Chaffee County Heritage Area & Collegiate Peaks Scenic And Historic Byway

MANAGEMENT PLAN 2008
# Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction .................................................. 1
   1.1 Description of the Chaffee County Heritage Area
   1.2 Purpose of the Heritage Area and the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway
   1.3 Purpose of the Management Plan
   1.4 The Planning Process
   1.5 Organization of the Management Plan

2.0 Vision for the Chaffee County Heritage Area. .................. 11
   2.1 Vision
   2.2 Goals of the Management Plan

3.0 Intrinsic Qualities ............................................. 13
   3.1 Scenic Beauty
   3.2 Natural Diversity
   3.3 Agricultural Lands
   3.4 Cultural, Historical and Archeological Heritage
   3.5 Recreational Resources

4.0 Issues and Opportunities ....................................... 37
   4.1 Growth and Development
   4.2 Land Use Policy
   4.3 Scenic Character
   4.4 Recreational Conflicts and Opportunities
   4.5 Protection of Significant Historic Resources
   4.6 Historic Preservation and Economic Sustainability
   4.7 Wayfinding
   4.8 Visitor Amenities

5.0 Wayfinding and Interpretive Strategy .......................... 45
   5.1 Wayfinding
   5.2 Interpretive Strategy
   5.3 Interpretive Framework

6.0 Strategic Plan .................................................. 59
   6.1 Preserve Scenic Character through Resource Protection
   6.2 Identify and Protect Significant Historic Resources
   6.3 Educate and Engage the Community and Visitors
   6.4 Action Plan for the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board
7.0 Background

7.1 Natural Resources Inventory
7.2 Cultural, Historic, Archeological Resources Inventory
7.3 Existing Land Use
7.4 Wayfinding and Road Conditions
7.5 Existing and Visitor Amenities

8.0 Appendix

A. Oral History Workshop Summary and Transcripts

List of Maps

Chapter 1.0 Introduction
Figure 1. Chaffee County Heritage Area Boundary

Chapter 3.0 Intrinsic Qualities
Figure 2. Scenic Byway Viewshed Analysis
Figure 3. Scenic Byway Viewshed Analysis – Excluding Public Lands
Figure 4. Skyline Analysis
Figure 5. Character Zones and Priority Views
Figure 6. Natural Resource Composite
Figure 7. Agricultural Lands

Chapter 5.0 Wayfinding and Interpretive Strategy
Figure 8. Interpretive Framework

Chapter 7.0 Background
Figure 9. Bighorn Sheep Habitat
Figure 10. Black Bear Habitat
Figure 11. Elk Habitat
Figure 12. Lynx Habitat
Figure 13. Mule Deer Habitat
Figure 14. Raptor Habitat
Figure 15. Riparian Habitat
Figure 16. Potential Conservation Areas
Figure 17. Listed and Eligible Historic Resources
Figure 18. Potential Historic Resources
Figure 19. Historic Downtown Resources
Figure 20. Wayfinding and Interpretive Signage: Existing Conditions
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Description of the Chaffee County Heritage Area

As the valley of the Arkansas River winds its way through Chaffee County, it reveals a rich tableau of human interactions with a very special natural landscape. Majestic peaks rise dramatically to more than a mile above the fertile river plains to crest at above 14,000 feet. The broad meanders of the Arkansas River, a modern world-class destination for recreation, stretch for miles, surrounded by ancient geologic formations on all sides.

Along the valley’s western edge are the fourteen 14ers in the Sawatch and Collegiate Ranges along the Continental Divide; the rugged canyons, forests and watercourses are marked with furious but short-lived mining and timbering operations.

To the south are the Ute Peaks—Ouray, Shavano, Chipeta, and Pah lone, named for the Ute Indians who once called the valley home, where their winter hunting grounds are the same grounds now hiked and explored by visitors seeking solitude and adventure. To the east are craggy, piñon-juniper forests of the East Salida Hills and Fourmile area, which were once key providers of public grazing land and are now popular destinations for multiple-use recreation.

Signs of the evolution of Chaffee County’s heritage are evident all around. Mountain bikers and hikers venture on historic railroad routes deep into the rocky hills of the Fourmile area, passing Native American and mining remnants including chert quarries and crude early ore-crushers called arrastas. Rafters and kayakers negotiate the waters of the Arkansas River through rocky canyons and swift rapids. Through intricate historic ditches these same waters reach the valley’s broad agricultural lands, irrigating local hay fields and watering livestock on ranches that have been in continuous operation for more than 100 years.
Historic stagecoach trails, railroad routes, early motor ways and the remnants of a late 19th century smelter parallel the river’s path, evoking tales of early explorers, settlers, and miners who sought adventure and a new life as well as ore and minerals. Narrow ribbons of riparian habitat sheltering birds and small mammals along the river give way to shrub and grasslands supporting bighorn sheep, elk and deer.

The 57-mile Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway, incorporating pieces of US Highways 285 / 24, and 50, as well as Colorado Highway 291, connects the historic towns of Buena Vista, Salida and Poncha Springs. Though all are energized by a diverse economy of agriculture, arts, recreation and tourism, each rural town displays its own character.

Historic downtowns, dating from the time of the railroads in the late 1800s, bustle with activity as residents and visitors enjoy good food, unique shopping, and an abundance of visual and performing arts in an environment that is at once modern yet steeped in historical ambiance. Neighborhoods of historic Victorian homes surround the busy downtowns, and these communities remain close-knit in their common heritage.
1.2 Purpose of the Chaffee County Heritage Area
and Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway

Chaffee County is endowed with a diversity of resources that define its heritage: archeological and historic sites, agricultural, railroad and mining cultural traditions, and land use patterns reflecting these histories. Extensive public lands, world-class mountains, and rivers support globally significant rare animal and plant communities. The county is known for its unparalleled scenic beauty and an arts community with national recognition.

The Chaffee County community has long recognized the value of this distinct natural environment and the unique cultural, historical and recreational resources that it has spawned. To protect and preserve these resources, to promote economic development, and to provide educational opportunities, the community established the Chaffee County Heritage Area in 2004. The establishment of the Heritage Area grew out of a growing consensus among county residents, governmental agencies, and local businesses that those heritage resources that define the county’s sense of community should be protected by creative and sensible solutions to retain and attract residents, appropriate businesses, and tourism.

This designation of Chaffee County as a Heritage Area is by resolution (Resolution No. 2004-45), officially established by the Chaffee County Commissioners with a defined boundary that coincides with the official county boundary (Figure 1, page 4). To guide development and management of the Heritage Area, the County Commissioners established the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board (CCHAAB) at the same time.
Chaffee County Heritage Area Boundary

Figure 1

PLAN LEGEND

Amenities
- Airport
- Golf Course
- Ski Area
- Trail
- Stream/River

Ownership
- Private
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Forest Service Wilderness
- State Land
- State Park, Wildlife, or Recreation Area
- Private w/Conservation

Scenic Byway

Downtown Area

Federal Highway

Local Road

Heritage Area Boundary

November 2007
The CCHAAB consists of seven to nine members appointed by the Commissioners “to provide assistance on matters associated with planning and implementation of the Heritage Area program.” Members must be full-time residents and are selected by geographical diversity. At the direction of the County Commissioners, the program is administered and coordinated by the Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA), a local non-profit 501-c (3) cooperating association.

Soon after its creation the Board recognized the value of having the county’s major highways designated as a Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway, and using that designation to energize and catalyze protection and preservation of the heritage resources of the Heritage Area, i.e., the whole county. Establishing a byway was given the highest priority, and in 2005, through the Board’s efforts and with community support, the Collegiate Peaks Historic and Scenic Byway was formally established.
1.3 Purpose of the Management Plan

Completion of a byway Corridor Management Plan is required by the Colorado Department of Transportation Scenic Byways program, and, with agreement from the state program, CCHAAB chose to meet that requirement by incorporating the corridor plan into this county-wide Heritage Area Management Plan (the Management Plan), which includes planning for historic initiatives and preservation of intrinsic resources. Approval of the Management Plan will make the Heritage Area and Byway directly eligible for additional grant funding under the National Scenic Byway Program.

The approved Plan is also expected to significantly improve chances for successfully competing for grant funds from many other sources. Great Outdoors Colorado funds may be explored for proposals relating to land conservation and scenic view protection, and the State Historical Fund is a possibility for preservation of historic structures and other physical remains.

The Chaffee County Heritage Area Management Plan will:

• Guide decision-making by the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board (CCHAAB) in the management and promotion of the Chaffee County Heritage Area and the Collegiate Peaks Byway;

• Provide a vision and goals for the Heritage Area and Byway’s future, an inventory of its intrinsic qualities, and identification of ‘key findings’ related to the unique character of Chaffee County;

• Recommend a set of strategies and actions, and present a phased implementation plan.

The Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board (CCHAAB) will:

• Act as a coordinating body to support and promote county-wide historic and heritage initiatives (including preservation, interpretation, and educational efforts) by organizations and institutions identified as partners, including but not limited to the county and local historic groups;

• Provide expertise on county-wide historic preservation issues, and participate in County planning activities in an advisory capacity;

• Assist the county in maintaining the historic sites database to inventory historic sites and to facilitate evaluation of potential impacts of proposed development; and

• Manage and coordinate the Heritage Area and Byway administration.
1.4 The Planning Process

The planning process for the Management Plan occurred over a one-year period, guided by the Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board with the involvement of the community through public meetings, oral history workshops, and stakeholder interviews. Planning occurred through three primary tasks: Research and Inventory of Intrinsic Qualities, and Identification of Issues and Opportunities; Presentation and Review of Initial Findings and Potential Tools or Strategies; and Recommendations for Strategies and Actions.

The primary source for initial data was the Chaffee County GIS (geographic information system), which provided information on the county’s topography, geomorphology, roads, railroads, water, land use, and historic resources. The county’s agricultural lands were mapped by Chaffee County using data generated by the Natural Resource Ecology Lab at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, and included in the initial database. A number of additional sources were consulted in the inventory preparation, including the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). Local historic preservation groups including Historic Salida, Inc. and Buena Vista Heritage, and several public agencies including the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) and the USFS (United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service) provided data on potential cultural and historical resources.

Members of the CCHAAB provided expertise on local issues, historical resources, and recreational resources. Close collaboration occurred throughout the planning process with the Chaffee County land use update, particularly in coordination with the Chaffee County Citizen’s Land Use Roundtable, a group of 16 people representing county residents who participated in land use focus groups. The preliminary recommendations from this group helped to confirm shared community values such as the importance of the county’s rural character, its wealth of recreational opportunities, and most importantly the value that the county’s scenic views have to residents.

On November 29, 2007, more than 35 community members met for an afternoon to share their personal stories about Chaffee County. Many of these individual and family stories were instrumental in crafting the interpretive themes presented in Chapter 5.0.
These stories ensure that the interpretive strategy builds upon experiences of the community and reflects the unique intrinsic qualities of the county.

The members of the CCHAAB worked together to develop recommendations to guide the future of the Heritage Area and the Byway. With the assistance of the planning consultants, CCHAAB created and presented initial findings and potential tools to the community in two public open houses in late November 2007. Additional input was solicited from the Chaffee County Planning Commission and planning staff, the Citizen’s Land Use Roundtable, and stakeholders that included property owners along the Byway. In August 2008, the CCHAAB returned to the community (through two public presentations) to share their consensus recommendations for the improvement and management of the Heritage Area and Byway. These recommendations provide three strategic approaches to fulfill the vision and goals of the Chaffee County Heritage Area. A series of actions is provided so that the CCHAAB can proceed with specific implementation tasks. An action plan for the next five years provides the CCHAAB with immediate priorities.