



# **SILVER THREAD**

**COLORADO SCENIC AND HISTORIC BYWAY**

**AND**

**NATIONAL FOREST SCENIC BYWAY**

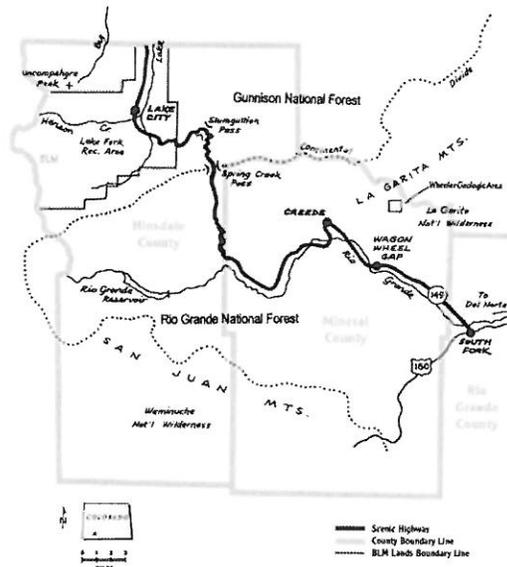
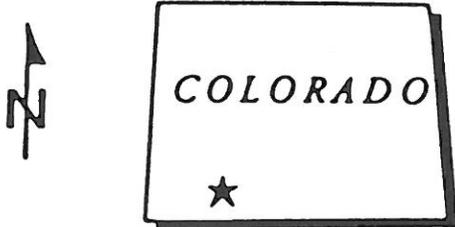
## **Corridor Master Plan**

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# Introduction

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*"Unwind Along The Silver Thread"* is an appropriate phrase for travelers on Highway 149. Along with fun and relaxation, the Silver Thread Scenic and Historic Byway provides a history lesson as it spirals upward, taking travelers to breathtaking scenic vistas. (The road was so named to honor the vast silver industry that thrived along this road.) Rising over 3,181 vertical feet in 55 miles before a dizzying decent into Hinsdale County, the road unveils the mysteries of the Mighty Rio Grande, the geologic wonders of this region and the archeological finds of early man and Native Americans. The Silver Thread also contains abundant wildlife, recreational and cultural opportunities.



**Silver Thread Highway**  
State and National Forest Scenic Byway

Located in the heart of the San Juan Mountains, isolated and exquisite, this road was once a footpath worn into the earth by Ice Age Man. Thousands of years later, the Ute Indians kept using these trails to reach hunting camps, hot springs and their sacred Wheeler Geologic Area. In the 1850's the Indians were overwhelmed by homesteaders and miners and were relocated to the southwest corner of Colorado. Their ancestral paths were widened and improved to become the Del Norte-Antelope Park Toll Road. This pay-to-ride stage line linked the supply station of Del Norte to the mines in Creede, Lake City and over Stony Pass to Silverton. Today, Highway 149 (The Silver Thread Scenic Byway) still acts as a haunting reminder that this road not only winds up toward the sky - it winds back in time.

On October 18, 1990, a 75 mile stretch of this epic highway was chosen to become a Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway by the Colorado Transportation Commission. This route was also designated by the US Forest Service as a National Forest Scenic Byway on December 14, 1989. The designation of Highway 149 as a Scenic Byway is just one more outstanding reason why multiple thousands of visitors make the Silver Thread a destination point year after year and generation after generation.

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# Vision & Goals

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The Silver Thread Committee was formed in 1990. It developed the vision statement and goals listed below and has acted as the guiding force to carry out these goals. Members include representatives from the Rio Grande National Forest District (RGNF), the Gunnison National Forest District (GNF), Bureau of Land Management Gunnison Resource Area (BLM), the Silver Thread Interpretive Center, Chambers of Commerce, City and County government representatives, private residents, historical societies and business people.

## Vision Statement:

*Promote the Silver Thread Scenic Byway and enable the public to enjoy and protect all the inherent qualities that make their experiences as memorable as the Byway itself.*

## Goals:

1. **Promote** all the resources on the Silver Thread
  - A. Build a Visitor Center in Lake City
  - B. Create a Friends of the Silver Thread. This group will act as the Central Coordinating Committee for the Silver Thread.
  - C. Remain active in regional and state tourism groups
  - D. Create and update lure brochures for the Byway
  - E. Educate Colorado Welcome Centers regarding the Silver Thread
  - F. Seek media coverage whenever possible
  - G. Bolster shoulder and winter seasons
  - H. Pool tri-county resources to promote key attractions on Byway.
  
2. **Educate** public to preserve and protect historic, natural, cultural, scenic and archeological resources on the Silver Thread.
  - A. Historic: Mining, early tourism, toll roads, towns, structures
  - B. Natural: Wildlife and habitat, geologic wonders, the Rio Grande
  - C. Scenic: Wilderness areas and public areas
  - D. Archeology: Black Mountain Folsom Site  
Ute Indian Heritage
  - E. Develop 12 interpretive turnouts relating specifically to the natural, cultural, and archeological aspects of the Byway
  - F. Create personal walking and riding tours
  - G. Educate all staff at Information Centers
  - H. Continue development and production of useful handouts
  - J. Create a series of "Treasures Along the Silver Thread" Open-air Workshops

**3. Reclaim resources** that have been compromised.

- A. Use Rio Grande National Forest District Scenic Resource Section (Pages 3-418 through 3-431) of the Final Environmental Impact Statement as a guide to identify improve and protect scenic resources along the Silver Thread.
- B. Encourage completion of Gunnison National Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan, emphasizing inclusion of a section for identification, improvement and protection of scenic resources along the Silver Thread.
- B. Encourage private owners of historic properties to seek funding to protect and preserve structures and sites.
- C. Encourage creation of Historic Districts (mining, county & town) where needed.
- D. Identify potential open space areas. Encourage the preservation and protection of open spaces.
- E. Research Legacy Grants to purchase valuable open spaces along corridor. Work with Forest Districts to discuss land trades.
- G. Eliminate undesigned, dispersed camping areas on Silver Thread.

**4. Improve Safety and Comfort** along the Silver Thread:

- A. Where possible, create a trail system that runs adjacent to the Silver Thread.
- B. Identify dangerous stretches of highway. Work with cities, counties and state to create a long range plan for improvement of same
- C. Build new restrooms and upgrade existing restrooms where necessary
- D. Work with cities, counties and the Colorado Department of Transportation to actively enforce state and local laws to create a sign code for the Silver Thread.
- E. Broaden highway shoulders wherever possible.

**5. Create a Plan for Financial Security of Byway:**

- A. Identify funding sources
- B. Create individual and business memberships to Silver Thread
- C. Enlist support of Elk Foundation, Trout Unlimited, etc.
- D. Create sellable merchandise
- F. Host fundraisers
- G. Where possible, consolidate financial resources from all counties to promote Silver Thread.

**6. Seek designation of Silver Thread as an All American Highway.**

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# Review of Inherent Qualities Along the Silver Thread

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Following is a brief overview of the scenic, natural, recreational, archaeological, historic and cultural qualities intrinsic to the Silver Thread Scenic Byway. Each of these sections is followed by a map and chart which help detail each of these qualities.

The Silver Thread slowly climbs to a peak elevation of 11,530 feet, which takes sightseers through a total of 9 individual land types.

Beginning in South Fork and passing through Rio Grande, Mineral and Hinsdale Counties to arrive in Lake City, travelers enjoy the high alpine Rio Grande Valley as it parallels its namesake, the mighty Rio Grande. Along the Silver Thread, visitors can view the source of this legendary river. Geological wonders abound due to enormous volcanic activity in this area some 65 million years ago. The Creede Caldera is a paradise for geological field work. Seemingly endless pine and spruce forests greet visitors at every turn as the highway unwinds to pass by the Smithsonian Institute's archeological dig.

The Weminuche and LaGarita Wilderness Areas are accessed from this Byway. The Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway is accessed from the Silver Thread and, in turn, the San Juan Skyway is accessed via the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway.

Wildlife watching is one of Colorado's fastest growing outdoor activities and the Silver Thread does not disappoint. (Wildlife viewing enthusiasts spent \$792 million in Colorado in 1996. That translates to 30% of total wildlife-related expenditures.<sup>1</sup>) Big game is abundant, making wildlife watching a popular activity during any given season. Birds of prey include eagles, hawks and falcons. Thousands of sandhill cranes migrate along the Silver Thread together with a handful of imperiled whooping cranes. Canadian geese and vast numbers of other birds can be viewed in spring and fall.

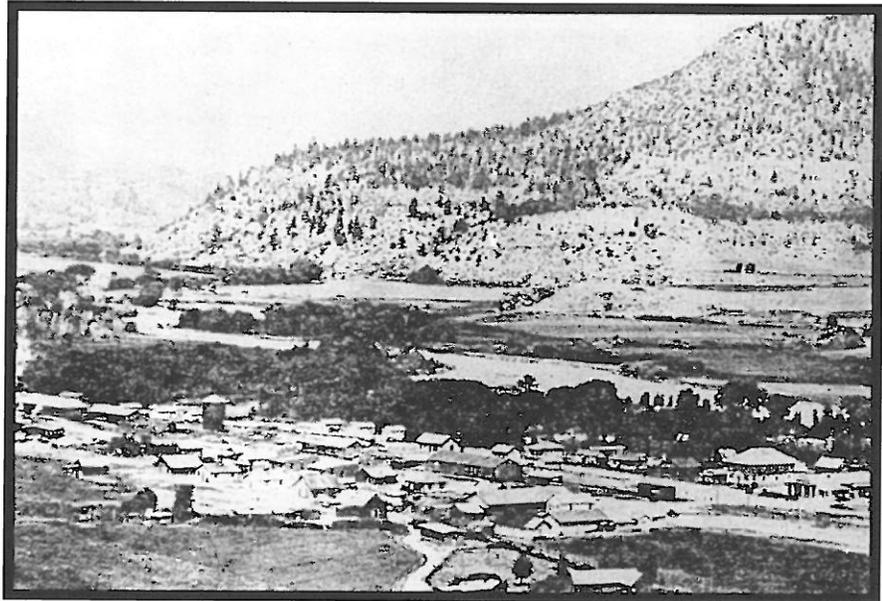
Rio Grande County is 61% public land, Mineral County is 96% public land and Hinsdale County is 97% public land. Consequently, outdoor recreation abounds along the Silver Thread. Gold medal trout waters and trophy size big game herds of elk and deer are the two top reasons visitors flock to this area of the San Juans. Combine these with a multitude of outdoor activities and one can easily see why the Silver Thread country has been a destination drive for visitors for countless generations.

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<sup>1</sup> 1996 *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The **corridor communities** of South Fork, Creede and Lake City were born from and survived the boom and bust cycle of mining in the San Juans. The history and quaint charm of each town help make this Byway a truly unique driving experience.

**South Fork** was named for its location at the junction of the Rio Grande and its south fork. In 1848, one of the first white men in this region was the famous Colorado explorer, John C. Fremont. While trying to locate a railroad route through the Rockies, Fremont was forced to camp near South Fork to wait out a raging snowstorm.



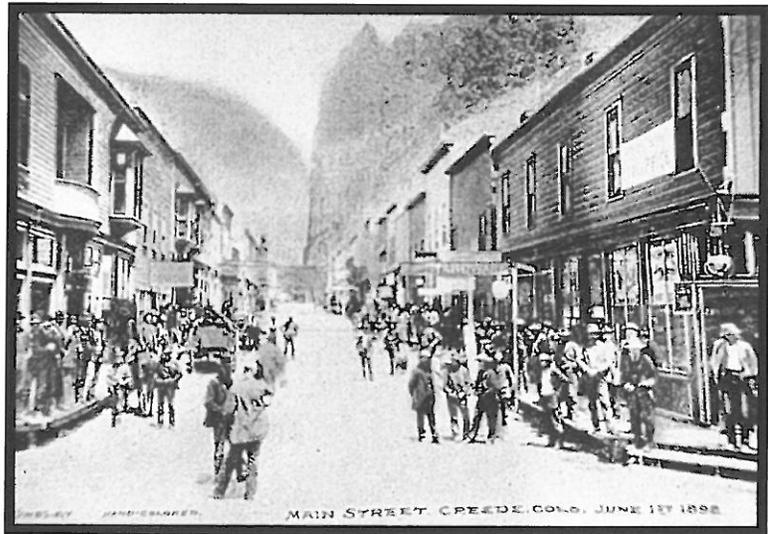
**South Fork, Colorado circa 1900**  
Photo: Courtesy of Rosiland Weaver

Frozen and hungry, death struck his band and it was here that Fremont wisely decided to retrace his tracks and save what he could of his group. (A short walk from South Fork, hikers still visit this historic campsite today.) Years later, South Fork was established as a stage stop along the Del Norte to Lake City toll road. Thanks to the efforts of people like Fremont, trains did finally make their way through South Fork and this struggling community began to prosper because it was better able to transport timber and produce to market. With the train, the town thrived. South Fork began as a town for working people. That still holds true today. Sawmilling, agriculture and ranching continue to play important roles in South Fork's survival. Exceptional fishing, hunting and recreation opportunities have allowed South Fork to prosper in the tourist industry as well.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Taken in part from: *Silver Thread Historic Milepost Guidebook*.

**Creede** was a wild and wanton boom town in the 1890's. Saloon's, women of the night and gunfights made Creede notorious throughout Colorado. But, it was silver that made Creede famous. Abundant silver. Nicholas Creede first discovered this tremendous resource in 1889 and by 1892 millions of dollars of the valuable ore had been pulled from the mines. Creede prospers today thanks to a history of mining. For that reason, Creede has two related visitor experiences that must not be missed. One is a fully interpreted 17 mile driving tour which takes visitors through the heart of Mineral County's old mining district. Known as the "Bachelor Loop" it begins on the Silver Thread, in the town of Creede. Creede's Underground Mining Museum wins the prize for unusual. This unconventional repository of mining memorabilia is housed completely underground. A 45 minute museum tour allows visitors to walk through a simulated hard rock mine.



**Town of Creede circa 1895**

Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy Creede Repertory Theatre

**Lake City**, a beautifully preserved Victorian mining community, marks the northern end of the Silver Thread. A National Historic District, Lake City is unequalled in location and beauty. The town was founded in 1874 and was to become one of the richest lead and silver producers in the San Juan Mountains. The 1880's were peak growth years for Lake City. While most mining communities, like Creede, were shameless and saturated with alcohol and women of ill repute,



**Town of Lake City circa 1940**

Photo: Courtesy Hinsdale Historical Society

Lake City catered to a very civilized clientele. It exuded class and refinement. It even had churches. In fact, Lake City was one of the most genteel communities in the state. People came from all over Western Colorado to attend cultural events and shop in the plentiful stores in Lake City.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the total year-round population of all three communities on the Silver Thread is approximately 3,000 hearty souls. That number reflects an enormous decrease from the 30,000+ people who populated these towns in the boom days of the 1880's and 1890's.



**Town of Sherman circa 1895**

Photo: Courtesy Denver Public Library through Hinsdale County Historical Society

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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# Assessment of Resource Qualities Along Corridor

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## Scenic and Natural Resource Areas

### Rio Grande National Forest

#### Land type Associations\*

LTA 1	Engelmann Spruce on Mountain Slopes
LTA 2	Aspen on Mountain Slopes
LTA 3	<b>White Fir &amp; Douglas Fir on Mountain Slopes</b>
LTA 4	Alpine Sedges & Forbs on Alpine Summits
LTA 5	<b>Ponderosa Pine and Douglas-fir on Mountain Slopes</b>
LTA 6	Pinion on Mountain Slopes
LTA 7	Gambel Oak on Mountain Slopes
LTA 8	<b>Arizona Fescue on Mountain Slopes</b>
LTA 9	<b>Thurber Fescue on Mountain Slopes</b>
LTA 10	<b>Willows and Sedges on Flood plains</b>
LTA 11	Nonvegetated Areas on Mountain Slopes
LTA 12	Western Wheatgrass and Other Low-Elevation Grasslands on Alluvial Fans
LTA 13	<b>Engelmann Spruce on Landslides</b>

\* Bold = LTA's existing on Silver Thread Scenic Byway

Nine individual land types offer abundant variety as one drives the Silver Thread. Land Type Associations (LTA's) have been identified by the Rio Grande National Forest. Listed here, LTA's are based on similarities in geology, soils, and plant associations. LTA's are an appropriate ecological unit to use in Forest planning and watershed analysis. On the RGNF, soil units were amassed into 13 distinct LTAs. Of the 13 mapped units, 9 exist along the Silver Thread.<sup>4</sup>

The following chart clearly identifies the more notable scenic and natural areas along the Byway. The most distinguished natural feature on the Silver Thread is the mighty Rio Grande. The source of the Rio Grande begins as melt off in the San Juan Mountains, where annual snowfall averages 375 inches. Much of the Silver Thread runs parallel to this majestic river. Winding its way nearly 2,000 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, the Rio Grande provides water for Colorado, New Mexico and Texas.<sup>5</sup>

### Land type Association Acreages

#### Percent of Forest

LTA 1	48%
LTA 2	2%
LTA 3	5%
LTA 5	5%
LTA 8	5%
LTA 9	6%
LTA 10	3%
LTA 11	2%
LTA 12	2%
LTA 13	2%

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<sup>4</sup> Taken in part from: *1997 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan* by the Rio Grande National Forest District.

<sup>5</sup> Approximations provided by *Colorado Climate Center, CSU*.

Most surprising to travelers are the tremendous geologic phenomenon along the Byway created by stupendous volcanic activity in this area millions of years ago. The Palisades Canyon, Wheeler Geologic Area and the Slumgullion Earth Flow are but three spectacular examples of the singular geology which resides in abundance along the corridor. It should be noted that while Wheeler sits some 10 miles off the Byway, the primary access to this isolated treasure is via Highway 149.

**Palisades Canyon**, near South Fork, was formed after cooled and hardened volcanic debris shrank to form intersecting cracks, very like the shrinking that occurs when a mud puddle dries up. Unlike a mud puddle, however, the Palisades are a majestic marvel.

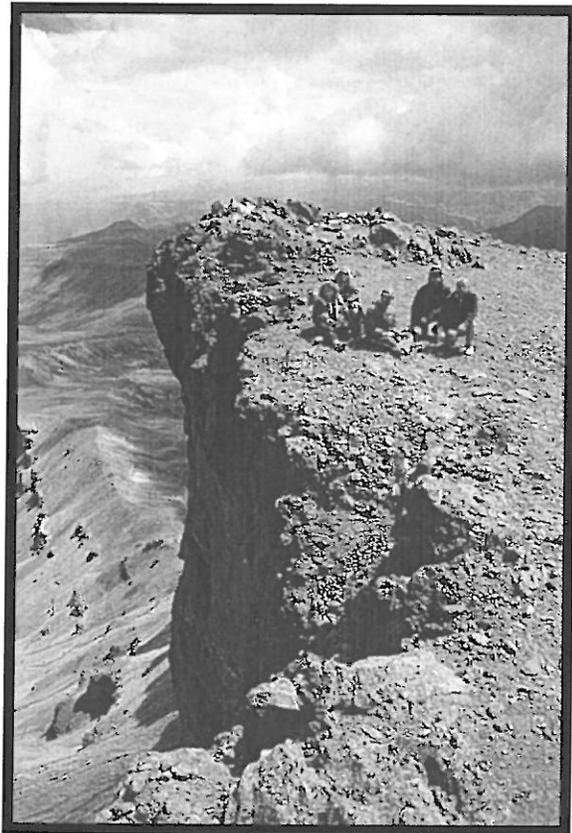
**Wheeler Geologic Area** is acclaimed, world-wide as a geologic treasure. It was named after surveyor, George Wheeler, who mapped this area just after the turn of the century. These extraordinary rock formations were formed over 65 million years ago by violent volcanic eruptions that literally shook the Earth. Rock debris blown from these fiery volcanoes was deposited here. The resulting spirals, columns and caves were created by uneven erosion in the porous volcanic tuft. Now, part of the LaGarita Wilderness, Wheeler itself can be explored only by horse or on foot. Though hidden, this jewel of the Upper Rio Grande is well worth the strenuous journey to view it.

**Slumgullion Earth Flow** as seen from the Silver Thread, is the spectacular result of two mud slides. Just 700 years ago, the volcanic soils of the Mesa Seco were supersaturated with water from heavy rains. Millions of tons of mud and rock broke loose and flowed like a dirty, raging river for four miles. The mudslide deposited so much material on the bottom of the valley that it formed a natural dam across the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River, forming the second largest natural lake in Colorado, Lake San Cristobal. Geologists come from all over the world to study this rare National Natural Landmark. There is no site quite like it elsewhere on Earth.

Tremendous geologic upheaval created the San Juan Mountains which encompass the Silver Thread. The San Juans contain lush alpine valleys and forested mountains which provide ideal habitat for a wide variety of animals. Wildlife include elk, big horn sheep, moose, mule deer, coyotes, black bear, bobcat, mountain lions, eagles, hawks, falcons, marmots and countless song and migratory birds.

## Scenic and Natural Areas

#	Site Name
1	Rio Grande National Forest
2	Coller Wildlife Area
3	Palisades
4	Wagon Wheel Gap
5	Rio Grande
6	Wheeler Geologic Area Access
7	La Garita wilderness
8	Town of Creede
9	Creede Caldera
10	Snowshoe Mountain
11	Antelope Springs
12	Weminuche Wilderness
13	Bristol Heal Mountain
14	Pearl Lakes/Brown Lakes/Rio Grande Headwaters
15	North Clear Creek Falls
16	Spring Creek Pass (Continental Divide)
17	Slumgullion Pass
18	Gunnison National Forest
19	Slumgullion Earth Flow
20	BLM Land
21	Lake Fork of the Gunnison River
22	Lake San Cristobal

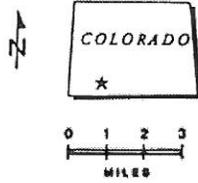
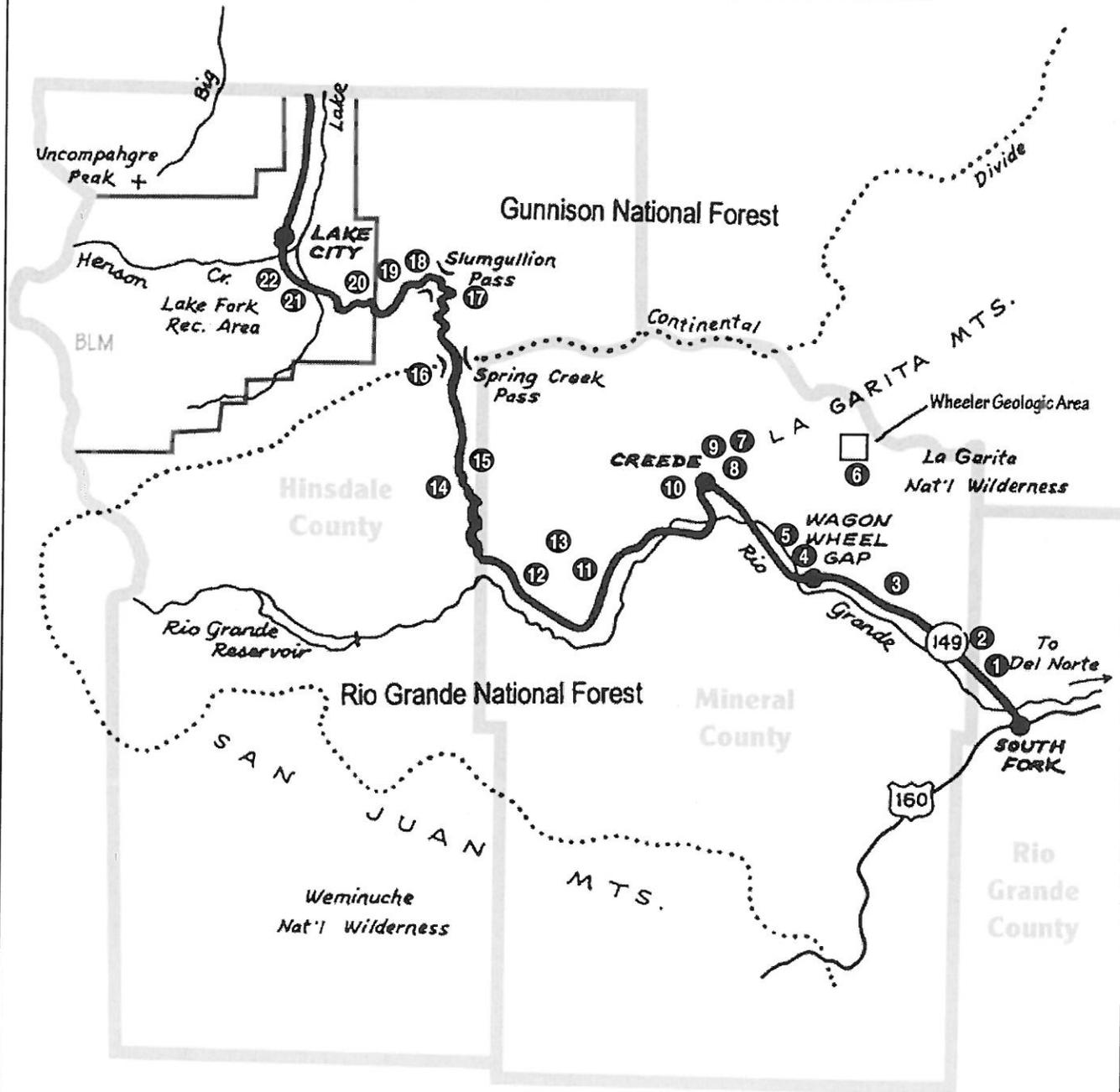


**Hikers on Uncompahgre Mountain**  
Photo: John Gary Brown

# Scenic and Natural Areas

## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



- Scenic Highway
- County Boundary Line
- BLM Lands Boundary Line

## Multiple Use

Both the Gunnison and the Rio Grande National Forests are a major natural resource along the Silver Thread. Thus, appropriate management of these forests is imperative to maintain the scenic and recreational qualities that lure visitors and keep residents. In addition to recreation, timber harvesting and rangeland grazing also require careful management by the Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forest Districts.

**Timber Resources** along the Silver Thread are being thoroughly researched to ensure a plan for appropriate management. If timber activity is scheduled within the Byway view shed, it will be done to meet the scenic objectives and maintain the integrity of the landscape. Meanwhile, the Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forest Districts will continue to carefully monitor, at a local level, the forest itself and all the impacts placed on it. Further, the Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forest Districts are required to use Forest Wide Goals and Objectives and Standards and Guidelines to protect timber resources. Additional protective measures are part of Standards and Guidelines specific to Management-Area Prescriptions. The Silver Thread Byway Committee supports this approach.

### **Rio Grande National Forest District Timber Harvesting and Rangeland Grazing**

Understanding the need for **timber harvesting**, the RGNF is continually weighing that need against the potential of causing harm, literally and visually, to the forests along the Byway. The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Rio Grande National Forest District clearly states that the “cumulative effects of past, current, and planned harvesting (through a ten-year plan) will be less than 10% of the Forest.”

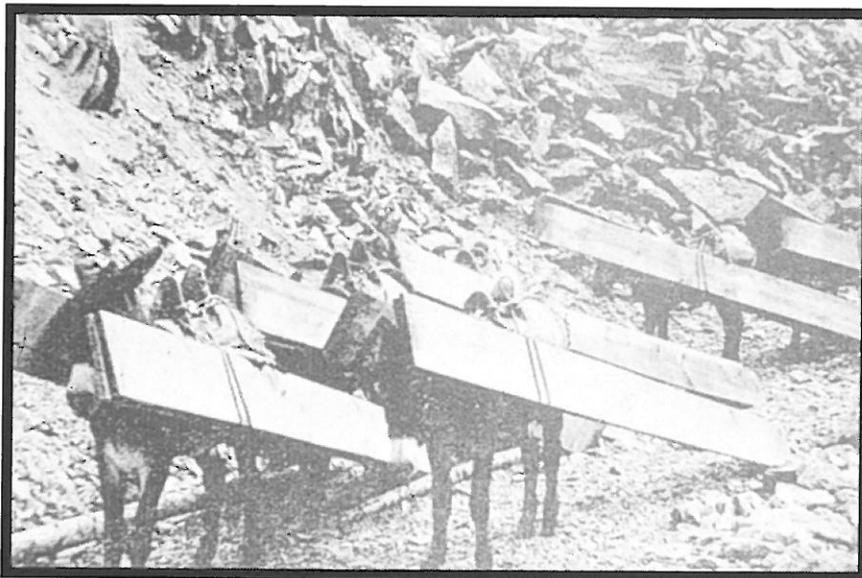
Livestock began grazing on the Rio Grande National Forest in the 1850's. The combination of uncontrolled livestock use and high numbers of livestock has affected range condition and plant composition. Consequently, **rangelands** are now carefully monitored. These forests provide forage for livestock and wildlife. On the RGNF, taking into consideration the total acres of land suitable for livestock and the amount of forage for big game and livestock that is required annually, it is estimated that roughly 70,480 wildlife animals and 81,940 livestock animals can be grazed each year on the Rio Grande National Forest.

## Gunnison National Forest District Timber Harvesting Rangeland Grazing

The Gunnison National Forest District has prepared a prescription for **timber harvesting** along the Byway which states that the forested areas adjacent to the Byway are considered to be “roaded natural and rural recreation opportunities. This major travel route maintains and improves visual quality. Vegetation treatment including timber harvest will enhance visual quality, recreation setting and plant and animal diversity.”

Recently, timber was successfully harvested to enhance the Silver Thread. Approximately 400 6' to 8' spruce trees were uprooted and re-planted to form a '**living snow fence**' in Rambouillet Park between the West Fork of the Cebolla and Rambouillet Creek, adjacent to Highway 149. The fence is unique in the state. Large trees were used for the living snow fence instead of the usual, smaller saplings. Saplings take 20 years to reach maturity before adding the necessary bulk to prevent snow from drifting. By using mature trees, the living snow fence will become effective much sooner. The sooner the better, because this particular stretch of the Byway is prone to snow drifts.

On the Gunnison National Forest, where open grazing of sheep and cattle intermingle with recreation, the policy states that **range management** will reduce conflicts between recreation and livestock, while appropriate vegetation treatment will enhance plant and animal diversity.



**Mules Hauling Lumber to the Mines circa 1890**

Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy Creede Repertory Theatre

## Three Successful Wildlife Projects Along the Silver Thread

### A Peek At Sheep

The Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep is native to this state and is, in fact, Colorado's state mammal. Before the arrival of European man, bighorn roamed from the south fork of the Rio Grande to its headwaters. By the late 1800's, prospectors had killed most of these sheep for food, and by the turn of the century only remnant herds were left on Pole Mountain and in the La Garita Mountains. While an occasional bighorn would wander through the area, there were no viable populations.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife reintroduced bighorn sheep to this area in 1983. They were transported from Ouray and released on Seepage Creek. There have been four subsequent bighorn transplants in three locations: Long Ridge, Riverhill and Blue Creek. Bighorn are very susceptible to a lungworm parasite and die from pneumonia. If a population exceeds the habitat carrying capacity, disease can wipe out an entire population. Restricted hunting and the transplanting of animals are both used to maintain healthy populations.<sup>6</sup>

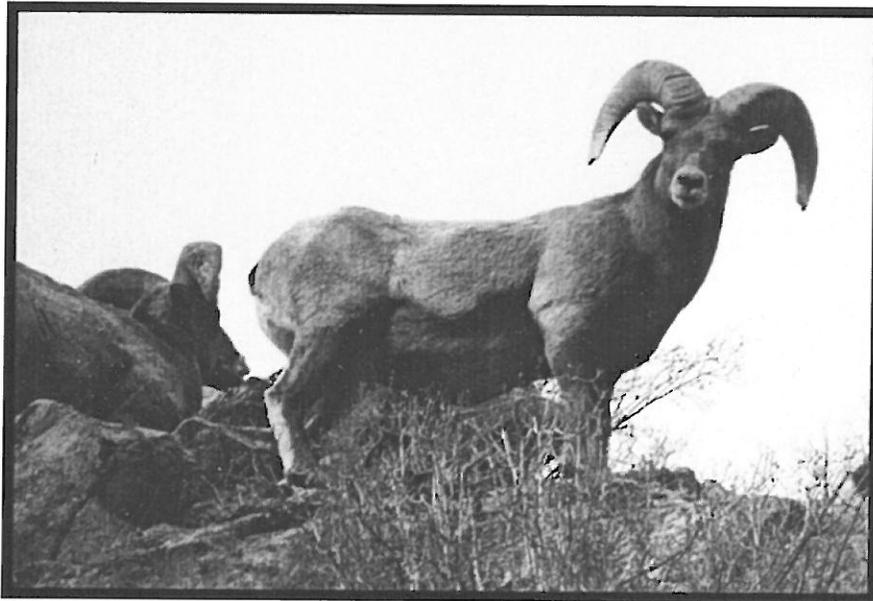


Photo: James Kehr

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<sup>6</sup> Provided by Glen Hinshaw, Wildlife Education Specialist, Retired.

## Moose on the Loose

**Moose** were introduced in the San Juans near North Clear Creek Falls in 1991 and 1992. Approximately 100 moose were transported and airlifted from northern Colorado and Utah. The herds have been carefully monitored and studied since their release. After tracking the moose for 6 years, the animals have shown they are surviving, staying in the area and reproducing. The moose are here to stay and the project has been declared successful. It is difficult to determine the age of moose and some of the original transport animals were likely older animals. This fact contributed to a high mortality rate among the cows. At present, however, there are many cows in the 4-6 year age range, the prime age for reproduction. If the population continues to increase at its current rate, the Department of Wildlife is predicting that limited hunting of moose could begin as early 1999.



Photo: James Kehr

## Fly Away Home

As sand hill cranes seasonally trace their migratory path from Utah to New Mexico, many fly slightly off course and find themselves on the waters along the Silver Thread. This provides bird watchers with a wonderful opportunity to view these spectacular birds. And, if the following experiments prove successful, the exquisite whooping cranes may one day find themselves off course but joyfully viewed by travelers on the Silver Thread as well.

A very innovative experiment was conducted between 1975 and 1997 which introduced the eggs of the endangered **Whooping Cranes** into the nests of sand hill cranes. While the plentiful sand hills accepted the eggs and nurtured the hatchling whoopers, the number of whooping cranes continued to decline due to improper sexual imprinting from the sand hills to the whoopers. Sadly, this experiment was not deemed successful and only 3 cross-fostered whooping cranes remain in the Rocky Mountain sand hill crane population.

Undaunted, the Fish and Wildlife Service released into the wild, captive reared whooping cranes, sexually imprinted by their own species. And, because migration is learned behavior in cranes, these seven whoopers were trained to migrate by following an ultra light aircraft. (This concept was documented in the popular film: "**Fly Away Home**".) In the fall of 1997, the cranes followed the ultra light to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in central New Mexico. The whoopers spent the winter at the refuge and successfully migrated back to Idaho in March, 1998 - all by themselves! With the success of this experiment, the ultra lights can now be used extensively to teach migration patterns to other endangered birds.<sup>7</sup>



Photo: James Kehr

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<sup>7</sup> Taken in part from *Whooping Cranes: The Road to Survival*, published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. August, 1997.

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## Recreation Resources:

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Many dozens of recreation opportunities are available to travelers of the Silver Thread. There are 1,665,356 acres of public land in the Gunnison National Forest District, 150,000 acres of BLM land and 1,859,444 acres in the Rio Grande National Forest District. In addition, there are four wilderness areas abutting the Silver Thread, and 90 miles of river bank on or adjacent to the Byway.<sup>8</sup> This corridor acts as a gateway to 9 scenic lakes and 22 trail heads. The elevation ranges from 8,180 to 11,530 while revealing an enormous variety of landscapes.

Other recreation opportunities available along the Byway include lake and river fishing, hunting, camping in any of 16 designated campgrounds with a total of 254 individual sites, including many RV sites, 1 major wildlife area; and dozens of pull outs for informal wildlife viewing. There are also many hundreds of miles of hiking and biking opportunities and over 300 miles of groomed snowmobile and nordic ski trails. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) and the Colorado Trail can be explored from the Silver Thread. Two-wheel and four-wheel drive opportunities are nearly endless as the Silver Thread lends access to the 4x4 Alpine Loop, and the San Juan Skyway Scenic Byways. The San Juan Skyway, in turn, connects with The Trail of the Ancients Scenic Byway, further extending an already outstanding driving experience. The Silver Thread and its adjacent byways afford visitors the opportunity to visit dozens of high mountain ghost towns.



**Rafting the Rio Grande**  
Photo: John Gary Brown.

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics are approximations gathered from the Rio Grande National Forest District and Division of Water Resources.

Recreational opportunities abound along the Silver Thread Corridor. The following list and map mark the developed recreation areas. But it should be noted that four wheeling, hiking, biking, fishing, camping, rock hounding, photography, horseback riding, wildlife watching, hang-gliding, rafting, canoeing, ice climbing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and hunting opportunities are plentiful along the Silver Thread. These activities are certainly not restricted to the areas outlined on the map below.

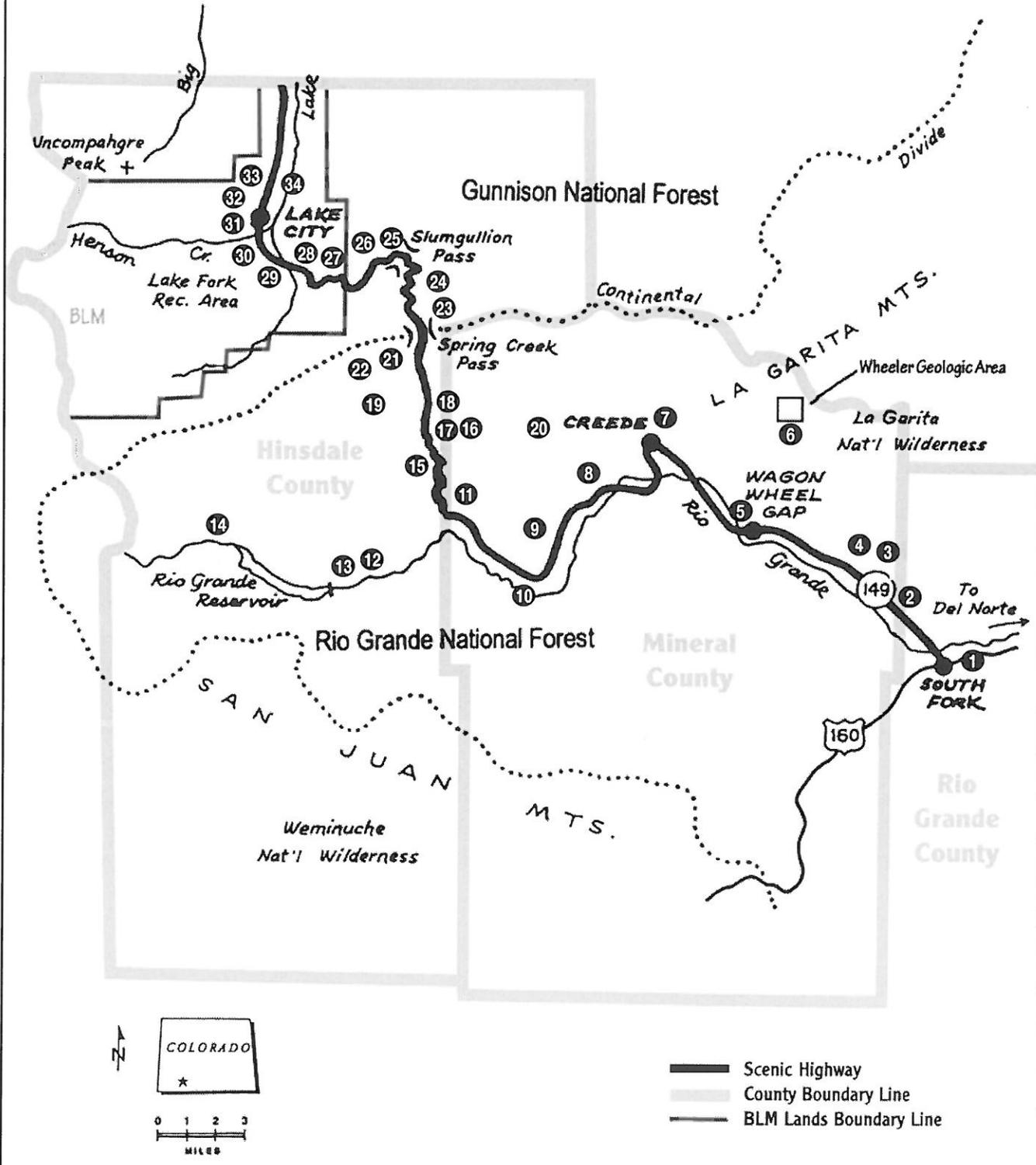
## DEVELOPED RECREATION AREAS

#	SITE NAME	ACTIVITIES/FACILITIES
1.	South Fork & Visitor Center	Recreation/Services/Restrooms/Information
2.	South Fork Gold Medal Fishing	Trophy Fishing
3.	The Palisades Campground	Camping/RV/Hiking/ Fishing/ 4x4
4.	Coller State Wildlife Area	Wildlife watching/Fishing
5.	Wagon Wheel Gap	Fishing/Hiking/Wildlife Watching/ 4x4
6.	Wheeler Geologic Area (14 miles off highway)	Hiking/Horseback Riding/Camping, Snowmobiling/4x4
7.	Creede & Bachelor Historic Loop	Driving Tour/4x4/Mining History/Hiking/Fishing/Nordic Skiing & Rafting
8.	Marshall Park Campground	Camping/Fishing/Hiking/4x4
9.	Antelope Springs	4x4/Hiking/Fishing
10.	Wrights Lower Ranch Wildlife Viewing	Bighorn Sheep/Elk/Water Fowl
11.	Road Canyon/Rio Grande Reservoirs	Boating/Fishing/Camping/Hiking
12.	River Hill Campground	Camping/Hiking/Fishing/Horseback Riding
13.	Thirty Mile Campground	Camping/Hiking/Fishing/Horseback Riding
14.	Lost Trail Campground	Camping/Hiking/Fishing/Horseback Riding
15.	Bristol Head Campground & Falls	Camping/RV/Hiking/Fishing/4x4
16.	North Clear Creek Campground	Camping/RV/Hiking/Fishing/4x4
17.	North Clear Creek Falls	4x4/Hiking/Wildlife/Scenic/ Restrooms
18.	Silver Thread Campground & Falls	4x4/Hiking/Camping/Wildlife/Scenic/Fishing/Nordic Skiing
19.	Rito Hondo & Continental Reservoirs	Fishing/Boating/4x4/Snowmobiling/Hiking
20.	Bristol Head Mountain	4x4/Hiking/Fishing/Wildlife watching/ Nordic Skiing/Snowmobiling
21.	Spring Creek Wildlife Viewing Area	Moose/Elk
22.	Spring Creek Pass & Corrals	Snowmobiling/Nordic Skiing
23.	Continental Divide National Scenic Trail	At Spring Creek Pass: Hiking/ Backpacking/Camping/Snowmobiling
24.	Hinsdale HauteRoute	Nordic Skiing
25.	The Colorado Trail	At Spring Creek Pass: Hiking/ Backpacking/Camping/Snowmobiling
26.	Slumgullion Pass	Geologic interest point/Restrooms/Snowmobile Access
27.	Slumgullion/Deer Lakes/Hidden Valley	Camping/Hiking
28.	Windy Point Scenic Overlook	Scenic/Restrooms/Hiking
29.	Slumgullion Earth Flow	Geologic interest point/snowmobiling/ winter restrooms
30.	Lake San Cristobal Overlook	Scenic/geologic& mining interest point
31.	Alfred Packer Massacre Site	Historical/Archaeological Point of Interest
32.	Lake San Cristobal Recreation Area	Camping/RV/Hiking/Fishing/Boating/4x4/Horseback Riding/ Canoeing/Guide Services/Lodging/Restaurant
33.	Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway	4x4/Camping/Hiking
34.	Lake City & Visitor Center	Recreation/Services/Restrooms/Information

# Recreation Areas

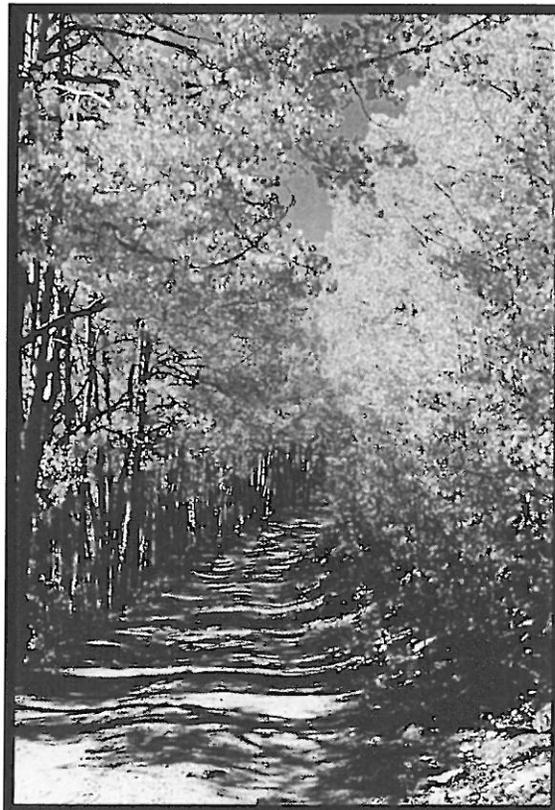
## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



## Roads To Trails Along The Silver Thread

#	ROAD NAME	ROAD NUMBER, IF KNOWN
1.	Pool Table Road	FS 600
2.	Farmers Creek Road	FS 501
3.	Bachelor Loop/West Willow	FS 503
4.	Deep Creek Road	County Road
5.	Miners Creek Road	FS 507
6.	Middle Creek Road	FS 523
7.	Antelope Springs Road	FS 509
8.	Antelope Springs Road	
9.	Fern Creek	FS 522
10.	Rio Grande Reservoir Road	FS 520
11.	North Clear Creek Falls Road (South Entrance)	FS 510
12.	North Clear Creek Falls Road (North Entrance)	FS 510
13.	Silver Thread Trail	FS 510
14.	Rito Hondo Reservoir/Continental Reservoir Road	FS 513
15.	Spring Creek Pass Corrals	
16.	Brown Lakes/Pearl Lakes Road	FS 515
17.	Bristol Heal Road	FS 532
18.	Spring Creek Pass (Elevation 10,898) Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Colorado Trail	
19.	Oleo Ranch Road/Tumble Creek Trail Head Cebolla Trail Skyline Trail	FS 729
20.	Main Line Trail	FS 734
21.	Cannibal Plateau Trail/Slumgullion Pull-off/Snowmobile Trail Access	FS 788
22.	Lake San Cristobal Recreation Area	

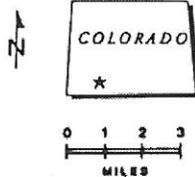
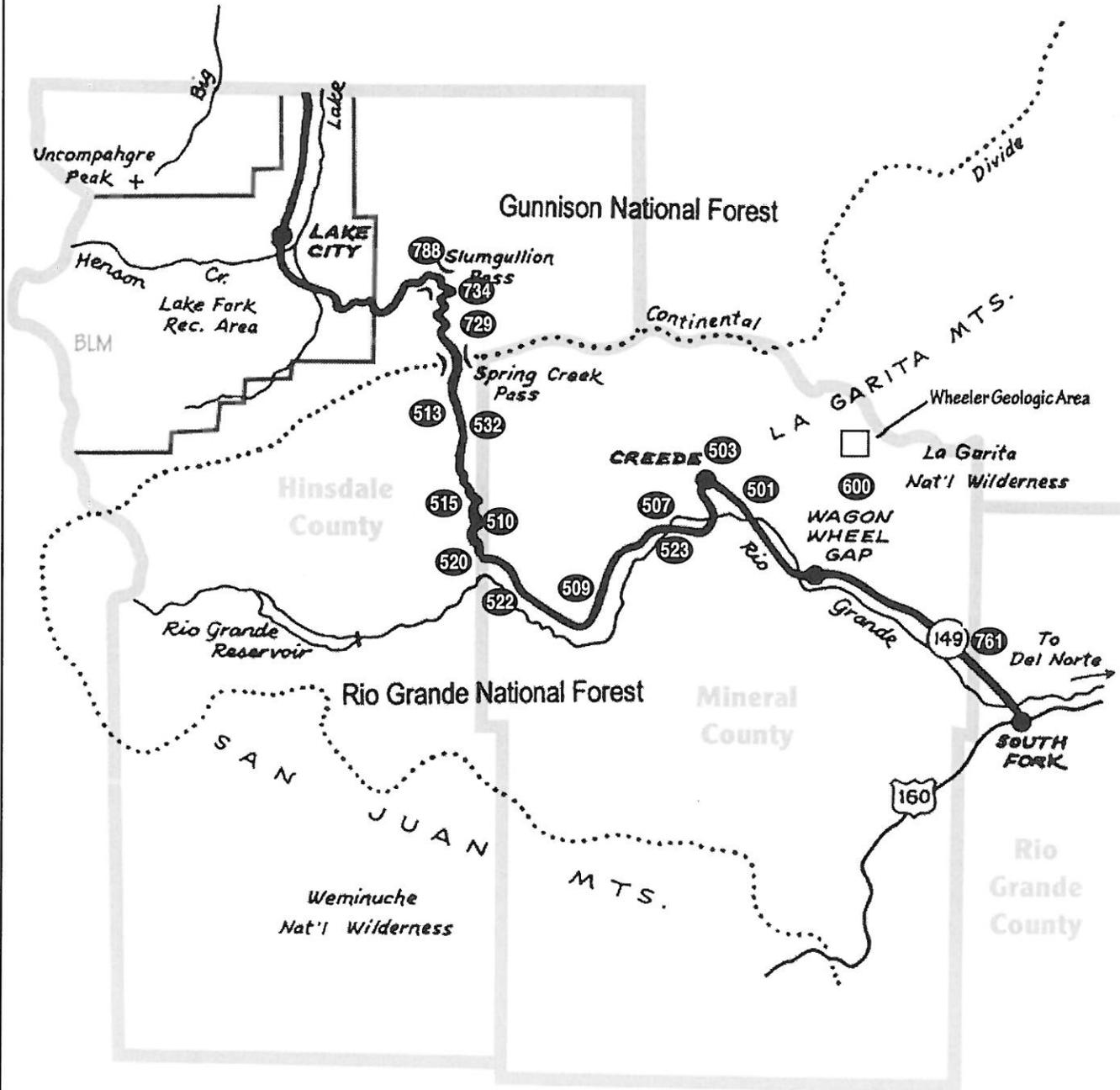


**Fall on a Back Country Road**  
Photo: John Gary Brown

# Trailhead Access

## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



- Scenic Highway
- County Boundary Line
- BLM Lands Boundary Line

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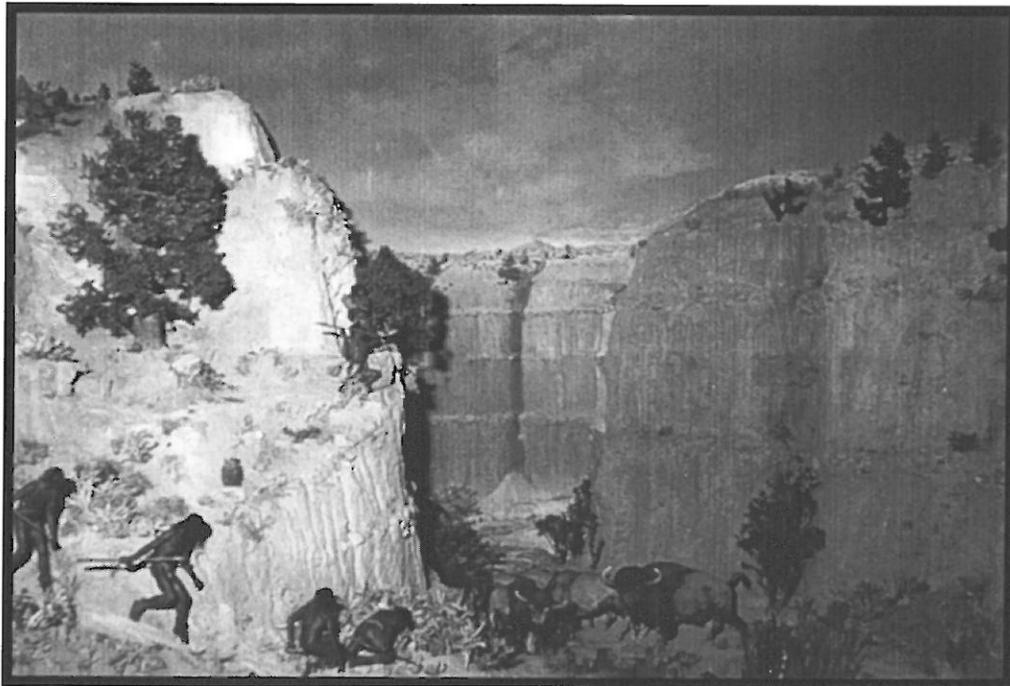
## Archaeologic & Historic Resource

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Transportation routes are a major focal point of the Silver Thread. Ice Age trails evolving over thousands of years to modern highways, mark the progression of travel on Highway 149. Outlined below is a brief history of how various forms of conveyance have ultimately shaped the development of the Silver Thread Byway.

### Paleo Indian Tradition

Earliest man used his feet for locomotion. In 1993, an ancient and important archaeological site was unearthed in the vicinity of the Silver Thread: the Black Mountain Folsom Site. Folsom people were skilled hunters and gatherers who generally focused on killing a now extinct form of bison. They designed and produced very unique, fluted projectile points which were exquisitely made of quality stone. Evidence indicates that the stone was often gathered or traded from as far as 300 miles away. The Black Mountain Folsom site dates to about 10,600 BP (years before present) and is exceptional because a Folsom camp has never been discovered at this altitude (approximately 9,900'). It is believed the site was occupied for a short period of time by a small group of hunters who were away from the main group of people. Paleoindian cultures, like Folsom, continued until the end of the wet and cold Pleistocene period when climatic conditions similar to today began in the early Holocene period about 7,500 BP.<sup>9</sup>



**Folsom Man Diorama, Mesa Verde National Monument**  
Photo: National Park Service

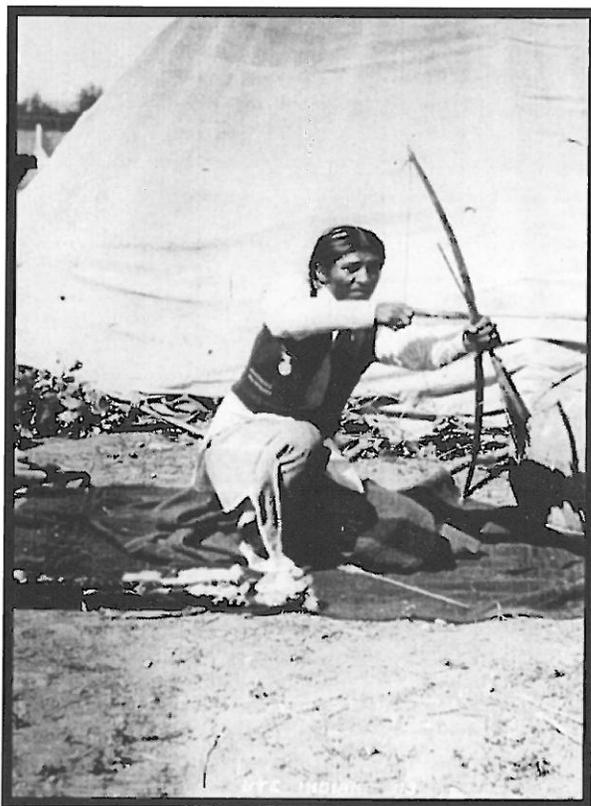
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<sup>9</sup> *Summary of the Prehistory of the Creede Area*, by Vince Spero, Archaeologist, San Juan/Rio Grande National Forest District.

## Archaic Tradition

By 7,500 BP the Archaic Tradition began. Using Paleo Indian trails through what is now the Silver Thread, Archaic Man still traveled on foot. The Archaic Tradition is individualized by the use of a greater variety of plants and animals. A possible local emergence of the Archaic Tradition, termed the Upper Rio Grande Culture, is present along the Silver Thread. Artifacts associated with the Upper Rio Grande Culture are usually made of black or dark colored basalt or obsidian. Artifact types located in this area include: large stemmed projectile points, side scrapers, bifacial knives, large choppers and gravers. One handed manos and slab metates (grinding stones), probably used for grinding wild seeds, have also been found in this area.

The Archaic Tradition is generally divided into three periods: the Early Archaic (7,500 BP- 5,000BP), the Middle Archaic (5,000 BP - 3,000 BP), and the Late Archaic (3,000 BP - 1,500 BP). All three utilized this area. Populations are thought to have increased through time during the Archaic Tradition. People associated with the Archaic Tradition probably traveled the landscape in bands consisting of extended family groups. Artifacts found on the surface of an identified Late Archaic site indicate that a wide variety of stone tools were used by people in their seasonal hunting and gathering camps.<sup>10</sup>



**Ute Indian Portrait**  
Photo: Denver Public Library

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<sup>10</sup> *Summary of the Prehistory of the Creede Area*, by Vince Spero, Archaeologist, San Juan/Rio Grande National Forest District.

## **Ute Occupation**

Still on foot and using trails thousands of years old, Ute Indians, the oldest continuous residents of what is now Colorado, arrived as early as 700 BP and established themselves as the primary residents of the San Juan Mountains, including the area along the Silver Thread Byway. The Utes hunted in this region long before white man knew of its existence. Never staying in one place permanently, the Utes hunted and gathered during summer seasons, enjoying the wide variety of resources available in the San Juans. One asset, the hot springs at Wagon Wheel Gap, known to them as 'Little Medicine', was a favorite camping spot as was Wheeler Geologic area.

## **Coronado's Expedition**

When Coronado ventured through Colorado in search of another Mexico or Peru, he 'discovered' the Yutah (or Ute) Indians. Coronado changed forever the way of life of the Ute Indians. For these Native Americans, it was their first contact with a foreign culture. The Spaniards left a definitive mark on the American Indian way of life as it was also the Ute's introduction to the horse. It changed their 'hunter/gatherer' lifestyle, by giving them a mobility and freedom unprecedented in their history. Footpaths along the Rio Grande now had to accommodate horses.

## **Charles Fremont Expedition:**

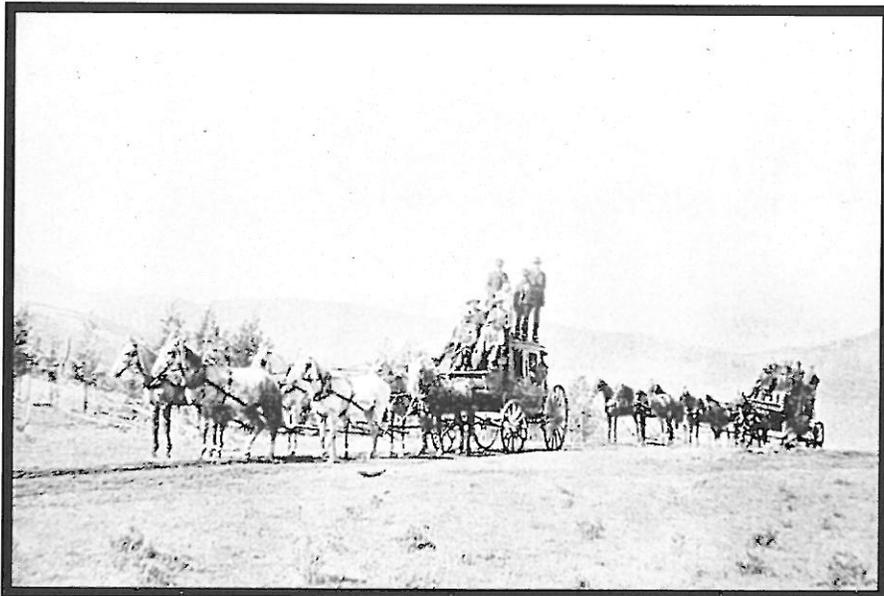
After Coronado, Charles Fremont made his ill-fated expedition. New transportation in the form of trains (or Iron Horses, as the Indians called them) was opening up the west. Fremont was searching for a new railroad route to California. During the winter of 1848, Fremont met with debilitating snowstorms which killed his animals and some of his men. In the La Garita Mountains, north of present day South Fork, he was detained by blizzard conditions and it was here that he aborted the expedition in order to save the lives of his men. Once, again, this portion of Colorado was left to the Utes.

## **The Utes Forced From The San Juans**

Inevitably, two factors worked in unison to finally force the Utes from this area: the building of Ft. Garland and the enactment of the Homestead Act in 1862. The mandate to Ft. Garland was clear: move Chief Ouray and his Ute Indians to a reservation in the Cortez/Ignacio area which had been created for them in 1868. This was accomplished when the Utes ceded the San Juan Mountains with the signing of the Brunot Treaty in 1873.

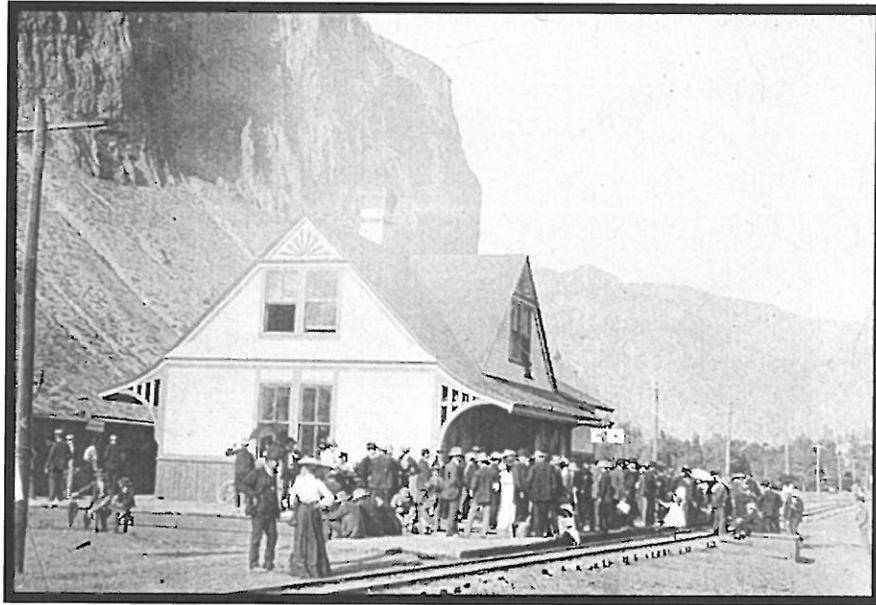
## **Toll Roads**

With the Utes vanquished and forced onto the Ignacio Reservation, travel along what would one day be the Silver Thread was no longer restricted. Land could be homesteaded and mined. Indian footpaths and horse trails were no longer sufficient to bring in the swell of humanity and haul out the priceless ore. Wagons and stagecoaches began widening old paths. Way stations and depots began springing up along these strange, new “roads”. Entrepreneurs like Otto Mears, “The Pathfinder of the San Juans”, made vast fortunes developing toll roads through this rugged and harsh terrain. Twenty-five cents to one dollar was charged to offset the cost of building the roads. The toll roads and stagecoaches brought in homesteaders, tourists, and miners.



**Opening Up the San Juans to Travel, circa 1890**

Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy Creede Repertory Theatre



**Going to 'Little Medicine'. Wagon Wheel Gap Depot**

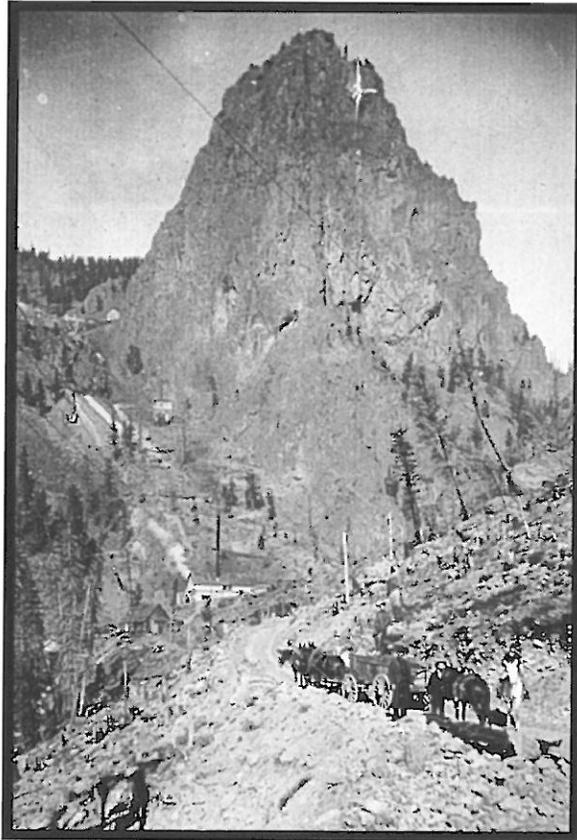
Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy of Creede Repertory Theatre

### **A Return to 'Little Medicine'**

On the heels of the toll road came the rail road, built initially to transport throngs of tourists to Wagon Wheel Gap. Later, a Depot (shown above and still present today) was built to cater to an ever-growing number of guests. Why were the tourists flocking to The Gap? They came in droves to bathe in and drink from the 'Little Medicine'. It would seem the Utes named these bubbling hot waters rightly. The curative and restorative powers of the 'Little Medicine' were praised throughout the country. So popular had they become in the late 1800's that a lavish hotel was built. And, in one last grand gesture, a bathhouse was constructed at the springs, piping in water and protecting guests from the elements as they luxuriated in the therapeutic springs. The hotel is gone now. The bathhouse, which is privately owned, still stands as a poignant reminder of the dawn of Anglo habitation along the Silver Thread.

### **Mining in the San Juans**

Mining is the industry that has left an indelible mark in this area. With the discovery of silver in Creede and Lake City in the late 1800's, toll roads and rail roads were extended at a break-neck pace, creating a vast transportation network throughout the San Juan Mountains. Daily trains and stage coaches unloaded scores of miners. With the miners came shopkeepers, saloon keepers, bankers, "fallen doves", preachers and con artists. South Fork, Creede and Lake City flourished until the silver panic of 1893. With the mountains still rich with ore, mines regrouped and opened again, operating with great success for decades. It was only in the last half of this century that the silver market completely collapsed and forced the mines to close, leaving behind them a legacy as rich as the silver veins that still run through the San Juan Mountains.



**A Long Ride to the Commodore Mine**

Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy of Creede Repertory Theatre.

### **Automobiles**

Cars soon replaced all other forms of transportation mentioned above. The last passenger train to Creede was in 1935. Since that year, automobiles have dominated the landscape on the Silver Thread. Dirt roads were gradually paved, making travel safer and faster. In 1968, Highway 149 was paved between Creede and Lake City, except for a portion of highway in the Santa Maria area. This last portion was paved in 1982.

Begun as a footpath for ancient man, the Silver Thread Scenic Byway will one day accommodate foot traffic again. Appropriate trails and adequate shoulder space for non-motorized traffic are now in the planning stages for large portions of the Silver Thread. When this plan reaches fruition, the highway will have come full circle. Also, when interpretation of the Byway is complete, 8,000 years of locomotion will be understood and appreciated by highway travelers.

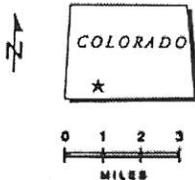
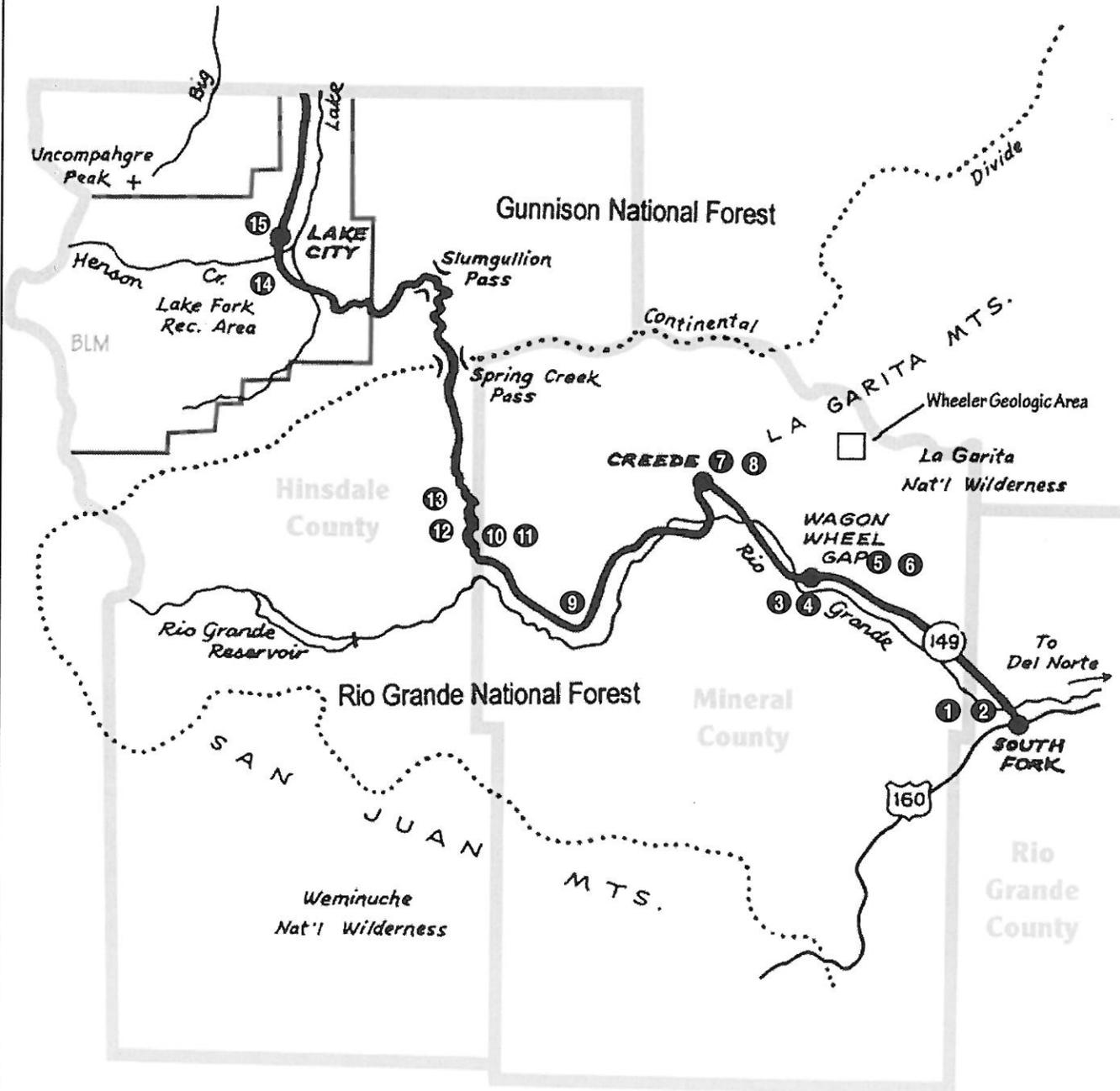
## Archaeologic & Historic Sites

#	SITE NAME	ARCHAEOLOGIC or HISTORIC
1.	Town of South Fork	Historic
2.	Fremont Campsite	Archaeologic/Historic
3.	Wagon Wheel Gap Depot	Historic
4.	Post Office Rock	Historic
5.	Wagon Wheel Gap	Historic
6.	Wagon Wheel Gap Water Shed Test Site	Historic
7.	Bachelor Historic Loop	Historic
8.	Town of Creede	Historic
9.	Antelope Springs	Historic
10.	San Juan City	Historic
11.	Wrights Ranch Overlook	Historic
12.	Rio Grande River/Browns Lake Overlook	Historic
13.	Black Mountain Site	Archaeologic
14.	Alfred Packer Massacre Site	Historic/Archaeologic
15.	Town of Lake City	Historic



**View of the Old Town of Sherman**  
 Photo: Hinsdale County Historical Society

# Historical/Archeological Silver Thread Highway State and National Forest Scenic Byway



-  Scenic Highway
-  County Boundary Line
-  BLM Lands Boundary Line

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# Cultural Features

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Literally speaking, cultural features are defined as the habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc. of a given people in a given period. Along the Byway, there are museums, arts councils, historical societies, mountain man clubs, dozens of cultural events and art galleries - all enriching and augmenting the cultural features of the Silver Thread. A few key cultural events are listed below, but this by no means, is a complete list.

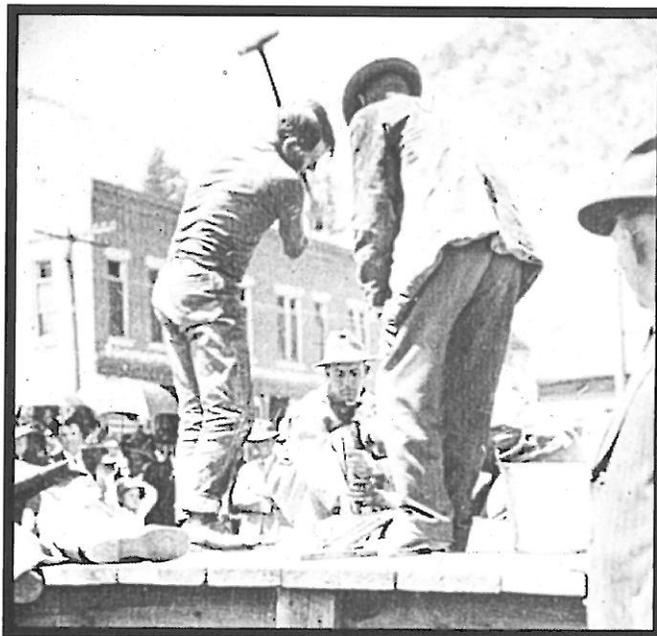
South Fork is well known for its history in timber and logging. These two industries shaped South Fork and help keep it alive to this day. To celebrate this history, South Fork hosts “**Logger Days**” every summer, with dozens of logging events, chain saw sculpting, food and dance. Attendance at this two day event is always a must for locals and visitors alike.

Creede is home to the **Creede Repertory Theatre**. This nationally acclaimed theatre has produced a number of plays about Colorado and Creede history as well as a wide range of dramatic literature including offerings for children. Playing to thousands annually, this acting troupe has a stellar 30+ year reputation for excellence and innovation in the arts.



**Performance at Creede Repertory Theatre**  
Photo: John Gary Brown  
Courtesy of Creede Repertory Theatre

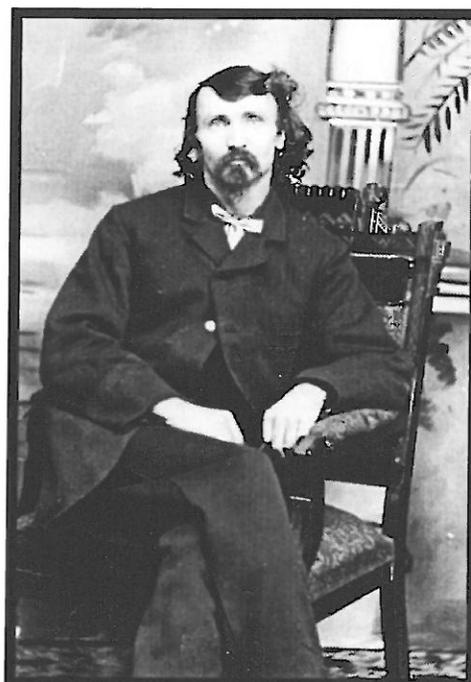
Creede also hosts the **Colorado State Mining Championships** every July 4th – along with its own local mining competition, the “Days of ‘92”. This high profile event has been held every July 4th since 1892. Competitions include: hand steeling, hand mucking, double jacking and single jacking. These methods of working the rock by hand were used by miners before they had electricity to power their tools. Approximately 10,000 people descend upon Creede every July 4th to watch these rapidly disappearing historic mining techniques.



**Days of ‘92 Mining Competition circa 1940**

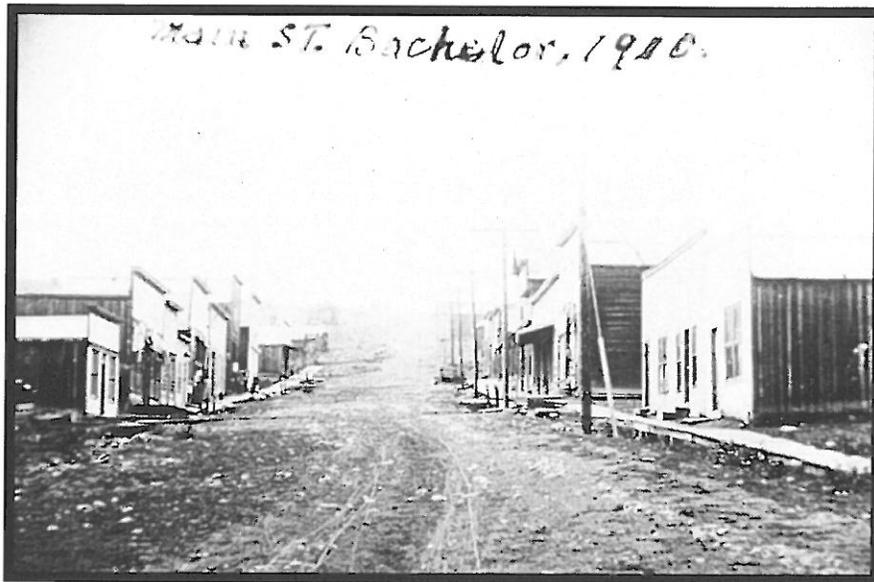
Photo: Al Birdsey Collection. Courtesy of Creede Repertory Theatre

The Lake City Arts Council leases the Black Crooke for local theatre productions, concerts and other entertainment events. **Lake City** has been designated as a **National Historic District**. The walking tour offered by the Historical Society is exceptional and should not be missed. The Lake City Museum familiarizes everyone with such characters as Otto Mears who opened up the San Juans to transportation and Hinsdale County’s famous convicted cannibal, Alferd Packer. In an effort to lighten the macabre nature of Alferd’s crime, he was remembered, for a time, in an annual barbeque, where the featured cuisine was – ribs.



**The Cannibal, Alferd Packer**

Photo: Wallace Collection, Hinsdale County Historical Society



**Town of Bachelor. 1910**

Photo: Al Birdsey Collection.

Worthy of special note are the many **ghost town sites** accessed by the Silver Thread. Near South Fork: Summitville. Near Lake City: Capitol City, Rose's Cabin, Sherman and Carson. Near Creede: Sunnyside, Spar City, Weaver and Bachelor. These towns prospered once because of the countless mines that dotted the land along the Silver Thread. The lives of these communities ebbed and flowed with the success of the mines in



**Bachelor Town Site. Today.**

Photo: John Gary Brown, Courtesy of Creede Repertory Theatre

their area. The staggering number of old mines and ghost towns in the San Juans lend credence the notion that mining created towns and without mining, some towns died.

More famous than the ghost towns they helped build, colorful characters from dime novels made names for themselves along the Silver Thread: Poker Alice Tubbs, Calamity Jane, Soapy Smith, Bat Masterson and Bob Ford (the slayer of Jesse James). The Creede Candle reported: *"Creede is unfortunate in getting more of the flotsam of the state than usually falls to the lot of a mining camp. Some of her citizens would take a prize at a hog show."* These legendary figures can now be conjured up and remembered as one drives the Silver Thread.

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# Resource Management Actions and Strategies

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In order to realize the goals and objectives outlined earlier, the Silver Thread Committee must continue its efforts in obtaining broad based support and interest from private businesses, local chambers of commerce, city and county governments, the National Forest Districts and Department Of Wildlife, recreation groups, historical societies and the Colorado Department Of Transportation.

## Scenic & Natural Area Goals

It is the goal of the Byway Committee to work in unison with the Gunnison and Rio Grande National Forest, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), city and county governments and the Colorado Department of Transportation to protect the intrinsic beauty of the Silver Thread Byway by: A. identifying all current open space sites along the Silver Thread Corridor, B. preserving open space that warrants preservation, C. maintaining and enhancing the corridor by adopting planning and design strategies which will minimize the impact of development along the corridor, D. protecting and preserving the outstanding scenic and recreation features along the Byway corridor while managing the multiple-use activities on the land.

## Scenic & Natural Area General Actions

1. The vast majority of land along the Silver Thread is managed by two National Forests, the Rio Grande and Gunnison Districts and by the BLM Gunnison Resource Area. Each of these government entities has their own set of plans regarding how public lands should be managed. For this reason, the Silver Thread Scenic Byway Committee will attempt to stay up-to-date on Forest Management Plans, Wilderness Implementation Schedules and Resource Management Plans and, when possible, make recommendations and suggestions to further protect the scenic and natural areas along the Silver Thread, while maintaining multiple use.
2. It is recommended that a Scenic View Analysis and Intrusion Report be prepared specifically for the Silver Thread with the help of all the government agencies listed above, along with the Silver Thread Committee and the Colorado Department of Transportation. While some of this work has been done in the Committee's Interpretive Master Plan, it is believed that broad based input is critical to properly address site selection and maintenance concerns. Careful identification of current and future scenic turnout areas will allow all parties to safeguard against too much intrusion along the corridor while creating a methodology for careful development.

3. The Silver Thread Committee endorses the concept that long range planning policies must be developed and adopted to **protect critical wildlife habitat in Colorado and along the Silver Thread**. “When it comes to development and habitat loss, Colorado is the crucible of the West,” says Alan Christensen, Vice President of the Conservation Programs for the Elk Foundation. Hal Clifford, in his article “Losing Colorado?”, written for Bugle Magazine emphasizes the following: “Between 1990 and 1995, Colorado’s population grew 13.7%. Many of these new residents built in places crucial to elk, deer and other large game. Colorado State University determined that 30% of the state’s elk and deer winter range and 47% of critical winter range was overrun by development between 1970 and 1995. As people spread into Colorado’s big game country, animals find themselves cutoff from traditional wintering grounds. Saving what habitat remains will require unprecedented partnerships between private landowners, state and federal agencies, county governments, ranchers, conservationists and others.”<sup>11</sup> The Silver Thread Scenic Byway Committee is one of those “others”.

4. Develop a strategic plan, in cooperation with county planning offices, land conservation trusts, government entities and local realtors for **preserving significant open space lands**. As local real estate company, Rincon, stated in the March 5, 1996 issue of The Mineral County Miner. “Too often, developers come here from some remote place, knowing nothing about the area. The developer buys a huge chunk of land, chops it up into all these smaller pieces, sells it as quickly as possible, and leaves. We’re not against development, as long as its done responsibly.”

“Rincon supports the idea of developing land already set aside as residential...It’s very easy to help people see that in Mineral County, the average buyer doesn’t need a huge plot of land...Once they understand how Mineral County is set up, that it’s 96% Forest Service land, they decide to go with residential property. It’s a BIG backyard we have to play in...and a lot of people are delighted when they find out they can enjoy all it has to offer without buying it.”<sup>12</sup>

5. Encourage Rio Grande, Mineral and Hinsdale Counties to adopt land use regulations which specifically address the preservation of scenic and natural wonders along the Silver Thread.

6. Adopt and implement management objectives for the Silver Thread. The objective is to manage, protect and preserve the scenic and recreation values and uses within the Byway corridor, while managing the multiple-use issues as well.

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<sup>11</sup> “Losing Colorado?” by Hal Clifford, Colorado Correspondent for *The Boston Globe & Dallas Morning News*.

<sup>12</sup> The Mineral County Miner, Thursday, March 5, 1996. ‘Big backyard’ development by Susan Baxter, Staff Writer.

7. Request that the Colorado Department of Transportation work closely with local county governments to identify, protect and enhance the corridor's scenic and natural qualities.
8. Where possible, develop a pedestrian trail system that parallels the Silver Thread to safely accommodate off-road traffic.
9. Encourage all companies providing power along the Silver Thread to use construction methods which will minimize visual impact of the utility lines along the Silver Thread.

## Scenic & Natural Site Specific Actions

In cooperation with County Commissioners from Rio Grande, Mineral and Hinsdale Counties, the following specific actions are to be implemented over the next 3 to 5 years in order to enhance the scenic and natural beauty of the Byway.

<b>Proposed Scenic &amp; Natural Site Actions</b>			
#	Scenic and Natural Area Proposed Site Actions	Priority	Responsibility
1.	Prepare site at Collier Turnout	2	Silver Thread Committee
2.	Landscape site at Wagon Wheel Gap Turnout	2	Silver Thread Committee
3.	Clean and enhance McKinney Springs Turnout	2	Mineral County
4.	Replace three panel kiosk at Creede Park	3	Silver Thread Committee/Town Of Creede
5.	Install Restroom Facilities at Creede Park	1	Town/Mineral County/CDOT
6.	Restore Clay Mine Site at Mile Marker 23	3	RGNF District/Mineral County/Historical Society
7.	Erect ranching interpretive panel at Rio Grande National Forest Corrals	3	Silver Thread Committee
8.	Thin trees at Overlook at Mile Marker 47 to open view	1	RGNF District
9.	Upgrade restroom at N. Clear Creek Falls	1	Gunnison National Forest District/CDOT
10.	Re-work all signage at Spring Creek Pass	1	Silver Thread Committee
11.	Thin trees on right, near Mile Marker 59 to accommodate driving view	2	Gunnison National Forest District
12.	Thin trees on right, near Mile 62.7 to accommodate driving view	2	Gunnison National Forest District
13.	Acquire permission from owners to interpret Alfred Packer Massacre Site	1	Silver Thread Committee
14.	Upgrade restroom facility at Windy Point	1	Gunnison National Forest District/CDOT Hinsdale County

## Recreation: General Actions

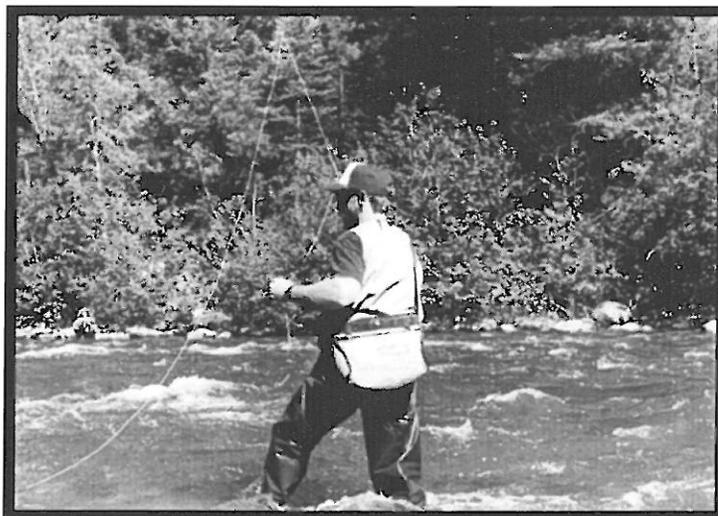
1. **Locate Funding for Visitor Center in Lake City.** Of the highest priority to the Silver Thread Committee is the improvement of the location of the Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center in Lake City. Currently, the Visitor Center is located on Lake City's Main Street. However, the majority of travelers drive to Lake City on Highway 149, which sits one block east of Main Street, making it difficult for visitors to find the Visitor Center. It is the hope of the Lake City Chamber, the Hinsdale County Commissioners and the Silver Thread Scenic Byway Committee that one of the following can be accomplished for Lake City A. locate a new Chamber facility situated on Highway 149, or B. locate a parcel of land (for purchase or through donation) to build a Visitor Center on Highway 149.

If neither of these options are feasible, the Silver Thread Committee would then pursue funding to develop high quality signage to direct traffic to the existing Chamber offices.

2. It is recommended that **pedestrian trails** be constructed, where CDOT easement allows, to provide for the safe movement of pedestrian traffic adjacent to Highway 149. Where trail construction is not possible, shoulders should be widened to accommodate non-motorized travelers. Increased non-motorized use along the highway has made this an urgent public safety as well as a recreation need.

3. **Stocking fish in the Rio Grande.** It is recommended that the Colorado Division of Wildlife proceed cautiously in stocking the Rio Grande and its tributaries over the next 3 to 5 years due to a shortage of 'clean' fish. A parasite, called Whirling Disease, is now threatening countless rivers and streams throughout Colorado. For this reason, little or no stocking will be done in the Rio Grande for the foreseeable future. Until stocking can resume, discussions are now underway regarding whether or not to further reduce the bag limit, or go to the more extreme 'catch and release'. No decision will be made without public meetings and input.

As mentioned above, **Whirling Disease** must be carefully monitored and all possible safeguards taken to keep rivers and streams along the Silver Thread free of this disease. Of the 16 fish hatcheries in Colorado, only 4 are free of the whirling disease bacteria. The San Luis Valley (which includes the Rio Grande) is now designated as 'protected habitat'.



Fly Fishing the Rio Grande

While there is some presence of the parasite in the Rio Grand and there has been some impact from the disease, it is limited. This parasite appears to be harmless to people, but certainly not to trout. The Fish and Wildlife Service is now using the Rio Grande as a 'study stream'. The question they are attempting to answer in this study is:

*“If infected fish are not stocked in the Rio Grande, will the presence of the Whirling Disease parasite continue to rise?”*

Answering this important question will help biologists understand how to cope with this parasite.

In the short term, Colorado is making every effort to eradicate the parasite from their fish hatcheries. When this is done, the state will then begin to focus on the more serious problem of how to eliminate the disease from rivers and streams.

5. It is recommended that the state legislature re-write **hunting regulations** for rural areas to accommodate sparsely populated subdivisions. As currently written, state law only prohibits shooting in areas that contain more than 100 dwellings per square mile. Most subdivisions along the Silver Thread contain less than 100 dwellings per square mile. Consequently, these isolated housing areas can find themselves in the crosshairs of hunters. Until state legislation is reviewed and amended, it is recommended that local county commissioners adopt shooting ordinances to restrict shooting in certain areas. It is further recommended that county's install "Shooting Closure" signs in subdivisions along the Silver Thread to ensure the safety of residents and highway travelers during hunting seasons. Also, as currently written, it is legal to field dress harvested game adjacent to Highway 149, which many travelers, including children, find extremely offensive. It is recommended that this regulation be amended to protect travelers from this discourteous but necessary task.

6. In order to **maximize promotion dollars**, which are limited, it is the recommendation of the Silver Thread Committee that all tourist related entities (Chambers, visitor centers, lodging, etc.) on the Silver Thread combine talent and financial resources to promote important Byway events. i.e. Logger Days, Colorado State Mining Championships, Arts and Crafts Fairs, etc. By pooling resources of manpower and money, more can be accomplished. This would also instill in all communities a sense of ownership of the Byway. And, it would create important partnerships between the communities and counties while maximizing advertising dollars.

7. Ensure that all pull offs, interpretive areas, visitor centers and campgrounds are fully accessible and barrier free.

8. The creation of a **Friends of the Silver Thread Committee** is important in order to maintain and plan for the growth and financial independence of the Silver Thread. As funding dollars and resources continue to shrink, the demand for them continues to rise. In light of that situation, it is of the utmost importance that this support group be formed and that its primary function be that of raising money to maintain and improve the work that has been begun by the Silver Thread Steering Committee.

The specific responsibilities of the Friends group would include:

- A. Promote the Silver Thread
- B. Educate public to enjoy but protect the historic, natural, cultural, scenic and archeological resources on the Silver Thread
- C. Assist and support, where possible, reclamation projects along the Silver Thread.
- D. Work with all appropriate organizations to improve the safety and comfort of travelers on the Silver Thread.
- E. Help the Silver Thread Byway Committee develop a long range plan for the financial security of the Byway.
  - a. Help with Fundraisers
  - b. Create merchandise that can be sold along the Silver Thread
  - c. Develop and sell written literature pertaining to the Silver Thread. Purchase and resell local history books on the area.
  - d. Organize and guide “Treasures Along the Silver Thread” open air workshops
- F. Attend Southwest Tourism Councils regional meetings to keep the Silver Thread apprised of regional and state tourism goals and objectives.
- G. Create and sell a “Watchable Wildlife” Brochure for the Silver Thread.
- H. Help the Silver Thread Byway Committee in designating the Silver Thread as an All American Highway.

# Review of Transportation Standards And Safety Actions

The Silver Thread Scenic Byway is included in two separate Transportation Districts. South Fork through Creede is contained in the Colorado Region 5 Transportation Plans. The portion of Highway 149 in Hinsdale County is incorporated in Colorado Region 3 Transportation Plans. A review of these Plans reveals that due to the small population base in all three counties, only small projects are slated for the Silver Thread. All work will be in compliance with the Colorado Department of Transportation standards and will have marginal impact upon the intrinsic qualities of the Silver Thread.

## Safety and Hazard Areas

Overall, safety conditions along the Silver Thread are listed as ‘fair’. There are a few stretches of Highway 149 which have historically required special attention due to design complications and topography. Listed below are those problem areas and actions that have/will be taken to maintain the safety of these areas.

### Proposed Safety Actions

#	Proposed Safety Actions	Mile Marker	Priority	Responsibility
1.	Widen length of Hwy 149 to accommodate pedestrian traffic	1-75	1	All Counties/CDOT
2.	Stabilize rock Gabon basket to keep rocks off highway	12-13	1	Mineral County
3.	Develop pedestrian/off-road trail adjacent to Silver Thread	14-23	1	CDOT/Mineral County/Civic Groups
4.	Continue pedestrian/off-road trail along Silver Thread	23-33	3	Mineral County/Civic Groups/CDOT
5.	Cut out hillside at “S” curves, to improve visibility	29-30	1	Mineral County
6.	Stabilize falling rock areas to keep rocks off highway	35-37	1	Mineral County
7.	Stabilize falling rock areas to keep rocks off highway	64-65	1	Hinsdale County
8.	Clean Highway of winter sand build up for better tire traction	55-75	1	Hinsdale County
9.	Create pedestrian trail between Lake City & Lake San Cristobal	72-75	1	Hinsdale County/CDOT

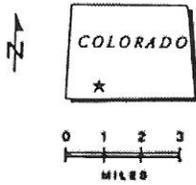
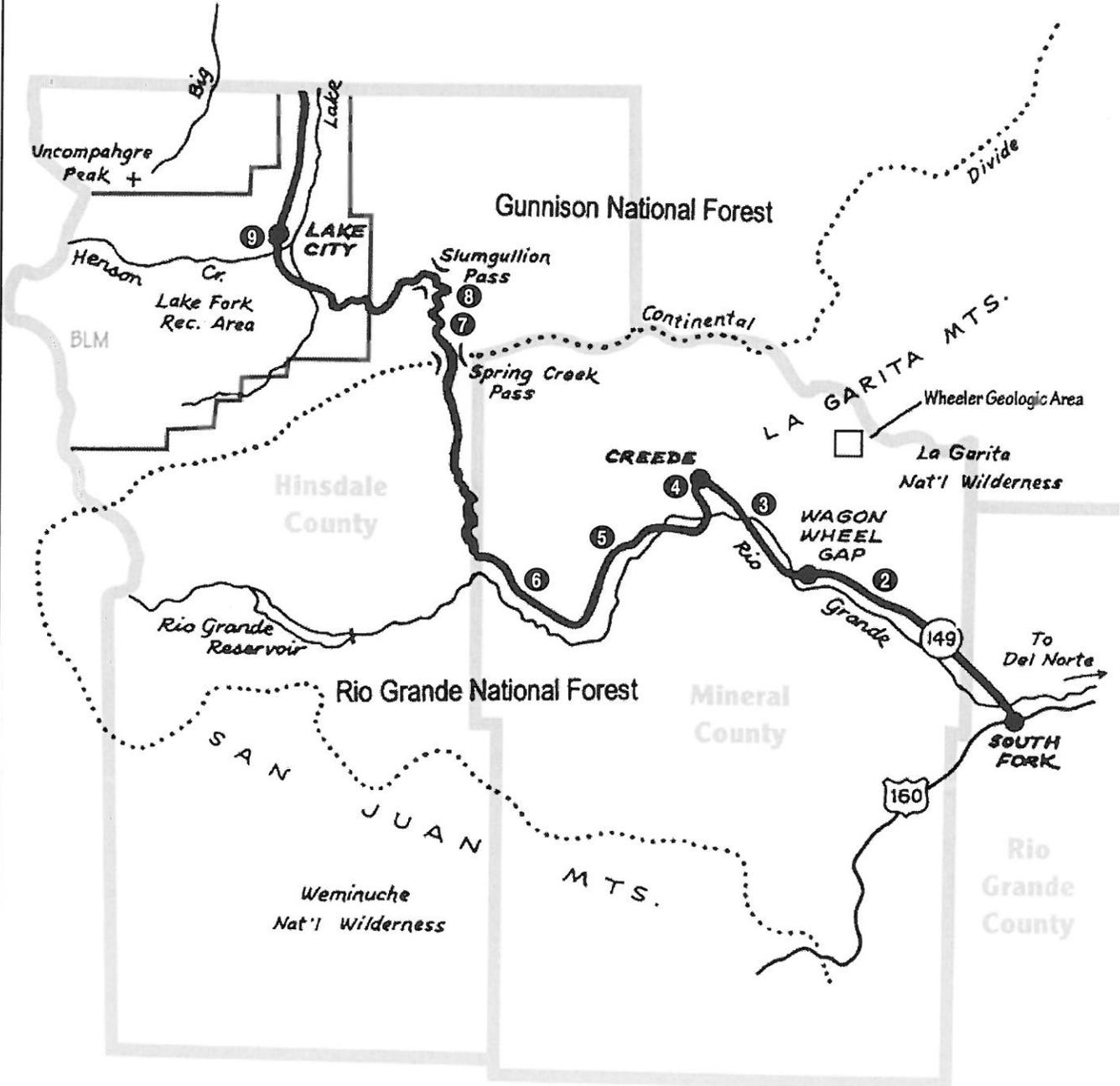
## Roadway Surface Conditions

Highway 149 is a tertiary road. The overall condition of the pavement can only be listed as fair to poor. While some of the Byway meanders through large valleys, much of it is constructed through narrow canyons with miles of steep cliffs on one side and sheer drop offs on the other. By no means does this make the highway unsafe. It simply means that, according to Colorado Department of Transportation standards, the Byway road surfaces need improvement.

# Safety Actions

## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



- Scenic Highway
- County Boundary Line
- BLM Lands Boundary Line

During spring melt off, particular attention must be paid to areas where falling rocks obstruct the highway and can cause accidents and car damage. Sharp curves have historically caused visibility problems for drivers. Sunless, icy patches can make for hazardous winter driving. And, while county and state officials are keenly aware of these ongoing problems and work diligently to keep them in check, the mountainous nature of the road and extreme weather conditions may forever keep Highway 149 from attaining anything better than a fair roadway surface status.

CDOT, District 3, recently completed major improvements on a section of Highway 149 between North Clear Creek Falls and Slungullion Pass. Working in close cooperation with the Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forest Districts and using Forest Service Highway Funds, major re-surfacing work was completed, shoulder improvements were made along with guardrail and other safety improvements. In addition, improvements were made to trail heads, parking areas and scenic/interpretive turnouts. Consequently, for the next 6 years, District 3 has no plans for improvements to its portion of Highway 149.

### **Widen the Full Length of Highway 149. Add Pedestrian Trails Where Possible.**

With increased promotion of the Silver Thread Highway comes increased traffic, including pedestrian traffic. In order to safeguard against potentially serious safety issues, Rio Grande County, Mineral County, Hinsdale County and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) are developing long range plans to accommodate non-motorized traffic along the highway.

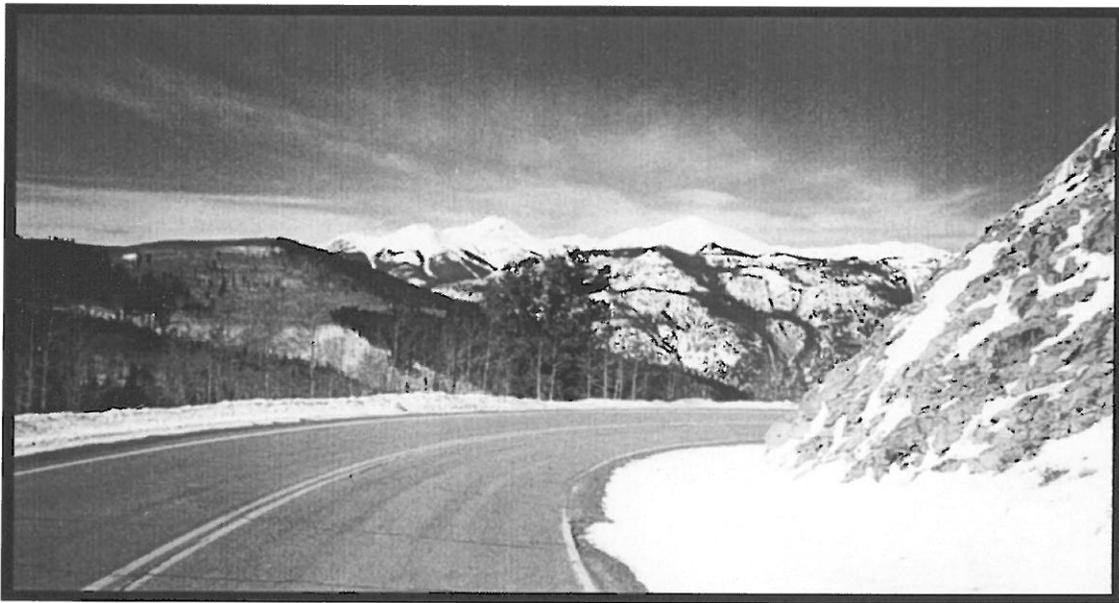
South Fork, the gateway to the Silver Thread, is planning a trail system for their rapidly growing community. To that end, the Silver Thread Visitor Center, the Chamber of Commerce, the Town and the Rio Grande National Forest District are all joining forces to submit a proposal to the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) requesting enhancement monies to fund the writing of a Trails Master Plan for the South Fork area. The Master Plan will include partnerships for the development of new trail systems, improvement to existing trails, interpretive enhancement where appropriate, along with a budget outline for maintenance and upkeep. It is hoped that the Master Plan and its goals and objectives will be implemented over the next 3 to 5 years.

Much of Highway 149 is in Mineral County. This thoroughfare winds through deep, narrow canyons, making it nearly impossible to create bona fide pedestrian trails. As part of the above noted Master Plan, Rio Grande County, in cooperation with Mineral County is proposing that CDOT widen shoulders on the narrow portions of Highway 149 which run through Rio Grande and Mineral Counties. In so doing, non-motorized traffic would be able to safely use the Highway.

However, in areas where the road runs through wide, valley floors, the Commissioners are proposing that highway easement be used to create completely separate trails which will run parallel to the highway. The first of these would be a pedestrian trail starting at Wagon Wheel Gap (Mile Marker 14) through the Town of Creede to Airport Road (Mile Marker 23).

In Hinsdale County, the Colorado Department of Transportation has enhancement money set aside in its year 2000 budget to begin construction of a pedestrian trail system between the town of Lake City and the Lake San Cristobal Recreation Area. This four mile stretch of highway is quite narrow and potentially dangerous for pedestrians. This proposed recreation trail would be situated adjacent to Highway 149 to safely accommodate pedestrians. Between now and the year 2000, Hinsdale County is working to put together a Scope of Work which will include design and planning components, a proposed budget and timelines for completion of the project.

It is also recommended that Mineral and Hinsdale Counties work with CDOT to pursue the possibility of installing modern restrooms at the Creede Recreation Park, which sits on the Silver Thread, and at the North Clear Creek Falls turnout. It is further recommended that the restroom at the Windy Point Overlook be modernized. To date, there are no modern rest areas between South Fork and Lake City. There are two primitive stops, but these are difficult to locate and, because of their primitive nature, not often used. What few public restrooms exist on Highway 149 are severely overtaxed in busy summer months.



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# Development Plan

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Ninety percent of all lands along the Byway are under the supervision of two National Forests and the Bureau of Land Management. In the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) produced by the Rio Grande National Forest District, particular attention has been paid to the Silver Thread and the desire of the RGNF to protect and preserve those same scenic and natural qualities that prompted Byway status in 1989. Additionally, the current amended FLRMP for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison Nation Forest places the Silver Thread Byway in a 2B management prescription. The Grande Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison will be writing a new FLRMP in the near future. Likewise, it is recommended that the BLM, in its Resource Management Plan, address appropriate resource management as it relates to the Silver Thread.

It is further hoped, that during the course of the next 5-10 years, the Forest Districts will continue to monitor usage along the Silver Thread. This monitoring will assist in evaluating whether certain areas along the Byway need designation as "Special Management Areas". The Freemont campsite in South Fork has been so designated. Such areas as North Clear Creek Falls and the Folsom Archaeologic Dig Site may eventually require special management status.

The remaining 10% of land along the Byway covers three counties and is under private ownership. The majority of privately owned land adjoins the Silver Thread. (See Rio Grande National Forest District map, next page) This flanking of public to private land creates a host of sensitive planning problems. Political support for land use planning and regulations varies from county to county. There are substantial differences in how each county is planning for growth and development along the Silver Thread. Development is important for financial security. Likewise, preserving the inherent qualities of the Byway is also critical to keeping tourism dollars in the area. It is anticipated that each county will, at some point, address development and zoning strategies for the Byway. The Steering Committee suggests that these strategies address the need to minimize the visual impact of development along the Byway.

The Steering Committee would also encourage private property owners to look into the possibility of trading privately owned open space along the Silver Thread to Forest Districts or Bureau of Land Management in exchange for less visible public properties. This would help maintain visual beauty, minimize development and protect the natural resources on the Byway.

If trading land is not an option, it is recommended that private landowners pursue scenic easements to keep the Byway visually attractive.

# Silver Thread Scenic Byway



**Private Land**

- Major Highway
- San Juan/Rio Grande Nfs
- GMU, Nfs
- Pike/San Isabel Nfs
- National Monuments/NRA
- BLM - Canon City District
- BLM - Montross District
- FWS Refuges
- Tribal lands
- State lands

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# Outdoor Advertising Regulations & Plans

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After numerous meetings and telephone conversations with various department heads at the Region 5 CDOT offices, it would appear that CDOT will continue to be very conservative in its approach to signage along Highway 149. CDOT is routinely reminded of the importance of limiting signs in order to maintain the visual integrity of the Byway. Signing from South Fork to Creede is currently limited to directional signs, Forest District information signs and unobtrusive interpretive panels. Generally, from Creede to Lake City, signs are directional and informational in nature. There are a couple of trouble spots that need attention. The Silver Thread Byway Committee would like to make the following recommendations to CDOT, County and City Governments.

1. It is recommended that City and County governments officially adopt and enforce federal, state and CDOT laws as they pertain to highways signs.
2. Special consideration must be given to the city limits of each town along the corridor. It is recommended that signs be consolidated and, where possible removed, to eliminate congestion. Example: If a number of churches have individual signs, would it be better to simply consolidate them into one sign which states: "The Churches of South Fork (Creede/Lake City) Welcome You" with the number of the local Chamber of Commerce to get specific information on locations and times of services? Likewise, would it be more attractive and economically realistic to have all guest ranches or restaurants or retail businesses coop sign space? Maximum advertising using a minimum amount of space.
3. It is recommended that all Forest District signs be thoroughly evaluated. This process should include evaluation of sign locations, effectiveness, size, age and condition. It is recommended that outdated signs either be removed or relocated. Many signs along the corridor are faded and hard to read. They should be replaced. Again, in some areas signs could be consolidated. Recently, the Rio Grande District installed bulletin boards at the point of access to the majority of Forest Service roads to which land use rules and regulations are attached. While useful, these boards look unfinished. It is recommended that they should either be relocated further from the highway or painted to give them a more professional appearance. Either solution will improve the scenic integrity along the Byway.
4. Some advance information signs could be erected at key locations, informing drivers of information centers and recreation areas.
5. It is recommended that all Colorado Department of Wildlife signage be evaluated. The committee noticed more CDOW signage along the Byway in the past 4 years near Collier Wildlife Area and Unit 76.

6. Interpretive signs will be installed along the Silver Thread Byway in 1999. The signs have been carefully planned and designed to blend with the landscape while fulfilling their goal of being educational and attractive. This project is quite broad in scope and, therefore, an entire section of this Master Plan has been devoted to the interpretive project. Following is a list of proposed changes in signs along the Silver Thread.

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## Recommendations for Signage Improvements

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<b>#</b>	<b>Outdoor Advertising Improvements/Actions</b>	<b>Priority</b>
1.	Town of South Fork and Rio Grande County. Review sign code. Update and enforce as necessary. Encourage sign consolidation to eliminate visual congestion in city limits.	1
2.	Coller Wildlife Area. Consolidate signs onto one kiosk. Remove/replace old, faded signs. Where possible, relocate signs to different area.	1
3.	Town of Creede and Mineral County. Review sign code. Update and enforce as necessary. Encourage sign consolidation to eliminate visual congestion in city limits.	1
4.	Spring Creek Pass Turnout. Relocate Moose Hunting Sign to Moose Interpretive Panel near North Clear Creek Falls.	1
5.	Town of Lake City and Hinsdale County. Review sign code. Update and enforce as necessary. Encourage sign consolidation to eliminate visual congestion in city limits.	1

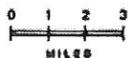
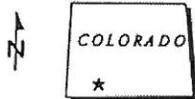
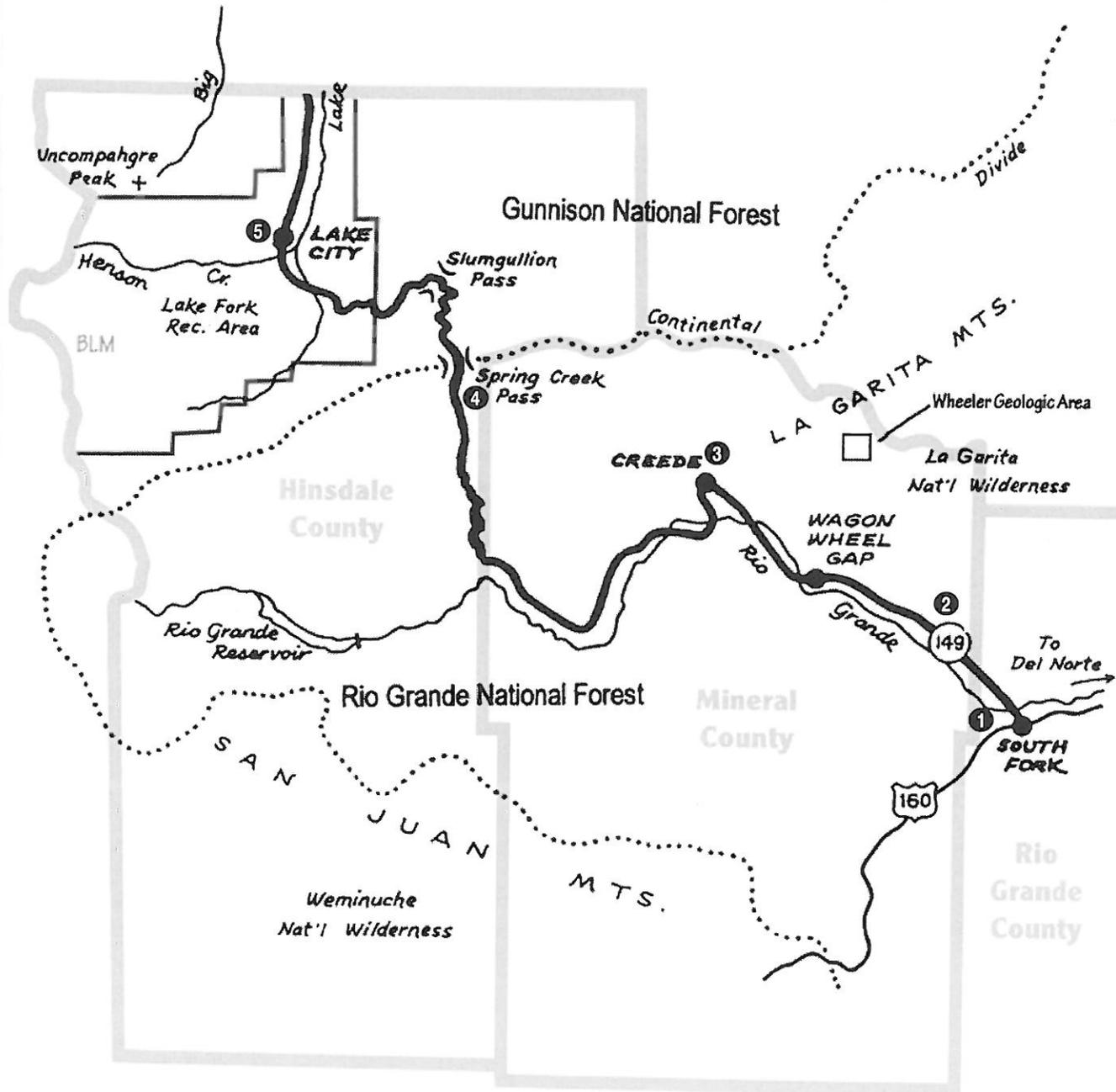
### FULL LENGTH OF HIGHWAY

1.	Full length of Byway. Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forest District sign evaluation. Where appropriate, remove, relocate, replace and consolidate signage to minimize visual pollution to Byway.	1
2.	When pedestrian trails are in place along corridor, install adequate signage to warn vehicles of the presence of pedestrian traffic.	2
3.	When pedestrian trails are in place, install adequate pedestrian safety signage.	2
4.	When highway shoulders are widened, install adequate signage to warn vehicles of the possibility of pedestrian traffic.	2
5.	When highway shoulders are widened, install adequate signage to warn pedestrians to be respectful of vehicle traffic.	2
6.	Full length of Byway. Consolidate/minimize directional signs wherever possible.	1

# Signage Improvements

## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



- Scenic Highway
- County Boundary Line
- BLM Lands Boundary Line

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# Public Participation

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Acting as a Steering Committee since 1989, federal, state, county and town officials along with businesses, civic organizations and individuals have been instrumental in the creation of the Silver Thread Scenic Byway and have been eager and active in guiding the preparation of this Corridor Master Plan. Likewise, when deemed appropriate, additional meetings and telephone conversations were held with appropriate individuals and officials to discuss the corridor plan and to gather accurate information.

Tremendous interest in and support for this Corridor Master Plan have been continually demonstrated by the groups mentioned above. Keeping the lines of communication open and fully understanding the goals and objectives of the Steering Committee and its Master Plan is important to all groups. A series of meetings have been scheduled to allow input from cities, counties, government agencies, etc. Their input will ensure that the Master Plan meets with the approval of all participating organizations and that the plan is acceptable and accurate.

In order to keep public interest and involvement high, it is hoped that a Friends of the Silver Thread Association can be developed to gather more public support for the Byway and to assist in fund raising and promotion of the Silver Thread. It is also hoped that this Association will implement the Vision and Goals outlined in this Master Plan.

For this Association to succeed, it must have the full participation of all interested agencies, groups and entities existing along the Byway Corridor. These specifically include, but are not limited to: Forest Districts, BLM, Department of Wildlife, county planning officials, zoning boards, land use administrators, land conservation groups, chambers of commerce, historic preservation groups, outdoor recreation organizations, business associations and regional tourism councils. The majority of these groups already participate on the Steering Committee and have pledged their support for the Byway.

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# Interpretive Plan

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Historically, visitors to the Silver Thread Scenic Byway have come to this area for generations. Children came with parents. Those children grew and now bring their children. And, thus the cycle has repeated itself for well over 100 years. We call this group of people “seasonal residents”. They are in this area on a part-time basis but consider themselves a part of the community. But, in recent years, with increased marketing and public relations efforts, visitor centers are seeing more first time visitors to the area. Travelers from across the nation are making this area a destination point. Likewise, international tourism is increasing in more remote areas like the Silver Thread.

In order to appropriately address the needs of all these visitor groups, the following strategy has been adopted by the Silver Thread Byway Committee.

## **Interpretive Master Plan**

The Silver Thread Byway Committee contracted Interpretive Management Associates to develop an Interpretive Master Plan for the Byway. The plan was completed in March, 1993. This development process included countless meetings with all interested parties to receive input on interpretive needs. To keep the public up-to-date on the Silver Thread, meetings were rotated throughout all three counties. Adequate notice was given to members and, often, press releases were mailed to community papers with the hope that more of the general public would attend these meetings. Additionally, minutes of all meetings were mailed to Steering Committee members who had been mandated to keep their individual group current as to developments along the Byway.

Taking into consideration the long range plans of all civic, government and public entities, the following goals and objectives and actions have been proposed over the next 3-5 years.

## **Interpretive Goals & Management Objectives:**

The Interpretive Master Plan consists of two components, a general discussion of the Byway signage, and text for all sites. The intent of this plan is to draw together all aspects of the Byway which will provide a meaningful visit for travelers. The overall topic to be emphasized is: “Weaving natural resources and people through time.” The overall theme for interpretation is: “The Silver Thread Scenic Byway affords the visitor a chance to mentally travel through time and witness the natural and cultural events of the area.” Using this topic and theme, the following goals, management objectives and time lines have been established regarding interpretation.

**I. Interpretive Goals:**

- A. May, 1998 to May, 1999: Using the Interpretive Master Plan, complete and install 25 interpretive panels along the full length of the Corridor. The attached Sign Project List and Map detail this venture. (Signs in bold type will be completed.)
- B. Spring, 1999: Locate additional funding, complete interpretive signage. Those signs not highlighted and listed as secondary, will be slated for development on this round of funding. The entire interpretive project should be completed by the spring of 2000.
- C. Spring, 1999 - 2000: Seek additional funding to help Lake City improve Chamber of Commerce facilities: A. find more conveniently located building to lease or purchase, B. purchase land for construction of new facility, C. if A & B cannot be accomplished, locate funding to create excellent signage to current Chamber location.
- D. Follow the premise that: "Less Is More" when developing interpretive turnouts and materials.

**Silver Thread Scenic Byway  
Interpretive Sign Project  
Gunnison and Rio Grande National Forest Districts**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Material</b>
1. South Fork kiosk	High	Welcome/Orientation	??	Digital-Fiber
South Fork kiosk	High	Cultural History Overview	??	Digital-Fiber
South Fork kiosk	High	Geology Overview	??	Digital-Fiber
South Fork kiosk	High	Wildlife Overview	??	Digital-Fiber
Collar	Secondary	Portal	??	Wood
Collar	Secondary	Palisades Geology	36"Wx24"H	Digital-Fiber
2. Wagon Wheel Gap	High	Transportation: Stage/RR/Toll Road	36"Wx24"H	" "
Wagon Wheel Gap	High	Ute Indians w/Wildlife Use	" "	" "
Wagon Wheel Gap	High	Rio Grande-River of Life	" "	" "
Bachelor Loop kiosk	Secondary	Orient to Bachelor	??	Digital-Fiber
Bachelor Loop kiosk	Secondary	Creede Caldera	??	Digital-Fiber
Bachelor Look kiosk	Secondary	History of Creede	??	" "
Bachelor Loop kiosk	Secondary	Bachelor Loop History	??	" "
Corral	Secondary	Ranching History (Soward)	36"Wx24"H	" "
Corral	Secondary	Transportation/Toll Roads	" "	" "
3. San Juan City Overlook	High	San Juan City	36"Wx24"H	" "
San Juan City Overlook	High	Stony Pass Road/Silverton	36"Wx24"H	" "
4. Hermit Lake Overlook		Weminuche Wilderness/Peakfinder	36"Wx24"H	" "
Hermit Lake Overlook		Rio Grande Headwaters	" "	" "
5. North Clear Creek Falls	High	Falls & Stage Stop	36"Wx24"H	" "
6. Spring Creek Pass	High	Orient CO Trail/CDNST Trail	42"Wx42"H	" "
Spring Creek Pass	High	Leave No Trace	" "	" "
Spring Creek Pass	High	Moose Message	" "	" "
Spring Creek Pass	High	Winter Recreation	" "	" "
Spring Creek Pass	High	Continental Divide Watershed	" "	" "
Spring Creek Pass	High	Wildlife	" "	" "
7. Windy Pass Overlook	High	Peakfinder (NW)w/Wildlife	36"Wx24"H	" "
Windy Pass Overlook	High	Peakfinder (W) w/Wildflowers	" "	" "
Windy Pass Overlook	High	Peakfinder (SW) w/Spruce/Fir	" "	" "
8. Slumgullion	High	Slumgullion Slide	36"Wx24"H	" "
Slumgullion (Optional)	High	Snowmobile Trail	" "	" "
9. Lake San Cristobal Ovlk	High	Lake Formation	36"Wx24"H	" "
Lake San Cristobal Ovlk	High	Golden Fleece & Black Crook Mines	" "	" "
* Packer Site	Secondary	History of Alfred Packer	36"Wx24"H	" "
* Packer Site (Near Road)	Secondary	Portal	" "	" "

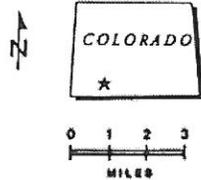
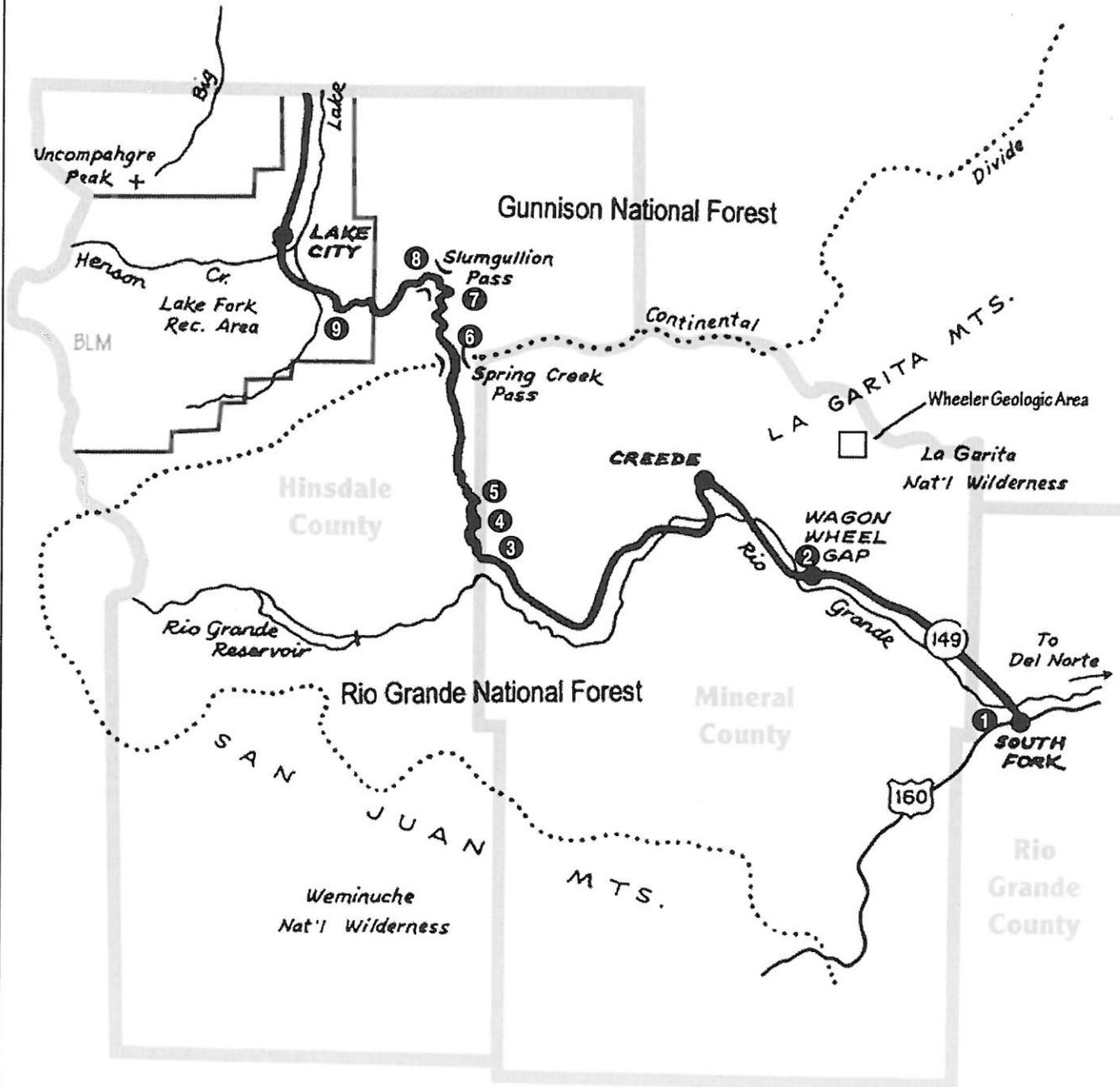
**Bold.** Indicates signs that will be created and installed with ISTE A funds received in 1997.

\* Must receive permission from private landowner.

# Interpretive Signs

## Silver Thread Highway

### State and National Forest Scenic Byway



- Scenic Highway
- County Boundary Line
- BLM Lands Boundary Line

## **II. Interpretive Management Objectives:**

- A. Provide consistent, quality information regarding the historic, natural and cultural opportunities available along the Silver Thread.
- B. Increase public awareness regarding management of public lands by Forest Districts, the Bureau of Land Management and Historic Districts as major providers of recreation in the state of Colorado.
- C. Increase awareness regarding respect for and preservation of public lands along the Byway.
- D. Add interpretive signage along the Byway corridor as time, space and money allow.
- E. Use a “less is more” approach to interpretation along the Silver Thread. Appropriate interpretation is important without polluting the scenery with too much signage.
- F. When possible, stimulate local economies along the Silver Thread.
- G. Through information and signage, educate visitors to:
  - 1. Enjoy scenic and historic sites, but leave them undisturbed.
  - 2. Respect the cultural and natural resources available along the Silver Thread.
  - 3. Encourage “Leave No Trace” ideologies when using public lands.
  - 4. Encourage safety in every aspect of travel along the Silver Thread.

## **III. Visitor Contact Points Along the Silver Thread:**

- A. Silver Thread Visitor Center. South Fork
- B. South Fork Historical Society
- C. South Fork Tines (Newspaper).
- D. Creede/Mineral County Chamber of Commerce and Information Center
- E. Creede Historical Society and Museum
- F. Creede/Mineral County Underground Mining Museum
- G. Rio Grande National Forest District Office. Creede
- H. Creede Miner (Newspaper).
- I. Lake City Chamber of Commerce/Gunnison National Forest District Office/BLM
- J. Hinsdale County Museum. Lake City
- K. Lake City Historical Society
- L. Silver World Newspaper. Lake City.

## Interpretive Publications Available To Date:

1. Silver Thread. Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway Historic Milepost Guidebook
2. The Silver Thread National Scenic Byway, Lure Brochure
3. Silver Thread Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway Newspaper, published by Silver World Newspaper
4. Wildlife On The Silver Thread



## Interpretation Theme

### **“Weaving Natural Resources and People Together Through Time.”**

Geologic upheaval is a primary factor in shaping this region and in determining how and where people settled the area along the Silver Thread. Early man, Native Americans, Trappers, Settlers, Tourists and Miners have all played a vital role in establishing the current configuration of Highway 149. The interpretive theme constantly highlighted is that of the role Mother Nature has played in creating this region and the role mankind has been given in preserving it. The success of balancing Man and Nature can be witnessed while driving the Silver Thread.

## Tourism Development and Promotion Plan

Over the past decade, all three towns along the Silver Thread have been in a transitional period. Historically, all communities have relied on mining and associated businesses to generate revenue and taxes. Tourism was considered secondary income. With the closing of the mines in the mid-1980's, South Fork, Lake City and especially Creede suffered serious economic setbacks. During the past 10 years, all communities have worked hard to redefine themselves as sightseer destinations and to outline marketing strategies to increase traffic. Tourism is the main industry in Creede and Lake City.

In response to this emphasis on tourism, visitor services are springing up all along the Byway to help ever-growing numbers of visitors. **The Silver Thread Scenic Byway Information Center was built specifically to highlight the Silver Thread and all three communities residing on it.** Strategically situated in South Fork, it is the flagship for promotion of the Byway.



Silver Thread Interpretive Center, 1998

It is the goal of the Silver Thread Committee, the Lake City Chamber Board and the Town of Lake City that over the next 3-5 years, to **relocate the Lake City Chamber of Commerce** to a more conspicuous location, or install adequate signage to navigate visitors to their current site.

It is the goal of the Silver Thread Committee to **host workshops to recruit and educate volunteer staff members** on appropriate ways to work with the public and answer their questions in a pleasing, courteous and helpful manner.

It is the goal of the Silver Thread Committee to have the Friends of the Silver Thread **develop a “Watchable Wildlife” booklet** that can be purchased by visitors. The booklet will use milepost markers to aid visitors in their wildlife watching experience. The proceeds will go toward the cost of booklet production and will, hopefully, be a source of revenue for the Byway.

This Committee encourages area writers to **produce more sellable material regarding the Silver Thread.**

There is a groundswell of support for South Fork, Creede and Lake City to **combine marketing dollars to attract more visitors during the shoulder seasons of spring and fall.** These are slow times for everyone on the Byway and consequently there is an excess of tourism services available. It is hoped that by pooling tri-county resources, promotion of key spring and fall attractions will help bolster these shoulder seasons. Target markets should be young people, young married couples with no children and senior citizens. (School limits the possibility of attracting families, except for weekend outings.)

Likewise, winter activities abound along the Byway and a **consolidated approach to promotion** would saturate the media with that fact.

Interpretive panels and museums inform and educate but participation is passive. It is the desire of the Silver Thread Committee to allow visitors to actively participate in their education. To accomplish this, a **series of Treasures Along The Silver Thread open air workshops** can be developed to entertain, educate and physically exercise visitors. These workshops would take place during a block of time or could be scattered through the summer. Where needed, experts and professionals would be located to teach and supervise participants. Enrollment fees would cover expenses and create profits for the Friends of the Silver Thread. Workshops might focus on the following:

1. History of the Silver Thread
  - Visit all communities on Silver Thread
  - Visit ghost towns easily accessible from Silver Thread
  - Visit Fremont Campsite
  - Tour mining districts
  - Tour local museums
2. Geology along the Silver Thread
  - Explore Palisades
  - View and Study Creede Caldera
  - Mining and Geology
  - Study Bristol Head Mountain
  - North Clear Creek Falls
  - Slumgullion Earth Flow

3. Man Along the Silver Thread
  - Folsom Man/Native Americans
  - Trappers/Explorers
  - Homesteaders
  - Tourists
  - Miners
4. Wildlife Watching Along the Silver Thread (Adults and Children)
  - Tour highway for wildlife experiences
  - Educate visitors regarding appropriate wildlife watching etiquette
  - Develop in-depth brochure/handout regarding wildlife watching
5. Wildflower Workshops (Adults and Children)
  - Locate and identify Wildflowers
  - Regulations regarding protection of flora in Colorado
6. Mushroom Workshops
  - Locate and identification of edible mushrooms
  - Preparation and proper storing of edible mushrooms
7. Survival Skills
  - First Aid in the Backcountry
  - What to Pack
  - How to Pack a Backpack
  - Essential Emergency Equipment
  - Getting Help
8. "Leave No Trace" Camping
  - Survival skills workshop required
  - Go camping with "Leave No Trace" experts
9. Rafting the Rio Grande (Adults and Children)
  - Riparian habitat along the Rio Grande
  - History of the Rio Grande
  - Plans for protection of the Rio Grande
  - Geology along the Rio Grande
10. Llama Trek (Adults and Children)
  - One day hike
  - History and habits of llama
  - No impact animal on the environment
11. Fly Fishing the Gold Medal Waters of the Rio Grande
  - Group instruction on fly fishing
12. Hunter Safety Classes
  - Week long course in firearms safety
  - Review of hunting regulations

## Winter “Open Air Workshops” could include:

1. Nordic Skiing (Adults and Children)
  - How To Begin
  - Beginning Classes
  - Intermediate Classes
  - Advanced Classes
2. Snowmobiling Trips (Adults and Children)
3. Snowshoeing Lessons and Trips
4. Wildlife Watching
5. Ice Skating Lessons

## Other Visitor Services

The Chambers of Commerce in South Fork, Creede and Lake City provide extensive visitor information and sponsor many tourist related activities during the year. Forest Service District Offices in Rio Grande, Mineral and Hinsdale Counties provide a wide range of visitor information and the Bureau of Land Management, housed with the Lake City Chamber, assists in providing information for guests in Hinsdale County.

It bears repeating that shoulder seasons: fall and spring are an ongoing challenge on the Silver Thread. Decreased tourism translates to decreased revenues. It is believed that by all three communities joining forces and consolidating promotion dollars, more can be accomplished to attract visitors and keep them in the area longer. Fall and spring should be the focus of promotion.

## Management Actions

1. The first goal of all tourism providers should be to **keep visitors on the Byway** as long as possible.
2. One of the first tasks of the Friends of the Silver Thread should be to help locate funding to **create and produce a “Watchable Wildlife” booklet for the Byway.**
3. All **salable literature pertaining to the Silver Thread should be made available** to all tourism organizations along the Byway.
4. Management of tourism organizations should research the possibility of creating individual and collaborative **“home pages” on the World Wide Web.** The homepage should list recreation and cultural opportunities, environmental issues of import, lodging information and necessary information for travel planning.

5. It is strongly believed that **children should be included in tourism promotion**. By creating workshops and programs specifically for them, they can actively participate in the preservation and protection of natural resources.

6. It is recommended that in addition to training volunteers with people skills, that **all tourism providers be trained in teaching protection and preservation methodologies** to each other and to the general public.

7. Given the demographics of tourists in this area, **special workshops should be developed and promoted for senior citizens**.

8. It is suggested that a **liaison be developed between the Silver Thread Scenic Byway and RV Parks in South Fork, Creede and Lake City**. These parks could be a tremendous resource for volunteer help. RV parks should also receive special attention when promoting Silver Thread workshops and activities as a ready-made audience exists from May through September.

**Annual Review of Corridor Master Plan:**

It is the decision of the Silver Thread Steering Committee that a Review Board be established to review this Plan on an annual basis. The Review Board will monitor progress and make updates to the Plan as they are needed.

## **A Word of Thanks:**

The Silver Thread Scenic Byway wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the following people and organizations in developing this Corridor Master Plan.

- Sandy Thompson, Gunnison National Forest District
- Sally Pearce, ISTEA Projects Coordinator
- Silver Thread Scenic Byway Committee - Core Team
- Colorado Climate Center
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- Rio Grande County Commissioners
- Mineral County Commissioners
- Hinsdale County Commissioners
- Town of South Fork
- Town of Creede
- Town of Lake City
- Creede Chamber of Commerce
- Lake City Chamber of Commerce
- Silver Thread Visitor Center
- National Park Service and Mesa Verde National Monument
- Denver Public Library

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## **For More Information on the Silver Thread Scenic Byway, Contact:**

Silver Thread Information Center: 719/873-5512 or 800/571-0881

Creede-Mineral County Chamber of Commerce: 719/658-2374 or 800/327-2102

Lake City Chamber of Commerce: 303/944-2527 or 800/569-1874

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