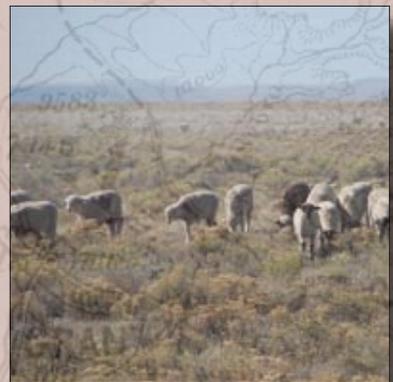
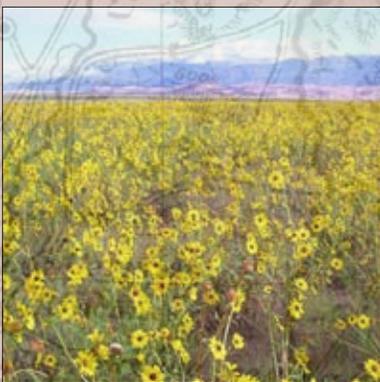
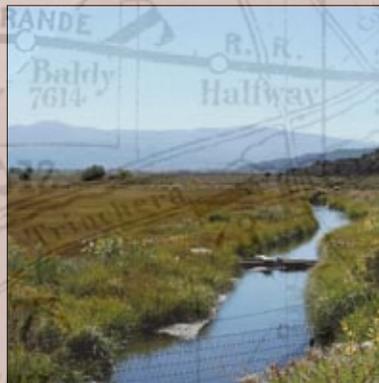
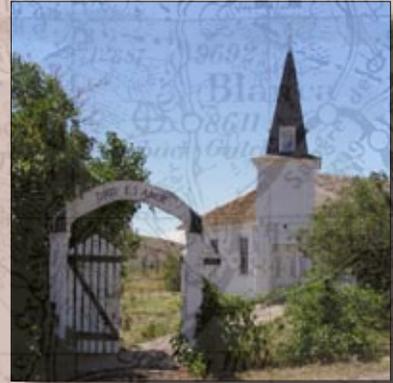


SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

MANAGEMENT PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



NOVEMBER, 2012

INTRODUCING THE SANGRE DE CRISTO NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA



The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area tells the stories of the peoples, culture, and environment of more than 3,000 square miles of the upper headwaters of the Rio Grande in Colorado's San Luis Valley. It is among the most unique and well-preserved cultural landscapes in the nation, with stunningly beautiful natural resources and a rich mixture of historic Hispano and Anglo settlements. The three southern counties of the valley, Alamosa, Conejos, and Costilla, form the core of the heritage area—all knit together by the Rio Grande and its intricate network of tributary creeks, lakes, wetlands, artesian springs, and irrigation canals.

In English, "Sangre de Cristo" translates as "Blood of Christ," a 17th century name owing to the mountains' red glow from the setting sun on rare, spectacular occasions. No matter where in the heritage area, a beautiful mountain view either east or west is likely to be part of the scene. The San Luis Valley is a prominent feature of the southern Rocky Mountains, framed by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains on the east and the San Juan Mountains on the west. Taller and more dramatic, the Sangre de Cristos most distinctly characterize the edge of this contrasting landscape of desert, wetlands, mogotes (rolling hills), agricultural fields, rivers, and primeval lakebed and volcanic fields. Perhaps the most unusual sights are the flocks of sandhill cranes that pass through in the spring and fall, and the dune field of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, one of the quietest national parks in the lower 48 states. (Photos: sandhill cranes by Sean Canon; and Sangre de Cristo Mountains lit by the setting sun, photo by Patrick Myers, courtesy National Park Service)



OUR MISSION

The mission of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area is to promote, preserve, protect, and interpret its profound historical, religious, environmental, geographic, geologic, cultural, and linguistic resources. These efforts will contribute to the overall national story, engender a spirit of pride and self-reliance, and create a legacy in the Colorado Counties of Alamosa, Conejos and Costilla.

OUR GOALS

The National Heritage Area seeks to:

- ◆ Support development of a vibrant heritage tourism sector that stimulates preservation, economic development, and community revitalization;
- ◆ Tell the stories of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area in ways that build community pride and support preservation, living traditions, economic development, and community revitalization; and
- ◆ Cultivate excellent management that provides regional leadership, reflects community values, and achieves sustainability.

NUESTA VOZ

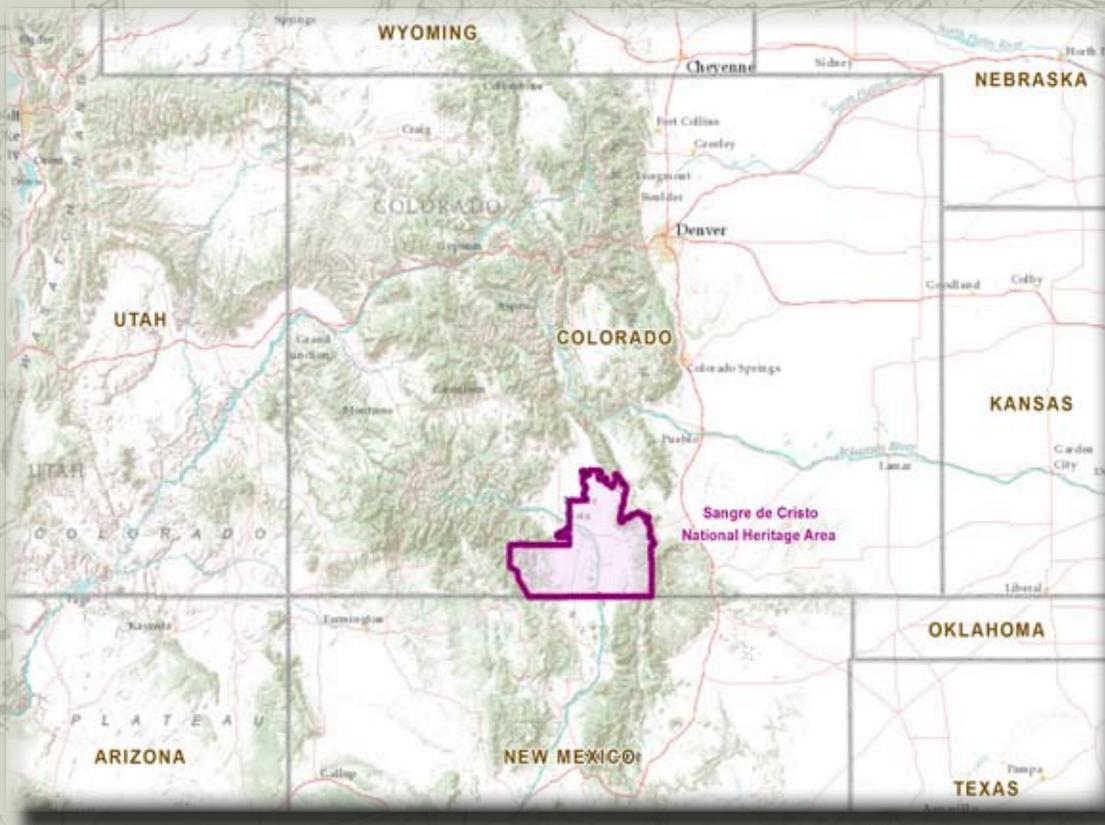
Our vision for the heritage area can be summed up in two words: *Nuestra Voz* — Our Voice. The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area captures the essence of who we are, allowing us to impart our stories and preserve our heritage through our collective vision and creativity. Our spiritual, historical and cultural traditions, including reverence for land and water, assemble an extraordinary legacy to impart with current and future generations. Our communities are united in promoting the sacred center of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area landscape — our living history — as a sustainable, national and international destination while enhancing the quality of life for our residents.

Mariachi San Luis, an intergenerational musical group, was formed in 1998 in San Luis. Adobe de Oro and Adams State University sponsor an annual mariachi conference in Alamosa. The conference lasts an entire day and consists of a music review by the instructors, workshops, a group rehearsal, and a nighttime concert featuring all musicians. Students in attendance are from all over the San Luis Valley. (Photo by Ann Marie Velasquez)

WHAT IS A NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA?

The National Park Service defines National Heritage Areas as:

- Regions with **concentrations of nationally significant resources** – natural, scenic, cultural, historic and recreational;
- Regions known for their **unique identity** and for being good places to live in and visit;
- Places where both **residents and travelers are attracted to experiences of historic places and stories**, beautiful views, outdoor recreation, and related cultural events;
- **Reliant on partnerships** – unlike a national park, which is owned and managed by the National Park Service, lived-in landscapes require many owners and stakeholders to work together;
- **Regions linking thematically related, locally managed sites**, using heritage as a unifying motivation for collaboration; and
- Alliances of residents, businesses, local governments and state and federal agencies **collaborating to create more livable and economically sustainable regions**.



The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area encompasses:

- ◆ 3,563 square miles
- ◆ 2 National Trails
- ◆ 3 counties
- ◆ Over 40 heritage tourism attractions, museums, and interpretive sites
- ◆ 53 towns and villages
- ◆ 11 Centennial Farms
- ◆ More than 27,000 residents (with over 51% Hispanic or Latino residents)
- ◆ Over 890,500 acres of protected federal and state natural areas, including one National Park, one National Forest, two Wilderness Areas, and three National Wildlife Refuges
- ◆ 2 National Historic Landmarks
- ◆ 12 distinct ecological regions
- ◆ 1 National Register Historic District
- ◆ 230,000 acres of wetlands
- ◆ 37 properties listed in the National and State Registers of Historic Places
- ◆ 1,300 miles of gravity-fed irrigation channels
- ◆ 1 Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway

THE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA'S ENABLING LEGISLATION...

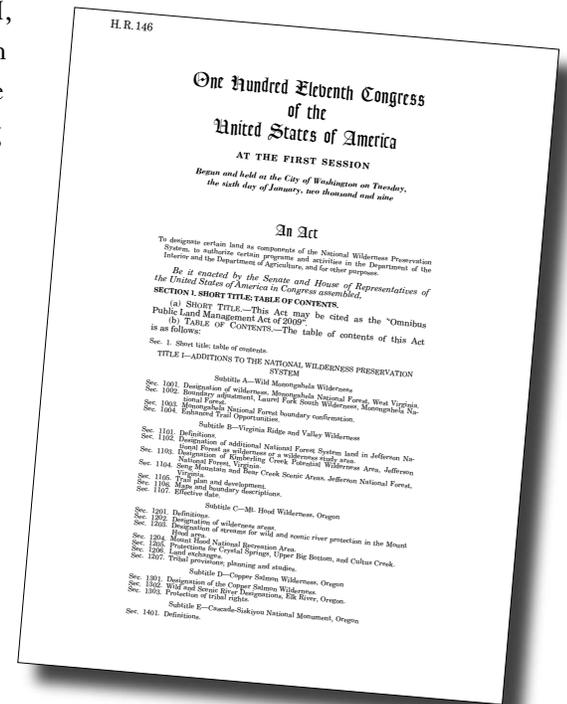
The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area was designated in Title VIII, Subtitle A, Section 8001 of Public Law 111-11, officially signed into law on March 30, 2009. The legislation set the heritage area's boundaries; named the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Board of Directors as the managing entity; and set standards for a management plan. This document summarizes the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Management Plan, which was approved by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar on [date]. The plan identifies goals, policies, strategies, recommendations, and actions to be undertaken through the collaboration of a broad range of partners.

Nothing in the legislation abridges the rights of any public or private property owner, as provided in Section 8001(f). It also does not alter any duly adopted land use regulation or approved land use plan, nor authorize or imply the reservation or appropriation of water or water rights.

...and the Role of the Board of Directors

The primary duty of the Board of Directors is to assist units of local government, regional planning organizations, and nonprofit organizations in carrying out the approved management plan by:

- ◆ Carrying out programs and projects that recognize, protect, and enhance important resource values;
- ◆ Establishing and maintaining interpretive exhibits and programs;
- ◆ Developing recreational and educational opportunities;
- ◆ Increasing public appreciation for the National Heritage Area's natural, historical, scenic, and cultural resources;
- ◆ Protecting and restoring historic sites and buildings consistent with National Heritage Area themes;
- ◆ Ensuring the posting of clear and consistent signs identifying points of public access and sites of interest;
- ◆ Promoting a wide range of partnerships among governments, organizations, and individuals to further the National Heritage Area; and
- ◆ Encouraging economic viability "by appropriate means...consistent with the Heritage Area."



The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Board of Directors, advisors, and the consultant team meet in the fall of 2010 at the Sanford 4 Museum to kick off the management planning process.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Cultural traditions are as varied as the National Heritage Area's natural and historic resources. Many physical resources pertain to Hispano heritage, including historic plazas, placitas, moradas, soterranos, churches, cemeteries, hundreds of miles of hand-dug irrigation canals called acequias, and small-scale ranches and farms.

In the southeast corner of the area, settlers from Mexico founded San Luis, Colorado's oldest town, on April 5, 1851. They brought with them Spanish traditions handed down from at least the 17th century, mingled with New World knowledge gleaned from interaction with indigenous American Indians of today's American Southwest and Mexico. Dance, music, an archaic Spanish dialect, foods, farming, weaving, embroidery, and the carving of religious statues in wood, called santos, are among customs that have persisted and enrich local culture today. After the region was ceded by Mexico at the end of the Mexican-American War (1846-48), settlers followed from the eastern United States, beginning with Mormons in the 1870's. Over succeeding decades still more groups arrived – predominantly Swedes, Dutch, and Germans. Quite recently, Amish families have arrived, like their predecessors drawn by rich farmland. Japanese Americans from the Pacific states were settled in the valley during World War II as part of the notorious internment program.



View of San Luis and La Vega from the San Pedro Mesa. Modern occupations within the heritage area include farming and ranching, including a growing number focusing on local foods amongst irrigated fields of alfalfa and potatoes. The Rio Culebra Cooperative – named for the stream at the heart of the valley seen here – includes 52 families that raise grass-fed beef and lamb plus heirloom varieties of beans and “chicos del horno,” white corn dried in traditional ovens in a method unique to this region.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area is home to a rich mosaic of living cultures, rooted in history, expressed through communities and the landscape, and continuing to evolve. Historic preservation concentrates upon recognizing and preserving the physical components that give communities their unique character. Historic preservation is an essential part of community revitalization, with these objectives:

- ◆ Connect with federal and state initiatives, e.g., the U. S. Department of the Interior's American Latino Heritage Initiative.
- ◆ Continue to inventory and study historic resources. In-depth studies of the heritage area's resources provide a broader understanding and appreciation of their significance, and modern mapping, photography, and database technologies help us use information in new ways.
- ◆ Provide regional leadership in developing public appreciation, advocacy, technical information, and training to encourage local action. Support local governments and grassroots advocates and develop close working relationships with such knowledgeable advisors as Colorado Preservation, Inc., History Colorado, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- ◆ Provide technical assistance and financial support through a well-established, competitive matching grants program to support projects, encourage long-range project development, and provide visible signs of progress.

CULTURAL HERITAGE AREA ATTRACTIONS

Primary cultural attractions within the heritage area include:

- The Community Partnerships Gallery (Alamosa)
- Concilio Superior building (1925) of the Sociedad Proteccion Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (Antonito)
- Conejos County Mural Tour
- Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (Antonito and Chama, NM)
- Fort Garland (Costilla County)
- Historic Downtown Alamosa Walking Tour
- Jack Dempsey Museum (Manassa)
- Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway (all counties)
- Luther Bean Museum (Adams State University, Alamosa)
- Medano Zapata Ranch of The Nature Conservancy (Alamosa County)
- Old Spanish National Historic Trail (Costilla and Alamosa counties)
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church (by appointment; Conejos)
- Pike's Stockade (by appointment; Sanford)
- Rio Culebra Villages (Costilla County)
- Rio Grande Scenic Railroad (Alamosa, Fort Garland, La Veta Pass)
- Sacred Circle Tour of Costilla County's Catholic Churches
- San Luis Historic District (historic district listing in the National Register; Costilla County)
- San Luis Museum and Cultural Center (Sangre de Cristo Heritage Center; San Luis)
- San Luis Valley Museum (Alamosa)
- Sanford Museum (Sanford)
- Stations of the Cross Trail & La Capilla de Todos los Santos (San Luis)



The old Denver & Rio Grande RR depot was the historic junction in Antonito between the standard-gauge line serving the San Luis Valley and what is now the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (1880), a National Historic Landmark and part of the system that served the gold and silver mines of the San Juan Mountains. The depot is to be restored with funds from the State of Colorado and the National Heritage Area.

NATURAL HERITAGE

Natural resources are inextricably linked to the significance of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area. This beautiful and bountiful landscape, much of it protected, serves as the foundation for the region's agricultural economy and its tourism and recreational activities. Whether it is the region's water, soils, wetlands, forest, or dunes, all of these resources interact within a living cultural landscape that continues to evolve over time.

In total, federal lands comprise approximately 35 percent of the heritage area with thousands of acres available to both residents and visitors to enjoy. These include the Rio Grande National Forest (the largest single landholding within the heritage area); three National Wilderness Areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service; and the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve managed by the National Park Service. The heritage area's federal lands also include the Alamosa, Baca, and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges, the Bureau of Land Management's Blanca Wetlands and Zapata Falls, and thousands of acres of rangeland with active

grazing allotments. In addition, the State of Colorado protects the San Luis State Park and Wildlife Area and a host of smaller sites. Within the publicly owned lands of the heritage area, visitors can participate in a wide variety of recreational activities, including hiking, camping, biking, climbing, boating, picnicking, fishing, hunting, birding, and photography.

NATURAL HERITAGE AREA ATTRACTIONS

Primary Natural Area Attractions within the Heritage Area include:

- Alamosa Ranch (Alamosa)
- Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge (Alamosa County)
- Baca National Wildlife Refuge (Alamosa County)
- Blanca Wetlands (Alamosa County)
- Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (Rio Grande National Forest, Conejos County)
- Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (Alamosa County)
- Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge (Alamosa County)
- San Luis State Park and Wildlife Area (Alamosa County)
- Zapata Falls (Alamosa County)

The Rio Grande winds through the middle of the heritage area. Approximately 33 miles of its corridor was federally designated as a Natural Area in 2006 in order to conserve, restore, and protect natural, historic, cultural, scientific, scenic, wildlife, and recreational resources. Its boundaries include the Rio Grande, from the southern boundary of the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge to the New Mexico state line, plus lands extending one quarter of a mile on either side of the river bank.

Given the National Heritage Area's complex patchwork of natural resources and managing agencies, there is an outstanding level of collaboration between local, state, national, and non-profit agencies. Help is needed, however, in serving the public's thirst for access and education. The heritage area can partner with and support the stewardship, recreation, and land conservation initiatives led by these agencies and organizations. It can also encourage their continuing collaboration on "big picture" approaches and cooperative programming, and serve as a supporting resource on developing opportunities, facilities, and best practices.



Interpretive signs along the Sand Sheet Loop Trail at the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

This region's historic and cultural heritage stems from its roots in a rich, intriguing natural environment that has long offered many opportunities for engaging with the outdoors. Encouraging public appreciation and protection of these resources is a never-ending need. Fortunately, there are many helping hands and much collaboration. The heritage area can address needs for greater public information and deeper interpretation through these objectives:

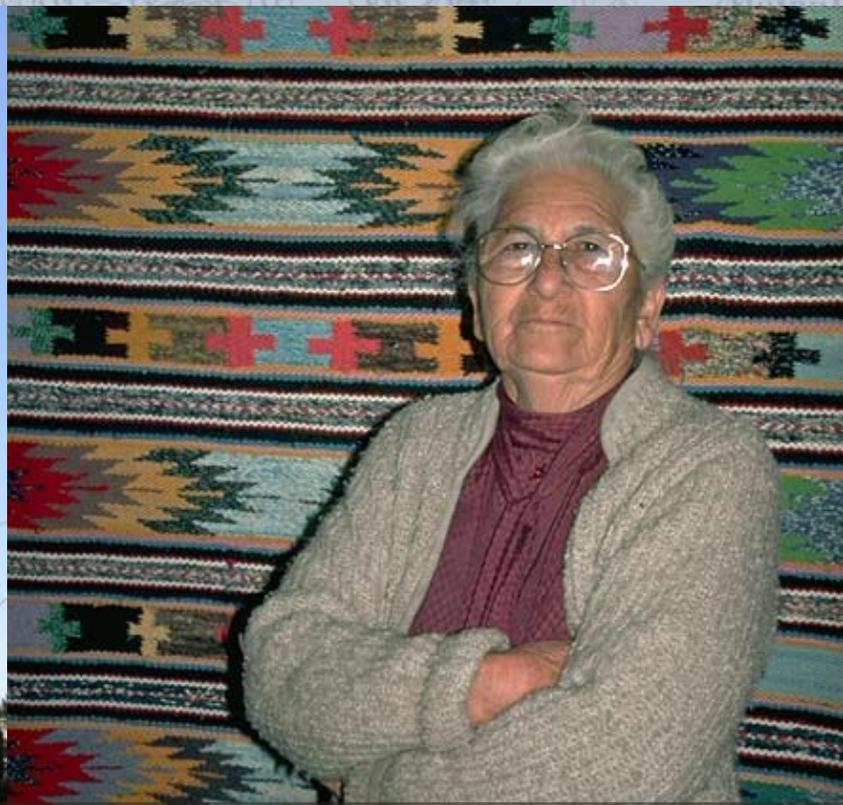
- ◆ Forge close ties and partnerships with federal, state, and regional land stewardship entities.
- ◆ Build public awareness through interpretation to help residents and visitors appreciate the heritage area's unique landscapes and ecosystems and to build support for the private and public entities that are working to conserve it.
- ◆ Build visibility of existing opportunities, encourage public access, and promote recreation-related business development. The heritage area can make more complete information readily accessible to residents and visitors; improve existing public access facilities; and encourage eco-tourism initiatives and other outdoor recreation programming.
- ◆ Support planning and development of local and regional recreational trail networks. This includes planning by San Luis Valley Great Outdoors for greater access to the Rio Grande.
- ◆ Support watershed restoration efforts. Water is the valley's big – and untold – story, key to understanding its ecology, its communities, and its character.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR CONSERVING COMMUNITY AND TRADITION

The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area can support communities, schools, and residents in conserving a sense of community and tradition and build both local and visitor awareness of the heritage area's character and significance. The region's cultural heritage is expressed through a rich variety of festivals, art shows, museums, farmers' markets, musical performances, youth programs, church and family activities, and formal educational programs. Programming objectives include:

- ◆ Create a community memory program to encourage residents to record cultural traditions and memories. Programs addressing sense of community and tradition should encourage residents to answer the question, "How do I see myself belonging to this place?"
- ◆ Encourage community engagement in arts and cultural programs. The heritage area brims with opportunities for residents to participate in programs, performances, and events where their talents and traditions take center stage.
- ◆ Develop youth education programs that increase appreciation of local history and culture and encourage leadership development. Teachers, schools, parents, the students themselves, and a wide range of civic organizations can be enlisted through training, collaborative programs, demonstration initiatives, public recognition, etc.
- ◆ Encourage continued dialogue and action reflecting the deep community awareness of agriculture – its cultural ties and its possibilities for supporting community and economic well-being.

Colorado has made visual and performing arts, including music, dance, and theater, core to both the primary and the secondary curriculum. Participants in the planning process recognized the opportunity for local history, arts, and culture to help local youth understand their past, identify with the region's culture, enrich their education, and explore ways to contribute personally to the long-term sustainability of their communities.



Left: The Conejos County Chamber of Commerce's "Murals of Conejos County Driving Tour" includes these silos in Antonito as stop #8, "The History of San Luis Valley." Along with many others showcased in the tour, this mural is by Fred Haberlein, an internationally recognized muralist and Antonito High School graduate (photo by Ann Marie Velasquez). Right: Eppie Archuleta (born 1922) is globally recognized for preserving the ancient folk art of weaving and the loom through her Spanish colonial and Rio Grande Indian style rugs, tapestries, and serapes (photo by Kathleen Figgen, courtesy Southern Colorado Council on the Arts Folklorist Collection, Adams State University, Nielsen Library).



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR HERITAGE TOURISM AND MARKETING

Heritage tourism is an economic development strategy. It is important to pay attention not only to telling the heritage area's stories but also to how visitors will learn about the region's heritage and experience it for themselves. A major marketing objective in this plan is for visitors to the Great Sand Dunes National Park to realize that there is much more to experience in the National Heritage Area than is commonly known. Pacing (1) visitor research and (2) the development of the interpretive presentation with (3) the expansion of marketing efforts over time will be critical to ensure that visitors find the destination is well worth the drive. Other strategic objectives are:

- ◆ A heritage area-wide graphic identity and messaging campaign.
- ◆ A welcoming culture of hospitality.
- ◆ Fully informed visitors, through such means as signs, publications, and social media.
- ◆ Strong public relations, achieving cost-effective visibility in the region, ultimately reaching national and international audiences.
- ◆ Strong festivals and events.

LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

Local interpretive sites and visitor attractions, such as museums, within and close to communities should participate in the development of community interpretive plans, should be key elements in their presentation, and should help facilitate implementation. Local interpretive sites serve as local destinations where rich interpretive experiences can be offered. Themes and stories presented at local sites should be closely coordinated with other forms of community interpretation.

Established in 1858 and commanded by legendary frontiersman Kit Carson, Fort Garland had a garrison of more than 100 men and served to protect the earliest settlers in the San Luis Valley. Original adobe buildings on the grounds (including the barracks pictured here), exhibits on infantry, cavalry, and Buffalo Soldiers stationed at the fort, an authentic 1871 stagecoach, and historic dioramas offer visitors a memorable experience of American western history. Fort Garland is one of the major interpretive sites in the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area.

CREATING AN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM...



The National Heritage Area's interpretive strategies will create a high-quality interpretive experience that weaves the heritage area's stories, communities, sites, and landscapes into a coordinated whole. Interpretation can reveal the rich stories of the people of the southern San Luis Valley, their traditions and arts, their historic contribution to the expansion of the United States, and the evolution of a remarkable landscape and culture. The building blocks of a complete, enhanced interpretive experience include several key components:

Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway; focusing upon the valley's Hispano culture, this byway links communities and sites and features orientation kiosks and interpretive waysides along its route. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail, which follows part of the same route, is under development and will add to the National Heritage Area's ability to satisfy visitors seeking to traverse the entire region.



Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve and the Fort Garland Museum, the National Heritage Area's leading interpretive sites, the former focusing on natural resource themes and Fort Garland on early settlement. Both work to inform visitors of other opportunities for exploring the region.



The Cumbres & Toltec and Rio Grande Scenic Railroads, popular visitor attractions that provide a broad experience of the landscape. The arrival of the railroad in the late 1870s was a defining element in shaping the valley's history. Today these two rail lines are centerpieces of the region's visitor experience.

The National Heritage Area's communities are where the region's cultural heritage is experienced. Each has a distinctive character and distinctive stories. Some are confined to a particular cultural group, while others clearly represent a blending of cultures.

Local museums, which are tailored to the interests and stories of their locales, and provide rich, friendly, and highly personalized experiences that present the region as well as individual communities (see list on page 6).



The valley's protected natural landscapes in addition to the Great Sand Dunes (see list on page 7). These are places where the details of the valley's distinct landscapes and ecosystems are best experienced.

Photos from top: Los Caminos Antiguos byway interpretive sign; the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Visitor Center; the Cumbre & Toltec Scenic RR water tower in Antonito; the Jack Dempsey Museum in Manassa. Next page, from top: Historic train depot of the Rio Grande Scenic RR in Alamosa also serves as the Colorado Welcome Center; R&R Market in San Luis, Colorado's oldest family-owned business; Pike's Stockade memorial; and the auto tour at Alamosa NWR with snow-capped Blanca Peak in the background.

PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES Interpretive themes are the big ideas that convey the significance about a place or subject and are the key ideas that audiences should remember.

Theme 1: A High Desert Valley's Wind, Water, and Sand Dunes

The delicate interplay of wind, water, and sand have shaped the San Luis Valley's unique landforms and contributed to its biological diversity. Though receiving little rainfall, the Valley's hidden aquifers support extensive wetlands that are home to globally unique plant and animal species and are a migration stopover for many birds.

Theme 2: Land of the Blue Sky People

Interwoven with the Valley's natural history is a very long and rich human history. The San Luis Valley served prehistoric and Native American cultures as a seasonal hunting ground where fowl, game, and edible and medicinal plants were bountiful. Select landscape features within the Valley have long been revered as sacred.

...USING FOUR METHODS

The management plan organizes the work of creating the National Heritage Area's interpretive experience into four broad areas of action based upon resources and responsible partners (see centerfold map on next page):

1. Heritage Area-wide Interpretation introduces themes and orients visitors. This will primarily be the responsibility of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Board of Directors in partnership with Los Caminos Antiguos (LCA). Possible components are: website; a family of heritage area-wide publications; a landscape guide; a family of entrance, wayfinding, and exhibit signage; orientation exhibits; additional interpretive exhibits for Los Caminos Antiguos and the Old Spanish Trail; branch routes for LCA; and driving tours and themed itineraries.

2. Community Interpretation and Visitor Services combine to form the core of what the plan calls "visitor experience." The plan proposes a system of three levels of community participation: Cornerstone Communities (Alamosa, Antonito, Fort Garland, and San Luis), Valley Communities (with visitor services), and Heritage Communities (without visitor services). Possible components are: community interpretive plans; introductory exhibits; local interpretive sites; outdoor interpretive exhibits; preserved historic buildings and landscapes; outdoor art installations; interpretive publications; themed walking tours; living history presentations; festivals and events; and community arts and crafts.

3. Site Interpretation details stories appropriate to each site or museum that illustrate heritage area themes and offer high-quality programs and exhibits. Existing sites range from large regionally prominent attractions offering professional interpretive programming, to small local museums run by dedicated volunteers, to self-guided sites featuring outdoor exhibits. The heritage area seeks to engage all of these, with individual partners taking the lead. Possible components are: self-assessments; introductory exhibits; interpretive enhancements; cooperative programming; interpretive workshops; technical assistance; site improvements; and collaboration with communities.

4. Natural Resource Interpretation, primarily the responsibility of federal and state partners, tells the landscape story and encourages use of the many public trails with enhanced interpretation. Interesting aspects of the natural landscape are prevalent almost anywhere and especially well-suited to presentation through driving tours. The landscape should play a role in the interpretation of almost any theme or subject within the valley. An increased emphasis upon combining recreation and learning about natural resources could appeal to an important segment of the visiting public. Possible components are: landscape guide and exhibits; driving tours and themed itineraries; maps, trailhead exhibits, and trail guides; website and social media; and back-country guides.



PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES (CONTINUED)

Theme 3: Interwoven Peoples & Traditions

The San Luis Valley is a place where different peoples have converged for thousands of years. The Valley's profound historical, religious, and cultural convergence remains visible in the landscape and can be experienced in its communities, art, food, lodging, and events.

Theme 4: Hispano Culture: Folklore, Religion and Language

The lower San Luis Valley lies at the intersection of the Hispano Southwest and Anglo Rocky Mountain West where the flavor of Hispano culture thrives. The Valley's relative isolation has preserved a living cultural tradition where art, language, architecture, folklore, and religious traditions remain evocative of the region's early Spanish and Mexican settlers.

Legend

- Cornerstone Communities**
- Valley Communities**
- Heritage Communities**
- Sangre de Cristo NHA**
- County Boundaries**
- Major Roads/Highways**
- Local Roads**
- Railroads**
- Cultural Site**
- Nature Site**
- Visitor Centers**
- Los Caminos Antiguos Waysides**
- Churches & Moradas**
- Centennial Farms**
- Cemeteries**
- Scenic & Historic Byway**
- Proposed Branch Routes**
- Continental Divide Trail**
- Old Spanish Trail**
- Proposed Entrance Markers**

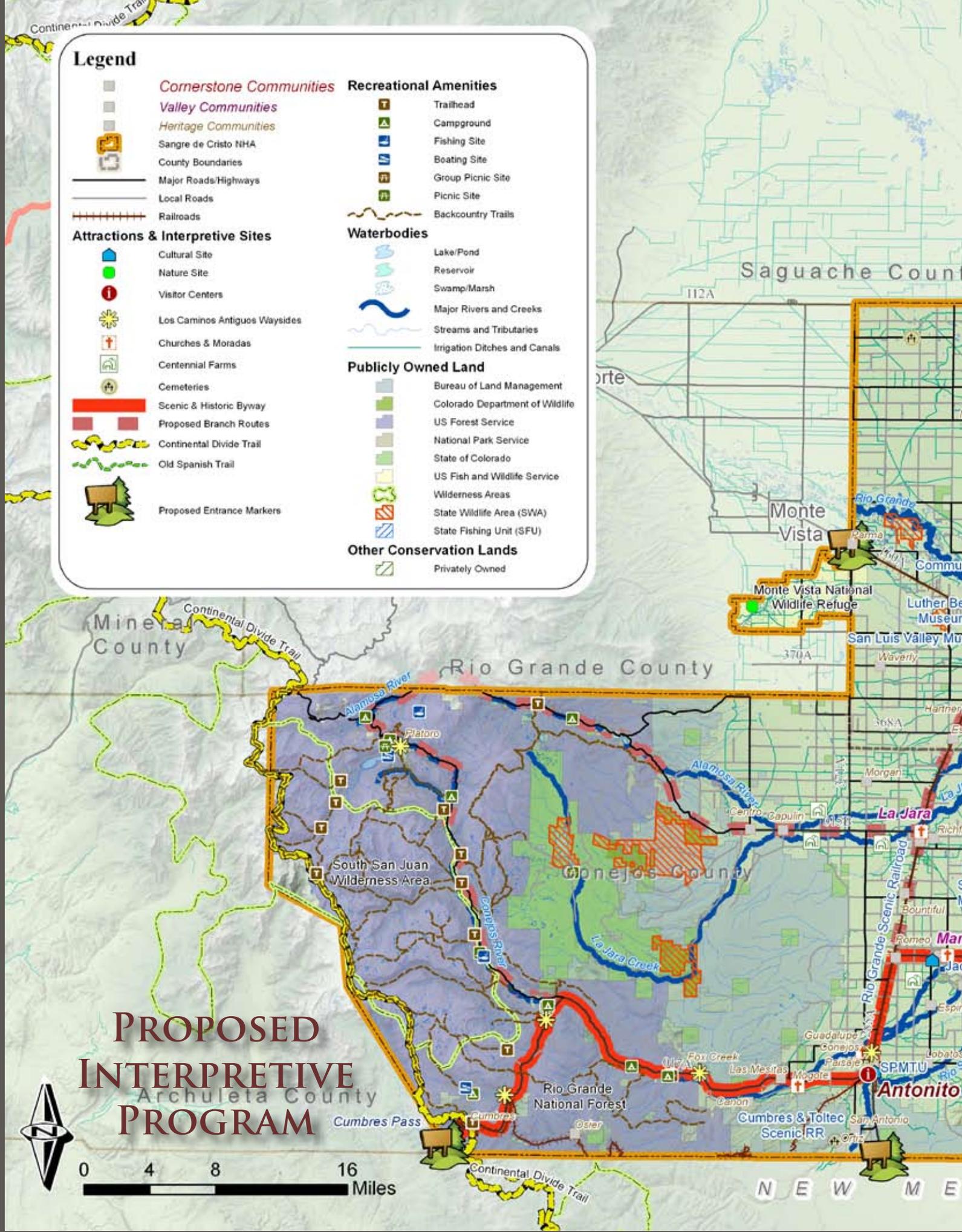
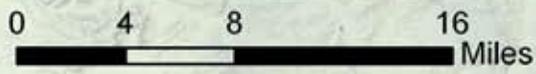
- ### Recreational Amenities
- Trailhead**
 - Campground**
 - Fishing Site**
 - Boating Site**
 - Group Picnic Site**
 - Picnic Site**
 - Backcountry Trails**

- ### Waterbodies
- Lake/Pond**
 - Reservoir**
 - Swamp/Marsh**
 - Major Rivers and Creeks**
 - Streams and Tributaries**
 - Irrigation Ditches and Canals**

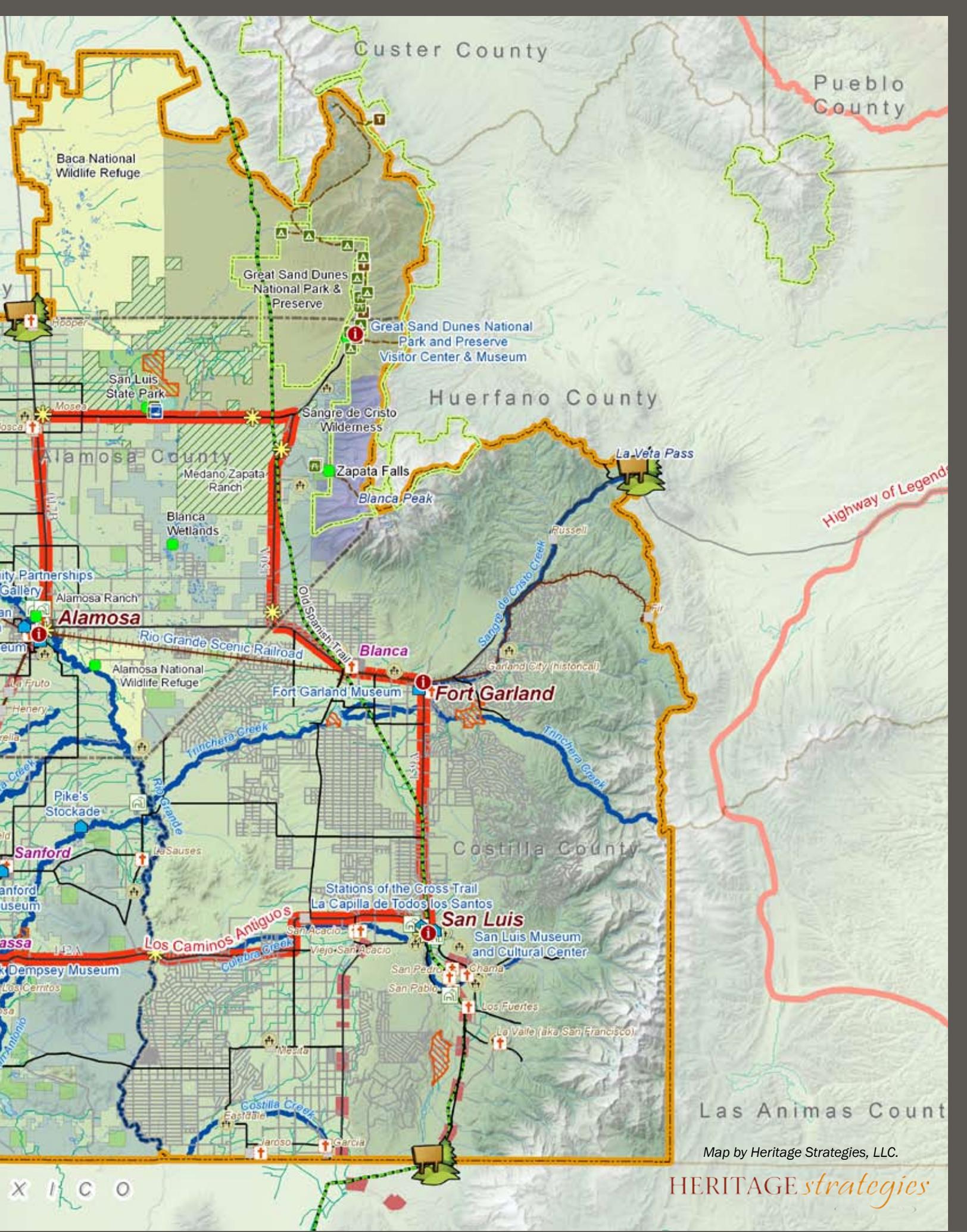
- ### Publicly Owned Land
- Bureau of Land Management**
 - Colorado Department of Wildlife**
 - US Forest Service**
 - National Park Service**
 - State of Colorado**
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service**
 - Wilderness Areas**
 - State Wildlife Area (SWA)**
 - State Fishing Unit (SFU)**

- ### Other Conservation Lands
- Privately Owned**

PROPOSED INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM



N E W M E



Custer County

Pueblo County

Baca National Wildlife Refuge

Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Visitor Center & Museum

Huerfano County

San Luis State Park

Sangre de Cristo Wilderness

La Veta Pass

Highway of Legends

Alamosa County

Medano Zapata Ranch

Zapata Falls

Blanca Peak

Blanca Wetlands

Old Spanish Trail

Sangre de Cristo Creek

Garland City (historical)

Alamosa

Rio Grande Scenic Railroad

Blanca

Fort Garland Museum

Fort Garland

Trinchera Creek

Trinchera Creek

Sanford

Costilla County

Stations of the Cross Trail
La Capilla de Todos los Santos

San Luis

San Luis Museum and Cultural Center

Los Caminos Antiguos

Culebra Creek

San Acacio

San Pedro

San Pablo

Los Fuertes

La Valle (aka San Francisco)

Las Animas County

Map by Heritage Strategies, LLC.

HERITAGE *strategies*

X I C O



As part of an early action strategy to support the National Heritage Area, the Board of Directors established a small grants program. A second-phase restoration of Alamosa Masonic Lodge #44, a splendid 1887 ironfront on Alamosa's Main Street, received an NHA grant matched by State Historical Fund monies.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

Heritage tourism could provide a significant economic boost to local communities and be a foundation for community revitalization and enhancement. The heritage area's role is to shine a light on new and less well-understood opportunities that capitalize on the region's singular heritage and qualities. Community revitalization can result from successes in interpretation, celebration of cultural heritage, protection of natural resources, and historic preservation. Every dollar invested in endeavors that support heritage tourism is a dollar that will also benefit residents and quality of life. The heritage area will rely on San Luis Valley's existing business development programs, fundamental to entrepreneurial success – there is no need for duplication. Strategies include:

- ◆ Encourage communities to develop revitalization plans customized to their interests and capabilities, using community interpretation and heritage tourism as central components. Assisting communities in becoming 'visitor ready' and in providing a high-quality visitor experience as a basis for community revitalization is a key strategy of the management plan.
- ◆ Establish a quality assurance program recognizing the efforts of participating visitor service providers and interpretive sites, offering a heritage area emblem for successful providers to display in signage and marketing materials plus special heritage area-wide promotions and marketing. The special relationship established with participants would also yield information that would strengthen the heritage area's ability to perceive and meet business needs in serving visitors.
- ◆ Create a San Luis Valley/Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area brand for local products representative of local character and culture.
- ◆ Encourage local entrepreneurs, including purveyors of the region's arts and crafts and locally grown and processed local foods and businesses providing visitor services, especially but not limited to those offering one-of-a-kind opportunities for visitors, such as outfitters, bed-and-breakfast lodging, or farms offering "agri-tourism" experiences. "Clusters" of such businesses are needed in order to achieve the critical mass that reassures visitors that the heritage area offers the variety they crave. And what better setting for such businesses than our historic commercial areas?

MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The heritage area's management plan is intended for implementation over the next ten to fifteen years and describes several critical areas of focus in management and implementation, including cultivating partnerships; achieving visibility; and achieving financial stability through resource development. Partnership-building addresses a wide range of federal, tribal, state, local, and nonprofit entities.

Highest priority activities during the first phase of plan implementation (approximately three years) are activities (1) for which no other organizations are directly responsible, (2) that encourage communities and partners to take collective action to support the heritage area and take individual advantage of its benefits; and (3) that grow the capacity of the Board of Directors to address the full span of heritage area programs:

- ◆ Improving the visitor experience, by encouraging visitors to enjoy interpretive offerings and recreational opportunities throughout the heritage area, through byway improvements and wayfinding information;
- ◆ Creating a program to designate and involve Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area Communities, to encourage historic preservation and business development projects that support community revitalization;
- ◆ Creating the beginnings of a broad program to support partner development;
- ◆ Reaching out to schools and other forms of community engagement;
- ◆ Addressing long-term sustainability through resource development planning and execution; and
- ◆ Making the heritage area visible to residents, partners, and audiences near and far.

VISION FOR PARTNER DEVELOPMENT

Goal 3-13 of the management plan lays out a vision for partner development: Stand behind partners; assist and lend credibility to their endeavors. Emphasize networking, skill-sharing, coalitions, joint ventures, and other working relationships among partners as the primary means of building the heritage area and accomplishing its goals in a mutually beneficial way.

The Alamosa Community Gardens Project is a collaboration among local schools, nonprofits, and the community to teach gardening and nutrition while providing healthy produce to benefit garden participants and community services such as the local food bank. In addition to managing two community gardens in Alamosa (Polston Elementary School and Boyd Park), the organization also manages a community greenhouse, which consists of a passive solar adobe building. (photo courtesy of Alamosa Community Gardens)

A National Heritage Area grant is to support acquisition of additional land for this important community project.



HIGHLIGHTING COMMUNITY MEMORY

Since so much of the cultural significance of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area stems from its residents – their families, traditions, faith, and communities – it is important that residents express an individual sense of belonging within the broader history and place that all have helped to shape. At the same time, presentation of the heritage area needs to be well-structured so that its identity as a whole is clear and comprehensible to residents and visitors alike. Potential “community memory” activities include oral history programs enlisting students, a community archive or repository, creating locally inspired markers or public art, or a local marker program for historic buildings.

The tiny villages of the upper Rio Culebra above San Luis include several mission churches for the local parish. Pictured is the St. Isidro Mission church of the village of Los Fuertes. Note the miniature of the building at right, which congregants carry in traditional local processions. (Photo by Ann Marie Velasquez)

HOW COMMUNITIES CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

The National Heritage Area seeks to enlist communities in building up the heritage area’s visitor experience. Participating communities can identify ways in which the National Heritage Area can support local interests and initiatives, involving residents and community leaders in the process. To participate, a community would follow heritage area guidance, first in evaluating its visitor services, and second in determining how it wishes to work on an interpretive presentation. It would document its ideas in a brief plan listing actions and priorities, seek the National Heritage Area’s acknowledgment of its status, and begin work on its top-priority actions. Upon approval, the community’s plan would become part of the guidance for implementing the management plan and be incorporated into heritage area programming.

By participating, communities gain local recognition and new ways to express community creativity and can compete for heritage area support and technical assistance for their priority projects. Visitor-ready communities can be promoted by the heritage area according to visitors’ needs, expectations, and interests.





This prizewinning float appeared in the 2011 Manassa Pioneer Days parade, illustrating its celebrated, fiercely competitive quality. One of the Valley's oldest festivals (with one of the oldest rodeos in the West), it commemorates Mormon pioneers who founded the town in 1879. The Manassa Project (manassaproject.org) devotes funds raised by this event to a variety of community heritage projects. (Photo by Ann Marie Velasquez; float sponsored by Martin Cattle Co.)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festivals and events are important means of promoting living cultural traditions and offer ways to provide richer visitor experiences showcasing communities for short periods of time. Many communities in the heritage area have annual celebrations, many relating to the region's religious heritage. Larger communities organize more than one – sometimes many more, as in the case of Alamosa, which offers a farmers' market, monthly art walks, and outdoor musical performances along with various single events from a winter festival to a rodeo to an "early iron" rally for owners of vintage cars and steam engines.

While a single annual event may not generate sufficient year-round visitation to justify additional hotels, restaurants or retail businesses, a full calendar of events happening region-wide can help to stimulate such private investment. Understanding issues and opportunities facing current and potential festivals and events in all three counties (including the challenge of volunteer capacity) will help the heritage area develop strategies to support a robust calendar. Such strategies could include identifying sources of grant support or seeking to dedicate part or all of a staff position within a regional service organization to supplement volunteer efforts in coordinating events.



The villages of Chama and San Luis celebrate their respective patron saints in Fiestas de Santiago y Santa Ana each year at the end of July. One of the San Luis Valley's oldest festivals, it is rooted in Spanish colonial heritage, as this parade rider in 16th-century Spanish garb suggests. (Photo by Ann Marie Velasquez)

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Cover photographs, from top left: Steam engine on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, a National Historic Landmark, photo by Cheryl Fountain; hiker in the wilderness of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, with the Sangre de Cristo Mountains as backdrop, photo by Scott Hansen, courtesy National Park Service; “Dios es Amor” (God is Love) gate and San Rafael Presbyterian Church (1880), Mogote, restored with the help of the Colorado Historical Fund, photo by Ann Marie Velasquez; Fort Garland commandant’s quarters, photo by Peter C. Benton, Heritage Strategies, LLC; the People’s Ditch in San Luis, the first acequia in Colorado (1851), photo by Peter C. Benton; Rio Grande style of Spanish Colonial weaving by National Heritage weaver Eppie Archuleta, credited with saving the tradition and the type of loom used, photo by Kathleen Figgen; grassland sunflowers, photo by Patrick Myers; santos carvings (bultos, sacred carvings in the round), photo by Kathleen Figgen; sheep grazing in San Luis shrublands ecoregion in northern Conejos County below the foothills of the Rio Grande National Forest, photo by Peter C. Benton. The two photos by Ms. Figgen are courtesy of the Southern Colorado Council on the Arts Folklorist Collection, Adams State University, Nielsen Library.