

Executive Summary

Based on 2 ½ years of collaborative partnership with local, state, federal and commercial entities, the Roads, Rivers, and Recovery Project achieves an extraordinary and varied range of goals at an impressive cost-benefit ratio (15:1), and with \$17.5 million in pledges from multiple interested parties, including the Colorado Department of Transportation, the Colorado department of Health and the Environment, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Silver Dollar Metropolitan District and the City of Blackhawk. Total construction cost of the Project is \$82.7 million. The Project provides a unique opportunity to: (1) create high-paying construction jobs immediately; (2) create and support long-term, high-paying tourist, mining and construction jobs; (3) to improve safety for private, transit, and commercial vehicles; (4) reduce greenhouse gases while increasing commerce; and (5) to bring a “dead” section of river to life by creating habitat that sustains brown trout, and (6) promote a more diversified economy for a future.

The Roads, Rivers, and Recovery Project roadways, US Highway 6, US Highway 40, and State Highway 119, follow old railroad beds built between Denver, Colorado, and a historic gold-mining district in the Rocky Mountain foothills, complicating any transportation improvement plans. Today, the gradual grade is a preferred access to recreation areas, a commercial mine, and gaming areas, as well as for transit buses and commercial trucks. When portions of Interstate 70 are closed by winter weather or accidents, these roads serve as alternate routes. However, all three roads wind along steep-sided canyons and next to rivers. The canyon walls are prone to rockfalls; sharp curves create safety hazards; and large cell phone “dead zones” can leave motorists stranded for long periods of time. Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep have migrated along a trail that crosses SH 119 in the Project area, but increasing traffic volumes now put both the sheep and motorists at risk. When hazardous materials accidents occur, spills can enter the adjacent rivers, which provide drinking water to more than 300,000 people.

The Project creates Recovery in several ways. Construction of roads, bridges, and a bike path will immediately create jobs in the Project area. Regional business jobs related to aggregate mining (which supports construction along the Rocky Mountain Front Range), gaming, commercial outfitters (climbing, kayaking, etc.) are relatively high-paying jobs that will be retained and expanded with the Project improvements. Reconstruction, which includes curve removal, partial road widening, and installing road monitoring and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), will improve safety and give motorists advance warning of accidents or rockfalls. The ITS will speed emergency response time, decrease road closure time, and lower impacts to air quality. Construction of the wildlife bridge will improve safety for both the sheep and motorists.

The Project includes efficiencies such as using rock waste from highway construction to build the base for a Mine Drainage Treatment Facility. The facility is necessary because the Project area is in the Central City/Clear Creek Superfund Site, and will be built as a joint effort between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Diverse organizations and people (including urban and rural communities, counties, private employers, wildlife managers, and university students) have been brought together through the North Clear Creek Mitigation Advisory Committee (NCCMAC), a unique and innovative partnership, to work on the Project. NCCMAC is a model of interagency and industry cooperation. Duplication of effort is avoided by information sharing, coordinating Project timing saves material costs (such as rock generated by CDOT being used to cover exposed mine waste), and combining Project components (such as mine cleanup and highway construction) saves money. Savings will be used to restore parts of the adjacent North Clear Creek to create brown trout habitat. For these reasons, the Roads, Rivers, and Recovery Project meets and exceeds the TIGER Grant criteria, and provides the biggest bang for the taxpayer buck.