

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: U.S. Highway (US) 34

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
034A	From U.S. 40-A west of Granby north via Grand Lake and east via Trail Ridge Rd, Estes Park, Loveland, and Greeley To a Fly Over Direct Connection with U.S. 034A/I 76A Northeast of Wiggins
034B	From East of I-76 at county road 14 west of Fort Morgan east via Fort Morgan, Brush, Akron, and Wray To Nebraska State Line
034C	From U.S. 34-A west of Estes Park east at Elkhorn Ave Estes Park Business Route To U.S. 34-A and U.S. 36-B east of Estes Park
034D	From Direct Connection Flyover from east bound U.S. 34-A west of Greeley east and south To U.S. 34-A Southeast of Greeley
034E	Brush Spur Connection - From U.S. 34-B east of Brush northeast to I 70-A and U.S. 6-J northeast of Brush
034Z	From U.S. 34-D (10th Av) and 10th St north via 10th Ave and west at Greeley Business Route To U.S. 34-D

Highway Location:

Counties: Grand, Larimer, Morgan, Washington, Weld, Yuma
 Length (Miles): 269.375

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>
5GA.307	Listed on National Register>Multiple Resource Component	11/14/1984>	TRAIL RIDGE ROAD
5LR.13318.1			ELKHORN AVE.
5LR.502	Listed on National Register>Multiple Resource Component	11/14/1984>01/29/1988	TRAIL RIDGE ROAD
5LR.885	Listed on National Register>Multiple Resource Component	07/20/1987>	FALL RIVER ROAD
5YM.262.1	106 - Officially eligible>Field eligible	09/26/2006>09/08/2006	HIGHWAY 34 (SEGMENT), U.S. HIGHWAY 34

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

Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms (forms) for previously recorded segments of this highway listed above and available in Compass were reviewed:

Trail Ridge Road (5GA.307/5LR.502) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) in 1984 for its national significance for engineering and its role in developing highways in the National Parks.

Fall River Road (5LR.885) was listed on the National Register in 1987. It is significant for its role in transportation in the National Park.

5LR.1338.1 is the Elkhorn Road segment (34C) in the town of Estes Park. The segment is considered supporting of the overall linear resource (US 34) and significant under Criterion A for transportation and tourism in Estes Park.

5YM.262.1 is a segment of US 34 near Yuma. It was surveyed in 2006. Even though the whole highway was not surveyed, it was assumed to be eligible to the National Register for the purposes of Section 106, and the segment supported the overall eligibility of the highway for its role in the expansion of national highway system in Colorado.

5LR.9533 is a bridge over the Big Thompson River, 2 miles west of Loveland. The bridge is listed on the National Register. The background information on the site form was very helpful about the construction of the segment of US 34 along the Big Thompson River.

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

<i>OAHF Site No.</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>Assessment (If Applicable)</i>
5GA.1750	Grand Lake Lodge	Listed on National Register
5GA.299		Listed on National Register
5GA.299	Hozwarth Cabins	Listed on National Register
5LR.1184	Fall River Entrance, Rocky Mountain National Park	Listed - National Register
5LR.487	Utility Area Historic District, Rocky Mountain National Park, Tortilla Flats, Poverty Flats	Listed - National Register
5LR.9700		Eligible-Field
5WL.846	Bolker Subdivision, Greeley	Eligible - Officially
5WN.85	Otis Commercial District, Washington County	Listed - State Register

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Historical Data:

US 34 crosses the eastern plains counties of Yuma, Weld, Washington, and Morgan and enters into the central mountains of Larimer and Grand counties. The entire route is 269.375 miles long. There are different sections of US 34. 34A begins in Granby in Grand County, at the junction of US 40. The route travels north and northeast over the high mountain passes along Trail Ridge Road into Rocky Mountain National Park and the town of Estes Park. It travels east, through the Big Thompson Canyon to north of the town of Loveland and continues east through Greeley and then southeast to a junction with Interstate (I)-76, near Wiggins in Morgan County. There is a gap along I-76 for US 34, and 34B begins just west of Fort Morgan and continues east and southeast through Akron, Otis and Yuma to the Colorado and Nebraska border. 34C is a spur that extends along Elkhorn Road in Estes Park as a business loop in the town of Estes Park. This spur is 1.69 miles long. 34D is a segment of the business loop around Greeley. This segment is 14.7 miles. 34E is a short, .96 mile spur at Brush connecting to I-76. Finally, 34Z is a short spur in Greeley that is a business loop in downtown between 23rd Avenue and 10th Avenue.

In 1913, the Colorado Highway commission established State Primary Road No. 51 that extended across Larimer and Grand counties. In 1922, when Colorado entered the Federal Highway system, the route was designated State Primary Road No. 46 (5LR.9533). The segment of the route from Granby to Estes Park to Greeley (34A) was designated on state travel maps as State Highway (SH) 16 by 1924. The western portion of the route from Granby through Rocky Mountain National Park to Estes Park was first built as Fall River Road beginning in 1913. The segment from Estes to Fall River Pass was complete by 1917. The western portion to Grand Lake was not complete until 1920 (5GA.1750). The steep, narrow road at times had a 15% grade (5LR.885). The route was the only automobile access into the national park and over the Continental Divide at Fall River Pass to Grand Lake until the building of Trail Ridge Road in 1932. Portions of Fall River Road west of Fall River Pass were incorporated into Trail Ridge Road and later US 34. The construction of Trail Ridge Road began in 1927 and finished in 1932. The Bureau of Public Roads oversaw and provided the funds for the construction of the improved road in the national park. In November 1929, Colorado Highways quoted Horace Albright, director of the National Parks, saying Trail Ridge Road "will be a marvel of engineering skill and a sensation to the traveling public" (Colorado Highways, 8 Nov. 1929: 5). The route absorbed some portions of Fall River Road but had an easier and less steep grade of 5%. The route incorporated the scenic views as much as possible. The building of Trail Ridge provided tourists more accessibility to the already popular destination of Rocky Mountain National Park.

Early travel into the Estes Park Valley from the east by wagon was difficult due to a narrow canyon gorge called the Narrows along the Big Thompson River. Alternative wagon roads were used along other routes as early as 1875. The earliest road along the current route of US 34 from Loveland to Estes through the narrows was first commissioned by Larimer County Commissioners in 1903. Contractor William A. Riley used crews (including convict labor) to blast the rock walls in the Narrows and build a road through the canyon in 1904. The road was a single lane rough track without shoulders built a few feet above the river which had a few turnouts for wagons to pass one another. The route often flooded, making travel impossible during high water events. Despite these conditions, stagecoaches started using the road to bring tourists to Estes Park, who had disembarked from the train at Loveland (Litvak, 2014: 12). The Colorado Highway Department improved the route in 1908. In 1919 and 1920 it was widened between Drake and Estes Park. The road became part of the Federal Aid system in the 1930s and saw improvements of realignments, widening, grading, rechanneling the Big Thompson River of the route between Granby and Loveland, through the Big Thompson Canyon between 1933 until 1938 under the PWA and Federal Works Agency (PWA 6001-B; AWP- 6010; and Fall River Road No. 1). Most of the route in Rocky Mountain National Park through to the Big Thompson Canyon was paved by 1936, the final portion north of Granby was paved by 1947 (Salek).

The segment of US 34C (Elkhorn Avenue) was an early road in the late 1870s in Estes Park to the William James Ranch which later became the Elkhorn lodge, a tourist resort. With the platting of the town of Estes Park, the route was designated Elkhorn Avenue and became a main thoroughfare in the town and provided access to Rocky Mountain National Park when it was designated in 1915. It was incorporated into US 34 in the late 1930s (5LR.13318.1).

The segment from Greeley to Fort Morgan was designated on state travel maps from 1916 to 1926 as SH 16 and then from 1926 as SH 38/SH 2 until 1932. The final segment from Brush, through Akron, Otis to Yuma to Wray was originally State Primary Route No. 19. In 1924 it was designated as SH 54 until 1939 when the entire route was designated US 34. The segment from Brush to Yuma was paved by 1934.

The road was realigned on the eastern plains with the removal of the stair step pattern near Brush sometime between 1927 and 1930. Additional changes include the business routes in Estes Park in the late 1960s, Greeley in 1970,

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and the Loveland I-25 interchange in 2010. Flooding in 1976 and again 2013 damaged a large portion of the Big Thompson River segment, requiring rebuilding and realignment of the route in areas (Salek).

The area that encompasses Rocky Mountain National Park was first inhabited by the Ute Indians who used the area for hunting and fishing. Fur trappers in the 1820s also passed through the area, however, their presence was fleeting. During the 1870s, the Powell and Hayden survey expeditions to North and Middle Park brought some of the first glimpses of the area to the easterners eager to settle new lands. Early wagon roads, such as the Berthoud Wagon Road, built around 1864 and improved in 1874 provided the only access to the area. Railroads did not reach Grand County until David Moffat's Denver, Northwestern & Pacific Railroad entered Granby 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. Rail transportation to Estes Park reached as far as Loveland with stage coaches providing the transportation the rest of the way.

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 north central mountains were first settled by prospectors and homesteaders. Gold, copper and silver mines were worked near Grand Lake. The town of Grand Lake became a supply community for the mines. However, the mining era was over in this area by the late 1880s. The arrival of the railroad in 1905 to Granby helped bring tourists to Grand Lake and the western portions of Rocky National Park. On the eastern side of the National Park, the Estes Park Valley was first settled by homesteaders and ranchers. Ranching in the Estes Park valley was one of the businesses, besides the tourist industry, that brought settlement and economic development to the valley. The pioneer families of Estes Park used ranching for subsistence and did not have large operations. Many ranching operations supplemented their income by catering to tourists who rented cabins and horses while exploring the natural beauty of Estes and the newly formed Rocky Mountain National Park. Although by 1885, cattle ranching in the valley peaked due to oversaturation, substantial herds still grazed in the valley through the early 1900s (Pickering 1999: 23-25).

US 34 is also associated with the theme of agriculture on the eastern plains of Colorado. Northeastern Colorado is within the physiographic province of the Great Plains, and more specifically, the area known as the High Plains. The terrain is relatively flat, with gentle hills and shallow waterways, and the climate is semiarid, with low levels of moisture. There are few trees and the region is known for weather extremes. The South Platte River and its tributaries is the primary source of water and the lifeline for communities in northeastern Colorado. The river has guided travelers for millennia, starting with trails used by Native Americans, trappers, and explorers. Beginning in 1858, after the discovery of gold at the confluence of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River--today's Denver--the South Platte River Trail guided the majority of travelers to the gold camps and support towns. The trail began at the confluence of the North Platte and South Platte in North Platte, Nebraska, as a branch of the Overland or Oregon Trail. The transcontinental railroad also followed the river in 1881 when the Union Pacific built its branch line to Denver. After 1910, with the establishment of the Colorado Highway Commission, the river dictated the paths of the region's first major highways and bridges for river crossings. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, built in the late 1880s, traveled west from Hastings, Nebraska and connected the plains towns of Wray, Eckley, Yuma, Otis, Akron, Brush, Ft. Morgan, to Denver.

Prior to the homestead era and the arrival of the railroad, the South Platte River valley was prime pastureland and ranchers took full advantage of the ability to run cattle freely for grazing. John Wesley Iliff and others amassed huge herds near the river in the 1860s and 1870s, buying key parcels and leasing state and federal lands in northeastern Colorado. The cattle were trailed to railheads in Cheyenne or Denver before 1881, and after 1881, the railroad towns of Brush, Iliff, Sterling, and Julesburg became busy freight shipping points. Farmers formed cooperatives to build major irrigation systems based on priority water rights from the South Platte. Greeley was one center of activity where irrigation canals and storage reservoirs significantly increased the acreage for agriculture. Prior to these systems, crop raising was limited to fields in river and creek bottoms but irrigation made it possible for farmers to plant crops in fields on higher benches further from the river. Fifty miles east of Greeley, Fort Morgan became the center of several irrigation systems that radiated to outlying farms and ranches, as did Sterling, another forty miles downstream (Wyckoff 1999: 164).

The region has always had a relatively sparse population. Larger towns such as Greeley, Fort Morgan and Sterling settled on the river, connected to the smaller towns of Ovid, Sedgwick, Crook, Iliff, Atwood, and Merino. Major irrigated crops included corn and feed crops for animals. Sugar beets became a prominent crop after 1910 in Weld, Morgan, and Logan counties. The Great Western Sugar Company built ten processing factories in the South Platte River valley at Loveland, Greeley, Eaton, Fort Collins, Windsor, Longmont, Sterling, Brush, Fort Morgan, and Ovid.

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The raising and processing of sugar beets also brought large numbers of field workers from other countries to the region, including Germans from Russia, Japanese, and Mexicans. While irrigated farming is possible near the river and in fields that have water rights to the underground Ogallala aquifer, dryland farming supported farms and ranches (Webb 1931: 373). During the 1880s, railroads promoted development along their routes, selling lots and platting towns. The town of Otis was first settled in 1882 as a camp for workers on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. The railroads and boosters attracted settlers with promises of good rainfall for their crops. However, most of the eastern plains of Colorado were quite dry and in the 1880s was period of abundant rainfall. From 1886 to 1889 as the result of new settlement, thirteen new counties were formed: Washington, Phillips, Yuma, Sedgwick, Logan, Prowers, Morgan, Lincoln, Kit Carson, Cheyenne, Kiowa and Baca. The cycle of wet and drought years, brought a boom and bust pattern for the eastern plains communities dependent on dryland farming (Abbot et al 1994: 174-175). The small agricultural towns such as Yuma and Otis relied on dryland farming for subsistence. Major dryland crops include winter wheat, sorghum, milo, alfalfa, and field peas.

US 34 is associated with the development of Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) and Estes Park as a tourist resort in Larimer and Grand Counties and the tourist resort town of Grand Lake. After the establishment of RMNP in 1915, the Department of Highways worked with local officials to improve the highways from nearby communities to the park. By the 1920s automobile tourism was an important part of the economy in this part of Larimer and Grand Counties. The improvement of roads for the purpose of tourism was successful in attracting new visitors to the region and provided a new industry for the communities of Granby, Grand Lake and Estes Park (Abele 1998: E-7; Grand Lake Lodge website). The eastern portion of US 34 provided connectivity as a farm to market route between the shipping and transportation hub of Greeley and the eastern plains towns of Akron, Otis, Yuma, and Wray and eventually to Nebraska.

(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

US 34 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS. In addition, a segment of US 34 in Rocky Mountain National Park is classified as an Aesthetic Route. The route has significance as an Aesthetic Route in the areas of Transportation and Engineering. As an Engineered Route, the highway has significance in the area of transportation and tourism and the development of Rocky Mountain National Park and politics/government for its association with WPA projects. In addition, the eastern segment is considered a Farm-to-Market subtype as defined in the MPS.

Criterion A

US 34 is an Aesthetic Route that climbs to the top of the Continental Divide in Rocky Mountain National Park. The route was designed with the intent of traveling over the high mountain pass and showcasing the large sweeping views from the alpine tundra. US 34 is associated with the development of Rocky Mountain National Park and the tourism industry of Estes Park and Grand Lake. Therefore, this portion of US 34 is considered to possess significance under Criterion A for Transportation and Entertainment/Recreation at the local level as an Aesthetic Route. In addition, US 34 is also an Engineered Route that possesses significance in the area of Transportation at the state level. It was a prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD). The eastern plains segment was built early in the 1920s and the western portion was constructed from 1932-1939. This segment is a farm-to-market route, connecting small agricultural towns to railroad shipping centers at Greeley and other hubs on the eastern plains. As an Engineered Route, US 34 is also significant in the area of Politics/Government. The route in Big Thompson Canyon and Fall River Road was improved by WPA workers between 1933 and 1938. Project plans confirmed the association. Therefore, US 34 possesses significance under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Politics/Government at the state level as an Engineered Route.

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

As an Aesthetic Route and Engineered Route, US 34 possesses significance under Criterion C in the area of Engineering at the state level of significance. Trail Ridge Road improved the existing Fall River Road through Rocky Mountain National Park for 37.9 miles to Grand Lake between 1927 and 1932. Reaching an elevation of 12,183 ft, the road is considered among the highest continuous highways in the United States. The route showcases views of high alpine vistas as well as lower elevation pine forests. The route featured gentle grades of 5% as opposed to Fall River Road's 15%. In addition, the CHD improved the segment in Big Thompson Canyon to provide better access from the river valley and Front Range communities. These improvements included widening the roadway and rechanneling the riverbed. These improvements are examples of challenging engineering in the mountain and river valleys, while maintaining the scenic views of the roadway.

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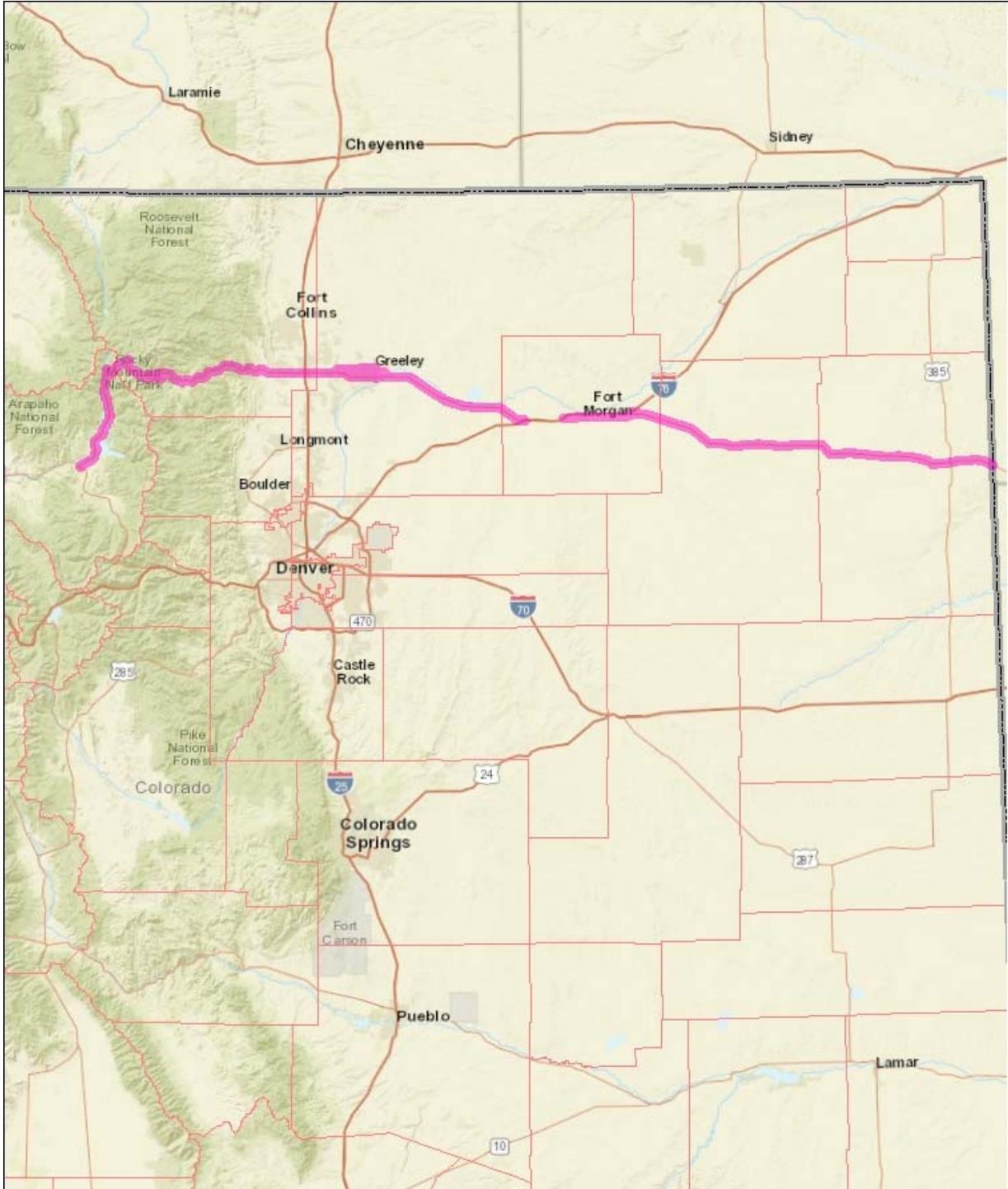
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Criterion D

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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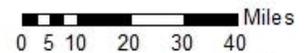
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- SH 34
- State Boundary
- County Boundary



SH 34



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