

SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST ROADLESS AREAS from a wildlife perspective

The San Juan Public Lands encompass approximately 2.5 million acres in five counties in southwestern Colorado. U. S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) jointly manage these lands under the "Service First" concept which strives to eliminate jurisdictional boundaries and enhance stewardship. We realize the Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) analysis applies only to lands within the National Forest System,

San Juan National Forest System Lands encompass about 1.9 million acres. Approximately 32% of these lands or 604,000 acres are categorized as IRA. Within the IRA, 29% or 543,000 acres allow road construction or reconstruction under existing management. Road construction is prohibited in 3% or 61,000 acres. The SJNF contains over 3700 miles of "classified" and "unclassified" roads. About half of the land area is accessible by roads.

These diverse landscapes provide a range of plant communities: sagebrush, mountain shrubs, pinyon-juniper, ponderosa pine, aspen, spruce-fir and tundra. These plant communities vary by seral stage, structural characteristics, and species composition. Combined with a broad elevation gradient, aspect, slope and soils, the result is an enormous diversity in wildlife habitats complimented by huge array of wildlife species.

The San Juan National Forest provides habitat for approximately 190 bird species, 55 mammals, twelve reptiles and five amphibians. Forty-three listed or sensitive species occur within the San Juan National Forest including: bald eagle, peregrine falcon, Canada lynx,¹ Southwestern willow flycatcher, Mexican spotted owl, spotted bat, American marten, Northern goshawk, Lewis' woodpecker, fox sparrow, Western boreal toad and Colorado River cutthroat trout. Several of these species are unique to southwest Colorado, have narrow habitat affinities or are sensitive to roads and other human disturbance.

For example, the spotted bat has been documented only in Northwest Colorado and in the Southwest corner of Colorado. This bat prefers open ponderosa pine forest habitats with a rock features such as vertical cliffs or canyons near water, where they roost and rear young in the crevices. Spotted bats select cliffs that are far from human activity.

Wildlife of the San Juan National Forest contributes significantly to the economy of the State of Colorado, particularly its rural counties such as Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Mineral and Montezuma. Hunting, angling and wildlife viewing contribute about \$2.5 billion annually to the local economy. Much of that money is brought in by charismatic mega-fauna, e.g., deer and elk. The San Juan's big game populations number approximately 44,000 elk and about 71,000 deer. Other species of economic interest include: Merriam's turkey, bighorn sheep, trout and a variety of birds. With respect to the economy and money generated from wildlife-recreation, it is important to understand that it is as important to provide diverse experiences. Some people prefer easy encounters with wildlife that are steps away from their vehicle, while others prefer remote, backcountry experiences.

The mission of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) is to protect, preserve, enhance and manage wildlife and their environment for the use, benefit and enjoyment of the people of Colorado and its visitors. One of the ways we achieve our mission is to regularly provide information, comments and management recommendations to land management agencies, counties, municipalities and citizen's groups such as yours.

¹ The San Juans comprise the core of Colorado's Lynx Recovery Area.

To provide the Citizens' Taskforce with information that might be useful, we are also including information specific to each roadless area. **We have organized our comments into two categories:**

- 1. Named parcels over 5,000 acres**
- 2. Unnamed parcels between 2,500-5,000 acres**

SAN JUAN ROADLESS AREAS, NAMED PARCELS OVER 5,000 ACRES

Glade IRA

Plant communities within the Glade IRA vary by elevation and include: aspen and mixed conifer forest, mountain shrublands and pinyon/juniper woodlands.

The Glade IRA provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species found in mid-elevation montane habitat types. Some of these species are classified as "Forest sensitive" including purple martin and loggerhead shrike. Numerous species of game animals including mule deer, elk, black bear, mountain lion and bobcat are found within the Glade IRA year round. Ungulate densities increase dramatically in the fall and winter. CDOW has mapped a portion of the area as critical deer and elk winter range. The Glade supports a significant portion of deer and elk for Game Management Units 70, 71, 711 during the winter months. Winter wildlife inventories and a radio telemetry elk study conducted by the CDOW within the IRA shows that the area is heavily used by wintering elk. Historically, this area supported a robust band-tailed pigeon population but their numbers have declined significantly in the last 20 years.

Glade - Management Recommendations

The Glade is currently managed under a "4 B" prescription by the USFS which emphasizes wildlife habitat management. Motorized travel is restricted from December 1 to April 1 to protect wintering wildlife. In addition, motorized travel is limited to established and inventoried roads between April 1 and November 30 each year.

Travel management in the surrounding area is unrestricted. Unrestricted travel management increases the importance of this area for wildlife, creating an area where wildlife can avoid disturbance. This "safe area" also prevents displacing elk onto adjacent private agricultural lands. The area provides opportunities for hunters who choose to hunt away from off road vehicles and high density roaded areas.

The CDOW recommends that the Glade IRA remain managed as roadless to benefit wildlife. Further, eliminating and reclaiming existing non-inventoried roads and motorized trails within the IRA would increase wildlife values and prevent off road travel violations. Any effort to increase enforcement of the current travel restrictions is appreciated.

McPhee IRA

Habitat in the McPhee IRA can be characterized as mountain shrublands at lower elevations and ponderosa pine/aspen forests at higher elevations.

The area supports a significant portion of wintering wildlife from the surrounding area, particularly elk and deer. Telemetry elk studies conducted in the area as well as winter wildlife inventories indicate that approximately 3,000 elk from the surrounding three game management areas winter in the area. Management goals for the USFS and the CDOW are to improve existing wintering big game habitat in the IRA encouraging deer and elk to stay on public land as opposed to feeding on adjoining private agricultural lands.

The area is historic habitat for both Gunnison's sage grouse and mountain sharp-tailed grouse. The IRA contains habitat for several Forest sensitive species including Northern goshawk, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Lewis' woodpecker. Black bear, mountain lion and Merriam's turkey are also common.

McPhee - Management Recommendations

Sage Hen, the lower portion of the IRA, is closed to motorized vehicles during the winter to protect wintering big game and is managed by the USFS under a "4B" prescription. It is virtually the only portion of public land on the south side of the Dolores River canyon that meets the habitat requirements for wintering big game. CDOW recommends retaining McPhee as roadless. Further, eliminating non-inventoried and non-system roads within the IRA will increase the values of this critical wildlife habitat.

Fish Creek IRA

The Fish Creek IRA is dominated by mixed coniferous forest on the northern portion and aspen and mountain shrub on the southern portion.

The area has high concentrations of elk during the spring, fall and summer. Winter use by elk is restricted to the southern portion of the IRA. Significant numbers of elk utilize the area for calving. Band-tailed pigeons nest in and utilize the area in spring, summer and fall. Black bears find the area especially important as the shrub community provides important feeding areas during the critical fall period. Radio telemetry data shows that Canada lynx use the area.

Fish Creek – Management Recommendations

This IRA is rare with respect to the surrounding area as it represents a large, mid-elevation area that is mostly free of roads and motorized trails. The use by and density of wildlife is higher within the IRA than in surrounding areas because of the lower density of roads and lessened use by off road vehicles.

Travel management currently restricts motorized vehicles to designated roads and trails. The CDOW concurs with this management and recommends closing and revegetating all non-system roads and trails to benefit wildlife. Closing or prohibiting motorized travel on the designated ATV trail off the Willow Divide Road into the Fish Creek drainage would prevent undue harassment of wildlife.

Stoner Mesa IRA

Habitat types in the Stoner Mesa area range from mountain shrub, ponderosa pine and aspen to mountain meadow and spruce/fir forests.

The area supports a significant population of elk and a large number of mule deer. Stoner Mesa provides necessary elk habitat requirements year round. Elk use decreases in the winter, dependent on snow depths and is restricted to the southern end of the IRA and the Stoner Creek drainage. CDOW has documented significant mule deer fawn production in the area. This IRA falls within the lynx recovery area and CDOW has documented use by Canada lynx. Stoner Mesa also supports blue grouse, Merriam's turkeys, and the band-tailed pigeon populations.

Stoner Mesa – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends that the Stoner Creek IRA remain roadless. Prohibiting motorized vehicle traffic from the Stoner Creek and Stoner Mesa trails would prevent unnecessary disturbance to wildlife and outdoor sports enthusiasts. The size of this IRA with the existence of few motorized trails or roads provides unique experiences for outdoorsmen who seek areas free of disturbance.

Storm Peak IRA

The Storm Peak IRA is a huge roadless area consisting of several different plant communities. The variety of habitat types within these communities supports many different wildlife species.

Mountain lions, black bears, elk and mule deer utilize the IRA. Radio telemetry data shows that Canada lynx also occupy the Storm Peak area. The CDOW is evaluating Storm Peak as a potential release sight for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep as it provides the necessary habitat requirements. Elk use the area during the spring, summer and fall. In winter their use is restricted to the south facing slopes and is dependent upon winter snow depths. Given the size of the Storm Peak IRA and the number of south facing slopes even winter use can be significant.

A wild population of pure native Colorado River cutthroat trout exists in the lower end of Little Taylor Creek. The entire drainage is designated as cutthroat habitat by CDOW regulations.² Additional populations of pure native cutthroat trout may exist in other waters within the IRA.

Storm Peak – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends the continued management of Storm Peak IRA as roadless, with motorized vehicles restricted to existing system roads and trails. However, prohibiting motorized travel on the Calico, Priest Gulch and Johnny Bull trails would prevent disturbance to wildlife and habitat destruction caused by off trail vehicle abuse.

Ryman IRA

The Ryman IRA is comprised of mixed coniferous forest, mountain meadow and aspen plant communities.

The area supports a significant population of elk year round. Elk use decreases during the winter months. Elk seek calving areas in aspen/moist meadow habitat, found throughout the IRA. The area also provides important mule deer fawning areas and habitat during the spring, summer and fall. Black bear and mountain lion use the area along with a variety of small mammals and birds, including Merriam's turkey and blue grouse.

Ryman – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends continuing the roadless status, with vehicular traffic restricted to existing system roads. This large IRA with its few existing motorized trails and roads is highly used by a variety of wildlife species. The area is also important to hunters and anglers seeking areas free from motorized users.

Prohibiting off road travel and vehicular travel on non-system trails and roads will reduce disturbance to wildlife.

Blackhawk Mountain IRA

The Blackhawk Mountain IRA lies east of the town of Rico. Dominate plant communities include: mixed coniferous forest, aspen and mountain meadows of grasses and forbs.

Elk are the dominate ungulates in the large areas that are furthest from roads and off highway vehicle trails. Elk use the area for calving, spring and fall foraging areas and hiding cover. The elevations above tree line are used extensively by elk, in the summer months where they take advantage of high protein grasses and forbs. Mule deer also fawn within the Blackhawk Mountain area. The IRA provides suitable Canada lynx habitat and radio telemetry data confirms Canada lynx use.

Blackhawk Mountain – Management Recommendations

The Blackhawk Mountain IRA is generally free of off highway trails and non-system trails and roads due to its topography. The lack of off system, non inventoried roads and trails results in an increase use by wildlife within the IRA. A few non-system roads exist and numbers appear to be increasing.

The CDOW recommends that the Blackhawk Mountain IRA remains roadless to prevent disturbance to wildlife that utilize the IRA. The CDOW further recommends restricting motorized vehicles to existing system roads.

Hermosa IRA

² CDOW Wildlife Commission Regulations Chapter 0

The Hermosa IRA is located northwest of Durango. It is the largest roadless area in within the San Juan National Forest. This landscape encompasses a diverse mix of ecotypes from montane shrublands to alpine and includes some of the largest stands of old growth ponderosa pine in this area. The centerpiece of this landscape is Hermosa Creek. But, the IRA also contains Bear Creek and a portion of the Roaring Fork watershed.

The Hermosa area is important to many wildlife species, including several big game species. The CDOW has mapped the area as important winter, winter concentration, summer, calving/production and transitional ranges. Elk remain in the Hermosa Creek area year round unless pushed down by heavy snow in severe winters. The area also contains important movement corridors. Mule deer utilize the area for fawning, transition and summer ranges. Because of the high concentration of big game prey species, the area is also important mountain lion. Black bear depend on the mixture of native grasses, shrubs and forbs during the den emergence and summer hyperphagia.³

Peregrine falcons nest on the cliffs of Elbert Creek and Hermosa Cliffs. Several pairs usually produce two or more chicks each year. Peregrines are sensitive to human disturbance and are listed as USFS sensitive species. Merriam's turkey and blue grouse are plentiful and utilize forested areas for nesting and fall feeding habitat. Bald eagles and osprey have been sighted in the area.

Several creeks within the Hermosa IRA are important in the Colorado River cutthroat Trout recovery plan. The CDOW introduced Nanita Lake strain, Colorado River cutthroat trout in the East Fork of Hermosa Creek above the waterfall near Sig Creek in 1992 (after a cooperative restoration project between the USFS and the CDOW in the late 1980s). Big Bend Creek, from the headwaters to the confluence with Hermosa Creek, contains a population of genetically pure Colorado River cutthroat trout as does Clear Creek⁴ (located several miles south of Big Bend Creek and part of the Hermosa Creek Drainage). Future plans include re-introducing Colorado River cutthroat trout to North Hope Creek.

Although lynx were not initially released in the Hermosa IRA, they have been located during on-going lynx monitoring associated with the recovery effort. The area supports a healthy prey base for the lynx including snowshoe hare, pine squirrel, mice and blue grouse. Numerous forest sensitive species occupy this landscape including American marten, flammulated owl, northern leopard frog, Lewis' woodpecker as well as others. The USFS increased monitoring efforts in 2005 to help determine population viability across the San Juan National Forest.

Additionally, the area has some very unique wildlife attributes. The cliffs between Durango Mountain Ski Resort and Elbert Creek are historic range for bighorn sheep. Historically, sheep utilized the "Hermosa Cliffs" as summer range. Recently, bighorn sheep have begun to re-occupy this habitat as a result of a transplant into the Animas River Drainage in 2000.

Hermosa – Management Recommendations

CDOW recommends maintaining the current roadless management of the areas. Constructing new and more roads into this IRA would fragment valuable habitat and alter the wild nature of the area. The roadless nature in the Hermosa IRA has many wildlife values and provides distinctive outdoor recreation opportunities for people seeking wishing backcountry wildlife experiences. The existing road and trail system provides sufficient diversity for the various users (e.g., hikers, bikers, horseback riders, ATVs).

La Plata IRA

³ Hyperphagia is an excessive intake of food. Bears, in preparation for hibernation, will spend about 20 hours per day feeding. During hyperphagia, they may consume 15,000 to 20,000 calories daily.

⁴ The Clear Creek population of cutthroats in the Hermosa drainage was introduced by CDOW transplant from Big Bend Creek in 1989

The La Plata IRA is south and adjacent to the Hermosa IRA. Habitat types include spruce/fir vegetation intermixed with ponderosa pine, high mountain meadows, lower elevation stands of Gambel oak and steep rocky canyons.

The spruce-fir forest and high mountain meadows provide production, summer, fall and transitional habitats for mule deer and elk. Mule deer winter below US Highway 160. Elk winter below Baldy Mountain and in Perins Peak State Wildlife Area (SWA)⁵. CDOW has mapped important migration corridors in the La Plata Mountains and Junction Creek. Because of the high concentration of big game prey species, the area is also important mountain lion. Black bear depend on the mixture of native grasses, shrubs and forbs during the den emergence and summer hyperphagia.⁶ Merriam's turkey and blue grouse are plentiful and utilize forested areas for nesting and fall feeding habitat.

The La Plata IRA also provides diverse habitat for small mammals, rodents, cavity nesting birds and smaller predators. Pika inhabit rocky canyons while pine squirrel, Williamson's sapsucker, gray jay and Cooper's hawk live and nest in the mixed spruce/fir/ponderosa habitat. Pine marten are also found in forested areas in La Plata Canyon and Junction Creek and are currently listed on the USFS list of sensitive species.⁷

Several creeks within the La Plata IRA are important in the Colorado River cutthroat trout recovery plan. Flagler Creek within the Junction Creek Drainage was stocked with Weminuche strain of Colorado River cutthroat in the summer of 2005. More creeks in this drainage are scheduled for stocking in future.

Additionally, the area between Baker Peak and Baldy Peak is documented historical range for bighorn sheep. Bighorn sheep inhabited in this area during the summer and moved into lower elevations near the Decker Tract of Perins Peak SWA, Junction Creek and Hermosa Creek in the winter when pushed out by snow. Few of the animals remain in the area and are occasionally seen in La Plata Canyon and along the Junction Creek Road (USFS Road 171).

La Plata – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends maintaining the current roadless management of the La Plata IRA. The La Plata IRA provides many wildlife values and recreation opportunities for people seeking backcountry wildlife experiences. The existing road and trail system provides sufficient diversity for various users (e.g., hikers, bikers, horseback riders, ATVs). Constructing new and more roads into this IRA would fragment valuable habitat, alter the wild nature of the area and increase conflicts between user groups and mining stakeholders. (Both La Plata Canyon and Junction Creek have a major roadway in them that provides access to trailheads and receive heavy use, spring to fall. Conflicts are increasing between hikers, bikers, people out for a drive and other users, including the owners of private land in-holdings, i.e., mining claims.)

⁵ Perins Peak SWA is managed for big game winter range and is closed to vehicular and all public access during winter.

⁶ Hyperphagia is an excessive intake of food. Bears, in preparation for hibernation, will spend about 20 hours per day feeding. During hyperphagia, they may consume 15,000 to 20,000 calories daily.

⁷ The USFS increased monitoring efforts in 2005 to help determine population viability across the San Juan National Forest.

San Miguel IRA

The San Miguel IRA is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness and shares many of the same wilderness attributes. The spruce-fir forest and high mountain meadows provide important habitat for numerous wildlife species.

The area has been mapped as important calving, summer and transitional habitat for elk. Mule deer use the area as summer range, migrating from winter ranges as far away as Montrose, Telluride and Durango. The area is mapped as historical habitat and overall range for bighorn sheep. The Lynx Recovery Project has released lynx in and around Silverton because of the high numbers of snowshoe hare. Lynx use, documented by radio telemetry data includes travel between the Silverton and Telluride areas.

Due to the concentration of big game prey species the area is important mountain lion habitat. Pine marten have been found in the San Miguel area and are currently listed on the USFS list of sensitive species. The USFS increased monitoring efforts in 2005 to help determine population viability across the San Juan National Forest.

Two wild Colorado River cutthroat trout populations live in waters within the San Miguel roadless area: Deep Creek, from headwaters to confluence with San Miguel River and Elk Creek, from headwaters to confluence with Fall Creek.

San Miguel – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends maintaining the current roadless management of the San Miguel area. The rough terrain in this area limits road construction in many areas. The trail system for the Colorado Trail provides diversity for different users.

HD Mountains IRA

The HD Mountain IRA is located southeast of Bayfield. This area is currently leased and planned for oil and gas development. It is also a popular hunting area.

The HD Mountains are important winter range/severe winter range and a winter concentration area for mule deer and elk. The HDs are also overall range and summer range for mule deer. The HD Mountains IRA contains habitat for at least four species of big game as well as small mammals. The CDOW, USFS, BLM and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT) are currently in the second year of a five-year radio-collar/GPS deer study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impacts of oil and gas exploration on deer survival and habitat use in the HD Mountains. The USFS and the Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) worked together to improve and reclaim areas within the HD Mountains for big game and other species. This involved hydro-chopping and re-seeding of native vegetation including forbs and grasses. The area is important to black bears due to the large quantity of oak brush. Mountain lions are prevalent in the area due to the concentrations of big game.

Historically, peregrine falcons have nested in the HD Mountains area. It provides overall winter range for bald eagle, and a golden eagle foraging area. It is mapped as overall range and winter concentration area for Merriam's turkey. This area hosts a variety of raptors and passerine bird species. The HDs provide marginal Mexican spotted owl habitat, however the owl is likely to use the area for dispersal.

HD Mountains - Management Recommendations

With current and planned oil and gas exploration and drilling in the HD Mountains, it is inevitable that new roads will follow. If new roads are constructed for oil and gas we recommend that the numbers of roads are kept to a minimum and gated to restrict vehicular travel by the general public.

The current travel management allows for off road motorized use in this area. We recommend restricting the motorized vehicles to the existing road and trail systems.

East Animas IRA

The East Animas IRA is bordered by the Animas Valley on the west and Missionary Ridge to the east. The Animas Valley is comprised of numerous homes and small ranches.

This roadless area is over 5000 acres and serves as a migration corridor for deer and elk and as important winter range for elk. Over 1000 elk use this area during normal winters. The roadless quality of this area creates a buffer between the private land found in the Animas Valley and public lands on the San Juan National Forest. Without this roadless area, large herds of elk would create additional and unnecessary conflicts on ranches and other private land in the Animas Valley. Lower elevations are important habitat for black bears due to the abundance of Gambel oak. Some bears travel great distances using the East Animas as a fall feeding area, foraging on acorns. Gambel oak acorns provide high quality⁸ nutrition, allowing bears to store ample fat to survive hibernation. The Animas Canyon at the north end of this IRA is home to a herd of bighorn sheep. These sheep were transplanted in 2000. This herd is thriving and expanding its range.

East Animas – Management Recommendations

CDOW recommends leaving this area as “inventoried roadless.”

Baldy IRA

The Baldy IRA is a large roadless area. Many of the slopes are steep with aspects greater than 45 degrees. During the Missionary Ridge fire of 2002, this area burned intensely. Many hillsides were originally covered with ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and Gambel oak. The fire was so intense that it consumed most of the trees and was classified as a “stand replacement” fire.

During the last four growing seasons the Gambel oak has made a comeback, providing important habitat for numerous passerine birds and Merriam’s turkey. Many of the burned trees are still standing. The numerous insects consuming these dead and dying trees provide important foraging spots for the many species of woodpeckers and nuthatches found on the forest. These species include: Lewis’ woodpecker, three-toed woodpecker and pygmy nuthatch, all of which are listed as sensitive species by the USFS. Those areas where the fire was less intense are covered in tall grasses and 8-10’ aspen saplings. These areas are heavily used by wintering elk.

Baldy – Management Recommendations

CDOW recommends retaining this area as roadless to benefit wildlife.

Florida River IRA

The Florida IRA is a large roadless less area providing excellent wildlife habitat for mule deer, elk, black bear, Merriam’s turkey and numerous wildlife species. The area is a mixture of ponderosa pine and aspen at lower elevations and Engelmann spruce at higher elevations.

This area is used by lynx and has had an active lynx den the past two years. Also found in this area is an active bald eagle nest on the west shore of Lemon Reservoir. Parts of this IRA were affected by the Missionary Ridge Fire in 2002. Since then many of the hillsides have begun to

⁸ High in fat and in protein

show signs of recovery. In some places the grass is 2 feet tall and the aspen rejuvenation is remarkable. Several large herds of elk have begun to use this area during the winter.

Shearer Creek is located in this IRA. In 2005 Colorado River cutthroat trout were stocked into this creek as part of the ongoing recovery effort in Western Colorado.

Florida River – Management Recommendations

CDOW recommends retaining this area as roadless to benefit wildlife.

Weminuche Adjacent IRA

The Weminuche Adjacent IRA is bordered by development to the south. This area is classified as roadless but is netted with trails due to the current travel management status that allows off road travel by ATVs and motorcycles. Currently this area is underutilized by wildlife.

Weminuche Adjacent – Management Recommendations

The Division recommends keeping this area roadless. We will work with the USFS for a change in the travel management in the revision of the forest plan and in other opportunities to discuss travel management.

Runlet Park IRA

This roadless area has many of the same qualities as the Piedra Adjacent area with respect to backcountry big game hunting and high habitat quality because of the Missionary Ridge Fire. The area is an important, documented elk calving site. Blue grouse are also plentiful and utilize Runlet Park as nesting and fall feeding habitat.

Additionally, the area has some very unique wildlife attributes. The cliffs below Runlet Park are critical winter range for the Pine River bighorn sheep herd. This herd of sheep is one of the historic, original, herds in the state. When the animals are pushed out of the high mountains in the Weiminuche Wilderness Area because of deep snow these south facing cliff sides are critical for their survival. Research has shown that bighorns do not respond well to human disturbance. The roadless nature of the area is **essential** for their survival.

Another species that is also dependent on the area and sensitive to human disturbance is the peregrine falcon. For many years peregrines have nested on the cliffs below Runlet Park. The nest usually produces two or more chicks each year.

The Lynx Recovery Project has released lynx near Runlet Park because of the high numbers of snowshoe hare in the area. Lynx are often located in the vicinity as part of the on-going lynx monitoring, associated with the recovery effort.

Runlet Park – Management Recommendations

The primitive nature and scenic beauty of this area has been recognized by adjacent private landowners. The adjoining properties of the Granite Peak Ranch have been placed into conservation easements with the La Plata Open Space Conservancy. The easements protect this land, in perpetuity, against any future development including the building of any additional roads. The public land surrounding these properties should be managed accordingly.

Piedra Adjacent Area IRA

These unroaded areas are adjacent to the Piedra Special Management Area which is managed similar to a mid-elevation wilderness area. Mixed conifer, aspen, spruce-fir and oak are the dominant vegetation types, providing summer and fall habitat for numerous species, including mule deer, elk, black bear and mountain lion. An excellent trail system provides adequate foot and horse access throughout while leaving plenty of escape and hiding cover for wildlife.

Williams Creek and Weminuche Creek provide river otter (State Threatened) habitat. Sightings have been reported in both drainages. In addition, evidence of otter reproduction has been found in the Williams Creek drainage, in the identified roadless area.

Similarly, East Creek and the First Fork of the Piedra have unique and significant wildlife values. The Missionary Ridge fire in 2002 burned into East Creek and altered the habitat greatly, increasing the amount and quality of forage for a variety of herbivores. It has become especially attractive to wintering elk herds and provides high quality transitional range for many animals. The Missionary Ridge fire created a mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas. This habitat diversity provides high quality habitat for a variety of bird and small mammal species. Cavity nesting birds⁹, in particular, have responded favorably to this change. An expanding Merriam's turkey population is increasing each year.

The First Fork drainage is a critical migration corridor for wintering big game animals. During severe winters these animals use the First Fork corridor to migrate south to critical winter ranges around the HD Mountains. Preliminary results from a mule deer radio-collar study, conducted jointly with the CDOW and the SUIT have verified the existence and importance of this area as a migration corridor.

Piedra Adjacent Area – Management Recommendations

An ATV/snowmobile trail across Middle Mountain is very popular and provides a level of motorized access that is not well represented in the vicinity, allowing hunters and others without horses to "pack in" further than they might otherwise. Confusion over the travel management in the area has caused some conflicts and should be addressed in the forest plan currently under revision.

The CDOW manages a small manmade lake in the First Fork drainage. Jacobs Ladder Lake is stocked each year with cutthroat trout and provides a unique opportunity to fish a backcountry lake that is a short hike from the Beaver Meadows Road. This backcountry, yet easily accessible, experience is enjoyed by many people each year.

The East Creek drainage is an important fall hunting area for big game, especially elk. The current roadless nature of the area provides a semi-remote hunting experience close to Vallecito Reservoir for private parties as well as outfitter camps.

The value of mid-elevation roadless areas is often understated. Yet, as is the case with the Piedra Special Management Area, they have high wildlife values for many species that are not present in high elevation roadless areas. We recommend maintaining the current roadless management of this area. The roadless nature within the Piedra Adjacent Roadless Area also provides distinctive outdoor recreation opportunities for people wishing to experience wildlife in the backcountry. Putting roads into this area would fragment valuable habitat and alter the wild nature of the area.

⁹ In North America, 55 avian species nest in cavities.

Graham Park Adjacent Area IRA

The Graham Park IRA is adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness and shares many of the same wilderness attributes. The spruce-fir forest and high mountain meadows provide summer and fall habitat for mule deer and elk, as well as numerous other species. Lynx are known to use the adjacent wilderness area. The CDOW has conducted snowshoe hare surveys since 1998 along the Mosca road (FS 631, south of the IRA) and has found significant numbers of snowshoe hares, an important prey species for endangered lynx. Bighorn sheep are found along the Pine-Piedra divide on Granite and Graham Peaks, as well as in the cliffs which form the Weminuche Wilderness boundary in the Poison Park, Cimarrona, and Williams Creek areas.

The Pine River bighorn sheep herd summers and rears lambs in the Graham peak area. Research has shown that bighorns do not respond well to human disturbance. The roadless nature of the area is **essential** for their survival.

The CDOW and SUIT radio-collar mule deer study (mentioned in the HD Mountains and Piedra Adjacent Area comments) has also shown that many mule deer in the Pine and Piedra drainages use the high country around Graham Peak for summer habitat and fawn-rearing areas. Elk use the area for calving and summer habitat.

Several creeks in the Graham Park IRA are important in the Colorado River cutthroat trout recovery plan. Shaw Creek from the headwaters to the confluence with Weminuche Creek has a wild population of cutthroats of unknown purity. Sand Creek, from its headwaters to FS 631, and Falls Creek, from its headwaters to Weminuche Creek have both been stocked with the pure Weminuche strain of Colorado River cutthroat trout in 2005.

Graham Park – Management Recommendations

Outside of the Graham Park IRA, clear-cut logging has occurred along the Mosca road in the past. Some areas were replanted with non-native lodgepole pine. Current logging practices have had less negative impacts in the area, but most of the areas that are suitable for logging have already been entered. Conflicts between forest users with ATVs going around the gates on closed logging roads have occurred. Similar problems, with ATV's leaving the designated trail, have occurred on the Sand Creek ATV trail, off FS 631. The trail from Poison Park to the Weminuche Wilderness boundary has both ATV and horse traffic on it and conflicts occur between users on this heavily used trail. We recommend reviewing travel management on the Pagosa Ranger District to reduce these conflicts and continue the current forest management practices.

Serviceberry IRA

The Serviceberry IRA is bordered on the west by private property and Colorado Highway 84. Numerous roads receive heavy vehicle traffic on the north, south and east ends of the area. The size of this isolated roadless parcel and motorized traffic surrounding it has led to its increased value to wildlife.

Deer, elk, turkey, black bears and mountain lions use the area extensively. This is one of the last areas deer can be found east of Highway 84 in the fall prior to their migration west and south. The CDOW has mapped this area as severe winter range for elk (although elk are found on it year round). Due to its lower elevation and southern aspects it is used consistently in the winter by Merriam's turkey. The area has a large amount of Gambel oak providing important fall forage for black bears.

Serviceberry – Management Recommendations

The Division of Wildlife recommends that the Serviceberry IRA remain roadless. Prohibiting motorized vehicle traffic in the area to prevent illegal motorized travel and abuse would benefit wildlife. The Serviceberry IRA currently has no motorized vehicle trails. USFS land east of the Serviceberry IRA has many roads and receives a lot of unauthorized ATV use. A potential for the expansion of this traffic into the roadless area exists, although the steep terrain may limit the possibilities of that occurring. Off road travel could lead to serious erosion and noxious weed problems. Uncontrolled infestations of noxious weeds permanently alter native plant communities upon which wildlife depends.

South San Juan Adjacent IRA

The South San Juan Adjacent IRA is bounded on the east by the South San Juan Wilderness. On the west side, private property borders much of its length.

The area is used heavily by deer and elk in the spring, summer and fall. The southern end is recognized the CDOW as severe winter range and a winter concentration area for elk. Merriam's turkey are prominent throughout the IRA. Mountain lions are common and black bears rely on the Gambel oak found along the western and southern end of this roadless area.

South San Juan Adjacent – Management Recommendations

The South San Juan Adjacent IRA has no motorized trails. Due to its proximity to private property along its lower elevations and potential for heavy vehicle use, the Division of Wildlife recommends that it remain roadless. To maintain the values of the area (due to its lack of roads) we urge the USFS to make an aggressive effort toward preventing the trespass of off-road vehicles into this area from adjacent private property.

Treasure Mountain IRA

The Treasure Mountain IRA is south of Wolf Creek Pass and backs up to the Wolf Creek Ski Area and the Continental Divide. It is primarily high elevation, very steep terrain. However, it is heavily used by elk and deer in the spring, summer and fall months. There is a peregrine falcon eyre in the IRA.

Treasure Mountain – Management Recommendations

The Division of Wildlife recommends that the Treasure Mountain IRA remains roadless. Two motorized trails through the area are passable only on a motorcycle. Although most of the area is unsuitable to motorized traffic due to the steep grades, there is the potential for abuse by ATV's which could lead to serious erosion and noxious weed problems. A large tract of USFS land north of the IRA has a number of roads of varying quality and receives a significant amount of vehicle traffic, leaving many options for people wishing to access this type of terrain with motor vehicles.

Turkey Creek IRA

Adjacent to the Weminuche Wilderness, the Turkey Creek IRA is north of Pagosa Springs and extends to Wolf Creek Pass and the Continental Divide. The varied elevation and topography in this area provides a wide array of habitat types from Gambel oak/ponderosa pine woodlands to alpine tundra. The eastern edge of the area contains one of the Pagosa Ranger District's largest stands of aspen.

This habitat diversity supports many wildlife species. The area is used extensively by deer and elk in the spring, summer and fall months. Strong populations of Merriam's turkeys are expanding their range. A healthy bighorn sheep population uses higher elevation habitats as do Canada lynx (documented by radio telemetry data). The CDOW has confirmed that both bald eagle and peregrine falcon nest within the Turkey Creek IRA or on large, privately owned parcels adjacent to it. The area contains a population of pure Colorado River cutthroat trout, one of only a handful in the state. Mountain lions rely heavily on prey animals that are abundant in this area. After exiting their dens in the spring many black bears use the aspen habitat type for spring foraging. In fall black bears rely on the Gambel oak in the southern edge of the unit as essential forage before hibernation.

Turkey Creek – Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends that the Turkey Creek IRA remain roadless. This area currently has one motorized trail open to ATV use that extends less than 1.5 miles into the roadless area. There are similar habitat types adjacent to the Turkey Creek IRA, but they all have motor vehicle use to varying degrees and are of less value due to roads and vehicle traffic. There is a heavy amount of hunting in the vicinity. Vehicle access into this area would lead to over-utilization by hunters in the fall.

Further, we recommend that the USFS close and reclaim access to any current or future logging or fire suppression roads into the Turkey Creek IRA by making roads physically impassible. (If necessary for USFS administrative use, roads should be closed by locked gates.)

SAN JUAN ROADLESS AREAS, UNNAMED PARCELS 2,500-5,000 ACRES

Hunt Creek/ Thomas Mountain IRA

The Hunt Creek/Thomas Mountain IRA lies south of Disappointment Creek and east of Ryman Creek in the Dolores Ranger District of the San Juan National Forest. The IRA is covered mostly by pinyon/ juniper woodlands and mountain shrub plant communities. A radio

telemetry elk study and winter wildlife inventories show that significant numbers of mule deer and elk from the three surrounding game management units winter within the IRA. CDOW has mapped the area as critical deer and elk winter range.

Hunt Creek/Thomas Mountain - Management Recommendations

The Hunt Creek/Thomas Mountain area is within a USFS winter wildlife closure area, i.e., motorized vehicles are restricted to system roads between April 1 and November 30 each year and all motorized vehicles are prohibited between December 1 and March 31 annually. This protection was intended to protect the large concentration of wintering big game in the area and to prevent displacing those animals onto the surrounding private agricultural land. The area also provides a place for outdoorsmen to avoid off road vehicles.

Because this area is virtually without roads or motorized trails it is used heavily by big game. The CDOW recommends closing and reclaiming the few existing non-inventoried and non-system roads to prevent disturbance to wildlife.

Salter Canyon/ Hoppe Point IRA

This IRA lies north of the Dolores River canyon and is vegetated with ponderosa pine/aspen forests and significant areas of Gambel oak/service berry/mountain mahogany shrub lands. The area also has large open parks dominated by grass and forbs.

The area is an important wintering area and migration route for big game, particularly elk. Several hundred elk use the area throughout the winter. Thousands more elk migrate through the area on their way to and from adjoining wintering areas. The CDOW and the USFS are working to improve this area for deer and elk winter range with the objective of holding animals on the forest in the winter as opposed to nearby private agricultural lands.

The area is important for Merriam's turkeys providing suitable habitat for all seasons and life stages. The area has the potential to provide sharp-tailed grouse habitat. The sharp-tailed grouse was once common on the forest, but was extirpated in the 1980s. They have been reintroduced by the CDOW with cooperation from private landowners and the USFS. The recent grouse reintroduction is successful, with grouse currently living and reproducing on adjacent, private CRP fields. With future plans to establish the grouse in the forest and within the IRA, this area might provide an important travel corridor from the private land to the forest as the population expands.

Salter Canyon/ Hoppe Point - Management Recommendations

The area is currently an "open" travel management area, but has fewer roads and trails than nearby portions of the forest. The CDOW recommends that the area remain a roadless area and that non-system trails and roads be closed and reclaimed to lessen impacts and disturbance to wildlife.

Nipple Mountain IRA

The Nipple Mountain IRA is dominated by mountain shrubs and aspens interspersed with mountain meadows. The area is an important elk calving area and is a summer and fall concentration area. Elk calf banding studies conducted in the 1990's, and a more recent and an on-going elk radio telemetry study have shown that a significant portion of the local elk population produces calves here each spring. Elk occupy the IRA in higher numbers during the summer and fall than they do other areas on the forest with similar habitat types. Nipple Mountain is important for mule deer also, providing important habitat requirements during the spring, summer and fall. It is heavily used as a fawn production area. Both species use the southern portion of the IRA during mild winters.

The IRA is an important blue grouse production area with concentrations of blue grouse being higher than in adjoining areas. It is suitable habitat for mountain sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tails were extirpated from the area in the 1980's and have been recently reintroduced onto private property near the forest. The goal is for the birds to reoccupy their historic habitat.

This IRA is seasonally important to black bears providing important foraging areas during the fall with its high densities of chokecherry and service berry on the southern portion of the IRA.

Nipple Mountain - Management Recommendations

The CDOW recommends that the area remain roadless and suggest closing and reclaiming all non-system roads and trails to improve and protect wildlife habitat. Hunters who wish to hunt in an area free of off road vehicles and with low road densities find this area extremely attractive.

Bear Creek IRA

The Bear Creek IRA is comprised of mixed conifer, aspen and riparian willow communities, with diverse under-stories of grasses, and forbs. Riparian habitat is one of Colorado's most dynamic and crucial habitats, supporting a tremendous plant and animal diversity. This crucial habitat makes up less than one percent of the total land area in the Western United States.

The area supports a significant population of elk year round. It also provides important elk and mule deer calving and fawning grounds, spring, summer and fall habitat. Black bears and mountain lions use the IRA extensively. The IRA provides adequate habitat for Canada lynx and borders Colorado's Lynx Recovery Area. Thriving snowshoe hare, pine squirrel, mice, and blue grouse populations provide a natural food source for lynx, coyote, bobcat, pine marten and other carnivores. Pine marten are found in forested areas in the Bear Creek IRA and are currently listed on the USFS' list of sensitive species.

Riparian areas provides valuable habitat for numerous aquatic plants, animals, and insects as well as beaver and muskrat. Populations of river otters and bald eagle may exist on lower parts of Bear Creek near its confluence with the Dolores River. A population of Colorado River cutthroat trout exists in Bear Creek.

Bear Creek – Management Recommendation

The Colorado Division of Wildlife strongly recommends maintaining the current roadless management of the area. The IRA is important to a diversity of wildlife species. The CDOW also recommends restricting motorized vehicles along Bear Creek IRA to prevent the destruction of important riparian habitat.

Rock Mountain and Pagosa Peak IRA

The south facing and cliff areas have been found to be important wintering areas for mature bull elk. Several cliffs in this area have also been identified as peregrine falcon nest eyries.

Rock Mountain and Pagosa Peak - Management Recommendations

Keeping the area directly below these areas roadless will help maintain this important habitat value.

Archuleta Creek IRA

The Archuleta Creek IRA is a 2,500-5,000 acre roadless area southeast of Chimney Rock Archeology area and adjacent to a large tract of Southern Ute Tribal land southeast of the intersection of Highways 160 and 151. The area is covered with a diversity of habitat types including, riparian, ponderosa pine/Gambel oak, sagebrush, and old-growth mixed conifer in some of the canyons. The diversity of habitat types makes this area very unique, attracting a wide range of wildlife species.

The area is currently mapped as winter range and critical winter range for mule deer and elk. The area is also mapped as a winter concentration area for bald and golden eagles. Merriam's turkey, black bear, mountain lions, numerous small mammals, songbirds and raptors use the diverse habitat in the area. Mexican spotted owls have been documented in Archuleta Creek as recently as the summer of 2004. The owls are listed as a Federally Threatened species and have been documented in the old growth mixed conifers found in the feeder canyons in Archuleta Creek. Currently there is only one road that travels up the bottom of the canyon with no roads in the feeder canyons or on the plateau.

Archuleta Creek – Management Recommendations

The DOW recommends that the area remain road less and that there are no new road construction in the area to preserve its unique landscape and wildlife value.

Klutter Mountain IRA

The Klutter Mountain IRA is a 2,500-5,000 acre roadless area approximately 12 miles south of Pagosa Springs, on the west side of Highway 84. The habitat type on Klutter Mountain is mainly ponderosa pine/Gambel oak with some heavy mixed conifer. The majority of the mountain has steep hillsides.

Klutter Mountain is mapped as winter range and critical winter range for mule deer and elk. As well as foraging on Klutter, elk and deer cross through and around Klutter as they move from summer to winter range or from winter range to critical winter range. The Valle Seco, adjacent to Klutter on the west side, holds large numbers of deer and elk throughout the winter. It is mapped as eagle winter range. Black bear and Merriam's turkey are present in the area due to the abundance of Gambel oak. Mountain lions inhabit the area, especially in the winter, due to the large wintering herds of deer and elk.

Klutter Mountain – Management Recommendations

The DOW recommends that the area remain road less with no new road construction to protect the large numbers of wintering elk and deer and avoid disturbance. This area has especially high wildlife values as a large subdivision of 35-acre lots borders it to the southeast.