

# Project Category

**NSBF Byway Community Award: Viewshed Improvement**

## Project Name

**Peninsula and islands purchase on Lake San Cristobal, Silver Thread, Colorado**

## Byway Name

Silverthread Byway

Designation: 1989

Distance: 117

## Overview

The America's Byways Silver Thread Scenic Byway traverses the central San Juan Mountains between the small communities of South Fork, Creede, and Lake City, Colorado. As travelers descend down Slumgullion Pass, one can overlook Lake San Cristobal – the state's second largest natural lake. The Lake Fork of the Gunnison River was dammed more than 800 years ago when the Slumgullion Earthflow slid. Hinsdale County has been working together with private landowners to protect and preserve the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the Lake for the past twenty years. Recently, the 10.3 acre parcel of the Morningside Lode was put onto the market. Trust For Public Land and Hinsdale County received a Resilient Communities grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) to purchase this \$1.45 million property. The community was able to raise the \$218,000 match within five weeks of the grant award. A strategic plan now covers access to the shoreline for motorized and non-motorized boats, an ADA fishing pier, an outdoor classroom, updated restrooms and trails, and safety upgrades to the pedestrian bridge that connects the islands to the peninsula. The steepness of the terrain means that lake shore access can be challenging. This purchase increases outdoor recreation opportunities and protects the aesthetic and scenic values of Lake San Cristobal. A conservation easement has been placed on Peninsula Park and this newly-acquired county land will be added to the 1997 Conservation Covenant that protects Lake San Cristobal. The Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway (a Bureau of Land Management designation) runs along the western shoreline and connects the high alpine passes and small mountain communities of Lake City, Ouray, and Silverton, Colorado. The protection of this unparalleled scenic beauty is a community value and goal.

## Intrinsic Qualities

We are a region defined by pathways. For 10,000 years wild game wore narrow paths in the San Juan Mountains which were hunted during summers by the Ute tribe, whose culture traces back to A.D. 1300. Horses, introduced by European explorers, widened the trails and allowed the Utes to travel greater distances. Private enterprise built toll roads over the rugged, treacherous land, levying 25¢ for a horse and rider to \$1 for a wagon & team of horses. The 1880s brought railroad tracks and trains to haul supplies in and out for miners seeking precious metals and shopkeepers "mining the miners". Automobiles replaced toll roads and most railroads in the early 1920s. Mining structures continue to dot the hillsides above our roads. This Colorado Scenic Byway and newly-designated America's Byways features spectacular waterfalls, along gold-medal fishing waters of the Rio Grande and the Lake Fork of the Gunnison, and access to the high alpine country of the Alpine Loop. Eight hundred years ago, the Slumgullion Earthflow dammed the Lake Fork which formed Lake San Cristobal.

An overlook showcases the lake and upper watersheds. In the 1960s, the Bureau of Land Management transferred ownership of the lake and surrounding lands for a campground, picnic area, and boat dock to Hinsdale County. The mining claim of the Morningside Lode was retained in private ownership and subdivided into three potential home-sites. December of 2020, the Trust For Public Land and Hinsdale County, together with the Ben Brownlee Memorial Fund and Friends of Lake San Cristobal, were able to successfully raise \$218,000 in five weeks to match a \$1.305 million Resilient Communities grant from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and purchase this parcel. These efforts to preserve the aesthetic, scenic and historic values along the Silver Thread and the off-chute Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway will allow generations to experience and enjoy this landscape.

## Byway Best Practice

This community-driven purchase of the peninsula and adjacent islands on the shoreline of Lake San Cristobal along the Silver Thread and Alpine Loop further enhance the visitor’s experience by 1) maintaining the visual corridor of the lake overlook; 2) create additional activities along the byway with the enhanced outdoor recreation and lake shore access; 3) establishes an outdoor classroom site where eventual interpretive programs will be offered to byway visitors; 4) protects the only archipelago in Colorado (a series of islands); 5) increases the ADA fishing and access opportunities through planned infrastructure; 6) increases “spaces of solace” for byways visitors. Interpretive programs and multi-sensory signs are planned to further enhance experiences.

## Keys to Success

This project was made possible through collaboration, the generosity of private contributions, and a community coming together with a common goal to protect the peninsula for generations of residents and visitors. The stewardship and conservation ethics of Hinsdale County residents and partners – as demonstrated by the 1997 Covenant – demonstrates forethought and has helped retain the aesthetic values of the area. The Silver Thread byway is a vibrant path through our rural mountain towns, a figurative “thread” that binds us, bringing our diverse communities together to celebrate our individual communities and our region.

## Additional Information

### Contact Information

Kathleen Murphy

719-658-2374

office@creede.com

PO Box 580, Creede, CO, 81130

### Project Year(s):

12/1/2020 - 1/1/2022

### Website

[silverthreadybyway.com](http://silverthreadybyway.com)

# Photographs

