



Field Manager Report

April 2025

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

Note: Topics below are all status updates, unless noted otherwise.

Personnel

Longtime Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area Manager Edd Franz retired at the end of the year. Outdoor Recreation Planner Caroline Kilbane is serving in a 120-day detail behind Edd. We hope to announce the position to be hired permanently in the coming months.

This past Fall, the Field Office announced a Realty Specialist position to support the office's robust and active Lands program. We hope to fill the position soon.

Career-seasonal staff including much of the Field Office's recreation program staff will be returning in the coming weeks.

Seasonal staff hiring will be limited to two positions this year. Two longtime UFO employees, Cole Patton (Range Technician) and Ronald Lunsford (Park Ranger – River) will be returning to their seasonal positions in the coming weeks.

The Grand Junction Field Office hired a permanent National Conservation Area Manager for Dominguez-Escalante and McInnis Canyons National Conservation Areas. Former Gunnison Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner James Lovelace began this winter.

Lands and Minerals

Bull Mountain and 5-Pad Proposal Supplemental Environmental Assessment

The Colorado River Valley Field Office, with support from the Colorado State Office Air Program, prepared a draft supplemental environmental assessment to further analyze greenhouse gas and cumulative hazardous air pollutant emissions and impacts that may result from the extraction, processing, transmission and combustion of oil and natural gas produced through operations proposed under the 5-Pad Project EA and the Bull Mountain Unit Master Development Plan EIS.

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 BMUMDP includes 146 wells, 4 water disposal wells, 33 well pads, roads, surface and buried water supply

and buried gas gathering pipelines, 3 compressor stations inside the unit, and 1 compressor station outside the unit. The original proposal for the Dual Operator 5-Pad proposal included 25 wells on 5 well pads. Within the BMUMDP, of the 146 proposed wells, one well has been drilled and is a producing gas well; currently two wells have been drilled and are producing gas within the 5-Pad Proposal.

The BLM issued the draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment and unsigned Finding of Non-Significant Impact to the public for a 30-day comment period on March 14, 2025, <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2036199/510>.

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.

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.
- **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.
- **Other Permit Renewals** – UFO is working on an existing list of approximately 12 allotments that have Land Health Completed and require a CX or a simple EA to renew. The goal is complete 5 to 8 permits under this list this year. Until we receive grazing applications from permittees in these

allotments, we are unsure which allotments can be completed. Green, Roatcap, Baldy, and Hillside Allotments are likely to be completed this year.

Recreation

UFO Business Plan

BLM published the Final UFO Business Plan in the Federal Register on November 21, 2024. The final plan includes the full fee structure of \$12/night for camping at developed campgrounds and \$4/day day-use fees at all developed recreation sites in the Uncompahgre Field Office (excluding GGNCA). The plan includes an option for users to purchase an annual pass for day-use fees at \$20/year. While the full fee structure was included in the final plan, the Field Office only intends to implement the overnight camping portion of the plan in the near term. Through the public comment process, many commenters were in favor of charging fees at campgrounds and river access facilities but were opposed to day-use fees at trailheads. The UFO recreation team is working to purchase and install needed amenities at campgrounds, to be able to implement the new fees a in the summer of 2025.

Regional Partnership Initiatives

Colorado Parks and Wildlife 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 quality outdoor recreation experiences. UFO participates in three southwest Colorado initiative groups. You can view the Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative story map online at: storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/393237b131b2455e9ff2fc3692c4226f.

- The Western Slope Outdoors Alliance (WSOA) is focused on Montrose, Delta, and Mesa counties within the watersheds of the Uncompahgre, Gunnison, and Colorado rivers. 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. This group has a dedicated a coordinator on staff.
- 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.
- San Miguel County Recreation Roundtable focuses exclusively on San Miguel County and actively participates on recreation projects by bringing together diverse stakeholders.

West End Trails

The West End Trails Alliance and West End Economic Development Corporation, with support from Montrose County, the Nucla and Naturita Area Chamber of Commerce, the town of Naturita, and the West End Public School District received a planning grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to conduct wildlife, cultural resource, and plant surveys as part of their proposal for a trail system on BLM-managed lands in Montrose County's West End. The West End communities have been looking at ways to bolster the local economy and improve recreational amenities at the same time. The UFO had a public envisioning period, where the public and partners could send in comments on the project and desired future opportunities on BLM managed lands. Those comments were accepted from January 21 through March 18, 2025. The UFO has reviewed the 21 unique comments and is working to incorporate the feedback into the initial stages of its planning effort.

Planning

UFO Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Settlement agreements to the 2020 UFO Approved RMP required a Notice of Intent (NOI) to formally initiate 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 developed a draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS to be published and available for public comment in early December. BLM is expecting to brief the new administration to determine how the draft plan can align with administration priorities. Information and documents are posted on the ePlanning project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>.

Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (GGNCA)

Wilderness Campsites Modifications

In March, the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area staff completed the Environmental Assessment to make minor changes to the existing network of campsites along the Gunnison River in the Wilderness. These changes include, adding one campsite, removing one campsite, and modifying the designation of four campsites within the wilderness boundary, and adding two campsites downstream of the wilderness boundary. Currently, the desired setting for outstanding primitive recreational opportunities is somewhat curtailed by the imbalance of designated campsite locations along the river, and the proposed action strives to correct this imbalance and enhance visitor recreational experience while preserving overall wilderness character. The river rangers will be making the on-the-ground changes in the spring of 2025, aiming to have the changes in place prior to the stonefly hatch.

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

Escalante Ranch Acquisition

In July 2024, the 4,000-acre Escalante Ranch inholding within D-E NCA was purchased by The Conservation Fund. The BLM has secured funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire the property, which is anticipated late Fall 2025. The BLM is working with community partners to guide future management of the ranch.