

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 39

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

| <i>CDOT Route</i> | <i>Route Description</i> |
|-------------------|---|
| 039A | From U.S. 6 I and SH 52-A east of Wiggins north To SH 144 A in Goodrich |

Highway Location:

Counties: Morgan
Length (Miles): 7.557

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> |
|----------------------|--|------------------------|------------------|
| None | No previously recorded segments are found on or adjacent to this highway | | |

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

No Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments of this highway were identified in Compass.

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 39 begins at the junction with SH 52 and U.S. Highway (US) 6/Interstate(I)-76 at exit 66 east of Wiggins in Morgan County. It travels north for 17.55 miles to SH 144 at Goodrich.

SH 39 became a state highway in 1939. By 1955 eight miles of the route from Wiggins north to the South Platte River was paved. The entire segment was paved by 1957. A segment from the South Platte River to Goodrich was widened in 1994, otherwise there were no alterations to the alignment.

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 Railroad 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.

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. 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. 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 north of the river near the small communities of Peetz, Stoneham, Briggsdale and Keota. Major dryland crops include winter wheat, sorghum, milo, alfalfa, and field peas (Webb 1931: 373).

The route connects travelers from US 6 and I-76 outside of Wiggins to Jackson State Park, just northwest of Goodrich. Jackson Lake was first built in 1902 for water storage for irrigation. It became a state park in 1962 when recreational interests in the area increased (Colorado Parks and Wildlife 2016). The route provides connectivity for recreation, yet it does not directly lead to Jackson State Park.

SH 39 is one of many short rural regional connector roads developed to access more prominent routes that connect to urban centers along the front range. State highways, farm-to-market roads, and small local connector roads served to link more remote areas with major regional transportation corridors, towns, and cities; however, research and review of historic mapping does not indicate that this highway provided direct access to destinations related to important historic themes such as industry, agriculture, or commerce.

(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

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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 39 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

Criterion A

As an Engineered Route, State Highway 39 does not possess significance under Criterion A. SH 39 is a short connector route for recreational purposes and to larger transportation corridors on the eastern plains. Research failed to indicate this highway has a direct association with a historical theme important in Colorado history, or that it represents an early or prominent road construction project of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD), or the connections it provides from any subsequent highway improvements. As such, the highway does not possess significance under Criterion A.

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

This highway is not considered to be an early or prominent project of the CHD. 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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0 0.275 0.55 1.1 1.65 2.2 Miles



- SH 39
- County Boundary

SH 39



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