**United States Department of Agriculture**
Forest Service

# Environmental Assessment

## Colorado Department of Transportation

## Colorado State Highway 133

## Horseshoe Bend Fill-site &

## Placita Restoration

**Aspen-Sopris Ranger District**
**White River National Forest**
**SW1/4 Sec.7, NW1/4 Sec.18, T.11 S., R.88 W, 6th PM**
**Gunnison County, Colorado**
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# Introduction

The Aspen-Sopris Ranger District of the White River National Forest prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to determine whether effects of the Colorado Department of Transportation's (CDOT) proposal to permanently store roadside debris just east of McClure Pass inside "Horseshoe Bend" would be significant enough to require the preparation of an environmental impact statement. The reclamation of a previous debris storage site at Placita was also analyzed.

There were no significant effects determined through this analysis. The results are summarized in the finding of no significant impact. By preparing this EA, the Forest Service is fulfilling agency policy and direction to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and state laws and regulations. For this project, the responsible official is the Forest Supervisor.

The proposed action will allow CDOT to utilize approximately 9.17 acres at the location just east of McClure Pass. This will involve depositing the roadside debris in one acre phases that will be reclaimed prior to filling in the next sections.

Most of the 3.0 acre roadside debris at the old Placita site has already been reclaimed. A small boulder storage site of 0.70 acres will be reclaimed to prevent sedimentation from reaching the Crystal River. Useable boulders will be stored at the new facility, and moved as each new phase becomes utilized.

For more details of the proposed action, see the Proposed Action and Alternatives section of this document.

# Background

Each year, thousands of tons of rock fall onto CSH 133. The Colorado Department of Transportation needs a location to permanently incorporate roadside debris into the landscape. This was done in the past at locations in the vicinity of Placita, 1.5 miles to the north of Horseshoe Bend. Continued use of these areas was found to be undesirable due to visual impacts along the highway and sedimentation that could enter the Crystal River.

The Horseshoe Bend site is worth examination because the loop in the highway has formed a sediment basin keeping deposits from reaching the Crystal River. It is also in close proximity to the geologic events that drop rocks onto the highway. With proper landscape design, re-vegetation, and construction of berms, the visual impacts can be adequately minimized. If approved, this proposal will be authorized with a long-term special use permit.

Although there is no longer fill being deposited in the Placita sites, a boulder storage area remains. These rocks are useful for doing emergency road repairs in the vicinity of Redstone and Marble which experience severe mudflows. Earlier scoping indicated the public was in favor of retaining an area for storing these boulders.

This proposal includes storing these boulders at the Horseshoe Bend site. The useable rocks would be placed on the outside edge of each one-acre site and moved to the next one-acre site during the final reclamation of the previous fill area. No new storage of boulders will be allowed at Placita.

## Proposed Project Location

The preferred alternative is the “Horseshoe Bend” fill site located 23 miles south of Carbondale, Colorado just off of Colorado State Highway 133 (CSH133) in the SW¼ Sec.7, NW¼Sec. 18, T.11 S. R.88 W., 6th P.M., on the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District. The site is immediately off of Colorado State Highway (CSH) 133. The permitted boundary area will be for 9.17 acres.

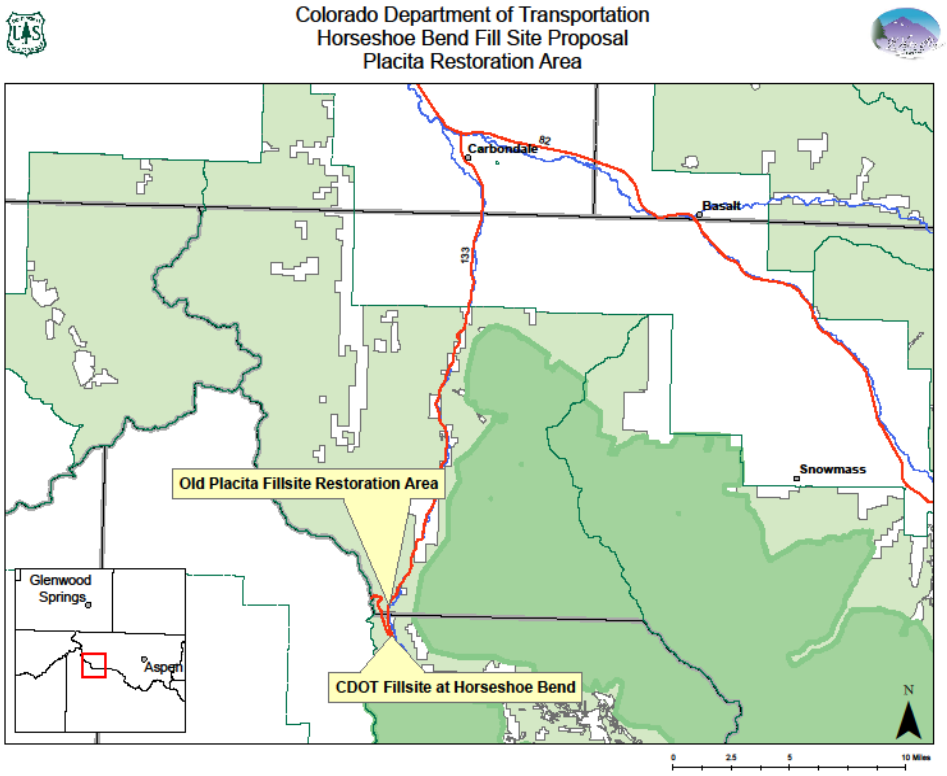


**Figure 1. Horseshoe Bend is approximately 23 miles south of Carbondale**

In addition to this project, the old debris storage sites across from the historic town site of Placita will be re-landscaped and re-vegetated. These sites are located to the east of CSH 133 in the SW1/4 of Section 6, T.11S. R.88W, 6th P.M. Combined, these sites are approximately 2.9 acres.

The primary vegetation type in the fillsite area is aspens, with some pine and spruce trees along the outer edges. Geologically, the rock formation are composed of the Mesa Verde Formation, composed of sandstones, siltstones, and intermixed with coal layers that are

mined further to the south in Summerset. These formations tend to be unstable, and are a cause of multiple rockslides onto the highway.

## Purpose and Need for Action

The need for action includes:

- Reducing the time it takes to remove rock fall and debris from the highway
- Placing rock and debris in an environmentally stable location
- Allowing an opportunity for timely emergency road repairs

A brief explanation of the need for action includes an understanding of the roadside geology on McClure Pass. The geology of CSH133 is composed of unstable mudstones and sandstones creating a safety hazard. At least one fatality and a number of accidents have occurred along this section of road from falling debris or collisions with rocks.

***McClure Pass:*** *Each year, hundreds of tons of rock fall onto the highway's right of way.*

The purpose of the proposed action includes:

- Responding to a CDOT special use permit application and plan of development
- Enabling CDOT to respond to rock fall events in a safe and timely manner
- To provide a permanent disposal location for the rocks and debris
- Providing a temporary boulder storage location for use on CSH 133 emergency repairs

# Public Involvement and Tribal Consultation

The project was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions in February 2009. Updates have been provided quarterly.

A public scoping comment period on this proposed activity was distributed to the district's west zone mailing list and local landowners on February 27, 2009. Eleven comments were received in response. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the United States Forest Service (USFS) attended various meetings primarily with the West Elk Scenic Byway Committee. The USFS interacted with the local landowners, the Crystal River Caucus, Pitkin County Open Space, the Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association, Wilderness Workshop, and the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies throughout the scoping process.

Due to delays in processing this application, the decision was made to renew our public scoping effort in order to make certain all concerns raised will be addressed. In September, 2014, a *Notice of Proposed Action* for this project was distributed via the West Zone's NEPA mailing list, and published in a legal ad in the *Glenwood Springs Post Independent* on November 5, 2014. Three comments were received from local organizations. All three comments received were in favor of the proposal pending the adaptation of design criteria that addressed scenic and environmental issues. Key components from the public input were incorporated into the design criteria for this project.

To address the key issues, the USFS identified certain alternatives described below. The alternatives developed will include project design features that will be a part of the decision on this analysis.

# Proposed Action and Alternatives

## Proposed Action for Horseshoe Bend

***Alternative A: Proposed Action – Use of Horseshoe Bend Site***

To respond to the purpose and need for action, the Forest Service proposes utilization of the area inside the "Horseshoe Bend" switchback by CDOT as a rock material and debris fill site.

The proposed project area is located 23 miles south of Carbondale on CSH 133, in the SW¼ Sec.7, NW¼ Sec. 18, T.11S, R.88W. 6th P.M, Gunnison County, Colorado. This area is managed by the White River National Forest, Aspen and Sopris Ranger District. The proposed location is within a 9.17 acre man-made loop in the highway. It is an artificially created depression from the reconstruction of the highway in 1964. There are a number of trees along the outside perimeter of the site. It is the prominent switchback at the bottom of the east side of McClure Pass. The elevation is approximately 7700'.

The capacity of the Horseshoe Bend could accommodate approximately 20,000 cubic yards of material. Depending on the volume and frequency of the geologic events, it could take between 20 - 50 years for the site to become full.

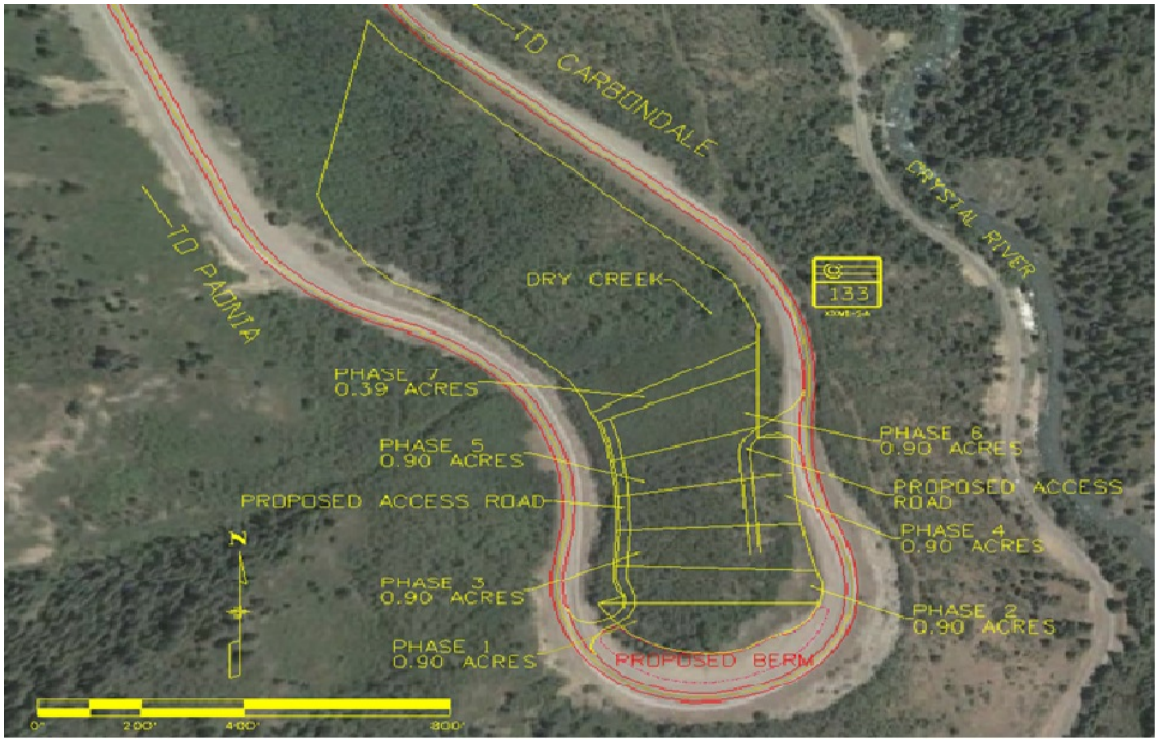


**Figure 2: Proposed layout of phase's and access roads for the Horseshoe Bend fill site**

## Proposed Action for Placita

Much of the reclamation from the old permitted site has been completed at the time of this EA. These areas were within the right-of-way for the State Highway. A remaining area of .69 acres where boulders were stored needs to be reclaimed. CDOT is proposing storing boulders in each of the phased areas at the Horseshoe site, and moving them when then next new phase is utilized.


**Figure 3: Proposed layout for the Placita Disposal Site**

# Alternatives to the Proposed Action

***Alternative B: No Action:*** The Environmental Assessment (EA) may document consideration of a no-action alternative through the effects analysis by contrasting the impacts of the proposed action and any alternative(s) with the current condition and expected future condition if the proposed action were not implemented (36 CFR 220.7(b)(2(ii). Under the No Action Alternative, CDOT would be required to find another location for material disposal. The depression within the switchback would remain as is.

For the Placita Disposal Site, there is no "No Action" Alternative, since restoration of the site was agreed upon in the now expired authorization for this area.

## Other Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

***Alternative C: Continued use of the Placita sites:*** This alternative was found undesirable because sediment could eventually drain into the Crystal River. Additionally, this alternative would impact sagebrush habitat and create a scenic disturbance difficult to mitigate.

***Alternative D: Disposal of debris at the old Janeway Campground area:*** Janeway Campground was closed due to the large mudslides that frequent the area. It is not far from a small housing development and the Mystic Eagle Mine. Additionally, it is in the viewshed of the Swiss Village subdivision. The cumulative effects of adding a dumpsite in this area at the gateway to the Avalanche Creek drainage were undesirable. This is also in an area with temporal access restrictions due to the big-horn sheep population.

***Alternative E: Utilization of two sites near the top of McClure Pass:*** These sites would have involved filling in sections of abandoned highway and would have been difficult to access in winter. Furthermore, they did not provide the volume of storage as the Horseshoe site and were located on relatively steep slopes. They are also used for recreational purposes such as cross-county skiing.

# Effects and Issues to Consider

Issues are unresolved cause and effect relationships that arise as a result of the proposed action. The environmental assessment will address the effects of the proposed action and the no action alternatives for the Horseshoe Bend Fill Site Proposal.

Initially, the Forest Service identified the issues in Table 2 below to be considered and analyzed. These issues and comments were received from the initial scoping from the public, local organizations, and the Forest Service inter-disciplinary planning team working on this proposal. Additional issues will be added if identified through this scoping effort. The assessment will be issue-driven and contain detail commensurate to the degree to which a resource may be affected.

Other issues raised in response to this notice of proposed action will be considered and addressed in the environmental analysis. Some issues may be addressed through modification of the proposed action, development of a new alternative, or mitigation measures.

**Table 1 - Summary Comparison of Potential Environmental Consequences**

| Alternative A – developing the fill site | Alternative B- No Action |
|---|---|
| **SCENIC INTEGRITY** | |
| ***Issue: Utilizing the Horseshoe site would create a visual disturbance*** | |
| Rock and dirt piles can be unsightly. Design features and best management practices would be required to re-vegetate the area and give it a natural appearance. | Visual disturbances would be limited to the existing conditions. No landscape design would occur to make this more suitable. Temporary dumping would still occur along the right-of-way areas and stored until relocated. |
| **WATER QUALITY** | |
| ***Issue: Preserving the Wild and Scenic characteristics of the Crystal River and preventing sediment from disturbing the river*** | |
| It is unlikely that this proposal will affect the water quality of the Crystal River. This site is an isolated basin that only drains though the soil. An intermittent drainage on the north end of the area only runs in the spring. A 100' buffer zone, as required by the Army Corps of Engineers, design features, and best management practices should prevent sediment from being discharged from this area. . | No changes in water quality from present conditions. |
| **PUBLIC SAFETY** | |
| ***Issue: Removal of dangerous road material in a timely manner*** | |
| Disposing of the material in the same vicinity of the rockslides adds to the public safety factor because response time and transportation distances are significantly reduced. This can eliminate unnecessary vehicle traffic turning onto and off of CSH 133. | Public risk of accidents is greater due to longer delays in hauling material from the area and longer transportation distances and response time. |
| ***Issue: Pedestrian Safety*** | |
| A steep slope exists on the inside of the existing pit. Creating berms and filling in the depression could help prevent accidents. | Lack of landscape design could lead to an accident from pedestrians falling or driving down the slope. |
| ***Issue: Vegetation in the seed mix for restoration will attract grazing wildlife and create a hazard*** | |
| Using an improper seed mix for the restoration of this project could create a hazard if it attracts deer and elk. A seed mix less favorable to attracting animals and causing vehicle-animal collisions would be utilized. | No changes or improvements in vegetation. |
| **ECONOMICS** | |
| ***Issue: Costs of disposing of materials*** | |
| This site could save expenses by reducing the distance for transporting materials, eliminating fees from paying for private disposal sites, and avoiding the payment of | Hauling and disposing of the waste materials elsewhere is expensive. A private disposal site would likely be needed. The waste materials need to be sold to CDOT |

**Table 1 - Summary Comparison of Potential Environmental Consequences**

| | |
|---|---|
| federal mineral material fees for the removal of the rocks from the National Forest. A national strategic goal of the Federal Lands Highway Program is to: "…provide for economy of operation and maintenance and the safety of the users…" | under material regulations, creating additional administrative workload. |
| **Maintaining a storage area for useable rocks** | |
| ***Issue: Ensuring a supply of rocks is readily available for emergency repairs*** | |
| Boulder storage areas would provide a location to easily obtain rocks for emergency road repairs. These can be stored in the one-acre sites, and then moved as the restoration process continues. The existing Placita site would be reclaimed. | No changes to boulder storage. Another site for boulder storage would need to be found. This would likely involve longer transportation distances. |

# Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

This section summarizes the potential impacts of the proposed action and alternatives for each impacted resource. Resources that were not impacted and therefore not further analyzed include:

## Cultural and Heritage Resources

Cultural and Heritage Resources were initially considered for analysis due to the potential for ground disturbance. The cultural report was completed by CDOT Archeologist Daniel Jepson and reviewed by WRNF Archeologist Andrea Brogan. Upon examination, it was determined that no cultural resources exist within the project area. The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) determined that *no historic properties were affected, and the no Section 106 actions were required.*

## Climate and Air Resources

The preferred alternative does not warrant an analysis for Climate and Air Resources. The threshold for quantitative analysis is 25,000 metric tons, which is equivalent to the annual emissions of 4,600 vehicles. The project would not increase the quantity of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by more than that threshold.

## Paleontological Resources

This area was examined by Acting Paleontologist Technician Karl Oliver. This section of the Mesa Verde formation has some plant fossils, however all fossil types were common, and further investigation was not warranted.

## Timber Management

This area was examined by USFS Timber Manager Travis Bruch. Timber within the fillsite was determined to be mostly unhealthy aspen with no commercial value. Some spruce and fir along the edges of the site were determined to have value to help preserve scenic integrity. It was recommended that a free commercial timber permit be issued to CDOT for the removal of the

trees that interfere with their operations. Trees along the outside boundary will be left in place where possible, to provide a scenic screen from visual impacts.

## Avalanche Hazard Potential

A detailed avalanche report was completed in this area in 1994 by Arthur I. Mears, P.E., of Gunnison Colorado. Several slide paths exist in the vicinity of the proposed fill site. Rarely have these been a concern, and occasional avalanche control may be done by CDOT. This will have no effect on this proposal.

## Engineering and Soils

This site was examined by Forest Service Employees Bruce Moss of Engineering, and Brian McMullen, the WRNF Soils Scientist. No major impacts were identified that would be a concern from a soils or engineering standpoint. The site was found to be stable. Placing the sediments inside the existing loop of the highway was determined to be a good idea.

## Lands Status and Survey

A complete survey of this site was done by the Forest Surveyor in 2008. The proposed permitted area is 9.17 acres. No formal right of way has been issued to CDOT for this section of highway on national forest. This will be addressed at a future date. This proposal will need authorization with a special use permit regardless of the status of CSH 133.

# Resources that could be impacted by this proposal:

# Hydrology

## Scope of Analysis

The 9.17 acres within the proposed fill site was examined by USFS Hydrologist Justin Anderson to determine if there would be any issues that would affect wetlands or if this proposed action could add sediment to the Crystal River.

**Affected Environment**

This environment is an existing loop that was formed during the highway construction in the 1940's. It provides natural protection from sedimentation reaching the Crystal River. It is classified as a Montane Aspen Forest, common to the elevations of 7500' – 9500' The Crystal River, is about a ¼ mile to the east of the Horseshoe Bend, and 1/8 of a mile from the retired Placita Fillsite.

# Current Conditions

No wetlands were identified with this project. A small intermittent stream channel exists in the northern section of the site, and is dry most of the year. The average width of this channel is about 3'.

# Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

**No Action Alternative:** There will be no effects to the existing environment that would *change water quality.*

**Proposed action:** Culverts would be placed where the intermittent stream exists, and a 100' buffer zone should prevent sediment from reaching the drainage and the Crystal River. If this and other BMP's are implemented, the proposed action should have no effect on water quality. BMPs are summarized in the Decision Notice and detailed within the Plan of Operations for this project.

## Forest Plan Consistency

This area overlaps two Forest Plan prescriptions: 4.4 Recreation Rivers – Designated and Eligible, and 4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors.

The Forest Plan directs us to limit actions in the water influence Zone (100') next to intermittent streams. This has been entered into the design criteria for this proposal. Proper design and the implementation of BMP's would make this proposal consistent with the Forest Plan.

## Cumulative Effects

Two other projects are proposed for this area. An underground powerline is proposed that would run from the west side of the fillsite to the top of McClure Pass along the ridge. This will not have an effect on Hydrologic Resources, if BMPs are implemented during construction and revegetation. An underground fiber optics cable may be placed on the west side of the highway, along the north section of the fillsite. These should have no long-lasting cumulative effects on this area.

# Wildlife, Botany, and Aquatics Resources

## Scope of Analysis

A Biological Assessment (BA), Biological Evaluation (BE), Management Indicator Species Evaluation, and Forest Plan Consistency Evaluation were prepared for the CDOT Horseshoe Bend Fill Site EA by Phil Nyland, Wildlife Biologist.

The BA conforms to legal requirements set forth under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (19 U.S.C. 1536 (c), 50 CFR 402.12 (f) and 402.14). Section 7(a) (1) of the ESA requires federal agencies to use their authorities to further the conservation of listed species. Section 7(a) (2) requires that federal agencies ensure any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of federally-listed species, or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat.

The Biological Evaluation (BE) analyzed the potential effects of depositing roadside debris on Forest Service sensitive species (FSM 2670.31-2670.32). The Regional Forester's sensitive species list contains taxa only when they meet one or more of the following three criteria: 1) the species is declining in numbers or occurrences and evidence indicates it could be proposed for federal listing as threatened or endangered if action is not taken to reverse or stop the downward trend, 2) the species habitat is declining and continued loss could result in population declines that lead to federal listing as threatened or endangered if action is not taken to reverse or stop the decline, 3) the species' population or habitat is stable but limited.

Monitoring and evaluation are separate, sequential activities required by National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations to determine how well objectives have been met and how

closely management standards and guidelines have been implemented. Management Indicator Species (MIS) are wildlife species identified to aid the Forest Supervisor in identifying how implementation of the Land and Resource Management Plan 2002 Revision (LRMP) (USFS 2002a) has affected long-term population trends of representative wildlife species. MIS for the WRNF Land and Resource Management Plan 2002 Revision, initially identified in 2002, were revised in 2006 (Forest Service 2006).

**Affected Environment**

This environment is an existing loop that was formed during the highway construction in the 1940's. It is classified as a Montane Aspen Forest, common to the elevations of 7500' – 9500' It does not provide significant animal habitat.

Animals do find themselves in this area surrounded on three sides by state highway. The montane aspen forest does provide some animal and bird habitat, however it is not close to water and has limited value. A three-legged coyote that was living in the area has not been seen for several years.

# Current Conditions

The Biological Assessment, Biological Evaluation, Management Indicator Species, and Forest Plan surveys did not find any sensitive or endangered birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, aquatic organisms, or plants in this area.

# Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

**No Action Alternative:** The status of this area would remain the same, with no fill material being deposited into the fillsite.

**Preferred alternative:** The primary concern regarding this proposal was using seed mixes that can attract deer and elk that could cause automobile accidents. A seed mix approved by the district wildlife biologist and the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CDPW) that should minimalize elk and deer attraction has been included in the Plan of Operations for this project that should eliminate this problem. Small groups of wildlife would be disrupted sporadically during geologic events that require road clearing. It is also recommended that tree clearing in the one-acre sites occur after bird nesting season is over, approximately July 15 or so of each year.

# Forest Plan Consistency

This area overlaps two Forest Plan prescriptions: 4.4 Recreation Rivers – Designated and Eligible, and 4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors.

**4.23 Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors**
***Theme:*** These types of areas are managed to protect or preserve the scenic values and recreation uses of designated scenic byways, scenic areas, vistas, and other heavily used scenic travel corridors.
***Management:*** Habitat improvement projects that will increase the potential for viewing and interpreting a variety of wildlife species, while providing for visitor and wildlife safety, are encouraged. This project will affect some localized wildlife in the short term, however once complete restoration has been achieved; it would likely have no effect on the wildlife habitat.

### 4.4: Recreation Rivers:

***Theme:*** These areas are managed to protect and perpetuate eligible river segments in their current condition so that their recreation river qualities are not diminished. Existing uses, levels of use, and management actions will vary from area to area.

***Management***: Visitors may find an altered environment. They are likely to encounter more people than one would expect in a "wild" or "scenic" river segment. Silvicultural practices are allowed that protect the immediate river environment, recreation, fish and wildlife, and water quality values.

## Cumulative Effects

Other proposed projects for this area include a possible buried powerline running to the top of McClure Pass on the west side of the fill site. This powerline, if approved, would be directly west of the fillsite on the other side of the highway. The Forest Plan calls for powerlines to be buried whenever possible. This project is in the development phase at this time and may be analyzed in an upcoming Environmental Impact Statement.

Another proposal for the area is the installation of a buried fiber optics cable that would provide service to the Town of Marble. Once installed, this would have no foreseeable cumulative effects on the Horseshoe Bend Fillsite Proposal.

## Scenic Resources

### Scope of Analysis

The 9.17 acres within the proposed fill site was examined by USFS Landscape Architect Donna Graham to determine if there would be any issues that would affect the visual resources to this area, and to propose basic ideas for minimizing the scenic impacts. It was also examined by CDOT's Landscape Architect Jen Klaetch to provide a plan of development that would lessen the scenic insult that could occur with this project.

**Affected Environment**

This environment is an existing loop that was formed during the highway construction in the 1940's; it provides natural protection from sedimentation reaching the Crystal River. It is classified as a Montane Aspen Forest, common to the elevations of 7500' – 9500' The Crystal River, is about a ¼ mile to the east of the Horseshoe Bend, and 1/8 of a mile from the retired Placita Fillsite.
This corridor is highly valued for its scenery. The scenic views are important to the users of this area. This area is currently providing scenic benefits to the adjacent highway users and provides a scenic setting for the local residents and users of the area. The trend appears to be increased use. This project will provide scenic opportunities for the public benefit. The Scenic Integrity Objective for this project is Low, but the adjacent Wilderness Areas ranges up to Very High.

# Current Conditions

This project is adjacent to Highway 133, a heavily traveled highway corridor and part of the West Elk Scenic Byway. The West Elk Scenic Byway (Highway 133) is a Concern Level 1 travel route, river corridor and viewshed. This area is heavily used, and highly valued by the public. Due to the high visibility of the river and this project, most of this area is in a critical viewshed. Foreground and Middleground Views along Highway 133 are important for users of this travel corridor. Highway 133 is a very scenic river and highway travel corridor. This project is just south of the Redstone and northwest of the Town of Marble. This is also the West Elk Scenic Byway corridor and directly adjacent to the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area and the Raggeds Wilderness Area.

# Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

**No Action Alternative:** there would be no affects to the existing environment that would change or improve scenic qualities.

**Proposed action:** Trees will be removed in one-acre phases prior to the filling process. Berms will be built around the perimeter of the site and planted to screen the inside of the loop until each section can be replanted. In the short term, there will be visual insults to the area. In the long term, once the re- vegetation has occurred, the area should look like natural forested lands.

# Forest Plan Consistency

This area overlaps two Forest Plan prescriptions: 4.4 Recreation Rivers – Designated and Eligible, and 4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors.

**4.4: Recreation Rivers:** These areas are managed to protect and perpetuate eligible river segments in their current condition so that their recreation river qualities are not diminished. Existing uses, levels of use, and management actions will vary from area to area.

The visual impacts of this fillsite will not be seen from the river corridor. The sedimentation inside the bend will be filtered into the ground, provided that the only intermittent drainage has a proper 100’ water influence zone. This proposal can meet the criteria for Wild and Scenic River-Recreation as shown in the White River National Forest – 2002 Forest Plan, Appendix BB-16

**4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors:** Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors. Desired conditions: Opportunities exist to view high-quality scenery that represents the natural character of the region. Forest management activities may be seen, but will be visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape. Travel corridors along scenic byways provide recreation and interpretive facilities that promote the reasons for designation as scenic

The area south of the Horseshoe bend is a popular pullover in an area where parking is tight. A scenic view into the Ragged Wilderness looking south is spectacular. With proper mitigation, berm construction, the incorporation of BMPs, and proper vegetation management and landscaping, Forest Plan objectives can be met. Some wildlife viewing could be possible from the

pullover on the south side, however it would be minimal. In the long-term event that the highway was to be moved further north with a viewing area overlooking the Ragged Wilderness; the possibility of wildlife viewing would increase.

## Cumulative Effects

Other proposed projects for this area include a possible buried powerline running to the top of McClure Pass on the west side of the fill site. This powerline, if approved, would be directly west of the fillsite on the other side of the highway. In the event this powerline were to be placed above ground on towers, this combined with the necessary vegetation management would likely have a cumulative effect on scenic resources, but it would only be visible from select angles.

Another proposal for the area is the installation of a buried fiber optics cable that would provide service to the Town of Marble. Once installed, this would have no cumulative effects on the Horseshoe Bend Fillsite Proposal.

# Recreation Resources

## Scope of Analysis

The 9.17 acre fill site area and proposal were examined by Martha Moran, the Recreation Manager for the Aspen-Sopris Ranger District.

**Affected Environment**

This environment is an existing loop that was formed during the highway construction in the 1940's, It is classified as a Montane Aspen Forest, common to the elevations of 7500' – 9500' It is along the West Elk Scenic Byway, which has high standards for visual impacts. The Crystal River is eligible for Wild and Scenic River – Recreation status.

## Current Conditions

This project is adjacent to Highway 133, a heavily traveled highway corridor and part of the West Elk Scenic Byway. The West Elk Scenic Byway (Highway 133) is a Concern Level 1 travel route, river corridor and viewshed. This area is heavily used, and highly valued by the public. Due to the high visibility of the river and this project, most of this area is in a critical viewshed.

Highway 133 is a very scenic river and highway travel corridor. This project is just south of the Redstone and northwest of the Town of Marble. This is also the West Elk Scenic Byway corridor and directly adjacent to the Maroon Bells Wilderness Area and the Raggeds Wilderness Area.

## Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

**No Action Alternative:** there would be no affects to the existing environment that would change or improve recreational qualities.

**Proposed action:** The area alongside the highway on the south side of the bend is a popular vehicular pullout. Areas such as this are not uncommon on Scenic Byways. With

proper design criteria and good vegetation management in the long run it won't be noticeable. Until berms are constructed and properly vegetated, there would be scenic disturbances.

The primary concern with the Crystal River is preventing sedimentation from reaching the river. Since this is an isolated loop that has minimal drainage outside of the enclosure, sediment will be filtered as the water drains into the ground. If procedures for best management practices are observed along with a proper water influence zone 100' on each side of the intermittent drainage, this should not be an issue.

A properly landscaped area could offer a more attractive and safer pullover. In many years, when the site is completely reclaimed, the possibility exists to relocate a portion of the highway further to the north, and provide a developed scenic overlook that would highlight the Raggeds Wilderness. The evaluation of this future possibility is not a part of this report.

# Forest Plan Consistency

This area overlaps two Forest Plan prescriptions: 4.4 Recreation Rivers – Designated and Eligible, and 4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors.

**4.4: Recreation Rivers:** These areas are managed to protect and perpetuate eligible river segments in their current condition so that their recreation river qualities are not diminished. Existing uses, levels of use, and management actions will vary from area to area.

The visual impacts of this fillsite will not be seen from the river corridor. The sedimentation inside the bend will be filtered into the ground, provided that the only intermittent drainage has a proper 100' water influence zone. This proposal can meet the criteria for Wild and Scenic River-Recreation as shown in the White River National Forest – 2002 Forest Plan, Appendix BB-16

**4.23: Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors:** Scenic Byways, Scenic Areas, Vistas, and Travel Corridors. Desired conditions: Opportunities exist to view high-quality scenery that represents the natural character of the region. Forest management activities may be seen, but will be visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape. Travel corridors along scenic byways provide recreation and interpretive facilities that promote the reasons for designation as scenic

The area south of the Horseshoe bend is a popular pullover in an area where parking is tight. A scenic view into the Ragged Wilderness looking south is spectacular. With proper mitigation, berm construction, the incorporation of BMPs, and proper vegetation management and landscaping, Forest Plan objectives can be met.

# Cumulative Effects

The proposals for the powerline on the east side of McClure Pass to provide power to a communication site could have a cumulative effect if built overhead. If underground, it would have not long-term effect. The installation of a buried fiber optics line to serve the Town of Marble should have minimal cumulative effects on this area.

# AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED

**Consultation and Coordination**

A notice by mail was sent February 27, 2009 to 152 people and organizations on the West Zone NEPA mailing list and specific parties likely to be interested, including 46 local land owners. Specific information is located in the project file.

This project has been listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) since February 2009. This was also re-presented to the public in a *Notice of Proposed Action* that was published in a legal ad in the *Glenwood Springs Post Independent* on November 3, 2014, and displayed on the Forest Service website, and made available at the Aspen-Sopris district offices.

Three local organizations responded and provided comments to the USFS: the Crystal Valley Environmental Protection Association, the Wilderness Workshop, and the West Elk Scenic Byway. All were supportive of the proposal, pending suggestions for design criteria, most of which were incorporated into the draft *Plan of Operations* for this project.

The Forest Service consulted individuals with Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment. A record of those contacts is in the project file.