

**Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance**

**Highway Name:** State Highway (SH) 131

**CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:**

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
131A	From I 70A at Mile Point 156 North To SH 6E East of Wolcott
131B	From SH 6-E in Wolcott North via State Bridge, Toponas, and Oak Creek To SH 40-A South of Steamboat Springs

**Highway Location:**

Counties: Routt, Eagle  
 Length (Miles): 68.75

**OAHP Site Numbers (for previously recorded segments, if applicable)\*:**

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Assessment Date</i>	<i>Site Name</i>
5EA.186.1	Officially not eligible>Field eligible	07/22/1994>07/13/1994	WOLCOTT TO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS STAGE ROAD
5EA.186.2	Officially not eligible>Field not eligible>Field eligible	09/20/2001>08/08/2001>06/30/1977	STATE BRIDGE TO WOLCOTT STAGE ROAD
5EA.186.3	Officially not eligible>Field not eligible	09/30/2002>07/24/2002	WOLCOTT TO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS STAGE ROAD - SEGMENT
5EA.186.4	Officially not eligible>Officially not eligible>Field not eligible>Field not eligible	10/24/2008>09/30/2002>08/04/2008>07/24/2002	STATE BRIDGE TO WOLCOTT ROAD
5EA.186.5	Officially not eligible>Officially not eligible>Field not eligible>Field not eligible	10/24/2008>09/30/2002>08/04/2008>07/24/2002	STATE BRIDGE TO WOLCOTT ROAD - SEGMENT
5EA.186.6	Officially not eligible>Officially not eligible>Field not eligible>Field not eligible	10/24/2008>09/30/2002>08/04/2008>07/24/2002	STATE BRIDGE TO WOLCOTT ROAD - SEGMENT, WOLCOTT TO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS STAGE ROAD - SEGMENT
5EA.186.7	Officially not eligible>Field not eligible	09/30/2002>07/24/2002	WOLCOTT TO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS STAGE ROAD - SEGMENT
5EA.2587.3	Supports eligibility of entire linear resource>Field eligible	03/27/2013>08/01/2012	US HIGHWAY 6 - SEGMENT
5EA.3004	Officially not eligible>Field not eligible	03/27/2013>01/17/2013	STATE HIGHWAY 131A; SPUR ROAD BETWEEN US 6 AND INTERSTATE 70
5RT.721.1	Field not eligible	10/19/1990	WHETSTONE ROAD, SEGMENT

**Discussion of Site Forms (for previously recorded segments, if applicable):**

Of the Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments of this highway listed above, 5EA.186.1-.7 discuss the Wolcott to Steamboat Springs Stage Road that ran from 1886 to 1908 in the area of the current highway. The Stage Road is recommended eligible for the National Register of Historic places (National Register), however all the segments recorded above were determined non-supporting of the overall linear resource. 5EA.2587.3 and 5EA.3004 were not available for review. 5EA.2587.3 discusses a segment of U.S. Highway (US) 6 at Wolcott and was determined supporting of the entire linear resource of US 6. 5EA.3004 is a site form for 131A between US 6 and Interstate(I)-70 near Wolcott. The resource was determined officially not eligible for the National Register in 2013.

**Historic Districts located within 250 feet of highway (OAHP Site Number and Name)\*:**

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>Assessment (If Applicable)</i>
None	No historic districts are found on or adjacent to this highway	

\*Information based on data from Compass provided by OAHP

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### Historical Data:

SH 131 A is a small, .32 mile spur between US 6 and I-70 just outside of Wolcott. SH 131B begins at the junction of I-70 at Wolcott and travels north via State Bridge, Toponas, Oak Creek to US 40 south of Steamboat Springs. The entire length is 68.75 miles.

Although a wagon route existed in the area of the present highway, SH 131 was built beginning in the late 1910s. The segment from Wolcott to State Bridge was designated as State Primary Route 39, and the segment from State Bridge to Toponas to Steamboat was part of Primary Route 40 on the 1916 state highway maps. By 1924, the segment from Wolcott to State Bridge was designated SH 11 until 1954 when it was eliminated from the state highway system. The segment from State Bridge to Steamboat was designated SH 131 by 1924. The entire route included State Bridge to Wolcott by 1954. During the late 1930s and through the mid 1950s, the route was improved and widened. In 1934 and 1935 the highway department employed Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers to rebuild the route through Oak Creek's main street to Phippsburg and then the final 16 miles north to Steamboat Springs. (U.S. Works Program Highway Project Number, WPSS No 388-C, 388-C and 388-D; USPW NRS 388 (1935)). The entire route was paved by 1970.

The westernmost third of Colorado is dominated by the Colorado Plateau, which stretches from western Colorado into eastern Utah, northern Arizona, and northwestern New Mexico. The Colorado Plateau is a high desert with scattered forests and mesas (or tablelands), including the forested Flat Tops and Grand Mesa, the desert buttes of the Bookcliffs and Roan Plateau, and the juniper studded canyons and red sandstone formations that include Colorado National Monument. The region is also characterized by broad swaths of federally-owned land managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service (Routt National Forest, Flat Tops Wilderness, and Grand Mesa National Forest), with lesser amounts belonging to the National Park Service (Colorado National Monument and Dinosaur National Monument).

Before the establishment of Colorado Territory in 1861, this area was part of Utah Territory (1854), reinforcing the physical connection between western Colorado and eastern Utah. Similarly, the land in the northwestern part of Colorado resembles southwestern Wyoming and there are strong economic and social connections as ranchers from southern Wyoming often owned land in northern Colorado, and vice versa. The Colorado River and its major tributaries, including the Colorado (Grand), Uncompahgre, and Gunnison are the major sources of water. Up north, the Yampa and White rivers feed into the Green River before it joins the Colorado in Utah and are the lifelines of the region. As with other parts of the arid state, the rivers dictated the location of settlements, railroads, agriculture, and the state's roads.

After the Utes were removed in 1880 to reservations in Utah (leaving only two small Ute reservations in the extreme southwest corner of Colorado), the railroads quickly mobilized to provide transportation and economic opportunity for farmers, ranchers, and other businesses. The Denver & Rio Grande Railroad built the first lines into the San Juan, Gunnison, and Colorado (Grand) River valleys between 1881 to 1883 and helped develop the towns of Grand Junction, Montrose, and Delta, among others. The railroad to Steamboat Springs and Craig was slower to develop, however, given the isolation of the area and issues with winter travel. David Moffat's Denver, Northwestern & Pacific Railroad entered Steamboat in 1909. After Moffat's death in 1911, the railroad was bought by the Denver and Salt Lake, and it continued to its termination point to Craig in 1913. The railroad stimulated the development of coal mining in the Yampa River Valley which required a reliable source of freight transportation.

Agriculture in the Grand and Gunnison river valleys started with experimentation on the best crops suited for the environment. Farmers in the early 1880s discovered the river valleys ideal for fruit growing due to the lower elevations, long growing seasons, and potential for large irrigation systems such as the Grand Valley Canal on the north side of the Colorado in the 1890s. The fruit growing region stretched from Fruita, Grand Junction, and Palisade along the Colorado River to Delta, Hotchkiss, and Paonia on the North Fork of the Gunnison. Peaches thrived near Palisade, while apples and pears did well near Cedaredge and areas of Hotchkiss and Paonia. Farmers also had success with sugar beets, corn, wheat, barley, millets, and potatoes (Wyckoff, 1999: 227-231). Settlements clustered near river bottoms at Parachute, Rifle, Meeker, Steamboat Springs, and Craig, where large ranches grazed cattle and sheep on higher benches above the river bottoms, much of it leased from the federal government for grazing. Brown's Hole, in the far northwest corner of the state, shared borders with Utah and Wyoming and was known as a good winter range for large cattle herds from Wyoming (Wyckoff 1999: 244).

In northwest Colorado, energy-related resources such as coal, oil shale, oil, and natural gas have been important to the economy of the region since the late 1880s although the industry was slow to develop along the Yampa until

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railroad lines provided transportation after 1909. Coal deposits are located in the Yampa Valley west and south of Steamboat Springs, the Danforth Hills northwest of Meeker, and the Grand Hogback (near New Castle) north of Glenwood Springs. Oil and gas are found near Rangely and Craig, and oil shale has been a boom and bust commodity in the Pieance Basin, northeast of Grand Junction, since the turn of the twentieth century. While trains are still used to haul coal through the area, trucks became increasingly more important to the industry after World War II and the improvement of the area's highways.

SH 131 connects the Yampa River Valley communities of Steamboat, Yampa, and Toponas to the larger transportation networks of US 40 and US 6 (now I-70). The road crosses scrubby sagebrush ranching land, coal mining and river valleys. Steamboat Springs was platted by James Crawford in 1884. The Ute Indians had used the area for hunting and visited the natural mineral springs in the area. The arrival of homesteaders in the 1870s brought cattle and hay ranches. Transportation networks relied heavily on stage and wagon roads until the arrival of the railroad. Cattle were driven either north to Rawlins, Wyoming or south to Wolcott to connect to the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad (Athearn 1982: 71). After the arrival of the railroad in 1909, Steamboat Springs became a hub for shipping of agricultural, livestock and coal. The height of the cattle industry in the area was between the late 1880s until the mid 1920s. Changes in the market and regulations such as the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 resulted in the decline of the industry. Cattle were still driven to market since the railroad proved too difficult at times to cross over the high mountain passes until the building of the Moffat Tunnel in 1928, thus relying on automobiles for transportation (Athearn 1982: 94). With the building of the Dotsero Cutoff in 1931, the railroad cut miles off the route, the railroad line to Steamboat became a branch service line and cattlemen and hay ranchers relied more frequently on the roads to transport their products. Coal was first discovered in the area of Oak Creek in the 1870s, however, it wasn't until 1909, when the railroad arrived, that the coal industry grew with better transportation to markets. Coal production continues in the area today.

SH 131 provided an important connection for agriculture and coal mining, along with the railroad corridors between Steamboat Springs and Wolcott and US 24/US 6 (I-70) and US 40, and is associated with federal work relief programs during the 1930s.

(Unless otherwise indicated, sources used in the preparation of this section included state highway maps, the Highways of Colorado by Matthew Salek, Highways to the Sky: A Context and History of Colorado's Highway System, Colorado State Roads and Highways, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission, plans in the Online Transportation Information System (OTIS), and site forms for previously surveyed resources in Compass when available.)

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- Not Significant - No historical significance identified**
- Significant - Historical significance identified (see details below)**

**Property Type and Areas of Significance:**

A detailed explanation why this highway possesses historical significance is provided in the Significance Statement below.

**Cultural:**

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)

**Engineering:**

Subtypes

- Farm-to-Market Road
- Limited Access, Multiple-Lane, Divided Highway/Freeway
- Highway Bypass

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)

**Aesthetic:**

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)
- Landscape architecture (Landscape Architecture)

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### Historic periods of highway construction:

- Pre-territorial (pre-1861)
- Territorial and pre-automobile state roads (1861-1890)
- Automobile age (1890-1930)
- Depression and World War II (1930-1945)
- Postwar Interstate Era (1945-1973)
- Completion and Augmentation of Interstate System (1973-2000)

### Level of Significance:

- Local
- State
- National

### Significance Statement:

SH 131 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS and has significance in the areas of Transportation and Politics/Government.

#### *Criterion A*

State Highway 131 is was an early project of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD), providing a transportation link between Wolcott and Steamboat Springs and later transportation corridors of US 24/6 and US 40. After changes in the railroad networks in the mid 1930s, ranchers and coal producers relied heavily on SH 131 to transport their products along this route to shipping points and markets and provided access to larger transportation corridors. As such, the route is considered significant under Criterion A in the area of Transportation at the local level. In addition, research revealed that portions of SH 131 were improved by using WPA funds and labor in 1934 and 1935. Plans dating to 1935 confirm this association. Therefore, those portions of SH 131 with a direct association with Depression-era federal work relief projects are significant in the area of Politics/Government at the state level.

#### *Criterion B*

Research did not reveal this highway to be directly associated with the events or work of a person important in history, nor does research indicate the highway represents the efforts of a specific individual to secure construction of this highway for the economic development of a community or area of the state. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion B.

#### *Criterion C*

Although State Highway 131 is considered to be an early project of the CHD, constructed as early as 1910, research and literature review yielded no evidence to indicate the use of innovative or important engineering design or construction techniques that serve to distinguish this highway from other roads and does not appear to exhibit important engineering innovations or important later modifications. The highway's design and construction appear to fall within the established standard practices of state highway design and construction of the time and the highway does not possess significance under Criterion C.

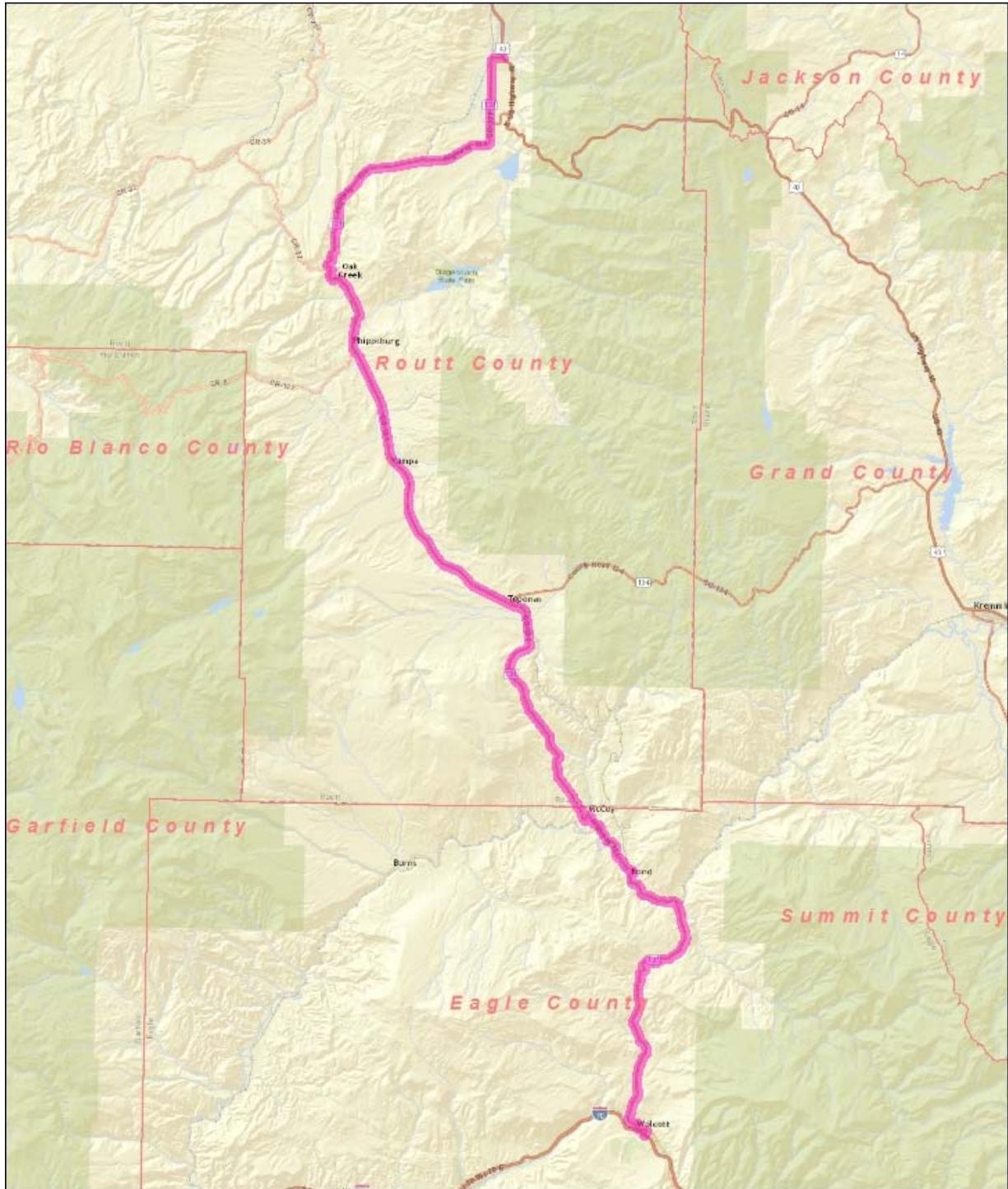
#### *Criterion D*

For a property to possess significance for information potential, the information yielded by the property must answer specific important research questions that cannot be otherwise answered. The technology of highway construction is well understood and documented. As such, this highway is unlikely to yield important information that cannot be discerned from archived plans and other records. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion D.

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Service Layer Credits: Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, USGS, Intermap, iPC, NRCAN, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri (Thailand), TomTom, 2013



- SH 131
- County Boundary

SH 131



Map indicates the extent of the highway based on CDOT GIS data; portions co-signed with other highways may not be indicated.