

**Northwest Resource Advisory Council Meeting,  
April 27, 2016**

**District Manager Update**

**Northwest District, Joe Meyer**

**District begins implementing Greater Sage Grouse plan** – Since the BLM signed the Record of Decision for the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage Grouse EIS in September, District staff has been working to ensure BLM staff and stakeholders understand how the decisions will be implemented. Since October, District staff has travel to all five field offices and the State Office to provide BLM staff with details about the decision. Staff held several meetings with oil and gas stakeholders to help explain the details of the plan. In April, District staff joined the State and Washington offices in hosting a workshop for stakeholders that included detailed break-out sessions, as well as a similar, two-day workshop for BLM and other federal agencies.

**Field Manager Updates**

**Little Snake Field Office, Hunter Seim (Acting)**

Travel Management Planning – The LSFO has inventoried 3,102.70 miles of routes to date, with over 5,000 segments identified. The LSFO completed Public Scoping on the inventoried routes in its first Travel Management Planning Area (TMA 1) in September of 2015. They also worked closely with Moffat County to identify routes not inventoried in the planning area. The TM route inventory has been completed by full time staff, interns, and seasonals using Federal Transportation Program, Colorado OHV grant, and BLM funds. All route inventory information has been placed and is consistently updated on the LSFO website.

The LSFO is using Logan-Simpson as a contractor in completing the planning efforts in TMA 1, which includes Sand Wash, Dry Creek, and Hiawatha. TMA 1 consists of approximately 780 miles of routes which include over 1500 segments. The LSFO started its planning process for TMA 1 in Dec. of 2015. We had our first public scoping meeting in February and are currently working on the route-by-route evaluations and designations. The route-by-route evaluations are being completed and analyzed using public comments and benefit and risk criteria developed by the LSFO interdisciplinary team using resource issues and benefits. The greater sage-grouse implementation strategy will also be evaluated and implemented into the planning process. After route evaluations are complete there will be an additional public meeting to address alternatives and the route by route evaluation decisions. Dates for this meeting are scheduled for late May of this year. The Environmental Assessment is scheduled to be completed by late October. The LSFO is also using MOU's with Governmental Agencies including Moffat County and Colorado State Agencies to coordinate TMP efforts.

The LSFO has selected its next TMA which will have over 1900 miles of routes to evaluate. TMA 2, which includes Powder Wash, Nipple Rim/Little Snake, and Great Divide areas is scheduled to begin the planning process in late December of 2016 utilizing the same contractor. Funding will be a factor in determining whether or not we will proceed with TMA 2.

## **Wild Horses**

We continue to work closely with a group of volunteers known as the Sand Wash Advocate Team (SWAT) in applying our PZP darting program and the Great Escape Mustang Sanctuary (GEMS) in providing us an alternative to housing removed horses outside of the overburdened adoption/long term holding pipelines. The PZP darting program is continuing in the Sand Wash Basin this spring as weather allows. Due to a hard winter, it is still too early to get a good estimation of the PZP program on this year's foal crop. We are planning to utilize newly available infared technology through an aircraft owned by the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control to conduct an accurate census on the herd. This aircraft will be in use primarily for support of fire suppression and detection activities, but it has the capability to identify individual animals at very high resolution and could provide us with a very efficient means of census. Herd estimate at this time is just shy of 600, excluding new foals.

In conjunction with GEMS, we are in the process of planning a small-scale bait trap gather in which approximately 50 horses would be removed, processed through Canon City, and held by GEMS.

## **Energy Gateway South and Trans West Power Transmission Lines**

EGS - The Notice of Intent was published on April 1, 2011. Public scoping was completed June 3, 2011. The draft EIS was published Feb. 21, 2014. The Biological Opinion has been signed. The final EIS is anticipated any time now; waiting for approval from the BLM Washington Office to publish and print the Final EIS. The ROD is expected in late Spring/Summer of 2016.

TWE - The Notice of Intent was published in January 2011. The draft EIS was published July 3, 2013. The final EIS was published May 1, 2015. The ROD and ROW grant are both at the solicitor's office for review and expected to be released very soon.

## **Sage grouse**

LSFO is responsible for the vast majority of priority Greater sage-grouse (GSG) habitat in Colorado. As such, the office is anticipating the final release of BLM policies that will be guiding the implementation of a great deal of our activities. In pursuit of this, the Northwest District is in the process of hiring three crews to perform rangeland data collection using BLMs Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) protocols. Within the LSFO, these intensive, standardized protocols will be first applied within both priority and general GSG habitat in Sand Wash Basin during the 2016 field season to provide a more complete picture of the baseline habitat conditions in an area with high public visibility, serious resource concerns and conflicts, and large areas of connected GSG habitat. This data will be vital in informing both near-term and long-term management decisions for this area.

## **Cross Mountain AGO Property**

BLM continues to move forward in managing the 2013 Cross Mountain Parcel. Work on rebuilding the perimeter fencing will commence this summer. BLM continues to work towards perfecting the conditional ditch water rights that were acquired along with the land. In conjunction with our weeds partnership with Moffat County, we commenced weed control in the fall of 2015 and expect those efforts to continue for the foreseeable future. We are also working

towards the creation of a riparian pasture for neighboring livestock allotments and developing a primitive parking and trailhead facility to enhance public access.

Field and Fire Season – While we were able to get an early start on field season this year, the weather has slowed some of our field activities down. Roads have been muddy and impassable in some areas of the field office. Fire activities have been minimal and the fire crews are giving us a hand with fencing projects and other work in the interim. We are presently undergoing a fire readiness review for the upcoming fire season. We anticipate a change in the weather patterns to get us back out in the field shortly.

### **Colorado River Valley Field Office, Karl Mendonca (Acting)**

**CRVFO working to improve sage grouse habitat** -- This spring nearly 200 acres of pinyon-juniper trees encroaching into sage brush meadows are being removed with mechanical equipment near the town of Burns, adding to the 500 acres treated in 2014. An additional 638 acres will be hand-cut this year. This project will increase sage grouse and big game winter range, as well as provide connectivity between two active leks in this area. Combined with several prescribed fires in the area, these pinyon-juniper removal projects are creating a mosaic of vegetation that will benefit not only Greater Sage Grouse, but also a wide variety of wildlife that use sage brush communities. The resulting reduction in continuous vegetation also greatly reduces the chance of a large wildfire that could impact sage grouse habitat. Partners include Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Lower Colorado River Habitat Partnership Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

**Roan Plateau Final SEIS anticipated this summer** – The 90-day public comment period for the BLM’s Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Roan Plateau Planning Area ended in February 2016. The BLM is currently reviewing the more than 50,000 comments it received in detail and developing the Proposed Plan for the Final EIS, which is anticipated to be released in late summer 2016. A final Record of Decision is anticipated in fall 2016.

**65 Leases Final EIS anticipated this summer** -- The BLM is conducting an Environmental Impact Statement to determine whether 65 leases in the White River National Forest should be voided, reaffirmed or modified with additional stipulations. The BLM is currently developing the Final EIS, which is slated for release in August 2016, followed by a Record of Decision in October 2016. After an initial review of the comments received, BLM presented a preliminary preferred alternative to its local, state and federal cooperating agencies. The preliminary preferred alternative is a blend of alternatives from the Draft EIS. BLM believes it strikes the appropriate balance by incorporating recent decisions by Forest Service while also recognizing considerations associated with producing leases. Under the preliminary preferred alternative, BLM would cancel in full the 25 leases in the Thompson Divide area that would have been cancelled in full (18 leases) or in part (7 leases) in the Proposed Action detailed in the Draft EIS. These are all undeveloped leases. There are an additional 13 undeveloped leases analyzed in the EIS. New stipulations reflective of the Forest Service's 2015 decision for future oil and gas leasing would be applied, as in Alternative 4 from the Draft. The 27 leases that are currently held by production would not be significantly modified. Up to five leases held by production would have minor adjustments to stipulations to address inconsistencies. The BLM is currently

undertaking the detailed analysis of the preferred alternative, which will be published in the Final EIS.

### **Kremmling Field Office, Stephanie Odell**

**Scoping beings for proposed land exchange** – KFO initiated a public scoping period for an Environmental Impact Statement evaluating the proposed Blue Valley Land Exchange. Under the proposed land exchange, the BLM would trade nine parcels totaling 1,489 acres in Grand County for nine parcels totaling 1,832 acres of mostly private lands in Grand and Summit counties. BLM is conducting the EIS to determine whether the exchange is in the public's interest to complete, and what the potential impacts of the exchange would be. The exchange could increase public access and increase publicly-held big game winter range, while the proponent would consolidate its holdings. Approximately 300 acres of the 1,832 acres gained by the public would be acquired by the U.S. Forest Service, with the remainder going to BLM. More than half of the BLM acreage (792 acres) that would be exchanged is surrounded by private land and has no public access. The majority of other BLM lands being considered for exchange are small, isolated parcels that receive little public use. The proposed exchange was initiated more than a decade ago but was deferred while the field office completed its Resource Management Plan Revision. The field office will host public open house meetings May 23 in Silverthorne and May 24 in Kremmling. The scoping period runs through June 8.

**Kremmling to begin user capacity study for the Upper Colorado SRMA** – The Kremmling Field Office is planning to begin a user capacity study to help its management of the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area. The last capacity study for the Upper Colorado River was in 2001. Over the last 15 years, private use has increased by 40,000 users, while commercial use has remained stable. During the last capacity study only the social aspects of the impacts were examined. A more comprehensive study needs to be done to include the impacts to biological resources as well as the social impacts. The field office hopes to partner with the Upper Colorado Wild & Scenic River Stakeholders Group to accomplish this task within the next couple of years. The results of the user capacity study will be used to make future decisions about the management of the river for the benefit of the public and natural resources.

**Bark Beetle mitigation work continues** – The Kremmling Field Office awarded the 3 Mile Sanitation Salvage Sale located in Jackson County in September 2015. The sale encompassed 113 harvest acres and 890 thousand board feet (MBF) of timber. The office also awarded the Smith Mesa Sanitation Salvage Sale located in Grand County in November of 2015. This sale encompassed 303 harvest acres and 1503 MBF of timber. KFO is currently administering 13 timber and biomass sales encompassing approximately 1,800 acres of harvest units in Grand and Jackson counties. The KFO expects to offer 4 to 5 sales later this summer encompassing about 500 acres, 2,500 MBF of timber and approximately 3,500 tons of biomass.

**KFO preparing fee proposal for North Sand Hills:** The recently completed Kremmling Field Office Resource Management Plan included a decision to develop an entrance and use fee at the North Sand Hills Special Recreation Management Area near Walden. A first step will be to meet with Jackson County to discuss the need and process. KFO will also need to meet with the Colorado State Land Board and the State Forest/State Park on how fees would be used within Cooperative Management Agreement area. KFO will then need to develop a conceptual fee

proposal for briefing and review of the Colorado State Office and Washington Office. Finally, KFO would develop a Comprehensive Fee Proposal, including a business plan and public communication plan, to present to the NW RAC for consideration.

### **White River Field Office, Kent Walter**

**White River Field Office piloted national AIM methods** – For the past five years the White River Field Office has been piloting a standardized monitoring methodology called Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM). Most field offices across the West are beginning their first season of AIM, but the WRFO has five years of AIM data already. When the AIM project began the field office was developing a Resource Management Plan Amendment for oil and gas that would necessitate extensive monitoring of disturbance and reclamation by not only BLM specialists, but also operators themselves. Now, with the Amendment complete, the standardization provided by AIM methodology allows operators to gather standardized data and enter it into the BLM's new electronic Data Management System. This makes it easier for BLM specialists and operators to access data, track reclamation status, and provide information to the public. The statistical strength and multi-purpose usefulness that standardized AIM data provides led the project to quickly evolve into a field-office-wide effort. The second year of monitoring moved into the Piceance-East Douglas wild horse Herd Management Area, and by year five the WRFO had points throughout the field office to aid in grazing permit renewals, among other projects. This season the WRFO will host two AIM teams of three employees each. One team will focus on continuing the monitoring work already started, and the other will focus on Greater Sage Grouse.

**WRFO developing conservation strategy for rare plants** – The White River Field Office is partnering with Rio Blanco County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the oil and gas industry, and Bio-Logic (a private consultant) developing a Programmatic Biological Assessment (PBA) that will identify strategies for conserving two federally listed plant species found only on the Piceance Basin (Dudley Bluffs bladderpod and Dudley Bluffs twinpod). This overarching document should increase certainty to proponents of oil and gas projects in the plants' habitat by outlining conservation and mitigation measures in advance. This should streamline the permitting and USFWS consulting process, since measures will be developed and agreed upon in advance. A goal of the strategy is also to provide for the long-term strategic conservation of the plants, and could lead to the de-listing of the two species.

**Large ethnographic study underway on the Piceance Basin** – The BLM is working with several archaeological research groups on a large, landscape-level ethnographic study of the northwest Piceance Creek Basin, covering about 280,000 acres. The area is currently under development for natural gas, nahcolite, and oil shale, but is known to have significant cultural resources and is an important area to Ute tribes. Past inventories have recorded hundreds of historical archaeological sites in the proposed study area, notably including the largest concentration of aboriginal wooden features (wickiups, platforms, and drift fences) known to exist in Colorado. Despite the deeply entrenched connection the Utes feel for the area, there has been virtually no study of these connections. The study will help document historic cultural landscape settings in the Basin, which will help inform BLM's management of the area. The mitigation of direct and indirect effects of large projects or multiple small projects would be

aided by consideration of cultural resources within this area as part of a cultural landscape concept. The research objectives for the study are to: 1) integrate comprehensive, landscape-scale, ethnological, ethnohistorical, and archaeological data and perspectives on Ute cultural resources and place-based heritage values present in the study area; 2) work co-creatively with Ute cultural representatives to plan, organize and conduct a comprehensive ethnographic study of the northwest Piceance Creek Basin; 3) compile, assess, analyze, and test comprehensive archaeological and environmental data from the study area, and; 4) synthesize results and facilitate development of an Ethnographic Landscape Management Plan in consultation with BLM and Tribal representatives.

### **Grand Junction Field Office, Katie Stevens**

#### **Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area**

The Dominguez-Escalante planning team is briefing the Washington Office on our Final EIS/Proposed RMP and hope to release it to the public this summer. This NCA is in both the Northwest and Southwest Districts but has its own Advisory Council to advise BLM throughout the RMP process. As directed by the legislation, that Advisory Council will sunset one year after the RMP is completed at which point the Northwest RAC will likely be more involved in D-E land management issues.

#### **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

This will be the first season of an online reservation system (Recreation.gov). This will allow users to make their reservation without having to call the office (often having to call multiple times on multiple days to get through). There is a \$6 transaction fee for all online reservations. We believe the users will really benefit from this new system and it should free up some BLM staff time to do more on the ground work in the river corridor.

The permit system continues to be judged as an overall success according to feedback from boaters and outfitters, and it appears visitation is increasing. In 2015, 23 percent of visitors were from Mesa County, 69 percent were from the rest of CO, and 8 percent were from out of state (this compares to 2014 which saw 12 percent of users from Mesa County, 75 percent of users were from the rest of CO, and 13 percent from out of state). Over the past few years, the number of permits we've issued (including commercial, has grown from 1,318 (2013) to 1,467 (2014) to 1,663 (2015). This equates to 10,919 visitors (2013), 12,679 visitors (2014) and 14,368 visitors (2015). Parks and Wildlife has raised some concerns about making sure non-rafters have adequate access to the ramp, and we're working on those.

NCA staff are also working closely with the City of Fruita on a new partnership to build mountain bike trails. Through this partnership, the City of Fruita is providing funding, in partnership with area businesses, to pay for rare plant and cultural surveys for the new trails. The City's ability to bring resources to the table is a key factor in the BLM's ability to consider and approve these new trails.

#### **Recreation**

**Recreation Strategy**-We plan to work with community partners during 2016 to compile GJFO's local Recreation Strategy under the Colorado and National Recreation Strategies. GJFO already has extensive local partnerships with area activity clubs and groups, and one of the important elements of the new strategy is the concept of repositioning toward the partnerships and areas most likely to be

successful, by including additional partners (community service providers-e.g., other entities invested in recreation) in the discussion of what recreation benefits and opportunities are most desired and important.

New motorized trailhead--The recreation staff is completing final analysis and design work for a new, additional trailhead near Little Park Road. This trailhead will serve the motorized trail network in Bangs, and provide opportunities to safely park off the main Little Park Road.

Progress on motorized trail connector—The GJFO is continuing to work with Mesa County, the Grand Mesa Jeep Club, and the Colorado Department of Transportation on a safe Highway 141 crossing near Whitewater. This crossing will support a new segment of trail, the Tabeguache Connector, which will restore motorized access all the way through to 141. This segment will connect Bangs Trailhead off of Little Park Road to the Dominguez-Escalante NCA, the rest of the Uncompahgre Plateau, and ultimately Montrose, allowing for a long distance riding opportunity. The trail connector segment has been approved and roughed-in, and we are just awaiting funding to complete the infrastructure for a safe highway crossing, which will allow us to apply for a CDOT permit and open the new trail segment. The project was awarded a 2017 State Trails Grant.

Colorado Access Grants—The GJFO is also partnering with Mesa County on a proposal to obtain Federal Lands Access Program funding to pave 18 Road, along with a couple other projects. This project would improve both road biking and mountain biking opportunities around the community of Fruita and accessing BLM's 18 Road (North Fruita Desert) mountain bike trails system. The current gravel road gets heavy use, and does not provide an adequate surface for road biking. By paving the road and shoulder, it would improve the draw of the region as a biking destination and make access for trail riding in the 18 road area safer and more enjoyable.

### **Wild Horses**

We are approaching the upper end of AML and expect to do a small bait-trap in the next 1-2 years. We would work to adopt most of the horses locally.

### **Range**

We are working on 9 environmental documents for permit renewals to be completed this year. The permit renewal process has gotten more complex over the years with more time needing to be built in for interdisciplinary review and consultation with interested publics. Six of these documents include allotments in Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat.

### **Oil and Gas, Realty**

We are working to complete several high-priority public safety projects with Mesa County. We have an EA back from the contractor and hope to issue a decision soon on a proposed realignment for 45.5 Road (De Beque cutoff). We are also working closely with Mesa County on the Bosley Wash project, which is a retention structure on public land in the North Desert. This is similar to the Leach Creek project, completed last year; both are designed to minimize the effects of stormwater runoff on I-70 and area neighborhoods.

GJFO and CRVFO recently completed approvals for the Winter Flats pipeline, a 21.9-mile pipeline operated by Summit Midstream near the community of De Beque. The project provided for gas and

water transport for projects operated by Black Hills Plateau Production, and involved careful and complicated siting considerations due to sensitive resources in the area, including De Beque Facilia, Colorado Hookless Cactus, cultural resources, a Wilderness Study Area, and lands with wilderness characteristics.

The GJFO and CRVFO are also reviewing 24 parcels to be offered in the November lease sale, containing 18,349.47 acres of Federal mineral estate. Two of the 24 parcels include portions of both the GJFO and the CRVFO resource areas. The remaining 22 parcel are located entirely in the GJFO resource area. The combined area of the parcels is distributed as follows: approximately 16,364 acres in Mesa County and 1,985 acres in Garfield County, with 17,429 acres in the GJFO and 920 acres in the CRVFO.

GJFO and CRVFO are also working on two Master Development Plans, Homer Deep and De Beque Southwest, in Garfield and Mesa Counties.

#### **Lands with Wilderness Character inventory**

Last fall, we completed road inventory (related to lands with wilderness characteristics road definitions) in the vicinity of the community of De Beque. We've been provided with funding for 1-2 interns this summer to work again on wilderness characteristics review. We are working on getting the project supervisor in place and will work quickly to hire those interns through Western Colorado Conservation Corps.