recreation Capacity Study for Twin Mountain Area, 1997.

⁸ Routt National Forest, Hahn's Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District. The USFS generally issues outfitters both 1-year temporary permits as well as 5-year permits with a 2-year probationary period with fees based on a percentage of revenue.

After much public involvement, the Forest Service adopted one of these alternatives.

To address issues of local importance, the USFS has initiated studies to analyze the capacity and impacts of recreational activities. The USFS will consider the recommendations of this Plan in its effort to recognize local concerns.

USFS also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Routt County that requires each entity to inform the other regarding land use planning and decision making.

Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks. Visitation at Steamboat Lake State Park increased 26% between 1993 and 1996⁹. The Master Plan for the Park outlines improvements and additions to Park facilities in the future as funding becomes available. Included among these planned improvements are more improved camping areas providing hookups for recreational vehicles. Short-term plans do not show an increase in the number of campsites.

2.2.3 Goal.

Encourage responsible public and private land use management to maintain the open space and rural character of the Upper Elk River Valley while recognizing the shift in the Valley's economy from agriculture and mineral extraction to outdoor recreation and tourism.

2.2.4 Policies.

1) Encourage and support the Routt National Forest Division to continue to seek the input of the local community as to future policies, projects and permits affecting the Upper Elk River portion of the National Forest.

2) Encourage and support Routt National Forest's and other agencies' efforts to enforce its regulations on National Forest lands especially during heavy use periods such as hunting season.

3) Discourage development of permanent commercial structures on National Forest lands.

4) Encourage alternate dispersed recreational trailheads and access to relieve congestion.

5) Continue dialogue between the Routt National Forest and State Parks to communicate problems, opportunities, and concerns regarding each other's facilities and find solutions where needed.

6) Encourage a partnership with the Routt National Forest and other agencies in providing educational facilities and programs that will inform visitors about proper use of public lands and trespass issues.

7) Encourage Routt National Forest to continue to work with local recreation groups to designate non-motorized winter use areas. Balance the need for motorized and non-motorized opportunities.

8) Support public land manager's efforts to acquire buffer zones and/or place conservation

⁹ Steamboat Lake State Park

easements on lands.

9) Any private campground must insure adequate provision for infrastructure including waste and sewage disposal must be made. Costs associated with development of these infrastructure improvements should be the responsibility of owners and users of the facilities.

10) Encourage State Parks and the Forest Service to recognize the community desire to avoid overcrowding and over use and to maintain open space and rural character of the Valley in their decision making process. Prior to permitting new uses evaluate the cumulative impact on the resource, infrastructure including roads and county character.

11) Create a consistent, expedited administrative process that allows for minor improvements on guest ranches. These improvements should not change the overall capacity and offsite impacts such as traffic.

2.2.5 Existing Implementation Measures.

1) Implementation of these policies requires continued frequent communication, coordination, and cooperation between Routt County and other public agencies that exercise control over use and development of public lands.

2) Informal working relationships between the County and these agencies are in operation now.

7)

3) There is an older Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes the relationship between the County and Routt National Forest that needs to be updated.

2.2.6 Action Items.

1) Schedule regular public community meetings with Routt National Forest and other public lands management agencies to bring the community up-to-date with current issues and upcoming activities.

2) The County should continue referring planning petitions for private land development adjacent to the public lands to the respective public land managers for their input.

3) Continue cooperative efforts between State Parks and the County in future master and site planning efforts.

4) Encourage the State Parks to purchase fee title, acquire the development rights, or negotiate deed restrictions on lands adjoining Steamboat Lake State Park, including areas of Steamboat Lake Subdivision to discourage encroachment of residential uses directly on the lake shores.

5) Encourage the State Parks to acquire adjacent parcels and help resolve the camping problem in Steamboat Lakes Filing 7.

6) Encourage the Routt National Forest to continue to conduct recreational carrying capacity analyses and implement their recommendations.

2.2.7 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Schedule agency meetings	Short	In-house	SLB, BLM, County, USFS	Year 1+	Year 1+
Refer petitions to public agencies	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 1+
State Park/County cooperative planning effort	Short	In-house	County, State	Year 1+	Year 1+
State Park buffer purchase	Short	\$ 100,000	State	Year 3+	Year 3+
State Park help in resolving of Filing 7 camping	Short	\$ 150,000	State	Year 3+	Year 3+
State Park additional management of private campground	Middle	\$ 25,000	State	Year 3+	Year 3+
Conduct recreational carrying capacity analysis	Short	\$ 100,000	County, USFS, State Parks, SLB, BLM	Year 2+	Year 5+
Implement recreational carrying capacity recommendations	Middle	\$ 100,000	State Parks, USFS, SLB, BLM	Year 4+	Year 6+

2.3 WILDLIFE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

2.3.1 Background

The Valley is known for its abundant wildlife and wildlife habitat. The planning area features an estimated 14 different ecosystems from high alpine to river/ riparian zones. About 300 species of wildlife live in these areas for at least part of the year. The area's big game, such as deer and elk, attract hunters and fishermen from all over the world. Although not as widely sought after, a variety of birds, amphibians, fish and smaller mammals are just as

important to the area's ecological balance¹⁰.

Some species of plants and animals in the Upper Elk are considered sensitive, threatened or endangered by state and/or federal agencies. Ecological inventories conducted by the Nature Conservancy and the Colorado Natural Heritage Program determined that the Elk River contains healthy remnant riparian ecosystems of global

¹⁰ Colorado Division of Wildlife

significance. Unlike most tributaries in the Colorado River basin, the Elk River does not have a major, main stem dam. Therefore, the Elk River system supports the flooding and meandering necessary to maintain these rare forests.¹¹

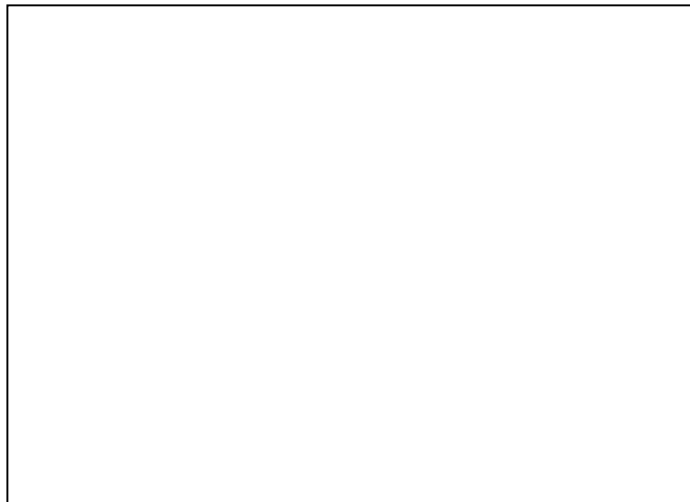
The banks of the Elk River are relatively undeveloped, offering excellent riparian habitat for the many species. Riparian areas comprise only about 3% of Colorado lands, yet over 80% of wildlife species depend on riparian habitat at some time during the year.¹² The health of the riparian zone of the Elk River directly effects water quality and the survival of many wildlife species as well as the human inhabitants of the Valley.

Big game currently flourish in the area due to game management, the lack of predators and the availability of food on winter ranges. Thousands of hunters come to the Upper Elk region in the fall to enjoy the hunting opportunities. Big game hunting is vital to the economy of Routt County and the Upper Elk River area. In 1990 hunting related business brought in \$24 million to Routt County's economy. The Colorado Division of

Wildlife (DOW) has been working on mapping habitats, ranges and movement corridors throughout the county, including the Upper Elk.

2.3.2 Challenges and Opportunities

Wildlife movements and use of



habitats have changed over the years due to settlement patterns and increased human activity. The Colorado Division of Wildlife's (DOW) mapping of

wildlife habitats is important information for planning and wildlife management purposes. This information is available through the County as well as over the Yampa Valley Information Utility website yampa.com.

The increase in new homes has resulted in requests to remove elk from livestock feeding areas. Elk and deer feed on landscaping materials such as small aspen trees, creating more conflicts with landowners. The DOW has established a Habitat Partnership that offers financial assistance to property owners for fencing and other improvements that help alleviate some of the conflicts caused by elk drawn to private property. In winter, elk gather on south and southwestern-oriented slopes where lower snow depth allows

¹¹ Mike Tetreault, The Nature Conservancy. Letter dated December 21, 1998

¹² Colorado Department of Natural Resources

for better forage. Winter range area is a small fraction of the normal range area and is critical to the viability of big game populations. Disturbance to these areas can stress elk, making winter survival difficult. One of the most important elk habitat and movement corridors in the Valley lies on a section of State School Lands near Moon Hill.

Much of the riparian habitat along the rivers and creeks in the planning area lies within private agricultural lands. Loss of these private agricultural lands could negatively effect riparian habitat and the species it supports. The biggest single threat to the Elk River system is residential development in the flood plain. This is due mainly to the flood protection and bank stabilization homeowners in the flood plain are forced to construct. These structures can alter or stop the river's natural ability to flood and meander and therefore affect the riparian habitat that depends on these natural processes. Devegetation of stream banks can also be a problem by increasing the sediment load in the river and straightening the channel.¹³

Development and recreation within elk habitat and corridors make maintaining a naturally self-sustaining herd more difficult. Elk herds once migrated in winter to the drier open areas west of Craig. Today, however, with the increase of highways, roads, fences and homes in the area, elk must

tolerate harsher winters on limited winter range.

The problem of pets interfering with wildlife has increased with development and tourism. Routt County has a leash law and shares animal control services with the City of Steamboat Springs. There has not been successful enforcement of this law.

2.3.3 Goal.

To maintain existing critical riparian areas and wildlife habitats, movement corridors, and calving areas and conserve the natural resources of the Upper Elk River Valley.

2.3.4 Policies

1) Inform realtors, property owners, designers, land planners and developers about the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) mapping of wildlife habitats, calving areas and movement corridors. Encourage DOW to refine its mapping and provide information on their use.

2) Encourage landowners to be more responsible in the feeding of horses and other livestock, use better landscaping techniques and fencing which discourages conflicts between wildlife, livestock and crops.

3) Direct winter recreation activities away from critical winter wildlife habitat and movement areas. One of the most important elk habitat and movement corridors in the Upper Elk area lies on a section of State School Lands near Moon Hill. This section should be managed to allow the Elk movement to continue unhindered.

¹³ Mike Tetreault, The Nature Conservancy. Letter dated December 21, 1998

4) Strongly encourage building and development outside of riparian areas, critical wildlife habitat and wildlife movement corridors within the planning area. If this is not possible, encourage mitigation of impacts to wildlife with appropriate lighting, fencing and pet control provisions.

5) Discourage winter recreational use in critical elk winter habitat and movement corridors.

6) Encourage existing federal land permittees to continue to maintain trails and operations outside of wildlife areas.

7) Encourage landowners to continue low impact grazing practices that protect and enhance river and riparian habitat.

8) Encourage landowners to participate in DOW's Habitat Partnership program to assist in alleviating big game conflicts between big game and property owners.

9) Encourage other agencies to provide educational and financial assistance to eligible landowners for habitat protection and enhancement.

10) Discourage proposals for dams on the Upper Elk River by working with the appropriate agencies and other affected parties.

2.3.5 Existing Implementation Measures.

1) Land Preservation Subdivision Exemption (LPS) and Subdivision policies discourage building in critical wildlife areas.

2) Routt National Forest and Routt County "Special" and "Conditional" use permit and rezoning process(es).

2.3.6 Action Items

1) Develop recommendations that will assist in enhancing and sustaining wildlife and plant communities in Upper Elk.

2) Create maps of wildlife habitat, riparian areas, and movement corridors for the entire Upper Elk planning area available to the general public and agencies via hard copy and the Internet.

3) Develop better pet enforcement standards for Upper Elk River Valley neighborhoods. Prepare and distribute materials that educate pet-owners of their responsibilities. Explore funding mechanisms for more/improved enforcement of the pet control regulations.

4) Work with DOW and ranchers to develop voluntary fencing standards that protect riparian corridors. Involve Colorado Division of Wildlife's Habitat Partnership.

5) Prepare and distribute educational materials concerning new grazing and riparian protection techniques.

6) Pass a resolution of the Routt County Board of Commissioners banning dams on the Elk River.

2.3.7 Locational Criteria

1) The policies and actions regarding wildlife and natural resources are recommended for application

throughout the planning area.

2.3.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Develop wildlife recommendations	Middle	\$ 20,000	Consultant, County, DOW, USFS	Year 3+	Year 5+
Distribute wildlife maps on internet and to the public	Short	In-house	County, DOW	Year 1+	Year 2+
Develop pet enforcement standards & educational materials	Short	In-house	DOW	Year 2+	Year 3+
Partner with DOW to develop voluntary fencing guidelines along riparian acres	Short	In-house	Nature Conservancy & Legacy	Year 2+	Year 3+
Prepare and distribute grazing & riparian educational materials	Middle	In-house	Nature Conservancy & Legacy	Year 3+	Year 3+
Initiate resolution banning dams	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 1+

2.4 BUSINESS, INDUSTRY, AND COMMERCIAL ISSUES.

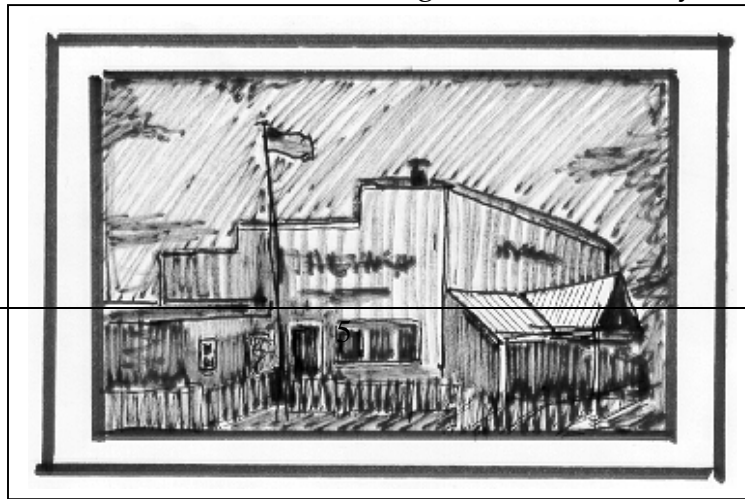
2.4.1 Background.

Hahn's Peak was the first settlement in Routt County, created in response to the mining boom. Joseph Hahn arrived in 1861, and the community grew to 75 residents by 1876. The town served as the Routt County seat from 1879 until 1912. Mining continued

through the 1920s and reopened sporadically in the 1950s and 1960s.

Mining evolved from prospecting, to placer mining to dredge and hard rock mining in 1906. Agriculture initially supported local

miners by providing vegetables, grains, dairy products, and meat. Ranching



and hay production eventually dominated, as due the harsh climate and better transportation

Columbine started in the 1880s serving as a stagecoach stop and local store. The original 11-acre town site was platted in 1897 as housing for miners of the Royal Flush and Tom Thumb. The community evolved after mining into lodging for hunters and fishermen and a supply store for sheepherders and cattle ranchers.

Clark was a stagecoach stop located at the crossing for the Elk River. The community included a store, sawmills, and blacksmith, serving the regions lumber and agricultural industries.

According to state wage compensation statistics, Upper Elk private employers account for less than 2% of Routt County's private employment wages. Almost 80% of the wages generated in the Upper Elk come from businesses located in the Clark area (including Seed House Road). Construction and hospitality businesses each account for over 40% of Upper Elk employment income.

Eight guest ranches in the Upper Elk area provide accommodations for 450 guests and employ about 100 people. The Upper Elk area provides a base for 13 construction companies employing about 60 people. Most are general contractors and none had more than 15 employees in 1996.

Numerous businesses and governmental agencies serve the Upper Elk, but base their operations, elsewhere. Examples include Routt

County, the Forest Service and Yampa Valley Electric.

Tourism. "The biggest change to the Yampa Valley in the past 25 years has been the substantial increase in the dollars generated by tourism. This has occurred while revenues from mining and agriculture have remained relatively constant.

"The tourism economy has three components: winter, summer and hunting season. More than half of the jobs in the Yampa Valley are estimated to directly and indirectly relate to tourism."¹⁴

Tourism based business in North Routt has three major parts: guest ranches, guides and outfitters, and retail-oriented shops and lodging. These businesses are primarily located between Clark and Columbine on RCR 129 and on Seedhouse Road. Nine guest ranches and accommodations based businesses are located in the area. These businesses vary in size, price and types of activities and amenities offered. Each fills a different niche in the tourist market by providing a range of accommodation levels for tourists. Some operations offer primarily accommodations and may contract with various guides and outfitters for guest activities. Others are more "self contained", offering a full program of activities as well as meals.

As discussed above, approximately 25 businesses hold USFS permits to operate as guides and/or

¹⁴ Vision 2020 Plan, 1994

outfitters within the planning area. Some of these outfitters are based outside of the area and transport their clients to the Upper Elk. Activities offered by these businesses include fishing, hunting, horseback rides, llama treks and balloon rides.

While some people choose to visit a guest ranch or go on a guided expedition, other visitors to the Upper Elk area come to enjoy the public lands on their own. Three National Forest campgrounds and less primitive facilities at Steamboat Lake State Park are available. Several businesses offer overnight accommodations as well. Retail shops in Clark, Hahn's Peak Village and Steamboat Lake Marina provide food and other necessities.

While tourism in the Upper Elk is still primarily summer based, more year 'round opportunities are available. In winter, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling have become increasingly popular. This area also attracts large numbers of hunters from the start of bow season in August through rifle seasons in late fall. Additionally, the Upper Elk area's tourism possibilities are becoming more significant to the ski industry as the trend to provide more diverse vacation packages grows. Travel or transportation constraints will limit some winter activities.

Mineral extraction including gravel pits, is an essential part of the infrastructure of the County. The countywide distribution of these operations lowers the cost of construction, especially for public roads.

2.4.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

As the area grows, there is a demand for new tourism related uses. The County is attempting to "catch up" with these activities to add some predictability to the planning process. Amendments have been proposed to the definitional sections of the Zoning Resolution concerning business and commercial uses.

The primary challenges associated with increased tourism are: (1) to disperse tourists and recreationists broadly to limit over use of certain areas; (2) to ensure that the transportation infrastructure is adequate; (3) that emergency services are available; and (4) that some number of affordable housing units is available for the labor pool.

2.4.3 Goal.

To maintain and support the economically important outdoor recreation based tourism business as well as agriculture, timber and mining while managing their impacts to preserve the open space and rural character of the Upper Elk River Valley and avoiding overcrowding. .

2.4.4 Policies.

1) Rural-type tourist operations such as guest ranches and similar operations are an appropriate and important part of the area's heritage and economy and should be supported. In evaluating proposals consider the following:

- a) New visitor accommodations should preserve significant

amounts of open space and the size of the operation should be proportional to the open space preserved with traffic generation less than the associated LPS development;

b) Provide year round access; and

c) Create minimal impacts.

2) Encourage appropriately scaled commercial development that is of similar size, height and character of existing structures. Ensure new structures are compatible with the rural mountain community with sensitive placement and design.

3) Locate new retail and commercial and hotel/motel type lodging uses in or adjacent to villages to support other businesses in the area. This types of commercial growth should be located in places where there is existing or planned-for infrastructure, including convenient access to roads, water and sewer, and other facilities.

4) Expansion of existing businesses is supported as owners determine a need, so long as such expansion is visually compatible with the rural mountain community. Size, shape and form, massing and height, materials and scale should be compatible to what is built today.

5) Encourage the Forest Service to implement small-scale timber sales to benefit local businesses if there is demonstrated local interest.

6) Encourage visitors to use guides and outfitters and guest ranches. Emphasize protecting the safety of the

visitors and responsible use of the land and its resources.

7) Promote home occupations and cottage industries especially those that use local wood and agricultural products or support other industries in the area.

8) Gravel extraction can continue in areas that minimize the impact on residents, visitors and the natural environment including the location of the facility and the associated hauling operations.

9) Encourage development of employee housing opportunities both on and off site.

10) Initiate a “community economic indicators” project to help business determine future needs and determine a sustainable economic business plan.

2.4.5 Existing Implementation Measures.

1) Routt County exercises control over extraction of sand and gravel and other resources under the Special Use Permit provisions of current regulations.

2) The Routt County Master Plan and this Community Plan influence location and design criteria for businesses.

3) Land in the Elk River Valley is zoned for agricultural uses. There is approximately 10 acres of commercial zoned land in the Hahn’s Peak area and scattered commercial sites in Steamboat Lakes Subdivision.

4) Proposals for commercial use, including tourist oriented or lodging businesses must be reviewed and approved by the County under provisions of the current Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.

5) Development review criteria require that provision be made for adequate public services.

6) Development standards require that appropriate infrastructure improvements be the responsibility of the owner/developer.

7) Implementation of these policies require continued frequent communication, coordination, and cooperation between Routt County and other public agencies that exercise control over use and development of public lands.

8) Informal working relationships between the County and the other public agencies are in operation now.

9) There is an older Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes the relationship between the County and Routt National Forest that needs to be updated.

2.4.6 Action Items

1) Craft recommendations that guide citizens and business owners in identifying areas of growth and the general character of commercial and business operations.

2) Amend the Zoning Regulations to add or provide better definitions and clearer processes for recreation and tourism related uses,

including guest ranches, Outdoor Recreation zone district, recreational resorts, recreational facilities, country inns and tourist homes, guides and outfitter, equestrian facilities, cottage industries, and home occupations.

3) Review this plan periodically to determine if changes to the plan are necessary. Events that would trigger review of this plan are:

a) a five year period has elapsed since the last review; or

b) adoption or amendment to the recommendation(s) of the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan that affect land use in this area; or

c) adoption or acceptance by Routt National Forest, State Parks, and the County of a recreational capacity analysis that determines that there are no significant existing problems with winter and summer usage; that there is adequate staffing to enforce all management objectives, and; that there is no increase in user days anticipated; or,

d) there is not agreement between



Routt National Forest and the County in application of this Plan's Policies and Action Items.

4) Initiate a economic database or indicators project to help business determine a sustainable economic direction.

2.4.7 Locational Criteria:

1) The area in and around

2.4.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Devise Growth Recommendations	Middle	\$ 50,000	County, consultant	Year 3+	Year 5+
Amend Zoning Regulations to Clarify Recreation and Tourism Issues.	Middle	\$ 20,000	County, consultant	Year 3+	Year 5+
Review Community Plan	Middle	In-house	County	Year 4+	Year 5+
Initiate database for economic project.	Short	\$ 20,000	Business Community, County	Year 2+	Year 2+
Conduct Community Economic Indicators Project	Middle	\$ 20,000	Business, Community, County	Year 3+	Year 5

the existing villages is well suited for development.

2) Gravel extraction activities should be located and developed in a manner that will not adversely impact adjoining properties, recreational users and tourists, nor the road system that provides access to the facility.

2.5 RESIDENTIAL HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

2.5.1 Background.

The villages of Clark, Hahn's Peak and Columbine have been residential centers since

their beginnings. In the 1960's, tourism began to capture a greater portion of Routt County's economy. The creation of the nearby Steamboat Ski Area and Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks



brought more visitors and recreation minded property owners to the area. As a result, new residential growth began to occur in the early 1970's. In the Valley, growth came in the form of new subdivisions throughout the Hahn's Peak basin and up Seedhouse Road. The largest planned development was the Steamboat Lakes Resort filings. (See section on "Steamboat Lakes Subdivision").

Another trend associated with residential growth in the Valley is the division of agricultural land into 35-acre tracts. Often called "ranchettes", these lots of 35 acres or more can be created with minimal County regulation and may cause the loss of viable agricultural parcels. The County's Land Preservation Subdivision Exemption and Minor Development Subdivision Exemption processes help to mitigate this phenomenon.

2.5.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

As in many areas of the Rocky Mountain west, the rural landscape and heritage were created by the generations of people who have derived their livelihood from the land and as a result, left the landscape relatively undeveloped. This phenomenon attracts many people to the area resulting in the high demand for rural residential property and an increased interest in outdoor recreation. The number of permanent residents in the Valley area grew by approximately 10% between 1980-1990. This number does not take into account seasonal residents and second home owners. A nationwide

trend highlighted at a recent Economic Summit in Steamboat Springs is that many second homes are being converted to primary residences as the population ages and retirees move to the "country". Another indicator of growth in the Valley is the number of new homes built. An average of 15 new homes were built per year in the 1980's. From 1990 to 1995, this number more than doubled to over 30 new homes per year.¹⁵ Between 1998 and 2003, the county's population is projected to continue to grow at a rate of 2.4%¹⁶. This growth will obviously impact the infrastructure and services within the County.

According to the Anne Tankersley of the Leland Consulting Group, "The Upper Elk River Valley will continue to attract residents since it offers a community environment, with affordable housing opportunities, available land for development, access to services and natural beauty."¹⁷

Hahn's Peak Historic District.

The Hahn's Peak Historical Zoning District (HPH) was established in 1978 to allow the local community to influence building and character within the District.

¹⁵ Routt County Assessors Office

¹⁶ Leland Consulting Group memo dated January 5, 1999.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

2.5.3 Goal.

To provide housing opportunities for permanent residents, working in the Upper Elk River valley. Allow only development that respects the regions' rural character, heritage, wildlife, and natural environment.

2.5.4 Policies

1) Where there seems to be infrastructure capacity shortfall, plan for replacement or consolidation.

2) Development should continue to pay its own way through the provision of construction and ongoing maintenance of services and infrastructure.

3) Design and construct buildings in Hahn's Peak Village to compliment each other in size, height and materials so that the residential and commercial properties relate and are seen as a village.

4) Discourage residential development in the flood plain.

5) New residential development should not be at densities greater than allowed under state law, existing approvals, or LPS developments.

6) Amend the Hahn's Peak Historical District section of the Routt County zoning Resolution to make the Hahn's Peak Village Architectural Control Committee and Homeowners Association referral entities rather than recommending bodies.

7) Resolve existing wastewater sewage problems in Hahn's Peak Village.

8) Prepare a water quality plan specific to the Hahn's Peak area that improves and maintains a healthy system.

9) Establish explicit policies and criteria concerning connection to the Hahn's Peak Village systems. Do not allow service connections outside of the area defined by the Hahn's Peak Village and Hahn's Peak Subdivision plats.

10) Protect the visual quality and rural character of the valley at night by encouraging the use of minimal exterior lighting, that lighting be downcast, and that there be no general floodlighting of buildings.

11) Avoid the placement of structures on skylined ridges as viewed from the RCR 129 and public gathering places.

12) Encourage alternatives to 35-acre subdivisions such as existing voluntary, incentive based programs such as PDR and LPS. Market and promote these programs.

2.5.5 Existing Implementation Measures.

1) Land in the Elk River Valley is zoned primarily for agricultural uses; there is no commercial zoning in the area except within the towns and large older subdivisions. Consequently, every proposal for new residential development on parcels smaller than 35 acres and every proposal for commercial use must be reviewed and approved by the County under provisions of the current Zoning and Subdivision Regulations. Review

criteria in these regulations require conformance with the Routt County Master Plan and the applicable Community Plan. Review criteria also require that provision be made for adequate public services. Development standards require that appropriate infrastructure improvements be the responsibility of the owner/developer.

2) The existing Steamboat Lake Subdivision 5-acre policy allowing wells and individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS) with rezoning and lot consolidations.

2.5.6 Action Items.

1) Amend the Hahn’s Peak Historical District section of the Routt County Zoning Resolution to make the Hahn’s Peak Architectural Control Committee and Homeowners Association referral entities rather than recommending bodies. Explore the option of creating an advisory guidance document that educates homeowners on improvements that continue the character of the village.

2) Resolve existing

wastewater sewage problems in Hahn’s Peak Village for existing developed systems to decrease or eliminate existing pollution problems.

3) Prepare a water quality plan specific to the Hahn’s Peak area that improves and maintains a healthy system.

4) Establish explicit policies and criteria concerning connection to the Hahn’s Peak Village systems.

5) Distribute the “Guide for Rural Living”, or the equivalent to new residents in the area at the building permit or property closing stage.

6) Initiate a “community economic indicators” project to help business determine future needs and determine a sustainable economic business plan.

2.5.7 Locational Criteria.

1) The policies are applicable throughout Routt County. The listed action items are primarily specific to the Hahn’s Peak area.

2.5.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Amend Hahn’s Peak Village Zone District regulations	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 2+
Create Hahn’s Peak guidelines	Middle	Consultant	County	Year 3+	Year 4+
Correct Hahn’s Peak Village	Middle	\$ 300,000	County, Property	Year 2+	Year 5+

sewage problems			Owners		
Prepare a Hahn's Peak Village water quality plan	Middle	\$ 25,000	County	Year 3+	Year 5+
Create connection criteria for Hahn's Peak sewage plan	Short	In-house	County	Year 3+	Year 3+
Distribute Guide to Rural Living	Short	\$ 5,000	County	Year 1+	Year 1+

2.6 STEAMBOAT LAKE SUBDIVISIONS

2.6.1 Background

Much of the land around Steamboat Lake State Park and adjacent to Hahn's Peak Village is platted into residential lots. The Steamboat Lake Subdivision, created in the early 1970's, has gone through a number of changes in ownership and zoning. Utility availability and use of the property have been two significant issues impacting the Subdivision. The Steamboat Lake Subdivision has never been developed the way it was originally envisioned. The original 10 filings contained over 2,200 platted lots, district water and sewer and associated amenities. At build-out, the population of the proposed community could expand to up to 5,000 additional residents.

The reality of the Steamboat Lake subdivisions is that only 219 lots can now be serviced by central water and sewer, about 10% of the total number of lots. The zoning on the majority of the lots is either Low Density Residential (LDR) or Medium Density Residential

(MDR). Both of these zone districts require that lots be served by a central sewer system. Routt County implemented a policy that prohibited the permitting of septic systems for lots less than 5 acres in size. Because most of the platted residential lots in the Steamboat Lake subdivisions were considerably smaller than 5 acres and do not have central services, they are considered to be unbuildable until services are provided. Because these lots are unbuildable at this time, very little other infrastructure has been built, including roads. A few property owners have assembled enough contiguous lots to equal five acres and have rezoned parcels to Mountain Residential Estates (MRE) to make legal buildable lots.

Today, many owners of lots in the original Steamboat Lake filings continue to be confused about the uses of their lots including the ability to camp on them. Some of the lot owners are now working together to explore options for their land.

Subdivision Name	Zoning*	Number of Lots	Water/Sewer Status	Number of Homes Built
Steamboat Lake Filing #1	LDR	131	54 served/77 unserved	17
Steamboat Lake Filing #2	LDR+C	374	165 served/209/unserved	41
Steamboat Lake Filing #3	LDR	311	Individual W+S, lots	0

			must be 5 ac. (min.)	
Steamboat Lake Filing #4	LDR	112	Same as Filing 3	0
Steamboat Lake Filing #5	LDR	298	Same as Filing 3	2
Steamboat Lake Filing #6	LDR+C	192	Same as Filing 3	0
Steamboat Lake Filing #7	LDR+C	313	Same as Filing 3	0
Steamboat Lake Filing #8	LDR+GR	118	Same as Filing 3	0
TOTAL		1849		61

*LDR = Low Density Residential; C =Commercial. Other similar zoning districts may be represented, i.e. General Residential (GR). Source Routt County Assessors Office, 1999.

2.6.2 Challenges and Opportunities

Camping and Accessory Structures. Most of Steamboat Lake lots remain undeveloped and some property owners have decided to use their lots for camping. The approved residential zoning on these lots has always prohibited camping as either a use-by-right or a use-by-permit and, therefore, camping on them is a violation of the Routt County Zoning Resolution.

Many landowners wish to continue camping in the area and have asked the County for help in finding ways to allow them to do so. Options put forth by the landowners include changing certain filings into camping or trailer parks, and rezoning entire filings to a zone district that is compatible with the 5-acre well and septic limitation such as MRE to allow building of vacation homes.

Some property owners leave their camp trailers on-site on a long-term seasonal basis. Others have erected storage structures. These structures violate zoning regulations because they are considered accessory structures that can only be built after the primary dwelling is built. Many of the property owners in Steamboat Lake are frustrated that their land is unbuildable and that

camping and accessory structures are prohibited.

2.6.3 Goal.

Development in the Steamboat Lake Subdivision should minimize public service expenditures, environmental impacts, and limit individual private risk where possible.

2.6.4 Policies.

1) Establish a land banking system. Encourage land trades between owners of lots in Steamboat Lakes subdivision filings that do not have appropriate public services and the County and/or Steamboat Lake State Park to facilitate acquisition of buffer areas and to assemble/provide buildable parcels for the Steamboat Lakes subdivision lot owners.

2) Ensure preservation of open space and common areas as they were originally approved or equivalent.

3) Until long-term solutions are realized, solve the illegal camping problems in Steamboat Lake Subdivision.

4) Continue the existing Steamboat Lake Subdivision 5-acre policy allowing wells and individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS) with rezoning and lot consolidations.

2.6.5 Existing Implementation Measures.

1) The existing Steamboat Lake Subdivision 5-acre policy allowing wells and individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS) with rezoning and lot consolidations.

2.6.6 Action Items

1) Routt County should clearly refine the 5-acre policy to include septic requirements, permits necessary,

and building setbacks.

2) Explore the possibility of directing growth where public services can be efficiently provided. Establish urban growth boundaries around village centers.

2.6.7 Locational Criteria

1) Determine which filings will have service in the shorter term and direct growth to these areas in Steamboat Lake Subdivision.

2.6.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Create more explicit 5 acre Policy	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 2+
Establish urban boundary for villages	Middle	In-house	County	Year 3+	Year 4+

2.7 TRANSPORTATION

2.7.1 Background.

The Laramie Trail became the first major transportation corridor in the Upper Elk area. Established in the early 1870's, this route connected Hahn's Peak Village and Columbine to Laramie, Wyoming via Whisky Park. The Ellis Freight Trail was established in 1888 and created a shorter route to markets to the north. The Elk River Road, which paralleled the Elk River, now designated as RCR 129, was established in the mid 1880's to link Steamboat Springs with Hahn's Peak, the County seat at that time.

Today, RCR 129 serves as the primary connection to North Routt

County, and is the only year 'round paved automobile route into the area. RCR 129 runs from Steamboat Springs through the Upper Elk River Valley, the Hahn's Peak basin, the Little Snake River Valley to Baggs, Wyoming a distance of approximately 80 miles. It is essentially the lifeline to and from the Upper Elk area, connecting the region to goods and services and other transportation links such as the two local airports. The unpaved section of RCR 129 between Columbine and Three Forks Ranch remains closed in the winter.

RCR 129 is a two-lane asphalt rural roadway, which follows the

contours of the Elk River Valley. Topography and the river flood plain are constraints to the use and capacity of the road. The width and contours of RCR 129 also affect its safe usage and create parking problems in some areas. Present traffic volumes are approximately 1900 average daily trips

(ADT), with growth to approximately 4500 vehicle trips per day by the year 2016. The design capacity of RCR 129 is approximately 12,000 trips per day. The volume and speed of traffic on a roadway can adversely affect the perception of quality of life for residents adjacent to a roadway.

Estimated Traffic Volumes on RCR 129¹⁸

County Road	Bridge No.	Feature	1998 ADT	2016 future ADT
129	909	Big Creek	1938	4459
129	908	Elk River	1415	3255
64	921	Willow Creek	307	706
64	920	Hinman Creek	173	398

The Federal Highway Works Administration (FHWA) has funded widening RCR 129. The FHWA program is meant to address roads that are in or provide access to National Forest Lands to mitigate increased traffic related to tourism, logging and residential development. The first phase from near Moonhill to the Milligan Ranch was completed in 1988. Phase two, from Steamboat Lake sewer ponds to Willow Creek was completed in 1992. Completed in 1996, the third phase widened and paved the previously un-paved portion of RCR 129 between Steamboat Lake State Park (RCR 62) and Columbine. Phase IV, completed in 1998, widened the narrow and damaged stretch of RCR 129 between Willow Creek Divide and RCR 62.

Alternative transportation modes in winter and summer to relieve traffic impacts in the valley are beginning to be discussed. Snowmobiles are a primary mode of winter transportation in this region. Used both for recreation and transportation, snowmobiles are allowed to travel on all unplowed county roads, portions of RCR 62 and RCR 129 as allowed by the Routt County Commissioners. The area is becoming increasingly popular as a snowmobile destination for those seeking alternative winter vacation opportunities.

Bicycle and pedestrian issues are becoming increasingly important as numbers of residents and visitors grow. Issues regarding non-motorized transportation have not been previously addressed for the areas outside of public

¹⁸ Routt County Road and Bridge Dept. from data received from Jack Vaughn of HLA, Inc. on 11-24-98

lands. A land use strategy that encourages diversity and the concentration of mixed uses will reduce dependency on vehicular travel.

2.7.2 Challenges and Opportunities

Automobile traffic on RCR 129 is increasing in proportion to residential and recreational growth in the Upper Elk Valley. Throughout the year, thousands of weekend tourists use this route to access the many recreational opportunities in the area.

Trails: Bicycle, Pedestrian, Equestrian and Snowmobile. In recent years RCR 129 has become a popular bicycling and snowmobiling route. While some stretches of the road have adequate shoulders for safe cycling, other areas are narrow with little or no shoulder presenting an unsafe situation for both motorists and cyclists.

Parking, especially for winter recreationists, is a growing problem as this use continues to increase. Trucks pulling snowmobiles need room to park and unload. Parking for recreation is limited to designated areas.

Trails linking commercial lodging areas and public lands offer a safe alternative for bicycle, pedestrian, snowmobile and equestrian travel on the County roads. Such trails would accommodate the growth of recreational use. Several potential trail connections will be addressed, including a trail linking Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake with Hahn's Peak and Columbine and Hahn's Peak. RCR 129 through Clark is narrow with no shoulders, yet this area has the highest pedestrian traffic in the

Upper Elk planning area and a off-road trail between Clark and Glen Eden should be a high priority.

Transit. Many residents of the Upper Elk Valley commute to Steamboat Springs for work and general services. If the demand is shown to exist, a link into the regional public transit system might be possible. Currently, commercial taxi transportation is permitted by the Forest Service to deliver visitors to the National Forest. This offers the opportunity for multi-day backcountry trips between the Seedhouse corridor and Steamboat Springs without the need for a vehicle.

2.7.3 Goal

To provide a safe and adequate transportation and road system with a variety of modes, minimizing potential modal conflicts and the cumulative environmental and community impacts.

2.7.4 Policies

1) Discourage new road building and extension of County maintenance service on to additional County roads.

2) Continue the policy of classifying internal subdivision roads as private, outside of the County's responsibility.

3) Resolve parking and traffic problems for snowmobiles and other recreationists and minimize impact on residential areas.

4) Provide a variety of alternative transportation modes to minimize impact of vehicular traffic.

5) Develop a trail system for alternative transportation modes (e.g. bicycle, pedestrian, equestrian, snowmobile) in the Upper Elk River Valley. Consider trails that link recreational concentrations in parks and a trail along RCR 129.

6) Encourage the use of public transit. Share shuttle service between schools, locals and tourists.

7) Widen those sections of RCR 129 between Mad Creek and Columbine not yet completed.

8) Connect appropriate trails to create an integrated system.

9) Do not pave RCR 129 beyond Columbine.

2.7.5 Existing Implementation Measures

1) Existing Subdivision regulations.

2) Special and Conditional Use permits for tourist related business.

2.7.6 Action Items

1) Seek cost sharing with other agencies, user groups to pay for construction and maintenance of parking small, sensitively located scattered parking areas for recreational users. Ensure County supports grant

2.7.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Conduct parking study including location, construction and maintenance	Short	\$ 10,000	State Parks, County, USFS	Year 2+	Year 4+

seeking effort for development of these sites.

2) Alert all potential developers, realtors, homeowners and landowners that the County is not receptive to accepting additional maintenance or plowing.

3) Continue to end winter maintenance and paving of RCR 129 at Columbine to discourage through traffic to and from Baggs and the Little Snake River Valley, to maintain Columbine’s lodging, ambiance, and historic character.

4) Investigate the feasibility of public transit in the Upper Elk River Valley.

5) Continue widening RCR 129 between Mad Creek and Columbine to provide a safer road system.

6) Develop a trail system plan and implementation strategy including a trail along RCR 129.

7) Provide an alternative to snowmobile traffic on RCR 129.

2.7.7 Locational Criteria

These policies and action items apply throughout the Upper Elk River Valley; many are in the Steamboat Lake influence area.

Education on County Road Maintenance	Short	In-house	County, Board of Realtors	Year 1+	Year 1+
Continue to end maintenance at Columbine	Short	In-house	County	Year 1+	Year 1+
Conduct public transit study	Middle	\$ 15,000	Business Community, Citizens, County	Year 3+	Year 4+
Widening of RCR 129	Long	\$millions	USFS	Year 5+	Year 10+
Develop trail system	Middle	\$100,000	State Parks, USFS, County	Year 3+	Year 4+

2.8 PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

2.8.1 Background.

There are four service providers other than the agencies under direction of the Routt County Board of Commissioners, which provide services to residents of the Upper Elk River Valley. These are: the Routt County Emergency (Medical) Management District, the North Routt Fire Protection District; the Routt County School District, and; refuse collection and disposal provided by 'Waste Management', a private company.

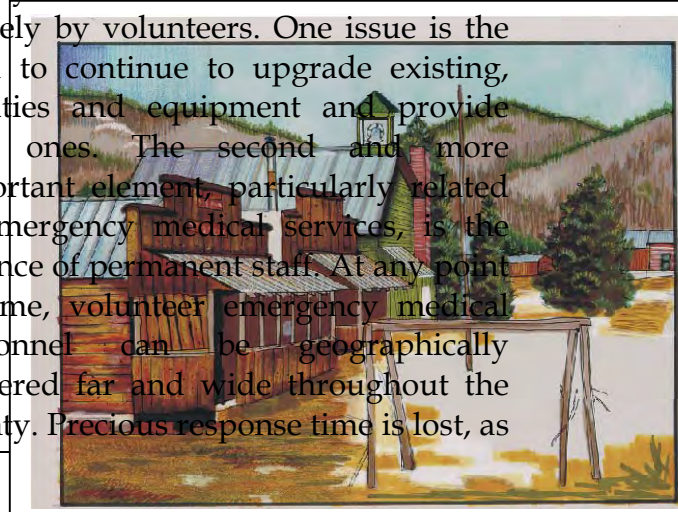
2.8.2 Challenges and Opportunities.

The three vital service agencies, which are the concern of Routt County residents, are the emergency, medical, fire, and the School District.

The issue regarding the School District is primarily a transportation issue. The construction of a school building is not justified due to the insufficient growth in population and

the wide age range of school age children in the Upper Elk River Valley. This requires children to be bused. As the population has increased however, the capacity of the buses is becoming an issue. Winter access along RCR 129 can be marginal during the winter school months, and occasionally impossible along other routes which creating problems for school bus service.

The provision of emergency medical and fire protection services is more critical. While there are facilities and equipment available at Clark, this facility and its services are staffed entirely by volunteers. One issue is the need to continue to upgrade existing facilities and equipment and provide new ones. The second and more important element, particularly related to emergency medical services, is the absence of permanent staff. At any point in time, volunteer emergency medical personnel can be geographically scattered far and wide throughout the county. Precious response time is lost, as



the volunteers are drawn from their regular job, which may also be critical, to access equipment and then respond to emergencies.

In both instances, the underlying issue is finance. The districts are each financed by property assessments. Legislative and political limitations, land use and property valuation, and citizen concern regarding taxation issues in general, are all factors in resolving the needs of the districts. The availability and cost of personnel is the major limitation to the provision of services because of the long-term fiscal impact. In metropolitan communities, police and fire pensions and direct labor cost consume as much as thirty percent of the general fund revenue.

Existing revenue is available to possibly support construction of an additional em/fire facility. However, funding for staffing would remain a void. Neither future population or revenue growth are likely to be significant enough to generate the additional revenue, to adequately fund staffing and equipment needed to provide either emergency medical/fire or school bus services.

2.8.3 Goal

Provide a framework of countywide public facilities and services to ensure adequate, accessible, and reliable resources for the health, safety, and welfare of the community. Avoid duplication of effort and ensure the availability of effective and efficient facilities and services for all County residents with a minimum of public expenditures.

2.8.4 Policies

1) Encourage private sector developers and organizations to consider the need for public facilities and services. Ensure that fire, police, ambulance, emergency management service, and other health, safety and welfare services are adequate to serve existing and proposed growth.

2) Promote the concept of the "Cluster" development to help decrease the need for public facilities and services; to decrease the need to extend and pay for public services, and; to maximize the area retained in rural land uses or open space.

3) In order to encourage centralization of facilities and services, allow higher densities of development within existing service area boundaries.

4) Implement or establish appropriate zoning ordinances to control septic system development, and enforce compliance of such regulations.

5) Establish development policies and strategies to pay for increases in public facilities and services.

6) Support rural garbage pick-up.

7) Encourage other local, state and federal governmental agencies to provide related facilities and services for county and local residents, while minimizing the costs of those services, given the financial limitations of the county's resources.

8) Work together at the County and District levels to create new sanitary districts to serve local

community needs, and be proactive in encouraging cooperation among local communities.

9) Establish standards for organization, development and administration of sanitary and other appropriate improvement districts where the district will facilitate developed goals and policies.

10) Encourage the location of public facilities in population village centers.

2.8.5 Existing Implementation Measures

1) The Routt County School District and the North Routt Fire Protection District are funded through mil levy assessments against property within the boundaries of their respective districts. Under Tabor, any increase in taxes must be approved by a majority of

registered county voters.

2) The Routt County Zoning Resolution does not allow small lot residential development without central water and sewer systems.

2.8.6 Action Items

1) Working with the appropriate entities, examine and identify the cost of service provisions under each item. Establish citizen based advocacy groups to lead campaigns for property tax increases (necessary for long-term operational expenses), and bond issues for capital facilities.

2) Establish a one-time ‘service assessment’ fee for capital facilities for new construction.

2.8.7 Locational Criteria

1) These policies and action items apply throughout the Upper Elk River Valley.

2.8.8 Action Plan Summary

RECOMMENDED ACTION	TIME FRAME	EST. COST	RESPONSIBILITY/ FUNDING SOURCE	PLANNING SCHEDULE	IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
Examine service needs/cost of service	Short	\$ 10,000	County, community	Year 3+	Year 4+
Establish service assessment	long	In-house	County	Year 5+	Year 5+