

BLM SOUTHWEST DISTRICT Field Manager Reports



AUGUST 2024



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

Field Manager Report

August 2024

Gunnison Field Office (GFO)

Note: Topics below are labeled either “**Status Update**” or “**New Update**” to help identify items that have changed from the previous report.

Field Office Staffing Update

After a vacancy of over a year and a half, GFO has hired Brian Brown to fill the Assistant Field Manager (AFM) position in Gunnison. Brian served a 120-day detail as the AFM in 2022 and has been with the Gunnison Field Office since August 2009 as our Forester, taking on several collateral roles including Contracting Officer’s Representative and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Coordinator. Of note, Brian served for over two years as the project manager representing BLM’s interests during construction of the new Gunnison Field Office building. Prior to the BLM, Brian served in various forestry and wildlife habitat roles for the State of Idaho Department of Lands.

One of Brian’s first projects will be to lead the hiring of two vacant Rangeland Management Specialist positions. GFO has been without range staff since the March retirement of one and the recent move to another BLM office of the other.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Domestic Sheep Grazing EIS Proposed Decisions - Status Update

On August 27, 2021, the BLM Southwest District Office released two proposed decisions for the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Domestic Sheep Grazing Permit Renewals. Both decisions were protested by multiple groups and individuals for a variety of reasons. The project area is located in Gunnison, Hinsdale, and Ouray counties and includes nine grazing allotments on 65,710 acres of public land.

In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the Southwest Resource Advisory Council voted on September 8, 2022 to create a subcommittee to analyze domestic sheep grazing in bighorn sheep habitat on BLM-managed high alpine allotments outside of Silverton, Colorado. The Sheep Grazing Subcommittee held six public meetings at the Uncompahgre Field Office from March through August 2023, and presented their recommendations to the BLM on October 11, 2023. Staff are considering those recommendations in light of the protests received and working with SWD Planning and Environmental Specialist Katerina Hardegen to identify a path forward.

North Powderhorn Fuels Reduction Project - Status Update

GFO is currently evaluating a programmatic hazardous fuels reduction project on public lands managed by the BLM near Powderhorn, CO. The total project area consists of 90,725 acres, which

includes 53,877 acres within the Powderhorn Wilderness and Wilderness Study Area. GFO would implement the project over 15 years, with a total treatment target of 20,000 acres, targeting bark beetle outbreaks, including numerous portions of the project area suffering 100% spruce mortality. Site-specific NEPA would follow for individual projects within the project area.

The programmatic portion of the North Powderhorn effort was completed in July 2024, with the signing of a Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact. Planning for treatments can now begin in earnest and crews are already out marking transects for data collection for the purpose of establishing a baseline of conditions before treatments are carried out.

Gunnison Weeds Treatment Project - Status Update

GFO is nearing completion of an environmental assessment (EA) to consider using integrated noxious and invasive plant management within the Gunnison Resource Area to reduce adverse impacts associated with increases in noxious and invasive plants. The EA will tier to the “Biological Assessment for Vegetation Treatments Using Aminopyralid, Fluroxypyr, Rimsulfuron on BLM Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement” (PEIS)(BLM 2015), which analyzed the impacts of using the herbicides (chemical control methods) to treat terrestrial noxious and invasive plants on public lands.

The BLM is approving seven herbicide active ingredients to control noxious weeds and invasive species on public lands. The decision was published in the Federal Register on July 12, 2024. BLM field and district offices can now begin considering the use of these tools in efforts to control and eradicate noxious weeds and invasive plant species on the public lands they manage. This would add greater flexibility and additional effectiveness to BLM’s vegetation treatment program to combat the rapid expansion of noxious and invasive weeds. The BLM has begun consultation with the USFWS on the Biological Assessment (BA) for Gunnison sage-grouse and anticipates a letter of concurrence from the USFWS with additional herbicides in critical Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

Lake San Cristobal Fuels EA – Status Update

The performance period for this contract EA was recently extended. The BLM ID Team is currently working with the contractor, EMPSi, to refine treatment areas, alternatives, and issues for analysis. The GFO Wildlife Biologist, members of the fuels staff, and students from Western Colorado University are currently conducting snowshoe hare studies.

This past winter, BLM recreation and fuels staff members spent field time in the project area to determine the feasibility of incorporating backcountry ski runs as potential fuels treatments. The areas identified for joint fuels-recreation treatments are viable for backcountry skiing. The BLM received the drafts of chapters 1, 2, and 3 and recently completed internal reviews.

The BLM is currently working with Hinsdale County, the Colorado State Forest Service, and West Region Wildfire Council to create a flyer about the Lake San Cristobal fuels project and potential funding to treat private lands directly adjacent to the project area. This flyer would be mailed out in late spring or early summer.

Recreation

Alpine Loop - Status Update

GFO saw significant increases in visitor use on the Alpine Loop in the past year, particularly in July and August. Since 2018, there has been over 20% increase in visitation, with close to 400,000 people

visiting the Alpine Loop annually. This has led to parking congestion at popular trailheads and stress on existing campsites and facilities. GFO is working closely with Hinsdale and San Juan counties to address these issues. We have financial agreements in place with both counties to provide law enforcement support and we piloted a wag-bag station at American Basin.

2024 will see continued work toward improving and designating dispersed campsites, modernizing the Mill Creek Campground, adding additional toilets, working with partner groups on outreach and education, and working with the counties to supplement and define parking areas. The BLM evaluated approximately 250 “ad hoc” dispersed campsites along the Alpine Loop as described in the 2010 Alpine Triangle Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) to determine which sites were appropriate to designate. Many inventoried sites were impactful to riparian areas or too close to cultural sites. Sites deemed appropriate to designate had signage and metal fire rings installed, with about 100 sites at this time. GFO is working with partners to adopt and improve an existing route from the Mill Creek Campground to access Sunshine Peak, a 14’er on BLM-managed lands in Hinsdale County.

The BLM is also moving forward (with the support of Hinsdale County) to acquire up to 30 patented mining claims in Hinsdale County. These private lands are adjacent to, or within the boundaries of wilderness study areas and these acquisitions would improve access to public lands and reduce the potential for development in and around our treasured lands on the Alpine Loop.

Developed Campgrounds - Status Update

Now that the necessary consultation and analysis has been completed, GFO has made fee campsites in the GFO reservable through Recreation.gov. GFO analyzed existing user fees at four campgrounds in the Gunnison area for consistency with criteria found in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. This analysis led to the preparation of a business plan recommending regular fee increases in pace with fees charged at area campgrounds. The business plan was presented at the Southwest RAC meeting in Gunnison in October 2023. All four fee campgrounds can now take payment through the “Scan and Pay” App which interfaces with Recreation.gov. Campers with cell service can use this E-commerce solution to make their reservations while on vacation or at any other time with a computer or smartphone.

Mill Creek Campground expansion: GFO has entered the planning phase for expansion of the campground (between Lake City and Cinnamon Pass on the Alpine Loop) and has received preliminary blueprints to start developing our consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Hartman’s Rocks Campground infrastructure improvement: Crews are busy placing boulders for campsite protection and to keep vehicles on trails. A longer-term project is underway to address significant head cuts and erosion in an ephemeral drainage.

Supplementary Rule - Status Update

On February 28, 2024, the BLM published a Federal Register notice announcing a proposed supplementary rule for public lands addressed in five planning efforts in the Tres Rios and Gunnison field offices, along with a 60-day public comment period running through April 29, 2024. The proposed supplementary rule would implement decisions related to motorized and non-motorized vehicles, day use areas, seasonal wildlife habitat protection, camping, and campfires.

Among other things, these rules would implement camping and fire restrictions within the Alpine Triangle, as determined in the TRFO RMP and the Alpine Triangle RAMP, such as providing protections for cultural sites (no camping within 150 feet and no fires within 100 feet of historic

structures), limiting camping to below 12,000 feet in the Redcloud Wilderness Study Area to protect Uncompahgre Fritillary Butterfly habitat, and requiring domestic animals (e.g. dogs) to be on a leash or under voice control within the Silverton Special Recreation Management Area.

Pause on New Special Recreation Permit Issuance - Status Update

GFO has temporarily paused the issuance of new Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) while we conduct a programmatic EA for the administration and issuance of SRPs. Existing permit authorization will be maintained and unimpacted during this planning action. Complimentary to the GUSG RMP Amendment, Alpine Triangle RAMP, and Hartman Rocks RAMP, this programmatic EA will allow the BLM to balance resource impacts with increasing demand for services. This process will:

- Provide data to assist the BLM with identifying where we are over-permitted or have opportunities to increase permitting
- Assist the BLM with processing applications and unique permitting requests
- Provide consistency in defining authorized use areas and guidance for permit stipulations in critical wildlife areas and designated wilderness lands
- Help define the necessary “guard rails” to ensure we have compliance with regulations and resource needs while continuing to provide opportunities to support our communities and public land visitors.

Reasonable modification for use of e-bikes – New Update

Following the issuance of BLM National Headquarters Information Bulletin 2023-050, the GFO has developed a process to consider and authorize the use of e-bikes on our non-motorized trails as a “reasonable modification” under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. GFO has now processed over ten applications submitted by individuals with stated disabilities that, when approved, allows them to operate an e-bike on our non-motorized trail systems. In the meantime, as other planning activities wrap up, GFO will launch an environmental assessment designed to consider allowing unqualified e-bike use on any of our non-motorized trail systems. The process will communicate our intentions far and wide to ensure all user groups and conveyances (hikers, horseback, bicycles, e-bikes, and single-track motorized) have a voice and will be heard.

Lands and Minerals

Mineral Point Water Right Purchase - Status Update

The purpose of the acquisition of the Mineral Point Ditch is to return the historically diverted water to Burrows Creek to maintain instream flows on Burrows Creek and the upper Animas River. The BLM’s acquisition of the property rights associated with Mineral Point Ditch would benefit Burrows Creek by maintaining water supplies for wetlands adjacent to Burrows Creek, diluting heavy metals in Burrows Creek, and facilitating successful implementation of remediation actions taken by BLM’s Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program within the Burrows Creek watershed. The appraisal has been completed and offers to the two holders have been accepted. Work in conjunction with partners will begin soon to monitor the effects on the environment from the reintroduction of this water. GFO has provided the EPA and the Colorado State Dept. Of Public Health and Environment with the action plan to decommission the ditch diversion and reconnect the water with his historical watershed. GFO expects work to begin in late July or early August with the decommissioning work and restoration of the fen that will once again receive waters from Burrows Creek.

Bonita Peak Mining District - Status Update

The Bonita Peak Mining District (BPMD) consists of historic mines and mining-related sources where ongoing releases of metal-laden water and sediments are occurring within the Mineral Creek, Cement Creek, and Upper Animas river drainages in San Juan County, CO. Many of these historic mines are located on public lands managed by the BLM, and 80% of the watershed is managed by the BLM.

The BLM, USFS, and EPA signed a joint memorandum of understanding (MOU) in July 2022 clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each agency. The goal of the MOU is improved cooperation between the agencies with respect to obligations of the EPA under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and BLM obligations under NEPA. The EPA is the lead agency for response actions on the private sites and the BLM is the lead for response actions on BLM-managed public lands.

Cleanup actions within the BPMD are ongoing by multiple agencies. BLM priority actions continue to focus on remediation, characterization of sites for remedy development, and operations and maintenance throughout BPMD. The majority of these sites are in the Cement Creek drainage and the Upper Animas River near its headwaters. The BLM completed work on the Wynona and the Joe and John mine sites this summer. Work on the Lark Mine in Prospect Gulch is ongoing and will likely be completed in the 2024 field season.

The EPA is working to install three monitoring wells in the Sunnyside Gold mine workings in the Lake Emma area. Each of the three wells will target narrow mine workings approximately 800 to 1,000 feet below the ground surface. This drilling effort is estimated to take all summer and into the fall. As part of the mobilization, the EPA will need to temporarily close County Road 25 while the drill rig is driven up to Lake Emma.

These characterization activities are important to EPA's understanding of water quality and movement of groundwater within the workings and throughout the BPMD groundwater system. Specifically, they will help determine hydraulic gradient, flow direction, and potential surface expression of the groundwater. The EPA is also constructing a site-wide repository located on top of the large historic tailings piles north of the town of Silverton. They plan to complete work by the end of the 2024 field season and use the repository to store solid waste material derived from the water treatment plant.

Proposed Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Conveyance for Kendall Mountain Recreation Area - Status Update

The Town of Silverton applied to the BLM to acquire public lands managed as part of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area, under authority of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act of June 14, 1926 (44 Stat. 741), as amended and supplemented (43 U.S.C. 869 et seq) (R&PP Act). The purpose of the Act is to authorize acquisition or use of public lands by states, counties, municipalities, or nonprofit organizations for recreational or other public purposes.

The BLM portion of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area, located on public lands just east of Silverton, has been operated as a community ski area and recreation area under a BLM R&PP lease since 2001. The Kendall Mountain Recreation Area includes the BLM land and the adjacent town-owned Kendall Mountain Placer and Lackawanna Placer. In March 2001, the BLM classified and withdrew the subject public lands for lease and conveyance under the R&PP Act. The purpose of the classification and application for R&PP lease and potential conveyance was to allow for construction and operation of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area.

Field Manager Report - August 2024
Gunnison Field Office

GFO accepted and approved a Plan of Development from the Town of Silverton in summer 2020. The proposed action is to convey approximately 93 acres of public lands to the Town of Silverton. Currently the BLM is awaiting concurrence on potential impacts to Canada lynx habitat, and expects this to be received during Spring 2024. Once concurrence is received and snow has melted off, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment will be completed. Because an Environmental Site Assessment report is only good for six months before an update is required, timing is essential.



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Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO) Canyons of the Ancients National Monument (CANM)

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Planning

Transportation and Access Plan (TAP2) - Status Update

The second TAP addresses BLM lands in Dolores, San Miguel, and Montrose counties. A resource management plan maintenance map, which established all inventoried routes for the TAP2 planning area, was published on December 5, 2023. Using this inventory as a baseline for designations, the BLM interdisciplinary team (IDT) is beginning an internal route-by-route review and the development of alternatives. Our target is to share this preliminary analysis with the public in fall/winter 2024. Public scoping, including meetings, will be planned to coincide with the issuance of the preliminary analysis.

Fuels and Timber

West Rim Timber Sale - Status Update

To keep ponderosa pine forests healthy, the BLM has completed the logging pile burn for 495 acres in the East Pines area. All logging piles have been seeded this spring. The BLM will complete an additional 110 acres of skidding on previously thinned areas in North Pines.

Dawson

Dawson Research project was designed by Colorado State University, the University of Reno Nevada, and the University of California Berkeley in conjunction with the BLM. The overarching goal is to create more research and literature on the pinyon and juniper vegetation types. Implementation of the prescription is complete. The BLM burned some piles this winter and plans to burn the rest in winter of 2024-25. All areas where piles were burned have been seeded.

Yellow Jacket Noxious Tree/Brush Removal - Status Update

The piles created from a previously completed cut, pile, and spray of 100 acres of tamarisk and Russian olive along Yellow Jacket Creek were burned by the BLM and the pile areas were seeded in FY24. The BLM also sprayed 40 acres of previously cut Russian olive and tamarisk in the Yellow Jacket area.

Dawson Draw Prescribed Fire - Status Update

New Dawson units have been developed in the project area. The prep and burning of 990 acres could begin next year.

West Rim Prescribed Fire - Status Update

The BLM accomplished 1555 acres with help from cooperators in FY24 so far. We plan to burn up to another 1,536 acres this fall and up to 3,091 acres in total in FY24.

Summit Lake

Pile and mastication will continue this year in the Summit Lake area. The 28-acre project area is in an important Wildland Urban Interface area.

Durango Area Hazardous Fuels Projects (signed January 2021)

This project reduces hazards associated with vegetation near and around the Durango area. It addresses a long-term need to manage vegetation adjacent to critical infrastructure, which includes reducing tree and shrub densities and fuel loads and protecting ecosystem heterogeneity. The BLM implements various treatments, including prescribed fire, manual tree removal/felling, pile burning, understory burning, and vegetative mastication.

Grassy Mountain Project - New Update

In Durango, most of our efforts will focus on the Grassy Mountain Project, which involves 411 acres of BLM land. This Shared Stewardship Project with the National Forest Foundation, U.S. Forest Service, and Colorado State Forest Service involves thinning stands and minimizing ladder fuels to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, which in turn reduces potential harm to watersheds and protects recreational opportunities. The project went out to bid in early July, additional changes will be made to the contract and it will be put out to bid again in August.

Grandview - Status Update

The BLM burned 247 acres of piles this past winter. Seeding has occurred on all but three of the units. Additional thinning around ponderosa stands in the area will occur this summer.

Rabbit Mountain EA

Work may begin on Rabbit Mountain this fall. The BLM plans to prep/burn previously burnt units from 2016-2019.

Wildlife

Durango Area Winter Wildlife Closures

In 2023, BLM completed the installation of permanent gates and wing fences at popular recreation access points within the winter wildlife closures areas around Durango. This action helped bolster enforceability of and conformance with annual winter wildlife closures in this popular recreation area. Compared with data from previous years, the 2023-2024 season saw an approximately 80% improvement in closure compliance. RMP closure language has also been modified to lift the closures on April 30 with the option to open earlier on April 15, as conditions allow.

Gunnison Sage Grouse

The GUSG RMP Amendment planning effort is still underway and the Record of Decision is anticipated to be signed in October 2024.

Summit Point Habitat Restoration Project

The TRFO Wildlife Program has coordinated with CPW on a 1,200-acre habitat improvement project for pinyon jays and big game. The project aims to improve habitat for pinyon jays, using various treatment methods for thinning pinyon and juniper to provide multiple age classes. The EA

was signed and posted on July 15, 2024.

Zeedyke Structures, Dry Creek Basin

To improve wildlife habitat in Dry Creek Basin, in June 2024 the TRFO wildlife staff coordinated a Colorado Youth Corps Association crew to install ten “rock dam” features (zeedykes) with the aim of improving water infiltration and habitat quality for local wildlife.



Zeedyke features constructed to improve wildlife habitat in Dry Creek Basin.

Canyons of the Ancients NM Big Game Habitat Management

In 2019, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) updated big game critical winter range mapping, adding over 100,000 acres of critical winter range to CANM. The BLM is still working to determine how to adapt management in these areas, primarily through an RMP amendment process presently underway to incorporate these mapping updates.

Unit	FY 19 Acres	CPW Update Acres	Increase in Acres
TRFO	181,984	230,985	49,001
CANM	0	100,846	100,846

Range and Weeds Management

General Permit Administration

At present, both of the TRFO/CANM Range Specialist positions are vacant. Our latest hiring effort resulted in the extension of two job offers that are presently out for review (as of July 16). Fiscal year 2025 will continue to see our Range workload dialed back as we (hopefully) onboard two brand new RMSs and work toward full capacity.

Weeds

The local BLM weeds crew directly treats approximately 300 acres of BLM-managed lands in TRFO and CANM annually. These acres are treated strategically to benefit functioning ecosystems and prevent new outbreaks from spreading, particularly in critical and potential habitat for Gunnison sage-grouse.

Spring Creek Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA)

The current wild horse population is 68, which is within the Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the HMA. In 2024, PZP (porcine zona pellucida vaccine) contraceptive efforts focused on retreating 19 mares that were not vaccinated last season. One new foal joined the herd this spring.



Gypsum Valley Grazing Decision

The final grazing decision was signed in August 2021 and appealed shortly thereafter by Western Watersheds Project. A petition to stay the decision was denied and the new permit was issued. The appeal is presently before the Interior Board of Land Appeals.

Recreation

Dolores River

No boatable spill in 2024...fingers crossed for 2025!

Vandalism

There has been a marked uptick in theft and vandalism of TRFO recreational infrastructure this year. Total cost of replacing and reinstalling stolen signs, gates, and kiosk panels in FY24 is rapidly approaching \$10,000. BLM Law Enforcement, in coordination with local agencies, has done an incredible job of identifying suspects and pursuing justice, although this has had little effect on reversing the unfortunate trend.

Animas City Mountain

On the heels of last year's successful prescribed burn on Animas City Mountain, which roughed in burn units based on trails approved during TAP1, both the Southwest Conservation Corps and Durango Trails finished the Lupine and Merve Trails. Additional volunteer work has improved various sections of trail around ACM and on BLM lands around the Durango.

Road 41 Parking

Implementation of the TAP1 decision to develop a parking area providing cross country non-mechanized access to both Weber and Menefee Wilderness Study Areas is complete. This parking area south of Mancos on Road 41 provides three pull-through trailer parking spots and six passenger vehicle parking spots.

Mud Springs

Approximately \$34k was spent contracting improvements at Mud Springs, south of Cortez, authorized under the TAP1 decision. Fencing installed under this contract will delineate a new OHV play area as well as mitigate illegal cross country damage to cultural resources caused by dirt bikes. Additional funding from CPW will continue building out this developed recreation area.

Aqueduct

2024 saw the finishing touches on the main Aqueduct parking area, northwest of Mancos. This work was implemented under the TAP1 decision authority. A new shade shelter was purchased and installed by our partners, the Mancos Trails Group, with support from the LOR Foundation. A local welder also created a custom "rustic" bike rack. The BLM contributed a picnic table, the material and labor to build an adjacent changing room, and funding to locate a port-o-let at the trail head seasonally.



Aqueduct parking area benefited from a number of improvements driven by local partners.

Cultural Resources

Uravan Mineral Belt Interpretation Loop

The TRFO archaeologist is working on route designation of an existing driving loop, accompanied by interpretive materials at select locations, that would be known as the Yellowcake Trail. The intent of the historic interpretive loop would be to preserve and share the history of uranium mining around Radium and Wedding Bell Mountains.

National Register Nominations

Burro Mine, nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, is anticipated to be officially listed by summer 2025.

Travel Planning and Implementation PA

In this BLM multi-office agreement, TRFO will continue to systematically complete cultural resource inventory of travel routes in the TAP2 planning area, and work towards revisitation of 183 historic properties with travel routes in their boundary and assess those sites for travel-related effects.

Minerals (Fluid)

Paradox Resources - Status Update

TRFO has been working in conjunction with the BLM Colorado State Office, Utah State Office, and Office of Natural Resource Revenue (ONRR) on a long-running compliance issue regarding royalty payment from federal units existing in both Colorado and Utah. Shut-in requests were received from ONRR in January, and the orders were translated into Incidents of Non-Compliance (INCs) and issued to Paradox in early March. 42 wells within the Andy's Mesa Unit (San Miguel County, Colorado) were issued and executed, with potential civil penalties in excess of \$38,000,000.00 to begin on June 1, 2023.

In May 2023, Paradox filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and is currently working with BLM solicitors, bankruptcy courts, and ONRR solicitors on a resolution that may or may not result in a lifting of the shut-in order. BLM Colorado submitted a proof of claim in October for \$157,916,000 for remediation and reclamation of all of Paradox and Four Corner's assets and federal interests.

On November 7, 2023, the bankruptcy court approved a proposed sale of all of Paradox and Four Corner's assets, including its federal interests. As part of the proposed plan of sale, GNG Partners agreed to pay all of the outstanding royalties and rentals to ONRR quarterly over 5 years. This comes to approximately 3 million dollars. The payment plan is backloaded with larger payments due in 2025. Typically, this is something that DOI would object to, but a decision was made by Interior leadership to not object to the sale based on the payment plan.

Update July 2024

GNG Partners has transferred the properties to a new operator. BLM COSO communicated the resignation of Paradox as operator and designation of American Helium Colorado as the new operator in Colorado. The process of transition is currently in progress.

Oil and Gas Development Projects - Status Update

Fluid mineral development recently has focused on tribal interests, with nearly all current activity within the TRFO taking place on Southern Ute Indian Reservation surface in the northern portion of the San Juan Basin, targeting primarily Mancos Shale methane gas and Fruitland Coal Bed Methane. The one exception is Kimber Morgan's well targeting carbon dioxide.

Summary of FY23 Approvals – New Notice

Operator	Well Name/Well Number	Disposition Date	Disposition
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL BB 33-6/27-3	8-Jul-2024	APPROVED
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL BB 33-6/27-2	8-Jul-2024	APPROVED
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL HS 32-6/2-1	11-Mar-2024	APPROVED
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL HS 32-6/#2- 2	11-Mar-2024	APPROVED
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE 32-9/#23-7H	20-May-2024	APPROVED
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL HS 32-6/#2-3	7-Mar-2024	APPROVED

Operator	Well Name/Well Number	Disposition Date	Disposition
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	REDTAIL BB 33-6/#27-1	13-Feb-2024	APPROVED
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE/705H	16-Oct-2023	APPROVED
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE/703H	16-Oct-2023	APPROVED
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE/701H	16-Oct-2023	APPROVED
KINDER MORGAN C02 COMPANY LLC	DOE CANYON/DW-1	15-Jul-2024	APPROVED
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE /706H	21-Feb-2024	In Reviews
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE /707H	21-Feb-2024	In Reviews
HILCORP ENERGY COMPANY	SOUTHERN UTE /704H	21-Feb-2024	In Reviews
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	OSPREY 32-5 / 5-2	1-Jun-2024	In Reviews
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	OSPREY 32-5 / 5-3	14-May-2024	In Reviews
RED WILLOW PRODUCTION COMPANY	OSPREY 32-5 / 5-1	6-May-2024	In Reviews

Inspection and Enforcement
Planned Inspections for FY 24

PET/PAT Workload:

Drilling: 15 (Federal- 5; Indian- 10)

Plugging: 36 (Federal- 16; Indian- 20)

Production Inspection: 314 (Federal- 6 high, 65 low; Indian- 12 high, 231 low)

Idle: 52 (Federal-13, 5 extra; Indian-34 high, 0 extra)

Workover: 100 (Federal- 0; Indian- 60 high, 40 low)

Oversight for PI: 7 (Federal- 2; Indian- 5)

Records Verification: 232 (Federal- 21 high, 70 extra; Indian- 71 high, 70 extra)

Oversight for RA/RV: 7 (Federal- 3; Indian- 4)

Surface Workload:

Environmental Surface: 255 (Federal- 125; Indian- 130)

Environmental Monitoring: 98 (Federal- 25; Indian- 68)

Coordination - New Notice

TRFO held quarterly meetings with the Southern Ute Tribe, as well as the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, to ensure our relationships and communication pathways remain open and collaborative. Quarterly meetings were also held with Kinder Morgan, which is our largest federal fluid mineral producer actively pursuing APDs.

Coordination meetings were also held with the Montezuma, Dolores, LaPlata, and San Miguel Boards of County Commissioners.

NSJB Stakeholder Meetings

TRFO is once again participating in the Northern San Juan Basin Stakeholder meetings organized by the San Juan National Forest (SJNF). These meetings serve as coordination on fluid mineral issues between the BLM, Columbine Ranger District of the SJNF, ECMC, and LaPlata and Archuleta counties, as well as representatives from local industry groups.

The final Fluid Mineral Leases and Leasing Process rule took effect on June 22, 2024. BLM Headquarters, Division of Fluid Minerals, provided training in June on:

- the bond changes (e.g., minimum bond amounts, bond phase-in, etc.)
- the operational changes (e.g., APD terms, suspensions, shut-in/temporarily abandoned wells, agreement filing fees,
- the post-leasing changes (e.g., updated filing fees, lease reinstatements, expiration of a lease for cessation of production, lease suspensions, , etc.)
- the pre-leasing changes (e.g., lease terms, lease preference criteria, required public participation periods, etc.) due to the final rule.

Southern Ute Community Action Programs, Inc. (SUCAP) Outreach Meetings

TRFO also participated in joint mineral outreach meetings organized by the ONRR and held in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration. The May meeting was held in Ignacio to answer questions for individual Indian mineral owners.

Minerals (Solid)

Locatable Minerals Projects

43 CFR 3809 Claims Under General Mining Law

Summary: TRFO has active uranium/vanadium and copper notices, as well as one plan of operations update.

Plans of Operation

Sunday Mines Plan of Operations - Status Update

TRFO has put this undertaking and project on hold pending submission of information related to reclamation and the proposed action. Under the current plan of operations, Piñon Ridge can produce material from 4 out of 5 shafts, but will be forced to reclaim the Topaz shaft in 2025 if an updated plan of operations is not approved for that portion of the operation.

Plans- 3809

Project	Operator	COC	Accepted	Acreage	Inspection
Sunday	Piñon Ridge	CO106029180	1981	57.6	4/10/2024
West Sunday	Piñon Ridge	CO105952325	1981	12.3	4/10/2024

Notices-3809

Project	Operator	COC	Inspection
Topaz	Piñon Ridge	COC70791	4/10/2024
Blue Streak	Nuvmco	CO101365983	5/29/2024
Stateline	Alianza	CO105257399	7/9/2024
Klondike	Alianza	COC80738	5/29/2024; 07/01/2024
Radium Hill	Thor	COC40448	6/5/2024
Sec 23	Thor	CO106332707	6/5/2024
Groundhog	Thor	CO106342023	6/5/2024
Rimrock	Thor	CO106342021	6/5/2024
Slick Rock	Highbury	CO106332662	2/14/2024

43 CFR 3600 Mineral Materials

Summary: Multiple active Free Use Permits (FUPs) as well as one recently released competitive (COMP) pit.

FUPs and COMP - 3600

Operator	Project	Disposition	Status
San Miguel County	Klondike	Accepted	Active
Montezuma County	Tozer	Accepted	Active
Dolores County	Disappointment	Accepted	Active
Dolores County	Black Snag	Accepted	Active
San Juan County	Dry Creek	Accepted	Active
LaPlata County	Montoya	Accepted	Active
Robert Dougherty	Cedar Point	Accepted	Closed

43 CFR 3500 Solid Leasable Materials

Summary: Recent submission of potash project identical to one previously analyzed (10 years ago), currently under analysis and review at the Colorado State Office BLM.

Prospecting Permits - 3500

Operator	Project	Disposition	Status
Ranahan	CO106326175	Received	Under Analysis
Ranahan	CO106326177	Received	Under Analysis
Ranahan	CO106326178	Received	Under Analysis
Ranahan	CO106326179	Received	Under Analysis
Ranahan	CO106326181	Received	Under Analysis

43 CFR 3400 Coal Management

Summary: The King Coal Lease boundary modification was finalized in Summer 2023.

Exploration Permits - 3400

Operator	Project	Disposition	Status
GCC	CO106100173	Approved	Active
GCC	CO106052020	Approved	Active
GCC	CO106093503	Approved	Active

43 CFR 3601 Mineral Materials Disposal Discussion

Disappointment Pit Expansion

TRFO is seeking comments on the preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzing a proposal from Dolores County Road & Bridge to expand the Disappointment Gravel Pit by 4.6 acres to mine an additional 50,000 cubic yards of mineral materials, located in San Miguel County, Colorado. (DOI-BLM-CO-SO10-2024-0021-EA). Comments can be made on the BLM's ePlanning website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/admin/project/2033139/570>

Comments should be substantive in nature and must be submitted through the ePlanning website by close of business **August 6, 2024**.

Black Snag Pit

TRFO anticipates processing an EA to expand the existing Black Snag Pit located in upper Disappointment Valley. BLM is also working with Dolores County on a possible upgrade to the Disappointment Creek crossing on the access road.

Montoya Pit

TRFO conducted an inspection of the currently operating Montoya Pit in LaPlata County. The continued production of gravel for the Four Corners Region is reliant on this pit. An additional quantity of disturbance (exact size unknown) is expected to be proposed in later 2023, recognizing the current production area will be mined out within the next 24 months. TRFO anticipates an EA for this likely beginning spring 2024.

Coordination

Western Small Miners Association

TRFO participated in regular meetings that most recently met in October 2023. The purpose of the meetings is round table discussion with regulators, industry representatives, and interested public related to federal and state permitting processes as well as the future of mining on the western slope of Colorado. Field and District office staff will attend the next regular meeting of this association in April 2024.

Abandoned Mine Lands

TRFO AML Program Update

TRFO completed NEPA on the closure of approximately 200 hazardous abandoned mine openings by the Department of Energy/Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety and Freeport in FY23. DOE/DRMS completed construction of approximately 145 hazardous abandoned mine openings in spring and fall 2023.

Northwind

Northwind completed their physical safety hazard inventory on hundreds of mine openings in western San Miguel, Montrose, Dolores, and Montezuma counties in Summer 2021 and were issued a contract for remediation work to be completed in FY22, including surveys, NEPA analysis, and closure construction. In fall 2023, Northwind completed 15 closures; no more closures are anticipated from Northwind.

DOE-DRUM - Status Update

DOE survey work is almost completed on Cold War-era defense-related uranium mines (DRUM) in San Miguel, Dolores, and Montezuma counties. DOE/DRMS completed construction of approximately 145 hazardous abandoned mine openings in Spring and Fall 2023. TRFO expects to receive a draft proposed action in February 2024 for additional closures to be performed by DOE and DRMS in 2025.

Freeport McMoRan - Status Update

Freeport completed construction on a portion of what was approved in Fall 2023 (~30 features), and have additional closures pending for Spring or Fall 2024(~5-10). Freeport is almost complete with new feature closures in TRFO, and will be working with the office to address sites which were put on a wait list due to difficult conditions and continue monitoring closures which were already performed.

Lands and Realty

Program Update

TRFO is in the process of filling a critical vacancy; our realty program has been without a full-time Realty Specialist for over two years. A vacancy announcement closed in mid-November and interviews were completed; unfortunately no candidates were selected. This has been an issue for several positions in TRFO and throughout the state. A new approach was undertaken and TRFO now anticipates having a full-time Realty Specialist in place by fall of 2024.

Canyons of the Ancients National Monument

Visitor Center and Museum - Status Update

The Canyons of the Ancients Visitor Center and Museum is open for normally scheduled days and hours from 9-5, Tuesday through Sunday.

Upcoming Events

- Star Party. September 6
- Luminaria Night. December 6
- Monthly lectures and indigenous art demonstrations.

Yellow Jacket and Flodine Park Grazing Allotments - Status Update

CANM initiated Section 106 consultation for a proposal to reissue permits for livestock grazing on the vacant Yellow Jacket and Flodine Park allotments. Staff are developing a programmatic agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to identify potential adverse effects to cultural resources and associated mitigations. I. A draft final agreement was sent to tribes and interested parties the week of April 15 with a deadline of May 31 for providing comments. The comments are currently being incorporated into the final version of the document. Once the agreement is complete, CANM will go through the NEPA process, with input from tribes and other interested parties to analyze other potential impacts from the proposal.

Mary Austin Acquisition (CANM)

The final decision for the Mary Austin acquisition was appealed by several parties opposed to grazing in the Monument on the grounds of adjusting the percent public lands as it relates to billing the permittees on the effected allotments. A petition for stay was denied. The administrative record is presently under review by a Department of Interior Solicitor prior to submission to the IBLA.

Painted Hand Pueblo

Upgrades to facilities at the Painted Hand Pueblo public site will be completed over the next couple of months. An accessible trail will be constructed with help from a trail crew from Saguaro National Park trail crew. Additionally. Interpretive signs, including images from students from the Maryland Institute College of Art, will be installed.



Field Manager Report

August 2024

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) including Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (GGNCA) and the UFO portion of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-ENCA)

Note: Topics below are all Status Updates, unless noted otherwise.

Planning

UFO Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Management and Planning Solutions, Inc (EMPSi) was awarded the UFO RMP Amendment contract in August 2023. The settlement agreements to the 2020 Approved RMP required a Notice of Intent (NOI) formally initiating the project to be published within 60 days of publication of the Notice of Availability for the Draft RMP Amendment for Gunnison sage-grouse, or big game, in the Federal Register, whichever came later. The NOI for the UFO RMP Amendment was published January 5, 2024, opening a 45-day public scoping period that ran through February 20. The BLM hosted two virtual public meetings on January 23 and 24 and one in-person open house at the Ute Indian Museum in Montrose on February 1.

The EIS includes an alternative that has more acres subject to No Leasing for oil and gas compared to the most conservative alternative (Alt. B.1) in the 2019 Proposed RMP. The RMP Amendment must also carry forward for further consideration Areas of Critical Environmental Concern previously considered under Alternative B.1 and management of lands with wilderness characteristics previously analyzed. Information and documents are posted on the ePlanning project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>

Personnel

In June, Dan Ben-Horin began as the UFO Field Manager. Dan comes to the UFO from the BLM Grand Junction Field Office, where he served as a National Conservation Lands Specialist for Dominguez-Escalante and McInnis Canyons national conservation areas. Dan is no stranger to the Western Slope, working with many UFO staff on project and management issues related to Dominguez-Escalante NCA. He also served in a detail in Montrose as a Southwest District NEPA Coordinator.

Our vacant Rangeland Management Specialist position was recently advertised, and we hope to fill the position in September or early October.

The UFO Recreation Team will be getting more robust starting later in August. The BLM hired Cameron Stark into our new Park Ranger position. Cameron will oversee both the OHV and non-motorized trail programs in UFO and GGNCA. He will provide guidance and expertise for both programs and improve our ability to serve our trail users. Cameron comes to us from BLM Utah's Price Field Office where he was a river ranger for several years. We plan to support this new position with both OHV grant funds and recreation fees.

Grazing and Natural Resources

Grazing Permit Renewals

Meanwhile, we continue to chip away at the following complex and high visibility permits:

- ***Crawford Area Allotments*** - The UFO has finished collecting supplemental land health data on the Green Mountain, Grizzly Gulch, Iron Springs, Poison Spring, and Gould Reservoir allotments in the Crawford area needed to complete the land health assessment for these allotments. Once revisions are completed, the land health assessment and evaluation, along with a draft determination document, will be sent to the interested public for comment. These allotments contain habitat for the Crawford satellite population of Gunnison sage-grouse and bighorn sheep.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on a three-year interim grazing plan for both sheep and cattle grazing in the Green Mountain Allotment has been completed. In the interim management plan, the BLM committed to monitoring utilization during and after the grazing season to ensure compliance with the plan. Utilization was collected for cattle grazing in the allotment this year and although monitored utilization levels have not been summarized to date, we are confident that observed levels of use were below agreed upon rates. A report of observed utilization levels will be sent to the USFWS in the coming weeks.

- ***Cactus Park & Lower Escalante Allotments*** - UFO is working with new permittees on sheep to cattle conversions for overlapping bighorn habitat in the Cactus Park and Lower Escalante allotments in Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The National Wildlife Federation is spearheading the installation of water catchments in support of the livestock conversion. The UFO is working on initiating NEPA analysis for the catchments; as well as reaching out to CO Department of Transportation to explore installing fencing along Highway 50 to prevent livestock and vehicle conflicts on the highway. We are working with National Wildlife Federation on the purchase of virtual fence towers to facilitate livestock management in these allotments utilizing virtual fences.

Texas A&M Corvid Surveying Project

The BLM is partnering with Texas A&M University and Cal-Poly Humboldt State University to determine raven presence, habitat selection, and density in occupied Gunnison sage-grouse habitat for the Crawford population. BLM Colorado natural resource managers need comprehensive information about the impacts of predators in general, and ravens in particular, on Gunnison sage-grouse populations. A 36-month project was recently funded to include a fully funded MS graduate student hired to begin work in fall 2024.

BLM/CPW Bighorn Sheep Population Estimation

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) periodically conducts research to better understand the nature of bighorn sheep populations including, but not limited to, interactions with domestic livestock, habitat selection and use, general population information, and population dynamics. This information is critical to CPW achieving its mandate of managing and conserving bighorn sheep populations. The information is also necessary for BLM to work with CPW to manage and maintain the S-80 bighorn sheep herd within the Gunnison Gorge NCA. Information collected during this effort will estimate and refine maps of seasonal habitats, including core herd home range, and refine density estimates for the S-80 herd utilizing Mark-Resight Density estimation. To this end, the BLM and CPW will be conducting camera resight surveys on marked bighorn sheep in the GGNCA during summer and fall 2024.

Dolores River Restoration Partnership

In FY22-23, the Dolores River Restoration Partnership (DRRP) completed 22 acres of initial tamarisk removal, 18 acres of revegetation with native plants (mostly grasses and forbs in no longer connected flood plains), and 230 acres of tamarisk resprout treatments in Uncompahgre, Tres Rios, and Grand Junction field offices. An additional 250 acres of secondary weeds was treated in TRFO and UFO. Forty-five conservation crew members were employed, contributing 588 hours, and the BLM hosted 33 volunteers to conduct cottonwood planting near the confluence of the Dolores and San Miguel rivers.

The UFO received Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding in FY22 to perform mastication work on 26 acres of heavy dense tamarisk on Bureau of Reclamation and BLM lands in the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area. The NEPA analysis for the BOR portion was completed in August 2023 and work was completed on 18 of the 26 proposed acres in December 2023. The work occurred about a quarter mile upriver from the Bedrock boat launch. The remaining six acres were no longer accessible to equipment due to large flows in 2023. In early October, an 8-person hand crew (Southwest Conservation Corps) conducted a 5-acre initial tamarisk removal project a half-mile above the confluence with Mesa Creek and will continue work on this stand in fall 2024.

Clay-loving wild buckwheat

Field office staff completed a highly accurate habitat probability model for the endangered clay-loving wild buckwheat (*Eriogonum pelinophilum*) while working with the USFWS on a Species Status Assessment to inform future decision making regarding the species. The BLM prepared a manuscript on the work, which was accepted for publication in the journal *Ecology and Evolution* in December 2023 and is available online at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ece3.10816>

Recreation

Rim Rucker-Electric Hills Trailhead

The singletrack trail system is very close to being fully built. Montrose County continues work on construction and improvements to the shared trailhead. The county holds a Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) lease on 40 acres there, including the trailhead and some surrounding lands.

Regional Partnership Initiatives

CPW and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) have collaborated to fund new and existing coalitions to join a statewide initiative working to ensure that Colorado's land, water, and wildlife thrive while also providing for equitable and quality outdoor recreation experiences. UFO participates in two southwest Colorado initiative groups. You can view the Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative story map online at: storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/393237b131b2455e9ff2fc3692c4226f

- The Ouray Regional Recreation and Conservation Alliance (ORRCA) is generally focused in the Ouray County area. Most of the federal lands in that area are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, so most of the group's focus thus far has been on National Forest lands.
- The Western Slope Outdoors Alliance (WSOA) is focused on Montrose, Delta, and Mesa counties within the watersheds of the Uncompahgre, Gunnison, and Colorado rivers. The group is about a year into the process. UFO staff are on the steering committee for the alliance, and actively involved in the group's work on its focus and goals. The three counties, various user groups, and members of the public are actively engaged. The group recently secured funding from CPW to hire a coordinator. The position has been advertised and a selection should be made soon.

Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Planning

Shortly after The Jumbo Mountain Travel Management Plan went into effect last fall, the BLM, the town of Paonia, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado held a work event on the trail system. Volunteers completed over a mile of maintenance on system trails, including the construction of numerous water bars. The trails opened for the season on April 15. Unfortunately, many of the seasonal closure signs appear to have been removed over the winter, and there was evidence of violation of the closure.

The BLM and our partner group, COPMOBA, are working with the local trails group to find ways to better engage local trail users to build community support for involvement on work projects and compliance with seasonal restrictions. The UFO is planning to install a kiosk with helpful information in Paonia's Apple Valley Park on National Public Lands Day in September. Apple Valley Park serves as the main staging area for the trail system.

West End Trails

The West End Trails Alliance, along with the towns of Nucla and Naturita, have been developing proposals for trail systems on BLM-managed lands in Montrose County's West End. Feeling the pain of a local economic downturn in the area following the closure of the New Horizon coal mine and Nucla Station power plant, the West End communities have been looking at ways to bolster the local economy and improve recreational amenities at the same time. While in the early stages of the process, the UFO is taking this on as our next travel management planning project. UFO staff is currently working to update kiosks in the area.

UFO Business Plan

The UFO Draft Business Plan outlining a proposal to charge new amenity fees at specified developed campgrounds and day use areas has been reviewed by the recreation team at the BLM Colorado State Office and Headquarters and comments have been incorporated. Next, we will have a public review and comment period from August 12 through September 16. Public comments will then be addressed and incorporated where appropriate, and the BLM will present the results of that process to the Southwest RAC at their November meeting and seek a recommendation at that time. The BLM hopes to start charging fees at some sites in spring 2025.

Lands and Minerals

Defense Related Uranium Mines (DRUM) Program

The Department of Energy's DRUM Program is a collaborative effort between the Colorado Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety and the BLM to physically close abandoned mine features on BLM-managed lands. DRUM program goals are to reconcile and improve abandoned mine lands (AML) data, conduct, and assess condition inventories, and determine physical safety hazards to both human health and environment. The program's current focus is on abandoned uranium mines within Uncompahgre, Tres Rios, and Grand Junction field offices. The proposed closures would obstruct and block access into adits, shafts, stopes, breakdown portals, subsidence portals, and unstable historical mining structures related to the uranium mining production era between the 1930s and 1970s. This work is needed to protect public safety by eliminating or reducing risks posed by abandoned mines while conserving wildlife habitat and preserving cultural resources.

North Fork Mancos Master Development Plan Supplemental Environmental Assessment

The Colorado River Valley Field Office, with support from the Colorado State Office Air Program, UFO, and the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, prepared a [supplemental EA](#) in

response to a remand of the North Fork Mancos Master Development Plan (MPD) by the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado. The supplemental EA addresses deficiencies cited by the Court, including an updated analysis of greenhouse emissions from construction, production, compression, transportation, and end-use (primarily combustion) of federal oil and gas produced by the project and the potential effects on air quality and climate change.

The updated proposed action provides new estimates of air emissions, conforms with 2021 State of Colorado air quality regulations for oil and gas activities, and includes operator-committed measures to reduce air emissions further and ensure compliance with regulatory standards. The final supplemental EA incorporates changes and clarifications in response to substantive public comments.

The BLM issued a Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact for portions of the MDP involving private and BLM surface September 29, 2023. The USFS issued a Decision Notice on Surface Use Plans of Operations for five wells in the Trail Gulch Unit in March, and the BLM issued a second decision May 3, 2024 approving three well pads proposed to be built or expanded on National Forest System lands subject to approval by the USFS.

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (GGNCA)

25th Anniversary of Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Gunnison Gorge Wilderness

On October 21, 2024, the BLM will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment by Congress of Gunnison Gorge NCA and the designation of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness within the NCA. The NCA was recognized for offering exceptional multiple use opportunities, natural, cultural, scenic, wilderness, and recreational resources and being worthy of additional protection, and was expanded to its current size of 62,844 acres in 2003.

Dark Sky Park Certification

In acknowledgement of the outstanding dark, starry skies of Gunnison Gorge NCA, the BLM, CCA, and community partners, including the Western Slope Conservation Center, collaborated on an application with DarkSky International to certify GGNCA as a "Dark Sky Park." GGNCA was notified recently that our certification has been approved. This makes GGNCA the third federal unit in our local area with that status, along with Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area. NCA staff are coordinating the announcement with BLM public affairs, CCA, WSCC, and DarkSky International.

Cottonwood Days Education Program

The BLM and CCA are planning for the 16th annual Cottonwood Days Education event this fall. We are glad to be back on-site and in person with the students. Other critical partners contributing to the success of the program included CPW, Gunnison Gorge Anglers (Trout Unlimited), and the Ute Indian Museum. About 400 sixth grade students from Delta and Olathe County schools attend learning sessions along the scenic Gunnison River within Gunnison Gorge NCA. Learning focuses on the cultural importance of the river corridor, water use and conservation, fish of the Gunnison River, aquatic invertebrates and the importance of water quality, and how artificial flies imitate various aquatic species.



At Cottonwood Days, sixth grade students learn firsthand about the fish of the Gunnison River.

UFO (southern) portion of Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area

Gunnison River Campsite Designation and Permit System

The BLM implemented a decision from the 2017 Dominguez-Escalante NCA RMP to require overnight boaters on the Lower Gunnison River from Delta to Whitewater to obtain a permit. BLM staff updated signage and conducted outreach regarding the change at sites like Mountain Buzz and American Whitewater. An environmental assessment was completed for the campsite designation project. Campsites along the river have been designated, and implementation of the campsite reservation system (and associated fees) is planned for the 2025 river season.