

## HERMOSA CREEK WATERSHED PROTECTION ACT

Southwest Colorado is home to a remarkable set of forested valleys and crystal clear streams known by Coloradans as Hermosa Creek. Long treasured by the residents of the Animas Valley, this area is renowned for its beauty, magnificent vistas, wildlife and the economic, job-creating activity the landscape generates for local communities. The vast watershed offers something for almost every type of outdoor enthusiast.

Recognizing the need to protect and preserve the watershed for the enjoyment of future generations, a diverse group of area residents known as the Hermosa Creek Workgroup came together in 2008 to discuss future management of this unique area. Following 22 months of negotiations, the Workgroup came to an agreement on the provisions of a blueprint to govern the future management of the watershed. For a copy of the Hermosa Creek Workgroup report please see:

<http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/riverprotection/pdf/Hermosa%20Creek%20WorkgroupFINALCOPYREVREVjune2010.pdf>

**Hermosa Creek Special Management Area:** Under the bill, as drafted by Senator Bennet to reflect the recommendations of the Workgroup, roughly 108,000 acres of San Juan National Forest land (west of Hwy 550 between Durango and Silverton) would be designated as the *Hermosa Creek Special Management Area (SMA)* to “conserve and protect for the benefit of present and future generations the... resources” of the area. All of the area will be protected under the bill, but some areas in the watershed will receive higher levels of protection while others will allow a broader range of uses.

In accordance with the Workgroup recommendations, 25% (27,433 acres) of the acreage in the SMA will allow all current and historical uses of the area – including mountain biking, motorized recreation, selected timber harvesting, grazing, etc. Another 40% (43,217 acres) of the watershed will still allow these activities to take place, but will no longer be eligible for the future building of roads or timber harvesting. All of the acreage in the SMA will be withdrawn from future mineral development, with the exception of 2,000 acres split between the northern and southern boundaries, per the Workgroup’s recommendation.

**Hermosa Creek Wilderness Area:** The remaining 35% (37,236 acres) of the SMA, encompassing the western 1/3 of the watershed, will be designated as wilderness to be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964. Hunting, fishing and all non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation is allowed in Wilderness. No new roads or development are allowed in wilderness areas. In accordance with the Workgroup recommendations, special water rights language has been inserted into the wilderness section of the bill to respect Colorado’s unique water law.