

Water and Its Importance to the Headwaters Economy:

documenting economic values of rivers and
protecting those values



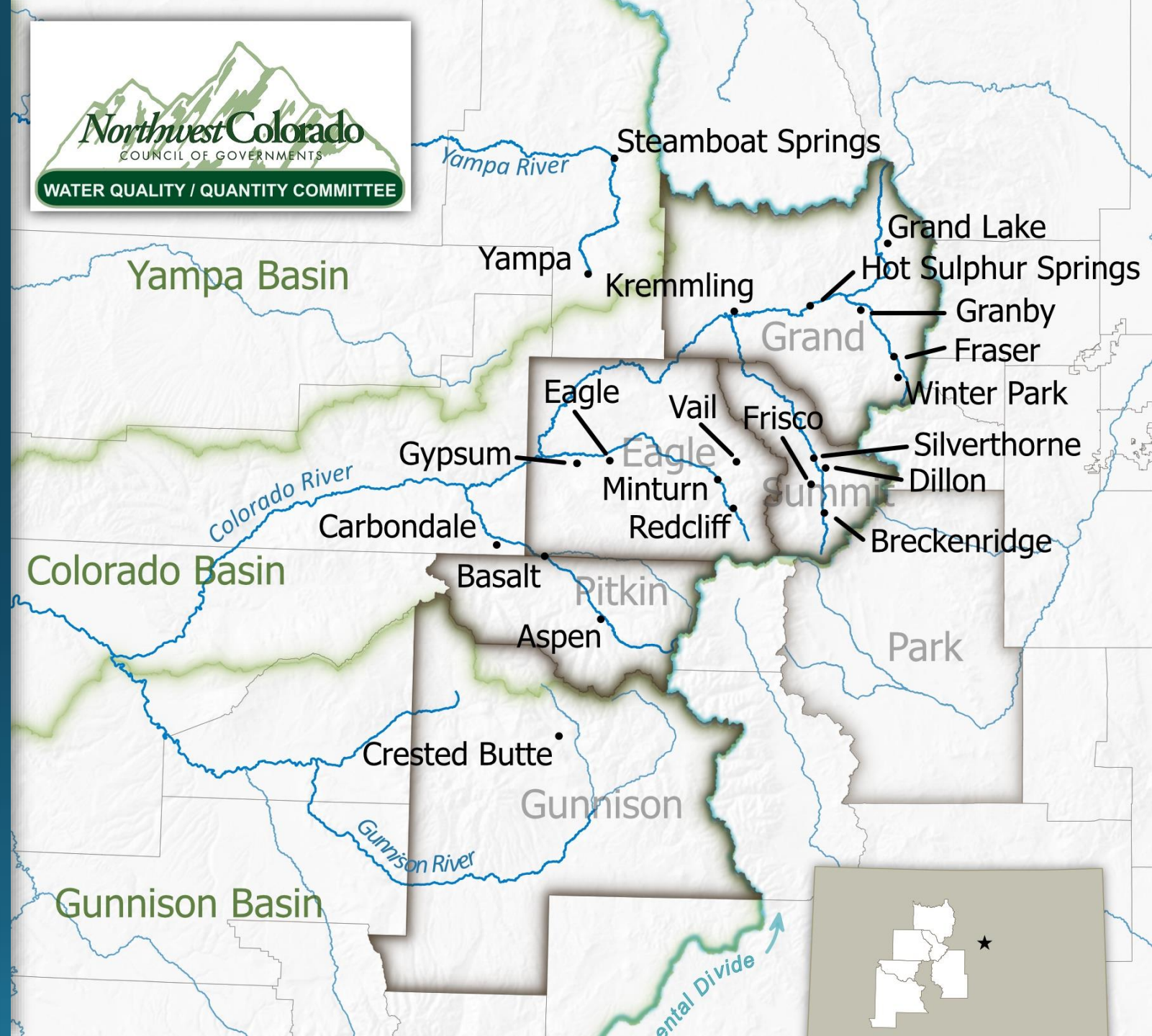
Northwest Colorado
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

WATER QUALITY / QUANTITY COMMITTEE

October 9, 2019

Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference

Our headwaters region

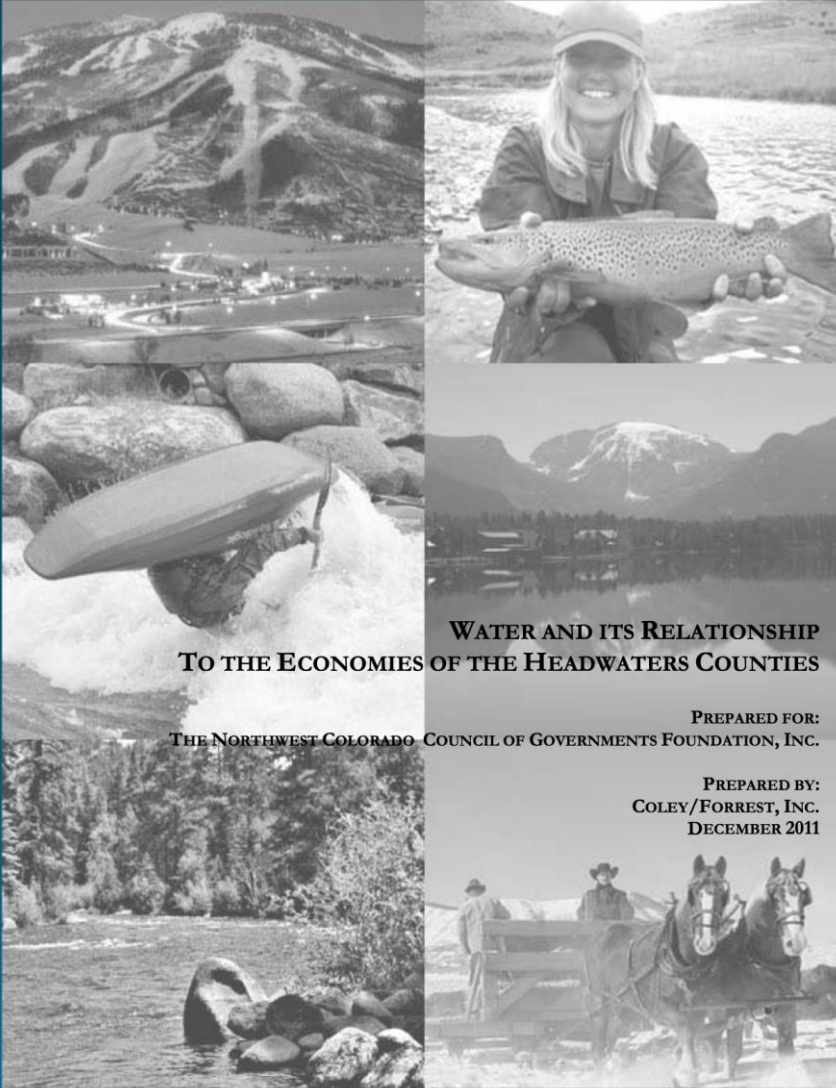


Mission

To facilitate and augment the efforts of member jurisdictions to protect and enhance the region's water quality while encouraging its responsible use for the good of Colorado citizens and the environment.



QQ Study (2011): *Water and Its Relationship to the Economies of the Headwaters Counties*



DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

- Headwaters of the Colorado River Basin: Water for Colorado + 6 states + Mexico
- Contain primarily public land (70%)

A horizontal bar chart with a white border, set against a dark blue background. The bar is divided into two segments. The left segment is yellow and contains the text 'Private Land, 30%'. The right segment is dark grey and contains the text 'Public Land, 70%'. The segments are separated by a thin white vertical line.

Private Land, 30%

Public Land, 70%

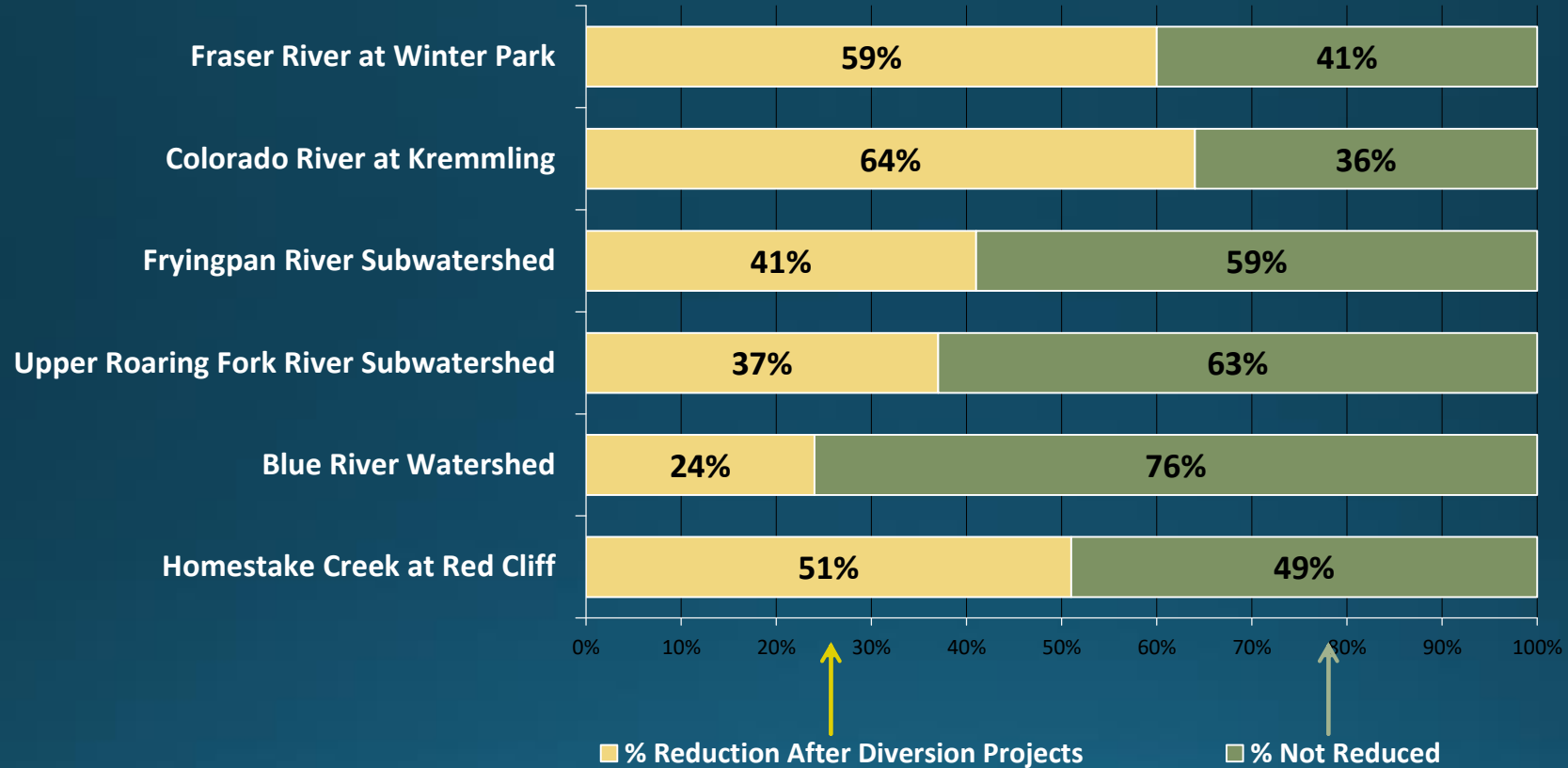
- World class recreation venues that attract national and international visitors and require minimal consumptive water

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Water quality and quantity impacted by transmountain diversions



% Streamflow Reductions Principally due to Transmountain Diversion Projects



Various Sources – See Report for details.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Water-dependent economies
(recreation-tourism,
agriculture, and resource
extraction)



*Photos by
Torie Jarvis*

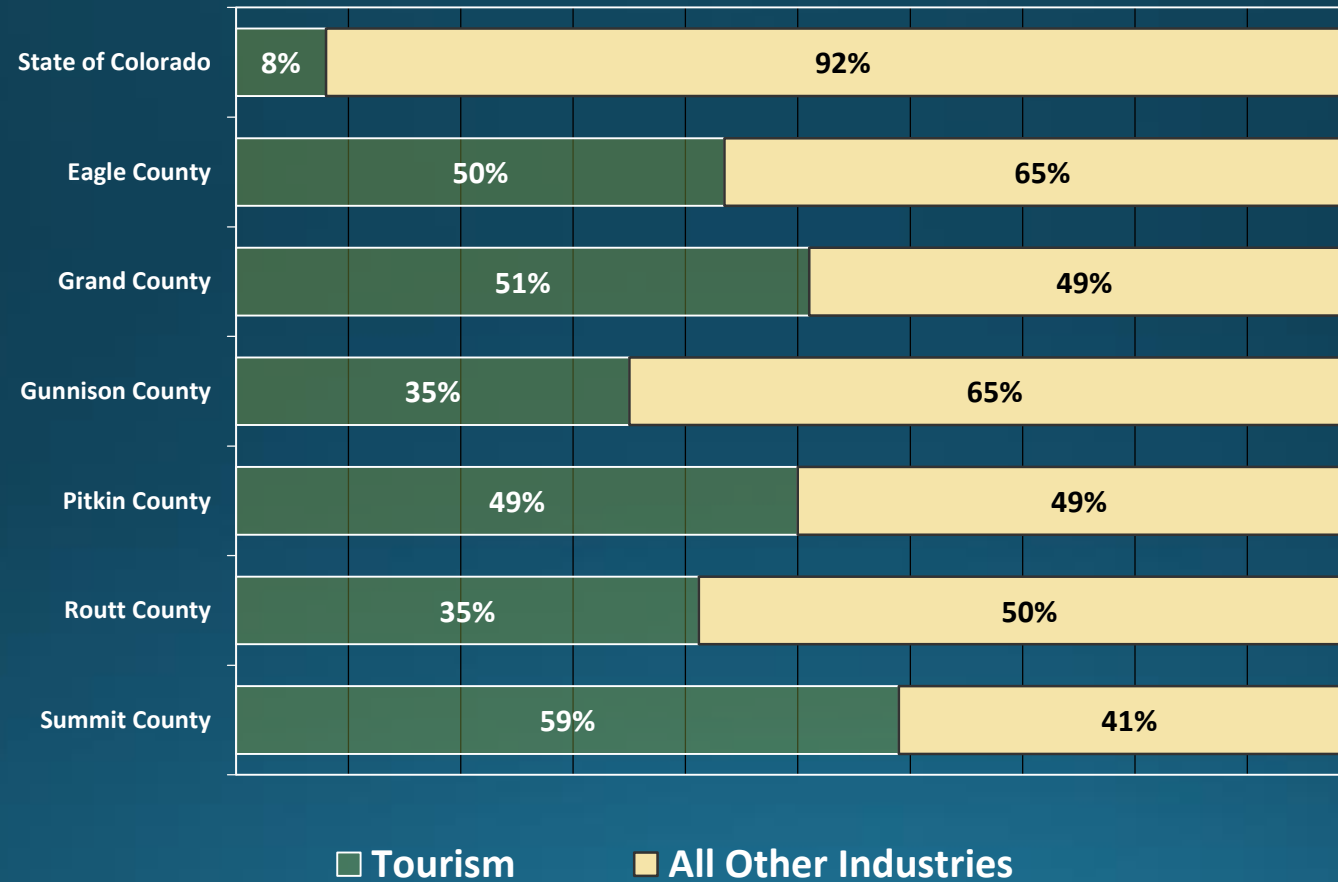


Photo by San Juan Citizens Alliance



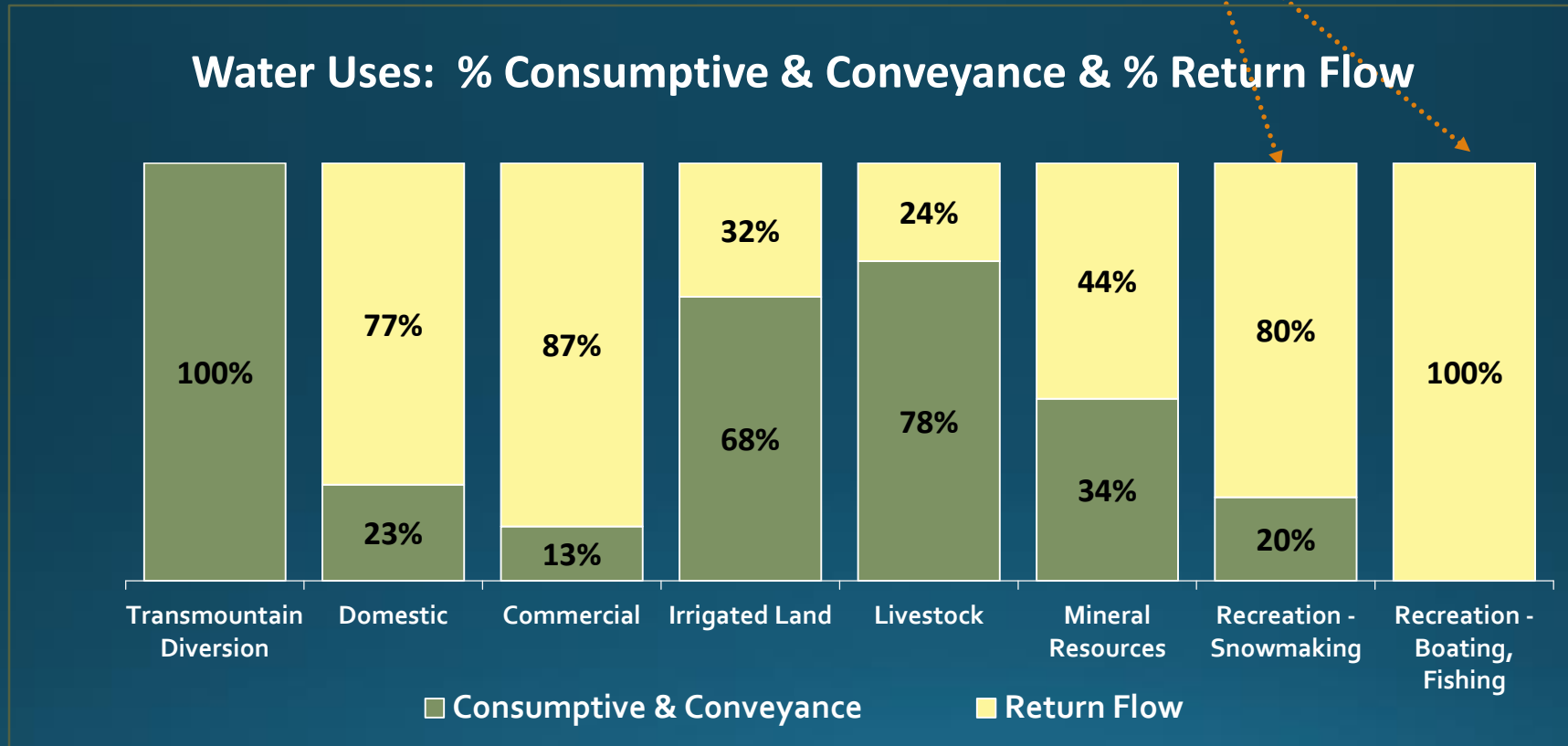
REC/TOURISM

% Jobs in Tourism and All Other Industries



Source: *Tourism Jobs in Colorado*, Center for Business and Economic Forecasting

TOURISM - Minimal enviro. footprint



Sources: *Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 1995*, Circular 1200, USGS and Individual Ski Areas (Snowmaking)

WATER & TOURISM, whitewater parks

- Current Parks: Avon, Aspen, Breckenridge, Gunnison, Vail, Basalt, Steamboat, Grand County, Town of Eagle, Glenwood Springs, Silverthorne (in the works), Glenwood Canyon (in the works)
- Go Pro Mountain Games in Vail, e.g., \$7.2 million in 2017



Above photo by Pitkin Healthy Rivers board;
left photo by Rick Lohre via www.mountaingames.com

WATER & TOURISM

- “Gold Medal” Fishing
- Endangered river designations
- Reservoir & Lake clarity and volume
- Instream flows
- “Wild & Scenic” Rivers



Grand Lake – Photo by Creative Commons

AGRICULTURE

- Value Often Understated
- Agriculture connected to recreation/tourism economy
- Many attributes are intrinsic and qualitative.
- Return flows sustain late season streamflows for fisheries and recreation
- Cow / calf operations & Eastern Plains feed lots



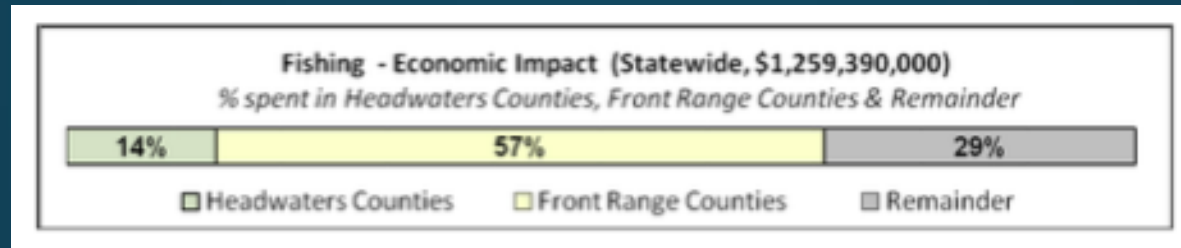
AGRICULTURE & TOURISM

- Winter visitors value agriculture
 - 51% - farms/ranches are an important attribute
 - 83% - valley views are an important attribute
 - 72% - open vistas are an important attribute
 - 54% - would reconsider visit if 25% of ranch land were converted
- Source: CSU Survey – Visitors to Gunnison County, March 2003



Statewide Benefits

- Region of statewide economic value.



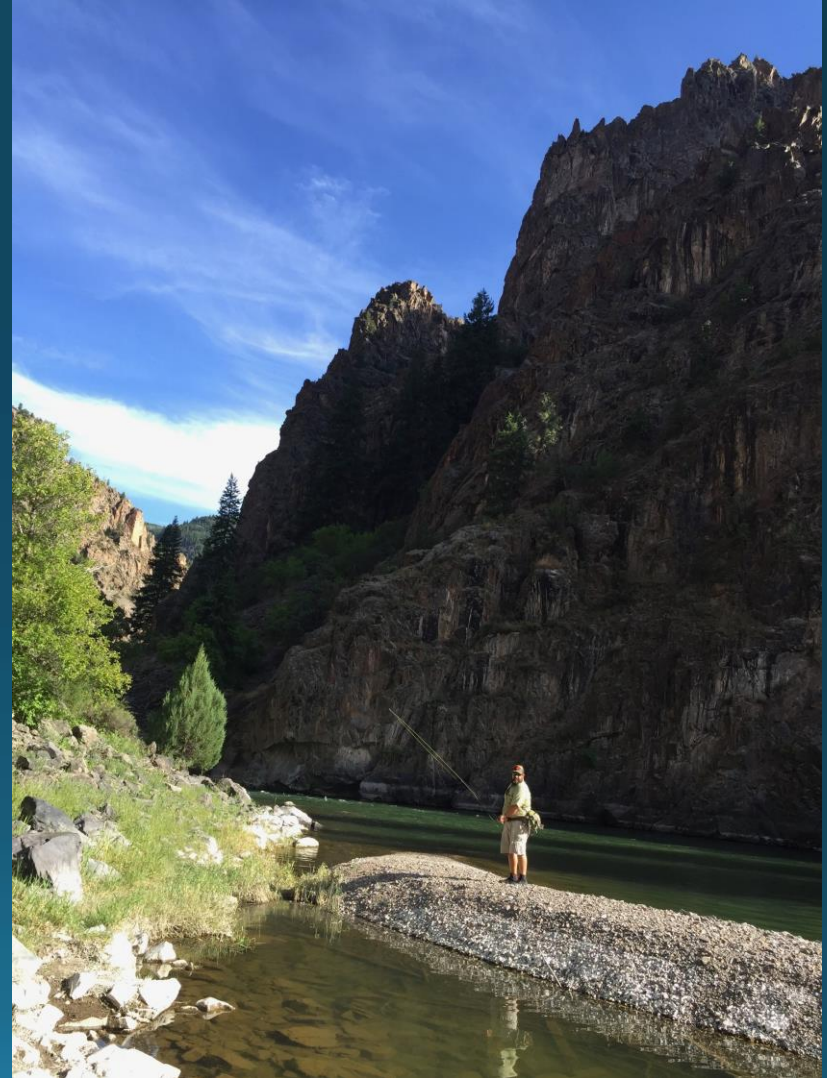
- Provides iconic images for economic development initiatives statewide



*"For Denver to do well, we have to have thriving mountain communities."
(Former) Mayor Hickenlooper*

Tools for increased streamflows

- Instream flow program
- Recreational in-channel diversions (RICDs)
- "Creative contracting"
- Local project permitting and development review
- IGAs and other negotiated agreements
- Voluntary community-based reductions under conservation plans.
- Others?



KEY MESSAGES

- We are all linked.
- Water in its natural stream course is essential to economies of headwaters counties. Headwaters counties' water needs are primarily nonconsumptive.
- West Slope is already compromised from historic diversions, and climate change will worsen conditions.
- Creative solutions are needed. We need to utilize all the tools to protect or increase streamflows.

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Study available at
Nwccog-qq.org