



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

Field Manager Report

Southwest Resource Advisory Council - Colorado

Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO)

Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision - The UFO is preparing a Proposed RMP and Final EIS. On October 26, the UFO briefed the BLM Deputy Director and members of the Assistant Secretary's office, which generated the need for additional information and further discussion of the plan. A follow-up briefing with the Department of the Interior will be scheduled in the near future. The UFO PRMP/FEIS remains a high priority for the BLM.

North Fork Mancos Master Development Plan (MDP) - The UFO is working with the Paonia Ranger District of the GMUG National Forest and the BLM Colorado River Valley Field Office to prepare an EA to consider a proposal from Gunnison Energy LLC. Gunnison Energy proposes to drill, complete, and operate up to 35 horizontal wells from three new well pads, one expanded well pad, and one existing well pad. Associated access roads and gathering pipelines would also be constructed and existing support facilities would be used. Development would occur over an estimated four-year period in Gunnison and Delta counties, northeast of Paonia. Although a Preliminary EA was released for public comment in May 2018, the BLM plans to seek additional public comment on the MDP because Gunnison Energy has changed its proposal to use the slickwater method of hydraulic fracturing instead of the previously proposed nitrogen foam (or gel) method. This change would result in increased water usage and truck traffic.

Fire Restoration - The Buttermilk Fire in the Gunnison Gorge NCA and the Bull Draw Fire on the west slope of the Uncompahgre Plateau burned approximately 748 acres and 9,923 acres of BLM-managed public lands, respectively. The UFO is conducting winter seeding efforts beginning February 2019, as well as initiating weed control and fence construction this year. For the Bull Draw Fire, the BLM, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Mule Deer Foundation, and a local rancher plan to rehabilitate 6,400 acres of public land, including aerial distribution of 87,000 pounds of mixed grass and forb seed. Ignited by lightning last July, the Bull Draw Fire spread across 36,553 acres near Nucla. Colorado Parks and Wildlife identified the project area as critical winter range for mule deer and a priority for rehabilitation. The project will help ensure the availability of forage for big game species and livestock, as well as reduce the potential for erosion.

Programmatic Vegetation Treatments EA - The UFO has a number of planned and ongoing site-specific vegetation treatments intended to reduce fuel loading and improve habitat conditions for Gunnison Sage Grouse and big game species. To better support future projects in these program areas, the UFO is initiating the preparation of a Programmatic EA. The purpose of this programmatic proposal is to ensure that the BLM adequately considers the environmental effects of these projects and determines suitable mitigation, while streamlining the NEPA approval process.

North Fork Coal Mine Methane Working Group - Comprised of state, county, industry, and conservation and business leaders, the Working Group was established to support coal mines and surrounding communities in the North Fork Valley through the development of a comprehensive

strategy for education, capture, exploration of mitigation, and economic utilization of coal mine methane. The BLM has participated as a non-voting invited party since the group's formation in October 2017. The Working Group has supported coal mine methane capture at the Bowie Coal Mine, which has mined out all of its leased federal coal. The North Fork Valley was home to three active coal mines: Bowie, Elk Creek, and West Elk. At this time, West Elk is operational, while Bowie and Elk Creek are sealed with active coal leases in place. BLM Colorado is considering proposals to capture coal mine methane and trying to unravel regulatory challenges on authorization, including the IBLA Decision in Vessels Coal Gas, Inc. 175 IBLA 8 (2008) (Vessels Decision).

Recreation Demand - The UFO continues to experience high demand for recreational amenities from local communities and user groups. In support of that demand, the UFO has a number of projects and actions in progress. A cultural resources inventory of the *Jumbo Mountain* area has been contracted to support ongoing collaboration with Delta County to designate an authorized trail system. The UFO is working with Montrose County and the MUT Chapter of COPMOBA to consider a staging area proposal under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act and a single-track trail proposal dubbed the *Shavano Gateway*. The BLM is working to make open OHV areas more recognizable from the adjacent (and closed) Adobe Badlands WSA. The UFO is also working with the "DAM Bikers" and Grand Junction FO to plan for trails in the *Escalante Triangle* area of Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The BLM is planning a programmatic analysis to facilitate special event permitting, including in the Dry Creek Travel Management Area and the Shavano Gateway area. The BLM will be working with Montrose West Recreation, Inc. as they implement their recent Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) trails planning grant to create a West End Trails Master Development Plan focusing on four areas surrounding Nucla and Naturita, in the west end of Montrose County.

Drought Monitoring for Range Management - Most of the UFO has been under "exceptional" drought conditions since April 2018. In accordance with the UFO Drought Detection and Monitoring Plan, the UFO has actively monitored drought conditions on 79 grazing allotments over the past year. The range staff has engaged with permittees in close consultation, cooperation, and coordination during these monitoring efforts. Due to the range conditions, permittees were only able to use approximately 74% of typically-authorized forage (AUMs) over the last year, based on voluntary non-use (60 out of 228 allotments were non-use). Per the Drought Detection and Monitoring Plan, the UFO will continue to monitor range conditions to determine if resting of some allotments is necessary to recover from drought stress, even if current winter moisture continues to be greater than last year. Such a determination would be made in close consultation and cooperation with permittees.