

ARTICLE V
SAN MIGUEL COUNTY
OPEN LANDS PLAN

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

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SAN MIGUEL COUNTY OPEN LANDS PLAN

PURPOSE

In 1998, the San Miguel County Open Space Commission recognized the need to establish a framework for setting its priorities. The Commission sought to develop a clear and consistent system for determining which projects to pursue. Commission members also recognized that its funding requests and grant applications, from sources such as Great Outdoors Colorado, would likely be more successful if they occurred pursuant to a comprehensive county plan.

The purpose of this Open Lands Plan is to develop a strategic framework for open space conservation, as well as to serve as a guide to the Open Space Commission, Recreation District Board and Board of County Commissioners regarding protection and/or acquisition of county open space resources. This Plan reflects the extensive community involvement solicited by the Open Space Commission. It explains the criteria to be used in identifying and selecting land to be protected, identifies how open space funds and resources could be utilized, and outlines tools and techniques to protect open space lands. The Plan does not identify specific properties for open space acquisition, nor is it binding on future open space decisions made by the Open Space Commission, Board of County Commissioners or Recreation District Board. Rather it outlines important open space resources and values and identifies general areas within the county that fit these values. Public input was a key component in prioritizing criteria and objectives for future open space projects. Realizing that the term “open space” holds different meanings for individual county residents, the Open Space Commission attempted to solicit numerous and diverse opinions.

An overview of the county, its size, population, growth and natural features are set forth in Appendix A. Details of the process used to solicit public input are included in Appendix B. The results of the public outreach efforts are attached as Appendix C. Finally, a description of potential Open Space Commission partners is set forth in Appendix D.

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION MISSION STATEMENT

The San Miguel County Open Space Commission seeks to protect and conserve open space for people, natural habitat for flora and fauna, and agricultural lands for the farming and ranching communities throughout San Miguel County for this and future generations. No one group can meet this mission; therefore, the San Miguel County Open Space Commission works cooperatively with regional landowners on a volunteer basis and in partnership with land trusts, and local, state, and federal government agencies. The San Miguel County Open Space Commission is composed of a diverse group of volunteers who represent all areas of the county.

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the last three years, the Open Space Commission, with direction from the Board of County Commissioners and input from the public, has sought to preserve open lands throughout the county. Accomplishments to date include:

- * Publishing a Land Conservation Booklet, in partnership with the Telluride Association of Realtors, The Nature Conservancy, the San Miguel Conservation Foundation and Great Outdoors Colorado, to give landowners information regarding open space preservation options, including conservation easements and estate planning.
- * Issuing a Visa credit card in partnership with the non-profit San Miguel Conservation Foundation and Telluride Visitor Services, from which a percentage of proceeds go into a fund to preserve open space in the county. Local merchants can participate in the program by displaying the credit card application in stores and offering incentives and discounts to cardholders.
- * Creating a development alternative, "Open Land Protection," that encourages landowners to cluster housing and create open space by providing a development bonus incentive.
- * Establishing a conservation plan with government agencies and landowners to protect the threatened Gunnison Sage Grouse.
- * Contracting to preserve an 800-acre centennial ranch on Wilson Mesa with the San Miguel Conservation Foundation and The Nature Conservancy through a purchase of development rights program.
- * Conducting educational programs on conservation options and estate planning throughout the county.
- * Coordinating a conference and discussions with the Forest Service and other local governments to improve coordination of public land trades.

MANAGEMENT OF OPEN SPACE

Having neither the staff nor resources to acquire and/or manage open space, the county must work closely with other land management entities or land trusts, which often receive a stewardship fee to manage conservation easements in perpetuity. The county recently created a Recreation District and Board to manage and oversee the development of county parks, trails and recreational programs and facilities. In general, the county would prefer not to acquire open space in fee simple title but would rather use other open space preservation techniques as listed on pages 4 - 8. Because the county is not a land management agency, it is especially important to coordinate with private landowners, federal, state and local agencies, and non-profit partners regarding management issues.

OPEN SPACE PROJECT/PARCEL RANKING MATRIX

Values: High = 4 Medium = 3 Low = 2	Value
Priority 1	
Public Funds spent wisely on the project (consider leveraging ability)	
Parcel or project helps provide or maintain important wildlife habitat	
Parcel or project promotes scenic landscapes, views and/or prominent hillsides	
Parcel or project promotes agricultural lands or agricultural character	
Parcel or project protects lands within or containing ecologically significant floodplains, wetlands or riparian areas	
Parcel or project would protect important land cover/natural resources (such as flora and fauna, forest cover, riparian corridors)	
Values: High = 4 Medium = 3 Low = 2	Value
Priority 2	
Need for protection is urgent-potential development threatens unique features of ecological, scenic or historic importance	
Parcel size is appropriate to benefit wildlife, views and/or natural resources	
Parcel is contiguous to public lands, open space or lands with conservation easements or parcel buffers adjoining land development or potential development	
Parcel or project provides educational opportunities regarding natural resources or regional history	
Parcel provides trail corridor or access to trails	
Parcel provides public recreational opportunities	
Parcel mutually benefits conservation partnerships	
Parcel can be effectively managed	
Parcel or project provides for protection of significant historic structures or archaeological sites	
TOTAL	

OPEN SPACE SELECTION CRITERIA

The criteria listed below, which are the culmination of public comment and survey results, will be used by the Open Space Commission to prioritize projects and to determine distribution of Open Space Commission resources. The matrix on page 6 can be used for ranking projects.

Priority 1

- * Public funds are being spent wisely on the project (consider leveraging ability)
- * Parcel or project helps provide or maintain important wildlife habitat
- * Parcel or project protects scenic landscapes, views and/or prominent hillsides
- * Parcel or project promotes agricultural lands or the agricultural character
- * Parcel or project protects lands within or containing ecologically significant floodplains, wetlands or riparian areas, watersheds and headwaters
- * Parcel or project protects ecologically significant land cover or natural resources (such as flora, fauna and forests)

Priority 2

- * Need for protection is urgent - potential development threatens unique features of ecological, scenic or historic importance
- * Parcel size is appropriate to benefit wildlife, views and/or natural resources
- * Parcel is contiguous to public lands, open space or lands with conservation easements, or buffers adjoining development or potential development
- * Parcel or project provides educational opportunities regarding natural resources or regional history
- * Parcel provides public recreational opportunities, including trails and/or access
- * Project mutually benefits conservation partnerships
- * Parcel can be effectively managed
- * Parcel or project protects significant historic structures or archaeological sites

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION TECHNIQUES

The open space preservation techniques listed below are the methods and tools the Open Space Commission hopes to use for future projects. This list also provides options landowners can choose from when considering open space preservation. While the majority of techniques are voluntary, county government may pursue legislative options (e.g., agricultural zoning and right-to-farm legislation).

Landowners interested in keeping some or all of their land in agriculture or as open space should review each option carefully and evaluate how it fits their particular situation, land type and parcel size. For example, the Clustered Development option might be preferable to a rancher who wants most of his land to remain in agriculture, but desires to sell a few small lots for cash, while a traditional conservation easement might be used by an individual who owns highly valued land and could utilize a federal income tax credit.

Acquisition of Title or Development Rights/Conservation Easements

1. Conservation easement: Landowners limit development on land by donating or selling conservation easements to a nonprofit land preservation organization. Federal tax deductions, reduced estate taxes and lower property taxes are possible incentives.
2. Purchase of development rights: A non-profit organization or government entity purchases the development rights to open or agricultural lands in order to keep them undeveloped or in ranching use. A term used when a conservation easement is sold rather than donated.
3. Cash purchase: Landowner sells property to a land trust or public entity at fair market value.
4. Donation or gift: Landowner makes a charitable donation to a land trust or public entity or non-profit organization.
5. Bargain sale: Landowner makes a combination gift and sale of property to a public entity or nonprofit organization.
6. Donation with reserve life estate: Landowner donates property to public entity or land trust but reserves the right to use all or part of the land during his or her lifetime and possibly the lifetimes of immediate family members.
7. Charitable gift annuity: Landowner donates property to a nonprofit land preservation entity in exchange for an annuity payment to fund retirement (instead of cash sale).
8. Installment purchase: A purchase is spread over a term of years to benefit both the purchaser and seller. An interest rate is built into each payment, and the interest may be tax exempt.
9. Rolling option: Public entity or nonprofit organization has option to buy portions of land over a number of years. This is often used by organizations that do not have the funds to purchase the land outright.
10. Bridge financing/land trust: Land trust acquires land and then resells to a public agency on terms that are beneficial to the public.
11. Land exchange or trade: Public lands are traded for private lands.
12. Right of first refusal: Landowners notify the public of intentions to sell, and give the public the opportunity to match the best offer.
13. Conservation buyer: A purchaser of a large parcel who is interested in conservation principles and is willing to limit development.

Development Patterns and Zoning

1. Limited or protective development: Property deemed valuable due to agricultural, scenic or natural resources is developed in a manner that protects conservation values.
2. Clustered development: Development is clustered on small lots so that view corridors, wildlife habitat and natural resources are protected. The landowner may receive a development bonus based on the percentage of land preserved in agriculture or open space (Referred to as a Subdivision Exemption for Open Land Protection in the San Miguel County Land Use Code).
3. Management agreement: Landowner and a land trust or public entity cooperate on managing a specific property to meet mutual objectives.

4. Agricultural zoning: A zone district that establishes a minimum size for subdivided parcels and identifies permissible uses that benefit agriculture.
5. Agricultural buffer zones: Non-agricultural development is required to provide separation between agricultural and non-agricultural uses to prevent non-farm uses from interfering with normal agricultural operations or creating the potential for nuisance complaints related to farm operations.
6. Overlay district and site plan review: Developers work with government entities to strive for sensitive development. The use of overlay districts, site plan reviews and performance standards are tools to encourage development to respect community character.
7. Transfer of development rights: Landowner transfers development rights to an identified receiving area that is designated for higher density development and may include banking of development rights. (Currently, no process exists for transfer of development rights in San Miguel County.)
8. Deed restrictions/covenants: Mutual covenants are made with adjacent landowners to restrict development of the properties (e.g., to preserve scenic corridors).

Other

1. Great Outdoors Colorado partnership: GOCO provides funding to communities to assist in protecting and acquiring open lands.
2. Right-to-farm legislation/Code of the West: Legislation adopted by a county to protect agricultural rights and discourage nuisance lawsuits against agricultural operations. Non-agricultural landowners are notified of these rights.
3. Create agricultural lands committee: The committee would advise County Commissioners on actions and policies that affect agriculture.
4. Estate planning: State and federal inheritance laws can place a hefty burden on families, requiring them to sell land just to pay taxes. Good planning can eliminate the need to sell off parcels to meet tax obligations.
5. Educational seminars and outreach: Speakers are brought into the community to explain conservation easement and estate planning concepts.
6. Technical assistance team: Experts work with landowners to assist in land planning and explore legal and financial aspects of conserving land.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Open Space Commission works with private landowners, other government agencies and non-governmental organizations to protect and acquire open space, as well as to educate the public about the benefits of preserving open lands. As emphasized in the Open Space Commission mission statement, no one group can meet its overall goal of protecting and conserving open space. A description of potential partners for the Open Space Commission is included as Appendix D.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The Open Space Commission works to preserve and protect lands that it, the Board of County Commissioners and the public designate as high priorities. Public meetings and a countywide open space and recreation survey in 1998 indicate that county residents consider wildlife habitat, riparian areas, scenic corridors, high alpine basins, agricultural lands and open space buffers between population pods to be most important. Keeping in mind that different planning areas have different open space priorities, the Commission considers projects based on community desires and needs.

1. Create Funding Sources

To make open space education and preservation a reality in San Miguel County, the Open Space Commission must work with both private and governmental partners. Since the Commission was formed in 1995, the San Miguel Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy and Great Outdoors Colorado have been key financial partners for many Commission projects. The Commission hopes to obtain some of the \$40 million that GOCO plans to distribute statewide over the next few years. The Commission plans to work with the County Commissioners, local land trusts and landowners to designate projects appropriate for GOCO consideration.

The Commission must consider a variety of funding options for leveraging money allocated through the county budget process. Currently, the Commission raises money through the County General Fund and the San Miguel Conservation Foundation Visa credit card. Proceeds from the card are dedicated to open space projects, as determined by a board consisting of members from the Conservation Foundation, Open Space Commission, County Commissioners and Telluride Visitor Services.

The Commission is considering voluntary methods to raise money from individuals and/organizations. For example, the Open Space Commission is exploring a voluntary rounding up of grocery or utility bills. The Commission is also looking for direction from the County Commissioners, the Recreation District Board and the public regarding ways to raise money through taxation. The Open Space Commission is considering asking the Commissioners to introduce a ballot issue that would create a funding source for open space preservation projects.

2. Build Cooperative Relationships With Owners

Building cooperative relationships with local landowners is essential for the Open Space Commission to achieve its goals. Not only can landowners and regional developers be important sources of information for the Open Space Commission members, the Commission also can be a resource for landowners. Continuing to focus on education and offering educational conferences and joint projects with landowners are additional ways to foster relationships within the community. The Commission should explore flexible, voluntary and incentive-based approaches to preserving open space.

3. Pursue Protection For Land

Through public meetings and the 1998 Open Space and Recreation Survey, the Open Space Commission gathered public input that ranked wildlife areas, riparian areas and scenic corridors as the most important areas to protect. The Open Space Commission will attempt to acknowledge these priorities in ranking future projects.

4. Support Agricultural Operations

Because agricultural lands are important open space resources, the Open Space Commission should advocate agricultural interests. One of the Open Space Commission's goals is to create a Right-to-Farm Policy and/or a Code of the West for adoption by the County Commissioners. This policy would make it easier for ranchers to pursue traditional agricultural activities despite increasing pressures from surrounding development.

5. Promote Partnerships

Working with local, state and national organizations is essential in pursuing the Open Space Commission's goals. Locally, coordinating with the Telluride Open Space Commission, County Recreation District, County Trails Commission, The Nature Conservancy and the San Miguel Conservation Foundation is essential so that various objectives do not conflict. The Open Space Commission also hopes to continue working cooperatively with community organizations, such as the Watershed Coalition, the Telluride Association of Realtors, the Telluride Regional Chamber of Commerce and Telluride Visitor Services to educate citizens about open space issues. The Open Space Commission should continue to work closely with local land trusts to increase the amount of acreage in conservation easements in San Miguel County. Partnerships are a key aspect of submitting grant applications to Great Outdoors Colorado.

6. Coordinate With Federal And State Agencies

The Open Space Commission should increase its coordination with both federal and state agencies in its pursuit of open space goals. The Commission hopes to take a more active role in reviewing land exchange proposals. Also, the Commission hopes to better coordinate with state and federal agencies in achieving open space goals on both private and public lands.

7. Provide Land Conservation Options

The Open Space Commission should explore the numerous techniques other than outright acquisition of property or conservation easements available for preserving open space, along with ways to implement them. The Commission should review the County Master Plan and Land Use Code for possible amendments to benefit open space preservation.

Also, the Commission should continue to explore incorporation of Purchase of Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights options within the county development review process.

8. Focus on Educational Opportunities

The Open Space Commission realizes that education is an important component of achieving open space goals. The Commission should continue hosting seminars for landowners, lawyers, real estate agents and the general public about conservation easements and other open space topics.

9. Participate with West End Stakeholders in Discussing Hunting and Recreation Policies With Public Agencies

During public meetings in the West End of the county, participants suggested that the Open Space Commission encourage public education regarding appropriate use of public lands by recreational and sporting enthusiasts. Also, it was suggested that the Open Space Commission consider participating in a conference with West End private landowners and public land agencies regarding management and recreational policies on public lands.

10. Encourage Preservation of Historical and Archaeological Resources

The Open Space Commission acknowledges the importance of protecting scenic and historic sites as well as the lands on which they are located. The scenic beauty of an open space parcel may be integrally linked to existing historical structures on the property.

APPENDIX A

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY OVERVIEW

SIZE, POPULATION AND GROWTH

San Miguel County boasts a diverse mixture of landscapes and wildlife habitats. At the east end of the county lies Telluride, the county seat. Approximately 3,700 people reside within the Telluride area, with about 2,000 residents in the Town of Telluride. Surrounding mesas comprise approximately 450 year-round residents.

Tourism, real estate and construction are the primary economic generators in the county. Tourism has stimulated construction of an ever-increasing number of second homes, and skiing and a variety of summer festivals bring visitors to town. According to the 1998 report from the Citizen Planning Advisory Committee, the Telluride area may house up to 8,500 year-round residents in the year 2020.

More than 1,000 people live on Wright's Mesa, about half of whom reside in the town of Norwood. The Norwood economy is tied closely to the Telluride Region; many residents commute in this Region. Other Wright's Mesa economic generators include ranching and provision of goods and services for the local community.

The West End of the county, including Egnar, Slick Rock, and Disappointment and Big Gypsum Valleys, is primarily high desert country bisected by the Dolores River and its sandstone canyons. Ranching is the livelihood for many West End residents, who number about 200.

PLANNING AREAS

The Open Space Commission has defined five specific planning areas to help describe the inventory of wildlife habitat, open space, public lands and trails in the county. In addition to diverse geographic and wildlife areas, the Commission recognizes that each area has varied political and economic objectives. The planning areas are:

Alpine Region

The Alpine Region includes Telluride, Mountain Village, Ophir, Trout Lake, the Aldasoro and Last Dollar Subdivisions, and surrounding high-alpine basins. Pockets of private land within the Uncompahgre National Forest extend west of Mountain Village on Turkey Creek Mesa and the West Meadows. Abundant patented mining claims occupy the alpine basins ringing Ophir and Telluride, where mining activity was most prevalent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of these mining claims are landlocked, surrounded by U.S. Forest Service holdings.

The Town of Telluride owns a large portion of the Bear Creek drainage, a popular recreational area just south of town. There is open space dispersed within Aldasoro, Lawson Hill and other subdivisions, while a golf course and ski runs account for some of the open space interspersed among developed property in Mountain Village.

The Alpine Region is home to elk and mule deer, with herds covering higher elevations during summer months and moving closer to the river canyons during the winter. Elk and deer winter range, severe winter range, migration corridors and elk calving areas are prevalent, sometimes in close proximity to developed lands.

Most of the significant trails in the Alpine Region are narrow hiking/biking trails located in the high alpine basins surrounding Telluride or are transportation oriented, linking Telluride to Mountain Village and Down Valley. A combination of Forest Service trails and old mining roads provide ample hiking opportunities. Easily accessible trails, such as the Bear Creek and Jud Wiebe trails, start in Telluride and can either be explored on short day hikes, or can connect with trails leading to higher elevations, such as upper Bear Creek, Bridal Veil and Mill Creek Basins. There are also several bike trails that lead to the valley floor, follow roads into the high basins or take cyclists onto single-track trails north of town.

Mesa Region

The Mesa Region consists of Hastings, Sunshine, Wilson, Horsefly/Iron Springs and Specie mesas.

Mesa lands are mostly privately owned and divided into parcels 35 acres and larger. Forest Service land flanks the Sneffels and Wilson mountain ranges on Hastings and Wilson mesas, respectively. On Horsefly/Iron Springs Mesa, a large portion of the development has been restricted to parcels 70 acres and larger, and although landowners have expressed considerable interest in conservation easements, to date private conservation easements have not been initiated.

Three conservation easements on Wilson Mesa keep approximately 3,800 acres in open space. A 640-acre parcel on Wilson Mesa owned by the State Land Board was recently nominated into the Stewardship Trust, which gives the parcel limited protection from being sold by the State Land Board as private land. A 1,700-acre conservation easement, in three phases, is partially completed on Specie Mesa. The State Land Board owns isolated parcels on Wilson, Hastings and Horsefly/Iron Springs Mesas.

Several elk calving areas dot the mesa regions. About half of the mesa lands are elk winter range, with elk severe winter range (used once every 6-to-10 years) reaching down into the adjacent valleys and high desert areas, where elk find warmer temperatures and forage protruding from lighter snowpacks. An elk migration corridor extends from Sunshine Mesa across Bilk Creek to Wilson Mesa. Horsefly/Iron Springs hosts turkey winter range, as well as an isolated turkey production area. Several bear/human conflict zones exist periodically on Hastings and Sunshine mesas, and bald eagle winter range adjoins Specie Mesa. Iron Springs Mesa is a home to the Gunnison Sage Grouse.

There are few public trails on the mesas. Most trails exist to provide access to higher elevations and peaks, including the popular “fourteeners” above Wilson Mesa. The most prominent cross-mesa trail, the Wilson Mesa Trail, stretches from Sunshine Mesa across Bilk Creek and Wilson Mesa to Fall Creek.

San Miguel River Corridor

The San Miguel River Corridor stretches from Society Turn down valley to Placerville, and then continues toward the Norwood Bridge. It also includes the South Fork of the San Miguel, which runs through Ilium Valley; Saltado Creek, which runs from Specie Mesa into the San Miguel River; and Leopard Creek, which flows into the San Miguel from Horsefly/Iron Springs Mesa. Other tributaries to the San Miguel River include Bilk Creek, Deep Creek, Mill Creek, Big Bear Creek, Fall Creek, Specie Creek and Beaver Creek.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management owns a significant amount of land along the river between Society Turn and the Norwood Bridge, and the U.S. Forest Service owns much of the land in the northern portion of Ilium Valley. The Nature Conservancy owns preserves on the South Fork and on the San Miguel River just downstream from Placerville.

The San Miguel River Corridor plays an essential role to the sustenance of elk and mule deer during the winter. Elk severe winter range parallels the river and Leopard Creek. Ilium Valley and the Leopard Creek corridor near Dallas Divide also host bald eagles during the winter.

The primary trail in the River Corridor runs four miles along the river from the confluence of Bilk Creek toward Sawpit. A historic road, now closed to motorized vehicles, the trail is a favorite among bikers, walkers and fishers. There are plans, which have been partially realized, for a river and/or highway trail corridor from Telluride to Dallas Divide and from Telluride to Lizard Head Pass.

Wright's Mesa

Wright's Mesa consists of the Town of Norwood and the surrounding farm and ranch lands. The Colorado Division of Wildlife owns small parcels on the west side of Wright's Mesa and around Miramonte Reservoir. Although extensive U.S. Forest Service lands stretch south of Wright's Mesa to the county boundary, more than half the land around Norwood is privately held. Several State Land Board parcels on Wright's Mesa also are currently used for livestock grazing. There are few recreational trails located on Wright's Mesa.

Approximately 80 percent of the mesa constitutes turkey range, and several turkey production areas are found south of Norwood. A large portion of Wright's Mesa also is elk winter range, with a number of elk calving and migration areas in the southern portion of the mesa. The threatened Gunnison Sage Grouse establishes lek (the ritual male strut during the mating season) and nesting areas near Miramonte and Gurley reservoirs. A voluntary conservation plan has been established to protect Sage Grouse habitat.

West End

Much of the West End lies in Dry Creek Basin and Disappointment and Big Gypsum Valleys, and approximately 65% belongs to the Bureau of Land Management. The Colorado Division of Wildlife also holds significant lands in the central area of the West End. Several large privately owned holdings covering grazing areas are concentrated in the southwest corner of the county. Eighteen State Land Board parcels are sprinkled throughout the West End.

The West End is almost entirely winter range for deer, as well as year-round habitat for pronghorn antelope and turkey. It is the year-round home to river otter in and along the Dolores River. Several pockets of peregrine falcon nesting areas parallel the Dolores River. The West End also is home to bald eagles and Gunnison Sage Grouse.

While the West End has few public trails, the opportunity to explore BLM land often draws people to the slickrock country near the Dolores River. Bikers and hikers find abundant roads built during the height of uranium/vanadium exploration and extraction, and climbers have found numerous sandstone routes in the West End. Boating and fishing enthusiasts enjoy the Dolores River in late spring and early summer.

APPENDIX B

METHODOLOGY OF SURVEY AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

During the summer of 1998, the Commission developed and mailed an Open Space and Recreation survey to all post office box holders in the county, and then held a series of public meetings in each planning region to hear county residents' attitudes about open space. Detailed maps were created to help Commission members and citizens enhance their understanding of how areas within the county differ with regard to wildlife habitat, existing open space, public lands and trails. The foundation for this Open Lands Plan was developed from citizen opinion expressed in both the survey responses (as reported in the San Miguel County Open Space and Recreation Study 1998 Final Results prepared by RRC Associates) and public meetings.

RRC Associates of Boulder prepared the survey, which evaluated the importance of open space to county residents. Approximately 4,100 surveys were mailed to county post office box holders. A total of 734 surveys, or 19 percent, was returned, which RRC characterized as "fairly strong" response and a sample representative of the whole population. However, it is important to note that respondents who complete a mailed survey typically feel more positive or more negative about the particular survey issues than does the general population. The geographic distribution of the returned surveys indicates that the Town of Telluride and Placerville/Sawpit were slightly over-represented in terms of responses compared to actual population, while the Mountain Village and Norwood were somewhat under-represented.

The survey asked residents to:

1. rank land types that should be preserved as open space;
2. choose where the county should allocate resources for open space and recreation programs and services;
3. assess appropriate methods for protecting open lands; and
4. evaluate possible funding sources for open space acquisition and protection.

The results were broken down by area of residence, which included Telluride, Mountain Village, Brown Homestead/Gold King, Lawson Hill/Ilium Valley, Last Dollar/Aldasoro, Ski Ranches, Placerville/Sawpit, Wilson/Hastings/Sunshine/Specie/Ironsprings Mesas, Norwood, Ophir/Ames and West End.

In the fall of 1998, public meetings were held in Telluride, Placerville, Norwood and Egnar. Survey results were discussed, and maps as attached in Appendix E, for each of the five planning areas were reviewed that showed open space parcels, public lands, wildlife habitat and riparian areas. Meeting participants were asked to review and comment on a draft list of criteria to determine priorities and options for open space preservation.

In addition to the survey and public meetings, efforts were made to contact several owners of large parcels and representatives of various interest groups. These one-on-one interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone. Some agricultural landowners also were personally invited, via mail, to submit comments.

APPENDIX C

PUBLIC OUTREACH RESULTS

SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

The survey indicated that in general there is broad support among county residents for open space acquisition and protection. Of choices listed in the survey, respondents considered open space acquisition to be the most important use of county resources and generally thought that the county was not doing enough in terms of open space preservation. Citizens indicated that the county should first allocate resources to the purchase and dedication of open space easements, purchase of development rights programs and maintenance and development of hiking/biking trails. Finally, it appeared that county residents are generally willing to support some voluntary funding for open space, such as rounding up a utility bill.

ALPINE PLANNING AREA

Residents of the Alpine Planning Region, comprised of the Towns of Telluride and Mountain Village, Trout Lake, Ophir/Ames, Last Dollar/Aldasoro, Ski Ranches, Lawson Hill and Ilium, produced varied survey results. For example, survey results indicate that Last Dollar/Aldasoro residents consider acquisition and protection of open space very important with regard to county resource allocation. Ophir/Ames residents placed high priority on preserving most land types, with the highest support for high alpine areas, wildlife habitat and river corridors. Ski Ranches residents rated the current level of effort to preserve open space by the county as “too much.” As for the current level of efforts by San Miguel County to create recreation programs, Mountain Village residents rated efforts as “too little.” Telluride residents said the current effort is just right, as did Lawson Hill and Ilium residents. Although 20 percent of the Town of Telluride’s general revenues are dedicated to open space protection within the Town, 36 percent of respondents from Telluride indicated that they would support a property tax increase for countywide open space protection.

In meetings with residents from the Alpine Planning Region, it was suggested that the Open Space Commission focus on creating buffer zones between pods of population and adjacent to public lands. Meeting participants agreed that no more high-country trails are necessary, but new biking and hiking paths should be developed to connect population centers. It was also recommended that local government bodies ensure that such buffer zones are created through the land development process. Alpine Region residents suggested that the county consider creating a program to allow development rights to be transferred to appropriate receiving zones. The Mesas, Wright’s Mesa and the West End were identified as areas from which development rights could be transferred to the Telluride area.

Criteria considered important to Alpine residents for evaluating open space projects included contiguity to other open space, public lands or lands with conservation easements, and parcels containing wildlife habitat, water and wetlands. Other important criteria included whether the project mutually benefited conservation partnerships, public funds would be spent wisely, and the parcel could be effectively managed.

MESAS/DOWN VALLEY PLANNING AREA

Survey results indicate that Wilson and Hastings Mesa residents consider open space acquisition and protection very important, and that they would like the county to increase its open space preservation efforts. Residents believe most land types should be preserved, with high alpine areas top priority, followed by wildlife habitat, river corridors and agricultural land. Placerville/Sawpit respondents also prioritized high alpine areas, river corridors and wildlife habitat. Mesa residents said they would support utility bill round-ups and property tax increases to fund open space. Twenty seven percent of Placerville/Sawpit respondents said they would support a property tax increase to fund open space.

Wilson Mesa residents indicated support for conservation easements on large parcels of land and preferred this alternative to clustered development. Discussions indicated that all county landowners, but especially those on the mesas, share a desire to preserve larger parcels of land for single buyers. One land developer indicated that his company encourages buyers to place land into conservation easements. The Wilson Mesa Homeowners Association is attempting to promote its own method of preserving open space by placing subdivision common lands into a conservation easement by the year 2002.

WRIGHT'S MESA PLANNING AREA

Although affordable housing, schools, transportation and public safety ranked higher than open space acquisition among Wright's Mesa residents, fifty percent of residents ranked agricultural lands as the top priority land type for protection, with wildlife habitat closely following. Wright's Mesa residents indicated that the current level of county effort to preserve open space and create recreation programs is too extensive. Norwood residents showed the least level of support for rounding up utility and grocery bills, and only 13 percent indicated that they would consider voting for a property tax increase to support open space projects.

Discussions during a public meeting in Norwood focused primarily on the importance of educating landowners about voluntary land conservation techniques. Participants suggested that often farmers and ranchers are unfamiliar with open space terminology and are suspicious of government programs. Voluntary land conservation options and programs should be emphasized on Wright's Mesa.

WEST END PLANNING AREA

Similar to people living in the Wright's Mesa Planning Area, West End residents prioritized agricultural lands and wildlife habitat for open space protection. West End residents would allocate fewer resources to open space and recreational programs than compared to other county programs such as schools and public safety. West End respondents showed little support for government-initiated funding for open space programs. County residents in general agreed that preserving prime wildlife habitat and riparian areas is important, including along the Dolores River in the West End of the county.

At a public meeting held in Egnar, participants agreed that, with approximately 65 percent of the West End in public ownership, little need exists for the county to preserve additional open space. West End residents said that because their land represents their life savings and children's inheritance, it was important for them to convert their land to cash if necessary. Additionally, tax credits hold little meaning for West End residents, as they generally do not have large incomes to which to apply them.

Although residents believe that agricultural lands are important to the community, many indicated that they would sell their agricultural lands for development if it were the best option for them.

West End residents expressed frustration with many of the recreational activities that take place in the "banana belt" of San Miguel County, referring to visitors that intrude on private land and leave behind trash. It was suggested that perhaps the federal, state and local governments should focus on educating public land users to respect public land and private property. For example, residents would like to encourage increased hunter protocol education by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

West End residents said they would like to improve relations with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Bureau of Land Management regarding wildlife management, hunting and public land trades. It was suggested that the Open Space Commission sponsor a conference with West End stakeholders to examine state and federal policies regarding hunting and recreation.

APPENDIX D

PARTNERSHIPS

The following groups and agencies are some of the potential partners for the Open Space Commission.

NON-PROFIT LAND TRUSTS

Each land trust has different missions and capabilities, and finding the right one to act as the receiving agent for a conservation easement requires talking with the land trust staff to see if their goals fit the property. The land trusts listed here have extensive experience with implementing conservation easements.

The Nature Conservancy - The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit conservation organization and land trust dedicated to preserving rare plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the land and water they need to survive. The Nature Conservancy is renowned for its businesslike, non-confrontational approach to environmental problem solving. The Nature Conservancy designated the San Miguel River watershed as a priority site in 1987. Since then, it has worked in partnership with private landowners, other non-profit organizations and government agencies to protect major stretches of the river corridor and large pieces of mesa-top uplands. The Nature Conservancy has an office in Telluride.

San Miguel Conservation Foundation - The San Miguel Conservation Foundation is a private, non-profit community organization created to preserve open space in the San Miguel County area. As a private organization with tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, SMCF offers a wide range of professional, legal, tax, environmental and land planning expertise to landowners interested in creative and beneficial approaches to today's land use challenges. Based in Telluride, SMCF acts quickly, privately and professionally with landowners to explore the income, estate and/or property tax benefits that result from land preservation. SMCF often engages in cooperative efforts with the Town of Telluride, San Miguel County, other local land preservation organizations and the region's major landowners.

Other land trusts - In addition to the Nature Conservancy and the San Miguel Conservation Foundation, other land trusts engage in conservation easement activity locally, including the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation, American Farmland Trust and the Valley Land Conservancy.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

San Miguel Watershed Coalition

The Watershed Coalition consists of representatives from a number of governmental and non-governmental groups, that together aim to study, protect and understand the San Miguel watershed. Last year, the Coalition produced a Watershed Plan, which emphasizes that maintaining agriculture and grazing lands is essential to the health of the watershed, and therefore the preservation of those lands is a top priority in rural areas. The plan also urges that wildlife habitat be preserved, and specifically identifies critical lands and plant communities. The plan encourages groups that perform wildlife and habitat inventories to continually update habitat information. The San Miguel County Open Lands Plan dovetails effectively with the Watershed Plan, which discusses growth, community preservation, recreation, logging and grazing practices, and many other issues relevant to preserving open lands.

Telluride Institute

The Telluride Institute has sponsored Open Space Commission projects and continues to be an important educational partner. The mission of the Telluride Institute is to contribute to the theory and practice of sustainable community through innovative research and education in the arts, environment and telecommunity, and to “build a society to match the scenery” from its base in the Rocky Mountain West.

MUNICIPALITIES

The San Miguel County Open Space Commission supports open space planning by local municipalities and hopes to work cooperatively with the towns in pursuit of their individual goals.

Town of Telluride - In 1993 Telluride residents voted to dedicate 20% of all town revenues to the preservation and protection of open space. Soon after, the town created the Telluride Open Space Commission, which produced an Open Lands Plan in June 1996 to establish a strategic framework for land protection activity in the Telluride region. The Telluride Open Lands Plan identifies strategic actions to be pursued over a ten year period, including in June 1996 to establish a strategic framework for land protection activity in the Telluride region. The Telluride Open Lands Plan identifies strategic actions to be pursued over a ten year period, including creating a natural areas inventory, improving interaction with the Forest Service, rating key parcels for protection, and protecting key open lands at the east end of town. In partnership with the San Miguel Conservation Foundation, the Town of Telluride has already preserved 300 acres in Bear Creek via a conservation easement. For land outside of the town boundary but within the county jurisdiction, the town and County Open Space Commissions support working together to achieve town open space goals.

Ophir - The Town of Ophir is pursuing its own aggressive open space program. Ophir sold town-owned lots to create an open space fund and is working in partnership with the San Miguel Conservation Foundation. Ophir's first priority is to protect nearby Waterfall Canyon from development, and is now working with landowners to keep additional properties from being developed. Ophir is seeking assistance from Great Outdoors Colorado to raise funds for purchasing land and conservation easements in Waterfall Canyon. The town's second priority is preservation of Swamp Canyon, which is less accessible than Waterfall Canyon and therefore less likely to be developed. Ophir is interested in working with landowners to purchase land/or conservation easements.

Norwood - The Town of Norwood Recreation Committee is currently in the process of master planning a 40-acre site for the Ah Haa School for the Arts, which currently sponsors art programs and offers classes in Telluride. The Recreation Committee is also planning a town park adjacent to the existing community center. Future projects could include equestrian trails around the town perimeter.

Mountain Village - The Town of Mountain Village was platted with over 60% active and passive open space. The town has an ambitious trails program and participates in regional trail planning.

STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES

The Open Space Commission must coordinate with a number of important state and federal agencies in order to achieve its goals, especially as two-thirds of the county land is owned by federal and state land management agencies. The Commission hopes to continue to foster positive relations with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Land Board and Colorado Division of Wildlife.

GREAT OUTDOORS COLORADO

In 1992, voter passage of Amendment 8 directed a portion of Colorado lottery proceeds to The Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO). The legislation earmarks funding for parks, wildlife, outdoor recreation, environmental education, and open land and natural area protection. The county is eligible to compete for grant funds and works in partnerships to increase its likelihood of success.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Public School System - The Telluride R-1 School District has been an important partner to the county in its efforts to obtain a parcel for a park near Placerville. A successful 1998 ballot issue combined a school tax issue with money for park acquisition and facilities. Telluride students have also helped to design the park facility, including determining how the river and natural vegetation can best be utilized and restored. The Open Space Commission plans to continue community education concerning open space issues through the schools.

Local Business Groups - The Open Space Commission has worked closely with local business groups to promote open space, educate the public and encourage locals and visitors to participate in the community's open space future. Last year, the Telluride Association of Realtors and the Open Space Commission teamed with the San Miguel Conservation Foundation and The Nature Conservancy to produce the San Miguel County Land Conservation Options booklet intended to educate landowners about open space preservation options. In 1999, the Telluride Association of Realtors helped co-sponsor an educational conference about tax planning and open space. The Commission also worked closely with Telluride Visitor Services and the San Miguel Conservation Foundation to produce and promote the San Miguel County Visa credit card. The Telluride Regional Chamber of Commerce is another partner the Commission hopes to work with in the future to further open space education.

San Miguel County Recreation District -The County Recreation District was created in 1998 by the Board of County Commissioners to address county recreation issues. The district's first task is to oversee the development of the down valley park, which will be intended for use by county residents and visitors. The Open Space Commission has a member on the Recreation District Board to facilitate cooperation between and funding for the two organizations.

San Miguel County Trails Commission - Formed in 1989, the Trails Council is made up of citizens and government officials representing a cross-section of interests. The Trails Council is working on a trail system from Telluride to Lizard Head and to Dallas Divide in addition to trails linking Telluride to Mountain Village and Turkey Creek Mesa.

San Miguel Basin Weed Advisory Committee - The San Miguel Basin Weed Advisory Committee is composed of citizens, ranchers and representatives of local state and federal agencies and appointed by the County Commissioners of both San Miguel and Montrose Counties. It is the role of this committee to advise both counties regarding weed management.

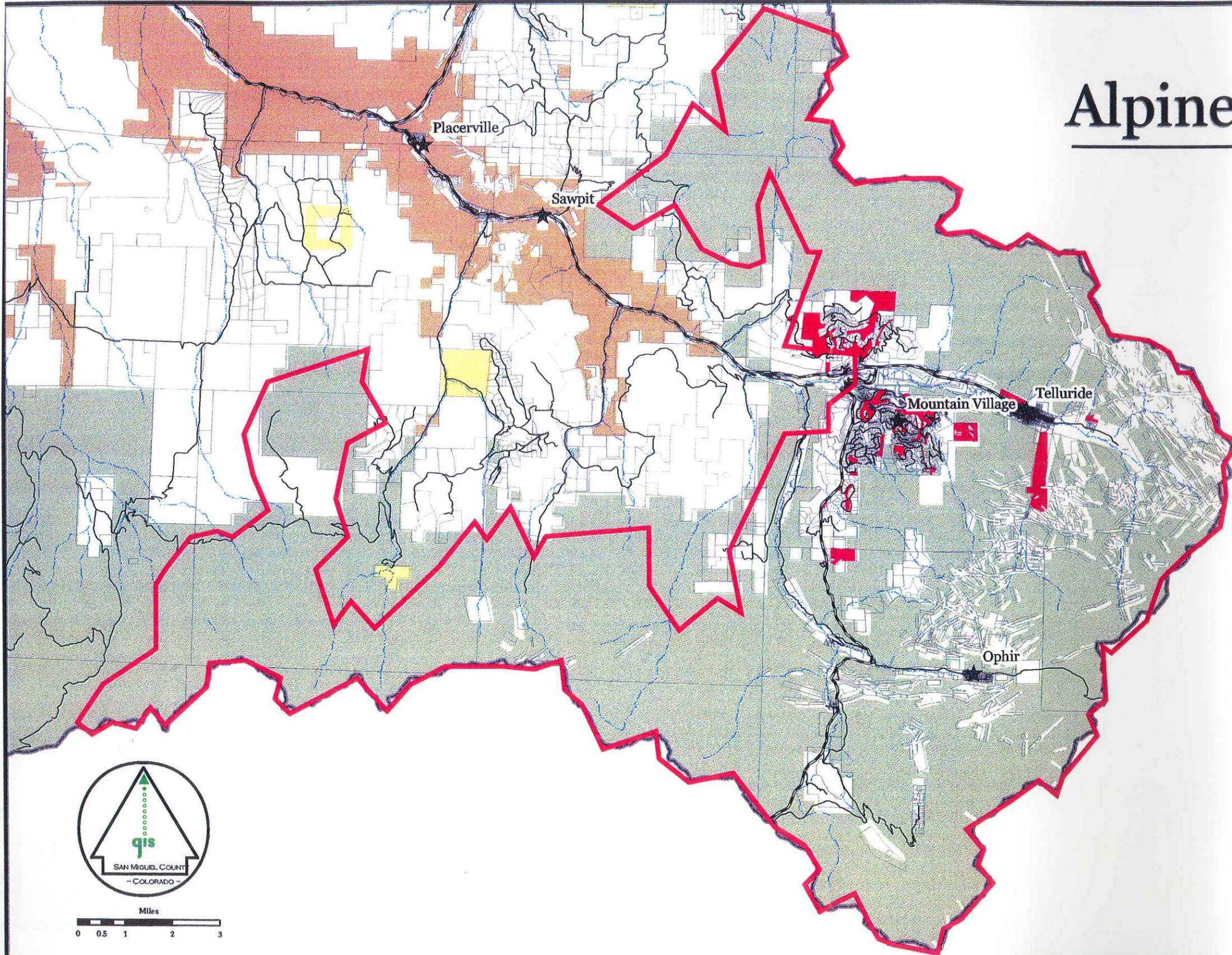
APPENDIX E
OPEN SPACE MAPS

ALPINE PLANNING AREA

Open Lands Plan
1999

Alpine Planning Area

San Miguel County Open Lands Plan



Legend

- Planning Area
- Open Space Parcels
- Land Owners**
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - State of Colorado
 - US Forest Service
 - Private (approximate)
- County Boundary
- Towns
- Roads
- Highways
- Streams

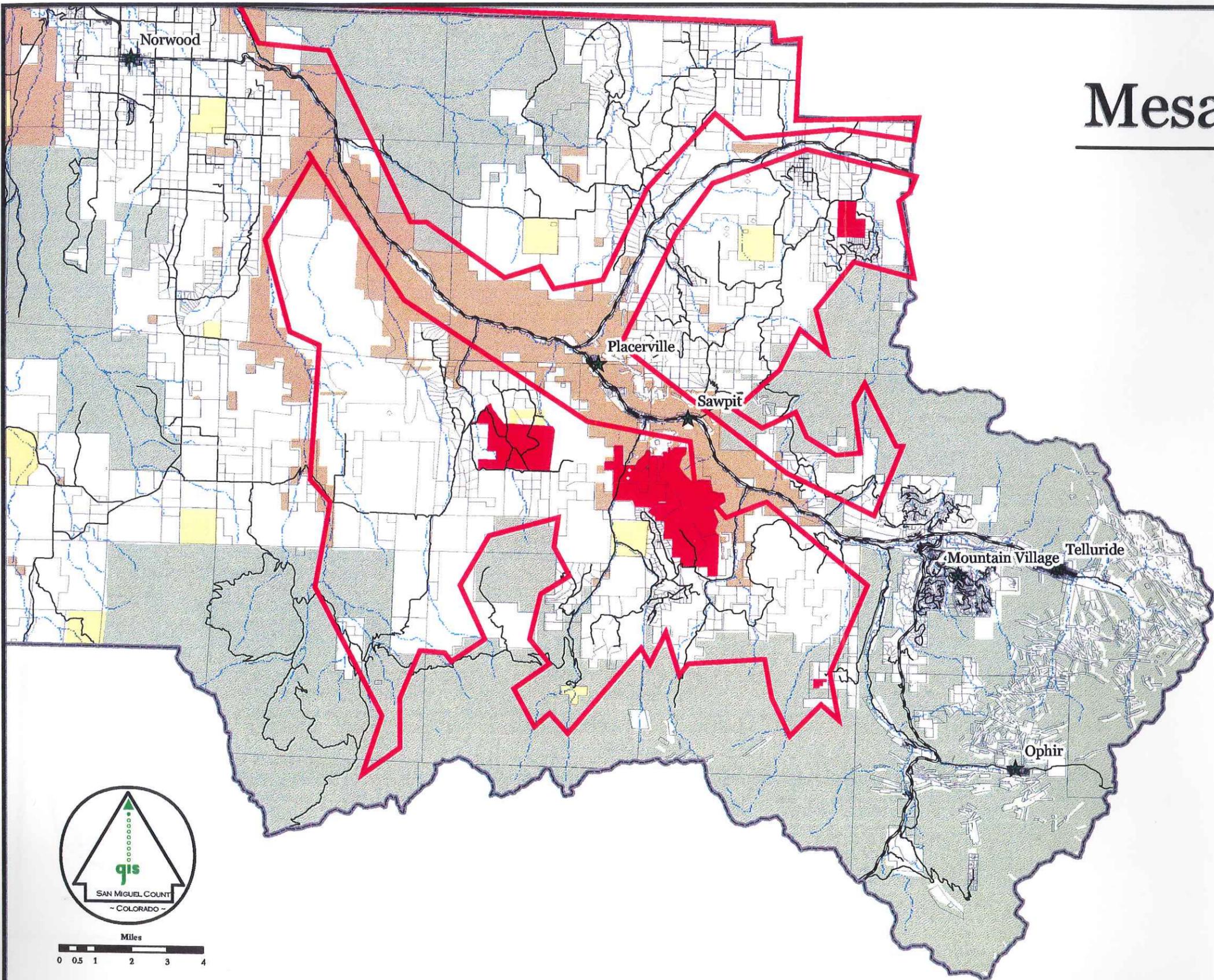
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NOTE: All data are approximate and should be used for guidance only! DATA: BLM, SMC Assessor, SWDC
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MESA PLANNING AREAS

Open Lands Plan
1999

Mesa Planning Areas

San Miguel County Open Lands Plan



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- Planning Area
- Open Space Parcels
- Land Owners**
- Bureau of Land Management
- State of Colorado
- US Forest Service
- Private (approximate)
- County Boundary
- Towns
- Roads
- Highways
- Streams

Prepared by San Miguel County GIS for SMC Open Space & Recreation, 3/02. Original map created 1/99 (HW)
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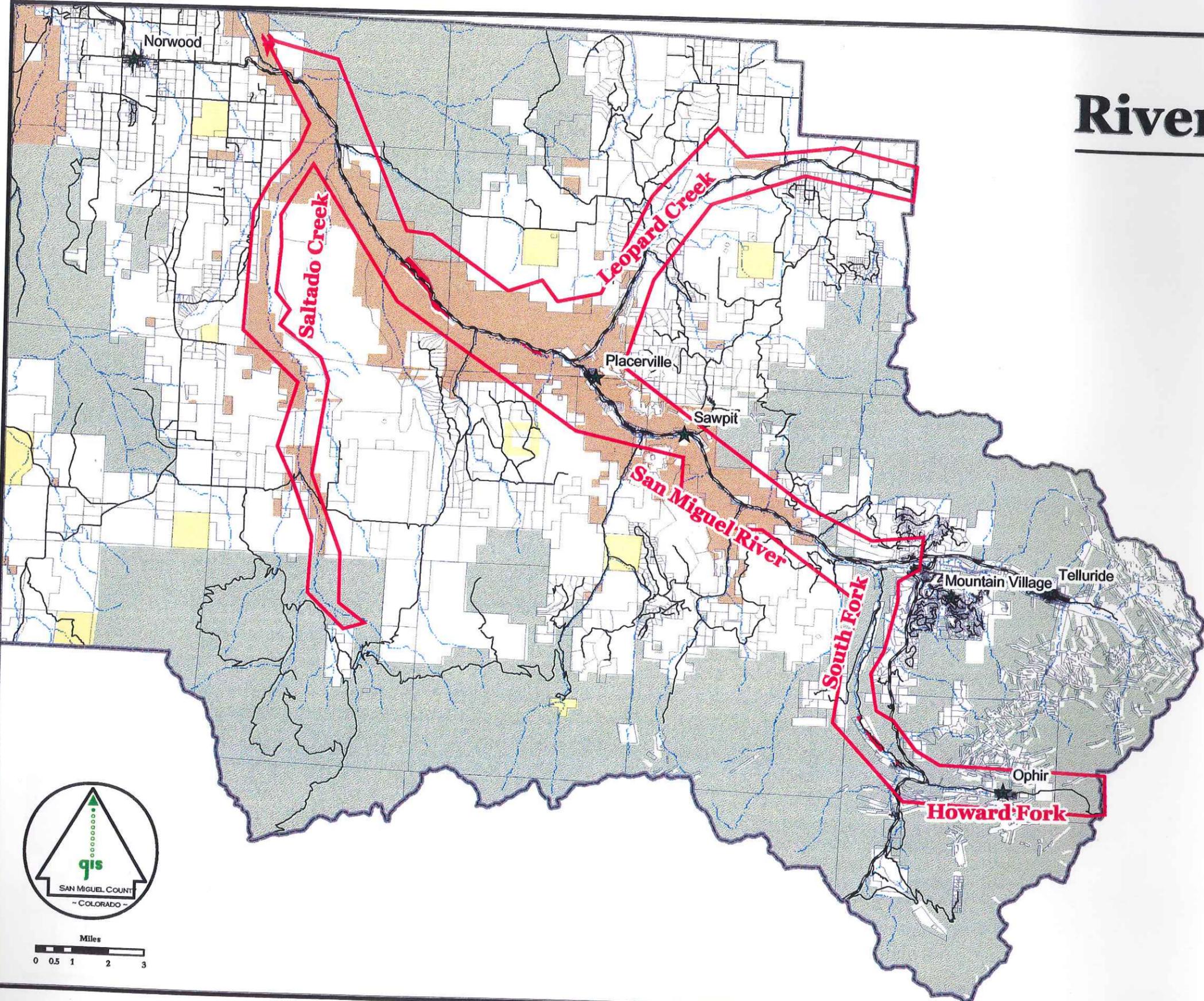


RIVER PLANNING AREAS

Open Lands Plan
1999

River Planning Areas

San Miguel County Open Lands Plan



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- Planning Area
- Open Space Parcels

- Land Owners**
- Bureau of Land Management
- State of Colorado
- US Forest Service
- Private (approximate)

- County Boundary
- Towns
- Roads
- Highways
- Streams

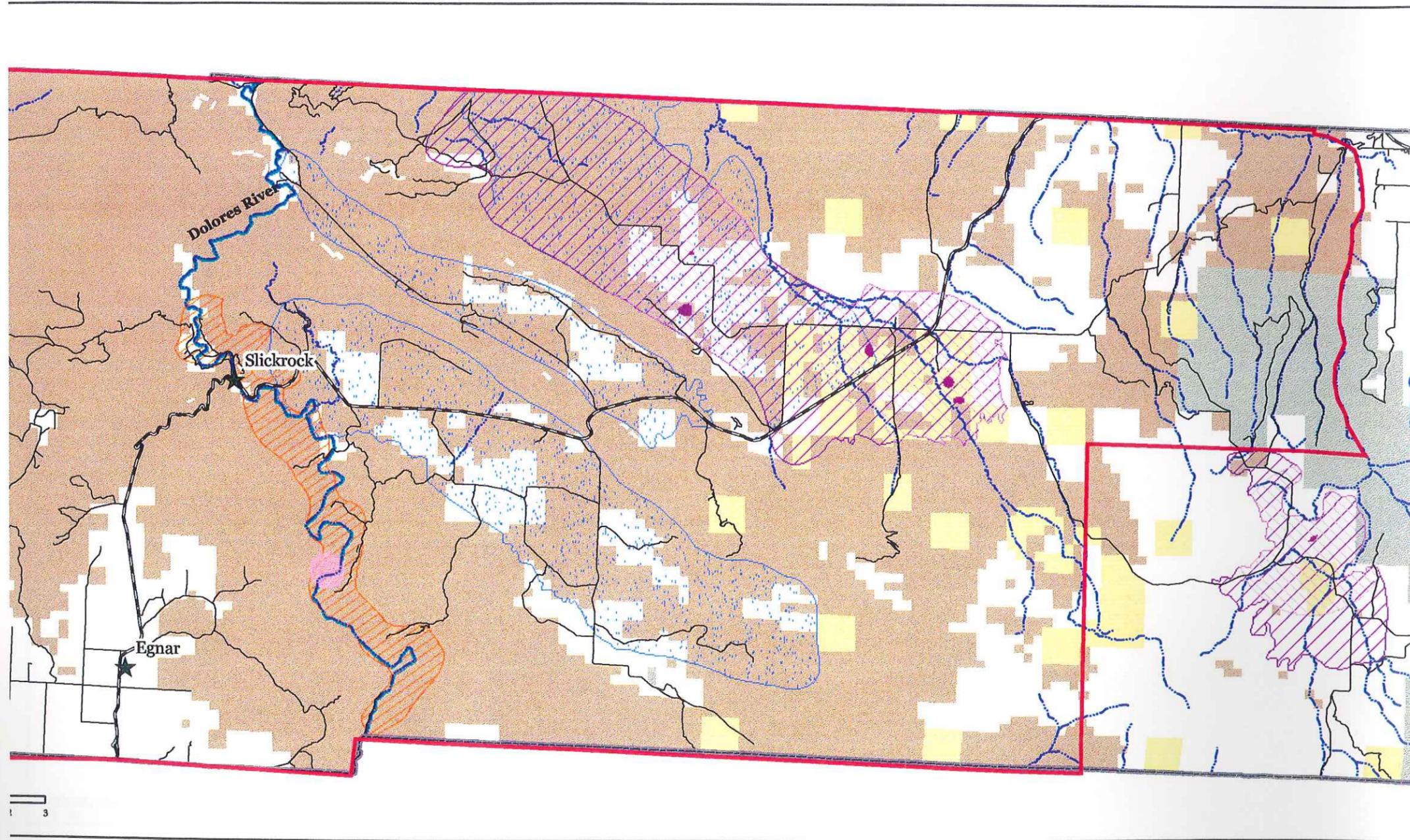
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WEST END PLANNING AREA

Open Lands Plan
1999

West End Planning Area

San Miguel County Open Lands Plan



LEGEND

Wildlife

- Peregrine Nesting Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Lek Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Nest Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Range
- Bighorn Winter Range
- Pronghorn Range
- River Otter Range

Planning Area

Land Owners

- Bureau of Land Management
- State of Colorado
- US Forest Service
- Private (approximate)

County Boundary

- Towns
- Roads
- Highways
- Streams



Prepared by San Miguel County GIS for SMC Open Space & Recreation, 3/02. Original map created 1/99 (HW)
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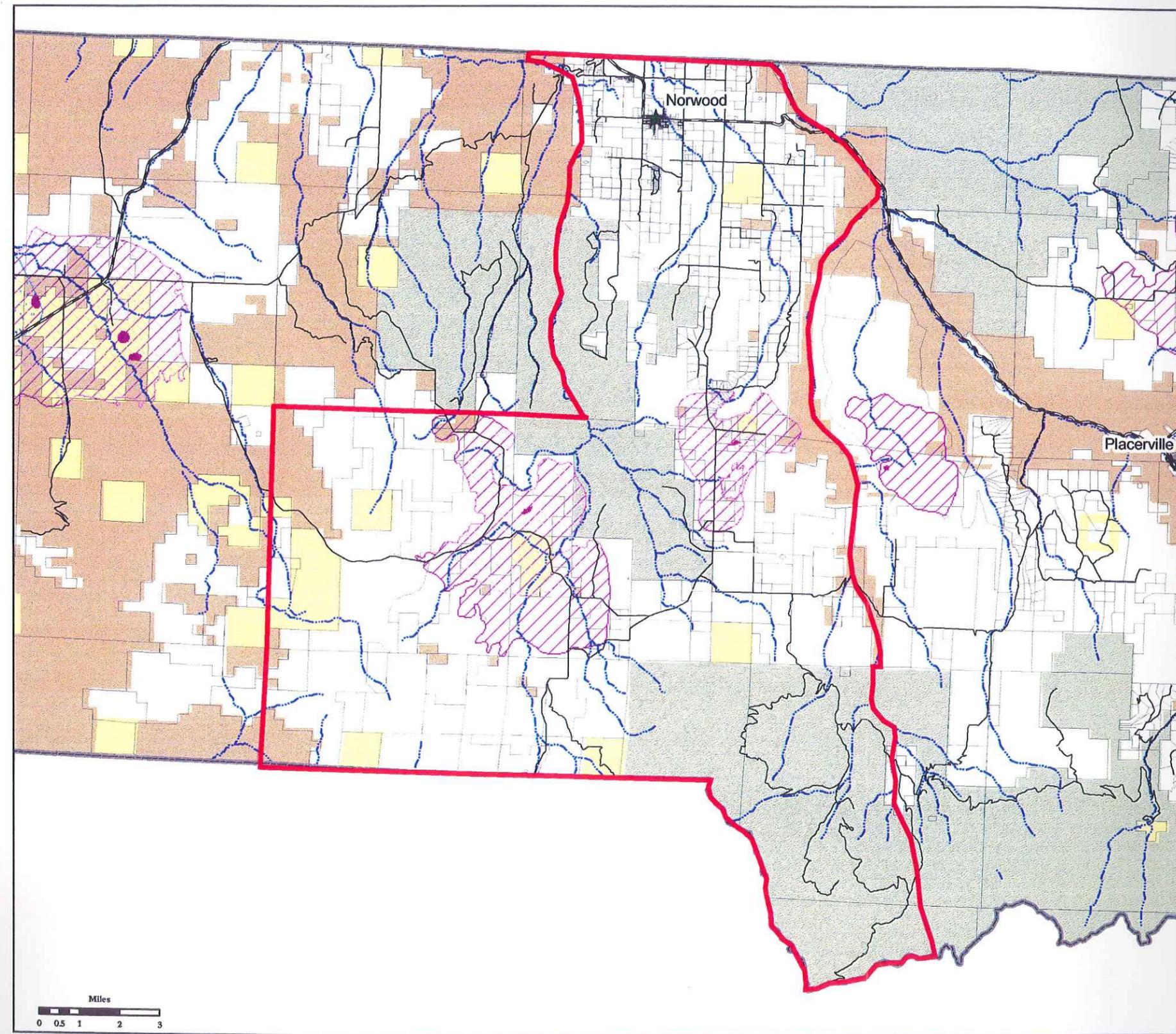
WRIGHT'S MESA PLANNING AREA

Open Lands Plan
1999

Wright's Mesa Planning Area

San Miguel County Open Lands Plan

LEGEND



Wildlife

- Peregrine Nesting Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Lek Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Nest Area
- Gunnison Sage Grouse Range
- Bighorn Winter Range
- Pronghorn Range
- River Otter Range

Planning Area

Land Owners

- Bureau of Land Management
- State of Colorado
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- Towns
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