

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 139

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
139A	From I 70-A south of Loma north via Douglas Pass To SH 64-A east of Rangely

Highway Location:

Counties: Rio Blanco, Garfield, Mesa
 Length (Miles): 71.69

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>
5GF.4322.1	Does not support eligibility of entire linear resource>Field needs data	05/26/2009>04/24/2009	STATE HIGHWAY 139, DOUGLAS PASS ROAD
5ME.15500.1	Officially not eligible>Field eligible	12/08/2006>08/23/2006	STATE HIGHWAY 139, DOUGLAS PASS ROAD
5ME.15500.2	Officially not eligible>Field eligible	12/08/2006>08/23/2006	STATE HIGHWAY 139, DOUGLAS PASS ROAD (SEGMENT), HIGHWAY 139
5ME.15500.3	Officially not eligible>Field not eligible	12/08/2006>08/23/2006	STATE HIGHWAY 139, DOUGLAS PASS ROAD, HIGHWAY 139 (SEGMENT)
5ME.15500.4	106 - Officially eligible>Field eligible	01/26/2009>09/18/2008	STATE HIGHWAY 139, DOUGLAS PASS ROAD - SEGMENT
5RB.2872	106 - Officially eligible>Field eligible	06/13/2006>04/01/1989	DRAGON-DOUGLAS TRAIL
5RB.2872.11	Field eligible	Apr-89	DRAGON-DOUGLAS TRAIL SEGMENT
5RB.2872.17	Field eligible	Apr-89	DRAGON-DOUGLAS TRAIL SEGMENT

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

The following Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments were reviewed for this highway: 5ME.15500.4 - this segment is listed as eligible in a record on Compass. However, no forms were available. Criterion for eligibility were not available.
 5GF.4322.1: Segment of the Douglas Pass Road, adjacent to SH 139 documented in 2009. Determined not eligible.
 5RB.2877.11 and 5RB.2877.17: This is the Dragon-Douglas Trail, which is listed as eligible. It meets SH 139 from the west at approximately MP 54, in Rio Blanco County.
 5RB.984. The Canon Pintado Archaeological District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register), includes the northern 15 miles (approximately) of SH 139.

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	

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Historical Data:

SH 139 extends a total of 72.065 miles, running south to north. It is contained in Mesa, Garfield, and Rio Blanco counties. The route begins approximately four miles east of Fruita and south of Loma at Interstate(I)-70, running straight north along section lines through the irrigated farmland of the Grand Valley. After crossing the Highline Canal, it winds north across the Book Cliff Range and into the Roan Plateau, where it traverses Douglas Pass and continues on to Rangley. SH 139 is contained in the Colorado segment of the Dinosaur-Diamond National Scenic and Historic Byway, which was designated in 1997.

SH 139 was designated a state highway in or around 1924. Prior to that year, it is visible as an unpaved road (11A) on a map dated 1922, but is not mapped in earlier years. Little of the highway was paved until the 1970s. Salek notes that SH 139 was turned back in 1954, but was then "resurrected" by 1964, by which time only the first 8 miles north from Loma were paved. By 1972, the year the southern end was extended to I-70, SH 139 was paved to Douglas Pass, in Garfield County, and the remainder was paved by or around 1975 (Salek). The highway is contained in the Colorado Plateau, which dominates the westernmost third of Colorado and stretches 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 U.S. 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, the Colorado Plateau was part of Utah Territory (1854), and western Colorado and eastern Utah are both contained in this arid geographic region, as is southwestern Wyoming. In the region of the Western Slope that anchors the southern end of SH 139, the Colorado River and its major tributaries, including the Grand, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison, are the major water sources. To the 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 state, the rivers dictated the location of settlements, railroads, agriculture, and roads.

After 1880, when the Utes had been removed 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.

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 growing fruit, due to the lower elevations, longer 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 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 important to the industry after World War II and the improvement of the area's highways.

Historically SH 139 served to connect the agricultural communities of the Roan Plateau and the Grand Valley with the railhead in Fruita and also to connect area mineral extraction industries with their markets. An article in Colorado

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Highways from December 1923 notes that the highway was the brainchild of the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce, whose president, William Weiser, was also the chair of the State Highway Advisory Board. SH 139 was intended to connect the transportation arteries of the Western Slope with the oil fields and refineries near Rangely, as well as the fertile agricultural region of the Uintah Basin. The new road, which contained numerous switchbacks and twenty-two bridges that were wider and more substantial than those seen previously in the area, including a "Loop Bridge," was noted to greatly facilitate access from Grand Junction to Rangely and, by extension, Vernal, Utah, and although much of it remained unpaved until the 1960s, it is notable as an Engineered Route that crossed Douglas Pass (Colorado Highways 1923).

(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 139 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS. (Although this route is now part of a scenic byway, this status was not conferred until 1997, and the road was not constructed as an Aesthetic Route, nor was it generally used as an Aesthetic Route in the historic period.)

Criterion A

SH 139 is an early project of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD), and as a farm-to-market route provided important connections for the communities of the Grand Valley and the Roan Plateau to the larger market and population centers of Grand Junction and Vernal, Utah. It also provided a corridor for oil and gas transportation in the Rangely region with the improvement and growth of trucking for freighting. As an early and prominent project of the CHD in the 1920s, the highway was constructed over Douglas Pass, providing an efficient and improved route for travelers over the mountain range and connecting the communities of the northern corner of the state to Grand Junction and Vernal. It possesses significance under Criterion A as an Engineered Route in the area of Transportation at the local 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 important 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

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.

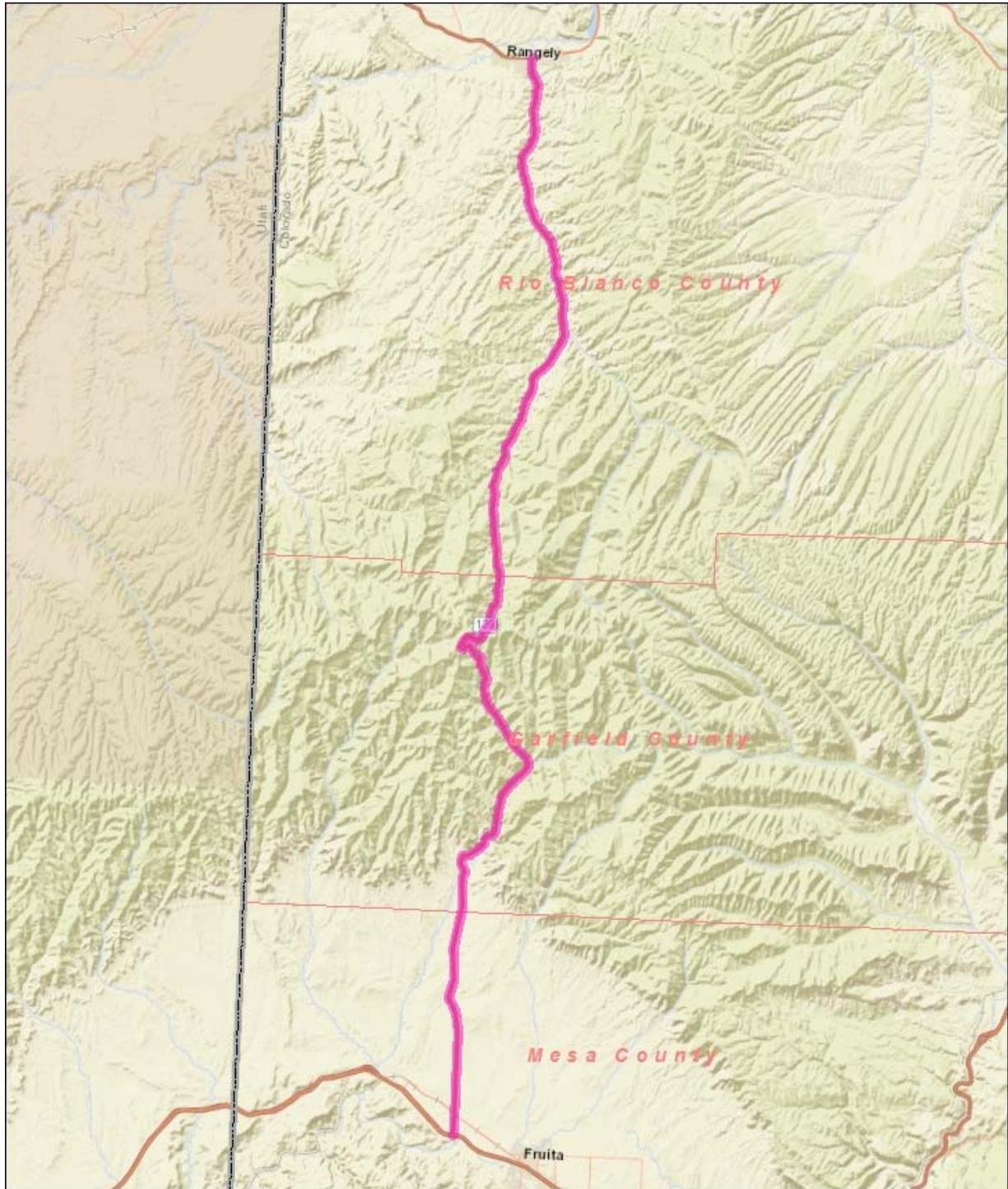
Criterion D

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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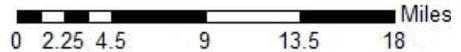
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- SH 139
- State Boundary
- County Boundary



SH 139



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