

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.

\$1.51 million in direct spending

Estimated 2024 commercial rafting expenditures on the Upper and Lower Eagle combined.

A measured part of the river economy

Reported 2024 commercial rafting activity

Reported river segment	User days	Direct expenditures	Economic impact
Upper Eagle (Dowd Chutes)	399	\$65,633	\$168,021
Lower Eagle (below Edwards)	8,801	\$1,447,715	\$3,706,151
Combined Eagle	9,200	\$1,513,348	\$3,874,172
Colorado River, Glenwood segment	62,137	\$10,221,187	\$26,166,240

These estimates describe **existing annual activity**, not projected losses. Combined Eagle sums the two Eagle rows. The economic-impact estimate includes multiplier effects; direct expenditures are the immediate spending measure. Glenwood is a separate river economy supplied by many water sources.

Rafting is one measured part of the economy. Fishing, camping, sightseeing and other recreation also connect river health to visitor spending.

Sources

[Colorado River Outfitters Association, 2024 commercial rafting report](#), PDF p. 8; revised August 13, 2025. Figures are CROA estimates; Combined Eagle is calculated from its two Eagle rows.

Fewer usable days mean fewer opportunities

The Eagle River Community Water Plan's **New Water Infrastructure with historical hydrology scenario** models fewer boatable days than current conditions.

The scenario combines projected 2050 demands, a potential Eagle River MOU infrastructure program, and Bolts Lake redevelopment. It is not a Whitney-only forecast.

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. That is an economic pathway, not a modeled revenue loss.

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**.

Fewer guide bookings, shorter stays and displaced spending are potential consequences. This dated announcement does not quantify business effects or establish that the closure remains in force.

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. The pathways below describe that connection; the retained research does not estimate a Whitney-specific loss for each town.

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 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.

The Community Water Plan identifies a risk that upstream development and climate change could worsen Eagle Mine fishery impacts. Seasonal effects vary: releases can improve some upper-river late-summer conditions, while runoff capture reduces whitewater flows. Gypsum does not show the same late-summer low-flow improvement.

Less dilution can raise the challenge

For May, Appendix K estimates that the mean monthly zinc-load reduction needed to reach its chronic rainbow-trout threshold rises from **140 kg to 434 kg** under the new-infrastructure scenario. The associated additional-flow dilution gap rises from **496 to 1,530 acre-feet**. The calculation holds historical metal loading fixed and varies modeled flows; it measures relative aquatic risk, not a cleanup bill.

Protecting fisheries and water quality could require more source control, treatment or protected water. The retained record does not quantify those additional costs or allocate them among communities.

Economic exposure and the estimate's scope

Current evidence does not supply a Whitney-specific annual dollar loss.

Boating percentages cannot simply be multiplied by rafting totals: the modeled reaches and CROA reporting segments differ, and usable days do not translate directly into revenue.

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](#).