

Land use should be part of vision for Cañon City 2040

The total land area within Fremont County is just under one million acres. The total acreage of public land within Fremont County is in excess of 54%. Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service land covers 455,300 of those acres.

According to the state Division of Reclamation and Mining Safety, there are 52 mines currently operating within Fremont County of which 26 are mining sand and gravel or aggregate. These mines operate numerous haul trucks on our state and local roads. The ever-increasing number of large haul trucks is crowding and destroying the state and county's roads and highways. In addition to the existing mines, a Canadian company, Zephyr Minerals Ltd., is proposing to open a gold mine in the foothills, which serves as a scenic backdrop south and west of Cañon City.

Picture Cañon City 2040's plan is comprehensive and reflects extensive planning, but it also needs a comprehensive awareness of the local BLM's Resource Management Plan, as well as the local USFS's planning efforts. It must then consider how those agencies' planning and current land use will affect the town, to include 2040's planning as it relates to the future of Cañon City. The track record of approval that the Fremont County Commissioners, the BLM, the USFS, and DRMS have established is well known and has not always been for the benefit of our citizenry.

Protected public lands are a huge boon for our local economy. When people come to vacation in Fremont County, they stay in hotels and campgrounds, eat in restaurants, stock their coolers and visit local attractions. If they forget to bring items, they will likely shop in the nearby community. It is no secret that people are willing to pay a premium to live near majestic scenery surrounded by wildlife. Studies ("Headwaters Economics" April 2017) have shown that counties thrive economically when they have more protected lands located within. They also have greater rates of employment and higher per capita income.

Privileged persons may have the use of private land they can use for biking, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, rafting and

canoeing, but most Americans turn to protected public lands for outdoor recreation, whether they are looking to climb our peaks, raft the Arkansas River, hike or bike our trails, enjoy scenic vistas or just bring the kids out for a Sunday picnic.

Without protection, these lands will lose their appeal. People do not want to bring their family across the country for a vacation among gravel pits, drilling rigs, hard rock mines, roads crowded and destroyed with 20-ton gravel trucks, clear-cut forests, or fish in water so polluted they cannot fry the day's catch on a campfire.

The aforesaid commentary contains foundational information that is pertinent from an environmental standpoint. It is relevant to Picture Cañon City 2040 in that the 3,500 plus acres of the permitted exploratory area currently granted to Canadian exploratory/mining company Zephyr Minerals Ltd. poses the operational risk of negating many of the main advantages posed by the 2040 plan.

In the 2040 planning document, concerns were voiced that many in our community perceived it as being a "prison town." Would the additional label of being a "mining town" not be similarly antithetical to the goals of Picture Cañon City 2040? Tourism, transportation and the marketing of our community would be affected in a much more negative way than what results from the presence of the Department of Corrections. This city/county needs sustainable industry, not short-term commercial projects (3-5 years?) that leave a legacy of waste and degradation.

This is the time to put your hearts into preserving the progress that is now in the sights of our community and which is being planned to become its legacy. There is literally nothing that the presence of a time-limited hard rock mine on the boundary of Cañon City would do that would not physically oppose the mission and goals of Picture Cañon City 2040.

The Royal Gorge Preservation Project is a nonprofit organization that according to its website was "created to preserve the natural beauty of the Royal Gorge region from environmentally destructive human activity."