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To the Colorado State Parks Board,

Comments and observations on “Over the River”

This is a unique opportunity to bring an international spotlight to the Upper Arkansas Valley. Christo’s past projects have created a huge following and immense media attention. We believe that this project will be the last Christo project and the publicity will be even greater than ANY project he has done. Being in the tourism business, our view is that “Over the River” will have a long term effect on the tourism economy in the Valley for years to come after the project is long forgotten by many of those who so strongly object. The eyes of not just the nation, but the entire world will be on the Upper Ark Valley.

In these times of school budget issues and the slow but certain elimination of programs other than the 3 R’s, what a wonderful opportunity this project will present for educators to expose students to a massive and world class art project. All education is not gained in just the classroom setting. In many school districts, and it is unfortunate, art and music programs are the first to suffer from budgetary constraints. We imagine that if this project takes place, it will be remembered for a lifetime by those whose school has the foresight to involve students with an interest in art in it.

Public safety is obviously the #1 concern and rightly so. If these safety issues can be identified and properly mitigated then that would be a great accomplishment as well.

The section of the River that is being proposed for the project has been “built” for commercial use and abuse. There is little about the river corridor from Salida to Parkdale that hasn’t been developed by man. With Hwy 50 on one side and the railroad on the other, all the way through the Canyon, the impact on the corridor has already long been realized. The artists have a far better track record of recycling and reclamation than the Hwy Dept or the railroad. Some of the biggest hazards, from a rafting perspective, are a direct result of the Hwy and railroad being built through there (and in the Gorge!) The deer, bighorn sheep and other wildlife have managed to survive and even proliferate, in spite of the vehicle traffic, and the trains that rocked through the Canyon at all hours, for the last 100 years. If the gravel pit at Parkdale is allowed to continuously operate we see no reason why the impacts of this project can’t be tolerated.

One concern we have heard from many of our fellow rafting outfitters, and a couple other tourism related businesses, is the timing of the project. From Memorial Day weekend through roughly the middle of August, is already “peak” tourism time. It would seem to make the most sense then, to allow this project to occur *after* the peak time for normal visitation is over. From mid- August to Labor Day would seem to be the most logical time for this project to be displayed. The amount of tourist traffic in the Canyon drops off dramatically by around August 15<sup>th</sup>. During the peak tourism times, it is already difficult to find a Motel/Hotel room and the traffic on Hwy 50 is much more of a factor.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and the opportunity to bring them forward.

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