



United States Department
of Agriculture



Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Lakewood, Colorado

RWA 14050006

June 2010

Piceance–Yellow Watershed

Hydrologic Unit Code 14050006

Rapid Assessment



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Introduction

Background Information

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging the development of rapid watershed assessments in order to increase the speed and efficiency generating information to guide conservation implementation, as well as the speed and efficiency of putting it into the hands of local decision makers.

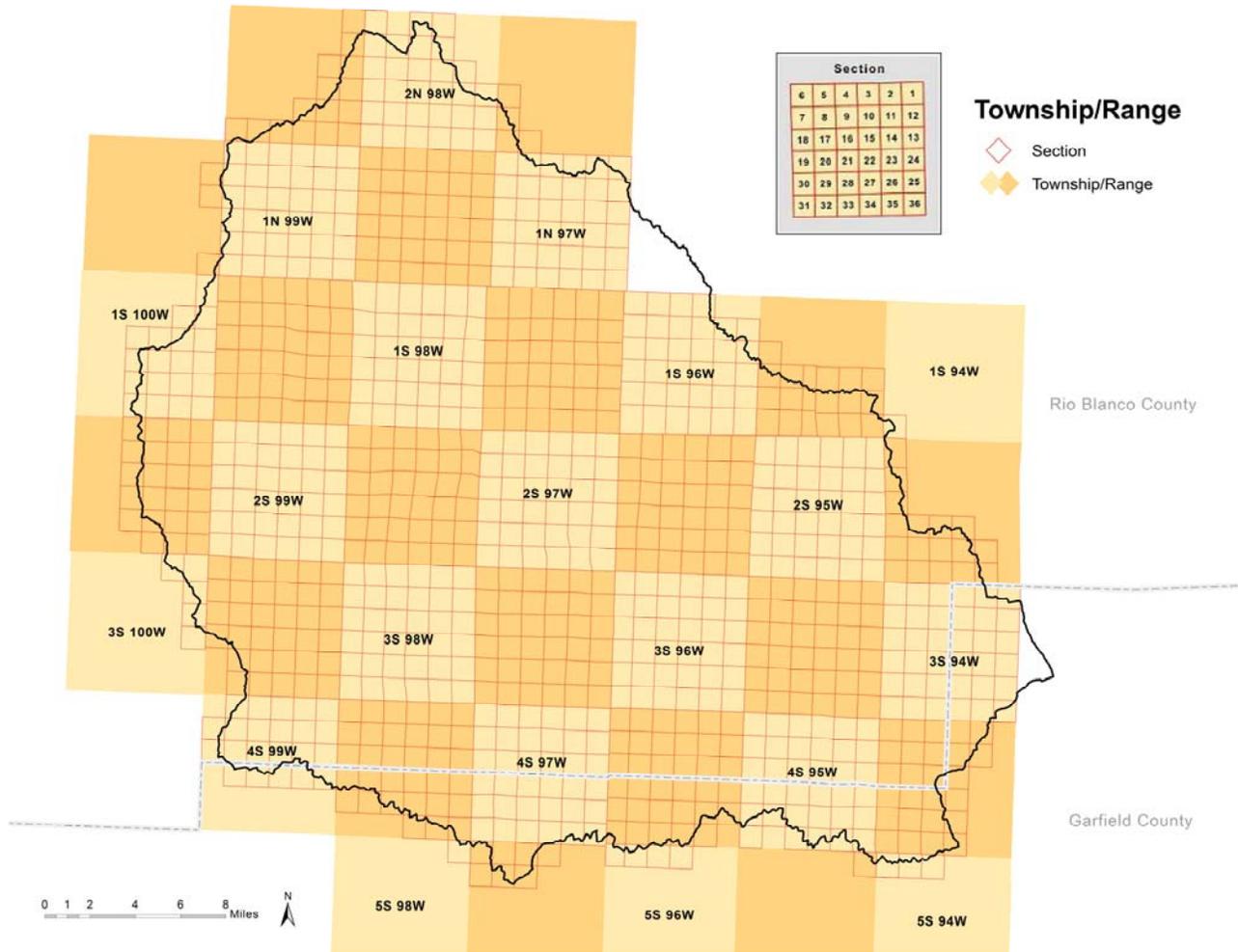
Rapid watershed assessments provide initial estimates of where conservation investments would best address the concerns of landowners, conservation districts, and other community organizations and stakeholders. These assessments help landowners and local leaders set priorities and determine the best actions to achieve their goals.

Benefits of these Activities

While rapid assessments provide less detail and analysis than full-blown studies and plans, they do provide the benefits of NRCS locally-led planning in less time and at a reduced cost. The benefits include:

- Quick and inexpensive tools for setting priorities and taking action
- Providing a level of detail that is sufficient for identifying actions that can be taken with no further watershed-level studies or analyses
- Actions to be taken may require further Federal or State permits or ESA or NEPA analysis but these activities are part of standard requirements for use of best management practices (BMPs) and conservation systems
- Identifying where further detailed analyses or watershed studies are needed
- Plans address multiple objectives and concerns of landowners and communities
- Plans are based on established partnerships at the local and state levels
- Plans enable landowners and communities to decide on the best mix of NRCS programs that will meet their goals
- Plans include the full array of conservation program tools (i.e. cost-share practices, easements, technical assistance)

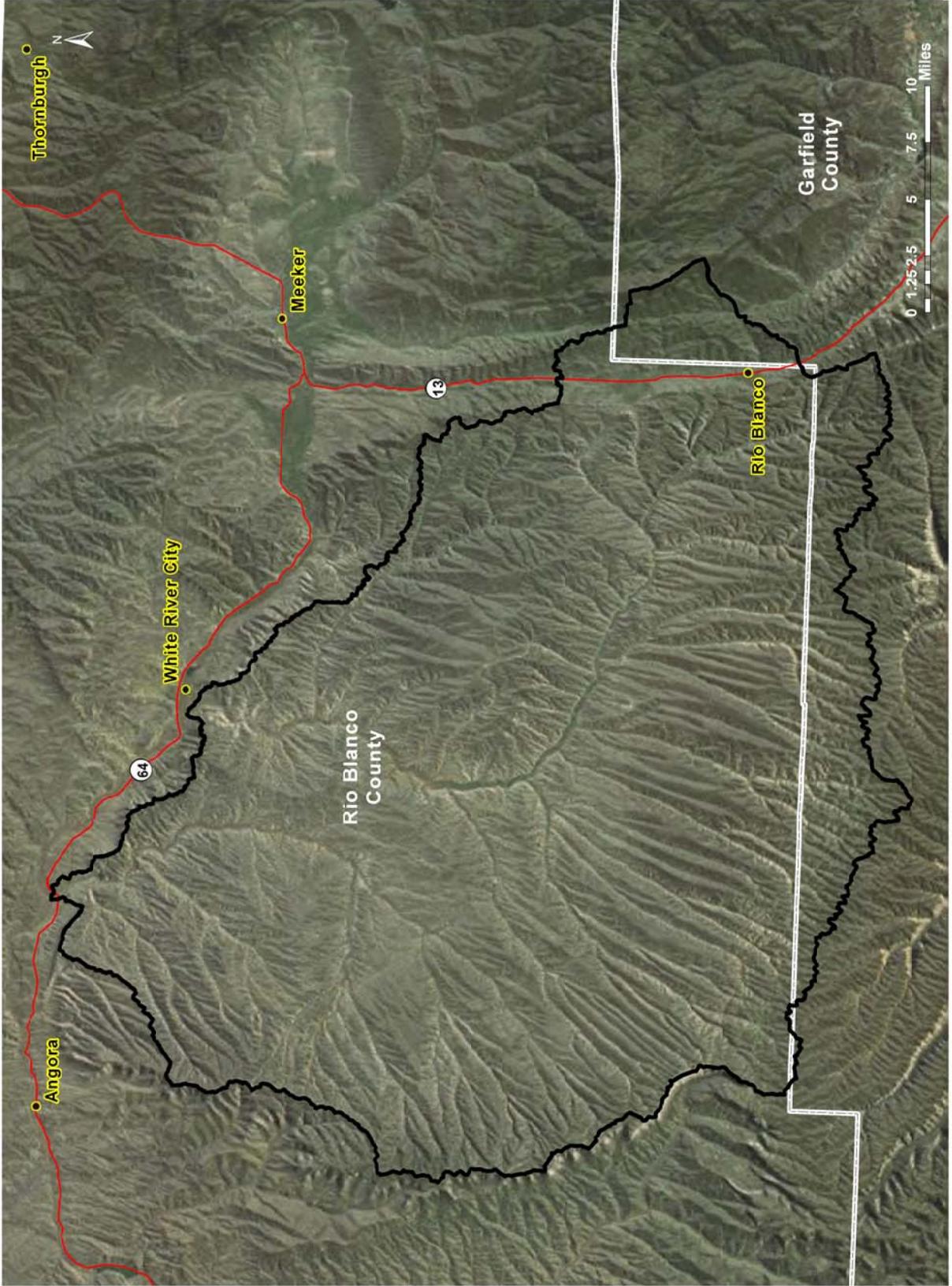
Rapid Watershed Assessments provide information that helps land-owners and local leaders set conservation priorities.

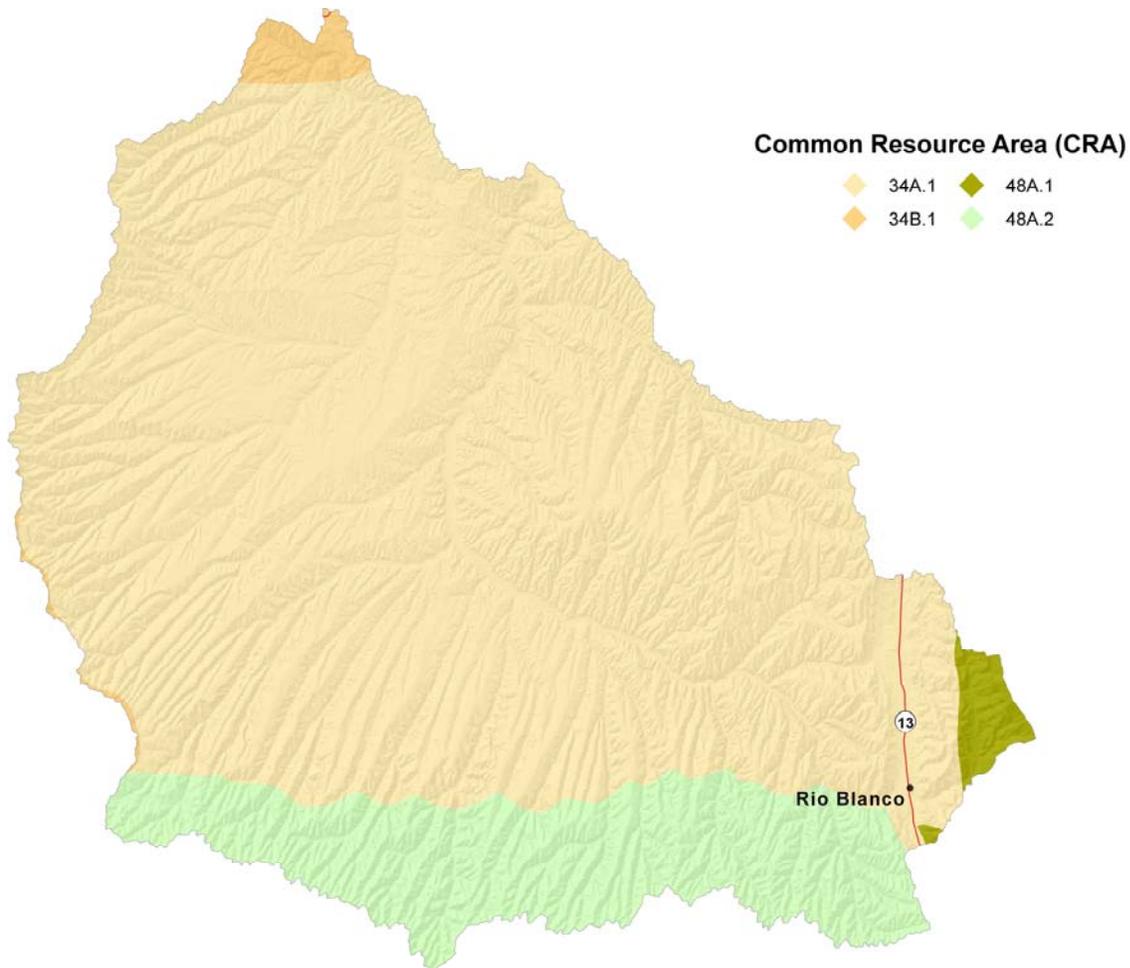


County	County Acres	County Acres in PICEANCE-YELLOW Watershed	% of County in the Watershed	% of Watershed in the County
Garfield	1,893,489	59,229	3.1%	10.1%
Rio Blanco	2,064,823	526,654	25.5%	89.9%

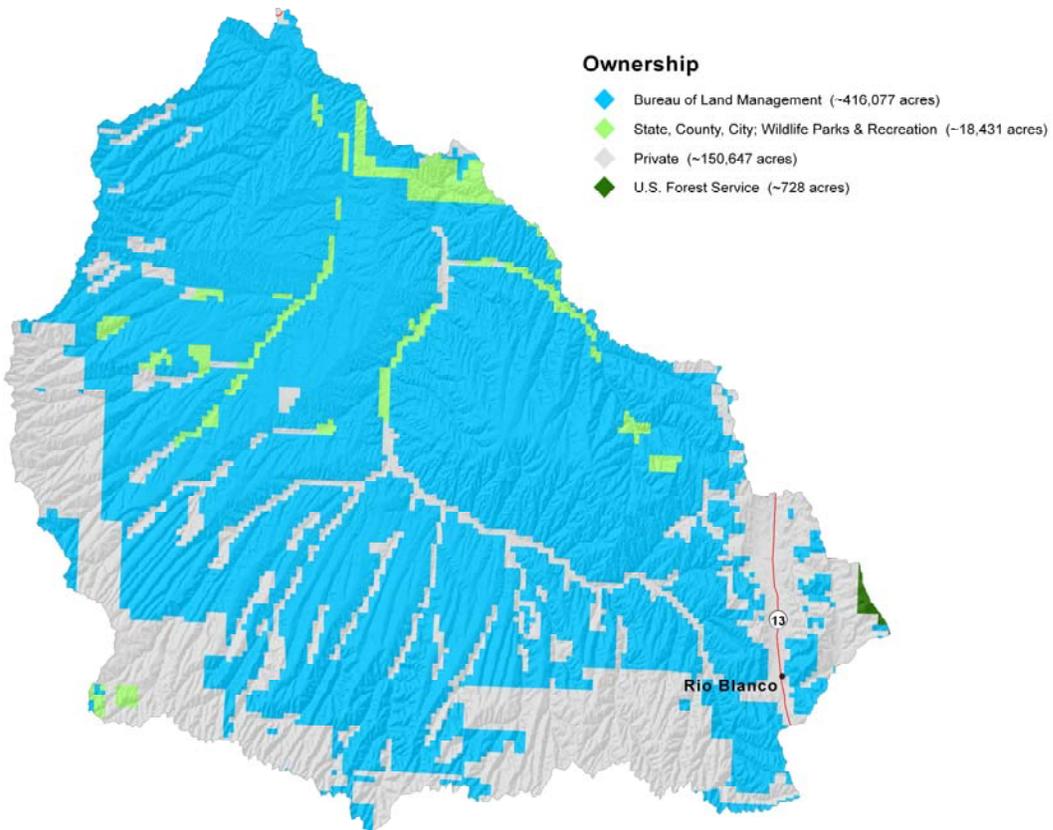
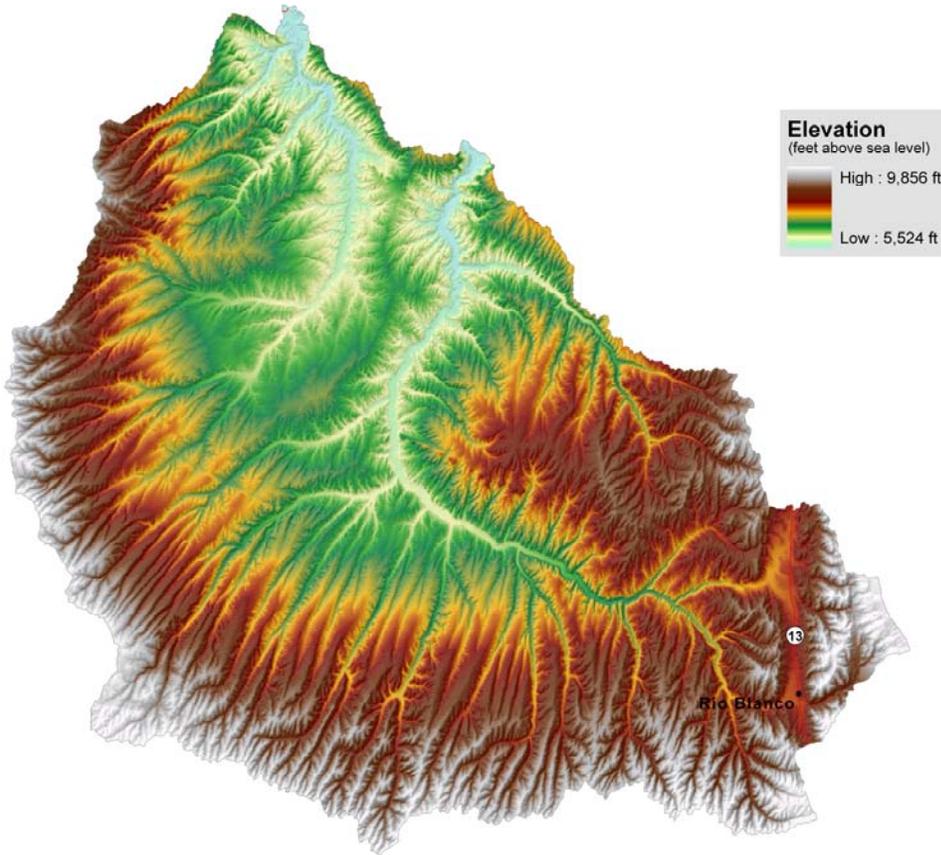
585,883

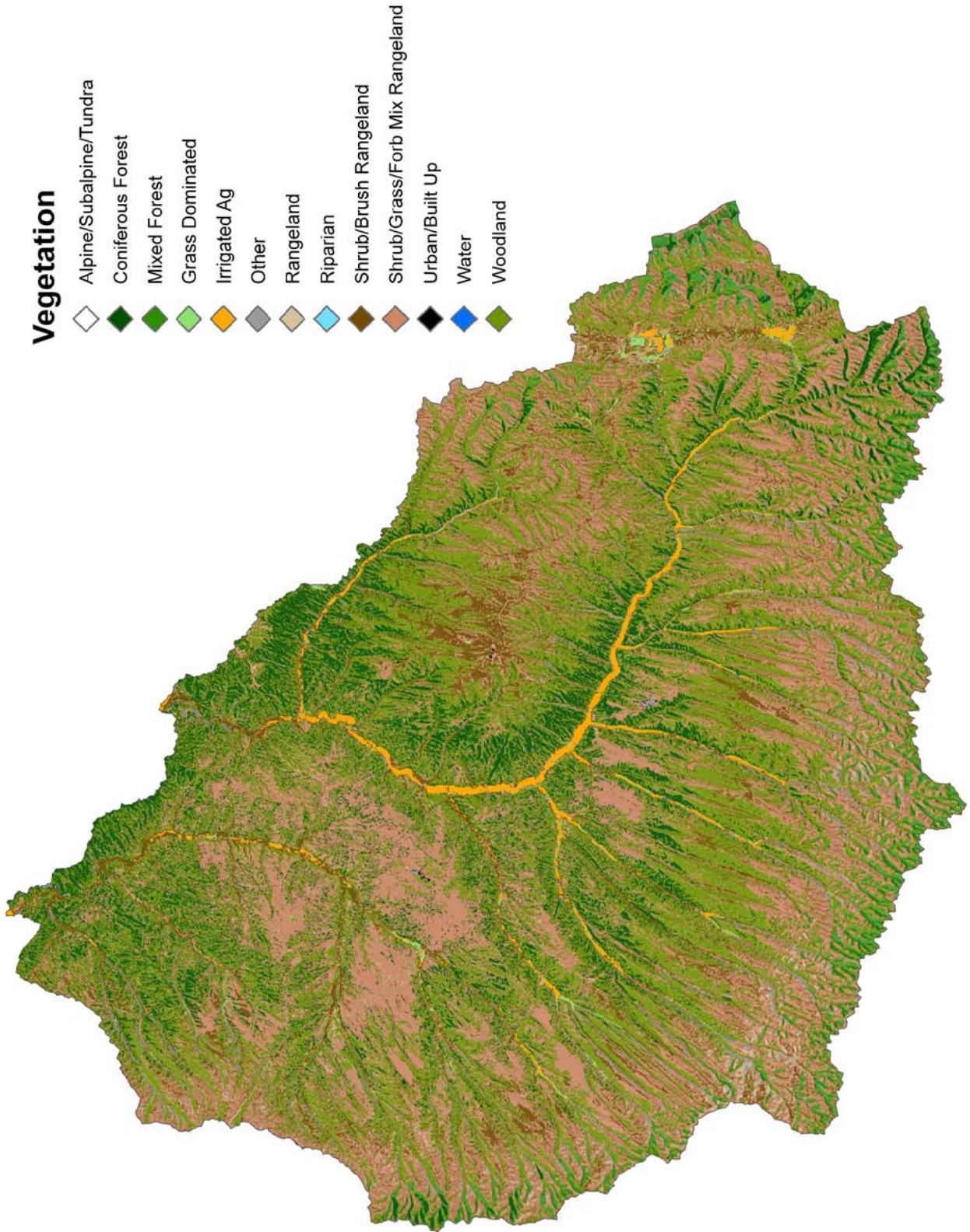
Piceance-Yellow Watershed - 14050006





MLRA	CRA	CRA NAME	CRA DESCRIPTION
34A	34A.1	Cool Central Desertic Basins and Plateaus--Green River Basin	This unit is in the cool semiarid basins, plateaus, and low mountains that are west of the Continental Divide in MLRA 34A. Soils have an aridic moisture regime and frigid temperature regime. Vegetation is sagebrush or shadscale and bunchgrasses. Major use is range. Precipitation ranges from 7 to 14 inches. Elevations range from about 4,000 to 7,000 feet.
34B	34B.1	Warm Central Desertic Basins and Plateaus - Semiarid Plateaus and Low Mountains	This area is on broad plateaus and in narrow saline basins in Colorado and Utah. Soils have an aridic moisture regime and a mesic temperature regime. Natural vegetation is typically big sagebrush and bunchgrasses. Major use is range. Precipitation ranges from 5 to 16 inches. Elevations range from about 4,500 to 6,000 feet.
48A	48A.2	Southern Rocky Mountains - Semiarid High Plateaus, Utah and Colorado	This area is a dissected high plateau. The temperature regime is frigid or cryic, and the moisture regime is ustic. Characteristic native vegetation is sagebrush, aspen, and Rocky Mountain Douglas fir. Elevations range from 5,000 to 9,500 feet.

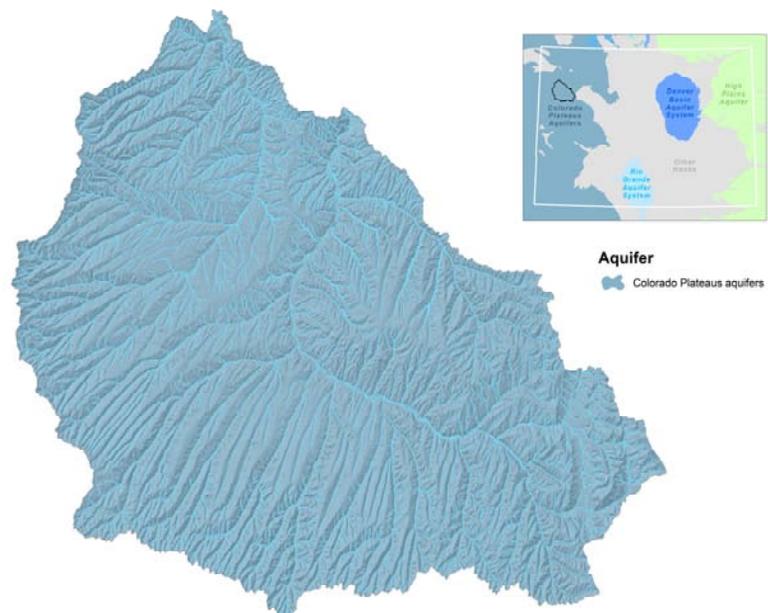
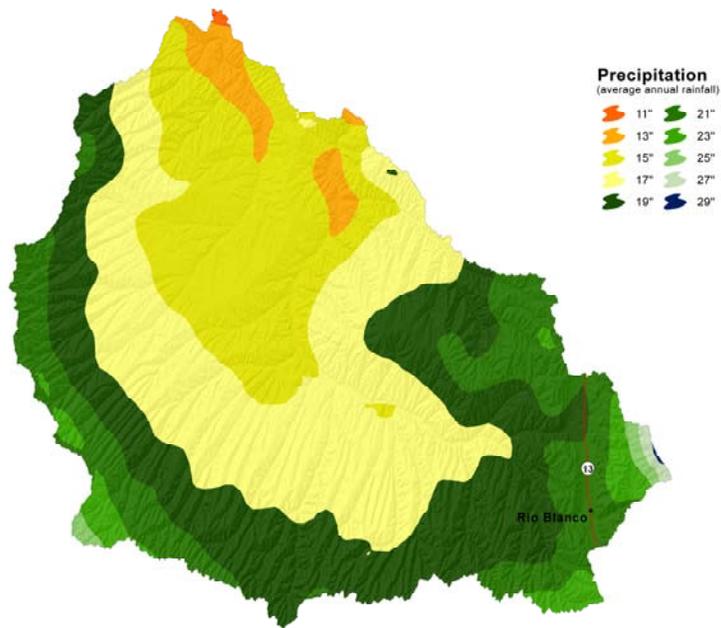


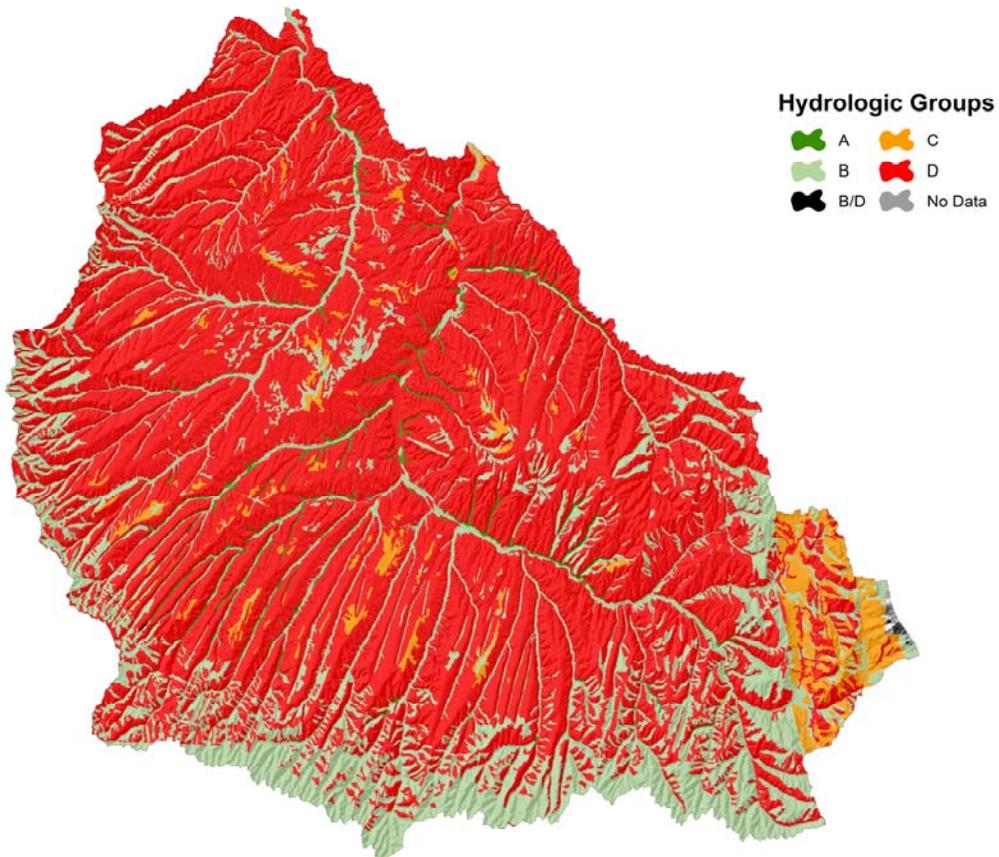
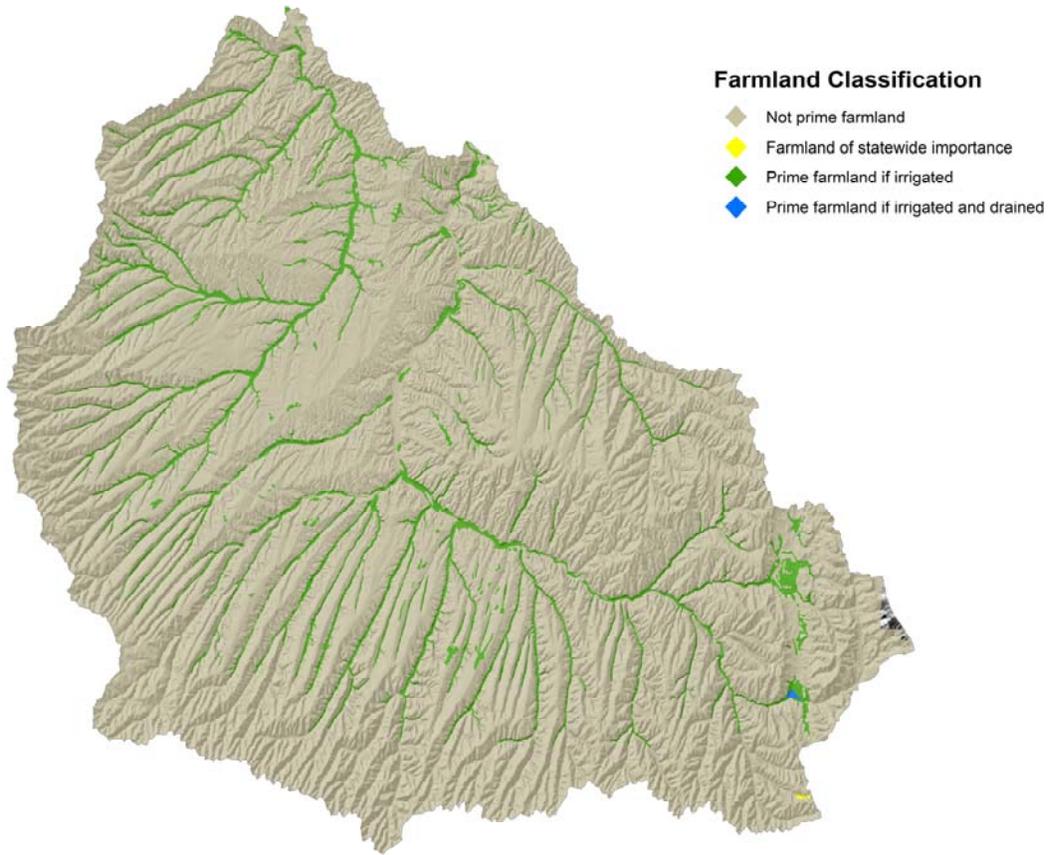


<u>PICEANCE-YELLOW WATER-SHED Land Use</u>	Total Acreage	Vegetation	Acreage
Cropland	3,400	Irrigated Ag*	3,400.0
Rangeland/Grassland	541,549	Disturbed Rangeland	4,120.5
		Forb Dominated	4.3
		Gambel Oak	5,328.5
		Grass Dominated	5,702.6
		Grass/Forb Mix	3,805.6
		Greasewood	2,287.7
		Juniper	10,382.1
		Juniper/Mtn Shrub Mix	6.0
		Juniper/Sagebrush Mix	13,855.4
		Mesic Mountain Shrub Mix	8,833.6
		PJ-Mtn Shrub Mix	72,460.9
		PJ-Oak Mix	6,392.2
		PJ-Sagebrush Mix	40,645.3
		Pinon-Juniper	47,378.8
		Rabbitbrush/Grass Mix	1,264.9
		Sagebrush/Grass Mix	111,636.8
		Sagebrush/Greasewood	6,297.0
		Sagebrush/Mesic Mtn Shrub Mix	87,573.2
		Sagebrush/Rabbitbrush Mix	3,898.6
		Sagebrush Community	32,405.4
		Sagebrush/Gambel Oak Mix	8.8
		Saltbush Community	1,909.0
		Serviceberry/Shrub Mix	40,324.7
		Shrub/Grass/Forb Mix	935.9
		Snowberry	6.6
		Snowberry/Shrub Mix	629.5
		Sparse Juniper/Shrub/Rock Mix	14,717.1
		Sparse PJ/Shrub/Rock Mix	18,720.6
		Xeric Mountain Shrub Mix	17.6
Forest	27,478	Aspen	18,255.2
		Aspen/Mesic Mountain Shrub Mix	975.6
		Douglas Fir	8,120.7
		Douglas Fir/Aspen Mix	61.2
		Douglas Fir/Englemann Spruce Mix	5.1
		Englemann Spruce/Fir Mix	5.1
		Spruce/Fir/Aspen Mix	44.9
		Sub-Alpine Fir	7.4
Riparian	165	Cottonwood	5.6
		Riparian	128.8
		Sedge	17.6
		Shrub Riparian	13.1
Water	55	Water	54.5
Other	12,638	SubAlpine Shrub Community	17.6
		Subalpine Grass/Forb Mix	36.0
		Commercial	59.5
		Rock	73.2
		Soil	5,496.4
		Talus Slopes & Rock Outcrops	6,955.6
~Total Watershed Acres			585,285.3

Precipitation

Droughts are regular visitors to the watershed as with the rest of Colorado. Statewide, in the 1900's alone, four prolonged dry spells occurred. There was one in the 1910s. Another, in the '30s, caused the dust-bowl period. The second worst drought on record in the state occurred in the mid-50s. A series of hot, dry summers following a period of scant mountain snowpack created water shortages. The fourth drought hit parts of Colorado in the late 1970s. In this century, the most severe drought since 1723 hit the state in 2002. Prior to the 1700's, researchers looking at tree ring records have found evidence of even more severe droughts, some lasting many years. Rainfall occurs as frontal storms in the spring and early summer and high intensity, convective thunderstorms in late summer. Maximum precipitation is from mid spring through late autumn. Precipitation in winter is usually snow.





Class 1 - soils have few limitations that restrict their use.

Class 2 - soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.

Class 3 - soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require special conservation practices, or both.

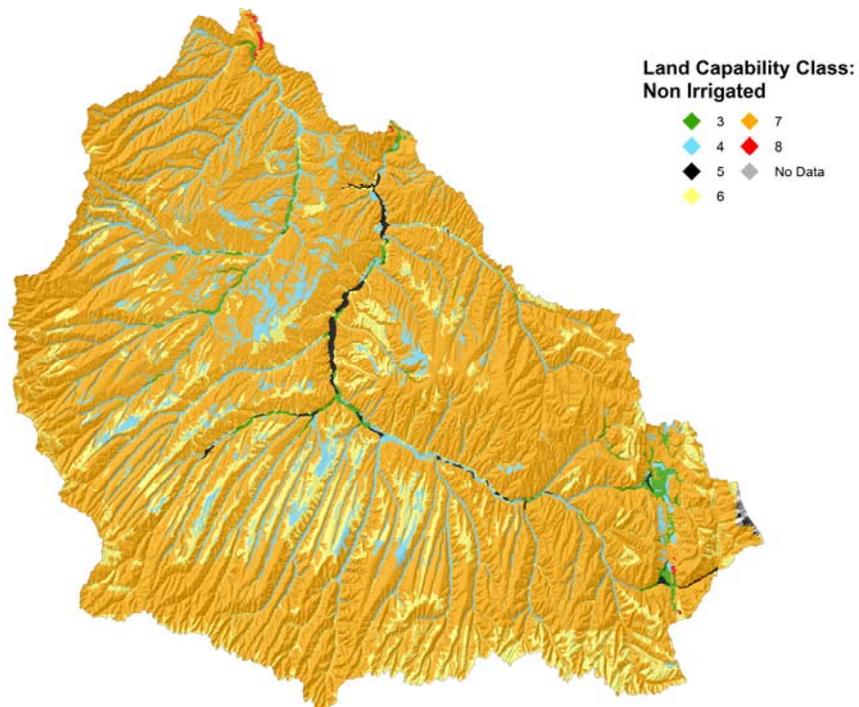
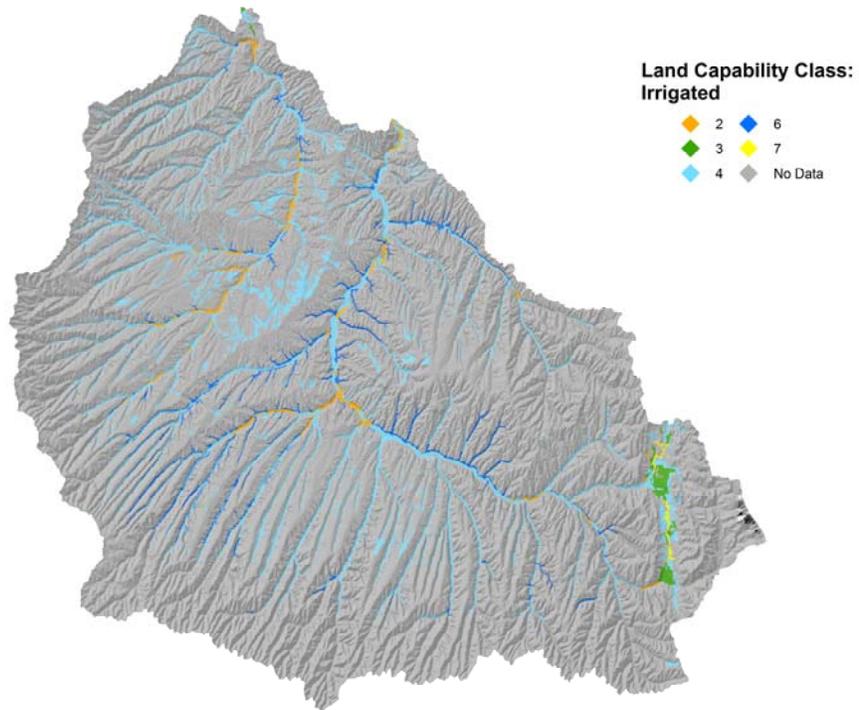
Class 4 - soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require very careful management, or both.

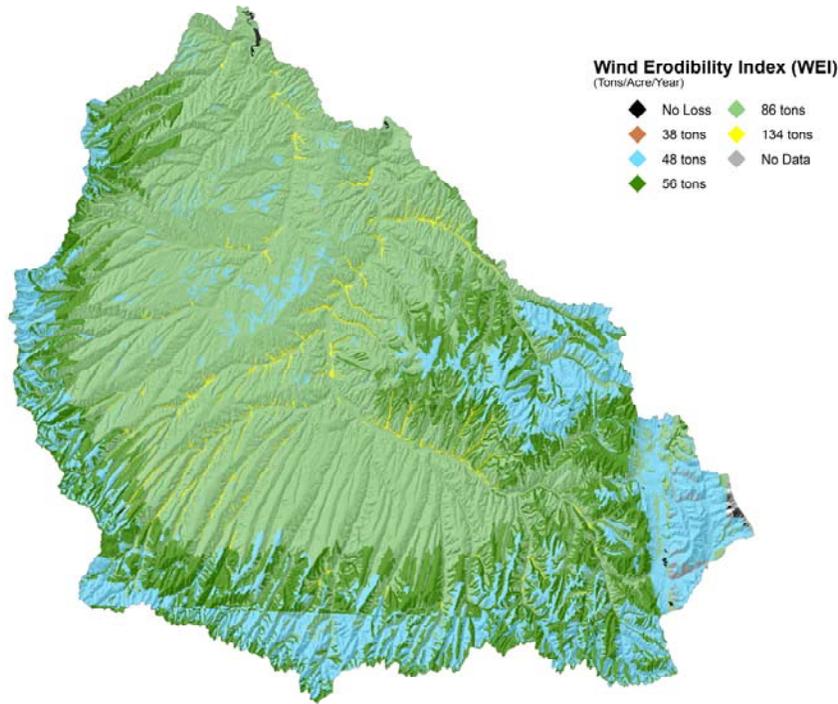
Class 5 - soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 6 - soils have severe limitations that make them generally unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to pasture, rangeland, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Class 7 - soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to grazing, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

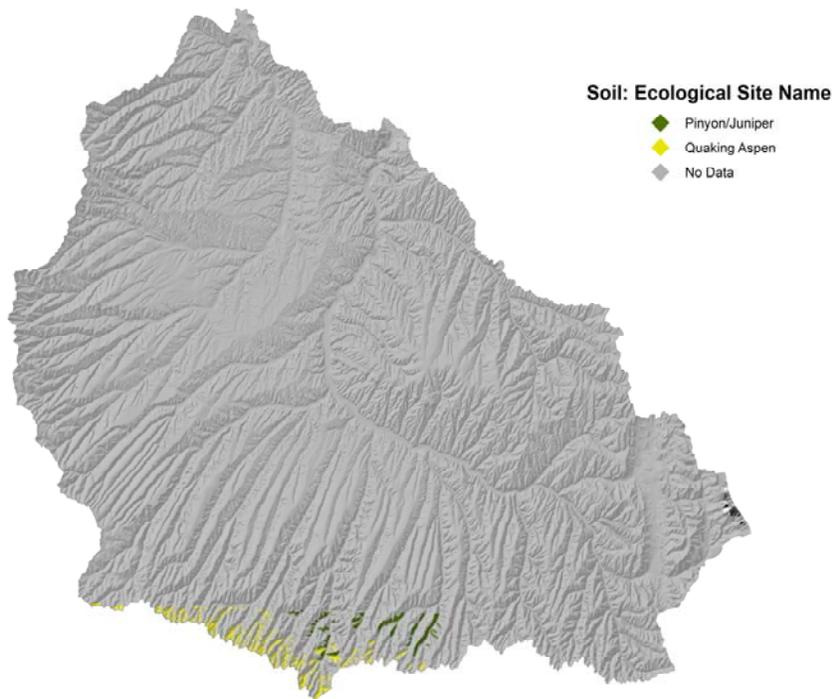
Class 8 - soils and miscellaneous areas have limitations that preclude commercial plant production and that restrict their use to recreational purposes, wildlife habitat, watershed, or aesthetic purposes.

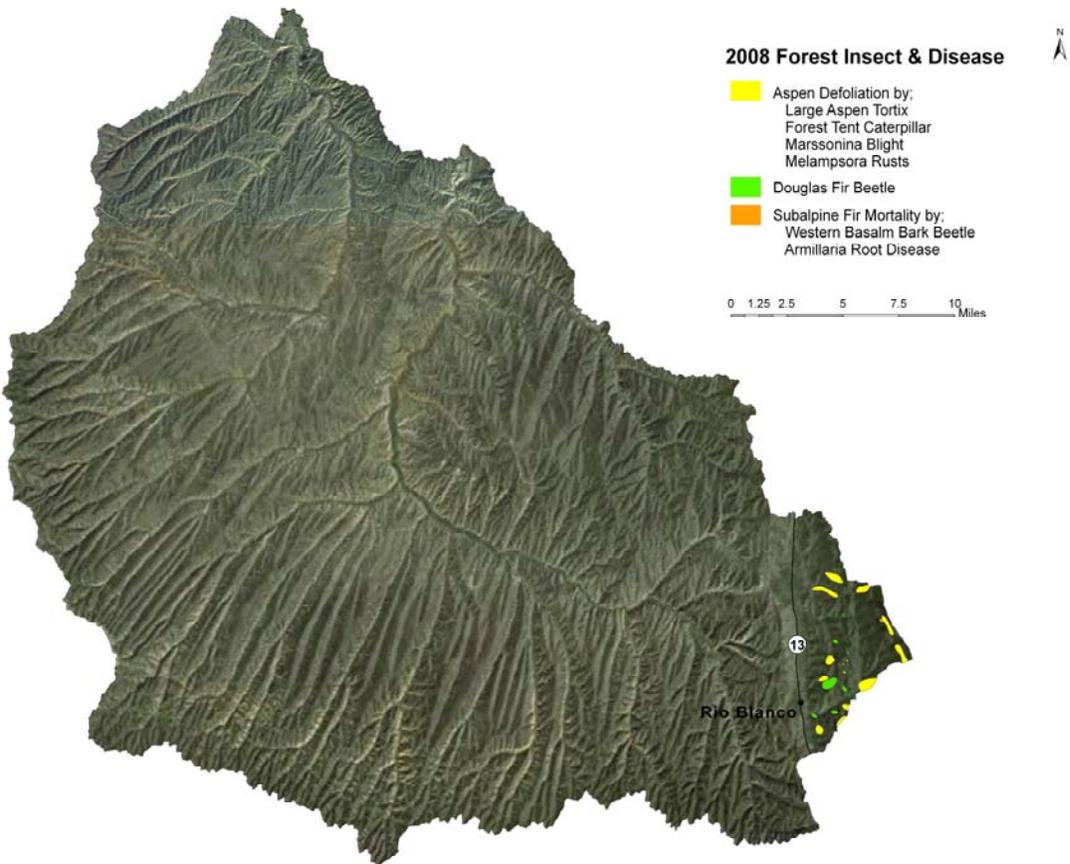
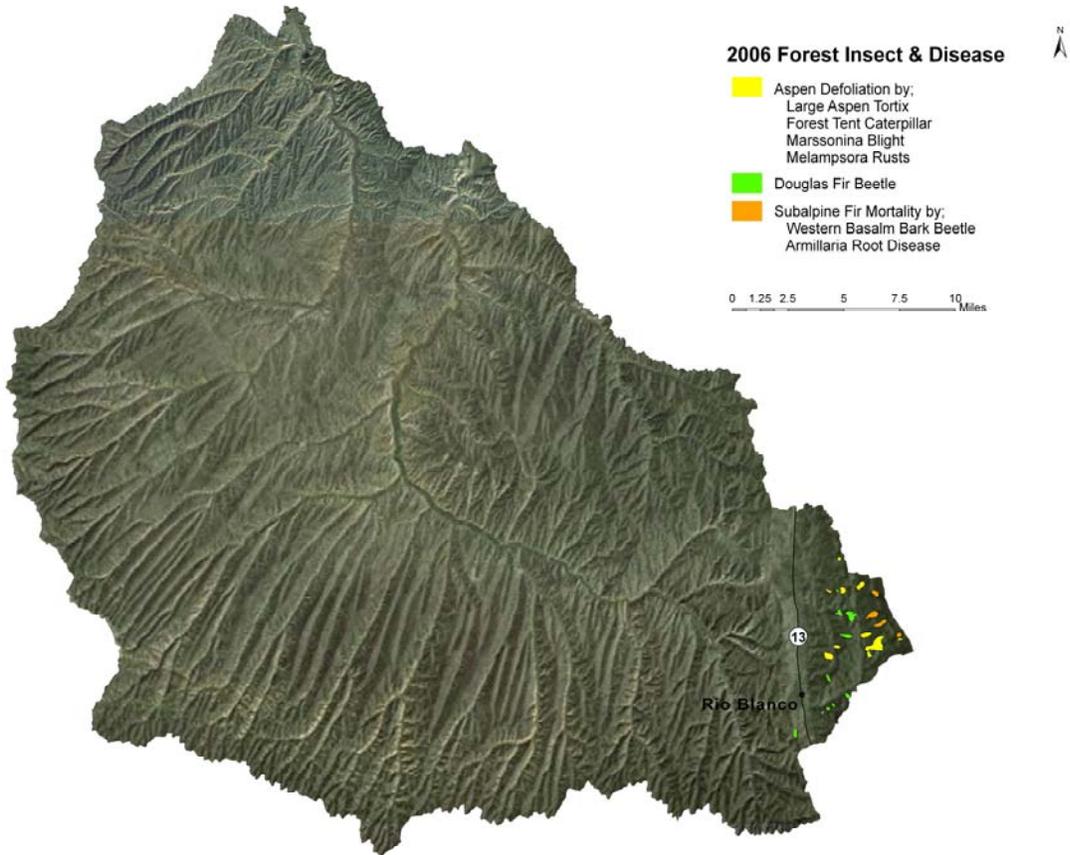




The Wind Erodibility Index (WEI): numerical value indicating the susceptibility of soil to wind erosion, or the tons per acre per year that can be expected to be lost to wind erosion if it is assumed there is no vegetative cover or management.

Soils with an erodibility index equal to or greater than 8 are considered highly erodible.





State and Federal Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Species and Species of Special Concern in Piceance-Yellow Watershed

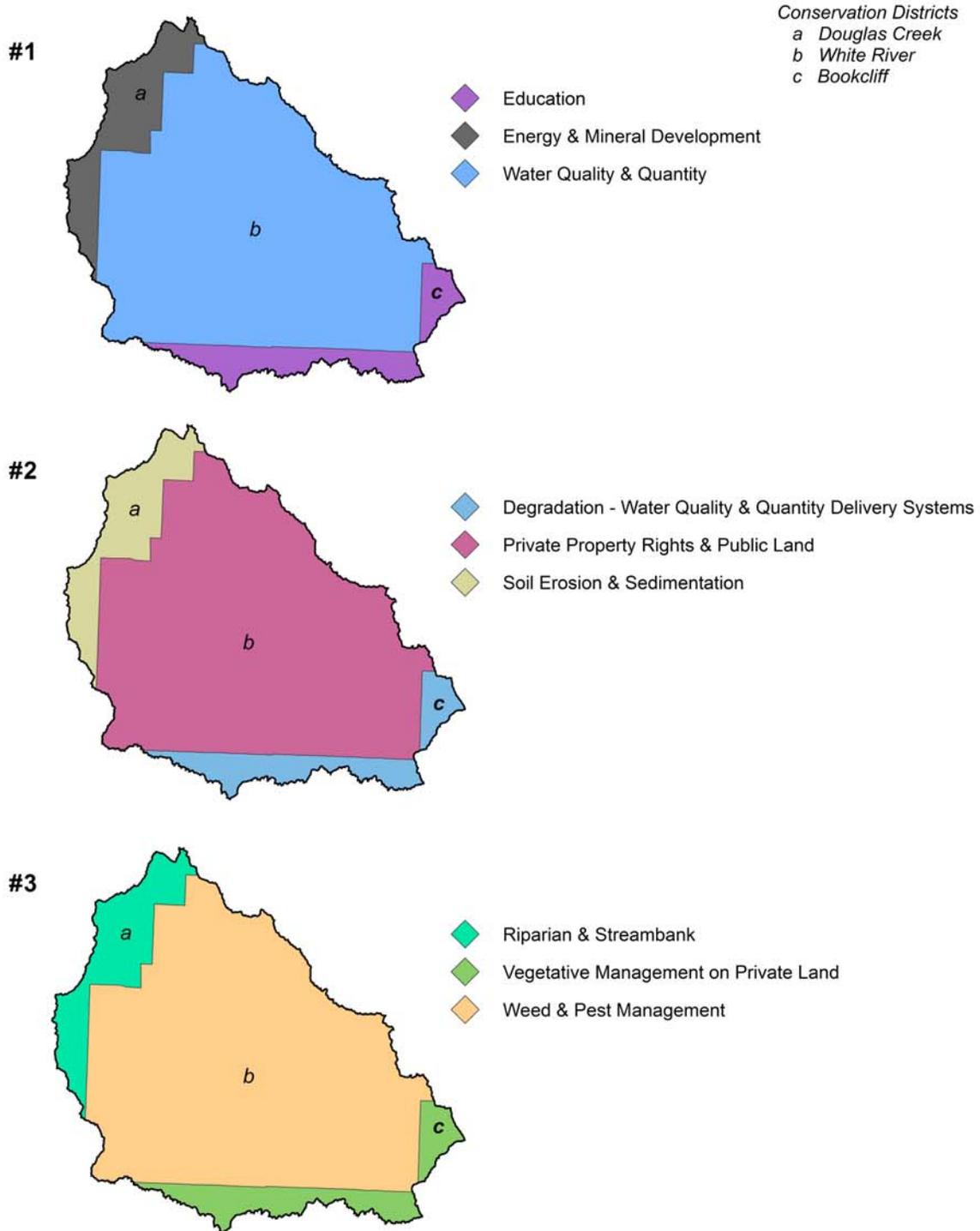
Common Name	Scientific Name	Class	State Status/Federal Status	Comments
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Birds	Threatened/None	Occurs year-round in the watershed
Bonytail	<i>Gila elegans</i>	Fish	Endangered/Endangered	Water depletions in the watershed
Colorado Pikeminnow	<i>Ptychocheilus lucius</i>	Fish	Threatened/Endangered	Water depletions in the watershed
Canada Lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	Mammals	Endangered/Threatened	May occur in the watershed
Colorado River Cut-throat Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki pleuriticus</i>	Fish	Concern/None	Occurs in the watershed
Colorado Roundtail Chub	<i>Gila robusta</i>	Fish	Concern/None	May occur in the watershed
Dudley Bluffs Bladder-pod	<i>Lesquerella congesta</i>	Plants	None/Threatened	May occur in the watershed
Dudley Bluffs Twinpod	<i>Physaria obcordata</i>	Plants	None/Threatened	May occur in the watershed
Greater Sage Grouse	<i>Centrocercus urophasianus</i>	Birds	Concern/None	Occurs in the watershed
Greater Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis tabida</i>	Birds	Concern/None	May occur in the watershed
Humpback Chub	<i>Gila cypha</i>	Fish	Threatened/Endangered	Water depletions in the watershed
Mountain Sucker	<i>Catostomus platyrhynchus</i>	Fish	Concern/None	May occur in the watershed
Northern Leopard Frog	<i>Rana pipiens</i>	Amphibians	Concern/None	Occurs in the watershed
Razorback Sucker	<i>Xyrauchen texanus</i>	Fish	Endangered/Endangered	Water depletions in the watershed
Townsend's big-eared bat (pale ssp)	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii pallescens</i>	Mammals	Concern/None	Occurs in the watershed
White River Beard-tongue	<i>Penstemon scariosus var. albifluvis</i>	Plants	Concern/None	May occur in the watershed
Western Yellow-billed	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	Birds	Concern/Candidate	May occur in the watershed

The terrestrial habitats in this watershed include a small amount of irrigated cropland; extensive acreage of big sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and oak shrub habitats; and small amounts of aspen and mixed forest habitats. Riparian areas provide aquatic habitats in the watershed.

Economically important species in the watershed include: black bear, elk, mule deer, mountain lion, and sportfish, throughout large parts of the watershed; and wild turkey in the east part of the watershed.

Social Data	Rio Blanco	Garfield
Demographics (US Census, American Factfinder)		
Total population	5,986	43,791
Male	3,021	22,489
Female	2,965	21,302
Median age (years)	37.5	34.2
White	5,687	39,394
Black or African American	11	196
American Indian and Alaska Native	46	310
Asian	17	191
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0	35
Some other race	121	2861
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	296	7300
Economic Characteristics (US Census, American Factfinder)		
In labor force (population 16 years and over)	3,143	23,562
Median household income (dollars)	37,711	47,016
Median family income (dollars)	44,425	53,840
Per capita income (dollars)	17,344	21,341
Families below poverty level	112	522
Individuals below poverty level	556	3206
County Agricultural Characteristics (Colorado Agricultural Census, county data tables)		
Farms (number)	245	499
Land in farms/ranches (acres)	376,509	404,335
Average size farm/ranch (acres)	1,537	810
Median size farm (acres)	305	110
Average age of farmer or rancher	56.5	54
Net cash return from ag sales (\$1,000)	2,081	-1,364
Cattle and calves (number)	21,000	22,000

Identified Long Range Resource Concerns Top Three Concerns within Conservation Districts



Selected Conservation Practices Applied, FY 2005 through FY 2009

Practice Code	Practice Name	Practice Unit	Applied Amount	Applied Count
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	ac	2.464	9
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	3,123	11
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	3,536	18

Conservation Systems to Address Major Resource Concerns *from the Field Office Technical Guide*

Grazed Rangeland—The grazing Resources need improved plant condition (similarity index), productivity, health and vigor. Animals need feed, forage, and shelter. The animals are adapted to the climatic and ecological condition of the resources.

CO 34.1-GR-01

<i>Practices</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Resource Concerns Addressed</i>
314 Brush Management	This area encompasses the lower elevation mesas and Plateaus that represent the transition to the Southern Rocky Mountains. The typical vegetation is a scattered overstory of two needle pinyon and Utah juniper with a understory of big sagebrush and perennial bunchgrasses. In some areas pinyon and juniper can increase and become a dominant species.	Fish and Wildlife - T&E Species: Declining Species, Species of Concern Plant Condition - Productivity, Health and Vigor Soil Erosion - Sheet and Rill Soil Erosion - Wind
338 Prescribed Burning		
378 Pond		
382 Fence		
528 Prescribed Grazing		
574 Spring Development		
595 Pest Management		
614 Watering Facility		
645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management		
666 Forest Stand Improvement		

Estimated Costs of Application of Conservation Systems

Landuse	Estimated Acres Need to be Treated	Estimated Average Cost per Acre (\$)	Costs (\$)
Range	10,000	30	300,000
			Total Costs: \$300,000

FOOTNOTES/ BIBLIOGRAPHY

Threatened and Endangered Species information was gathered using data from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) Natural Diversity Information Source (NDIS). NDIS GIS data may be downloaded at <http://ndis.nrel.colostate.edu>. For more information on Colorado's Endangered & Threatened Species, as well as Species of Concern, visit <http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/SpeciesOfConcern/ThreatenedEndangeredList/ListOfThreatenedAndEndangeredSpecies.htm> or <http://mountainprairie.fws.gov/endspp/CountyLists/COLORADO.htm>

Resource Concerns were identified using the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts' (CACD) long range (10 year) plans from the period of 1996-2000. Only the top three environmental resource concerns for each district were used. For more information on Colorado's Conservation Districts, visit <http://www.cacd.us>.

Maps were generated using Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO) tabular and spatial data. SSURGO data was downloaded for the following Colorado surveys:

Douglas-Plateau Area (CO682) Published 12/5/2006

Rifle Area (CO683) Published 1/10/2007

Rio Blanco County Area (CO685) Published 2/4/2008

Vegetation data was generated using the Colorado Division of Wildlife's "Colorado Vegetation Classification Project" (CVCP) data. Completed in 2003, the CVCP is a landscape level vegetation dataset created using Landsat TM imagery and then formatted for GIS use. The species identified are an overview of the most common species associated in each cover type, in order of greatest occurrence. For more information on the Colorado Vegetation Classification Project, visit <http://ndis.nrel.colostate.edu/coveg>.

Common Resource Area (CRA), a subdivision of the Major Land Resource Area (MLRA), is a geographical area where resource concerns, problems, or treatment needs are similar. Geographic boundaries of a CRA are determined by landscape conditions, soil, climate, human considerations and other natural resource information. For more information on Common Resource Areas visit <http://soils.usda.gov/survey/geography/cra.html>.

Average Annual Precipitation data was developed through a partnership between the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) National Water and Climate Center (NWCC), the National Cartography and Geospatial Center (NCGC), and the PRISM (the Parameter-elevation Regressions on Independent Slopes Model) group at Oregon State University (OSU), developers of PRISM. Mean annual precipitation maps were developed calculating averages of rainfall for the period of 1961-1990. For more information on PRISM data visit <http://www.ncgc.nrcs.usda.gov/products/datasets/climate/docs/fact-sheet.html> or for more information about technical aspects of PRISM, visit the PRISM website at <http://www.ocs.orst.edu/prism>.

Land Ownership (status,07/22/2006 dataset) data was obtained from the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Office. For more information, visit http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/geographical_sciences/gis.html

Relief & Elevation maps were created using the National Elevation Dataset (NED), 30m Digital Elevation Model (DEM) raster product assembled by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). A hillshade grid was created from the 30m DEM to create a 3D effect. For more information about the NED visit <http://ned.usgs.gov>. The data was downloaded from the NRCS Geospatial Data Gateway at <http://datagateway.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Forest Insect & Disease data obtained from the U.S. Forest Service annual aerial survey. For more information visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/resources/fhm/aerialsurvey/>