

# *West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway*

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## CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Revised July 2019  
by the  
Byway's Steering Committee

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This Plan revises and supersedes the Corridor Management Plan from the year 2000. The original plan was produced under a contract with EDAW, who served as the Steering Committee's consultant in researching the producing the plan. The plan provides a framework for the Steering Committee, which manages and plans for protecting and interpreting the intrinsic qualities for which the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway was established.

The Plan provides a background for establishment of the Byway, as well as guidance for a variety of topics, including the Byway's organizational structure, resource protection, interpretation, trails, safety issues, and marketing.

## VISION AND MISSION

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The Vision of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway Steering Committee is to *"Protect, enjoy and share the scenic, historic, natural and cultural characteristics of the communities linked by the Byway."*

Thus, the Steering Committee works to preserve, protect, interpret and enhance the intrinsic qualities for which the Byway was established. The five intrinsic qualities include:

- Scenic (parks, forests, wilderness, open space, waterways, panoramic vistas, etc.);
- Natural (wildlife, migration corridors and habitat, botanical and geological components);
- Historic (the byway's story, and specific sites of historic interest) and cultural (ranching, agriculture, mining, and artistic elements)
- Archeological (the pre-historic story); and
- Recreational (for example, hiking, biking, photography, camping, boating, fishing, equestrian, and hunting).

## ESTABLISHMENT AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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The State of Colorado contains 26 Scenic Byways, 11 of which are designated as "Americas Byways," and the remaining 15 are Colorado designated Byways. The West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway is a State of Colorado designated Byway. The Byway passes through 5 counties along its journey — Garfield, Pitkin, Gunnison, Delta, and Montrose.

The West Elk Loop was designated as a State of Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway on September 21, 1991. In addition, the U.S. Forest Service designated it as a National Forest Scenic Byway on May 17, 1994. The Byway passes through two National Forests — the White River and the Gunnison — as well as lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Pitkin County Open Space and Trails.

The Steering Committee has worked on a variety of projects over the years, with the purpose of adding to the enjoyment of the Byway by its travelers. Some of these projects include:

- Design and production of wayside interpretive signs;
- Funding contributions to the Crested Butte Visitor Center, Crawford Information Kiosk, and Redstone Elk Park Interpretive Depot;
- Design and production of the Byway brochure and visitor's guide;

- Working with county and town planning offices to consider the Byways intrinsic resources when considering development proposals;
- Offering a format where the various entities along the Byway (town, city and county governments, state and federal agencies, and other organizations) can share information of common interest to the benefit of the Byway and its travelers; and
- Funding contribution toward acquisition of a conservation easement adjacent to Curecanti National Recreation Area.

## CHAPTER 1 - LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The 206-mile West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway is in west central Colorado. It is one of Colorado's premier byways, crossing through five counties, nine rural communities and a broad cross-section of the diverse landscapes, dramatic scenery, and the rich history and culture that make up Colorado's Rocky Mountain region. As shown on the map below, the West Elk Byway begins in Garfield County in the rapidly growing community of Carbondale in the Roaring Fork Valley between Glenwood Springs and Aspen. From here, one travels south up the Crystal River Valley into Pitkin County on Colorado State Highway 133, through the historic community of Redstone to McClure Pass (elevation 8,755 feet). At McClure Pass the Byway crosses into Gunnison County, descending south into the Muddy Creek drainage and then west into the upper North Fork of the Gunnison River drainage (North Fork Valley). On the way it passes by the historic mining communities of Somerset and Bowie. It then enters Delta County and continues through the fruit growing communities of Paonia and Hotchkiss.



At Hotchkiss the Byway turns south on Colorado State Highway 92 and climbs gradually upward to the town of Crawford. Just beyond Crawford State Park a spur road leads to the north rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Beyond this spur road the Byway passes into Montrose County, continues south and skirts the Black Canyon of the Gunnison in Curecanti National Recreation Area. Here, it passes back into Gunnison County, eventually crossing atop Blue Mesa Dam, then joins U.S. Highway 50. East on Highway 50 the Byway skirts Blue Mesa Reservoir, Colorado's largest body of water. On the reservoir's east end it enters the Gunnison Canyon where it follows the Gunnison River to the city of Gunnison. At Gunnison the Byway turns north on State Highway 135, passes

through the small resort town of Almont, and on to the historic mining town of Crested Butte. At Crested Butte the Byway continues west on Gunnison County Road 12 up and over Kebler Pass (elevation 9,980 feet) on a road that is partially graveled and partially paved. The Byway passes through Crystal Meadows before rejoining State Highway 133 near Paonia Reservoir.

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## BYWAY CORRIDOR

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Two types of delineations for the Byway corridor are shown on Map 1 (Appendix C). The blue lines delineate the overall Byway corridor area. This area includes both those lands visible from the Byway and those lands containing notable features that are not in view of the Byway but within close proximity. These latter areas are places that travelers are likely to visit while traveling the Byway and would therefore influence their overall impression of the Byway. Only four such areas have been delineated. They include the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Thompson Creek Natural Environment Area south of Carbondale, the historic community of Marble and its surrounding lands, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, and the lands surrounding the Crested Butte ski area. While not directly visible from the Byway, these are well known destinations that are directly accessed via the Byway.

All other lands included in the Byway corridor area are visible from the Byway. Some of these are only visible at great distances, such as the extensive areas of the Grand Mesa, Grand View Mesa and Fruitland Mesa. Because of their distance, extent and character, they primarily serve as background context for the lands closer to the Byway, which are the primary focus of attention. On the other hand, there are some lands that when viewed at considerable distances from the Byway become focal points because of their prominence and strong visual character. These include a variety of peaks and mountaintops, particularly peaks in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area, the West Elk Wilderness Area and the Raggeds Wilderness Area.

The orange line on Map 1 (Appendix C) encloses the lands contained within the Primary Byway Influence Area. These are the lands that form the primary focus of attention while traveling the Byway, and from which the dominating impressions and retained memories are most strongly derived. These are also the lands within which landscape modifications and management activities would be most visible to the traveling public. The Primary Byway Influence Area is often a much narrower zone than the overall Byway Corridor, typically averaging one to two miles in width. In some areas the Primary Byway Influence Area is notably wider, usually due to the presence of visually prominent, middle ground landscape features such as Mt. Sopris, Chair Mountain and portions of the Raggeds and West Elk Wilderness Areas. In other areas, the Primary Byway Influence Area widens due to the open nature of the terrain through which it passes or the elevated panoramic views, which are afforded at key locations. Conversely, in some locations the Primary Byway Influence Area is notably constricted due to various conditions of topography and vegetation that enclose the Byway, giving it a sense of intimacy with the surroundings and in some cases a sense of remoteness.

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## LAND OWNERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE JURISDICTIONS

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The West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway crosses a mixture of private and public lands as illustrated in Map 1 (Appendix C). The Byway crosses and/or passes nearby several public land jurisdictions. These include: two National Forests (White River and Gunnison), three BLM Resource Areas (Glenwood Springs, Uncompahgre and Gunnison), two National Park Service units (the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area), one BLM National Conservation Area (the Gunnison Gorge NCA), two State Parks (Crawford and Paonia), as well as scattered tracts of State School Board Lands and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) lands.

Paonia State Park is located at Paonia Reservoir in the Muddy Creek drainage adjacent to Highway 133. Crawford State Park is located at Crawford Reservoir just south of the Town of Crawford and adjacent Highway 92. An extensive area of CPW lands is located north of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Two CPW fish

hatcheries are also located along the Byway: one south of Carbondale on Highway 133 and one between Almont and Crested Butte on Highway 135. Several sections of State School Board lands are scattered between Gunnison and Crested Butte.

Most of the forested lands in view of the Byway in the Crystal River Valley (north of McClure Pass) are managed as part of the White River National Forest. South of McClure Pass, all Forest Service lands are managed as part of the Gunnison National Forest. Similarly, BLM lands north of McClure Pass are administered by the Glenwood Springs Field Office, those between McClure Pass and Mesa Creek along Highways 133 and 92 by the Uncompahgre Field Office, and the remainder of BLM lands along the Byway by the Gunnison Field Office. West of Gunnison, centered on the Gunnison River and the reservoirs of the Aspinall Unit (Blue Mesa, Morrow Point and Crystal) are two contiguous National Park Service properties: The Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park to the west and Curecanti National Recreation Area to the east.

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## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND LAND USE

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The Byway begins in the scenic Roaring Fork Valley in the town of Carbondale. The first two miles of the Byway are located within the town's new and rapidly expanding urban area. The older, historic portions of the town are located a few blocks east of the Byway. Leaving Carbondale and traveling south up the Crystal River Valley, the urban influences give way relatively quickly to a rural ranching landscape surrounded by a series of suburban developments. Most residences in this area are older rural homes among the ranches and farmsteads, but new homes are also being constructed here. The area is primarily rolling irrigated pasture/hayland with stringers of cottonwood along the drainages and irrigation ditches, bounded by sage and juniper covered ridges. The valley becomes increasingly enclosed and narrower as one travels to the south. Mt. Sopris, a single conical peak rising to an elevation of 12,953 feet at the head of the valley, is a dominant focal point with Chair Mountain becoming increasingly prominent closer to McClure Pass.

At the base of Mt. Sopris, the Byway enters a canyon setting. The valley bottom is narrow and visually punctuated by the clear flowing Crystal River and associated riparian vegetation (cottonwood, willow, alder). The enclosing canyon walls are composed of steep to sheer red rock in a variety of interesting formations. Evergreen vegetation is well established on the lower slopes and is scattered on the higher slopes as conditions permit. Pockets of residential development occur at regular intervals on scattered tracts of private lands along the river. All other lands in this area are managed by the White River National

Forest for a variety of public purposes. The community of Redstone and the Redstone Historic District are located in this area.



Moving higher in the Crystal River Valley, the Byway continues winding along the clear flowing Crystal River, bordered by steep mountain slopes of conifer and aspen rising 2,000-3,000 feet above the highway. A discontinuous band of cottonwoods are often associated with the river. Private residences are located on a few scattered private inholdings in this area as well. Attention is often drawn to the high mountain slopes while approaching the base of McClure Pass. Ascending the steep mountainside at McClure Pass affords panoramic views of highly

scenic peaks to the south, east and north, and to the scenic Crystal River Valley below. On the east side of McClure the geology includes formations of the Cretaceous Age with intermittent coal deposits and sedimentary layers. Crossing through aspen-conifer woodland stands at the summit of McClure Pass, the Byway enters the Gunnison National Forest. Panoramic views then open up to the west and south as the aspen and conifer forest gives way to grasses and oaks. Below are private ranching lands of the Lee Creek and Muddy Creek drainage basins. Ranching on the rolling hills and steep slopes of these isolated valleys continues to be the primary land use here as it has for many generations. Rising dramatically above these valleys to the east are the jagged peaks of the aptly named Raggeds Range in the nearby Raggeds Wilderness Area.

Muddy Creek has been impounded at the bottom of the drainage creating Paonia Reservoir, a nearly three-mile long reservoir bordered by steeply sloping hills of juniper and oak. Paonia State Park has been established here to capitalize on the various recreation opportunities provided by the reservoir. Beyond the State Park the Byway enters a deep, well-defined river canyon at the confluence of Muddy Creek and Anthracite Creek. At this point the Byway splits to form a loop - one portion going east up Anthracite Creek and the other going west down the North Fork Gunnison River, which is formed by the confluence of Muddy and Anthracite Creeks.

Continuing west on State Highway 133 along the North Fork Gunnison River, the Byway passes through a relatively narrow canyon bounded on both sides by high and very steep slopes which are generally covered by oak brush and scattered conifers. The hill slopes on the north side often have prominent exposed bands of cap rock and are irregular in nature. Where the valley bottom permits, limited agriculture in the form of orchards and irrigated hayfields is taking place. A strongly defined and well-developed riparian woodland (cottonwood and willow) is almost continuous along the river. The river itself is visually conspicuous and clear as it moves swiftly over the rocky bottom. Within this canyon setting are the historic coal mining communities of Somerset and Bowie.

This enclosed canyon setting opens onto a broad river valley, which appears almost idyllic. It contains a well-defined riparian river corridor along with prosperous appearing orchards and hay fields on the valley bottom that extend up onto some intermediate mesas and terraces. Intermingled throughout are canals and drainages with stringers of natural vegetation. All this is backdropped by the West Elk Mountains, which rise abruptly to the south. Within this rich agricultural valley are the towns of Paonia and Hotchkiss, which are skirted by the Byway. Besides fruit orchards, this area has more recently focused on locally produced farm and ranch products, referred to as a “farm to table” economy, including a thriving and growing wine industry.

At Hotchkiss the Byway turns south and follows State Highway 92 up an elevated series of sloping mesas (Spurlin, Crawford and Grand View). As the name implies, Grand View Mesa in particular, provides elevated, panoramic views to the north of the North Fork Gunnison River Valley and the Grand Mesa beyond. Land use is a mix of ranching and farming (cattle and irrigated pasture) but with a sprinkling of rural residences. An area of dry, broken adobe hills separates the agriculture of the valley from the ranching and farming of this higher area.

Within this region and set on a gently sloping hillside below Young's Peak is the town of Crawford. It is a well-established, compact town with attractive character. Several significant old buildings, including the Town Hall, the community church and associated cemetery, add a sense of permanence and history. Three and a half miles northeast of Crawford is the Needle Rock Natural Area, which is managed by BLM. This prominent geologic feature is the remnant of a volcanic plug consisting primarily of basalt, and stands 800 feet above the valley floor.

Just beyond town is Crawford Reservoir, which is managed as a state park. The reservoir is strongly influenced by campground, picnic, parking and maintenance facilities. The large reservoir is unusual in this region which makes it visually inviting. The reservoir was completed in 1962 by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) for irrigation purposes.

Continuing south, the Byway passes through medium to broad, gently sloping valleys of irrigated hay meadows and grazing cattle, bounded by mesas and ridges to the west and the scenic West Elk Mountains to the east and north. Here, ranching predominates; few rural residences are found other than those associated with farms and ranches. This extensive unit then transitions rapidly to steep oak brush hills and then to a mixture of oak brush, aspen and conifer as the Byway approaches the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Curecanti National Recreation Area. The Byway follows several miles of very winding road in the steep, south-facing slopes above Morrow Point Reservoir which lies far below in the canyon bottom. Attention is most strongly drawn to the canyon, which is visible to the bottom in very few locations from the Byway. However, at the various established overlooks, opportunities to view the canyon bottom are possible. In many locations, panoramic views extend beyond the canyon to the San Juan Mountains. Beyond the narrow band of Park Service lands are private, high elevation ranching lands.

Just prior to the intersection with U.S. Highway 50, Highway 92 crosses Blue Mesa Dam. Nearby are two good locations to view the dam and river and learn more about this important feature of the Aspinall Unit. Just to the west on U.S. Highway 50 is access to the Pine Creek, where a trail descends to the Gunnison River. Just downstream the National Park Service operates a scenic boat tour on Morrow Point Reservoir which operates during the summer months.

The Byway continues east on U.S. Highway 50, skirting the edge of Blue Mesa Reservoir for the next 15 miles. This is the largest water body in the state of Colorado. It is bounded alternately by open rolling sage hills and interesting, prominently elevated topography. Most notable in this regard are the ancient Dillon Pinnacles. At the eastern end of the recreation area, the Byway enters a winding canyon setting with very steep walls of 200' to 300'. Public lands continue beyond the bounds of the recreation area where a combination of BLM and CPW lands provide a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities and wildlife management activities.



The Byway emerges from this canyon setting into open ranching country of the Gunnison River Valley. The Gunnison River and associated cottonwood riparian forest are dominant elements in this valley, which is bounded by low sage covered hills. This setting gradually gives way to urbanization as the Byway nears Gunnison, the largest community on the Byway. At Gunnison the Byway turns north on Colorado State Highway 135. Transitioning through rural residential subdivisions, the Byway again continues through the open ranch lands of the Gunnison River Valley. Nearing the small community of Almont, the character of the land changes quickly to enclosed canyon-like, riparian woodland setting at the confluence of the Taylor and East Rivers.

Just beyond Almont is the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery. Here the valley widens again and ranches continue to dot the valley. The hills defining the valley become higher as the Byway proceeds up the East and Slate River valleys through an area of rural residential subdivisions and into the

historic mining town and popular winter recreation area of Crested Butte. Here the valley pinches off into a number of narrow valleys and drainages bounded by high mountain peaks. To the north are the peaks of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area, and to the northwest are the peaks of the Raggeds Wilderness Area.

From Crested Butte, the Byway turns west and enters Coal Creek Canyon on Gunnison County Road 12. Almost entirely on the Gunnison National Forest, County Road 12 is paved over the top of the pass and after the beautiful bridge over Ruby Anthracite Creek becoming an improved gravel road that continues west to the Raggeds along the Anthracite Creek drainage. This portion of the Byway is closed in winter.

Along this drive is a highly scenic, high mountain setting. There are alternately panoramic views to scenic mountain peaks and views enclosed by topography or vegetation. The town site of Irwin and various historic mining sites add to the interest of the area.

Dropping steeply down into the Anthracite Creek drainage to the west, the Byway enters a narrow, deep river valley bounded closely by steep, forested mountain slopes. The creek is clear and very swiftly flowing over a rocky bottom. Several ranches, residences and guest ranches are located along the Byway in this area. At the mouth of Anthracite Creek, the Byway becomes paved again near in the vicinity of Crystal Meadows. From here, it passes beneath Paonia Dam before returning to the intersection of Colorado State Highway 133, thus completing the 206-mile loop.



## CHAPTER 2 - INTRINSIC QUALITIES

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The intrinsic qualities of a scenic byway, as defined by the Federal Highway Administration, include its scenic, natural, recreational, historic/cultural and archaeological resources. These are the characteristics that make the lands along a byway special, give it definition and establish its unique character. They are the special qualities for which a byway is designated. As such, it is essential to understand and protect these qualities.

The discussion of the intrinsic qualities of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway in this section of the Plan is therefore closely linked to the chapter on Resource Protection, which describes the goals, objectives and means of protecting the Byway's intrinsic qualities.

Map 2 (Appendix C) provides information about the location and nature of the Byway's intrinsic qualities, except its scenic characteristics, which are shown on Map 3 (Appendix C). The intrinsic quality information is shown in two forms. The first is color-coded dots, which indicate the specific location of intrinsic qualities. Also shown are parallel lines along the Byway, similarly color-coded, which identify the intrinsic qualities that best characterize major travel segments.

The character and significance of the various intrinsic qualities of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway are highlighted below.

### SCENIC RESOURCES

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The Byway is near the heart of the Rocky Mountains and at the edge of the Colorado Plateau and canyon country. The magnificent landscapes of both regions have immediate and almost universal recognition nationally and, increasingly, internationally as well. The scenic qualities of the Byway are truly outstanding and varied. They include both dramatic, natural landscapes as well as lands whose character has been enhanced by visible signs of the long and hard-earned tenure of those who have come to settle the land.

The Byway covers an elevation range of almost 5,000 vertical feet - from just over 5,000 feet at Hotchkiss to just under 10,000 feet at Kebler Pass. Over this elevation range it passes through open mountain valleys and near high rugged peaks, through grasslands and conifer forests, alongside clear flowing mountain creeks and rivers, along lakes, through narrow, enclosed canyons and over panoramic prominences. It also passes through historic towns, working ranch lands, and richly productive farmland and orchards.

Over the 206-mile length of the Byway, the scenery is continually engaging as it transitions from the visual and spatial experience of one landscape type to another. Map 3 (Appendix C) provides information about the various aspects of the scenic resource. Included are the locations of landscape focal points, important ephemeral qualities, such as wildflower and fall colors areas, locations of development in rural areas, urban development, and segmentation of the route into distinctive segments according to the visual character of the landscape. The landscape character segments are numbered and keyed to narrative descriptions, which can be found in Appendix B.

From the Town of Carbondale on the north, the Byway enters mountain ranching country in the Crystal River Valley. At the foot of Mt. Sopris the Byway enters a confined canyon setting in the White River National Forest, where canyon walls, conifer and aspen trees and the clear flowing Crystal River predominate. At the head of the Crystal River Valley, the Byway climbs up a mountainside to McClure Pass. From this highly elevated prominence, panoramic views down into the Crystal River Valley, and beyond to the peaks and mountain valleys of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area lie at your feet.



The Byway then makes its way briefly through an aspen woodland before emerging to broadly panoramic views to the west over the hills and valleys leading to the Grand Mesa. Gradually, it makes its way down into broad valleys that begin to narrow and deepen as they descend to the mouth of Muddy Creek, along Paonia Reservoir.

Here the Byway enters the North Fork Valley, a winding canyon complex of rock and conifer walls enclosing the river and its associated riparian woodland. From this canyon setting, the Byway exits out into a lush agricultural valley of fields and orchards, interwoven with riparian stringers and back-dropped by the imposing peaks of the West Elk Wilderness. Skirting the peaks of the West Elk Wilderness to the south, the Byway gradually climbs up an expansive, gently sloping mesa, which then provides elevated views back to the agricultural valley below and the Grand Mesa beyond.

The Byway then enters an elevated, open valley ranching setting, which is bounded by the distinctive formations of the West Elk Wilderness to the east. From here it climbs up through oak brush hillsides to the edge of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. It then winds back and forth along the steep oak, aspen and conifer hillsides high above the dark canyon bottom. Numerous pull-offs and developed overlooks provide opportunities to view deep into the canyon as well as to look beyond the canyon rim at panoramic views to the south, which in places extend all the way to the San Juan Mountains.

The Byway gradually winds its way along the canyon edge to an opening where the enclosing canyon walls transition to hills that recede in size and distance, creating a much more open setting. At this location a dam has been constructed to form the extensive Blue Mesa Reservoir. For the next several miles the Byway parallels the edge of Blue Mesa Reservoir in the Curecanti National Recreation Area. Near the eastern end of the recreation area, the Byway enters another winding, canyon-like setting along the water's edge. This canyon setting in turn gives way to an open ranching landscape of sage/grass covered rolling hills that enclose the Gunnison River valley with its well- developed riparian woodland corridor.

This setting continues past the city of Gunnison to the community of Almont, where the Byway enters a brief but memorable narrow riparian canyon. Beyond Almont, the Byway transitions back into a high valley ranching landscape with enclosing hills that transition to mountainsides as the road approaches the town of Crested Butte. Just beyond this historic town are the peaks of the Raggeds and Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Areas.

Just west of Crested Butte, the Byway enters the Gunnison National Forest in a forested, mountain canyon setting that leads up to Kebler Pass, the highest point along the Byway. No panoramic views can be seen

from this point, however. In fact, the enclosing mountainsides provide an opportunity to reflect on the lingering reminders of the rich mining history of this area. Beyond Kebler Pass, the Byway winds through enclosing aspen groves that alternate with expansive views to the nearby Raggeds and West Elk Wilderness Areas (the latter of which has now been almost entirely circled by the Byway). The Byway then descends off this high country, top of the world setting, into a deepening and ever-enclosing canyon where Anthracite Creek runs free and clear alongside the Byway. At the mouth of Anthracite Creek, the Byway returns to the North Fork Valley.

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## NATURAL RESOURCES

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The natural features found along the Byway are truly rich and diverse, and therefore lend themselves to both casual enjoyment and serious study. It is the many natural qualities of the lands within the Byway corridor that create the diversity and scenery discussed above. It is principally the geologic forces that created the mountain peaks and well-watered valleys of this high elevation region, which have given it identity and distinctiveness. Its forces, and their consequences, are manifested in the conical form of Mt. Sopris, the jagged peaks of the Raggeds, the columnar forms of the West Elk Mountains, and the much-photographed pyramidal forms within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area.

It is the forces of mountain building and erosion that have also created the monumental Black Canyon of the Gunnison and the countless other, minor canyons and valleys through which the Byway winds. It is these forces that have created the white marble of Marble, the black coal of Bowie and Somerset, the red canyons of Redstone, the silver of Irwin, and the fertile soils of Paonia and Hotchkiss. It has at once created the glaciers and the hot springs, large rivers and countless clear flowing streams. And it is the result of these same forces that have, in turn, given rise to the vast array of plants and animals stratified along the 5,000-foot elevation range of the Byway.

The Byway is also enriched by the diversity of its biologic community—its flora, fauna, and riparian residents. Alert Byway travelers are apt to see a variety of animals along the loop, including mule deer, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk, black bear, fox, marmot, squirrel, or even cougar. Birds include a variety of songbirds, hawks, and eagles. Fish species include a variety of trout, perch, kokanee salmon and other species. The Byway skirts the largest body of water in Colorado—Blue Mesa Reservoir.



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## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

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The West Elk Loop offers a journey through history as varied as its many features. From the earliest Indian inhabitants of this region removed in 1881, to the fur traders, explorers, mining prospectors, cattlemen and farmers who poured in afterward, the area is rich in stories of historical explorations, mining, railroads and agriculture. Earliest inhabitants of the West Elk area were migratory Indian hunters and gatherers. Nomadic Utes followed, drawn by the climate, plentiful game and tranquil surroundings. The Dominguez and Escalante expedition of 1776, which was led by two young Franciscan priests to open an overland trail from Santa Fe to newly found missions in California, interrupted this solitude when the friars began the

first systematic mapping and recording of Colorado. A portion of the historic Dominguez and Escalante Trail follows State Highway 133 from Hotchkiss to Bowie, north of Paonia.

After an uprising of the Utes in 1879 at the White River Indian Agency, the Northern Ute Indians were relocated to Utah in September 1881 and confined to reservations. The first white settlers moved into the area lured by the fertile lands and dreams of silver and gold. These hardy individuals dwelled first in tents and later in cabins. Towns were quickly established, railroads were built, and ranchers and farmers soon discovered the potential riches of this land.

Thus began the tradition and culture of this region, which remains strong and is visually evident today along much of the Byway. The ranching culture of the region is manifested in various locations along the Byway; most notably along portions of Highway 135 between Crested Butte and Gunnison, and continuing along Highway 50 to the upper end of Blue Mesa Reservoir. It is also strongly evident from Hotchkiss, south along Highway 92 to Black Mesa. A smaller stretch also remains between the outskirts of Carbondale on Highway 133, south to the Forest Service boundary.

The historic farming culture of the North Fork Gunnison River Valley, from Hotchkiss to east of Paonia along Highway 133 is strongly evidenced here. The mining culture is still very much alive further up the North Fork Gunnison River Valley in the communities of Bowie and Somerset, where some coal mining continues. Evidence of the rich mining heritage of the past remain evident at Redstone, Irwin, Gothic, Marble and any number of smaller sites such as Janeway and Placita scattered through the region.

Virtually all the communities along the Byway are historic in the sense that they got their start near the time of first settlement. A brief historical sketch of communities and important sites follows:

**Carbondale** - Established as a railroad town on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad between Glenwood Springs and Aspen, Carbondale became a railhead for the Crystal River and San Juan Railroad, which eventually extended up the valley through Redstone to Marble. In the early 1900's, Carbondale became a major center for the production of potatoes, and later became a center for cattle ranching.

**Redstone National Historic District** – The historic mining town of Redstone is where John C. Osgood not only developed coal mines in nearby Coal Basin, but also built a model factory town complete with a European style country inn for the coke oven workers and a manor house for himself. The town was designated a National Historic District in 1989. Today, visitors can see the historic coke ovens where coal was turned into coke to be used in the steel-making process, and take a tour through the Redstone Castle, Osgood's palatial home. Redstone is also an artists' community where visitors can view and purchase artwork.



**Marble** – Located six miles off the Byway, Marble was established as a marble quarry and mill town. It is now a historic site on the National Register. The first half of the road into Marble is the old railroad bed of the Crystal River and San Juan Railroad Company, which operated from 1905 to 1941. This is the rail line that hauled marble from the Strauss and Yule quarries that built the Lincoln Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C. Important sites accessible by this roadway are the quarries, the Crystal Mill and the Town of Marble.

**Somerset, Bowie and Oliver** - In the early 1900's, there were approximately 40 coal mines in the upper North Fork Valley. The communities of Somerset, Bowie and Oliver were home to first generation immigrants from Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany, Wales, Sweden and Greece who came to work these mines.

**Paonia and Hotchkiss** - As early as 1881, Enos Hotchkiss and Samuel Wade determined that this area would be ideal for fruit orchards. By June 1882, these towns had been established, orchards planted and irrigation ditches constructed. Early ranchers sold their produce to peddlers who in turn sold to the surrounding mining towns. The railroad added to the success of the area, building a line from Delta to the Somerset mine above Paonia. In 1904, 1,000 carloads of fruit were shipped out of this region.

**Crawford and Maher** - The Hartman Cattle Trail, established in 1881 as the first cattle crossing from the Gunnison River valley to the North Fork Valley, parallels State Highway 92 over Black Mesa to Crawford. The Crawford-Maher area was the center of the Diamond Joe Cattle Company that ran over a hundred thousand head of longhorn cattle in the region to supply mining camps with beef.

**Gunnison Tunnel** - In 1901 William Torrence and Abraham Lincoln Fellows successfully traversed and surveyed the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. The information obtained led to the construction of the 5-mile Gunnison Tunnel bringing water to a thirsty Uncompahgre Valley. Agriculture blossomed, feeding the mining communities of the San Juan Mountains. The East Portal of the Gunnison Tunnel is visible today from the terminus of the Dead Horse Trail on the North Rim of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

**Sapinero** - Originally laid out as the railroad town of Soap Creek by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, Sapinero served as the temporary end of the line in 1881. During the winter of 1881-1882, over 1,000 men picked and shoveled away in the Black Canyon to push the railroad westward. These hard men, mostly Irish and Italian immigrants, braved unbelievable working conditions, unpredictable rock and snow slides, and consequences of unreliable explosives. Sapinero was surrounded by ranches and was a shipping point for livestock. Today, the original town site is submerged under Blue Mesa Reservoir.

**Gunnison** - Gunnison was founded in 1880 on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and served as a supply point for the booming mining areas of the San Juan Mountains, with much of its focus on cattle ranching. In 1910, the Colorado State Normal School opened its doors, in 1923 it became Western State College. In 2012 the college gained university status, and is now known as Western Colorado University.

**Almont** - The town was founded in 1879 on a 200-acre government land claim by Sam Fisher as a toll road and bridge site. He bridged the Taylor River and opened a road from Almont to the mouth of Spring Creek. The town was named after a Hambletonian stallion that ran undefeated in the late 1790's. A post office was granted in 1882, and through the years the town became a famous fishing and hunting resort.

**Crested Butte National Historic District** - Crested Butte is famous for both its history and Victorian architectural character. It was designated a National Historic District in 1974. The town was incorporated in 1880, the same year that the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad laid their narrow-gauge railway from Gunnison. Crested Butte served as a supply center for the outlying mining camps until the mid-1890s. Today Crested Butte is known as the "Wildflower Capitol of Colorado" and the "Fat Tire Birthplace of the World."



**Irwin/Ruby** - In July 1879, silver was discovered in Ruby Gulch by a down-and-out prospector named A.T. Gilkerson. Other significant discoveries quickly followed. The Town of Ruby was laid out by Charlie Christopher, a quarter mile below Irwin. Irwin, named after prospector Dick Irwin, was plotted and surveyed in November of 1879. The town boasted 529 homes, stores, 3 churches, a post office, school, bank, stamp mill, 6 sawmills, a theatre, 23 saloons, 7 dance halls, a newspaper and numerous bawdy houses by the fall of 1880. The Windsor Hotel accommodated such dignitaries as U.S. Grant, John Jacob Astor, William Vanderbilt and Horace Tabor. Over two million dollars' worth of silver and gold were extracted from the area from 1879 to 1897.

There are a number of museums located along the Byway which offer informative insights to the history and culture of the region. Museums are located in Carbondale, Redstone, Marble, Paonia, Hotchkiss, Gunnison, and Crested Butte. In addition, the National Park Service provides wayside exhibits along the Byway within Curecanti National Recreation that provide information on the railroad, mining and ranching history of the area. And although not on the Byway, the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose is an excellent source of information on the Ute tribes and their historic use of the area.

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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While it is widely known that this region was used by the Ute Indians, and by other migratory Indian hunters and gatherers before them, archaeological sites are sensitive and as such have not been developed to encourage public visits or examination. One site in the Emma area has evidence of use from archaic period some 8,400 year ago. This site is on private land. Two existing Byway interpretive wayside exhibits (one at Carbondale and one at Placita) pay tribute to these early residents.

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## RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

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A wide array of both developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities can be found along the Byway. In terms of formal designations, the West Elk Loop Byway passes through or adjacent to the following:

- two National Forests (Gunnison and White River)
- three BLM Field Offices (Colorado River Valley, Uncompahgre and Gunnison)
- one National Park (Black Canyon of the Gunnison - NPS)
- one National Recreation Area (Curecanti - NPS)
- one National Conservation Area (Gunnison Gorge – BLM)
- two State Parks (Paonia and Crawford – CPW)
- five Wilderness Areas (Maroon Bells-Snowmass, West Elk, Raggeds – USFS; Gunnison Gorge – BLM; and Black Canyon of the Gunnison - NPS)
- two National Historic Districts (Redstone and Crested Butte)
- a major downhill ski area (Mt. Crested Butte)



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## DEVELOPED RECREATION

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A brief description of some of the activities that are provided at the major developed recreational attractions on or near the Byway follows:

[Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park](#) – Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument was redesignated as a National Park in October of 1999. The spectacular north rim of the canyon is located just 11 miles off of State Highway 92. Visitor opportunities include sightseeing at canyon overlooks, hiking, camping, fishing, and rock climbing. A ranger station is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

[Cimarron](#) – Though not on the Byway, Cimarron is of special interest to railroad enthusiasts. It is located on Highway 50, 17 miles west of the junction with State Highway 92. It was a former narrow-gauge helper engine station on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. It features a visitor center and railroad exhibits of historic significance.

[Crawford State Park](#) – Crawford State Park is located on State Highway 92 just south of the town of Crawford. Available activities include fishing, boating, water skiing, sailing, swimming, camping, ice skating and cross-country skiing. Facilities include campgrounds, drinking water and flush toilets.

[Crested Butte Mountain Resort](#) – This ski area is located off State Highway 135, just north of the town of Crested Butte, and provides a diverse and challenging mix of slopes for skiers. The area consists of 81 trails served by 11 ski lifts, situated on 877 acres of land in the Gunnison National Forest.

[Crystal River Fish Hatchery](#) – The Crystal River Hatchery has been a brood hatchery for trout since 1941. Located on the west side of State Highway 133 a mile south of Carbondale, it uses an abundance of natural spring waters. The hatchery produces 15 million eggs a year from rainbow and cutthroat trout. The hatchery is open daily during daylight hours.

[Curecanti National Recreation Area](#) – Curecanti National Recreation Area stretches for approximately 35 miles along Highways 50 and 92. Elk Creek serves as park headquarters for this 42,000-acre recreation area. The Elk Creek Visitor Center is open year around. Visitor experiences include sightseeing, camping, boating, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

*Sightseeing* – State Highway 92 skirts the Black Canyon's north rim for spectacular views. Pioneer Point and other overlooks offer views into this deep canyon and a chance to learn of its history.

*Hiking* – Curecanti's trail system offers varied hiking experiences. Birders especially enjoy the 0.5-mile Neversink Trail with its lush, streamside habitat that birds favor. The 2.5-mile Dillon Pinnacles Trail threads dry mesa country to the spectacular Dillon Pinnacles and on for an impressive view of Blue Mesa Reservoir. Curecanti Creek and Hermits Rest Trails lead to Morrow Point Reservoir from Colorado 92. The Pine Creek Trail descends steeply to Morrow Point Reservoir where a tour boat offers excursions during the summer.

*Camping* – Curecanti's major developed campgrounds are at Elk Creek, Lake Fork, Stevens Creek and Cimarron. Smaller areas along Blue Mesa Reservoir at Dry Gulch, Red Creek, Ponderosa and Gateview offer more seclusion. Group campsites are available at East Elk Creek and Red Creek.

*Picnicking* – Picnic areas with water and toilets are available along the Gunnison River on the park's east end, and picnic tables are available along Highways 50 and 92.

*Water-Based Activities* – The 20-mile long Blue Mesa Reservoir has 96 miles of shoreline. It offers a range of water-based recreation activities including fishing, boating, water skiing, wind surfing and diving.

*Services* – Marinas offering a small grocery store, boat rentals, guide service, slips and showers are operated by concessionaires at Elk Creek and Lake Fork. There is a restaurant at Elk Creek. Boat tours are available at Morrow Point.

[Paonia State Park](#) – Paonia State Park is located on State Highway 133 in the Muddy Creek drainage just above the confluence of Anthracite Creek and the junction of 133 and Gunnison County Road 12 (Kebler Pass road). Available activities include boating, camping, water skiing and fishing. Facilities include campsites, picnic tables and vault toilets.

[Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery](#) – Located on Colorado 135 just north of Almont, this is the only fish hatchery in the state to have natural salmon return annually. Over ½ million trout are produced at this 860-acre site each year, along with two million kokanee salmon. Two miles of the East River and two ponds are open to the public for fishing.

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## UNDEVELOPED RECREATION

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Several undeveloped day-use and destination scale recreation areas exist along, or in close proximity to, the Byway. These include the following:

[Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness](#) – The Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness consists of 15,599 acres within Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. The Black Canyon is considered to be the deepest narrow canyon in North America. Difficult routes (not maintained trails) descend an average of 1,800 feet to the canyon floor. A portion of the access road to the north rim is graveled (closed in winter).

[Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area](#) – BLM's Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (NCA) is located just downstream from the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. It encompasses approximately 57,725 acres and is administered by the Bureau of Land Management. It includes a diverse landscape ranging from "adobe badlands" to rugged pinyon juniper covered slopes to the spectacular double canyon of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness Area. The access roads are unpaved (check with BLM regarding road conditions) and are closed in winter and early spring.

[Gunnison Gorge Wilderness](#) – The Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is located in the heart of the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area within the double canyon of the Gunnison River. It encompasses approximately 17,700 acres of public lands, including 14 miles of the Gunnison River. Hiking, backpacking, fishing, river-rafting and kayaking are popular recreational activities.

[Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness](#) – This Wilderness takes in more than 181,000 acres on the Gunnison and White River National Forests. Elevations range from 9,000 to 14,000. There are more than 100 miles of trails for foot and horse travel through extremely rugged terrain.

[Raggeds Wilderness](#) – The Raggeds Wilderness is a 65,443 acre area on the Gunnison and White River National Forests. Elevations range from 7,000 to about 13,000 feet. There are more than 90 miles of constructed trails in this Wilderness.

[West Elk Wilderness](#) – With 176,412 acres, the West Elk Wilderness on the Gunnison National Forest is Colorado’s fifth largest wilderness area. Elevations range from 7,000 to more than 13,000 feet. More than 200 miles of constructed trails are available for both foot and horse travel through the sometimes-rugged terrain.

In addition, the many thousands of acres of undeveloped Forest Service and BLM lands adjoining, or accessible from the Byway, offer a wide variety of undeveloped outdoor recreation opportunities. They include hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, boating/kayaking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, sightseeing, nature study, off-road vehicle use, mountain biking, horseback riding and many other related activities.

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## COMMUNITY FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

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A number of annual festivals and fairs take place in the communities along the Byway. Follow the links below to view upcoming community activities of interest:

[Carbondale Events](#) and [Carbondale Arts](#)

[Redstone Events](#) and [Redstone Castle Tours](#)

[Marble](#)

[Paonia](#)

[North Fork Valley](#) (Paonia, Hotchkiss and Crawford)

[Gunnison Valley and Crested Butte](#) and [Gunnison Valley Calendar](#)

## CHAPTER 3 - RESOURCE PROTECTION

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The West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway contains a number of significant resources. As discussed in Chapter 2, they include scenic landscapes, outstanding natural features, diverse recreational resources, nationally significant historic sites, and distinctive cultures and ways of life. It is these intrinsic qualities for which the Byway was established. It is also the qualities that make this a distinctive and special place for the people who reside here. For both reasons, it is critically important to protect the resources, and way of life, found along the Byway.

Because of differences in ownership, management and location, some of these resources are already adequately protected, while others are vulnerable; some are facing immediate pressures while others are not. Because of the inherent differences in these resources, some are more susceptible to disturbance or disruption than others, and some are abundant while others are rare. For these reasons, it is not necessary, or appropriate, to give all Byway resources the same level or type of protection.

Some of the key considerations in determining an appropriate prescription for resource protection include ownership, existing management plans or review mechanisms, pressures/risks, and resource sensitivity and significance. Together, these considerations also help to establish priorities for protection.

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

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Much of the land on or closely adjacent to the Byway is in federal or state ownership – U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife, as previously discussed. As such, these lands are automatically protected from certain types of disturbance. Management of these lands is prescribed by the respective land and resource management plans of these agencies. There are also large areas along the Byway which are in private ownership, and the values they contain are subject to pressures of the marketplace and the inclinations and needs of the owner. In most areas, the use of these lands is also influenced, to some degree, by existing county plans and/or codes. Within the five counties along the Byway, these plans and codes vary widely, as discussed below. The need for resource protection, and the approach to addressing it, therefore varies significantly along the Byway based on ownership.

Essentially all lands along the Byway are subject to some form of agency oversight or review procedures for actions that would measurably affect the use or character of the land. Some review and approval mechanisms are very specific and limiting, while others are very general and permissive. The management plans and other relevant documents of the various jurisdictions along the Byway were reviewed to identify the degree to which they presently provide protection of the intrinsic qualities of the Byway. A brief summary of these agencies' plans and policies is presented in the following table.

Agency	Management Document	Management Objectives	Key Provisions or Features of the Policy
Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Resource Management Plan, Master Management Plan	Provide recreation, wildlife protection and enhancement; manage hunting and fishing.	Manage wildlife and fisheries on state and private lands; on federal lands, manage wildlife and fisheries in cooperation with the appropriate federal agency.
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation	Resource Management Plan	Irrigation, power production, resource management (water & land).	Protect land and water resources while meeting the legal requirements of water compacts and treaties, irrigation storage and delivery, flood protection, power production, and recreation.
US Forest Service (USFS)	Forest Plan	Multiple-use management	Management actions require preparation of an EA or EIS.
U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)	Resource Management Plan (RMP)	Multiple-use management	Management actions require preparation of an EA or EIS.
U.S. National Park Service (NPS)	General Management Plan & RMP	Visitor use and understanding, resource protection.	Management prescriptions range from “developed” to “protected,” including various recreation designations. Management actions require preparation of an EA or EIS.
Garfield County	Comprehensive Plan & Zoning	Allow development consistent with plan goals and zoning restrictions.	Comprehensive Plan (2013). Retain rural character outside of urban growth area. Proposals reviewed pursuant to the Land Use and Development Code (2017).
Pitkin County	Crystal River Valley Land Use Master Plan (CRVLUMP)	Allow development only when consistent with the requirements and goals of the CRVLUMP.	Allows development consistent with the Crystal River Valley Land Use Master Plan (2016). Strong emphasis on environmental, landscapes, and water resources protections.
Gunnison County	Land Use Resolution	Allow development consistent with the requirements of the Land Use Resolution.	Land Use Resolution (2019) discourages sprawl, with criteria aimed at protecting environmental qualities. Administrative review for proposed land use changes.
Delta County	Master Plan and Land Use Regulations	Allow development with minimal government regulations while minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources and wildlife habitat.	Master Plan (2018). Land Use Regulations expected to be revised/approved in 2019. New plan will identify land use tools to guide development, provide a fair and predictable process while protecting private property rights. Agricultural values are important and continued agricultural economic viability will be encouraged.
Montrose County	Zoning Regulations, Subdivision Regulations	Development allowed consistent with zoning regulations. Manage growth with an emphasis on preserving agriculture.	Zoning Regulations amended 2016; Subdivision Regulations amended 2015. Byway falls entirely in the Maher Planning Area (agricultural zoning). Agricultural values are important and continued agricultural economic viability will be encouraged.

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## PRESSURES AND RISKS TO BYWAY RESOURCES

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The pressures and risks to Byway resources vary with location and by type. One of the greatest threats to the quality and character of the lands along the Byway is from development – most often rural residential development. This is particularly true for areas within a few miles of the principal Byway communities. Rural residential development, both acreages and subdivisions, is developing rapidly along some portions of the Byway. This is particularly an issue along Highway 135 between Gunnison and Crested Butte, along Highway 133 south of Carbondale and in the North Fork Valley, and along Highway 92 between Hotchkiss and Crawford. Commercial and residential developments also threaten to alter the tradition and character of communities steeped in history, such as Redstone and Crested Butte.

Risks and pressures to resources at other points along the Byway include mineral development (coal), oil and gas development, timbering, off-highway vehicle use, grazing, recreation use, and growth induced impacts.

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## RESOURCE VULNERABILITY

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Resource vulnerability is a term used to classify the potential for resource disturbance based on conditions of ownership, management, existing protection mechanisms, and pressures/risks to the resource. As a first step, all lands within the Byway corridor were classified according to common characteristics of these variables and mapped into “Management Units”. Each unit was sequentially numbered, and a table was prepared summarizing their characteristics. Criteria were then developed to assign levels of Vulnerability to Change, as follows:

- **Very High:** Lands lacking protection and facing strong development pressure.
- **High:** Lands lacking protection but not currently facing strong development pressure. **OR** Lands with weak protection mechanisms (e.g. comp. plans, policies, goals, etc.) in place and facing some development pressure.
- **Moderate:** Lands with weak protection mechanisms in place (as above), not facing strong development pressure.
- **Low:** Lands with current protection in place, but which may be amended (e.g., most USFS and BLM management prescriptions).
- **Very Low:** Permanent protection in place (e.g. designated wilderness, etc.).

The table at the end of this chapter summarizes the conditions within each of these management units and shows the resulting Vulnerability rating.

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## RESOURCE SIGNIFICANCE AND SENSITIVITY

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As noted above, not all of the Byway’s intrinsic qualities have the same significance and sensitivity. Those that are more subject to disturbance should be given a corresponding greater level of protection. The second major variable in determining priorities for protection (in addition to Resource Vulnerability as defined above) is the sensitivity and significance of the resource itself. While inherently subjective to some degree, an attempt was made to establish a relative scale of resource significance and sensitivity for the

intrinsic qualities of the Byway. This was guided by a structured consideration of five variables: visibility, sense of place, uniqueness, attitudes/ recognition and sensitivity, as follows:

- **Visibility** – Is the quality something tangible that can be seen from the Byway
- **Sense of Place** – Is the quality something that contributes in a significant way to creating a sense of place along the Byway?
- **Uniqueness** – Is the quality unique or highly distinctive?
- **Attitudes/Recognition** – Is the quality something that is widely recognized and/or highly valued by residents of the local community?
- **Sensitivity** – Is the quality something that is inherently sensitive to change or disturbance?

The intrinsic qualities within each of the management units along the Byway were rated according to these criteria on a simple, but standardized numerical scale, by the Byway steering committee. This resulted in final ratings on an overall relative scale ranging from Very High to Very Low.

Determining priorities for resource protection was the result of two primary considerations:

The *vulnerability* of the Byway's intrinsic qualities to change (based on ownership and management), and

The inherent *significance and sensitivity* of the resource.

The highest priorities for protection should be given to those resources, sites and areas with high vulnerability to change and high sensitivity/significance. Resources already well protected or of less sensitivity, while valuable and important, have less priority in terms of near-term expenditures of money and effort, given the practical reality of limited means.

The results of this analysis are presented in Map 4 (Appendix C). On this map, each of the management units are delineated with an indication of the priorities for protection on a scale of Very High to Very Low. The table at the end of this chapter provides a summary of the conditions within each of these units. It indicates the unit number and location (which is keyed to the Map), ownership, the pressures and risks facing that area, the vulnerability of the resources within each unit, the sensitivity/significance of the resources, and the resulting protection priority which resulted.

As this table and map illustrate, the highest priorities for protection (VH) are typically private lands that are facing strong development pressure, where there are few protection mechanisms in place. The list below includes some of these lands:

- The private lands between Carbondale and the White River National Forest boundary that are facing increasingly strong residential development pressure (Unit #3).
- The private in-holdings in the White River National Forest, further up the Crystal River Valley, are in rural residential subdivision use, which will continue to develop in this area (Unit #5).
- Extending west of Paonia along the south side of the Byway is an area that has recently been approved for sewer expansion. Residential and commercial development is anticipated to increase quickly in this rural, agrarian area as this service is provided (Unit #23). Pressure to develop the private agricultural lands throughout this valley also continue (Unit #21).

- Of greatest significance, in terms of size, are most of the lands along the Byway between the towns of Gunnison and Crested Butte where rural residential development is rapidly changing the character of this ranching country (Unit #s 48, 49, 54, 56, and 74).

A larger number of areas show a lesser, but still High, priority for protection. They include the following:

- Private in-holdings in the White River National Forest, in the vicinity of the Marble turnoff, are in rural residential subdivision, and continued development is expected (Unit #8).
- Lands in the Muddy Creek drainage are seeing increasing pressure from rural residential development (Unit #10).
- BLM lands up the North Fork Valley may be affected by coal development (Unit #17).
- Private lands from the North Fork Valley extending south down to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison are a high priority for protection because of potential rural residential development (Unit #s 25 and 32).
- Private lands along Curecanti National Recreation Area are at risk from potential residential development and heavy recreation use (Unit #37).
- The community of Crested Butte is changing rapidly because of development pressure and heavy recreation use (Unit #55).
- An area of private land just south of Kebler Pass is subject to possible residential development (Unit #s 60 and 64).

Combined, these High priority areas encompass most of the lands from Paonia to Blue Mesa Reservoir, with scattered lands extending farther, along the Curecanti NRA boundary and up the North Fork Valley.

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## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

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The following goals and objectives remain as guiding principles for the long-term management of the Byway:

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### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Protect the character and integrity of the intrinsic qualities for which the Byway was established.

**Objective:** Continue to apply the tools of the resource protection plan and comment on development proposals being considered by responsible entity (county or local government, agency, etc.).

**Goal:** Enhance the intrinsic qualities of the Byway where appropriate, in ways consistent with the overall objectives of the State Scenic and Historic Byways Program, to rehabilitate, develop, maintain, interpret, and provide accessibility to these sites and resources as appropriate.

**Objective:** Implement and monitor a coordinated resource enhancement and recovery program targeted at maintenance of existing sites and resources, rather than significant additional development.

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## BYWAY RESOURCE PROTECTION PLAN

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To be effective, protection of the Byway's intrinsic qualities must be attentively pursued, broadly coordinated, and multi-faceted. No single recipe for success exists. One that comes close, however, is the concept of an overlay zone, as discussed below. Additional techniques that can supplement an overlay zone are also discussed.

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### OVERLAY ZONE

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An overlay zone is a designation created by a governing agency that establishes criteria in addition to those regulations already in place. In effect, it overlays all existing zoning designations and adds to the regulations or performance standards already there.

In this context, a Byway overlay zone would be a zoning designation that is applied to the lands in view of, or closely associated with, the Byway. It would contain regulations that are directed toward protection of the intrinsic qualities found there. Because the 206-mile West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway crosses through many jurisdictions, an overlay zone would have to have broad acceptance by a large majority of these jurisdictions to be effective overall. The great value of such an approach is that it would establish nearly uniform guidance and procedures instead of those that might be established and applied piecemeal.

Because of their preliminary receptivity, the concept of an overlay zone will be formally presented to the five counties crossed by the Byway for their consideration. As currently envisioned, it would function as follows:

The Byway Overlay Zone would not establish mandatory prescriptive standards, but rather it would be performance based. It would use language that conveys the intent but gives flexibility to the applicant in meeting the standards of performance. Once the applicant submits a proposal for county review and approval, the planning staff would determine if it has the potential to impact any of the Byway's intrinsic qualities. If this review finds that there is potential to adversely affect any of these qualities, it would refer the submittal to the Byway Steering Committee for further review. This group would then make recommendations back to the local planning commission.

The overlay zone would include all lands within the Byway Corridor (as indicated on Map 7). As part of the county development application process, an applicant would be advised if the development fell within the overlay zone. If it did, the applicant would be given a set of standard design criteria and suggested considerations for meeting these standards, as part of the original application packet. This would provide the applicant an opportunity to design the development with those objectives in mind.

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### OVERLAY ZONE DESIGN STANDARDS

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The design standards and guidance given to applicants would be developed with language similar to the following:

All new development and expansion of existing development that falls within local jurisdictional review within the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway viewshed are recommended to be constructed and maintained in a manner that is consistent and compatible with the visual character and natural qualities that currently exist. This standard applies to all project components, including structures, access, utilities, signage, fencing, outdoor storage, etc.

Lighting and noise levels associated with the proposal must also be compatible with the setting in which they are proposed. No project or project component that will detract from the natural character of the Byway setting, or otherwise adversely impact the intrinsic qualities of the Byway, will be recommended for approval unless appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts are taken. The intrinsic qualities to be considered include scenic, recreation, natural (vegetation, wildlife/fisheries, water, air, geology, soils, etc.), historic, cultural and archaeological assets.

Discretion is given to the project applicant in meeting these standards. As an aid in facilitating compliance with the intent of these regulations, the following are offered as considerations that may be helpful in project planning.

**Siting** – Proper initial siting is the single most effective means of reducing visual contrast. Locating in areas that help to conceal the project can simply put much of the modification out of sight.

**Disturbance** – Keeping disturbance of the ground and vegetation to a minimum is of substantial help in reducing the visual evidence of a landscape modification – what isn't disturbed doesn't have to be reclaimed.

**Design Materials** – The use of materials and colors that are borrowed from the surrounding landscape are most effective in reducing visibility. Materials with reflective surfaces (such as roofs, siding, etc.) become significantly more visible than non-reflective surfaces. Darker colors are often less visible than lighter colors, depending upon the setting.

**Ridgelines** – Structures or other types of modifications on ridgelines and topographic prominences are substantially more visible than those which are located on flat ground or which are viewed against an inconspicuous topographic or vegetative background.

**Compatibility** – Visual compatibility, land use compatibility, and neighborhood compatibility are important objectives.

**Setbacks** – Moving developments away from the viewer helps to maintain foreground context and diminish the prominence of development.

**Landscaping/Reclamation** – Landscaping can help to reduce the impacts of disturbance and soften or conceal the visibility of development. The use of indigenous species is the most effective type of landscaping for maintaining a natural appearance and the integrity of the natural biological community.

**Lighting/Noise** – Lighting or noise, which is greater or significantly different than that in the surrounding landscape, is likely to be readily noticed and disruptive to the setting. Lighting that dilutes the night sky or causes spill and glare from unshielded fixtures would be seen as adverse.

**Access** – Access can be particularly disruptive to the setting if not done in a sensitive and subdued fashion. Road cuts/fills on steep slopes are particularly visible, damaging to the landscape, and difficult to ever effectively reclaim. Large or distinctive entry features can create a setting that would conflict with the rural character of most of the Byway. The appropriateness of road surface materials should be considered. Existing public access to recreation areas and other Byway attractions should not be adversely affected.

**Utilities** – Overhead structures such as utilities and communication facilities are readily visible and obtrusive in a natural setting. Burying overhead utilities puts them out of sight and reduces impacts where important types of environmental sensitivities would not be unduly compromised.

**Clustering** – Clustering has the advantage of reducing the amount of land affected by development and retaining the remainder in natural open space.

**Best Management Practices (BMP)** – The use of BMP is expected as routine practice, as a way of reducing site specific impacts that might otherwise occur.

**Visualization** – Technically accurate and context realistic simulations or drawings/ renderings, while not required, may help to facilitate the review process and clarify issues in question.

Proposals which are then submitted and evaluated by the County Planning Staff as adversely affecting any of the Byway's intrinsic qualities should be referred to the Byway Steering Committee for review and comment. Design enhancement measures may be suggested as a way to lessen the impact if the Byway Steering Committee confirms adverse effects. Such measures may relate to any of the design considerations identified above. It may also recommend other design or enhancement measures such as a wildlife protection plan to protect wildlife habitats, sites or corridors, a historic protection plan, an access management plan, or other conditions as appropriate.

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PROTECTION TECHNIQUES AND MECHANISMS

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As indicated, no single approach is expected to be fully effective in protecting the intrinsic qualities of the Byway. In addition to the overlay zone, a number of other land and resource protection techniques are finding success elsewhere. Most of these are mechanisms that respect the vested rights of private landowners. A brief description of some of the more common of these land use and resource protection tools follows:

**TDRs** – Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) provide a mechanism whereby development rights in a sensitive area can be sold to another party in a less sensitive area (receiving area), thereby protecting the lands and resources of the lands in which the rights were acquired.

**PDRs** – Purchase of Development Rights (PDRs) is the direct purchase of the development rights to a property to maintain existing resource values; usually financed through an open space sales tax or grants.

**Conservation Easements** – A conservation easement, similar to a PDR, involves the owner voluntarily agreeing to place a long-term or perpetual easement on his/her land that precludes development of specified types. Conservation easements are donated or sold to an organization or other entity, such as a land trust, because of a specific interest. These interests may include preservation of agriculture, maintenance of open space, protection of wildlife values, or a combination of goals. The owner generally benefits by direct monetary compensation, tax benefits, estate planning advantages, or a combination thereof.

**Exaction** – As a condition of obtaining subdivision approval, a local government requires developers to pay a fee or dedicate land to a trust fund for open space.

**Preferential Assessment** – Under state laws, agricultural and other special districts can be established to assess land as farmland, forestland, etc., rather than its highest and best use. Uses then must conform to those allowed under that designation.

**Fee Simple Acquisition** – The lands are purchased in fee and ultimate control is thereby secured; usually financed through an open space sales tax or grants.

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## LAND TRUSTS AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

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In addition to agency land protection efforts, there are several private and non-profit organizations actively involved in resource and open space protection. Most notable in this regard are land trusts and conservancies. These organizations operate at a variety of scales, from national organizations with broad land protection objectives to local organizations focused on specific types of lands and issues. A number of land trusts and conservancies are active within the region. They include the following:

- [American Farmland Trust](#)
- [Aspen Valley Land Trust](#)
- [Crested Butte Land Trust](#)
- [Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust](#)
- [Colorado Open Lands](#)
- [Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation](#)
- [The Conservation Fund](#)
- [Gunnison County Land Preservation Board](#)
- [Gunnison Ranchland Conservation Legacy](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
- [Pitkin County Open Space and Trails](#)
- [Roaring Fork Conservancy](#)
- [Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation](#)
- [Trust for Public Land](#)
- [Western Colorado Land Trust](#)

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## OUTDOOR ADVERTISING CONTROL

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Colorado State law provides for the control of outdoor advertising along the Byway. It has proved effective in keeping off-premises signage off the Byway. Pitkin County and others have strict sign codes that apply as well.

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## IMPLEMENTATION

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The following table contains actions items design to implement the resource protection plan for the Byway:

Action Item	Time Frame	Responsibility
Resubmit overlay zone concept and draft language to each of the five counties in a coordinated approach.	December 2019	Byway Steering Committee
Establish contact with representatives of land trusts and conservancies who are active in the region and communicate the resource protection goals and objectives of the Byway and the resource protection priorities that have been established.	December 2019	Byway Steering Committee
Maintain active coordination and dialogue with representatives of all interested and affected agencies (preferably through a representative serving on the Byway Steering Committee).	Ongoing	Byway Steering Committee
Review the goals and objectives initially established for resource protection, and revise if needed to maintain their relevance and appropriateness to current conditions.	Periodically	Byway Steering Committee
Maintain active communication with the county planners and administrators regarding the overlay zone and the review process.	Ongoing	Byway Steering Committee
Review changes and developments along the Byway to determine what impacts have occurred to the intrinsic resources. Contact those counties where impacts are deemed as inappropriate or unacceptable.	Annually	Byway Steering Committee

## CHAPTER 4 – INTERPRETATION

Various types of interpretive information are provided along the Byway, in a variety of forms including kiosks, wayside interpretive panels, monuments/markers, and brochures. Some of this information is provided by the Byway organization itself, while other information is provided by agencies and outside organizations.

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

The following is a summary of current interpretation along the Byway.

#### WAYSIDE EXHIBITS/INTERPRETIVE PANELS

These panels are mostly waist level panels mounted in metal frames; however some are larger vertical panels also mounted in metal frames.

- 20 panels by the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway Steering Committee
- 13 panels by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails in cooperation with the Town of Redstone
- 2 older roadside historic markers
- 12 panels and 3 supporting structures by History Colorado's Roadside Interpretation Program
- 6 panels by Delta County Tourism in cooperation with the Town of Crawford
- 10 panels by National Park Service, Curecanti National Recreation Area
- 2 panels by the Silver Thread Scenic and Historic Byway
- 1 panel by Colorado Park and Wildlife, Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery
- 4 panels by The North Fork Coal Companies

#### LOCATION AND CONTENT OF WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

The following table describes the various roadside interpretive panels placed by a variety of organizations and/or agencies along the Byway. Those panels that have been developed and are maintained by the Byway Steering Committee are **highlighted**. Note that a separate document—*West Elk Loop Byway Signage*—serves as a catalog of all the signs along the Byway.

Location of Byway Wayside Exhibits	Title and Topics Addressed
At the Carbondale Museum site.	<b>Carbondale: Farming for Gold</b> - Potato farming, removal of Utes, and early settlement in the Crystal River Valley.
At the historic site of Janeway (approximately 6 mi. north of Redstone), on the east side of the Byway.	<b>On the Way to Janeway</b> - about the Crystal River and San Juan Railroad and the community of Janeway.
Redstone Cliffs Lodge, 433 Redstone Blvd.	<b>Redstone: Hard Work Pays Off</b> - about Redstone and its development.
Redstone Cliffs Lodge, 433 Redstone Blvd.	<b>Genesis of an Empire</b> - about Coal Basin and the coke ovens.
Redstone, Depot Kiosk near the Elk Park parking area.	Several panels placed by Byway partner Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, include: <b>The Redstone Depot</b> (railroad history); <b>West Elk Byway</b> panel and map panel; <b>History of Redstone</b> ; <b>The Redstone Culture</b> ; <b>The Ruby of the Rockies</b> (available activities, things to do); <b>1903 Map of Redstone</b> ; and <b>two panels of historic photos</b> .
Redstone, east edge of Elk Park parking lot.	Two panels placed by Byway partner Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, include: <b>Biological Communities</b> (natural environment of the Crystal Valley); and <b>Notable Characters</b> (important persons in Redstone's past).

Location of Byway Wayside Exhibits	Title and Topics Addressed
Redstone, west end of the pedestrian bridge near the Elk Park parking lot.	Two panels placed by Byway partner Pitkin County Open Space and Trails, include: <b>Topography and Geology</b> (Crystal River environment); and <b>The Mighty Crystal</b> (information on the riverine system).
Redstone Coke Ovens on the west side of Highway 133.	<b>Redstone Coke Ovens</b> – original historic marker describing construction and purpose of the coke ovens; and <b>Coke Ovens Stabilization Project</b> – history of the coke ovens and the efforts to preserve them.
At the historic site of Placita, at a pullout on the east side of Highway 133.	<b>Once Indian Territory</b> - about Ute Indian occupation. <b>"Little Place" of Placita</b> - about the settlement of Placita and subsequent mining operations.
Junction of Highway 133 and County Road 3.	Four roadside panels placed by History Colorado. <b>Marble</b> – discusses the development of mining in the Marble area. <b>John C. Osgood</b> – the role Osgood played in development of coal mining and coke production in the Redstone area. <b>Redstone</b> – discusses more details of the history of Redstone. <b>Redstone Country</b> – includes an orientation map of the West Elk Byway.
Highway 133, large vehicle pullout at the winter gate at the south side of McClure Pass.	<b>Muddy Creek Slump</b> – discusses the geology along the Raggeds and the propensity for the ground to move and slump downhill.
Highway 133 just east of the junction with Grand Avenue (turnoff to Paonia).	Four roadside panels placed by History Colorado. <b>North Fork Valley</b> – early settlement and climate suitable for farming. <b>When Coal Was King</b> – development of coal mining in the area. <b>Theodore Roosevelt</b> – importance of Theodore Roosevelt in establishing the national forests, some of which later was designated as wilderness. <b>West Elk Country</b> – includes an orientation map of the West Elk Byway.
Highway 133, pullout on south side of highway between Paonia and Hotchkiss.	<b>Escalante's Diary memorial marker</b> – discusses the route taken by Dominguez-Escalante Expedition, erected by the North Fork Historical Society in cooperation with CDOT.
Hotchkiss, pullout on Highway 92 adjacent the North Fork River.	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – map highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. <b>Water: The Valley's Life Thread</b> – discusses the relationship between the river and the natural environment.
Crawford, Highway 92, information kiosk adjacent Crawford Town Hall.	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Information banner</b> – located on the outside siding of the kiosk and facing Highway 92. <b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. <b>Crawford, Last of the Cowntowns; Crawford State Park; Crawford Country map; Canyons, Rivers, Mountains; Crawford Agriculture; panel on local attractions</b> – a variety of panels discuss Crawford and this area of Delta County.
Highway 92, pullout at Crystal Creek Trailhead.	<b>Crystal Creek Trail</b> – NPS sign describes the Crystal Creek Trail within Curecanti National Recreation Area.
Highway 92, Hermits Rest Day Use Area.	Four interpretive waysides at this NPS day use area. <b>Curecanti</b> – explains the Curecanti area, visitor activities and responsibilities. <b>Curecanti map</b> – showing roads, trails, and visitor facilities. <b>Carving a Canyon</b> – the geologic forces that formed the Black Canyon. <b>Hermits Rest Trail</b> – description of trail to Morrow Point Reservoir.

Location of Byway Wayside Exhibits	Title and Topics Addressed
Highway 92, Blue Mesa Dam parking area.	<b>West Elk Loop Orientation map</b> – Byway’s large upright sign showing the Byway and points of interest. <b>Blue Mesa Dam and Reservoir</b> – Bureau of Reclamation sign describing the Aspinall Unit and Blue Mesa Dam and Reservoir.
U.S. Highway 50, Sapinero pullout.	<b>Crossing the Canyon</b> – NPS sign with the photo of the 4 bridges, now under the waters of Blue Mesa Reservoir.
U.S. Highway 50, large pull out west of the middle bridge, across the reservoir from the Dillon Pinnacles.	Two NPS interpretive wayside signs at this location. <b>If You Only Knew</b> – geologic explanation of the Dillon Pinnacles. <b>Forming a Pinnacle</b> – additional geologic explanation on the pinnacles.
U.S. Highway 50, Dillon Pinnacles Day Use Area.	Two NPS interpretive wayside signs at this location. <b>Curecanti</b> – explains the Curecanti area, visitor activities and responsibilities. <b>Curecanti map</b> – showing roads, trails, and visitor facilities.
U.S. Highway 50, Elk Creek Visitor Center	This NPS facility offers exhibits and information on Curecanti National Recreation Area.
Highway 149, restroom and parking area just south of the junction with U.S. Highway 50.	Two signs placed by our neighboring organization, the Silver Thread Byway. <b>Curecanti-Blue Mesa Reservoir</b> – information on Curecanti, its reservoirs and visitor opportunities. <b>Welcome to the Silver Thread Scenic Byway</b> – introduction and map showing points of interest on the Silver Thread Byway.
Gunnison, U.S. Highway 50, Gunnison Country Visitor Center	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – this is a wall mounted map located in the visitor center’s entry vestibule, and it highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. Outside the visitor center, there are four History Colorado roadside panels. <b>HO for the Gunnison</b> – the history and importance of the railroads. <b>Two Great Trains</b> – the history and importance of the railroads. <b>King Coal</b> – importance of coal mining and development of Crested Butte. <b>Gunnison Country</b> – includes an orientation map of the West Elk Byway.
Highway 135, pullout on west side of road where there is a fishermen’s stile providing access over the fence, about 1 mile south of turnoff for Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery.	Three signs at this location: <b>Roaring Judy State Fish Unit</b> – CPW sign with fishing information and regulations. <b>Almont Triangle</b> – Byway sign on area wildlife. <b>Wildlife</b> – additional information on area wildlife.
Crested Butte, Highway 135 at Elk Creek Ave, northeast corner outside of the Crested Butte Visitors Center.	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – map highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. <b>Crested Butte’s Colorful History</b> – events and chronology in the development of Crested Butte.
Forest Service Road 826 just west of the junction with County Road 12, near the turnoff for Lake Irwin.	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – map highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. <b>Wildlife on the Loop</b> – some of the wildlife found in the area.
On County Road 12, just east of the junction with Highway 133.	<b>West Elk Loop Byway Orientation Map</b> – map highlights points of interest along the West Elk Loop Byway. Four roadside panels prepared in cooperation with the North Fork Coal Companies. <b>Somerset and the Miners</b> – the importance of Somerset to miners and their families, and some of the history about development of mining in this area. <b>Evolution of Coal Mining</b> – describes coal mining processes and reclamation. <b>Coal Mining Since 1902</b> – history of Bear Coal Company and the Bowie Mine. <b>North Fork Coal Country</b> – how area geology has provided an opportunity to produce high quality coal.

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## KIOSKS AND VISITOR CENTERS

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Travelers are welcome to obtain information on the Byway at any of the following locations:

- Aspen-Sopris Ranger District Office, 620 Main Street, Carbondale (Monday – Friday)
- Redstone Elk Park Interpretive Depot – near south entrance into Redstone (open daily)
- Paonia Ranger District Office, North Rio Grande Avenue, Paonia (Monday – Friday)
- Crawford Kiosk, adjacent Crawford Town Hall (open daily)
- Elk Creek Visitor Center, Curecanti National Recreation Area (open daily)
- Gunnison Country Visitor Center, 500 East Tomichi Avenue, Gunnison (open daily)
- Crested Butte Visitor Center, 601 Elk Avenue, Crested Butte (open daily)

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## SIGNAGE

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The standard statewide scenic byway logo and identifier signs are posted at regular intervals along the Byway. There is no other Byway related signage or markers along the route.

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## PRINTED MEDIA

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Printed materials include a free informational brochure, a Byway guidebook, and other materials that are made available by agencies and tourism organizations.

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### BYWAY BROCHURE

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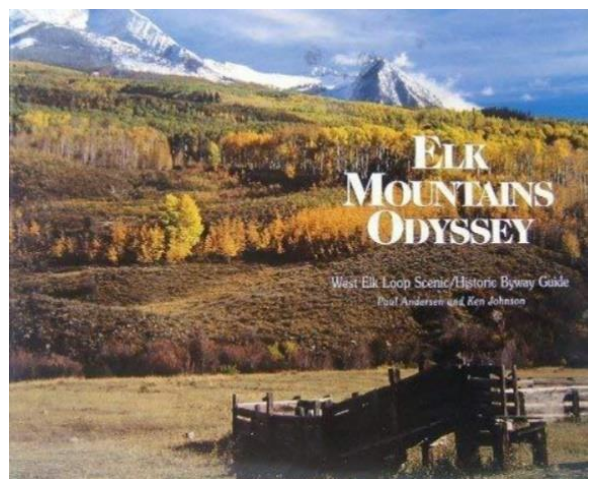
An informational brochure is available and updated periodically and is distributed through visitor centers, tourism offices, agency outlets, and chambers of commerce. The content of the brochure is focused entirely on the history and attractions of the Byway.

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### BYWAY GUIDEBOOK

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In addition to the brochure, the Byway Steering Committee obtained grant funds to produce a guidebook to the Byway – *Elk Mountains Odyssey: West Elk Loop Scenic/Historic Byway Guide*. Written by Paul Anderson and Ken Johnson, and published by Redstone Press in 1998, this 128-page book is an excellent guide that provides abundant information on the history, natural history, and culture of the region. It is organized by five geographic segments with an introduction to the region at large, including the pre-settlement Ute peoples and early exploration. For years the printed form was sold in area bookstores and distributed through tourism offices and visitor centers. The supply of this printed edition is just about exhausted. The Steering Committee has decided not to reprint the book, but instead make it available in digital format which could be distributed online.



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## OTHER MATERIALS

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Other materials such as brochures, event calendars, publications, websites, etc. are and will be produced by other entities, such as tourism associations, chambers of commerce, agencies, journalists, independent authors. The Byway Committee is available to review such materials for accuracy pertaining to the Byway as a courtesy to these other entities.

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## MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Interpretive goals and objectives were established to guide the corridor management planning study. The elements of the interpretive portion of the Corridor Management Plan include the interpretive themes and topics, waysides and signage, brochures, and other interpretive media.

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## INTERPRETIVE THEMES AND TOPICS

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The rich palate of natural features, historic events, wildlife and ecology within the region provides abundant opportunity to develop wayside exhibits on these topics.

The intrinsic qualities of each portion of the Byway and the issues that affect them form the focus for the exhibits. The existing interpretive themes for Byway segments have been developed as part of this plan, which fit into an overall Byway theme. These themes and associated interpretive topics are summarized in the table below:

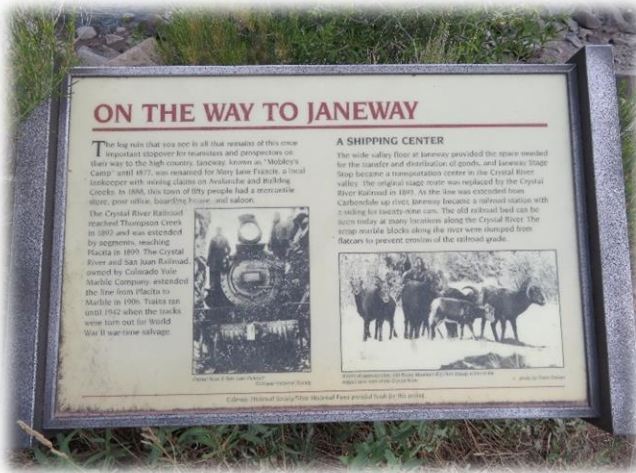
Overall Byway Interpretive Theme: Cultural History and the Natural World	
Byway Segment	Interpretive Theme
Highway 133 - Carbondale to the Forest boundary	History and Culture of the Lower Crystal River Valley
Highway 133 - Forest boundary to McClure Pass	History and Leisure: The contrast of use yesterday and today.
Highway 133 - McClure Pass to Gunnison County Road 12	Forces of Nature
Highways 133 & 92 - Gunnison County Road 12 to Black Mesa	Productive Land - Vulnerable Land
Highways 92 & 50 - Black Mesa to southwest of Gunnison	Spectacular Recreational Opportunities, the Importance of Water
Highways 50 & 135 - SW of Gunnison to Crested Butte	Lands in Transition
Gunnison County Road 12 - Crested Butte to Kebler Pass	Our Mining Heritage
Gunnison County Road 12- Kebler Pass to Highway 133	Scenic Panoramas, Our Mining Heritage

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## WAYSIDE EXHIBITS/INTERPRETIVE PANELS

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It is recognized that interpretation can provide not only enjoyment and enrichment of an activity or place, but it can educate as well. In this sense it can affect behavior. Interpretation, in the form of environmental education, is one of the best means of informing visitors regarding the environmental and cultural sensitivities of this region. It can, therefore, be a significant and important element in the protection of Byway resources.



It is important to monitor the existing system of exhibits, and to report maintenance requirements to the appropriate entity should an exhibit panel need updating or replacement. High altitude south-facing panels are particularly subject to sun damage and to damage by severe winter conditions.

An additional location for a panel or panels not currently available would be at or near the junction of Black Canyon Road and Colorado Highway 92. Travelers turning here to visit Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and/or the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area may have little advance information as to what lies ahead. Exhibit panels located here could be a useful tool to inform

travelers about the areas to visit, and road and seasonal conditions that can be expected.

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### OTHER INTERPRETIVE MEDIA

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Other opportunities exist to provide interpretive material to the visiting public and the formats for them will grow with changing technology. A video could be developed that highlights the intrinsic values found along the Byway and encourages visitor behavior which help protect these values. The video could represent each of the seasons and discuss a wide range of recreational opportunities, community activities, natural and cultural highlights, etc. Copies could be made available to local area schools and organizations to build awareness of Byway issues and gain support for Byway goals. It could also be available via internet streaming or over cellular networks; however, it should be noted that electronic coverage is very limited while driving the loop. Travelers should be advised to download such podcasts prior to starting their drive.

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### SIGNAGE AND PARKING

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Colorado Department of Transportation controls the roadside signage posted along the Byway. The Steering Committee has made a conscious decision to limit the amount of signage to a minimum necessary to provide information, education, direction, and safety messages. The Steering Committee should continue to work with CDOT to review roadside signage and facilities and to comment as proposals are being considered.

There are several CDOT supplied West Elk Loop Scenic Byway logo signs along the route, usually placed before and/or after major road intersections.

Education materials and locations have been selected to enhance the traveler educational experience, and to emphasize the intrinsic resources so that they can be enjoyed and at the same time be protected. Additional signage should be extremely limited, such as those needed for directional and safety purposes.



Pullouts to view interpretive panels exist along the Byway. They generally have ingress and egress to pull off on graveled surfaces with parking for 2 or 3 cars. Other pullouts along the Byway provide opportunities for to enjoy panoramic views or points of interest, with parking surfaces either graveled or paved. The document "West Elk Loop Byway Signage" serves as a catalog of all the signs along the Byway.

## ACTION ITEMS

Action Item	Time Frame	Responsibility
Monitor wayside interpretive panels for needed updates, damage, and normal wear and tear. Report conditions and recommend actions to maintain the panels in good condition.	Biannually, spring and fall	Byway Steering Committee
Continue to coordinate with existing and potential partners and sources to secure funds to cover the cost of interpretive panel updates and replacement.	Ongoing, as needed	Byway Steering Committee
Continue to coordinate with existing and potential partners to assure accuracy of wayside panels, brochures, publications, and other materials.	Ongoing	Byway Steering Committee, including member(s) with ties to or interest in agencies and associations that are existing or potential partners
Continue production of the informational brochure, including updating information if needed. Distribute the brochure through visitor centers, chambers, and tourism associations.	Inventory each fall; distribute as needed.	Byway Steering Committee
Review the effectiveness of Byway environmental stewardship messages by monitoring the condition of waysides, byway resources, current concerns and opportunities. Continue to seek ways to encourage Byway travelers to be sensitive to the impacts they make on the environment, and to encourage appropriate etiquette to sustain the Byway's intrinsic qualities (such as <i>leave no trace</i> concepts).	Ongoing	Byway Steering Committee
Investigate and develop a Byway interpretive and informational site at or near the junction of Colorado Highway 92 and Black Canyon Road. Topics may include the National Park, Gunnison Gorge NCA, Crawford State Park, road conditions, recreation opportunities, etc.	May 2021	Byway Steering Committee in coordination with NPS, BLM, CPW, and Delta County
Review Byway interpretive materials, exhibits and facilities to keep them current and identify the need for new themes, information, and/or facilities.	Ongoing	Byway Steering Committee
Determine a process to make the Byway Guidebook, <i>Elk Mountains Odyssey</i> , available in digital format for free or nominal charge, by partnering with IT or marketing specialist. Different formats (pdf, doc, and mp3) are currently available.	May 2020	Byway Steering Committee, IT and/or marketing partner
Reprint the Byway Guidebook, <i>Elk Mountains Odyssey</i> should funding become available.		Byway Steering Committee with author

## CHAPTER 5 - TRANSPORTATION (HIGHWAYS, TRANSIT, AND TRAILS)

The segment of State Highway 133 from Carbondale to the summit of McClure Pass is within the Colorado Department of Transportation's Intermountain Transportation Planning Region; the remainder of the Byway lies within the Gunnison Valley Transportation Planning Region.

Some limited public and private transit exist on portions of the Byway, more particularly associated with Gunnison, and Crested Butte. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Trail opportunities are numerous in certain areas along the Byway. Existing and potential trails will also be discussed later in this chapter, with an emphasis on non-motorized opportunities. Trails provide an opportunity for Byway travelers to gain a more intimate experience of the Byway and its natural and historical resources.

### HIGHWAY SEGMENTS

The 206 miles of Byway offers alternating mountainous and valley driving. Much of it is meandering, whether along river drainages or across mountain passes. Drivers also experience elevation change of about 4,600 feet, from 5,351 feet at Hotchkiss, to 9,980 feet atop Kebler Pass.

The entire Byway is paved except for portions of Gunnison County Road 12 (Kebler Pass Road).

State Highway 133 from Carbondale to Hotchkiss (67 miles) is a two-lane paved road maintained in good condition. It reaches an elevation of 8,763 feet at McClure Pass. From Carbondale to the upper end of Paonia Reservoir, it has a minimal paved shoulder of 2 feet or less. Portions of this road are periodically impacted by mud or rockslides that require closures or restrictions to effect repairs.

From Hotchkiss, the Byway heads southeast on State Highway 92 for 52.5 miles. This is a two-lane paved road, characterized by long, straight, open stretches in the northern portion and tortuous winding turns in the south as it weaves along the rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.



The Byway then follows U.S. Highway 50 to the town of Gunnison (26 miles). The segment follows the shore of Blue Mesa Reservoir, with alternating straight-aways and gentle meanders, then winds more sharply through the Gunnison River Canyon before entering the expansive Gunnison River Valley.

From Gunnison, the Byway is located on State Highway 135 which connects to Crested Butte (27.5 miles). This road travels through gentle open valleys characterized by long straight segments.

The final link in the Byway is Gunnison County Road 12, connecting Crested Butte to State Highway 133 (32 miles). It is a mixed surfaced road, some pavement and some graveled, that winds its way up and over Kebler Pass to an elevation of 9,980 feet. This segment of road is closed to automobile traffic during the winter months; however, it is open to snowmobile and Nordic ski use during the winter.

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## TRAFFIC VOLUME

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As would be expected, the highest traffic volumes are in or near the larger communities of Carbondale and Gunnison. After these two areas, traffic volume drops off. The highest counts outside of these cities include the segment of U.S. Highway 50 between Sapinero and Gunnison, State Highway 133 between Carbondale and Redstone, State Highway 135 between Gunnison and Crested Butte, and State Highway 133 between Hotchkiss and Paonia. State Highway 92 and the Kebler Pass Road (CR 12) have the lowest volume of traffic.

The reader may visit the Colorado Department of Transportation's [OTIS website](#) (Online Transportation Information System) to access a variety of information and data about the highway system. Also refer to Figure 6 (Appendix C), Traffic and Safety.

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## SIGNAGE

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There are two general types of signage along the Byway. The first is the standard regulatory and advisory signage provided by CDOT for all state highways. These include stop signs, yield signs, speed limit signs, winding road signs, etc. The second general type of sign that is allowed within the road right-of-way is Tourist Oriented Directional Signs (TODS). TODS is official signing that gives specific information regarding activities or sites of "significant interest to the traveling public". They can include motorist service information (gas, food, lodging, etc.), tourist attraction, or commercial interest signs.

Among the special TODS signage are the standard State Scenic Byway identifier signs with the columbine flower logo which mark the Byway route. These are placed at regular intervals along the Byway and at or near all Byway intersections.

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## EXISTING ROAD SHOULDER CONDITIONS

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Road shoulder conditions generally fall into three classes:

- Paved roads with 4' or wider paved shoulders
- Paved roads with less than 4' paved shoulders
- Paved roads with no shoulders, and unpaved roads with no defined shoulders

Road shoulder and other conditions were used to prepare the *Colorado Scenic Byways Bicycle Map* (see link below).

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## HIGHWAY AND BICYCLE SAFETY

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As could be expected, the areas with higher traffic volume generally experience more traffic accidents, and State Highway 92, with the lowest volume of traffic, experiences the lowest accident rate (refer to Figure 6, Appendix C). Because traffic data is available for broad segments only, it is difficult to identify particular hazard areas.

Responsibility for the condition and safety of the Byway road and right-of-way is the primary responsibility of various state and local agencies. The Byway organization's primary responsibility is one of coordination and advocacy for the interests of the Byway and the traveling public.

An active and ongoing coordination program with individuals of agencies who have the primary responsibility for highway condition and safety should be part of the plan. In addition, addressing specific issues that might from time to time arise that concern highway condition and safety should be part of the Byway committee members' ongoing responsibility.

The following resources may be of value as current and future references pertaining to road conditions, projects, bicycle accommodation, and safety:

[Transportation Region Gunnison Valley Plan](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[Transportation Region Intermountain Plan](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[Statewide Transportation Improvement Program \(STIP\)](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[The Whole System Whole Safety Initiative](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[Colorado Strategic Highway Safety Plan](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[Colorado Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

[Colorado Scenic Byways Bicycle Map](#), Colorado Department of Transportation.

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## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSIT

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There is limited public and private transit serving the Byway. Existing services include:

- [Roaring Fork Transportation Authority](#) (RFTA), provides year around bus service between Aspen/Snowmass and Glenwood Springs. Although there are stops in Carbondale, no service is provided south along State Highway 133.
- [Gunnison Valley Regional Transportation Authority](#) (RTA) provides year around bus service within Gunnison and between Gunnison and Mt. Crested Butte, with stops at Almont, Crested Butte South, and Crested Butte.
- [Alpine Express](#) operates shuttle service between Gunnison Airport and Crested Butte, and between Montrose Airport and Crested Butte.
- [Telluride Express](#) provides shuttle service between Gunnison Airport and Telluride Ski Mountain.
- [Bustang](#) is operated by the Colorado Department of Transportation. This interregional bus service links local transit systems to the highest traveled corridors in the state (e.g., one line connects Gunnison to Denver, and another Grand Junction to Denver (with a stop at Glenwood Springs).

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## EXISTING TRAILS AND TRAIL PLANS

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The USFS maintains a considerable network of trails and roads that provide access across National Forest System (NFS) lands. A travel management plan, developed for each forest, is illustrated on Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM). The MVUM shows in limited detail motorized and mechanized travel routes. Forest specific maps, for example the Gunnison Basin Public Lands map, shows in greater detail, trails, roads, campgrounds, trailheads and other facilities.

Current and new trail proposals on NFS lands must be consistent with the travel management plan and activities coordinated with the agency. New proposals are subject to approval only after evaluation and analysis through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

MVUM and other maps can be found [here](#).

The recreational benefits of the Byway are varied and include exposure to cultural and historic aspects (e.g., mining and agricultural) and other intrinsic qualities (scenic landscape, wildlife) and related activities. These benefits can all be further enhanced by development and use of trails. Increased interest in road and mountain biking is becoming increasingly important, and this interest adds to the economic wellbeing of the area.

A trail feasibility study completed in May 2004 by Newland Project Resources, Inc., examined possible trail alignments that would connect Carbondale to Crested Butte on public lands. Portions of the alignment have been completed. In Pitkin County, an 8-foot-wide paved trail now connects Carbondale to the KOA, and in Gunnison County the Old Wagon Road Trail has been completed as a single track from Crested Butte to 1 mile past the new bridge over Anthracite Creek. The 2004 report can be found [here](#).

Sources for trail information include Federal and State agencies, as well as regional trail advocacy groups. Examples of data available include USFS, BLM and NPS maps, Gunnison County Trails Master Plan, Pitkin County Open Space and Trails system information, and others.

Some trails offer pedestrian and bicycle travel opportunities parallel to the Byway. These tend to be limited in distance. Others include trails that lead away from the Byway but provide wonderful experiences within wilderness and other wild lands. Two organizations in particular are striving to increase trail availability in the vicinity of the Byway — [Pitkin County's Open Space and Trails](#) and [Gunnison County's Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee](#). Additional information on the trails of Pitkin County are available on the [Pitkin Outside](#) website.

The United States Forest Service also maintains a considerable network of trails that provide access across national forest lands. The agency has developed a travel management plan for each forest, and current and new trail proposals on forest lands must be consistent with the travel management plan and activities coordinated with the agency. Additionally, new proposals are subject to approval only after evaluation and analysis through the NEPA process.

The following websites provide a wealth of information on existing trails and trail systems on the byway, please explore on your own to find more pertinent information.

[Trails.com Hiking Trails in Colorado](#)

[Trails.com Mountain Biking in Colorado](#)

[Carbondale's Outdoor Recreation Webpage](#)

[Pitkin Outside Trail Finder Interactive Map](#)

[Aspen Trail Finder – Carbondale Trails](#)

[North Fork Valley Outdoor Activities](#)

[Road Bicycle Routes in Delta County](#)

[Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park North Rim Hiking Trails](#)

[Curecanti National Recreation Area Hiking Trails](#)

[Crested Butte & Gunnison Trails](#)

[Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association Trails](#)

[Gunnison Trails](#)

[Gunnison / Crested Butte Hiking and Biking](#)

[Colorado Bicycle and Byways Map](#)

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**BYWAY TRAILS STATUS**


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Byway Segment	Current Status
Hwy 133 - Carbondale to Redstone	A paved 10' wide trail connecting Carbondale to the KOA is completed. Beyond, 133 has no shoulders and a sharp drop off
Hwy 133 - Redstone to McClure Pass	Narrow shoulders Old RR grade and wagon road has been identified by a trail study The next phase of work will be planning and NEPA
Hwy 133 - McClure Pass to Kebler Pass Road	Narrow road shoulder Geologic instability (rock fall, mudslides) challenging road and trail maintenance Old wagon road and CR 2 to Erickson springs offer an alternative
Hwy 133 - Kebler Pass Road to Hotchkiss	Inconsistent shoulders, high truck traffic, winding roads makes this less desirable Side roads paralleling 133 are a possible and safer alternative
Hwy 92 - Hotchkiss to Black Canyon Rim	No parallel trail exists Narrow shoulders The community feels apprehensive additional bike travel; a variety of routes converge at Crawford urging bicyclists onto 92 Some agricultural roads may offer interesting but short reprieve
Hwy 92 - Black Canyon Rim to Hwy. 50	Very windy, narrow road No shoulders, but most travel slowly Low traffic volume on Hwy 92
Hwy 50 to Gunnison	Existing 4' plus shoulders, safer biking
Hwy 135 - Gunnison to Almont	Inconsistent shoulders Narrow, winding roads in canyons Some parallel trail completed north of Gunnison Entire route is paralleled by abandoned railroad grade
Hwy 135 - Almont to Crested Butte	Inconsistent shoulders Potential use of a 4-mile segment of abandoned railroad grade on private lands, subject to willing landowner
Gunnison CR 12 - Crested Butte to Hwy 133	A portion of a parallel trail has been completed (Old Kebler Pass Wagon Road) East side of Kebler partially paved Mostly gravel road west of the summit (more appropriate for mountain bikes)

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**PLAN ELEMENTS FOR TRAILS**


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When looking at the Byway in total, much of the route has opportunities for providing a non-motorized trail. Biking is a popular recognized activity that brings economic and health benefit and enhances community character.

The following recommendations are made based on the assumption that the trail does not need to be on or adjacent to the Byway for the entire length if the traveling experience is roughly equivalent, and that the best perspective is the long view. For example, the Muddy Pass segment of Highway 133 is not on the 20-year planning horizon so use of an existing but somewhat distant trail is proposed. On the other hand, scheduled improvements of Highway 135 are several years from completion but will likely be completed

prior to implementation of some other new initiative. Therefore, use of the Highway 135 shoulder by cyclists is the only viable (albeit unsafe) option for the near term. The Table below provides trail recommendations based on the above assumptions.

Byway Segment	Trail Recommendation
Hwy 133 – KOA to Redstone	Continue to work with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails as they continue planning for trail from KOA to Redstone
Hwy 133 – Redstone to McClure Pass	Continue to work with Pitkin County Open Space and Trails as they continue planning/NEPA for trail from Redstone to McClure Pass
Hwy 133 – McClure Pass junction with County Road 12 (Kebler Pass Road)	Work with the Forest Service and Gunnison County to implement recommendations of the 2004 Trail Feasibility Study to determine trail alignment(s) and implement planning process Encourage CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 133 when feasible
Hwy 133 – Junction with County Road 12 (Kebler Pass Road) to Hotchkiss	Use Highway 133 to east of Paonia where improvements end Working with the counties, determine if agricultural roads exist from east of Paonia to Hotchkiss that could be designated as an off-highway trail route Encourage CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 133 when feasible
Hwy 92 – Hotchkiss to Forest Boundary	Working with the counties, determine if agricultural roads exist from Hotchkiss that could be designated as an off-highway trail route Continue to use Highway 92 (generally open and straight) while encouraging CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 92 when feasible
Hwy 92 – Forest Boundary to Hwy 50	Work with the county to determine if the Hartman Trail could serve an alternate, non-motorized trail for this segment Encourage CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 92 when feasible
Hwy 50 – Junction of Hwy 92 to Gunnison	Use existing paved 6'-8' shoulder throughout
Hwy 135 – Gunnison to Almont	Use Highway 135 and the existing trail north of Gunnison where it exists Pursue development of separated route using railroad grade or alternate trail Encourage CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 135 when feasible
Hwy. 135 – Almont to Crested Butte	Pursue development of separated route using railroad grade or alternate trail Encourage CDOT to widen shoulders on Highway 135 when feasible
Gunnison County Road 12 – Crested Butte to Kebler Pass	Continue working with Gunnison County to provide a connector from Crested Butte to the winter parking area
Gunnison County Road 12 – Kebler Pass to junction with Hwy 133	Continue working with the Forest Service and Gunnison County to extend the trail past Anthracite Creek, and consider the recommendations from the 2004 Trail Feasibility Study (e.g., using the Dark Canyon Trail) for possible trail alignments

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## IMPLEMENTATION

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Implementation as it relates to the Trails element of the plan has more to do with continued coordination efforts to move the planning and development forward. Much remains to be done. The Byway Steering Committee can play a meaningful role as the sponsor of the Byway trail plan in seeing this plan come to life.

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## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Advocate for the design and construction of non-motorized recreation and transportation trails to accompany the Byway that generally connects communities using public lands.

**Goal:** Advocate for 4' wide shoulders along highways where that does not exist.

*Objective:* Continue to partner with outside trail interests and agencies in the region in support of development of the trails.

**Action Plan –** Long-term action items needed to maintain implementation of the transportation plan include the following. (Responsibility falls on the Byway Steering Committee when action is required.)

Action Item
Advocate bicycle access and safety as an issue that should be addressed by working with road management agencies (state and county).
Review proposed signage program for bicycle safety.
Establish contact and regular coordination with trail advocacy groups and potential funding partners.
Seek funding for studies to continue progress on Byway trails routes and implementation.
Seek funding to facilitate required environmental reviews for proposed trail route.
Continue to evaluate pull-outs to identify those where enhancements are needed, or safety is an issue.
Work with the Intermountain and Gunnison Valley Transportations Planning Regions to get a consistent 4-foot shoulder along the entire Byway.
Continue to monitor conditions of official Byway columbine signs and report needs to the appropriate county.

**Goal:** Provide a safe, efficient and pleasurable opportunities for drivers and trail users through a well-designed and maintained highway and trail system, recognizing that the primary responsibility in this area lies with the agency or entity wherein lies the particular road or trail segment (such as CDOT, county public works departments, state and federal agency, et.al.).

*Objective:* The Byway Steering Committee members should primarily be advocates and provide support as needed and as available. They should establish and maintain an active dialogue and ongoing coordination with appropriate contacts at the responsible agencies and entities.

Refer to Appendix G for a list of trail resources, contacts and funding sources.

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## CHAPTER 6 - MARKETING

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### THE BYWAY'S MARKETING PHILOSOPHY

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Marketing of the Byway takes place from a number of perspectives, in a number of ways, and by groups and agencies outside the Byway organization such as chambers of commerce and tourism entities. Many of these groups identify the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway as an attraction in their various marketing materials. The objective of marketing for the Byway and allied entities is very similar – to identify a range of local attractions which would entice the traveler to either journey here or, once here, to linger longer.

Byway produced brochures and related media focus on the five intrinsic qualities for which the Byway was established:

1. Scenic (parks, forests, wilderness, open space, waterways, panoramic vistas, etc);
2. Natural (wildlife, migration corridors and habitat, botanical and geological components);
3. Historic and Cultural (the byway's story, specific sites of historic interest, ranching, agriculture, mining, and artistic elements);
4. Archeological (the pre-historic story); and
5. Recreational (for example, hiking, biking, photography, camping, boating, fishing, equestrian, and hunting).

Marketing communication media and products produced by the Byway are designed to serve as an interpretive guide to visitors.

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### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Seek to educate visitors to enhance traveling experience while protecting the Byway's intrinsic values.

*Objective:* Identify and coordinate with regional tourism efforts to clarify the marketing goal of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway.

*Objective:* Provide information regarding the sensitive nature of the area's resources and attractions in any marketing efforts of the Byway organization and seek to work cooperatively with other marketing entities to ensure accuracy of information regarding the Byway.

*Objective:* Coordinate information sharing of events and activities that occur along the Byway to minimize conflicting dates and to encourage Byway-wide traveling scenarios.

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### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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There are numerous entities from state and national to local agencies and organizations that promote the Byway to people outside the region. The special qualities of this region require that the Byway provide interpretive information and messages of environmental sensitivity, through local visitor contact points, to those who do come.

Providing a message of environmental sensitivity is essential to preserving the intrinsic qualities that make the Byway so special. It is important to include a clear message of sensitivity of the environment and way of life which encourages visitors to act in ways that help protect these values. This message can also be reinforced through Byway sponsored media.

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## MARKETING PARTNERS

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Refer to the Appendix E for a listing of agencies and organizations active in marketing within the region.

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## IMPLEMENTATION

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Action Item	Time Frame	Responsibility
Produce and distribute an annual report highlighting achievements, successes, and events attributable to the efforts of the Byway	Annually	Steering Committee
Develop and update Byway communication channels	Ongoing	Steering Committee
Maintain coordination with outside marketing entities and provide guidance and input as appropriate	Ongoing	Steering Committee
Continue to supply local outlets with brochures as needed	Ongoing	Steering Committee
Review marketing outlets and related informational materials of outside entities including the state and national Byway websites to assure accuracy and to enhance opportunities	Periodically	Steering Committee
Monitor Byway marketing communication channels (brochures, social media, etc.) for public and agency feedback with the purpose of improving the traveler experience	Periodically	Steering Committee

## CHAPTER 7 - BYWAY ORGANIZATION

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The Byway management team, also known as the Steering Committee, functions as an informal organization representing three geographic zones, or 'Chapters:' 1) the Crystal River; 2) the North Fork; and 3) the Gunnison. The Chapters may meet independently to address local issues, and to work on local projects.

The Steering Committee meets three to four times a year to share information and to work on Byway-wide issues and projects. The Committee may elect to meet more frequently if needed. The Committee may also establish subcommittees to work on specific issues or projects. The work of the Committee is guided by this Corridor Management Plan and its Bylaws.

The informal structure of the Committee enables the participation of a variety of partners, including local communities and government representatives, state and federal agency representatives, and interested organizations and individuals.

The Byway is a 501c3 non-profit organization under the rules of the Internal Revenue Service. On occasion, assistance may be requested and given by affiliated agencies and organizations, such as other interpretive associations. These organizations may provide specific assistance, including grants administration.

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## CHAPTER 8 – CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

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### PLAN DEVELOPMENT

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Map 7 (Appendix C) illustrates some of the key physical elements of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Plan. This plan was developed over the course of a little more than a year through the combined efforts of the West Elk Byway Steering Committee and their consultant, EDAW, Inc. During this time, the key elements of the plan (resource protection, interpretation, trails, highway condition and safety, marketing and Byway organization and administration) were investigated, discussed, documented, and formalized through a cooperative and iterative process, which began with the development of goals and objectives (see Appendix B).

One of the fundamental underlying objectives of the study was to identify components and actions that would go beyond simply meeting the goals and objectives established for each of the individual study elements. It was seen as essential to the success of the plan that the actions recommended be mutually reinforcing, thereby integrating these separate plan elements into a cohesive management plan that would meet the overall mission of the Byway as stated in the Vision Statement:

*“Protect, enjoy and share the scenic, historic, natural and cultural characteristics of the communities linked by the Byway.”*

Other key objectives that guided the development of the plan were that the actions are feasible and implementable, and that they meet the specific needs of those who would implement and live with it. To these ends, a range of alternative approaches and actions were reviewed through the course of the study, and those that were the most appropriate in meeting the needs of the Steering Committee in achieving their Vision of the Byway were ultimately selected.

This plan will help to assure that the qualities and intrinsic values will remain intact into the indefinite future, despite the significant pressures these lands are facing.

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### PLAN OVERVIEW

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The plan is detailed in terms of the specific action/implementation items outlined in the various sections of this plan document. Those physical elements that lend themselves to mapping, are also illustrated in Map 7 (Appendix C), the Conceptual Master Plan, as discussed below.

Resource protection is one of the central elements of the plan. Some of the outcomes and action items of the resource protection plan include:

- Identification of resource protection priority areas
- Establishment of a Byway overlay Zone
- Documentation of lands with existing protection mechanisms in place

The High and Very High priority resource protection lands are shown on this Map. In all cases, these lands are private lands with some combination of development pressure and vulnerability to this pressure. Also pictured are the other private lands that would be covered by the Byway overlay zone (all private lands, regardless of their priority designation would be subject to the Byway overlay zone).

Agency lands are classified into two broad types: those that are essentially in multiple use management, and those that have some special protective designation. In the first category are all BLM lands, all state lands, and all Forest Service lands except the designated wilderness areas. The resources located there are given a management prescription within the broad multiple-use concept, based on the quality and type of resources, the prevailing public sentiment, and other agency considerations. These lands are then governed by management plans that are periodically updated and revised.

The management prescriptions are therefore subject to change. Despite the management prescription, which can range between a resource utilization emphasis and resource protection emphasis, these lands are always protected from private development by virtue of their agency status.

The second type of land is those lands designated with essentially a perpetual protection status. They include Forest Service Wilderness Areas and all National Park Service lands.

These lands are not subject to the periodic revisions to their management status and will remain essentially unchanged, except for minor recreation related modifications at Curecanti NRA.

Also shown on Map 7 (Appendix C), is the location of possible future interpretive sites. The interpretive section of the Plan (Section IV) details the specific types of topics that might be associated with each of these sites. They range from those designed to simply inform to those designed to educate. The intent is to provide these sites at regular intervals along the Byway so as to provide frequent opportunities to stop and be informed by messages that will provide an overall understanding of this region, as well as messages of environmental sensitivity, designed to be continually reinforcing.

In addition, the Conceptual Master Plan includes an indication of the location of a non-motorized trail to accompany the Byway. As this map indicates, and the text of the plan explains in greater detail, the trail location would include a combination of segments on the shoulder of the Byway, and variants that would be located on parallel trails. A variety of actions are needed to see this trail system developed as described in the text. The ultimate objective would be to have a complete Byway trail that would provide a combination of on and off-Byway segments that would provide a significantly greater measure of safety than is presently afforded to cyclists, hikers and equestrian users who may tour the Byway.

As noted, the plan contains a much larger number of action items, many of which for various reasons do not lend themselves to a physical representation. This map should therefore be reviewed in context with the full text and other data maps provided.

## APPENDIX A - COLORADO SCENIC & HISTORIC BYWAYS: BACKGROUND

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To review background information on the State of Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway System, follow this link: [The Benefits of Colorado's Scenic and Historic Byways](#)



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## APPENDIX B - GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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### RESOURCE PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Protect the quality, character and integrity of the intrinsic qualities of the region and communities for which the Byway was established.

**Objective:** Understand fully the nature and context of the Byway's intrinsic qualities (both public and private) and identify available protection mechanisms so that these qualities may be properly protected.

*Action:* Periodically review the Resource Protection Chapter of the Corridor Management Plan and evaluate changes on the Byway that have impacted the intrinsic qualities.

*Action:* Meet and or contact county planners and commissioners to inform them of the Byway, and the importance of maintaining and protecting its intrinsic resources.

*Action:* When a development proposal may impact intrinsic resources, review and comment through the county's normal public review process.

*Action:* Coordinate with organizations, such as land trusts, that may provide assistance and/or funding to protect intrinsic resources by utilizing tools identified in this document.

*Action:* Engage ranching, farming, and mining representatives to better understand their views and to establish the basis for long-term dialogue and involvement with them. Promote successes that have been achieved through efforts of coordination and cooperation.

**Objective:** Promote the use of the overlay zone with county planners when considering development proposals under their purview.

*Action:* Establish a mechanism whereas county planners contact the Steering Committee when impacts are suspected from development proposals that are being reviewed.

*Action:* As appropriate, review and comment on such proposals during the planning departments' public review periods.

**Goal:** Enhance the intrinsic qualities of the Byway where appropriate, in ways consistent with the overall objectives of the State Scenic and Historic Byways Program, to rehabilitate, develop, maintain, interpret, and provide accessibility to these sites and resources as appropriate.

**Objective:** Identify opportunities and needs for resource enhancement activities along the Byway.

*Action:* Establish priorities for resource enhancement activities, and periodically review opportunities to accomplish them.

*Action:* Identify individual, interest group and agency resources that are available to assist in moving enhancement projects forward.

*Action:* Monitor Byway conditions to identify needs to apply mitigation tools. Example of issues could be: trash, air and water quality, strip development, traffic speed and volume, water quality, wildlife, signage, access control, kiosk landscaping, and viewshed protection.

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## INTERPRETATION: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Provide an interpretive program to educate, inform and enhance the quality of a visit to the Byway by the public and by local residents, in a manner that will foster an appreciation for the lands, resources and communities along the Byway and promote responsible behavior.

**Objective:** Review current interpretive wayside exhibit program to identify needs and deficiencies.

*Action:* Periodically review contents of interpretive panels to determine if updates or corrections are needed.

*Action:* Annually inspect interpretive panels for damage to determine if any need replacement.

*Action:* Contact NPS and BLM about their interest in establishing wayside exhibits on or near Black Canyon Road, to provide visitors with information prior to their driving to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park or Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area.

**Objective:** Consider utilizing technology to expand interpretive information available to visitors.

*Action:* Consult with tourism and interpretation organizations to determine what technologies might be best, since much of the Byway is without cellular service.

*Action:* Identify funding sources to include new technological services.

**Objective:** Continue to utilize printed materials to meet interpretive needs.

*Action:* Seek funding for reprinting the brochure on an ongoing basis.

*Action:* Continue to distribute the brochure through the Steering Committee members.

*Action:* Determine an avenue to distribute the electronic version *Elk Mountains Odyssey*.

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## TRAILS PLANNING: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Where feasible, promote development of a non-motorized recreation and transportation trail to accompany/parallel the Byway.

**Objective:** Continue to encourage completion of the Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail.

*Action:* Encourage continued efforts being made by Pitkin County Open Space and Trails and the Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee.

**Objective:** For the remainder segments of the Byway, develop a conceptual trail plan for a non-motorized recreation and transportation trail to accompany the Byway (where geographic considerations will not accommodate an off-highway trail, widened shoulders could be considered).

*Action:* Develop a standalone plan for a Byway trail in sufficient detail to provide the Byway organization with future direction. Contents would include strategic goals and objectives, a map of the conceptual alignment and linkages to other trails and points of interest in the region, and funding/partner opportunities.

**Objective:** Continue to explore opportunities to use outside trail interests and agencies in the region in the development of trails.

*Action:* Contact agencies and groups that have trails programs to identify the nature of their programs or plans and their interest in coordinating these activities with the Byway organization.

*Action:* Contact CDOT to identify the nature and schedule of road improvement plans and investigate the receptivity for planning future improvements to include adequate shoulders for bike travel.

*Action:* Continue to seek funding opportunities which could be used as matching funds to achieve trails goals.

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## HIGHWAY CONDITION AND SAFETY: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Provide a safe, efficient and pleasurable driving experience for both tourist and local traffic through a well-designed and maintained highway system; recognizing that the primary responsibility in this area lies with the state and county departments of transportation.

**Objective:** Continue an active dialogue and ongoing coordination with appropriate contact with CDOT and the county highway departments.

*Action:* Identify appropriate persons in the various agencies with whom to initiate contact.

*Action:* Seek to involve representatives from these agencies in the Byway planning effort.

*Action:* Provide regular input on transportation related issues of the Byway to representatives of these agencies.

**Objective:** Continue to evaluate roads, road features, and facilities as they related to the Byway (road conditions, shoulder width, pull-offs, passing lanes and accident records) as an aid in identifying transportation-related issues.

*Action:* Inventory road conditions and request accident information.

*Action:* Map traffic and roadway information in order to aid in identifying highway operation and safety issues.

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## MARKETING: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Generally, seek to manage tourism rather than promote it.

**Objective:** Continue contacting our marketing partners (see Appendix D) to ensure accuracy of information pertaining to traveling the Byway.

*Action:* Identify other regional and local entities involved in marketing the region, initiate a dialogue.

*Action:* Establish an ongoing coordination mechanism with appropriate entities.

**Objective:** Provide information regarding the sensitive nature of the area's resources and attractions in any marketing efforts of the Byway organization and other regional marketing entities.

*Action:* Clarify the de-marketing goal of the Byway.

**Goal:** Implement the Byway marketing strategy.

**Objective:** Use a variety of means in an effort to provide appropriate messages to visitors before and during their visit.

*Action:* Provide visitors with maps, brochures or other printed materials which reinforce the Byway.

*Action:* Integrate appropriate Byway messages into the permanent interpretive exhibits.

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## ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Goal:** Maintain a strong, effective and lasting Byway organization through an informal alliance of community interests and outside agencies.

**Objective:** Continue to identify and seek participation of interested parties and potentially helpful outside entities.

**Objective:** Implement the corridor management plan.

*Action:* Make the corridor management plan publicly available on the Internet.

*Action:* Establish a program to regularly monitor and review the implementation of the corridor management plan.

**Objective:** Assert through consistent and positive means the Byway organization's rightful stewardship and leadership voice.

*Action:* Advocate the importance of the quality and character of the lands, resources, and developments within the Byway corridor.

*Action:* Contact Byway governmental entities with regard to same.

*Action:* Build a solid base of community understanding and support for the Byway sufficient to motivate active, broad-based citizen participation. Use publications, web site, etc.

*Action:* Recruit a stable financial base of support with partners and volunteers.

**Objective:** Ongoing meetings of the Steering Committee to review Byway goals, activities, and to coordinate the exchange of information between the various communities and entities along the Byway. Assert through consistent and positive means the Byway organization's rightful stewardship and leadership voice.

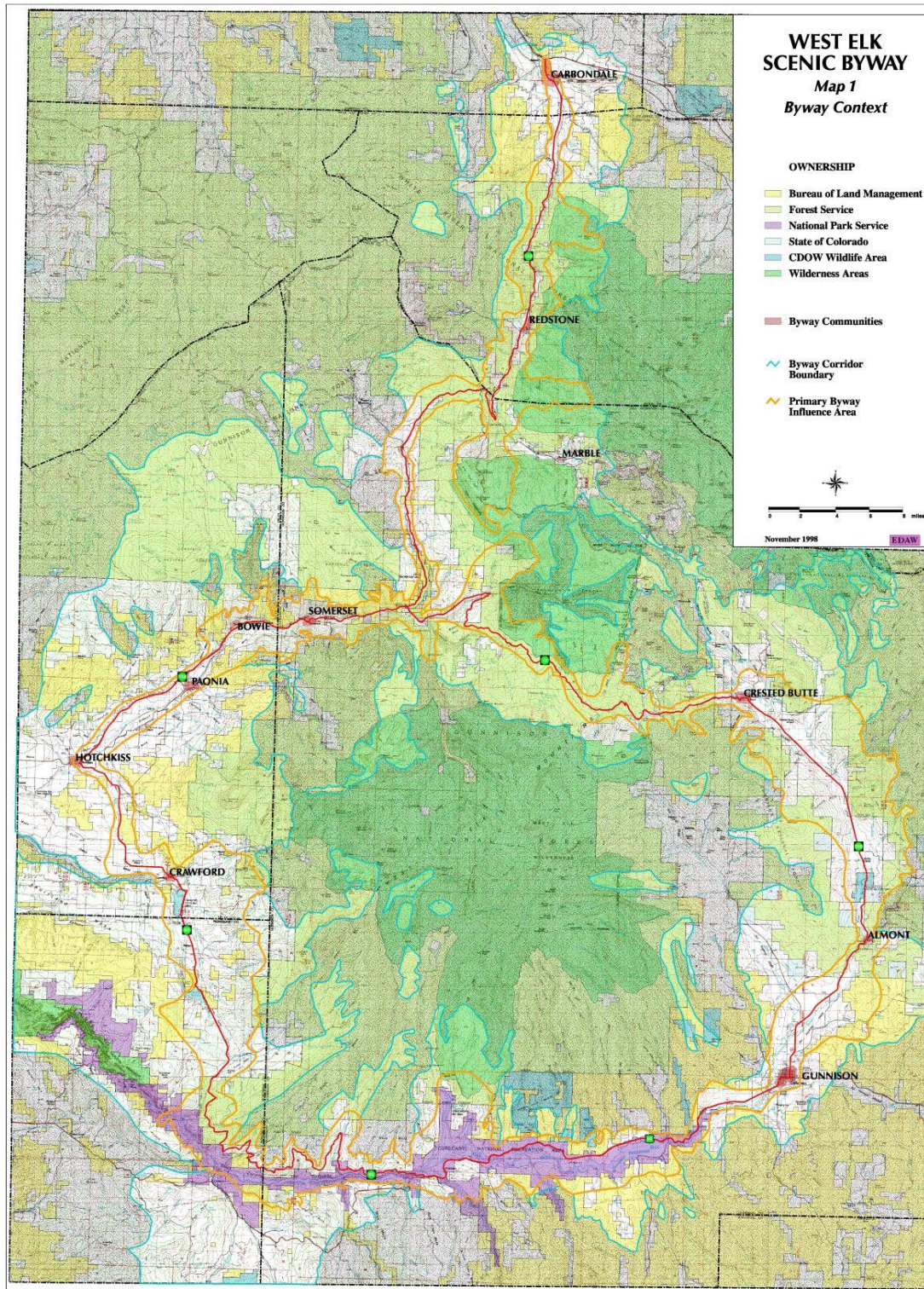
*Action:* Meet a minimum of three times per year.

*Action:* Rotate the location of Steering Committee meetings.

*Action:* Maintain an updated contact list so members and interested parties are aware of meetings dates and agenda items.

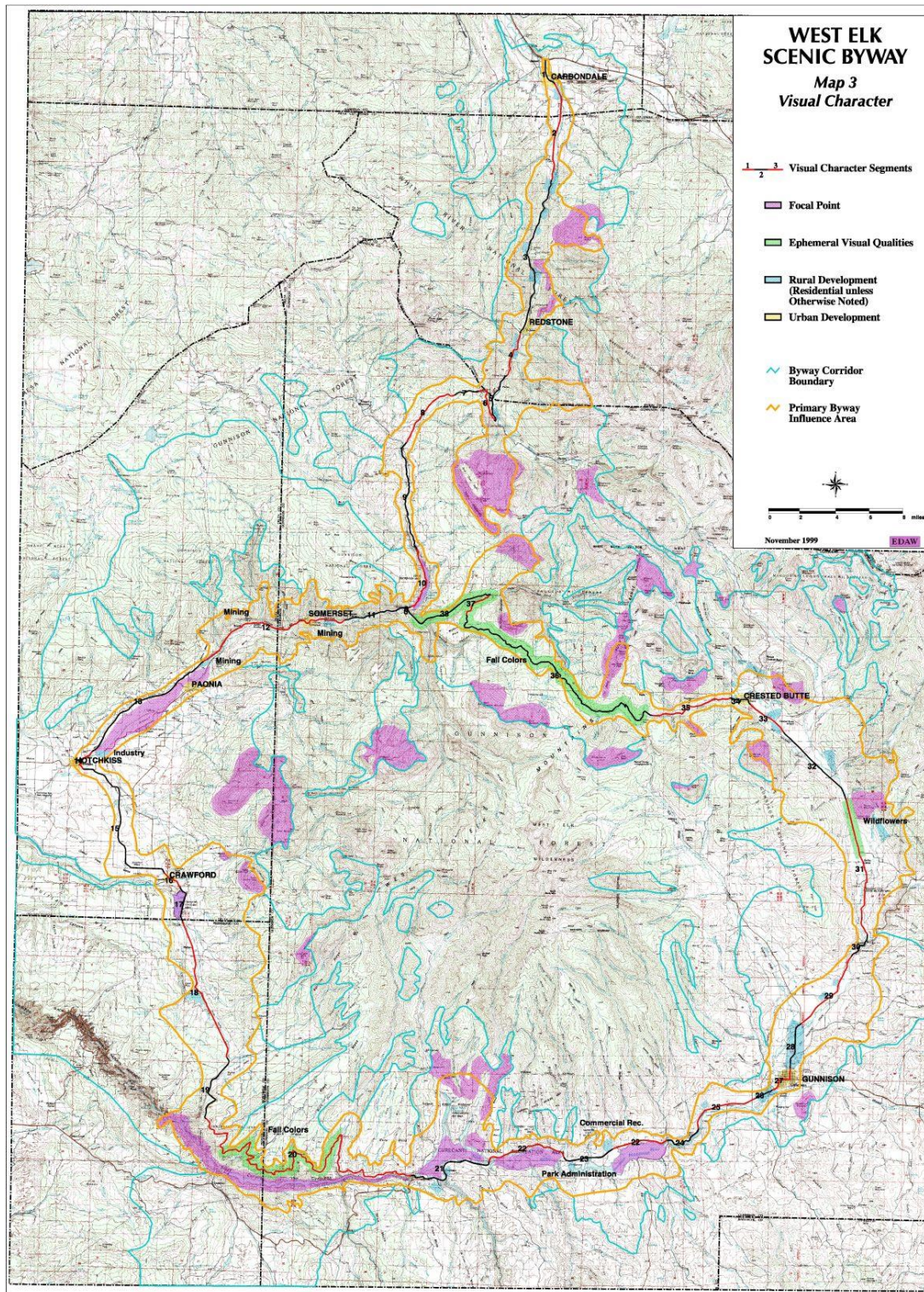
## APPENDIX C – MAPS

## MAP 1 – BYWAY CONTEXT

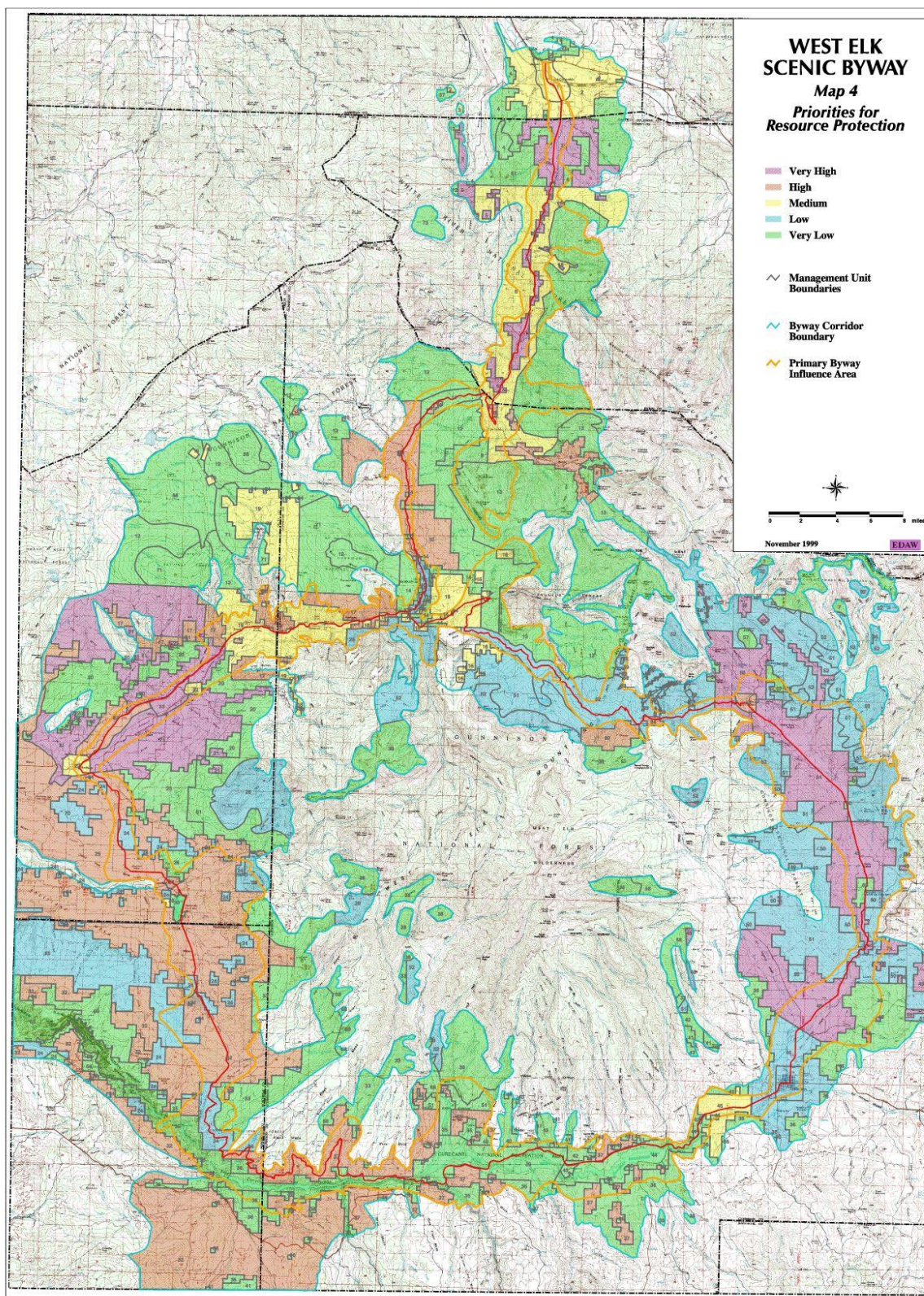




# MAP 3 – VISUAL CHARACTER



## MAP 4 – PRIORITIES FOR RESOURCE PROTECTION



## MAP 5 – INFRASTRUCTURE

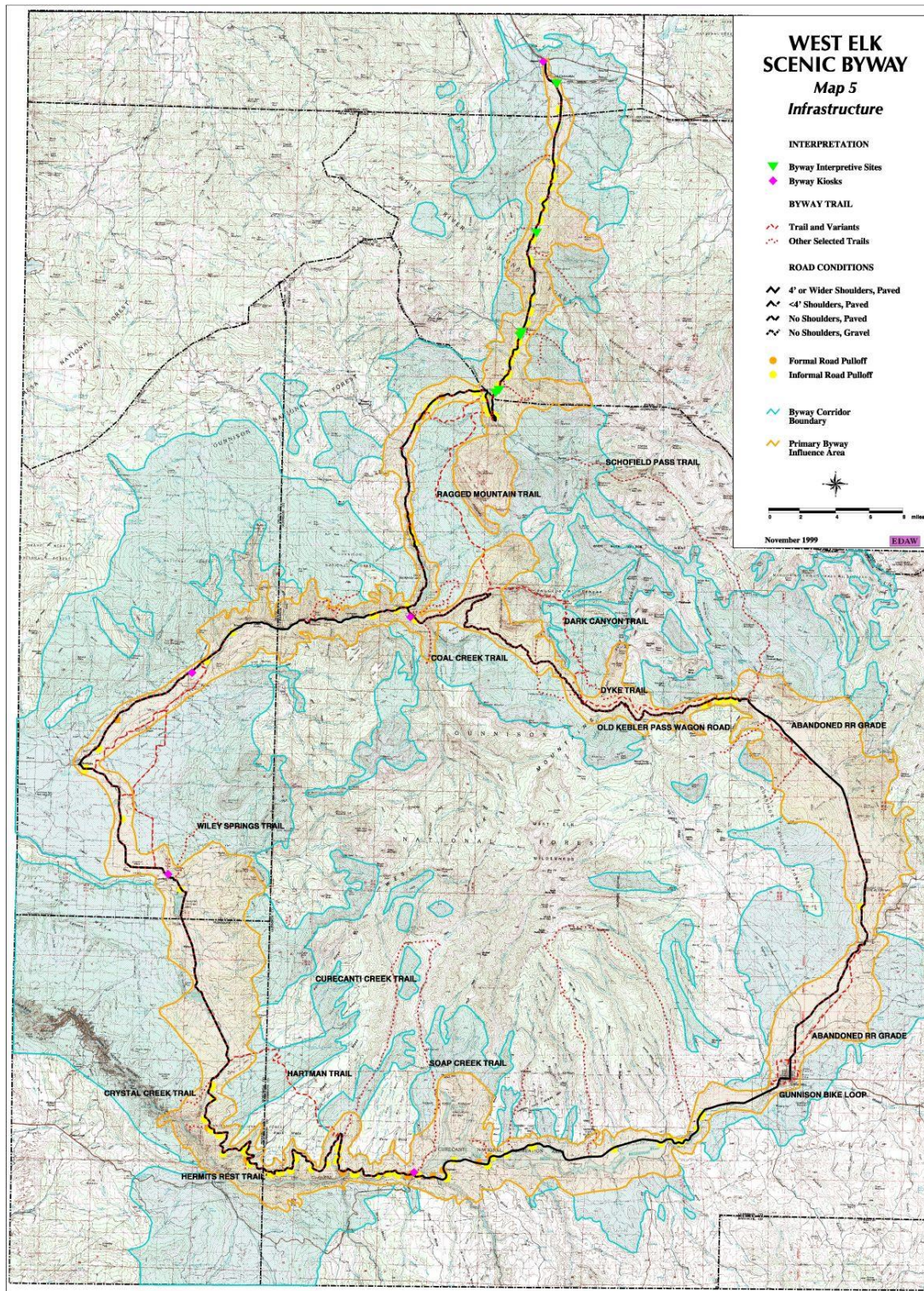


FIGURE 6 – TRAFFIC AND SAFETY

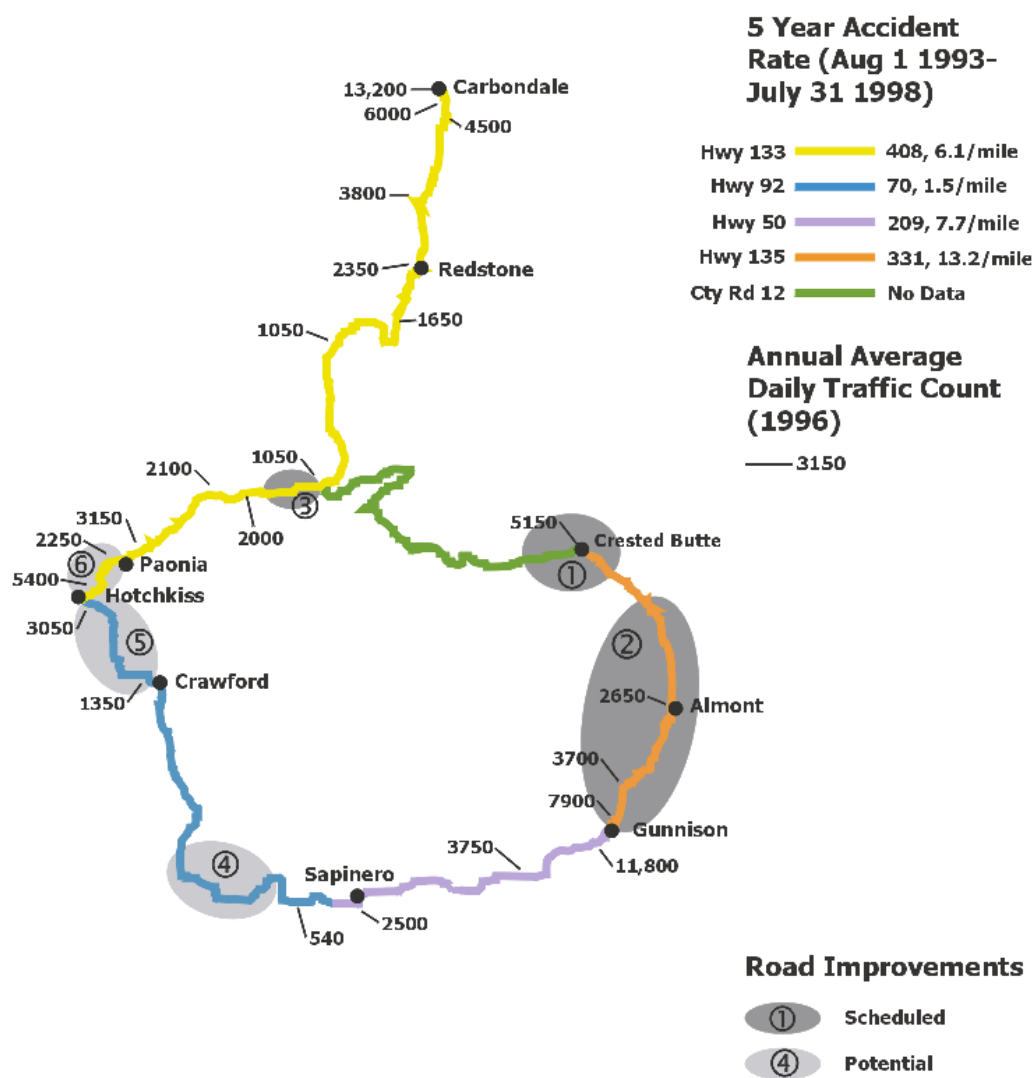
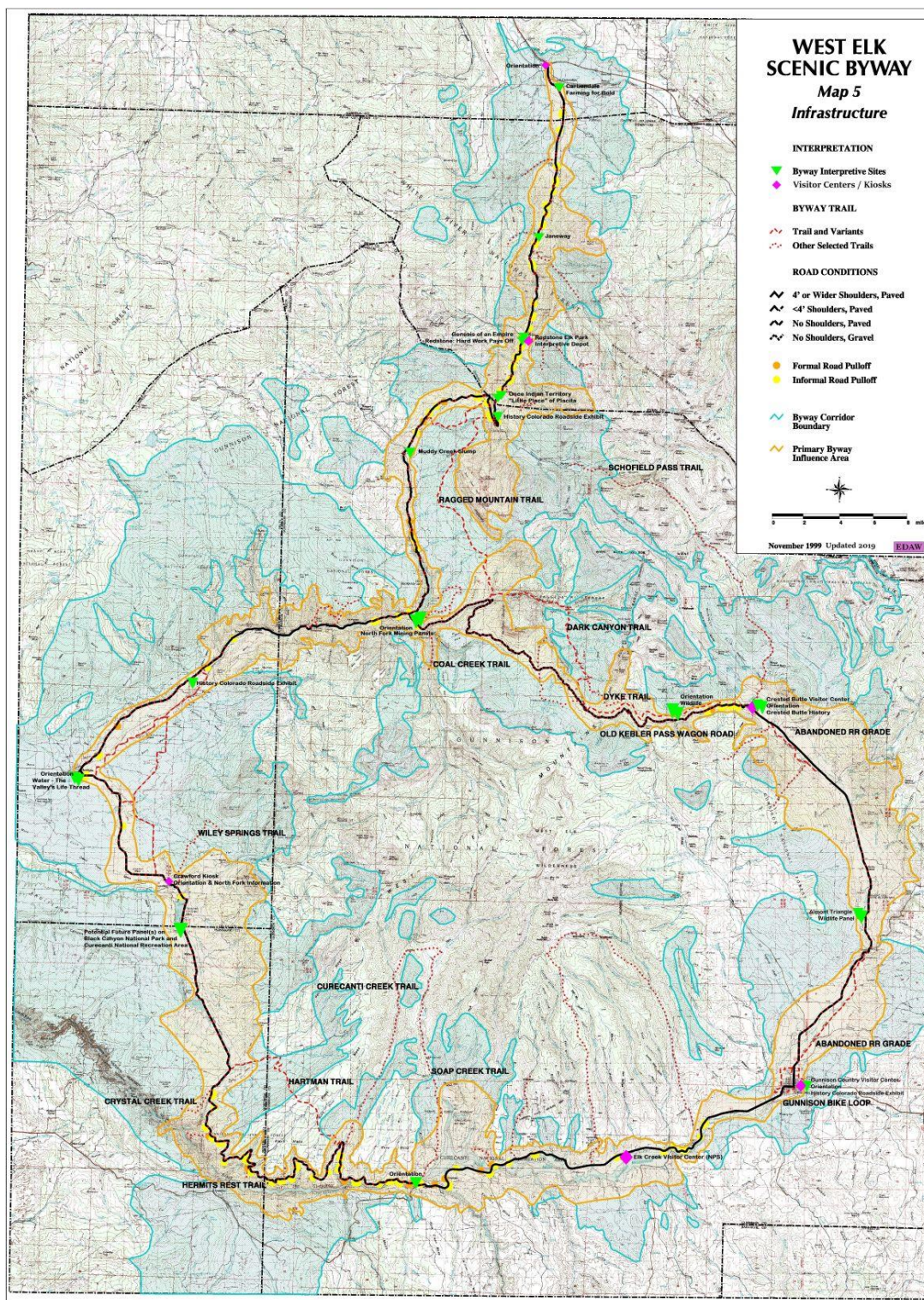


Figure 6. Traffic and Safety

## MAP 7 – CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN



## APPENDIX D - LANDSCAPE CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
1	<p><b>Carbondale</b></p> <p>The Byway passes through an area of relatively recent commercial strip and residential development rather than through the more established town center. It is difficult in this setting to determine where the Byway starts - the Begin/End Byway signs are actually adjacent to a utility substation. The lands along the Byway are essentially developed out in the commercial area; but in the residential areas toward the south end of town, additional infill is possible.</p> <p>Vulnerability: The primary vulnerability is continued infill and expansion of various urban land uses to the south.</p>
2	<p><b>Rural Carbondale</b></p> <p>There is a spotty mixture of new residential development and agriculture in the transition area between town and the open agricultural lands to the south. The urban influences relatively quickly give way to a more cultural landscape of ranching. Most residences in this area are ranch and farmsteads, but some new homes are also located here. The area is primarily rolling irrigated pasture with stringers of cottonwood along the drainages and irrigation ditches bounded by sage and juniper covered ridges. The valley becomes increasingly enclosed and narrower as one travels to the south as the adjacent ridges rise higher. Mt. Sopris is a dominant focal point in this view.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Increased pressure for rural residential development.</p>
3	<p><b>Lower Crystal River Valley</b></p> <p>The lower Crystal River Valley is more properly termed a canyon. The valley bottom is narrow and visually punctuated by the clear flowing Crystal River and associated riparian vegetation (cottonwood, willow, alder). The enclosing valley walls are made up of steep to sheer red rock in a variety of interesting formations. Evergreen vegetation is well established on the lower slopes and is scattered elsewhere where slope and exposure will permit. The Byway winds through this unit with ever changing, engaging views of the river, the red rock formations and occasionally to distant mountain peaks. Pockets of residential development occur at regular intervals along the Byway.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Continued infill of residential development on the private parcels along the river.</p>
4	<p><b>Crystal River Red Rock</b></p> <p>This is a portion of the valley where rock outcrops often occur along the Byway or are visible at higher elevations. Often, they are red in color and have interesting or massive forms. The river is an equally dominant influence, being clear, swift and flowing over a large rocky bottom. The slopes (where not exposed rock) are a combination of conifer, aspen and oak. The scene is made up of several strong visual elements – vegetation, landform and water. There are a number of very visible residences in this area, however. Most are well designed but they detract from the more natural quality that would prevail if these were absent or less visible.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Almost certain additional residential development.</p>
5	<p><b>Placita</b></p> <p>A place name of a community now gone on the Crystal River. This unit is narrow and winding, bordered by steep mountain slopes of conifer and aspen rising 2,000'-3,000' high. The clear flowing Crystal River is a dominant attraction when visible. Cottonwoods are often associated with the river but are thin and discontinuous. Attention is often drawn to the high mountain slopes and distant mountain peaks. Some residences are located here, especially near the Marble turnoff.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Residential development.</p>
6	<p><b>East McClure Pass</b></p> <p>This very steep mountain side is covered by conifer and aspen and is scenic in its own right, but it is the very panoramic views afforded from this steep mountain side of highly scenic peaks to the south, east, north and scenic Crystal Valley below that give it a unique quality.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Much is on private lands, but development potential would be low due to steepness of the slopes.</p>
7	<p><b>West McClure Pass</b></p> <p>High elevation mountain pass dominated almost entirely by mature aspen woodland. A relatively short segment of the Byway. Views are generally oriented to the Forest Service because of somewhat enclosing topography and dense aspen vegetation.</p> <p>Vulnerability: All on Forest Service – low.</p>

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
8	<p><b>Lee Creek</b></p> <p>Lee Creek is a broadly defined drainage that increases in breadth with increasing elevation. It encompasses a very large bowl at the upper end. Vegetation at the lower portion is primarily grass and oak brush grading into aspen and conifer near the top. To southbound travelers, a panoramic view is afforded from the upper end looking west and south. To northbound travelers, an inferior view of a broadly sweeping mountain bowl covered almost entirely by aspen woodland can be seen. The creek is relatively small but contains beaver ponds and is visually noticeable from some locations.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Mostly Forest Service in upper portions. Lower portion is private. Development pressure seems unlikely.</p>
9	<p><b>Muddy Creek</b></p> <p>This creek is well named, being relatively low in flow but nevertheless quite noticeably muddy. It is located in a narrow, steep sided valley – also covered by a combination of pines and oak brush, with oak brush generally predominant. Some significant stands of cottonwood occur along the creek but are quite intermittent. A few scattered residences are located here. The roadway is on unstable ground with large rock faces breaking off into the edge of the road. In several places the creek appears unnaturally aligned or constrained by bank armoring on the east and the roadway on the west.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Mostly private but remote, making significant development unlikely.</p>
10	<p><b>Paonia Reservoir</b></p> <p>This is a relatively narrow unit in the Muddy Creek Drainage that has been dammed to form a long, shallow lake for irrigation water. It is therefore almost dry by summer's end, creating an unattractive mud flat/slope. The hills enclosing the valley are relatively steep and alternately covered by oak brush and pine, often in various combinations.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Low. Paonia Reservoir State Park is located here.</p>
11	<p><b>North Fork Gunnison River Canyon – Forested</b></p> <p>This unit is much the same as the following, except that its slopes are predominantly forested and there is no coal or other development present.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Probably relatively little, although future coal development is possible. A mixture of private and public lands.</p>
12	<p><b>North Fork Gunnison River Canyon – Oak Brush</b></p> <p>A deep, well-defined river canyon with somewhat narrow bottom. The hillsides on both sides are high and very steep and generally covered by oak brush, but with groves and scattered individual conifers. The hill slopes on the north side often have prominent exposed bands of caprock and are irregular in nature. Where the valley width permits, limited agriculture is taking place – orchards or irrigated hayfields. Strongly defined and well-developed riparian woodland (cottonwood and willow) are almost continuous along the river. The river itself is visually conspicuous and attractive (clear) as it moves swiftly over the rocky bottom. This unit has 2-3 areas of conspicuous coal production. Bowie is a small town just off the Byway with a coal mine associated with it further up the ridge. The Town of Somerset and the Bear Mine Coal Generation further upstream are very conspicuous and may warrant interpretation.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Probably relatively little, although this unit is primarily on private lands and additional coal reserves are known.</p>
13	<p><b>North Fork Gunnison River Valley Agriculture</b></p> <p>This area appears almost idyllic with rich and prosperous appearing orchards and hay fields on the valley bottom and on some intermediate mesas and terraces, intermingled with bands and stringers of natural vegetation. All this is backdropped by the West Elk Mountains, which rise abruptly immediately to the south.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Expansion of Hotchkiss and Paonia, especially in light of new development that might follow the sewer extension west of Paonia.</p>
14	<p><b>Hotchkiss</b></p> <p>The Byway skirts the eastern edge of Hotchkiss, so from the Byway proper the primary image of the town is of the peripheral commercial uses and scattered residences. The development extends from the North Fork Gunnison River on the south to Hanson Mesa. It is generally a pleasant town as viewed from the Byway but lacks a sense of order or permanence unless the traveler gets off the Byway and goes into town where it has the appearance of a vital and well-established community.</p> <p>Vulnerability: As Hotchkiss continues to grow additional scattered residential and commercial development is expected adjacent to the Byway.</p>

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
15	<p><b>Mesa Agriculture</b></p> <p>An elevated series of sloping mesas (Spurlin, Cottonwood and Grand View). As the name implies, Grand View Mesa in particular provides elevated, panoramic views to the north to the North Fork Gunnison River Valley and the Grand Mesa beyond. Also, to the West Elk Mountains to the east. Land use is a mix of predominantly ranching and farming (cattle and irrigated pasture) but with a sprinkling of rural residences. An area of dry, broken adobe hills divides the two agricultural areas.</p> <p>Vulnerability: An increasing influx of residences could alter the pastoral character.</p>
16	<p><b>Crawford</b></p> <p>A well-established, compact town with attractive character. Several significant old buildings, including the town hall and community church with its adjacent cemetery, add a sense of permanence and history. Set on a gently sloping hillside below Young's Peak, it has a visually attractive setting as well.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Lack of land use regulations or town plan and additional growth could alter the unique setting and charm of this small town.</p>
17	<p><b>Crawford Reservoir</b></p> <p>Crawford Reservoir is managed as a state park. It therefore is strongly influenced by campground, picnic, parking and maintenance facilities. The large reservoir is unusual in this region which makes it visually inviting. The water is used for irrigation so that late season drawdowns are visually evident.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Little chance for change because of USBR ownership and state parks management.</p>
18	<p><b>Upper Agricultural Valleys</b></p> <p>Medium to broad, gently sloping agricultural valleys – cattle and irrigated hay meadows, bounded by mesas/ridges to the west and the West Elk Mountains to the east and north. Ranching predominates; few rural residences other than farms and ranches. Gould Reservoir is very shallow and dry by summer's end. It is very visible from the Byway and generally positive. Views are strongly drawn to the east and north to the high mountains. Focal points are Cathedral Peak and Needle Rock as well.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Several 35-acre parcels for sale here. Very little is protected by Forest Service ownership except the very high country. Concern regarding transition from pastoral agriculture to residential.</p>
19	<p><b>Crystal Creek</b></p> <p>A diverse landscape unit or rather a transition of different landscape units. Beginning from the south in an elevated topographic position with scattered trees and oak brush, transitioning to lower elevations through oak brush, then to the Crystal Valley of small-scale agriculture with a thin band of cottonwood.</p> <p>Vulnerability: North portion has some pressure for private sale.</p>
20	<p><b>Morrow Point Reservoir</b></p> <p>Several miles of very winding road in the steep, high, northern slopes above Morrow Point Reservoir. The vegetation on the north-facing slopes is relatively heavy and almost uniformly covered by evergreens. The slopes are so high and irregular that despite the monoculture, the views are very interesting. Attention is most strongly drawn to the canyon, which is visible to the bottom in very few locations from the Byway. However, at established overlooks, opportunities to view down into the canyon bottom are possible. The vegetation along the Byway on the south facing slopes is a mixture of aspen, evergreen, oak and sage in various combinations. In places, the road is very enclosed and in others it is very open. Overall, this area is visually striking and memorable.</p> <p>Vulnerability: The highway skirts in and out of private lands, and early signs suggest some subdividing of 35-acre parcels for residential use.</p>
21	<p><b>Western Blue Mesa Reservoir</b> (<i>portion with Byway on south side of reservoir</i>)</p> <p>Large open water body but bounded by interesting, diverse and prominently elevated topography. Of greatest visual interest are the Dillon Pinnacles. Also, rimrock mesas and bench formations are diverse and add a visually interesting backdrop to the reservoir. West Elk Mountains to the far north are visible. Evergreen vegetation on the elevated north-facing slopes to the south add interest and noticeably add an element of interest lacking for considerable distance to the east.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Private lands border the Byway in two places immediately to the south. Residential development is evident in one and near the other at Sapinero.</p>

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
22	<p><b>Blue Mesa Reservoir</b></p> <p>Very broad, open reservoir – several miles long and ½+ to 1+ mile in width. Bounded by rolling but somewhat prominent elevated sage covered hills. No sense of enclosure – actually a real sense of exposure. Very broad, open, large scale. Very few trees. Some drainages from the north contain clumps of cottonwoods and appear inviting. Overall it feels barren.</p> <p>Vulnerability: The road skirts private land to the north, which has some commercial, recreation-oriented development. More development within close proximity to the lake would be expected.</p>
23	<p><b>Middle Reservoir Area</b></p> <p>This is an area of low to moderate sized rolling/rounded landforms with sage vegetation. It appears barren and somewhat bleak because there is no sign of the reservoir except for a few brief glimpses. Development of the park visitor center, admin building, service structures and residences are evident from the highway. They are of various architectural styles and spread over a large area, giving it a non-unified appearance. Wood H-frame transmission line goes through this area as well.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Some areas outside the NRA are very close. In fact in one area, the road is outside the NRA making development on both sides of the road a possibility.</p>
24	<p><b>Gunnison River Canyon</b></p> <p>Winding canyon with very steep walls of 200' to 300'. Very enclosed and engaging with water as strong visual element. The Byway is very close to the water and nearly at the same level.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Little since it is all within the Curecanti NRA.</p>
25	<p><b>South Gunnison River Valley</b></p> <p>Open ranching country in valley bottom bordered by low rolling sage hills to north. The Gunnison River cottonwood riparian forest is dominant element to the south, and in some areas the river itself is visible and attractive.</p> <p>Vulnerability: The hills to the north (especially to the west) show some residential development. Sale for home sites along the river is also a potential, which would effectively isolate the Byway from the presence of the river.</p>
26	<p><b>Gunnison West Outskirts</b></p> <p>Mix of land use. Open to view – not well screened. From west to east: scattered rural residences gradually increasing in density, then to scattering of commercial with residential, then to various commercial types.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Expansion of residential and commercial gradually westward as well as infill seems likely.</p>
27	<p><b>Gunnison</b></p> <p>The Substantial town is long established and well maintained. All basic services are available.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Expansion of sprawl development around the town, which colors the perception of the town – the longer it takes to get through the sprawl the less favorable the image of town.</p>
28	<p><b>North Gunnison Outskirts</b></p> <p>A mixture of various urban land uses (primarily residential) mixed with some natural-appearing parcels. Numerous large trees are scattered throughout, which somewhat softens the visual impact of an otherwise hodgepodge of land uses. One's feelings are not so much of this area but anticipation of actually getting into town (if traveling south) or actually getting out of town (if traveling north).</p> <p>Vulnerability: Continued expansion and infill seems likely.</p>
29	<p><b>Gunnison River</b></p> <p>This is primarily flat open land with more distant views of relatively low, enclosing, nondistinctive, sage covered landforms. The dominant visual element is the river and associated cottonwood riparian area. The river is much larger than upstream and invites attention. Two areas of scattered residences also attract attention and give the feeling of approaching a town. Overall land use is large-scale ranching, which is interesting and somewhat attractive.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Increased rural residential development. Of particular concern is the area between the Byway and river.</p>

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
30	<p><b>Almont</b></p> <p>A small residential community nestled in an enclosed canyon at the junction of the East and Taylor Rivers, which then become the Gunnison River. The strong feeling of enclosure in a visually inviting setting is memorable. The hillsides are a combination of conifer and sage. The rivers and associated cottonwoods are strongly dominant. The town is primarily authentic old structures, which is also very interesting. You would like to stay or slow down to see more and find out more; undoubtedly some do.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Increased development seems probable.</p>
31	<p><b>East River</b></p> <p>The height and prominence of surrounding mountain slopes is much reduced (from Slate River unit below). Ranching is the predominant land use. Numerous authentic ranch operations are visually evident. Most engaging natural feature is the well-developed riparian cottonwood forest along the East River. At most places, it is very near the Byway and from a few locations can be seen from an elevated viewpoint.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Probably eventual residential development replacing both a way of life and a landscape. Residences or any development on hills would be highly visible and strongly influencing because of the low, open sage cover. The Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery is located here but not strongly visible.</p>
32	<p><b>Slate River Valley</b></p> <p>This area is a mixture of broad, undeveloped valley with few distinguishing characteristics and large, somewhat chaotic-appearing subdivided residential areas. Chaos of subdivisions has to do with random orientation of homes and wide disparity of building styles – a mix of well designed to those that look homemade. The subdivisions strongly compete for attention with the high scenic, forested, enclosing mountain slopes. Wood pole H-frame transmission line runs along west side of valley although not strongly noticeable. Very noticeable and discordant appearing industrial park is located along a ½+ mile stretch of highway.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Continuation of residential development.</p>
33	<p><b>Crested Butte</b> (<i>Town – outlying residential areas</i>)</p> <p>Appears to be well planned with respect to lot size and building style. Attention drawn to road, primarily due to traffic and irregular traffic patterns and number of close intersections. Crested Butte Peak looms strongly and is very attractive.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Continued residential and other urban development.</p>
34	<p><b>Crested Butte</b> (<i>Town – Historic Core</i>)</p> <p>Authentic Victorian era gold mining town with many substantial buildings. Narrow streets. Very engaging visually – invites exploration. Attention is inward.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Increasing traffic congestion probably inevitable.</p>
35	<p><b>Wildcat Creek</b> (<i>above Crested Butte</i>)</p> <p>Heavy forested, steeply sloping, north-facing slopes and sage-aspen south-facing slopes. Attention drawn to Crested Butte Peak for eastbound travelers. Keystone Mine is visible but not strongly distracting.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Expanding residential development on private lands – especially likely on southfacing slopes (north-facing slope is very steep and without suitable access).</p>
36	<p><b>Kebler Pass</b></p> <p>This is an extensive area through which the Byway winds over a mix of paved and gravel road in a scenic, high mountain setting. There are alternately panoramic views to scenic mountain peaks and views enclosed by topography or vegetation. Extensive areas of aspen create interesting patterns and contrasts with the otherwise evergreen forest. The town site of Irwin and various historic mining sites add to the interest of the area.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Possibly only from overuse from recreation. Road segments of gravel surface gives a distinct “out of the way” feeling to the Byway. Some portions have been paved to reduce the maintenance workload for county work crews.</p>

Unit #	Visual Character Unit Name and Description
37	<p><b>Watson Flats</b></p> <p>This is an elevated forest setting with numerous opportunities for panoramic views across forested lands to very high peaks and mountain ranges. The land is undulating and gently rolling to steeply sloping. Vegetation is a combination of oak brush, large aspen woodlands and conifer forest often mixed in interesting patterns. Its visual interest lies in its remoteness, occasional sense of vegetative enclosure and often panoramic views.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Probably only overuse from recreation as this area is almost entirely in Forest Service ownership. There are several residences/ranches to the north outside of the Forest.</p>
38	<p><b>Anthracite Creek</b></p> <p>This is a narrow, deep river valley bounded closely by steep forested mountain slopes. Views of distant high peaks are common. The creek is clear and very swiftly flowing over a rocky bottom. Several ranches, residences and guest ranges are located along this road.</p> <p>Vulnerability: Increased development and building. Property is for sale.</p>

## APPENDIX E - MARKETING PARTNERS

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A partial listing of those agencies and organizations active in marketing within the region include the following:

[Carbondale Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Colorado Scenic Byways Program, CDOT](#)

[Colorado Tourism](#)

[Crawford Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Crested Butte / Mt. Crested Butte Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Delta Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Delta County Tourism](#)

[Gunnison Country Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association](#)

[Hotchkiss Community Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Marble Crystal River Chamber](#)

[Montrose Office of Business and Tourism](#)

[Mountains and Mesas Travel Region](#)

[North Fork Valley Creative Coalition](#)

[Paonia Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Redstone Community Association](#)

## APPENDIX F - AGENCY CONTACTS

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CDOT Region 3 Planning Manager – 970.683.6251

CDOT, Western Byways Commission Representative — 970.325.4746

CDOT, Colorado Byways Program Manager — 303.757.9786

Delta County Road and Bridge — 970.874.2133

Delta County Sheriff's Office — 970.874.2000

Garfield County Road and Bridge — 970.945.1223

Garfield County Sheriff's Office — 970.945.0453

Gunnison County Public Works Director — 970.641.0044

Gunnison County Sheriff's Office — 970.641.1113

Montrose County Road and Bridge — 970.249.5425

Montrose County Sheriff's Office — 970.249.6606

Pitkin County Road and Bridge — 970.920.5390

Pitkin County Sheriff's Office — 970.920.5300

Region 10, Montrose — 970.249.2436

## APPENDIX G - TRAIL RESOURCES

Some of the primary considerations in trails planning include: trail alignment as determined by land ownership, topography, proximity to attractions/scenery, proximity to other trails/trail systems, and safety; trail infrastructure such as culverts, bridges, fords, handrails, etc.; trail maintenance and maintenance responsibility; liability; and funding and support including networking with other regional trails organizations.

### TRAIL ADVOCACY AND AGENCY CONTACTS

There may also be various avenues for funding, and there are organizations and individuals that are committed to the development of non-motorized trails within the region who could provide valuable assistance. Planning, design and construction assistance may be available largely through potential partners. The following is a list of trail entities within the region.

Agency/Office	Phone	Email Address
BLM, Uncompahgre Field Office	970.240.5300	
BLM, Gunnison Field Office	970.642.4940	
BLM, Colorado River Valley Field Office	970.876.9000	
CDOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Program	303.757.9982	
CDOT Scenic Byways Program	303.757.9786	<a href="mailto:lenore.bates@state.co.us">lenore.bates@state.co.us</a>
Club 20	970.242.3264	<a href="mailto:communications@club20.org">communications@club20.org</a>
Colorado Parks & Wildlife Statewide Trails Program	303.791.1957	<a href="mailto:megan.barton@state.co.us">megan.barton@state.co.us</a>
Crawford State Park	970.921.5721	<a href="mailto:crawford.park@state.co.us">crawford.park@state.co.us</a>
Crested Butte Land Trust	970.349.1206	<a href="mailto:director@cblandtrust.org">director@cblandtrust.org</a>
Gunnison County Sustainable Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Committee	970.641.7985	<a href="mailto:cpagano@gunnisoncounty.org">cpagano@gunnisoncounty.org</a>
NPS, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park	970.641.2337	
NPS, Curecanti National Recreation Area	970.641.2337	
Pitkin County Open Space and Trails	970.920.5232	<a href="mailto:web_open_space@pitkincounty.com">web_open_space@pitkincounty.com</a>
Region 10 League for Economic Assistance and Planning	970.249.2436	<a href="mailto:admin@region10.net">admin@region10.net</a>
USFS, Gunnison Ranger District	970.641.0471	
USFS, Paonia Ranger District	970.527.4131	
USFS, Sopris Ranger District	970.963.2266	
Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC)	303.715.1010	<a href="mailto:voc@voc.org">voc@voc.org</a>

## FUNDING SOURCES FOR TRAILS

The following list identifies some departments and agencies that may have funds available for trails and related projects.

Agency/Entity	Web Address
Colorado Department of Local Affairs	<a href="https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola/financial-assistance">https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola/financial-assistance</a>
CDOT - Enhancement Projects (STIP)	<a href="http://www.codot.gov/projects">www.codot.gov/projects</a>
FHA - Enhancements Activities	<a href="http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_enhancements/teas.cfm">www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_enhancements/teas.cfm</a>
CPW - Non-Motorized Trails Grant Program	<a href="http://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/TrailsGrantsNM.aspx">cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/TrailsGrantsNM.aspx</a>
NPS - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program	<a href="http://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/whatwedo.htm">www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/whatwedo.htm</a>
History Colorado State Historical Fund	<a href="https://www.historycolorado.org/state-historical-fund">https://www.historycolorado.org/state-historical-fund</a>
Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado:	<a href="https://www.voc.org/voc-stewardship-project-application">https://www.voc.org/voc-stewardship-project-application</a>
<b>Other Sources</b>	
Colorado Grant Watch	<a href="http://colorado.grantwatch.com/">colorado.grantwatch.com/</a>
Colorado Grants Guide	<a href="http://craamerica.org/colorado-grants-guide/">craamerica.org/colorado-grants-guide/</a>
Grants West	<a href="https://grantswest.com/">https://grantswest.com/</a>
Council on Foundations	<a href="http://www.cof.org/">www.cof.org/</a>
Grants.gov	<a href="http://www.grants.gov/">www.grants.gov/</a>
Nonprofit Expert:	<a href="http://www.nonprofitexpert.com/">www.nonprofitexpert.com/</a>

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## APPENDIX H - BYWAY DESIGNATION BY THE STATE OF COLORADO

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### RESOLUTION 91-A

WHEREAS, Colorado offers abundant and easily accessible opportunities for viewing and visiting scenic, recreational, historical, educational, scientific, geological, natural, wildlife, cultural or ethnic resources; and

WHEREAS, the Governor, by Executive Order, created a Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission, including a member of the Transportation Commission, for the purpose of furthering the objectives of overall economic and educational benefits; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has initiated a National Scenic Byways Program to designate and promote the best scenic drives through national forests, including those in Colorado, and the Bureau of Land Management has initiated a National Back Country Byways Program as part of a national effort to promote scenic byways; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have agreed to participate in and abide by the rules and regulations of the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Program; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has proposed the nomination of the Grand Mesa Scenic and Historic Byway, a 51-mile route following State Highway 65 and the Lands End Road through forests and meadows full of wildflowers, panoramic views from the mesa top, and history encompassing 10,000 years of human habitation; and

WHEREAS, a coalition of federal, state and local agencies have proposed the nomination of the West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway, a 205-mile drive following State Highways 133, 92, 135, U.S. Highway 50 and Gunnison County Road #12, a route rich in tradition and heritage and featuring magnificent mountain vistas, tranquil pastoral scenes of farmlands and cattle ranches, and spectacular views along the Black Canyon; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has proposed the nomination of the Flat Tops Trail Scenic and Historic Byway, a 75-mile drive following Forest Highway 16 through scenic and largely undeveloped landscape featuring outstanding mountain views, sage-covered rolling hills and working ranches; and

WHEREAS, Sedgwick County and the towns of Julesburg and Ovid have proposed the nomination of the South Platte River Trail Scenic and Historic Byway, a 14-mile loop following State Highway 138 and Sedgwick County Road 28, offering a scenic view of the South Platte River where thousands of pioneers and many trails crossed on their way during westward expansion; and

WHEREAS, the United States Forest Service has proposed the nomination of the Mount Evans Scenic and Historic Byway, a 27-mile route following State Highways 103 and 5 to the summit of 14,264-foot Mount Evans, through spectacular scenery of ponderosa pines, high alpine tundra, and panoramic views; and

WHEREAS, the majority of these proposed routes pass through land governed by the United States Government and are therefore subject to additional rules and regulations over and above rules and regulations of the State of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Transportation Commission has the authority to designate scenic and historic byways, to approve the state highway map on which scenic and historic byways are placed, and along with cities and counties, to fund promotional activities for scenic and historic byways; and

WHEREAS, the Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Commission, duly authorized by Executive Order and meeting in regular session, has reviewed and approved the nominations and recommends these five routes to the Colorado Transportation Commission for its approval; and

WHEREAS, these nominations have been reviewed by the State Transportation Commission of Colorado and are found consistent with the criteria of nomination;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the following nominations for designation as Scenic and Historic Byways are hereby approved by the State Transportation Commission of Colorado.

1. Grand Mesa Scenic and Historic Byway
2. West Elk Loop Scenic and Historic Byway
3. The Flat Tops Trail Scenic and Historic Byway
4. The South Platte River Trail Scenic and Historic Byway
5. Mount Evans Scenic and Historic Byway

APPROVED  
SEPTEMBER 21, 1991

## APPENDIX I - BYWAY DESIGNATION BY THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE

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### West Elk Loop Scenic Byway

A National Forest Scenic Byway

White River and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests

Prepared by: West Elk Loop Scenic Byway Committee  
Tom A. Kuekes, Chairperson

Submitted By: Veto J. LaSalle  
Veto J. LaSalle, Forest Supervisor  
White River National Forest

Date: 2/7/94

Submitted By: Robert L. Storch  
Robert L. Storch, Forest Supervisor  
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and  
Gunnison National Forest

Date: 2/12/94

Recommended By: Elizabeth H. Still Date: 2/12/94  
Elizabeth H. Still, Regional Forester  
Rocky Mountain Region, Forest Service

Approved By

David A. Hancherik  
Jack Ward Thomas, Chief  
U.S.D.A. Forest Service

Date: 5/17/94