The river supports our communities

Economic evidence for Red Cliff, Minturn and downstream communities

Water in the Homestake and Eagle River system supports local livelihoods. Usable river days bring customers to guides, outfitters, restaurants, shops and lodging.

A visit supports more than one business

People come to Homestake to camp, hike, fish, watch wildlife and spend time beside the water. Meals, supplies, guiding and overnight stays connect those visits to nearby businesses.

The landscape is part of the local economy.
Reliable access, healthy rivers and a valley worth returning to help sustain recreation and the livelihoods around it.

What is exposed

Flooding recreation areas, changing road access and altering river conditions could change where people visit, how long they stay and where they spend. Red Cliff and Minturn are closely connected to these places and activities.

Sources

Forest Service Homestake Valley Campground record, updated May 22, 2026. Forest Service visitor-spending report, Tables 4 and 5, describes how national-forest visits support spending in surrounding communities. Colorado River Outfitters Association, 2024 commercial rafting report, PDF p. 8, documents commercial activity on the Eagle River.

Fewer usable days mean fewer opportunities

Homestake Creek joins the Eagle River upstream of these recreation reaches. The Eagle River Community Water Plan asks how future demand and new storage and diversion works together could change the river that boaters use.

Its **New Water Infrastructure with historical hydrology scenario** combines projected 2050 demands, the potential Eagle River Joint Use infrastructure program, and redevelopment of Bolts Lake, a separate water-supply reservoir site at Minturn. **The boating figures below describe that combined scenario, rather than a Whitney-only forecast.**

The modeled combination

The 1998 Eagle River memorandum of understanding, or MOU, established the cooperative Joint Use framework in which Whitney has been discussed. The Community Water Plan models its objectives alongside future demands and Bolts Lake redevelopment. Those MOU objectives include 20,000 acre-feet of average annual East Slope supply and 10,000 acre-feet of reliable dry-year West Slope supply. The study applies historical river conditions to compare the combined scenario with current conditions.

The local water providers describe Bolts Lake’s location and water-supply role.

Modeled change in boatable days under the combined infrastructure scenario

Eagle River reach	Dry years	Wet years
Tigiwon to Dowd Junction, through Minturn	**85% fewer**	**48% fewer**
Edwards to Eagle	**9% fewer**	**10% fewer**

A boatable day is a day when simulated flow falls within recreational users' acceptable ranges. Fewer usable days can mean fewer trips sold and less associated spending. Those connections expose local businesses to changes in recreation conditions.

Fishing restrictions show the exposure

On **July 16, 2026**, Colorado Parks and Wildlife announced a **full-day voluntary fishing closure beginning July 17**, from Lake Creek in Edwards to the Eagle's confluence with the Colorado. CPW cited extremely low flows and high temperatures, with peaks of **77°F in Gypsum** and **74.5°F in Wolcott**.

Fishing restrictions can mean fewer guide bookings, shorter stays and spending moving elsewhere. This is a dated example of the pressures facing the river economy.

Sources

Recreation assessment, Appendix N, pp. 7, 10-11, 22. Technical assessment, Appendix C, pp. 9-11. MOU objectives modeled include 20,000 acre-feet of average annual East Slope yield and 10,000 acre-feet of firm dry-year West Slope yield. The published boating reductions describe a combined infrastructure-and-demand scenario, not Whitney-only losses.

CPW fishing-closure announcement, July 16, 2026.

Local places, connected livelihoods

River visits connect water conditions with local business activity. Each community has a different connection to the valley and the rivers downstream.

Red Cliff

Changes to Homestake camping, sightseeing, wildlife viewing and other recreation could reduce nearby visitor spending. Construction access changes could affect visits before operation begins.

Minturn

Fewer whitewater days and fishery or destination changes could affect guides, shops, restaurants and lodging.

Avon and Edwards

River recreation businesses and visitor amenities depend on usable flows. The July 2026 fishing closure began at Lake Creek in Edwards. Restrictions can shorten the season and displace guide trips.

Wolcott, Eagle and Gypsum

Fishing restrictions and shorter recreation seasons could affect visitor businesses and river amenities. Agricultural deliveries and water-service costs involve additional, distinct pathways.

Dotsero and Glenwood Springs

Changes in Eagle River contributions can carry into a larger Colorado River recreation economy. Other tributaries, storage releases and water administration also shape that larger river economy.

Sources

Community pathways synthesize the evidence cited on pages 1, 2 and 4. Local context: Minturn community-plan consultant, linking economic vitality and natural-resource stewardship; Town of Eagle tourism program, describing river recreation and its snowmelt season.

Water quality matters

Eagle Mine is an inactive mining and milling site between Red Cliff and Minturn. Mine drainage and wastes have contaminated the Eagle River with metals. Eagle River Coalition reports heavy-metal impairment of brown trout between Red Cliff and Gore Creek, absent native sculpin between Belden and Gore Creek, and few rainbow trout. This is a stressed fishery.

With the same amount of pollution entering the river, less water can mean a higher metal concentration. Homestake supplies water upstream of this affected reach, so changes to its contribution belong in the wider fishery story. The Community Water Plan identifies a risk that upstream development and climate change could worsen Eagle Mine fishery impacts. Reservoir releases improve some modeled upper-river late-summer conditions, while runoff capture reduces whitewater flows; Gypsum does not show that same late-summer improvement.

Less dilution increases pressure on fish.
The plan’s Eagle Mine assessment calculates how much zinc would have to be removed, or how much extra water would be needed for dilution, to reach its sustained-exposure threshold for rainbow trout. It holds historical metal loading fixed while changing modeled river flows.

What the zinc and water figures measure

Appendix K estimates that the average May zinc reduction needed to reach its chronic rainbow-trout threshold rises from **140 kg to 434 kg** under the new-infrastructure scenario. These kilograms represent zinc that would need to be removed from that month’s load. The alternative dilution calculation estimates the additional May water needed to reach the same threshold: **496 acre-feet under current conditions and 1,530 under the scenario**. These are two ways of expressing the modeled water-quality pressure.

A stressed fishery threatens fishing opportunities and the guide trips, visits and local spending they support. Greater pressure on pollution control, treatment and river flow adds another connection between water decisions and local livelihoods.

Protect the places that support local livelihoods

Homestake's recreation areas, the Eagle River fishery and usable river flows connect the health of the watershed to guides, outfitters, shops, restaurants and lodging. Protecting those places helps sustain the reasons people visit and return.

Sources

Eagle River Coalition monitoring program, Eagle Mine section. Community Water Plan main report, revised October 2024, pp. 23-25, 59. Eagle Mine assessment, Appendix K, pp. 4-6, 8-9. Community Water Plan portal.