



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pike and San Isabel
National Forests
Cimarron and Comanche
National Grasslands

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Date: January 13, 2004

Dear Reader,

Enclosed is the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the South Platte Wild and Scenic River Study. The study area is located in Douglas, Jefferson, Park and Teller Counties, Colorado. The study was initiated by the Forest Service under Section 5(d)(1) of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which authorizes federal agencies to conduct river studies as part of the land management planning process.

This study has had a relatively long history and, due to its close association with the controversial issue of water supply for the Colorado front range, it has seen a number of uncharacteristic features. For example:

- (1) The Draft LEIS identified two Preferred Alternatives, one of which (Alternative A2) had been neither described in detail nor analyzed in the document.
- (2) Formation of a group composed of a wide range of local interests whose purpose was to develop and propose to the Forest Service an alternative method of protecting river values that did not involve designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The group's proposal is Alternative A2.
- (3) A Supplemental Draft LEIS describing Alternative A2 and its environmental consequences. The Supplemental Draft's Preferred Alternative differed in several important ways from the alternatives analyzed in the document.
- (4) A period of separation between the Record of Decision and the FEIS.

When this study got started in the early 1990's the environmental documents were labeled as *legislative* because of the possibility that the process would culminate in a finding that some portion of the study river would be found suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. The usual sequel to such a finding is a recommendation to Congress that the suitable portions be designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Hence the *legislative* descriptor.

However, one of the key features of wild and scenic river studies is to explore possibilities for protecting river values short of designation. In this case it turns out that a non-designation alternative has emerged having a strong chance of success. Based on a remarkable cooperative effort by a wide range of local interests (see item #2 above), this alternative has a variety of attractive features that should be given a chance to work.

Because the Preferred Alternative identified herein involves neither a finding on suitability nor the prospect of an eventual recommendation to Congress, this document is not considered to be a *legislative* EIS.

A Record of Decision does not accompany this FEIS. The reason is that over three years have elapsed since the previous opportunity to comment occurred (issuance of the



Supplemental Draft LEIS) and important new information has become available that merits review and comment. The new information includes (1) the proposed Forest Plan amendment and (2) the Preferred Alternative. The remaining information in the FEIS has not significantly changed since the Supplemental Draft was released, and therefore comment is not being sought on it. A 60-day comment period is being provided.

Comments should be specific to the enclosed statement. In particular, comments should identify perceived violations of law, regulation or policy. Comments must be received by this office no later than close of business on April 2, 2004. Comments are to be sent to:

Forest Supervisor
Pike and San Isabel National Forests
Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands
2840 Kachina Drive, Pueblo, Colorado 81008
Attn: South Platte Wild and Scenic River Study

Alternatively, comments may be submitted electronically to the following e-mail address:

comments-rocky-mountain-pike-san-isabel@fs.fed.us

The subject line should read "South Platte Wild and Scenic River Study". Acceptable formats for attachments are MS Word, text, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, an automated electronic acknowledgement should normally be received from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive such acknowledgement, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

If you have questions about this project, please contact John Hill at (719) 553-1414, or by e-mail at jjhill01@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert J. Leaverton
ROBERT J. LEAVERTON
Forest Supervisor