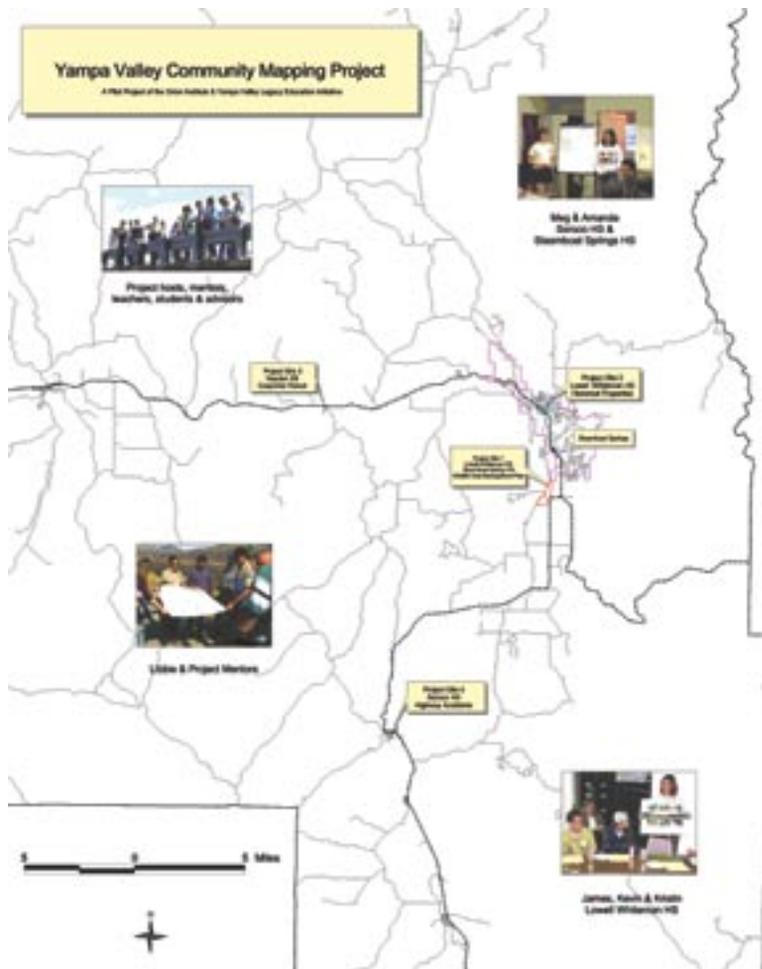


WILDLIFE IN COLORADO

Eighty-five students from two schools in Steamboat Springs, Colorado took on serious responsibility for the welfare of their community when they returned to school in the fall of 1999. Four hundred acres along the Yampa River had been set aside as a State Wildlife Area, and these students were now being asked to collect data and conduct research that would allow them to make recommendations the following spring concerning the use and maintenance of the land.

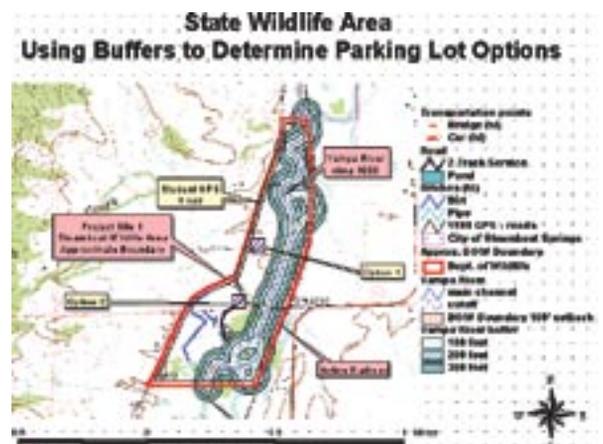
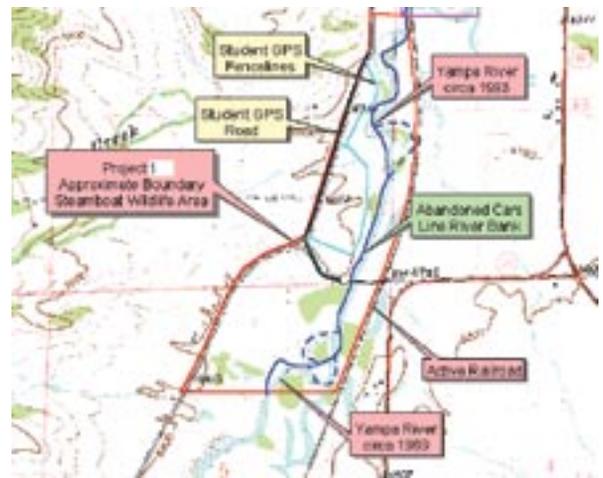
Their work was part of an integrated program of studies called FLITE: Freshmen Learning In Team Environments, which in turn was part of the Yampa Valley Community Mapping Program, a plan to involve students in the real work of their communities, sponsored by the Orton Family Foundation and the Yampa Valley Legacy Education Initiative.



The Community Mapping Program is an umbrella for several student projects in the Yampa Valley. Working on real-world problems and issues, students had to connect math, science, English, geography, and computer technology skills in effective ways.

The management plan for the Steamboat Springs State Wildlife Area was ambitious and comprehensive. Students would be

- determining and mapping exact borders.
- mapping existing structures, fence lines, pumps, ditches, and so on.
- mapping wetland areas and identifying wetland vegetation.
- mapping and determining changes in river channel.
- determining location for a handicapped trail easement for the adjoining Humble Ranch.
- determining possible parking area and trail for angler accessibility to the river.
- suggesting possible habitat improvements; fish, wildlife, plant, and stream stabilization.
- taking species inventories, both plant and wildlife.
- gathering entomological data of insects.
- researching possibly threatened and endangered species.
- writing informative pamphlets on the area to discuss restrictions, history, rules, and so on.
- designing kiosks and signs for parking area and other high visibility areas of the land.
- researching the history of the Yampa Valley Land and Cattle Company.
- researching the relationship between agriculture and wildlife.



Team members made their own maps, and discovered how mapping—on the surface a relatively straightforward and practical task—can instill a sense of ownership in the life and welfare of a community.



Before students could reach conclusions and make recommendations, they had to acquire data. Working with Libbie Miller, a Colorado Division of Wildlife Manager, and the Colorado Wildlife Commission, many days were spent in the field learning how to use such new technologies as the Global Positioning System—a way of making extremely precise measurements and calculating locations that was, until recently, a U.S. Department of Defense operation used strictly for military purposes.

By the end of the school year the next spring, the team had surfaced from their work with a three-volume set of recommendations. The scope of these recommendations ranged from parking lot design and signage to big game and waterfowl hunting restrictions; whether or not dogs and horses should be allowed in the reserved lands; ditch, headgate, and fence repair; use or demolition of existing structures; camping regulations; and bicycle use on trails.

The next step for FLITE students was to engage themselves in several rounds of presentations to public and private organizations, notably the Colorado State Division of Wildlife Commission.



Aerial photography, GPS satellite data, and paper maps were just some of the tools used by project workers as they took stock of their wildlife area.





Two pages from the massive three-volume report and recommendations that students put together over the course of the school year.



Junked cars had been used to shore up the eroding bank, but students recommended they be removed. It was not only ugly, but altered the riparian habitat, favoring the predatory pike at the expense of trout.

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Presentations of their findings to schoolmates, government officials, and fellow citizens culminated in awards in recognition of their service to the community, as well as hard-won knowledge that they were making their neck of the woods a better place to live.