



**NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS**



# Draft Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Business Plan

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

Grand Junction and Uncompahgre Field Offices



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**Signatures for Approving Business Plan**

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Assistant Field Manager-Recreation

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Date

Approved by:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) within the Upper Colorado River District and Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) within the Southwest District propose to establish camping and Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) fees as outlined in the draft Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) Business Plan (Plan). The BLM is permitted to collect fees for the recreational use of public lands under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA, 1976). Additionally, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA, 2004) provides the BLM with the authority to collect special recreation permit fees for specialized recreation uses and expanded and/or standard amenity recreation site fees for the recreational use of certain areas. Camping and Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) fees will be spent at the sites they are collected, providing the public a return on investment. The additional revenues derived from the new fee campgrounds and Special Area(s) will be used primarily for the maintenance of existing services to visitors and enhanced camping capacity. Furthermore, fees may be retained for several years, facilitating productive and long-standing partnerships, and providing for infrastructure replacement.

Camping and ISRP fees would be collected on site, on a first-come first-served basis, unless or until a reservation system is implemented. Day use and any areas where dispersed/undeveloped camping is allowed would continue to be available throughout the D-E NCA without a reservation or a fee (see Appendix B for allowable dispersed/undeveloped camping areas).

The two fee types proposed in this plan are expanded amenity fees and ISRP fees in Special Area(s) in alignment with FLREA. The expanded amenity fee is proposed for existing and future developed camping. Special Area fees are proposed where the Authorized Officer deems recreation use requires special management to protect resources of the D-E NCA. To address increased visitation within the D-E NCA, fees are deemed necessary to prevent/mitigate resource damage and to provide enhanced visitor services and the public would be notified of the ISRP requirement in a federal register notice.

The draft Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Business Plan was prepared and available for public comment posted on BLM's Recreation Site Business Plans website: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-fees/business-plans> The Plan was discussed with the Northwest Resource Advisory Committee (NW RAC) and the Southwest Resource Advisory Committee (SW RAC) at a joint RAC meeting on March 30, 2023. The Plan was again presented to the NW RAC meeting on June 22, 2023. The 30-day public comment period commenced on April 12, 2024 with final RAC approval occurring in May, 2024.

## INTRODUCTION

GJFO and UFO prepared the draft Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) Business Plan (Plan) based on the need to meet public demand, provide visitor services, and to meet the criteria defined in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004. The BLM is permitted to collect fees for the recreational use of public lands under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976). Additionally, the FLREA provides the BLM with the authority to collect an expanded and/or standard amenity recreation site fee for the recreational use of certain areas. The FLREA authorizes revenue from recreation fees to be retained locally and outlines uses of revenue, such as facility repair, maintenance,

enhancement, interpretation, visitor information, visitor services, visitor needs assessments, signs, habitat restoration, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and direct operating or capital costs associated with operations.

Currently, the D-E NCA does not collect fees at any recreation sites or areas. The focus of this Plan is to analyze and recommend recreation sites and areas within the D-E NCA that meet the FLREA requirements and to serve as public notification and opportunity to comment. This Plan describes the fee sites, proposed fees, future amenities, associated operating costs, financial analysis, and impacts of proposed fees.

The BLM Recreation Permit Administration Handbook (2930-1) is clear that “the intent of the fee program is not to maximize revenue, but rather to provide needed public services *while protecting and enhancing public lands and recreation opportunities*” (page 53). “*Recreation Use Permits (RUPs)*, [which include expanded amenities], *are issued to ensure that the people of the United States receive a fair and equitable return for the use of these facilities to help recover the cost[s]*” (page 9).

The two fee types proposed in this plan are expanded amenity fees and Individual Special Recreation Permit (ISRP) fees for Special Area(s) in alignment with FLREA. These fee types are proposed for existing and future camping opportunities meeting one of the definitions provided below:

- **Individual Special Recreation Permits (ISRPs)** may be required for individual (i.e., private, noncommercial) recreation use in Special Areas. Special Areas are defined as areas officially designated by statute, Presidential decree, or Secretarial order and include components of the ... the National Wilderness Preservation System; national conservation areas, national monuments, or national recreation areas...; or any area where the Authorized Officer (AO) determines that resources need to be protected by special management and control measures and that a permit system for individual use would achieve management objectives.
- **Expanded amenity recreation fees** cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services including but not limited to developed campgrounds with at least a majority of the following amenities: (1) tent or trailer spaces, (2) picnic tables, (3) drinking water, (4) access roads, (5) fee collection by an employee or agent of the BLM, (6) reasonable visitor protection, (7) refuse containers, (8) toilet facilities, (9) simple devices for containing a campfire (Sec.6802.(g)(2)(A) of FLREA). Expanded amenity fees are categorized per FLREA as one form of a RUP.

Fees generated in D-E NCA will help the BLM fulfill its mandate under Public Law (PL 111-11), the enabling Legislation for D-E NCA, to conserve and protect the resources, objects, and values (ROVs) of D-E NCA for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The entirety of D-E NCA meets the definition of a Special Area.

Where monitoring indicates that increased use or changes in use by recreating visitors is causing impacts to ROVs of the D-E NCA, the BLM will take measures to move from primitive recreation opportunities to more developed and sustainable improvements and facilities. Through

adaptive management, BLM may implement fees once the conditions warrant (ISRP fees) and/or amenities (expanded amenity fees) are in place. Reference Appendix A for areas foreseen in the RMP as likely requiring intensive recreation management.

Camping opportunities could progress through stages of development (Figure 1) based on visitor use surveys/assessments, monitoring resources, and funding availability.



Figure 1 - Flow chart of adaptive management for campsite development

The BLM will complete the necessary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation to evaluate future changes to campground size and level of development. New facilities or expanded campgrounds may be necessary to provide quality recreation experiences while protecting ROVs of the D-E NCA. Future visitor use may require management of individual use (ISRPs) in areas not considered in this business plan, for which notification would be published as a Notice in the *Federal Register*. If a future ISRP requires a fee for successful implementation and protection of the D-E NCA ROVs, such fees will mirror the proposal contained herein. Any future Notice published in the *Federal Register* for such an ISRP would include language alerting the public to this business plan.

## BACKGROUND AND AUTHORITIES

### Background

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to provide diverse outdoor recreation opportunities while maintaining sustainable resource conditions. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands and waters to the American public and their communities are to:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities.
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

This business plan will assist the BLM in meeting these recreation and visitor service goals in the D-E NCA. This plan covers existing campgrounds (e.g., Big Dominguez and Potholes) and establishes a framework for additional facilities as they are built and/or upgraded to the level outlined by FLREA through future planning efforts. Additionally, this plan covers any fees deemed necessary by the AO for administration of ISRPs.

### Authorities

The authorities and regulations for this business plan, including fee collection at federal recreation lands, are:

- The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 [Public Law 94-579] contains BLM's general land use management authority over the public lands and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section

302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM's authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.

- The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM's authority to collect recreation fees. The FLREA provides the BLM the authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at federal recreation lands and waters that meet certain requirements. The FLREA also allows the BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they are collected and directs how the BLM will manage and utilize these revenues, including for expenses such as facility repair, maintenance and enhancement, interpretation, visitor information, services and needs assessments, signage, law enforcement directly related to public use and recreation, and operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program.
- 43 Code of Federal Regulations 2931.2 (Permits for Recreation on Public Land) establishes a permit and fee system for use of fee areas such as campgrounds. Further, CFR 2933.11 identifies sites where users are required to obtain a Recreation use permit as sites "where we provide or administer specialized facilities, equipment, or services related to outdoor recreation". Management of Special Areas is grounded in 43 U.S.C. 2932.5.

This Plan also follows applicable BLM recreation program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Manual 2930, Recreation Permits and Fees, 2007
- BLM Handbook 2930-1, Recreation Permits and Fee Administration, 2014
- BLM Connecting with Communities Recreation Strategy
- Colorado Backyard to Backcountry Recreation Strategy

In December 2004, Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) was signed into law and updated in 2021. FLREA provides authority for the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees for use of some Federal recreation lands and waters, and contains specific provisions addressing public involvement in the establishment of recreation fees. FLREA also directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to publish six months' advance notice in the Federal Register whenever recreation fee areas are established under their respective jurisdictions.

Under Public Law 108-447, Sec. 803 (g) (2) (A/C) of the FLREA, developed campgrounds and rental cabins qualify as sites wherein visitors can be charged an expanded amenity recreation fee. Pursuant to FLREA and implementing regulations at 43 CFR Subpart 2933, fees may be charged for overnight camping, rental of cabins, and group use reservations where specific amenities and services are provided. Specific visitor fees will be identified and posted at each campground and affected Special Area. The proposed fee structure implements the decisions in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan (2017). Specifically for Special Areas, the decision REC-SRMA-MA-06 implements a Special Area ISRP requirement for all overnight private boaters (for the purpose of monitoring and to achieve RMA objectives). A Special Area under CFR 43 U.S.C. 2932.5 means "(1) *An area officially designated by statute,*



*or by Presidential or Secretarial order; [and] (2) An area for which BLM determines that the resources require special management and control measures for their protection...*” ISRPs are used to permit river use on the Gunnison River and may be used in the future to allow for special management and control measures throughout D-E NCA. ISRPs “*may be required for individual (i.e., private, noncommercial) recreation use in Special Areas. Special Areas are defined as areas officially designated by statute, Presidential decree, or Secretarial order and include components of the National Trails System; the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; the National Wilderness Preservation System; national conservation areas, national monuments, or national recreation areas; an area covered by joint agreement between the BLM and a state government, as provided for in Title II of the Sikes Act (16 U.S.C. 670a et seq.); or any area where the AO determines that resources need to be protected by special management and control measures and that a permit system for individual use would achieve management objectives.*”

## **LAND USE PLAN GUIDANCE**

The Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) was designated by Congress in 2009 with broad local, regional, and national support. Its Resource Advisory Committee met 35 times during the development of the Resource Management Plan (RMP), often with sizable public attendance. The 2017 Record of Decision and approved D-E NCA RMP is the foundation for the D-E NCA recreation program. The enabling legislation that proclaimed the NCA under the Omnibus Public Lands Act (2009) qualifies the NCA as a Special Area, allowing for a permit system. ISRPs are a classification of Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to manage for individual recreation use (BLM H-2930-1, Chapt.1, I.D.) which allows for fees to be charged. This plan applies to the two (2) existing campgrounds, future developed campgrounds and/or campsites, and Special Area ISRPs within D-E NCA. The RMP provides a framework that includes goals and decisions for the overall recreation program, and this Business Plan is consistent with RMP decisions, as presented in Appendix A.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA**

### **Administrative Unit**

The D-E NCA’s administrative boundary is split between Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) in Upper Colorado River District and Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) in Southwest District. The D-E NCA spans Mesa, Delta, and Montrose counties. This Plan pertains to the D-E NCA’s 1232 recreation fee account (LLCOG03000), which is exclusive to the D-E NCA.

### **Overview of D-E NCA Recreation Program**

The D-E NCA is part of the BLM’s National Conservation Lands, which offer the American people exceptional opportunities for hunting, solitude, wildlife viewing, fishing, history exploration, scientific research, and a wide range of traditional uses. The D-E NCA comprises 210,172 acres of protected public lands and includes the 66,280-acre Dominguez Canyon Wilderness (Figure 2). The southwest boundary of the NCA borders the Uncompahgre National Forest. The northwest boundary runs along Highway 141 and includes approximately 10 miles of the Tabeguache-Unaweep Scenic and Historic Byway. The northeast boundary is defined by Highway 50 and adjacent private lands. The southeast boundary is defined by Delta-Nucla (25 Mesa) Road, which runs south to the national forest boundary.

Redrock canyons and sandstone bluffs contain geological and paleontological resources spanning 600 million years, as well as many cultural and historic sites. The Ute Tribes today consider these pinyon-juniper-covered lands an important connection to their ancestral past. The Escalante, Cottonwood, Little Dominguez, and Big Dominguez Creeks drain the eastern Uncompahgre Plateau. Elevations in the NCA range from 4,800 to 8,200 feet. Approximately thirty (30) miles of the Gunnison River flow through the NCA, supporting fish, wildlife, and recreation opportunities. The Old Spanish National Historic Trail, a 19th Century land trade route, also passes through the NCA. A variety of wildlife call the area home, including desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, golden eagles, turkeys, elk, mountain lions, black bears, and collared lizards. There are 115 miles of streams and rivers in the NCA. The NCA provides habitat suitable for 52 protected species of animals and plants.

The varied landscape provides for multiple recreation opportunities, including auto touring, historical exploration, picnicking, ATV/UTV riding, biking, horseback riding, backpacking, hiking, rock climbing, bouldering, hunting, fishing, and camping. These opportunities are an important part of the rural, historical lifestyle of generational residents, newcomers, and visitors alike. Moreover, they are an important part of local economies. Visitors can choose to recreate by their own means or by hiring commercial outfitters to guide them.

# Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area

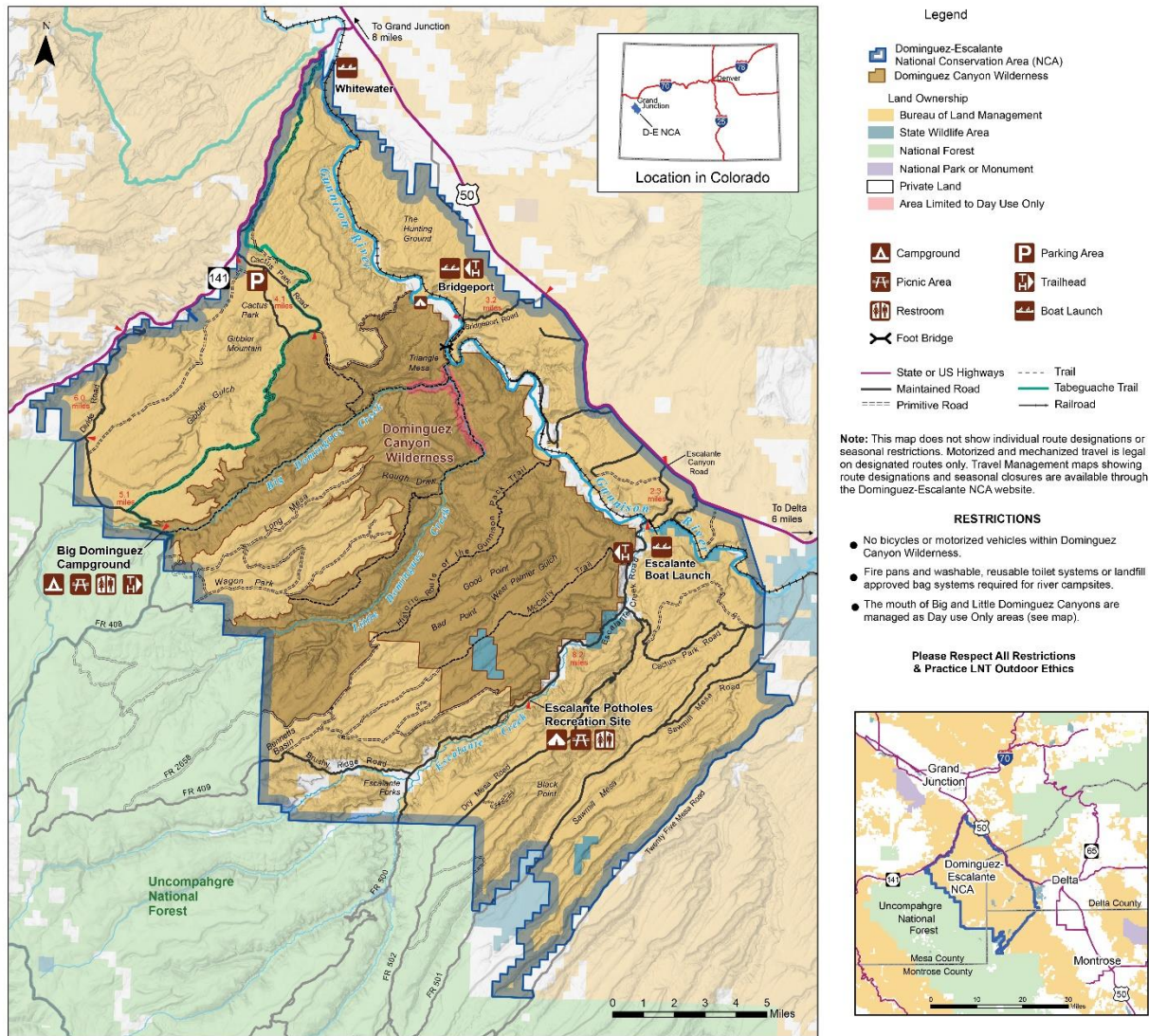


Figure 2 - Overview of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA)

## Stakeholders and Partners

The BLM has engaged stakeholder representatives through the RACs, receiving support for fee proposals. Further engagement with stakeholders will occur through the *Federal Register* Notification process, outreach efforts as more areas and sites are considered for fees, and through public comment periods as part of required NEPA analyses for the development of future campgrounds and/or campsites.

The D-E NCA receives substantial support and added capacity from its friends group and other partnerships. BLM staff, partners and volunteers conduct education, outreach, and stewardship in

the three western Colorado NCAs, engaging with thousands of youth and adults each year across the landscape.



Figure 3 - Volunteer clean-up event within the Gunnison River SRMA in D-E NCA

## DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF D-E NCA RECREATION SITES

### Existing Campgrounds Proposed for Fee

#### [Big Dominguez Campground](#)

Big Dominguez Campground (Figure 4) is located north of the Sawmill Mesa/Wagon Park Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA)<sup>1</sup> and west of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness, within the Cactus Park Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)<sup>2</sup>. The Big Dominguez Creek Trailhead intersects the campground. The trail is popular with foot and horse recreational travel and used by grazing permittees to trail cattle from the Gunnison River to their allotments on BLM and Forest Service lands. Mesa County maintains 1.9 miles of road that

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<sup>1</sup> An ERMA is an administrative unit that requires specific management consideration to address recreation use, demand, or Recreation & Visitor Services program investments.

<sup>2</sup> An SRMA is an administrative unit where the existing or proposed recreation opportunities and recreation setting characteristics are recognized for their unique value, importance, and/or distinctiveness, especially as compared to other areas used for recreation.

access the campground. High-clearance four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles are recommended during inclement weather and when the road has been damaged by erosion. There is a small two-track route that extends from the county-maintained road to the forest boundary. This route is used by 4WD vehicles and ATVs on BLM lands. The primary recreational activities within the area include hiking, horseback riding, and backpacking within the Wilderness and camping and OHV riding outside the Wilderness.

Big Dominguez Campground currently includes the following amenities required by FLREA: tent campsites, picnic tables, agency-provided metal fire rings, vault toilets, access road, and reasonable visitor protection.



Figure 4 – An example of a campsite at Big Dominguez Campground in D-E NCA

### [Potholes Campground](#)

Potholes Campground is located within the Escalante Canyon SRMA (Figure 5). To access Potholes Campground, visitors turn south from Highway 50 and drive for approximately 11 miles. Recreation opportunities include heritage/scenic touring in Escalante Canyon, big game hunting, OHV riding, picnicking, swimming, and kayaking. The primary recreational activity in the lower part of the canyon is scenic touring. The campground also attracts day-use visitors for picnicking and swimming. During spring runoff following exceptional winters, kayakers have an opportunity to run Class V+ rapids.



Figure 5 – Potholes Campground in D-E NCA

### Potential future fee sites/areas

Where monitoring indicates the BLM requires active mitigation of recreation impacts to ROVs in any given area of the D-E NCA, and/or amenities are provided per FLREA as a means of mitigating impacts to ROVs, the BLM will charge an expanded amenity fee and/or an ISRP fee for Special Area(s). Reference Appendix A for areas foreseen in the RMP as likely requiring intensive recreation management. Figure 6 showcases examples of current dispersed camping areas within D-E NCA.



Figure 6 – Examples of dispersed campsites in Escalante Canyon SRMA within D-E NCA

### [Gunnison River SRMA Individual Special Recreation Permits \(ISRPs\)](#)

From the city of Delta to the Whitewater take-out, the Gunnison River runs 39 miles, mostly through D-E NCA. A NEPA decision (DOI-BLM-CO-G030-2022-0001-EA) was authorized November 3, 2023 and requires that camping would only be allowed at designated campsites on this Class I and II, family-friendly stretch of river (Figure 7). Currently, self-issue free ISRPs are used to keep track of visitor use numbers. The ISRP was implemented in 2019 following a land use plan decision in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan of 2017 (REC-SRMA-MA-06, Appendix A). Being an implementation

decision in the land use plan, the Federal Register Notice for the RMP, 82 FR 4410, was sufficient public notice for a free ISRP implementation.

Presently, visitors can camp anywhere on BLM-managed lands. The majority of river campsites have been user-created over time and continue to be utilized. Campsites are primitive, with no developments. Some of the existing campsites are isolated, while others interface with the mouth of Big Dominguez Creek, which is a popular access point for hikers and backpackers into the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. Toilet facilities are available at each boat launch.

ISRP fees would be charged for overnight use of the Gunnison River SRMA (Figure 7); day use would remain free. Proposed ISRP fee structure is outlined in this Plan.

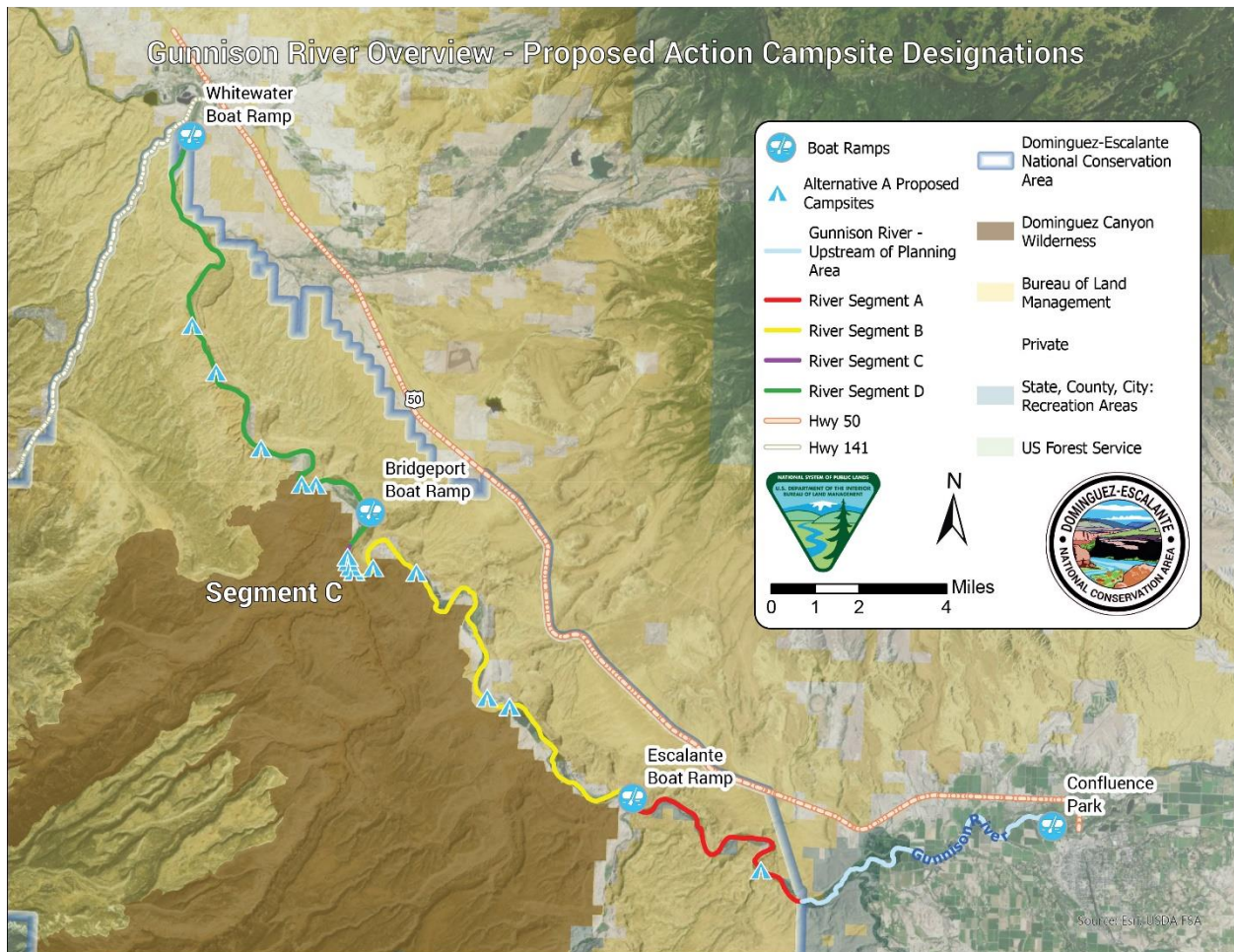


Figure 7 - Special Area (river segments A-D) within Gunnison River SRMA in D-E NCA



Figure 8 - *Left*: Escalante boat ramp. *Right*: River campsite within Gunnison River SRMA.

## D-E NCA VISITATION

### Visitor Profile

In FY 2022, an estimated 140,300 people visited the D-E NCA. Table 1 displays visitation to the D-E NCA over the past five years and how it compares to other National Conservation Areas in the region (McInnis NCA and Gunnison Gorge NCA). A “visit” is defined as one visitor entering onto lands or waters managed by the BLM for the purposes of recreation, no matter how long they stay. For example, a family of 5 hiking for one day would be 5 visits. A family of 5 camping in one area for 3 days would still be 5 visits. Visitor use numbers are tracked in the national Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) database. Visitor use numbers are collected through a variety of methods, including traffic and trail counters, estimates made by recreation staff, and special recreation permit holders’ post-use reports. While visitation occurs year-round, the busiest seasons are during spring and fall. Sites are available and open to the public year-round. In the last five years, visitation to the D-E NCA has increased by 36%.

Fiscal Year (FY)*	Total Visits		
	D-E NCA	McInnis NCA	Gunnison Gorge NCA
FY 2018	103,372	264,390	-
FY 2019	95,120	249,402	-
FY 2020	111,812	268,826	-
FY 2021	120,538	308,290	164,985
FY 2022	140,332	299,441	185,835
<b>Average Visits/Year</b>	<b>114,235</b>	<b>278,070</b>	<b>175,410<sup>^</sup></b>

Table 1 – Estimated visits to D-E NCA, McInnis NCA, and Gunnison Gorge NCA, FY 2018-FY 2022

\* Federal fiscal year (FY) runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following year.

<sup>^</sup> Visitor use data collection procedures changed from observational data only to traffic counter AND observational data. Average visits are calculated based on FY21 and FY22, due to more modern data collection procedures.

Other major attractions near D-E NCA that help drive visitation include:



- Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park (NPS)
- Colorado National Monument (NPS)
- Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Wilderness (BLM)
- Grand Mesa National Forest (USFS)
- Colorado River, Ruby-Horsethief Canyons (BLM)
- Mountain Bike trails in the 18 Road/North Fruita Desert area, Mark Ridge/Kokopelli area (BLM)
- Palisade Plunge Trail (USFS and BLM)
- Blue Lakes Trail in the Uncompahgre Wilderness (USFS)

### Visitor Demographics

Several indicators were used to provide insight into the recreational activities occurring in D-E NCA:

- Race, Age, Location, and Gender
  - In FY 2020, staff administered a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Survey to Gunnison River recreationists in D-E NCA. All respondents except one came from Colorado, though these visitors hailed from 24 different counties across the state. 32% of respondents came from Montrose, Delta, or Mesa counties, the three counties within an hour drive of the D-E NCA. From the demographic data collected, survey respondents were about 50% male and 50% female and generally middle-aged. 85% percent of visitors were adults.
  - The socioeconomic data on BLM recreation users is unknown; however, the U.S. Forest Service’s National Visitor Use Monitoring Program (NVUM<sup>3</sup>) 2019 data provides detailed visitation socioeconomic data for nearby forests. NVUM survey results<sup>4</sup> collected on the nearby Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) in fiscal year 2019 provide additional insight into the area’s typical recreational user. While these data are several years old and collected on forest, not BLM, lands, the survey remains one of the most accurate means for analyzing regionally specific data concerning recreational visitation.

The survey found:

- 31% of visitors were female and 69% were male
- 97% of visitors were white
- 17% of visitors were under 16; 9% were 20-29; 23% were 30-39; 14% were 40-49; 16% were 50-59; 13% were 60-69, and 8% were 70 or older
- Most visitors came from local areas with approximately 57% of visits by individuals who had traveled less than 50 miles to recreate

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/nvum>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fseprd563500.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd563500.pdf)

## Overview of D-E NCA Recreation Activities

The 2020 “Existing Conditions, Trends, and Projections in Outdoor Recreation” report<sup>5</sup> from Colorado Parks and Wildlife notes that walking and hiking/backpacking are the two most popular outdoor activities in the two tourism districts that include Mesa, Montrose, and Delta counties. The report also notes that 32% of respondents to a 2018 statewide outdoor recreation survey participated in tent camping and 26% in RV camping.

Monitoring by recreation staff confirms that camping and hiking are popular activities in the D-E NCA. However, OHV use, rock climbing, and boating are also prevalent due to the D-E NCA’s high quality, site-specific characteristics necessary to engage in these activities. Staff also note that D-E NCA attracts self-directed visitors who enjoy adventuring into remote places with limited guidance or resources. This is balanced by the fact that the D-E NCA is close to two major highways and has graded, maintained county roads within its boundaries. Access to the D-E NCA, therefore, can be relatively easy and does not necessarily require specialized vehicles, making a large portion of the D-E NCA accessible to a diverse range of recreational interests.

Furthermore, how visitors choose to camp is shifting as well, from simple tent camping to self-contained vans and large RVs, or travel trailers. Visitors are often hauling additional activity gear such as dirt bikes, UTVs, kayaks, or bicycles. Camping in a group remains popular, which indicates a need for some larger sites. Developing recreation sites to accommodate the different ways people want to experience public lands is essential to BLM’s mission.

## Connecting With Communities

Public lands provide unique opportunities for cultural and heritage exploration and tourism. They provide some of the most significant evidence of human prehistory and history within the United States, along with paleontological resources that span hundreds of millions of years. The BLM recreation strategy titled “Connecting with Communities” includes the goals of bolstering economic opportunities in local communities, delivering outstanding recreation experiences to visitors, and sustaining recreation settings on public lands.

## ANTICIPATED FUTURE VISITATION

According to data from the Colorado State Demography Office, the population in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties was 232,174 in 2021. The three-county area comprised 39 percent of the Western Slope’s population. With a population of more than 157,000, Mesa County is the largest county on Colorado’s Western Slope. The population in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties has grown at a slower pace between 2010 and 2020, compared with the prior decade. The three-county population increased at an average annual rate of 0.5 percent from 2010 to 2020, compared with 2.1 percent from 2000 to 2010.

Over the next 10 years, population growth is expected in all three counties. The projected annual average growth rate between 2020 and 2030 is lowest in Delta County, at 0.7 percent. Mesa and Montrose Counties each have projected average annual growth rates of over 1 percent. The

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<sup>5</sup> <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/Research/SocialScience/Trends-Report-July-2020-Final.pdf>

projected total change in population in the three-county area over this period exceeds 28,000. By 2050, the projected population in Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties could reach nearly 314,000 people.

The growing population base in the Western Slope and across the three-county area is anticipated to drive demand for developed and dispersed recreation opportunities (NVUM study). As a result, visitation to the NCA over the next decade is projected to increase and may lead to demand for new and/or more accessible developed recreation sites.

Geography	Historical Population*					Rate of Population Change (AARC)				Projected Population		
	1990	2000	2010	2020	2021	1990 to 2000	2000 to 2010	2010 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2030	2040	2050
Delta County	20,980	27,834	30,952	31,196	31,673	2.9%	1.1%	0.1%	1.5%	33,518	35,506	36,624
Mesa County	93,145	116,255	146,723	155,703	157,323	2.2%	2.4%	0.6%	1.0%	176,032	202,388	221,563
Montrose County	24,423	33,432	41,276	42,679	43,178	3.2%	2.1%	0.3%	1.2%	48,201	53,418	55,571
Western Slope**	334,208	461,423	554,574	587,702	590,618	3.3%	1.9%	0.6%	0.5%	651,485	731,437	790,017
Colorado	3,294,393	4,301,261	5,029,196	5,773,714	5,814,707	2.7%	1.6%	1.4%	0.7%	6,416,217	7,073,418	7,486,286

Table 2 - Population data for Delta, Mesa, and Montrose counties, 1990-2050 (source: Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office, 2023)

\*Data from 1990 to 2020 is derived from the Historical Census years, and 2021 data is derived from the Colorado Demography Office intercensal estimates.

\*\*The Western Slope is defined using the Colorado Department of Local Affairs' State Demography Office definition including Archuleta, Delta, Dolores, Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Jackson, La Plata, Mesa, Moffat, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, San Juan, San Miguel, and Summit counties.

Population growth in the region, combined with strong economic growth and organic economic growth in many of the region's industries such as healthcare, transportation, outdoor recreation, and manufacturing, is fueling growth at the local airport. The Grand Junction Regional Airport (GJT) is the largest airport on the Western Slope and one of the largest in Colorado. GJT, along with the aviation-related businesses and facilities, represents a vital and significant regional economic asset and supports the region's growing tourism base. According to the 2020 Economic Impact Study of Colorado Airports, GJT generates \$711 million in annual economic impact for Colorado and supports nearly 3,400 jobs. Growth at the airport is expected to continue with enplanements forecasted to increase at a rate of 2.6 percent through 2027, according to the GJT Master Plan. The facility is also home to several large, commercial, and non-commercial aviation organizations such as the BLM.

## FEE PROPOSAL

The proposed expanded amenity fee for each upland campsite is \$20 per night (up to 2 vehicles included and no more than 5 participants per vehicle). For larger capacity sites, as identified by the BLM, each additional vehicle beyond the first two vehicles will be \$10 each. A vehicle is

defined as legal transportation used to access the site (e.g., car, truck, motorcycle, van, or other wheeled conveyance). Participants may include non-human participants (e.g., dogs, horses, alpacas, etc.).

The proposed ISRP fee for the Gunnison River is \$20 per night for small groups (1-5 participants), \$50 per night for medium groups (6-14 participants), and \$100 per night for large groups (15-25 participants). Participants may include non-human participants (e.g., dogs, horses, alpacas, etc.).

The BLM will use various e-commerce technologies, as directed in Instruction Memorandum 2022-019, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve (if option is available), and pay for a site. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).

As BLM implements e-commerce solution options, a service fee would be charged in addition to the site fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G). Current service fees can range from \$0.50 to \$10.00. The service fee is subject to contracting requirements on e-commerce and will be adjusted as that contract changes. E-commerce solutions offer the added benefit of secure fee collection and labor cost savings for BLM staff. Further, e-commerce solutions typically provide reports of occupied and unoccupied sites which facilitates occasional patrol and enforcement by law enforcement officers.

To account for inflation or other economic changes, this business plan also proposes tying the new fee structure to the Western U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI). Fees would be reviewed annually against this index. The BLM would institute an automatic commensurate increase, rounded to the nearest whole dollar, if CPI rises by 20% from the date of approval of this plan. This process would be repeated further based on a 20% increase of the CPI from the date of the last BLM price increase. For example, at the date of publication of this business plan, the CPI was 329.330. A 20% increase would occur when CPI reaches 395.2068.

BLM would implement the above fee structure as proposed and then would reference the CPI through the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, specifically targeting the CPI closer to rural Western Colorado by using the monthly Western US CPI. This CPI targets the entire western US outside of the large metro areas that have their own CPIs calculated separately. While this is not a CPI for only Western Colorado, it does target the rural west and is the closest CPI that would represent the region. A yearly average of this CPI is published every January. This would create a more sustainable and consistent funding source that would increase assurances for users that the program could continue to provide regular maintenance and necessary capital improvements into the future. Fees could be adjusted without resubmitting a business plan. BLM would return to the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) after each fee increase (approximately every 4-5 years) to update the RAC on successes and challenges in using the Western U.S. CPI.

## **CURRENT OPERATING COSTS**

Table 3 shows an estimate of annual costs to maintain, repair, improve, and monitor the recreation sites within D-E NCA as of FY 2022. The operating costs depict the summary of total

obligations for D-E NCA. The projected costs for developed amenities, visitor services, security, and maintenance are based on anticipated site development and costs of collecting fees.

Service/Item Provided	Current Cost (FY 22)	Projected Cost (expanded amenity Sites)	Projected Cost (Special Area)
Visitor Information (kiosks, brochures, and other signage)	\$1,300	\$2,400	\$600
Cleaning Supplies (toilet paper, PPE, etc.)	\$1,200	\$2,000	\$500
Weed Control	\$1,900	\$2,000	\$500
Repairs	\$1,500	\$2,400	\$600
Toilets (pumping and service)	\$11,600	\$12,000	\$3,000
Equipment	\$1,100	\$2,000	\$500
Vehicle and gas	\$6,300	\$10,400	\$2,600
GS-7 Seasonal Park Ranger (80% in expanded amenity sites, 20% in Special Area)	\$30,000 (6 months)	\$50,405 (10 months)	\$12,601 (10 months)
GS-7 Full-time Park Ranger (80% in expanded amenity sites, 20% in Special Area)	\$44,000 (6 months)	\$53,451 (10 months)	\$13,363 (10 months)
Law Enforcement Support	\$13,350	\$16,000	\$4,000
Overhead/Admin (Outdoor Recreation Planner, NCA Manager, fee collection and processing* etc.)	\$6,950	\$11,200	\$2,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$82,250</b>	<b>\$164,255</b>	<b>\$41,064</b>

Table 3 - Current annual operating costs and projected operating costs in D-E NCA. Projected costs are based on estimated new developments.

*\*Fee collection and processing is subject to change dependent upon how e-commerce is implemented.*

The operating costs of maintaining the campgrounds include specialized equipment (e.g., facilities trailer, and cleaning truck equipped with hot water pressure washer), construction equipment (e.g., skid-steer loader), labor, contractual services, amortized costs associated with development of amenities, printing and reproduction, communications, utilities, supplies, materials, vehicles, and travel. Annual operating costs for the recreation program also include monitoring of visitor use, law enforcement services, and trash disposal (including illegal dump clean-ups). Up to seven (7) employees (permanent, career seasonal, or seasonal) currently provide services to the recreation program. Additional overhead/admin costs of administering the recreation program include managerial support, engineering collaboration, and office support.

## USE OF RECREATION FEES

Expanded amenity Sites	Quantity	Item Price	Total Price	20-year amortization
Vault Toilet	3	\$50,000/each	\$150,000	\$7,500
Picnic Table	61	\$500/each	\$30,500	\$1,525
Fire Rings	61	\$800/each	\$48,800	\$2,440
Site Engineering	3	\$35,000/site	\$105,000	\$5,250
Vehicle	0.5	\$6,000/year	\$3,000	\$150
Site Delineation (90 ft/ site)	61	\$100/ft	\$549,000	\$27,450
<b>Total over Time</b>			<b>\$886,300</b>	<b>\$44,315</b>

Table 4 - Projected cost of all necessary amenities to establish expanded amenity fee sites in D-E NCA.

Special Area(s)	Quantity	Item Price	Total Price	20-year amortization
Vault Toilet	1	\$50,000/each	\$50,000	\$2,500
Picnic Table	0	\$500/each	\$0	\$0
Fire Rings	0	\$800/each	\$0	\$0
Site Engineering	1	\$35,000/site	\$35,000	\$1,750
Vehicle	1	\$6,000/year	\$3,000	\$150
Site Delineation (90 ft/ site)	2	\$100/ft.	\$18,000	\$900
<b>Total over Time</b>			<b>\$106,000</b>	<b>\$5,300</b>

Table 5 - Projected cost associated with administration of Special Area(s).

The ability to charge fees at sites with expanded amenities and/or Special Areas would better ensure support for continued maintenance and operations if government appropriated funding changes. If appropriated funding were to remain the same or increase, fee revenue would enable the D-E NCA to institute improvements to the recreation amenities (see Table 3 for operating costs) as well as undertake some capital expenditures.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 above show estimated expenses associated with providing quality recreation experiences while also promoting sustainable use of the resource. Specifically, Tables 4 and 5 detail anticipated costs of capital investments required for sustainable recreation use of these areas in the future. In the far-right column in Tables 4 and 5, the 20-year amortized cost represents the annual cost to the government to provide amenities for the expected lifespan of said amenities.

Colorado directive for funds collected through user fees identifies the following as appropriate expenditures of user fees:

1. Repair, maintenance, and enhancement of recreation fee site projects.

2. Interpretation, visitor information, visitor services, and signs that directly benefit fee sites and areas where SRPs operate.
3. Habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependent recreation that is limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, or photography.
4. Law enforcement directly related to public use and recreation that benefits fee sites and SRP program.
5. Direct, operating or capital, costs associated with the cost of collecting and processing the recreation fee.
6. Support of volunteer and partnership projects, and similar partnership authorities related to recreation activities in fee areas or where SRPs operate.

The priorities for use of fee revenue are, first, to provide benefits at the site of collection; second, to establish new recreation sites as needed on lands within the D-E NCA; and third, to offset existing and new BLM recreation site costs within the same state. Future campsite developments will be considered primarily on the basis of recreation monitoring and resource impacts. Fees would be implemented at individual sites upon establishment of required amenities. Fees in Special Areas will be used primarily to increase monitoring and patrol by BLM personnel as well as establishment and maintenance of amenities necessary to protect ROVs of the area. Emphasis will be given to visitor services such as education, outreach, and stewardship of public lands through BLM staff and partners.

### **Fund Balance Maintenance**

Colorado directive for funds collected through user fees states that funds received from the public must be spent on activities which directly benefit the site or activity where the funds were collected. Two specific accounts will be created, one for expanded amenity sites and one for Special Area(s) in D-E NCA.

These funds are only supplemental to federally allocated funds received from BLM Headquarters. The BLM office will determine the most effective use of these funds with the maximum beneficial return for the site and/or the activity for which it was collected. Funds may be carried over to provide for expensive projects which would benefit the users. The balance will be managed as a working capital fund, with the goal of investing in facilities and services that will promote program growth consistent with visitor demand.

### **RECREATION FEE RATE ANALYSIS**

BLM policy proposes the use of two methods to calculate proposed recreation fee rates: the Cost Recovery and Fair Market Value methods. With the Cost Recovery method, a fee rate is calculated to provide revenue to recover the projected estimated annual operating and maintenance costs. With the Fair Market Value method, a fee rate is calculated to be comparable with fees charged at similar or comparable federal, state, and local recreation sites, particularly in the respective geographic area of the D-E NCA.

#### **Cost Recovery Fee Calculation Method**

To predict the revenue that would be generated by the proposed fee areas, BLM utilized average visitor use numbers as shown on Table 1. However, with no current fees established in these areas, there is not information to estimate fee compliance. Since these would be all new fees, D-

E NCA are estimating between 50% and 100% fee compliance. This range was used to calculate the fee rate which the BLM would need to charge to cover costs estimated in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The daily rate to recover cost column shows the amount which, if paid by visitors under various scenarios (rows in Table 6), would ensure that the people of the United States receive a fair and equitable return for the use of these facilities to help recover the cost[s].

	Estimated number of sites	Estimated number of usable days	Estimated occupancy rate	Estimated revenue days*	Annual cost of operations <sup>^</sup>	Daily rate to recover cost <sup>#</sup>
<b>Future sites (100% fee compliance)</b>	70	200	0.65	9100	\$208,570	\$22.92
<b>Future sites (90% fee compliance)</b>	70	200	0.65	8190	\$208,570	\$25.47
<b>Future sites (60% fee compliance)</b>	70	200	0.65	5460	\$208,570	\$38.20
<b>Future sites (50% fee compliance)</b>	70	200	0.65	4550	\$208,570	\$45.84
<b>Existing sites (100% fee compliance)</b>	9	200	0.65	1170	\$82,250	\$70.30

Table 6 - Cost recovery rate calculations for expanded amenity fee sites.

\* Estimated revenue days = (number of sites) x (number of usable days) x (occupancy rate) x (fee compliance rate)

<sup>^</sup> Annual cost of operations = (total projected cost from Table 3) + (20-year amortization from Table 4)

<sup>#</sup> Daily rate to recover cost = (annual cost of operations) / (estimated revenue days)

The cost recovery calculations in Table 6 display hypothetical expanded amenity fee rates required to cover the annual cost of operations. The bottom row shows the existing sites and the cost to the government for provision of 9 sites with expanded amenities which currently do not charge a fee.

	Estimated number of sites	Estimated number of usable days	Estimated occupancy rate	Estimated revenue days*	Annual cost of operations <sup>^</sup>	Daily rate to recover cost <sup>#</sup>
<b>Special Area with fees (100% fee compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	1050	\$46,364	\$44.16
<b>Special Area with fees (90% fee compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	945	\$46,364	\$49.06



<b>Special Area with fees (60% fee compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	630	\$46,364	\$73.59
<b>Special Area with fees (50% fee compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	525	\$46,364	\$88.31
<b>Special Area currently no fees (100% permit compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	1050	\$16,450	\$15.67
<b>Special Area currently no fees (50% permit compliance)</b>	14	125	0.6	525	\$16,450	\$31.33

Table 7 - Cost recovery rate calculations for Special Area ISRP fees.

\* Estimated revenue days = (number of sites) x (number of usable days) x (occupancy rate) x (fee compliance rate).

^ Annual cost of operations = (total projected cost from Table 3) + (20-year amortization from Table 5)

# Daily rate to recover cost = (annual cost of operations) / (estimated revenue days)

The cost recovery calculations in Table 7 display hypothetical Special Area ISRP fee rates required to cover the annual cost of operations, including the cost to provide additional amenities from Table 5 and increased monitoring by BLM staff from Table 3. The bottom two rows show the existing sites and the cost to the government for provision of 14 sites, without additional needed infrastructure and monitoring, which currently do not charge a fee.

### Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method

In addition to providing the cost recovery fee calculation method, this section of the Plan uses the Fair Market Value assessment approach to calculate the proposed fees. This approach compares the fees charged at campgrounds near D-E NCA, including privately-owned campgrounds (Tables 8 and 9). As Table 8 highlights, the proposed fee of \$20 a night for a campsite is congruent with other regional campground fees with similar amenities. Table 9 demonstrates in more detail how D-E NCA compares to other sites in the area. Similarly, proposed Special Area fees for the Gunnison River in D-E NCA mirror those of Ruby-Horsethief stretch of the Colorado River in McInnis NCA.

<b>BLM Proposal</b>	<b>Private (more amenities)</b>	<b>Federal/state (more amenities)</b>	<b>Federal/state (similar amenities)</b>	<b>Federal/state (fewer amenities)</b>
\$20/night	\$50/night	\$30/night	\$20/night	\$16/night

Table 8 - Overview of fair market value fee calculation, BLM proposal relative to private and other federal/state sites.

Site	Agency	Fees	Amenities
<b>Public Campgrounds</b>			
Rabbit Valley, McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area	Bureau of Land Management	\$20/site/night \$50/group site/night	Vault toilets, picnic tables, fire rings
18 Road/North Fruita Desert Campground	Bureau of Land Management	\$20/site/night	Vault toilets, picnic tables, fire rings
Saddlehorn Campground, Colorado National Monument	National Park Service	\$22/site/night (plus entrance fee)	Flush toilets, drinking water, picnic tables, grills
South Rim Campground, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park	National Park Service	\$16/site/night \$22/site/night (electric)	Vault toilets, drinking water, picnic tables, electric hook-ups
Cobbett Lake Campground	US Forest Service	\$16/site/night	Vault toilets, drinking water, trash collection, picnic tables, fire rings
Jumbo Campground	US Forest Service	\$22/site/night \$30/site/night (electric)	Vault toilets, drinking water, trash collection, picnic tables, fire rings
<b>Special Areas</b>			
Gunnison Gorge Wilderness ISRPs	Bureau of Land Management	\$3/day/person (day use) \$10/day/person (1 night) \$15/day/person (2 nights)	Developed parking at boat ramps, toilet facilities, interpretive kiosks, campsite posts
Ruby-Horsethief ISRPs	Bureau of Land Management	\$20/night for small group (1-5 people) \$50/night for medium group (6-14 people) \$100/night for large group (15-25 people)	Developed parking at boat ramps, toilet facilities, interpretive kiosks, campsite posts

Private Campgrounds <sup>6</sup>			
Cedar Creek RV	Private	\$27.41/night (tent) \$48.50/night (electric)	Flush toilets, showers, RV sanitary station, electric hook-ups, drinking water, Wi-Fi
KOA-Montrose	Private	Minimum \$50/night (price goes up depending on multiple factors)	Flush toilets, showers, RV sanitary station, laundry, electric hook-ups, drinking water, Wi-Fi, picnic tables, fire rings

Table 9 - Fair market value table for campgrounds in the area

## FEE DISCOUNTS

Section 5 of FLREA provided for the establishment of a single interagency national pass known as the America the Beautiful Pass – the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass. Holders of the Interagency Senior and Access passes may receive 50% off expanded amenity fees. This includes overnight camping at campgrounds. No discount or fee-free days would apply to Special Area ISRPs.

## IMPACTS FROM CHARGING RECREATION FEES

D-E NCA thoroughly considered the potential impacts from establishing fees at expanded amenity sites and Special Area(s). The following is an overview of impacts on visitors and the environment, non-market values and benefits, impacts on local economies, as well as socioeconomic impacts from the establishment of fees.

### Impacts on Visitors and the Environment

High quality recreation opportunities in the western slope of Colorado are valued by local communities, as well as statewide and nationwide visitors. Recreational opportunities, including camping on public lands, are major reasons many residents choose to live here. The BLM expects the demand for camping, and associated recreation on public lands, to only increase in the future. As area visitation increases, it often leads to negative natural resource impacts, such as more litter, human waste, and vegetation damage. It is becoming difficult to maintain the recreation sites in their current conditions and without fee revenues. Implementing fees at the proposed recreation sites would improve the quality of the visitor experience by supporting more amenities, increasing the presence of rangers, and enhancing education and outreach efforts. Fees ultimately help to enable responsible recreation, thus protecting the environment for present and future visitors.

### Nonmarket Values and Benefits

The term nonmarket values refer to the benefits individuals attribute to experiences of the environment or uses of natural and cultural resources that do not involve market transactions, and therefore lack prices. Examples include the perceived benefits received from wildlife

<sup>6</sup> Represents a minimum fee. Does not include taxes or reservation fees. Camping fees also vary by length of vehicle, whether or not a trailer has slide outs, the number of people and/or pets, days of the week, and months of the year. Prices shown reflect the lowest published per night price. Fees can increase greatly with the presence of any of the above factors. For example, most private campgrounds charge extra for any persons over two per site.

viewing, hiking in a wilderness, camping in a semi-wild setting with friends and family, or recreational hunting. Nevertheless, such values are important to consider because they help tell the entire economic story. Estimates of nonmarket values supplement estimates of income generated from commodity uses to provide a more complete picture of the economic implications of proposed resource management decisions.

Numerous studies document that individuals are often willing to pay more than their actual costs for a particular recreational experience. This is termed *consumer surplus* or *net willingness to pay*, the amount an individual would have been willing to pay for an environmental benefit minus the amount actually expended.

For instance, hikers pay a market price for gasoline used to reach a trail but may pay nothing to use the trail itself. Similarly, campers may pay a fee for this activity, but may be willing to pay more due to the “free” economic benefit accruing to this experience. Any amount that a recreationist would be willing to pay to use this otherwise free or underpriced resource represents the nonmarket consumer surplus value of that resource to that consumer.

Nonmarket use values have been studied extensively for a wide variety of recreation “goods.” A recent study<sup>7</sup> commissioned by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) examined studies designed to measure consumer surplus for a wide variety of recreation activities that typically occur on USFS lands, including camping at developed sites. Although the examined studies show a large degree of variation across geographies, they do show considerable degrees of consumer surplus for the studied activities. Of interest to the current project, the authors determined that camping in developed campgrounds, or sites with development amenities such as fire pits, electricity, toilets, picnic tables, and parking, on USFS land produced an average consumer surplus of \$35.28 per visitor day in the Rocky Mountain Region. This represents the amount of benefit campers are receiving above and beyond the actual fee charged. These average value estimates are what we would expect the economic benefit to be, conditional on available information and holding all else constant.

Although one may quibble with the various methodologies these studies employ, it is well documented that recreationists are deriving value well beyond the fees charged.

### [Impacts on Local Economies](#)

Delta, Mesa, and Montrose counties’ economies are heavily dependent upon tourism, and each county stands to benefit from more recreation opportunities. Many tourists and locals alike prefer to camp at public campgrounds and are looking for reasonably priced fee sites. The BLM proposes to expand provision of amenities and advance administration of Special Areas in response to increased visitation and associated impacts. Thus, the establishment of more fee sites is an indicator of increased visitation which represents a boon to gateway communities and their local businesses. Visitors typically contribute to local economies on their way to and from public

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<sup>7</sup> Rosenberger, Randall S.; White, Eric M.; Kline, Jeffrey D.; Cvitanovich, Claire. 2017. Recreation economic values for estimating outdoor recreation economic benefits from the National Forest System. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNWGTR-57. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station

lands through the purchase of lodging and a variety of consumables (e.g., fuel, food, equipment, etc.). Facilities that meet the needs of visitors are likely to continue to attract visitation and result in an economic benefit to local communities and the economy.

[Socioeconomic impacts, including low-income populations and environmental justice communities](#)

Recreation on BLM-administered lands supported \$1.4 billion in economic output and 11,000 jobs in Colorado in fiscal year (FY) 2021. Colorado’s 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) was developed in close collaboration with a wide range of partners to provide a shared vision for the future of Colorado’s outdoors. Surveys conducted as part of SCORP are used to identify recreation participation in Colorado regionally and statewide for residents of the state. Studies found that 92% of all adult residents engaged in outdoor recreational activities in 2019.

The socioeconomic data on BLM recreation users is unknown; however, the U.S. Forest Service’s National Visitor Use Monitoring Program (NVUM) 2019 data provides detailed visitation socioeconomic data for nearby forests including the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests adjacent to BLM- managed public lands. Over 73% of visitors traveled to these forests to recreate. The majority of visitors traveled from the nearby area. Specifically, 57 percent of visitation is from the area within 50 miles, while 43 percent of visitation is from over 51 miles.

The NVUM study further asked visitors to report their household incomes by category. The following data was gathered:

<b>Annual Household Income Category</b>	<b>National Forest Visits (%)</b>
Under \$25,000	4.7
\$25,000 to \$49,999	11.3
\$50,000 to \$74,999	20.0
\$75,000 to \$99,999	12.8
\$100,000 to \$149,999	11.4
More than \$150,000	39.8

Table 10 - Annual household income of visitors traveling to Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests

*Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.*

Many tourists prefer to camp at public campgrounds; capacity at adjacent National Forest campgrounds is exceeded for the majority of the camping season. These campers rely on BLM and private campgrounds as many cannot afford the high cost of hotel accommodations in the area or would prefer developed camping to dispersed camping. Those who vacation away from home are more likely to be above average in income and in particular, recreation visitors to the area have a higher-than-average income profile than the population at large. As indicated in

Table 10 above, 64% of household incomes exceed \$75,000 that are visiting nearby forests. Furthermore, BLM campgrounds offer a very low-cost alternative to staying in a hotel in the area (where prices can range from \$60 to over \$150 per room per night during the season). This low-cost alternative is particularly important at the group sites, where groups can enjoy the amenities of the area at a very low cost.

Impacts to low-income or minority populations are not expected to be significant, as there are other free dispersed camping areas managed by the BLM and the nearby US Forest Service’s Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests. Furthermore, there are discounted rates (50%) for camping for seniors and those with disabilities. An environmental justice screening was completed for Delta, Mesa, and Montrose counties. Based on U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) data as used by EPA’s EJScreen tool (U.S. EPA 2023; U.S. Census Bureau 2021), all three counties have low-income populations that meet the criteria for being identified as environmental justice populations compared with the state reference.

<b>Geography</b>	<b>Low Income<sup>*#</sup></b>	<b>Minority<sup>*</sup></b>	
Delta County	<b>39.6 percent</b>	19.2 percent	
Mesa County	<b>31.7 percent</b>	19.1 percent	
Montrose County	<b>31.3 percent</b>	24.1 percent	
Colorado (Reference area) <sup>#</sup>	23.6 percent	33.2 percent 36.5 percent (MGA)	

Table 11 - Delta, Mesa, and Montrose counties environmental justice baseline data

\* EPA EJScreen: <http://www.epa.gov/ejscreen> (accessed 06/21/2023); BLM EJ Mapping Tool

Note: A minority community of concern is present if the percentage of the population identified as belonging to a minority group in a study area is 1) equal to or greater than 50 percent of the population OR 2) meets the “meaningfully greater” threshold. Meaningfully greater is calculated by comparing the minority group population percentage with 110 percent of the reference area minority population. A low-income community of concern is present if 1) the population experiencing poverty in one or more study area geographies are near, at, or below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold of the reference area OR 2) if the population of the community experiencing poverty is at or above 50 percent.

^ Headwaters Economics BLM EPS and SEP: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/blm-profiles/> (accessed 06/21/2023) # American Community Survey, 5-Year 2017-2021 Estimates: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table> (accessed 06/21/2023)

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

As part of the proposal to establish camping fees, to develop new campgrounds, to expand existing campgrounds, and to establish ISRPs in Special Area(s), the Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) and Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) will conduct the following outreach efforts to notify the public of opportunity to review and provide comments:

- Post the Draft Business Plan on the blm.gov website
- Publish a news story in the *Grand Junction Sentinel*

- Publish a news story in the *Montrose Daily Press*
- Issue a News Release to print and broadcast media
- Post the fee proposal notice (in English and Spanish) at affected recreation sites

Prior to developing campsites and/or charging fees, the following outreach will occur:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and public comment period(s) for applicable future developments
- Publishing a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* for a minimum of 6 months prior to establishment of fees
- Publishing news stories about the *Federal Register* Notice of Intent
- Posting *Federal Register* notice near each of the affected recreation sites
- The BLM collects fee expenditure information annually and will post information on how FLREA fee revenue is spent in each campground. This information will be posted online<sup>8</sup>.

The BLM presented the topic of fees in D-E NCA at the combined NW and SW RAC meeting on March 30, 2023 and again to the NW RAC in June 22, 2023 during the development of this plan. The BLM will review and consider public comments and revise the draft business plan as needed, then finalize the business plan and present to the Southwest and Northwest Resource Advisory Councils (RAC)'s for their review and recommendations. Comments from both the public at large and the RAC would be considered prior to approval of the business plan. BLM will continue to review fees using the CPI and will inform them of actions taken regarding fee increases.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.blm.gov/colorado/flrea-revenue-and-spending-plans/annual-report/spend-plan-grand-junction-field-office>

## APPENDIX A. D-E NCA RMP Recreation Objectives and Guidance

Recreation	
<p>REC-OBJ-01: Provide quality recreational opportunities that are consistent with, and contribute to, the conservation, protection and enhancement of the resources that were identified as purposes of the designation of the D-E NCA. Manage recreation consistent with biological, natural, and cultural resource objectives.</p>	
Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs) General Guidance	
<p>Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs) are recreation areas that are managed to support and sustain the principal recreation activities and the associated qualities and conditions of the ERMA. ERMA management is commensurate and considered in context with the management of other resources and resource uses. The following general approaches apply to protect activities within the ERMAs designated in this RMP:</p> <p>In ERMAs, new recreation facilities (e.g., trails, trailheads, restrooms) to effectively address demand for identified recreation activity created by growing communities and recreation-tourism will be considered if 1) the proposal is consistent with interdisciplinary land use plan objectives; and 2) sufficient funding and long-term management commitments are secured from internal BLM sources and/or managing partners, visitor fees, or other sources.</p> <p>In ERMAs, BLM funding and staff will be prioritized toward effectively addressing visitor health and safety and user interaction issues and resource protection issues created by recreation activities.</p>	
Ninemile Hill ERMA	
<p>REC-ERMA-AU-06: Limit vehicle camping to designated, undeveloped vehicle campsites (outside of developed campgrounds). Dispersed horse and foot camping is allowed outside designated sites if at a distance greater than ¼ mile off motorized routes.</p>	
Sawmill Mesa/Wagon Park ERMA	
<p>REC-ERMA-AU-20: Escalante Triangle RMZ: Limit overnight camping to designated campsites and/or developed campgrounds.</p>	<p>REC-ERMA-MA-19: If additional management controls are needed to control camping, construct a developed campground in or near the Escalante Triangle RMZ, outside the River Rims ACEC.</p>
Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) General Guidance	
<p>SRMAs are managed to protect and enhance a targeted set of activities, experiences, benefits, and desired recreation setting characteristics. SRMAs may be subdivided into recreation management zones to further delineate specific recreation opportunities. Within SRMAs, management of recreation and visitor services is recognized as the predominant land management focus, where specific recreation opportunities and recreation setting characteristics are managed and protected on a long-term basis.</p>	
Gunnison River SRMA	
<p>REC-SRMA-AU-03: Limit overnight camping to designated campsites (outside of developed campgrounds).</p>	<p>REC-SRMA-MA-06: Implement a Special Area SRP requirement for all overnight private boaters (for the purpose of monitoring and to achieve RMA objectives).</p>
Cactus Park SRMA	
<p> </p>	



REC-SRMA-AU-20: Designate campsites within the RMA. Overnight camping limited to developed campgrounds and designated campsites.

REC-SRMA-AU-11: Limit overnight camping to designated campsites and/or campgrounds.

### Escalante Canyon SRMA

REC-SRMA-AU-20: Designate campsites within the RMA. Overnight camping limited to developed campgrounds and designated campsites.

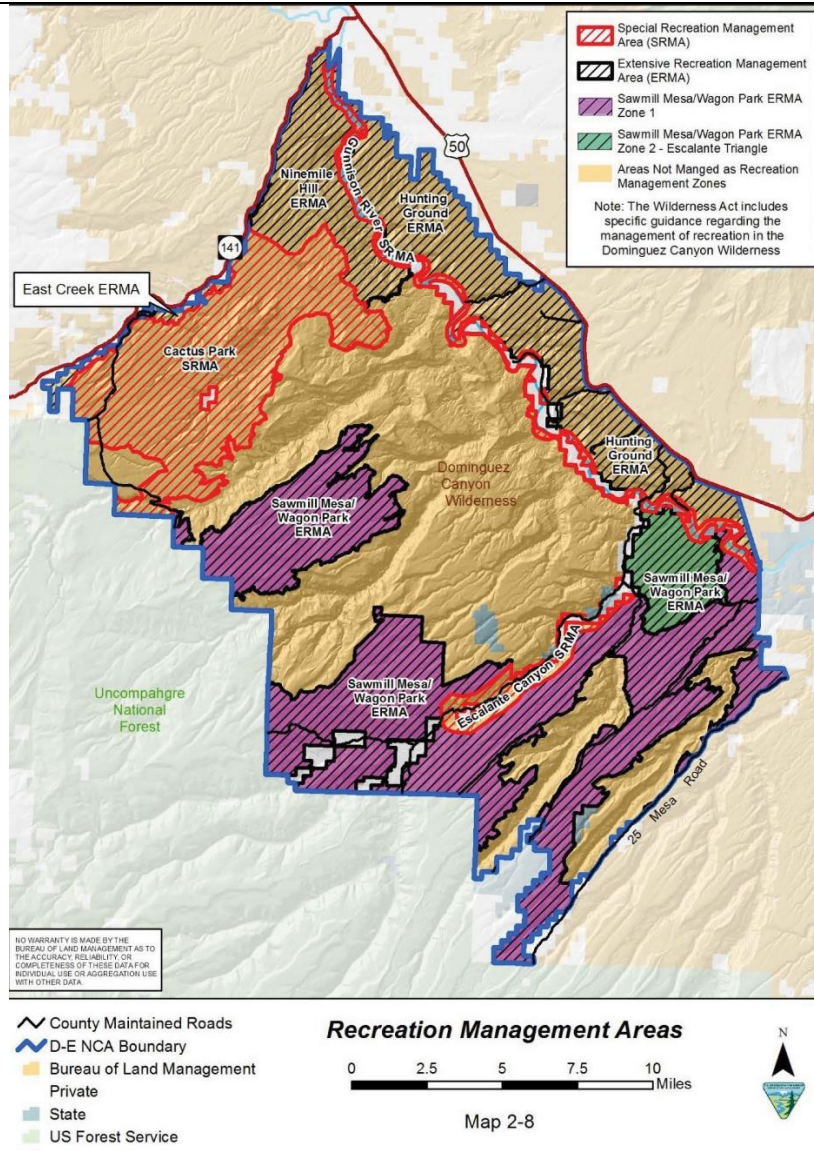
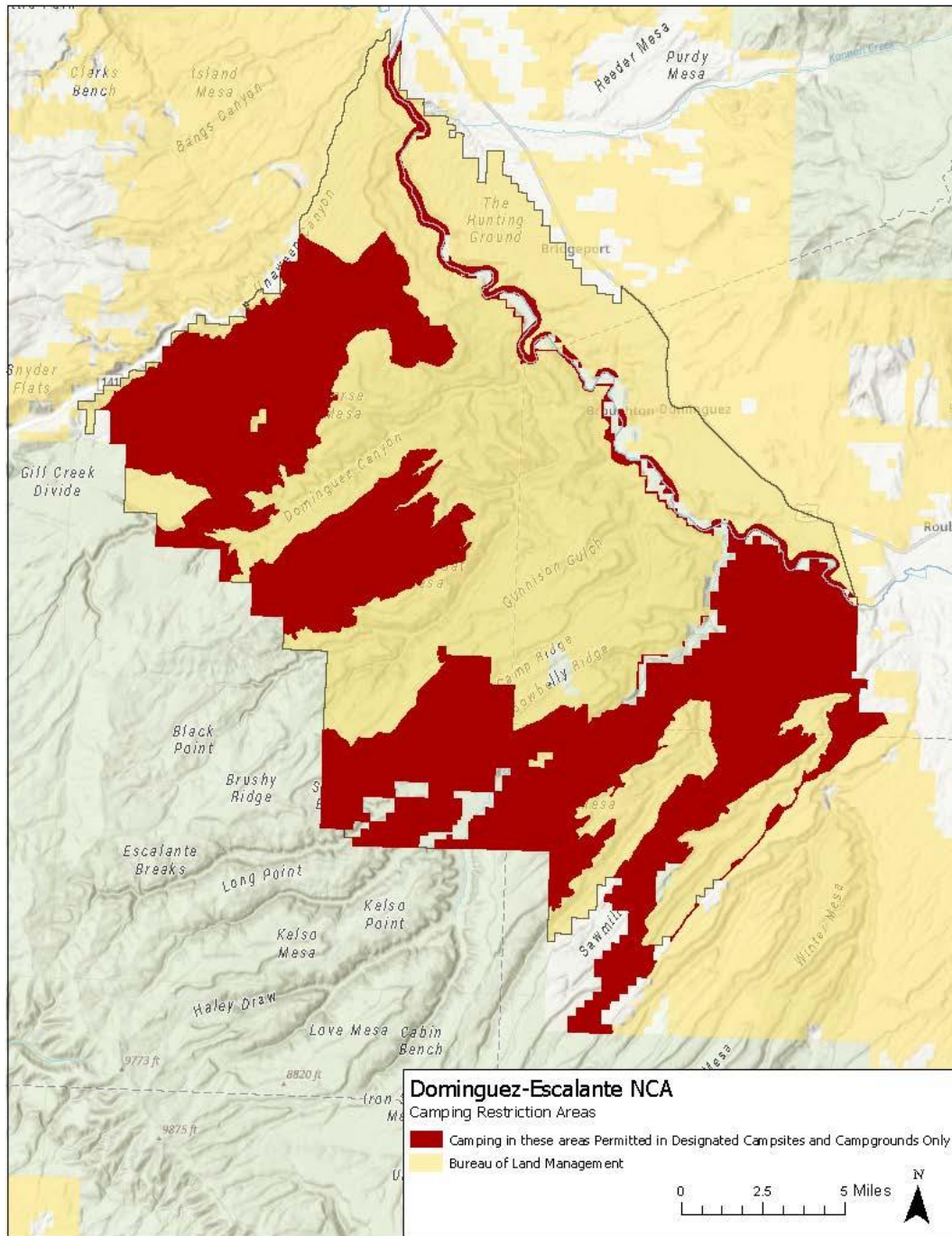


Figure 9 - D-E NCA Recreation Management Areas

## APPENDIX B. Dispersed Camping Restriction Areas in Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area



## FIGURES

Figure 1 - Flow chart of adaptive management for campsite development

Figure 2 - Overview of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA)

Figure 3 - Volunteer Clean-Up Event within the Gunnison River SRMA in D-E NCA

Figure 4 – An example of a campsite at Big Dominguez Campground in D-E NCA

Figure 5 – Potholes Campground in D-E NCA

Figure 6 – Examples of Dispersed Campsites in Escalante Canyon SRMA within D-E NCA

Figure 7 - Special Area (river segments A-D) within Gunnison River SRMA in D-E NCA

Figure 8 - Left: Escalante Boat Ramp. Right: River campsite within Gunnison River SRMA

Figure 9 - D-E NCA Recreation Management Areas

## TABLES

Table 1 – Estimated Visits to D-E NCA, McInnis NCA, and Gunnison Gorge NCA, FY 2018-FY 2022

Table 2 - Population Data for Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties, 1990-2050 (source: Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office, 2023)

Table 3 - Current annual operating costs and projected operating costs in D-E NCA. Projected costs are based on estimated new developments

Table 4 - Projected cost of all necessary amenities to establish recreation fees in D-E NCA. This table only predicts for expanded amenity sites

Table 5 - Projected cost associated with administration of Special Areas

Table 6 - Cost recovery rate calculations for expanded amenity fee sites

Table 7 - Cost recovery rate calculations for Special Area fees

Table 8 - Overview of fair market value fee calculation, BLM proposal relative to private and other federal/state sites.

Table 9 - Fair market value table for campgrounds in the area

Table 10 - Annual Household Income of Visitors Traveling to Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests

Table 11 - Delta, Mesa, and Montrose Counties Environmental Justice Baseline Data