



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

BLM Colorado – Northwest RAC

Your Public Lands – 245 Million Acres of Possibilities



Little Snake Field Office
Craig, Colorado
February 28, 2024



Northwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council Agenda

Little Snake Field Office

February 28, 2024

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 10:00 a.m. | Meeting Begins - Housekeeping and Introductions |
| 10:20 a.m. | Opening Remarks |
| 10:30 a.m. | Presentation/Discussion on Orphaned Wells |
| 11:00 a.m. | Break |
| 11:15 a.m. | Planning Updates with working lunch - Greater Sage Grouse, Big Game,
Upper Colorado River Resource Management Plan, Solar, Thompson
Divide |
| 2:15 p.m. | Field Manager Updates |
| 3:00 p.m. | Public Comment |
| 3:30 p.m. | Open Discussion and Closing Remarks |
| 4:00 p.m. | Adjourn |

A black and white photograph of an oil pumpjack in a desert landscape. The pumpjack is the central focus, with its long arm and counterweight visible. In the background, there is a steep, rocky hillside with sparse vegetation. To the right of the pumpjack, there is a small, cylindrical storage tank. The foreground is filled with dry grass and shrubs. The overall scene is arid and desolate.

Non-Compliant Operators
with Federal Liabilities

Orphan Wells

PURPOSE

- Provide an initial overview of the BLM's Orphan Well Program
- Identify the current issues within the Orphan Well Program
- Provide the status of Orphan Wells within the Northwest District

DEFINITIONS

- Idle Well – A well that has been non-operational for 7 or more years and has no anti Idle Well – A well that has been non-operational for 7 or more years and has no anticipated future beneficial use.
- Lessee – A person or entity holding record title in a lease.
- Non-Compliant Operator – An operator who is not responding to BLM and has violations or problems identified by BLM.
- Operating Rights Owner – A person or entity holding operating rights in a lease. Operating Rights Owners can also be lessees if they maintain Record title interest.
- Orphan Well – A well that has no liable party, and BLM must now plug and reclaim the well.
- Record title owner (RTO) – A clarifying term for those people or entities who hold Record Title interest in a lease. They may be considered lessee and operating rights owners, but we are talking only about Record Title Interest.

LEGAL AUTHORITIES

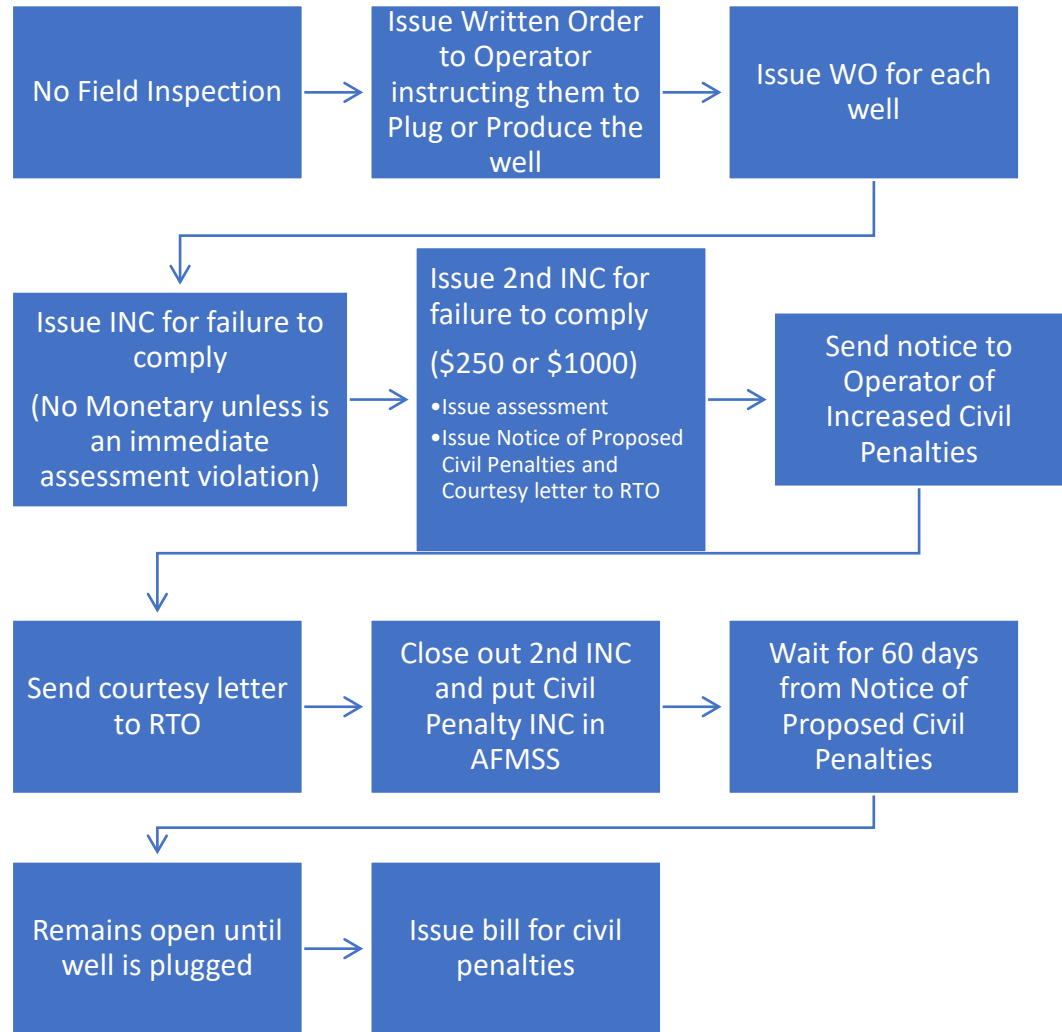
Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 as amended

- Section 30(a) “...as above provided, release and discharge the assignor from all obligations thereafter accruing with respect to the assigned lands...”
- Section 30(b) “...thereupon the lessee shall be released to all obligations thereafter accruing under said lease with respect to the lands relinquished, but no such relinquishment shall release such lessee, or his bond, from any liability...”

LEGAL AUTHORITIES (CONT.)

- 43 CFR 3106.7-2(b) – “After BLM approves the assignment or transfer, you will continue to be responsible for lease obligations that accrued before the approval date, whether or not they were identified at the time of the assignment or transfer...”
- 43 CFR 3162.3-4(a) – “The operator shall promptly plug and abandon, in accordance with a plan first approved in writing or prescribed by the authorized officer...”
- 43 CFR 3162.3-4(c) – “No well may be temporarily abandoned for more than 30 days without the prior approval of the authorized office...”

BLM Process



Process – Operator After Civil Penalty Bill

- Capture Operator's Bond
 - If Bond covers plugging and reclamation work with the State Office to contract to have the wells plugged and abandoned
 - If Bond is insufficient, hold bond until it is known which wells BLM will be plugging as orphan wells
- Place Operator on Nationwide 17g list
- Look into writing 60-day lease termination letter
- Issue Demand Letters (1 or 2 depending on if operator is also leasee).
- Scan Enforcement, Demand Letters and prepare to send to Treasury
- Start process with RTO

What Triggers the Process

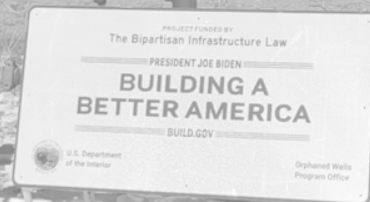
- BLM's IDLE Well Review process – current direction is wells idle for 4 years.
- Formal Inspection with either identified issues or non-compliance.
- Historic well discoveries – Previously released from Bond Liabilities.
- Removal of the operator's ability to operate?

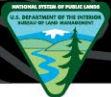
NW District

- 9 identified true “Orphan” wells in WRFO, 3 in LSFO and none in KFO.
- 3 currently remain unplugged the rest are in varying condition from still having facilities to being completely recontoured and being monitored for reclamation success.
- Currently, prioritizing 8 operators who have lost ability to operate under ECMC regulations within Colorado.
 - Potentially dealing with several hundred wells to begin pursuance.



Questions





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Break



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Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement

Resource Advisory Group Meeting: February 28th, 2024





Background





Current GRSG Planning Effort

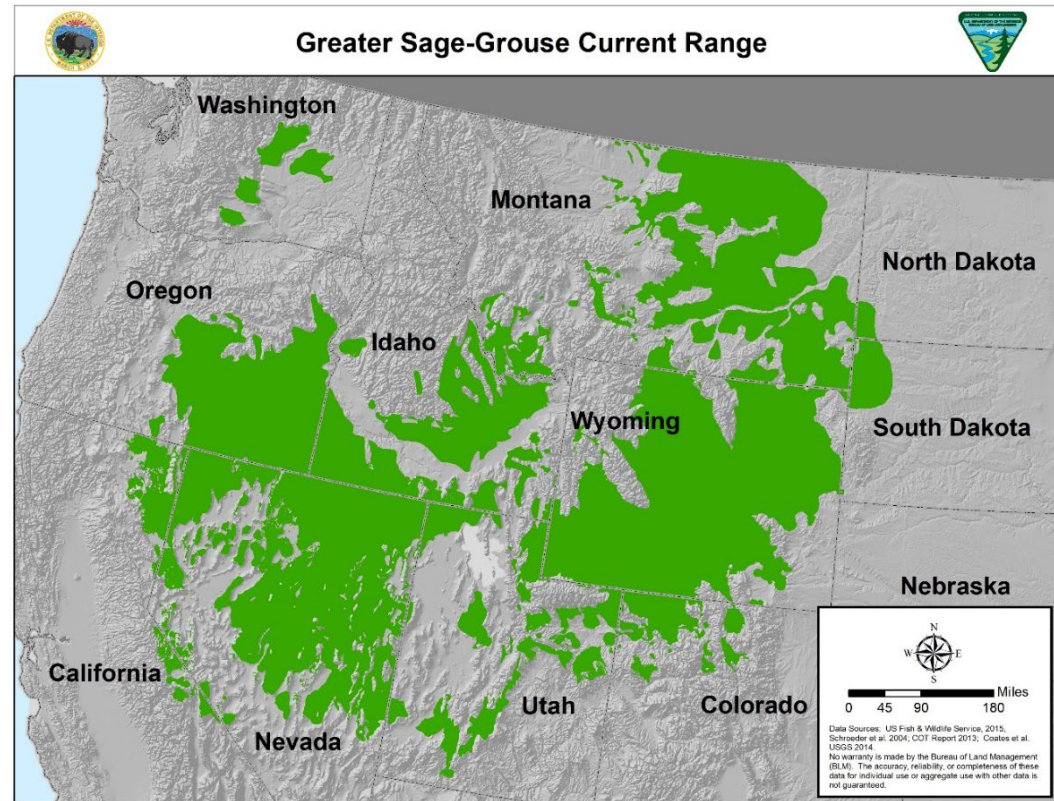
- Building on the foundation of prior planning efforts
- Incorporating new science published since 2015
- Working toward addressing concerning trends to improve GRSG conservation





Planning Area

- California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming





Cross-cutting planning issues for analysis

Adjustments to habitat management areas (including ACECs)

Mitigation strategy

Adaptive Management

Habitat objectives

Fluid mineral prioritization objective and WEMs

Renewable energy development & associated transmission

Disturbance caps

Impacts of predators

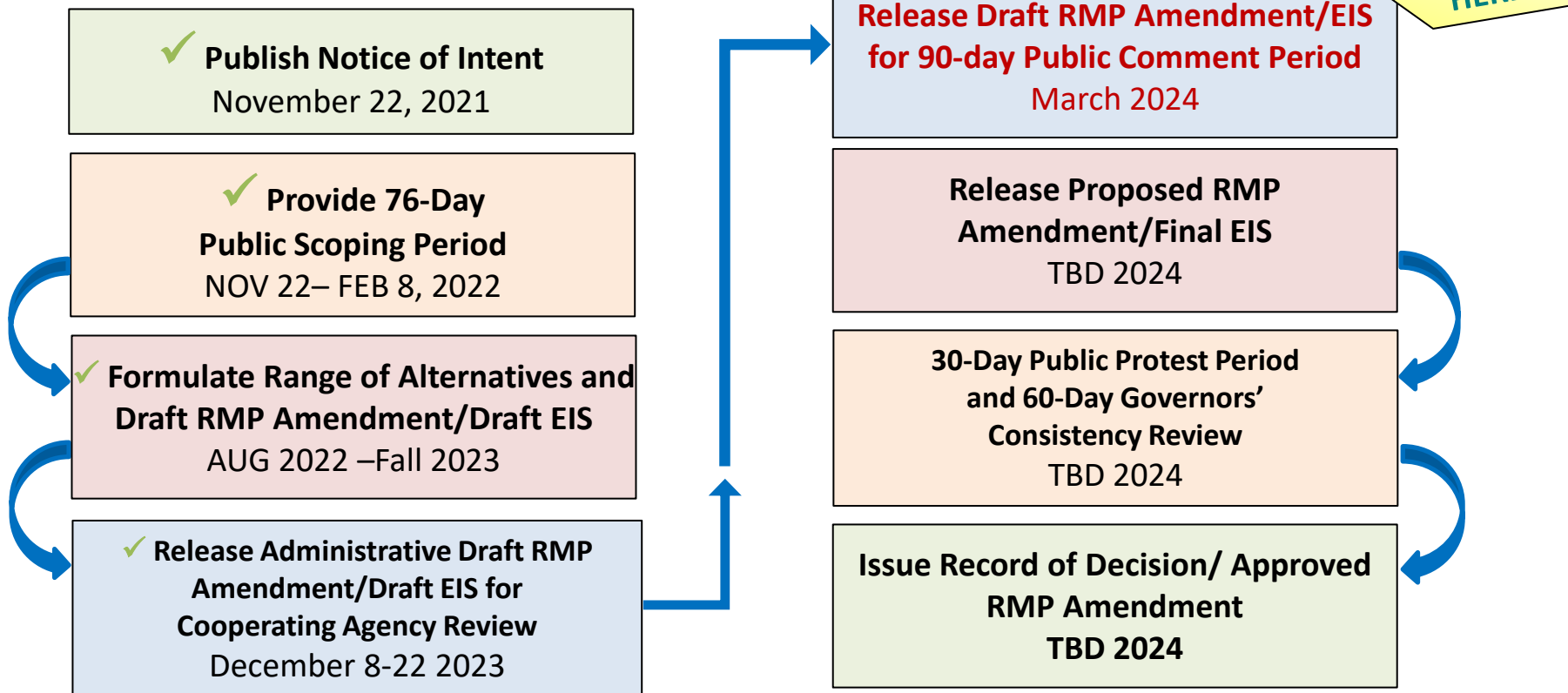
Livestock grazing

Wild horses and burros

State-Specific Circumstances



Projected Timeline





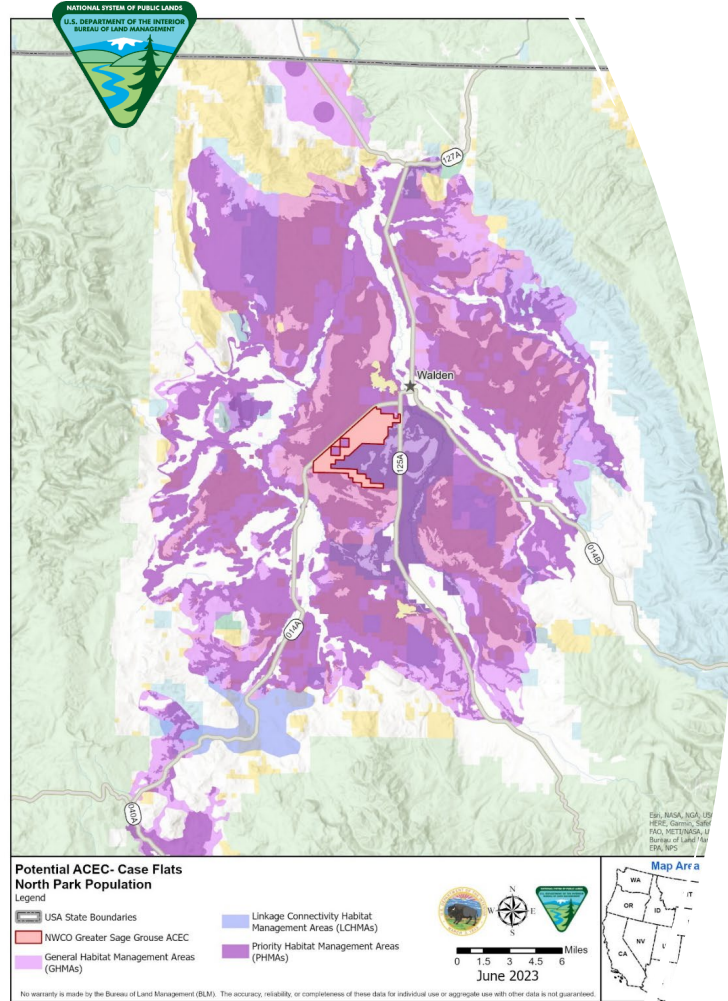
Alternatives for the GRSG EIS/RMP Amendment

Alternative 1 (2015 ARMPA)	Alternative 2 (2019 ARMPA)	Alternative 3 (Preservation)	Alternative 4 (New Science)	Alternative 5 (New Science, No ACECs)	Alternative 6 (Alt 5 + ACECs)
2015 plans No Action Alternative	2019 plans No Action Alternative	The greatest GRSG preservation approach within the agency's jurisdiction Analyze ACEC designation	Adjustments to HMAs based on the new information/ science Cross- boundary coordination of shared populations	New science, cross- boundary coordination, lessons learned Approaches not previously considered	Same as Alt 5 + ACECs



Potential ACEC in Alternatives 3 & 6

- Case Flats in North Park population (Jackson County)
 - 4,544 acres
- Met relevance and importance for wildlife and a natural process or system because of the unique winter concentration behavior exhibited
- Case Flats includes unitized fluid mineral leases and is in proximity to active oil & gas development, Highway 14, and ex-urban development.
- The likelihood of lease development is high, which could have direct and indirect impacts on GRSG and winter concentration in the area.





Next steps:

Draft EIS (public)

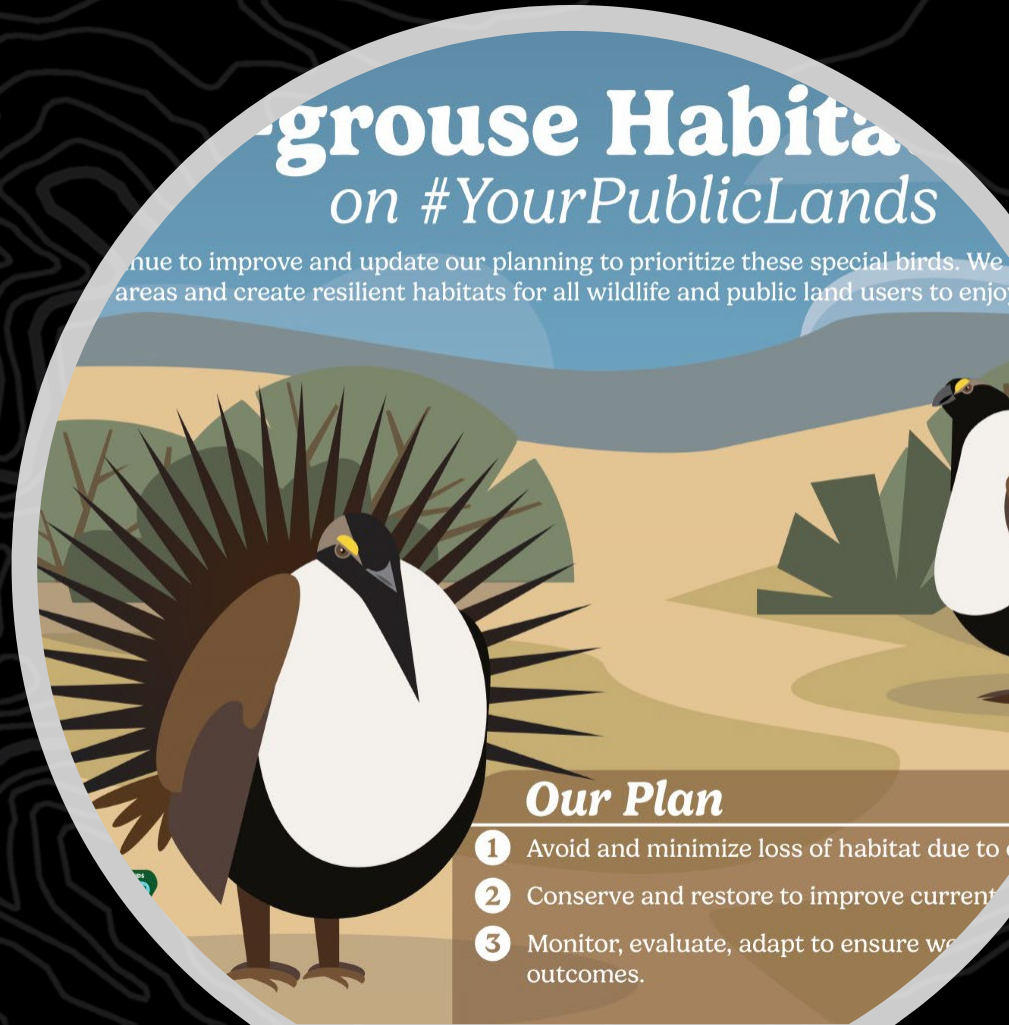
March 2024

90-day comment period

Public meetings, location and date TBD

Grouse Habitat on #YourPublicLands

Continue to improve and update our planning to prioritize these special birds. We will identify key areas and create resilient habitats for all wildlife and public land users to enjoy.



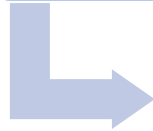
Our Plan

- 1 Avoid and minimize loss of habitat due to
- 2 Conserve and restore to improve current
- 3 Monitor, evaluate, adapt to ensure we achieve our outcomes.



Tips for the review process

Starting with
the
alternatives



- Chapter 2
 - 2.6 is cross-cutting
 - 2.7 is state-specific

Affected
environment



- Chapter 3

Impacts
analysis



- Chapter 4

Back to
Introduction

- Review
Chapter 1
after others



Appendices,
other
chapters

These tips are only recommendations!
Move through the document in
whichever order works best for you.



Range-Wide DEIS to State Records of Decision

Draft EIS/Draft Amendment

- Consider range of alternatives for cross-cutting topics and state specific circumstances.
- Identify Range-Wide Preferred Alternative (not state-specific).

Final EIS/Proposed Amendment

- Update EIS based on input from comment period.
- Develop new alternative(s) from the Draft EIS alternative range: State-Specific Proposed Amendments.

RODs/Final RMP Amendments

- State-specific Record of Decision
- Present amended actions.
- Provide rationale for the decision/differences.



ePlanning Site:

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2016719/510>

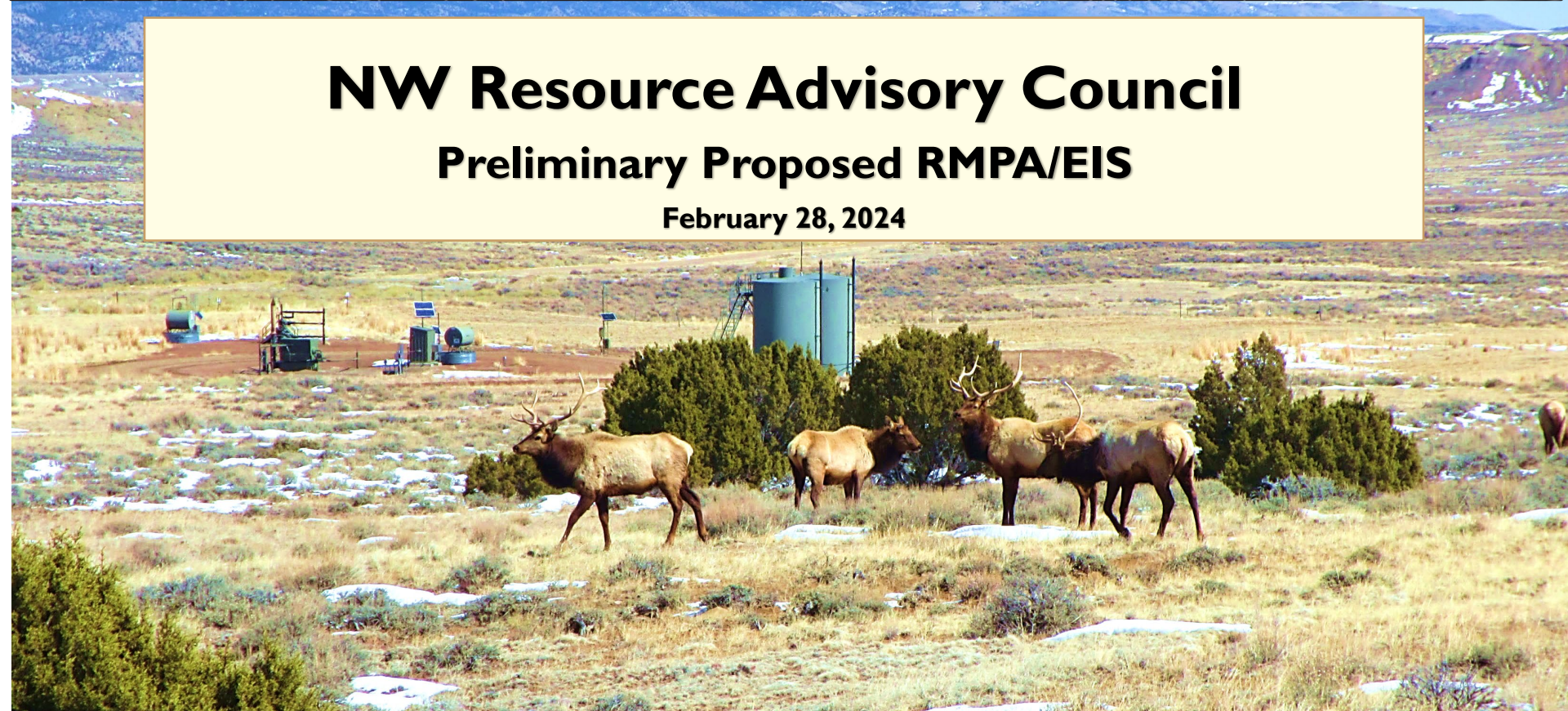


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Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement for Big Game Habitat Conservation for Oil and Gas Management in Colorado

NW Resource Advisory Council Preliminary Proposed RMPA/EIS

February 28, 2024





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Overview

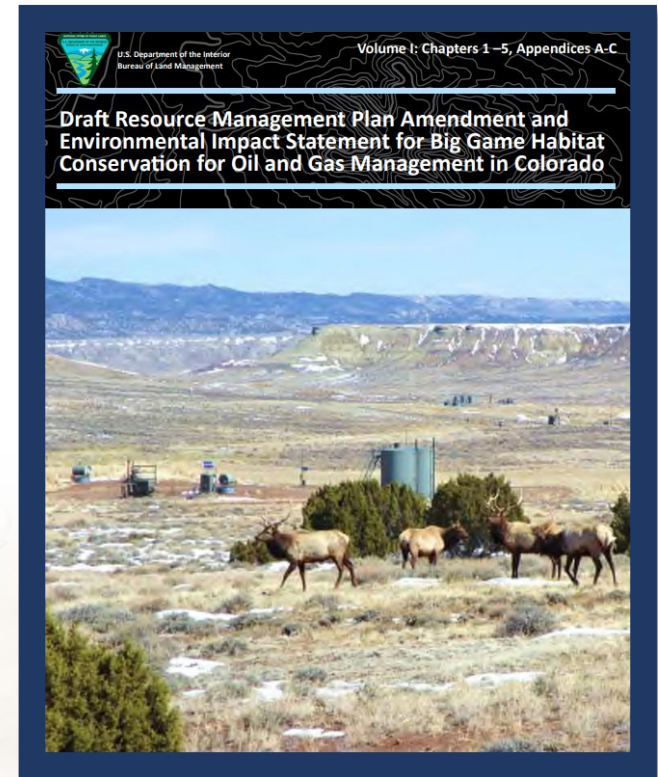
Project Updates

Comment Analysis

- Overview of substantive comments
- Perspectives
- Incorporation into proposed

Proposed RMPA/EIS

- Changes/updates
- Proposed alternative
- Schedule





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Project Updates

- **Response to public comments**
 - Public meetings held December 2023
 - Comment/summary report – Mid-March
- **Cooperator coordination**
 - 27 cooperating agencies, including 23 counties
 - Technical discussions
- **Technical Team meetings**
- **Tribal consultation ongoing**
- **Proposed alternative**
- **Preparation of final RMPA/EIS**
 - Administrative draft anticipated April 5
 - Draft **Biological Assessment** sent to USFWS
- **ROD** anticipated **November 2024**

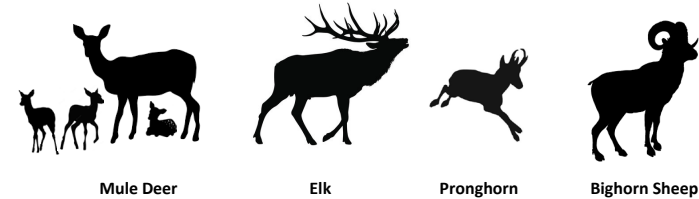


Meeting at Durango Public Library, December 7, 2023.



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Purpose and Need



- **To maintain, conserve, and protect big game corridors and other big game high priority habitat (HPH)**
- **Evaluate alternative approaches to oil and gas development and siting**
- **Management Consistency**
 - The Colorado Energy and Carbon Management Commission (ECMC) 1200 series rules specify where oil and gas operations are subject to specific ECMC requirements. CPW's implementation of the ECMC requirements for high priority habitat is intended to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to big game habitats.
- **Cumulative analysis of other land uses**
- **Settlement Agreement**



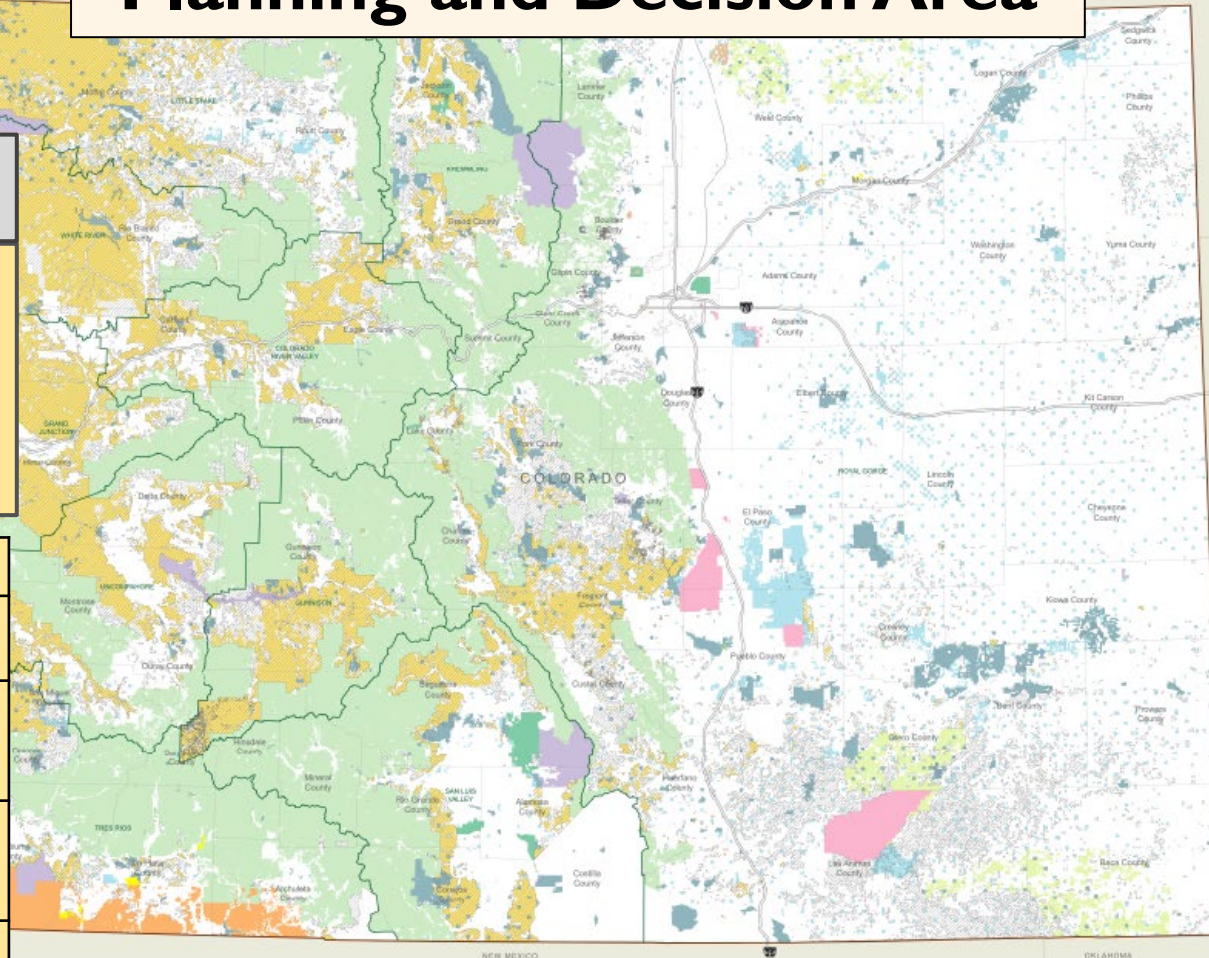
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Planning and Decision Area



Planning Area is all land in Colorado, regardless of surface ownership.

Decision Area includes BLM-administered surface land and fluid minerals (split-estate under private, state, local but not under national forests or grasslands, national parks, or Tribal reservations).



Decision Area (updated 02/26/2024)	Acres
BLM-administered surface estate and mineral estate	8,311,188
BLM-administered mineral estate with nonfederal surface estate	4,666,029
BLM-administered surface estate with no BLM-administered subsurface mineral estate	121,193
Total decision area	12,977,217







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Big Game High Priority Habitat

75% of Decision Area contains big game HPH.

Approximately 6.17 million acres of big game HPH are on BLM-administered surface land in Colorado, and 15.94 million acres of big game HPH are on Federal mineral estate.

-  Bighorn sheep high priority habitat
-  Elk high priority habitat
-  Mule deer high priority habitat
-  Pronghorn antelope high priority habitat



Pinch points were added in 2023.

- Bighorn Sheep – production areas, migration corridors, winter range
- Elk – production areas, migration corridors, severe winter range, winter concentration areas
- Mule deer – migration corridors, severe winter range, winter concentration areas
- Pronghorn – migration corridors, winter concentration areas

Accuracy standards: This information may be updated without notification and is subject to change as new data becomes available.



Refresh: Range of Alternatives in Draft

	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B (Conservation and Cooperation) *Preferred Alternative	Alternative C (Enhanced Conservation; Balance Use for Split-Estate)	Alternative D (Greater Conservation)
Density Limitation	No change to oil and gas management across existing stipulations and conservation measures. This alternative reflects the management decisions and language retained in existing RMPs.	1/640	1/640	1/640
Disturbance Threshold		None	3% (does not factor private lands)	3% (factors all land ownership)
Major Leasing Constraint - Closure		None	None	Yes
Major Leasing Constraint - NSO		Yes	Yes	Yes
Minor Leasing Constraint - CSU		Yes	Yes	Yes
Minor Leasing Constraint - TL		Yes	Yes	Yes
Waivers, Exceptions, Modifications		Moderate	Least restrictive, flexibility for split-estate	Most restrictive/protective
Mitigation	Align with the State's mitigation strategy or apply similar mitigation practices.			



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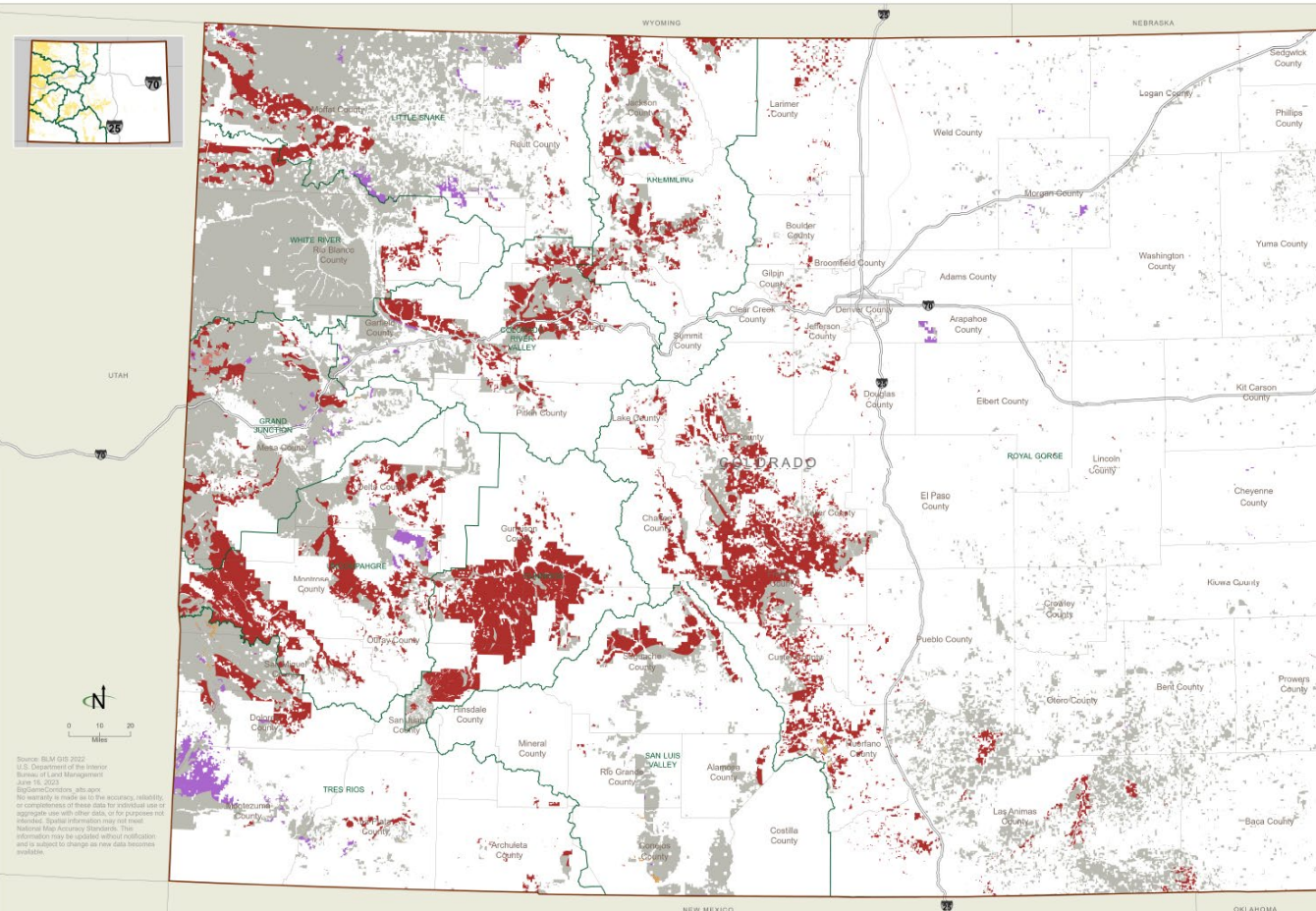
Preferred Alternative (Alternative B)

- Evaluation of facility density – surface density as a trigger to assess mitigation
- Management alignment with ECMC 1200 series rules for oil and gas development in HPH (Rule 1202.c, d; Rule 1203)
- Meets State Director's planning guidance
- Conserves big game high priority habitat while balancing oil and gas resource use



Figure 2-46, Alternatives A to D: Change in Fluid Mineral Leasing Stipulations

- Change in closed to fluid mineral leasing
- Change in open, subject to no surface occupancy (NSO)
- Change in open, subject to controlled surface use (CSU)
- Change in open, subject to timing limitation (TLs)
- BLM surface and subsurface decision area
- Planning area
- BLM field office



Alternative B would NOT close any new areas to oil and gas leasing.

Alternative D would close an additional 3,934,000 acres of HPH to leasing compared to the no action for a total of 5,726,000 acres in BLM Colorado (compared to 1,792,000 acres existing). 56% of the decision area would remain open to leasing. Most field offices are impacted.



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Comparison of Alternatives

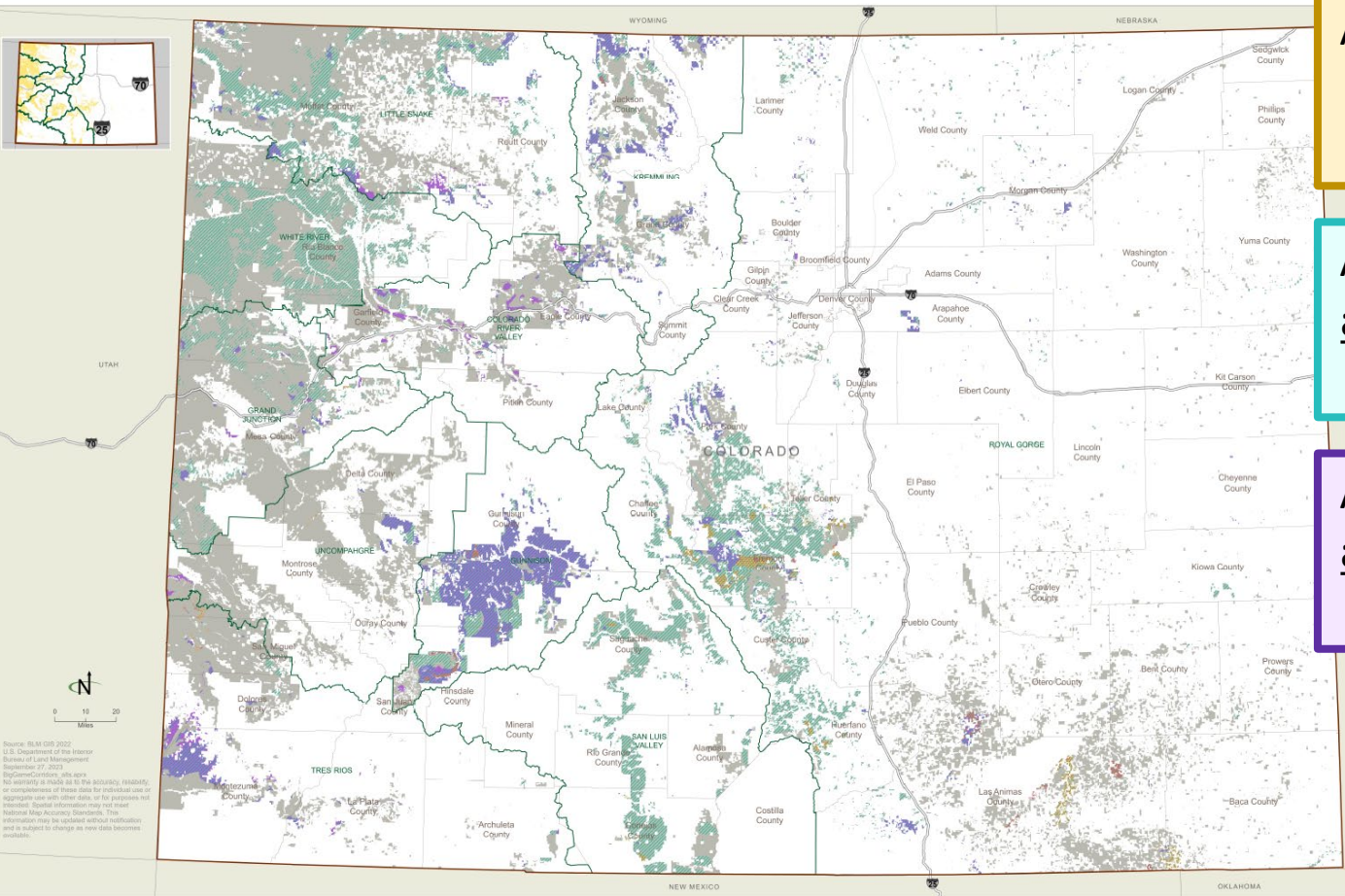
Allocation: Closure to Future Oil and Gas Leasing

Status	Alternative A: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative B: Acres (Percent of Decision Area) <i>*Preferred Alternative</i>	Alternative C: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative D: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)
Closed to Leasing	1,792,000 (13.8%)	1,792,000 (13.8%)	1,792,000 (13.8%)	5,726,000 (44%)
Open to Leasing	11,218,000 (86.2%)	11,218,000 (86.2%)	11,218,000 (86.2%)	7,284,000 (56%)
Total acres	13,010,000 (100%)	13,010,000 (100%)	13,010,000 (100%)	13,010,000 (100%)



Figure 2-44, Alternatives A to B: Change in Fluid Mineral Leasing Stipulations

- Change in open, subject to no surface occupancy (NSO)
- Change in open, subject to controlled surface use (CSU)
- Change in open, subject to timing limitation (TLs)
- BLM surface and subsurface decision area
- Planning area
- BLM field office



Alternative B would add an additional 170,000 acres of NSO to HPH.

Alternative B would add an additional 4,775,000 acres of CSU to HPH.

Alternative B would add an additional 1,339,000 acres of TL to HPH.



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Stipulation: No Surface Occupancy

Status	Alternative A: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative B: Acres (Percent of Decision Area) <i>*Preferred Alternative</i>	Alternative C: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative D: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)
Open to leasing subject to NSO	2,706,000 (20.8%)	2,878,000 (22.1%)	2,878,000 (22.1%)	1,904,000 (14.6%)

NSO only applies to bighorn sheep production areas and pinch points.



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Stipulation: Controlled Surface Use

Status	Alternative A: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative B: Acres (Percent of Decision Area) <i>*Preferred Alternative</i>	Alternative C: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative D: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)
Open to leasing subject to CSU	3,407,000 (26.2%)	8,182,000 (62.9%)	8,182,000 (62.9%)	4,252,000 (32.7%)

Stipulation: Timing Limitation

Status	Alternative A: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative B: Acres (Percent of Decision Area) <i>*Preferred Alternative</i>	Alternative C: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)	Alternative D: Acres (Percent of Decision Area)
Open to leasing subject to TL	6,920,000 (53.2%)	8,259,000 (63.5%)	8,259,000 (63.5%)	4,532,000 (34.8%)



Impact Analysis Highlights

Big Game

Incorporation of regional contexts and current CPW recommendations and ECMC regulations will reduce impacts on big game, such as habitat fragmentation, mortality, injury, or displacement, from oil and gas development.

Socioeconomics

Could lead to reduction in royalty revenue ranging from about \$230 thousand per year in 2045-2050 to \$5.9 million per year in 2030-2034, on average. Revenue from severance tax could decrease by a range of about \$28 thousand per year (from 2045 to 2050, with 2 percent rate) to about \$1.8 million (from 2030 to 2034, with 5 percent rate), on average.

Other Wildlife

The increase in areas subject to NSO, CSU, and TL stipulations would increase protections to wildlife and special status species, particularly those species associated with pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, and mountain shrub vegetation types.

Fluids (Oil and Gas)

Impacts on fluid minerals resources would be approximately the same as under Alternative A. The CSU could increase development costs and mitigation. Could require a change in proposed pad locations.

Air and Climate

Total GHG emissions and associated social cost of GHG from new federal production, transportation, processing, and downstream combustion under Alternative B in 2030 would be approximately 8% lower than for Alternative A.



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Comment Submissions Received

- **744 total submissions**
 - Majority form letters
 - 234 unique submissions
 - 12 cooperating agency submissions
 - 10 organization submissions
 - Individual letters

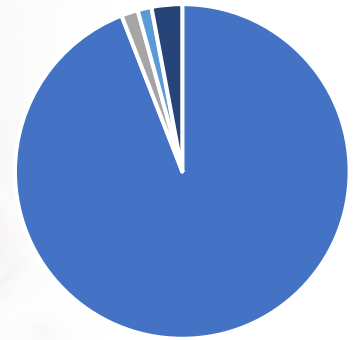
Cooperating Agency

Arapahoe, DNR/CPW/ECMC,
Dolores, Eagle, Garfield, Gunnison,
Mesa, Montezuma, Moffat, Pitkin,
Routt, U.S. FWS, EPA

Organizations

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership (+12), Western
Environmental Law Center (10+),
Citizens for a Health Community,
Colorado Wool Growers, Continental
Divide Trail Coalition, San Juan Citizens
Alliance, Wilderness Society, Pew
Charitable Trusts, Earthjustice (+6),
Colorado Oil and Gas Association

Submissions



Form Letters
Cooperating Agencies
Organizations
Individuals



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Top Coded Themes

Label	Count of Comment Code Number
Data and science	377
Big game species and habitat	241
Alternatives	219
Specific change to or critique of an alternative	149
Range of alternatives	129
Disturbance threshold	116
Constraints (TL, CSU, NSO, closed)	108
Recreation	102
State plans/policies	94
FLPMA	92
Planning criteria	88
Mule deer	87
Collaboration, coordination, and partnerships	77
GIS and maps	73
Purpose and need	68
Travel and Transportation	59
Instruction Memorandum for big game	56
Executive orders	53
NEPA	52
Elk	50
Federal plans/policies	47
Climate and Greenhouse gas emissions	46



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Comment Perspectives

- Support for Alternative B and D most common
- Support for current scope and expanded scope
- Close all HPH to new leasing
- Expand NSO to production sites, migration corridors, and winter concentration areas
- More strict waivers, exceptions, modifications
- Cumulative analysis of other land uses
- Questioning of science supporting 3% disturbance threshold
- Calculate facility and route density on all lands and route densities within each big game species' DAU, and for each species' HPH type within each DAU
- Include all roads and trails in disturbance
- Cumulative impacts factored in mitigation
- A clear and consistent approach to ensure that the authorization of mitigation projects will result in a net conservation benefit to the species, and not be administratively burdensome for BLM, CPW, or operators
- Defined process for updates to HPH





Comment Highlights – Major Leasing Constraints

- **Closure**

- Support for Alternative D closures to new leasing in no known, low, and moderate potential areas overlapped with HPH
- Close HPH to new leasing regardless of oil and gas potential
- Close 4,650 acres from Roan Plateau Plan
- Close all bighorn sheep HPH to new leasing
- Close Thompson Divide
- Opposition to any closures

- **No Surface Occupancy**

- Maintain NSO within 0.5 miles of all CPW-mapped highway crossing pinch points and non-highway pinch points
- Changes to NSO pinch point stipulation
- Remove WEMs or make stricture for NSO
- Opposition to 0.5 mile buffer in the NSO (COGA)



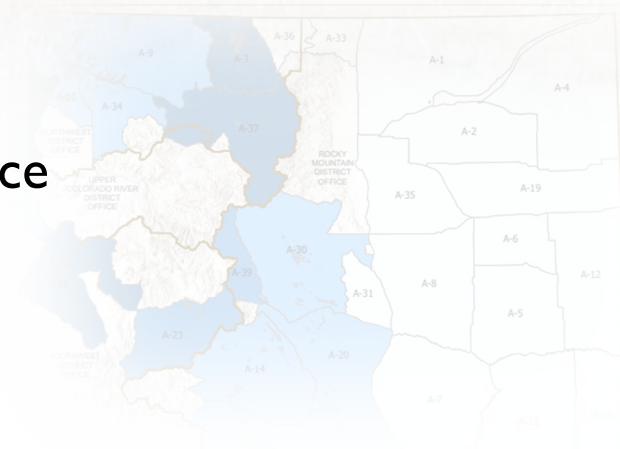
Disturbance Tracking Considerations

Opportunity

- Partnership with state
- Improved satellite imagery
- Example Habitat Management Frame for Greater

Challenges

- Long term information and trends
- Large effort to digitize HPH for 4
- species, best use of resources?
- Data limitations – jurisdictions, current absence of trails in SDARTT
- Determination of biological significant scale, difference in thresholds
- Value without associated RMPA stipulation
- Consider in future planning effort
- Evolving body of science and literature
- Not contained in ECMC rulemaking





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Schedule



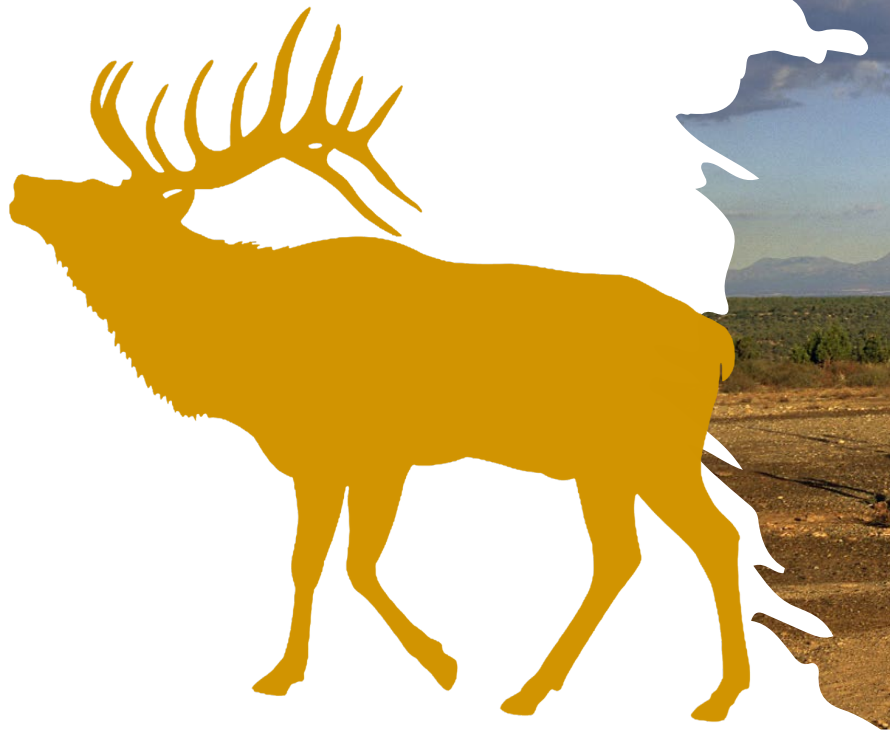
Timeline	Key Milestones
July 19, 2022	Notice of Intent published and 45-day scoping period
May 2023	Internal BLM Colorado review of draft RMPA/EIS.
July 2022	2-week Cooperating Agency review of draft RMPA/EIS
August 2023	Solicitor and BLM Headquarters review of draft RMPA/EIS
November 2023	Notice of Availability for the RMPA/DEIS and 90-day public comment period
April 2024	2-week BLM and Cooperating Agency review of proposed RMPA/EIS
July 15, 2024	Notice of Availability for the proposed RMPA/FEIS
August 2024	Public Protest Period (30 days) and Governor's Consistency Review (60 days).
November 15, 2024	Record of Decision/Approved Plan

Settlement agreement commits preparation of the RMPA within two years of the published NOI (*State of Colorado v. Bureau of Land Management*, 1:21-cv-00129 (D. Colo.).



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Questions and Discussion





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BLM Colorado

2/28/24 – Update for the NW Resource Advisory Council

Supplemental EIS (SEIS)

for the

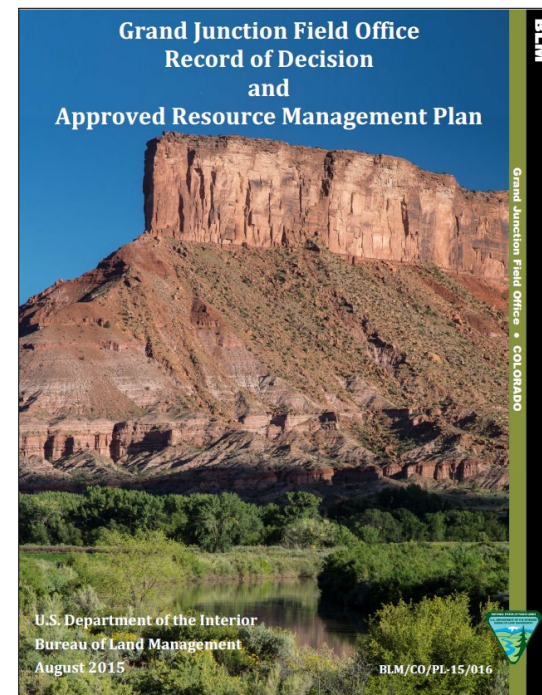
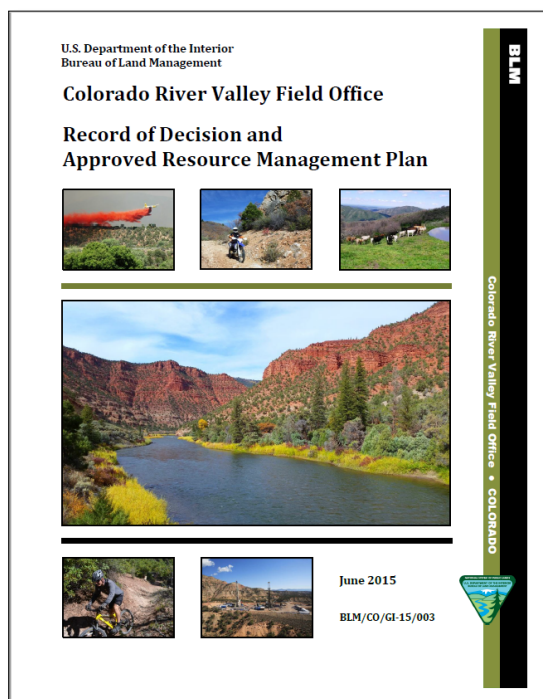
Colorado River Valley

and

Grand Junction

Resource Mgmt Plans

(2015)





Presentation Topics

- Litigation Background
- Purpose & Need
- Planning Area
- Range of Alternatives
- Public Comment
- Proposed RMPs
- Schedule



Litigation Background

2015: CRV &
GJ RMPs
Approved

CRVFO RMP
approved in
June 2015.

GJFO RMP
approved in
August 2015.

July 2016
Lawsuit
(CRV)

District Court
found BLM's
NEPA analysis
for the CRV
RMP to be
insufficient on
two counts.

2019
Settlement
Agreement

Reanalyze
greenhouse gas
emissions to
include end-use
combustion.

Consider a
broader range of
areas closed to oil
and gas leasing.

October
2019
Lawsuit (GJ)

Lawsuit for
same
deficiencies in
the GJ RMP.

BLM proposed
to complete
joint
Supplemental
EIS for the two
RMPS.

BLM published the Notice of Intent for the Supplemental EIS in June 2022



Purpose & Need

Purpose for BLM Action

- To [broaden the range of alternatives](#) in the 2015 Colorado River Valley and Grand Junction RMPs with respect to the [lands that are allocated as open or closed for oil and gas leasing](#).
- To provide [additional air quality analysis](#) for the fluid mineral management alternatives considered in the 2014 CRVFO Final EIS and the 2015 GJFO Final EIS and in this Supplemental EIS.

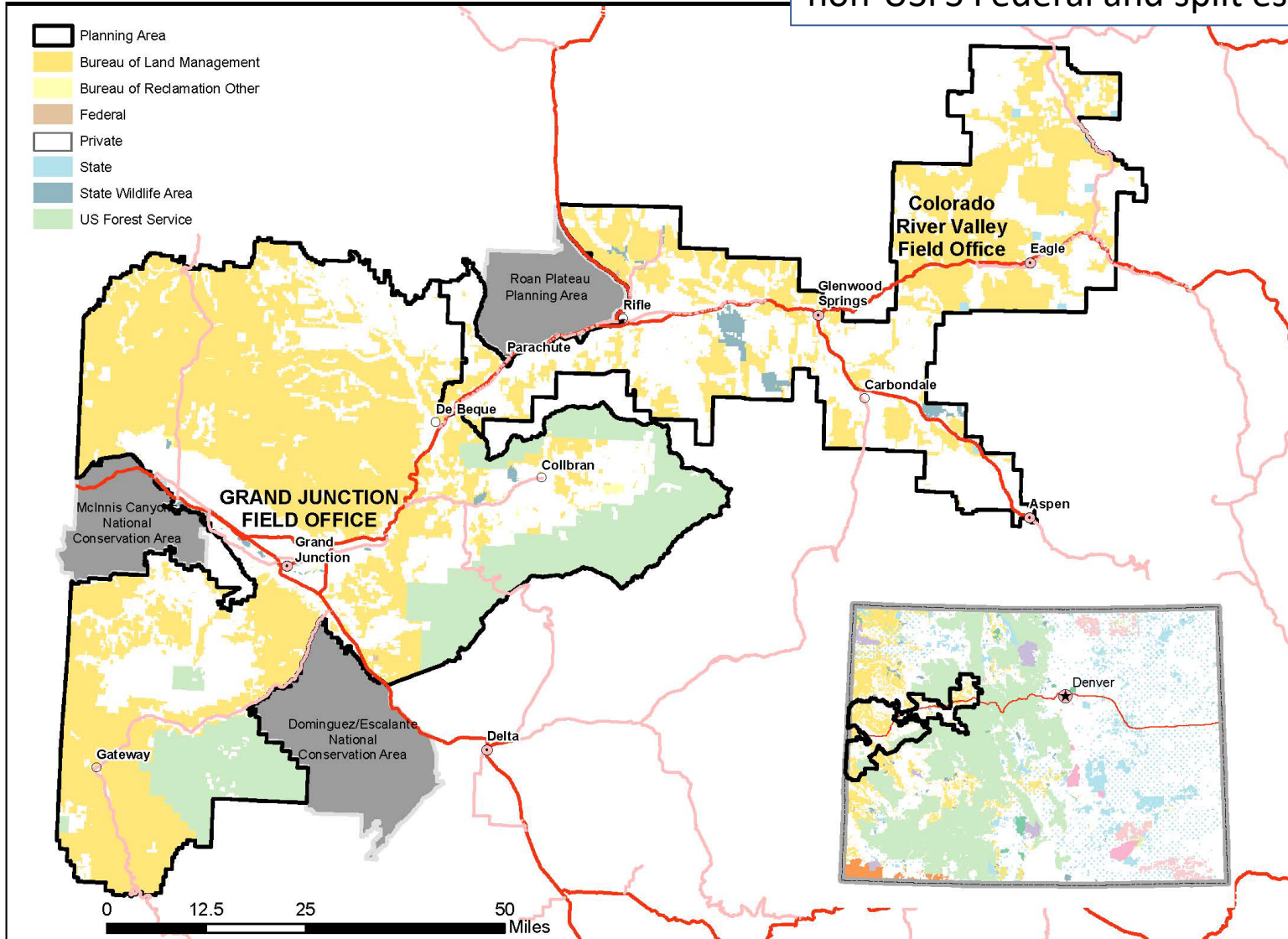
Need for BLM Action

- To [comply with the settlement agreements](#) in litigation of the Colorado River Valley RMP and subsequent oil and gas leasing in both field offices.
- To revisit the Grand Junction RMP, as described in BLM's motion for [voluntary remand](#) in litigation associated with the Grand Junction RMP.
- To consider new information and to [consider areas with Tribal significance](#).



Planning Area

Decision Area is BLM lands,
non-USFS Federal and split estate





Range of Alternatives – Alts A to D

- **Alternatives A to D are from the 2014/2015 Final EISs for the RMPs**
- **Alternative A (No Action Alternative)**
 - Management from the 1987 Grand Junction RMP and 1984 Glenwood Springs RMP
- **Alternative B (Approved 2015 RMPs)**
 - Decisions from the 2015 Approved RMPs are not vacated. Except for oil and gas leasing decisions, all decisions in the Approved RMPs are currently being implemented.
- **Alternative C**
 - More conservation-focused management than other alternatives
- **Alternative D**
 - Similar to Alternative A (more development-focused management)



Range of Alternatives – Alts E and F

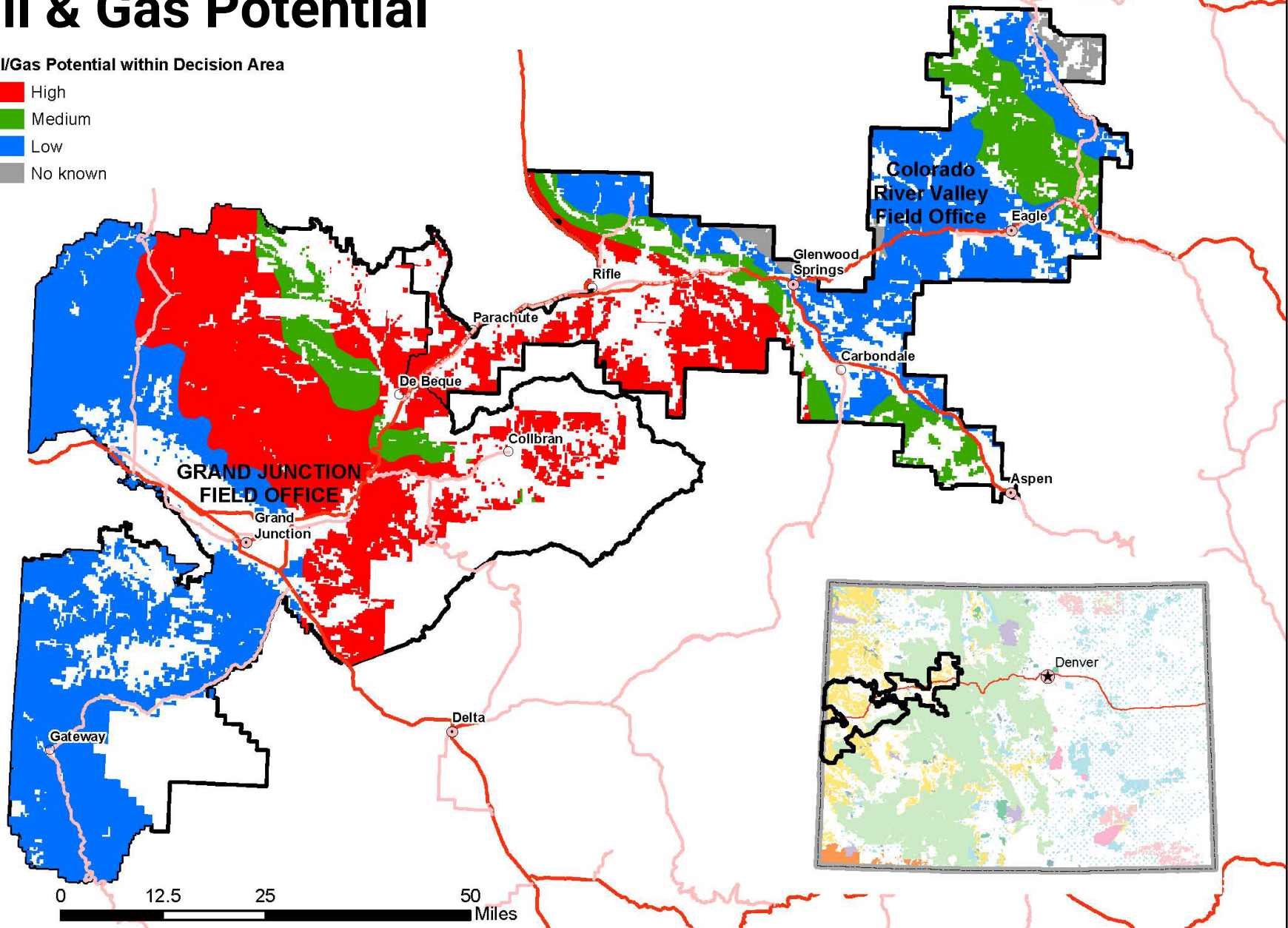
- **Alternatives E and F are new to the Supplemental EIS**
- **Alternative E (BLM Preferred Alternative)**
 - Retain management from 2015 RMPs (Alternative B)
 - Carry forward additional areas closed to leasing (Alternative C)
 - Close areas of no-known, low, and medium oil and gas potential
- **Alternative F (Scoping Alternative)**
 - Includes all components of Alternative E
 - Adds additional areas closed to oil & gas leasing as suggested during public scoping



Oil & Gas Potential

Oil/Gas Potential within Decision Area

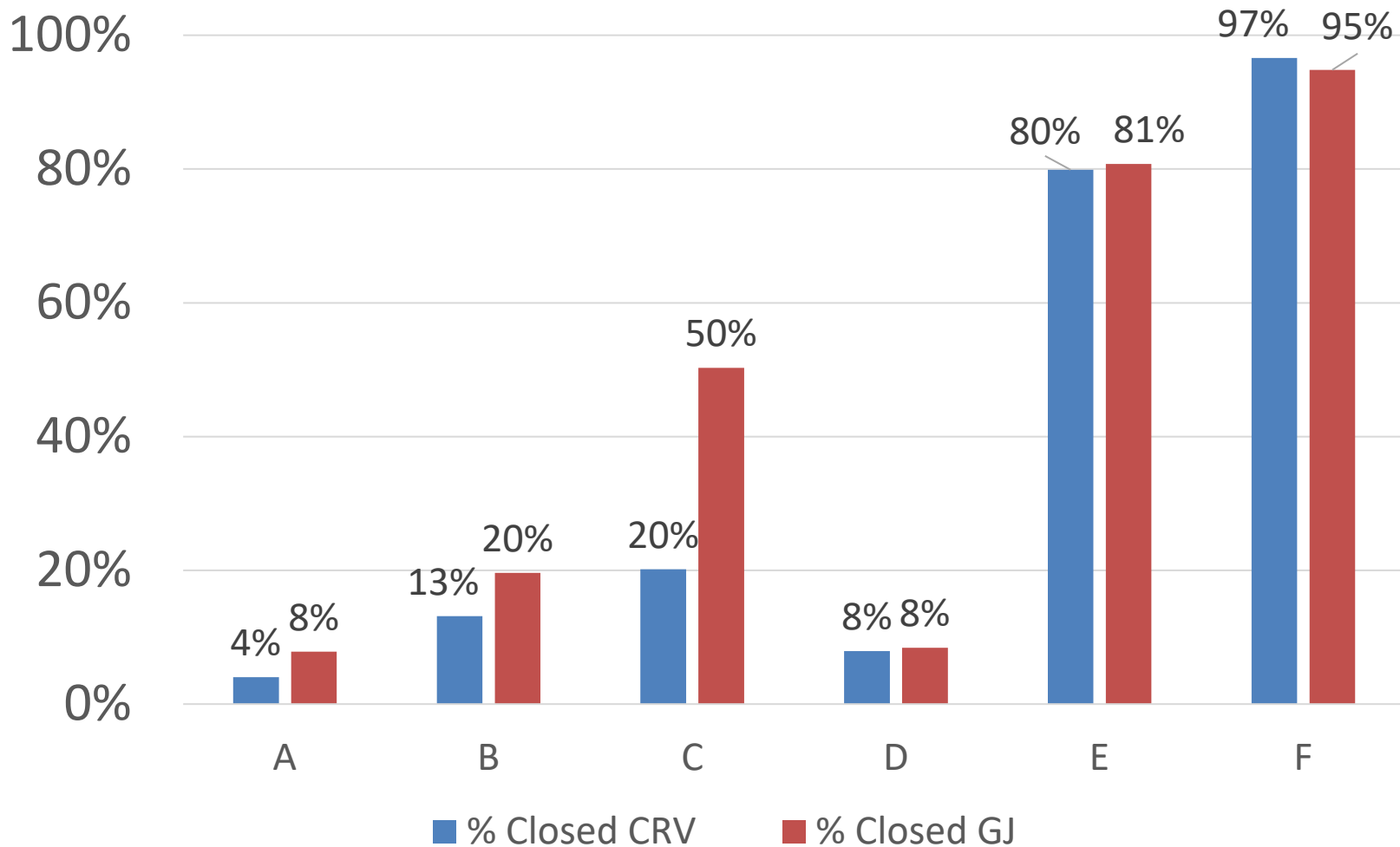
- High
- Medium
- Low
- No known





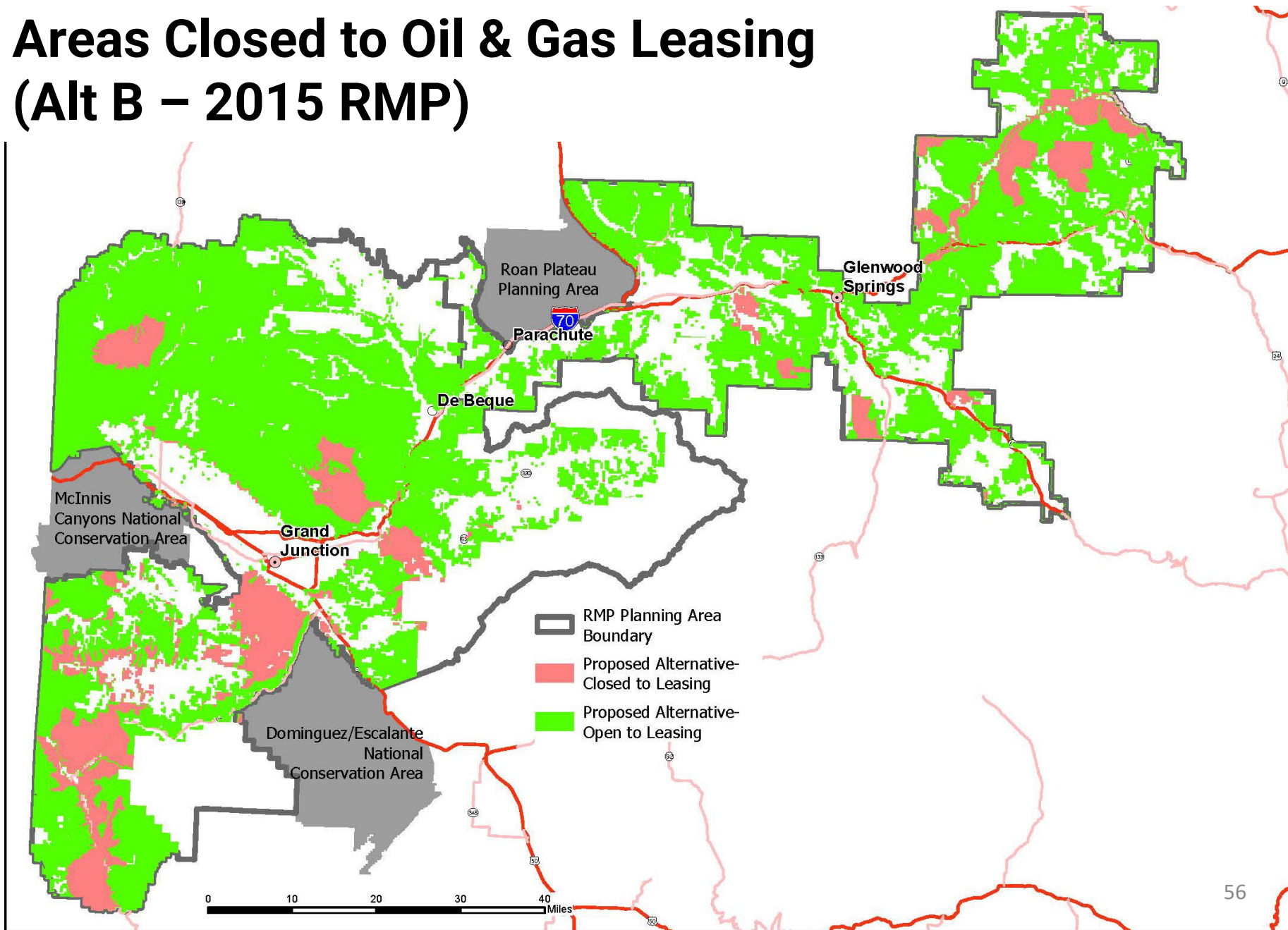
Range of Alts – Areas Closed to Oil & Gas Leasing

Areas Closed to Oil & Gas Leasing by Alternative



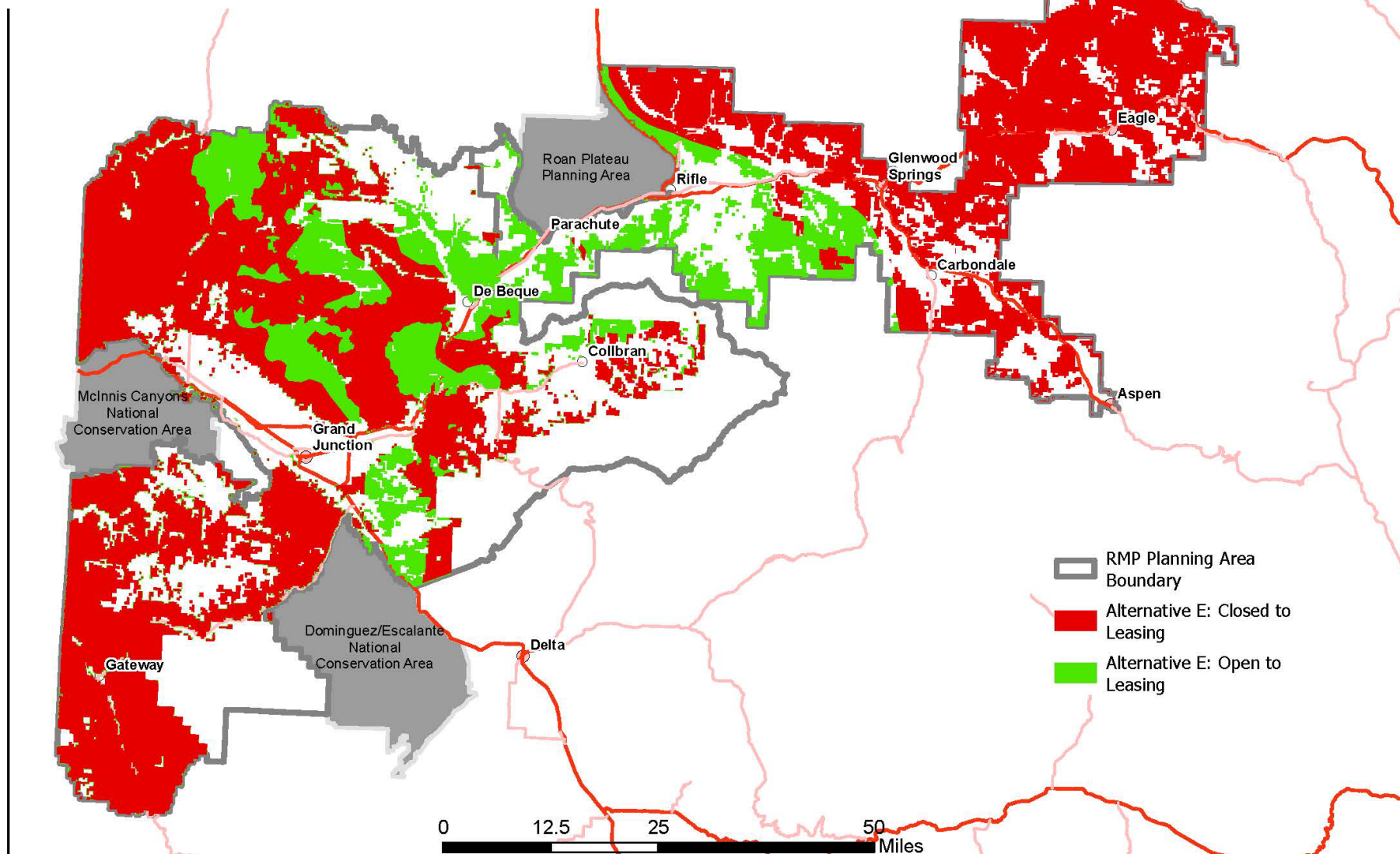


Areas Closed to Oil & Gas Leasing (Alt B – 2015 RMP)



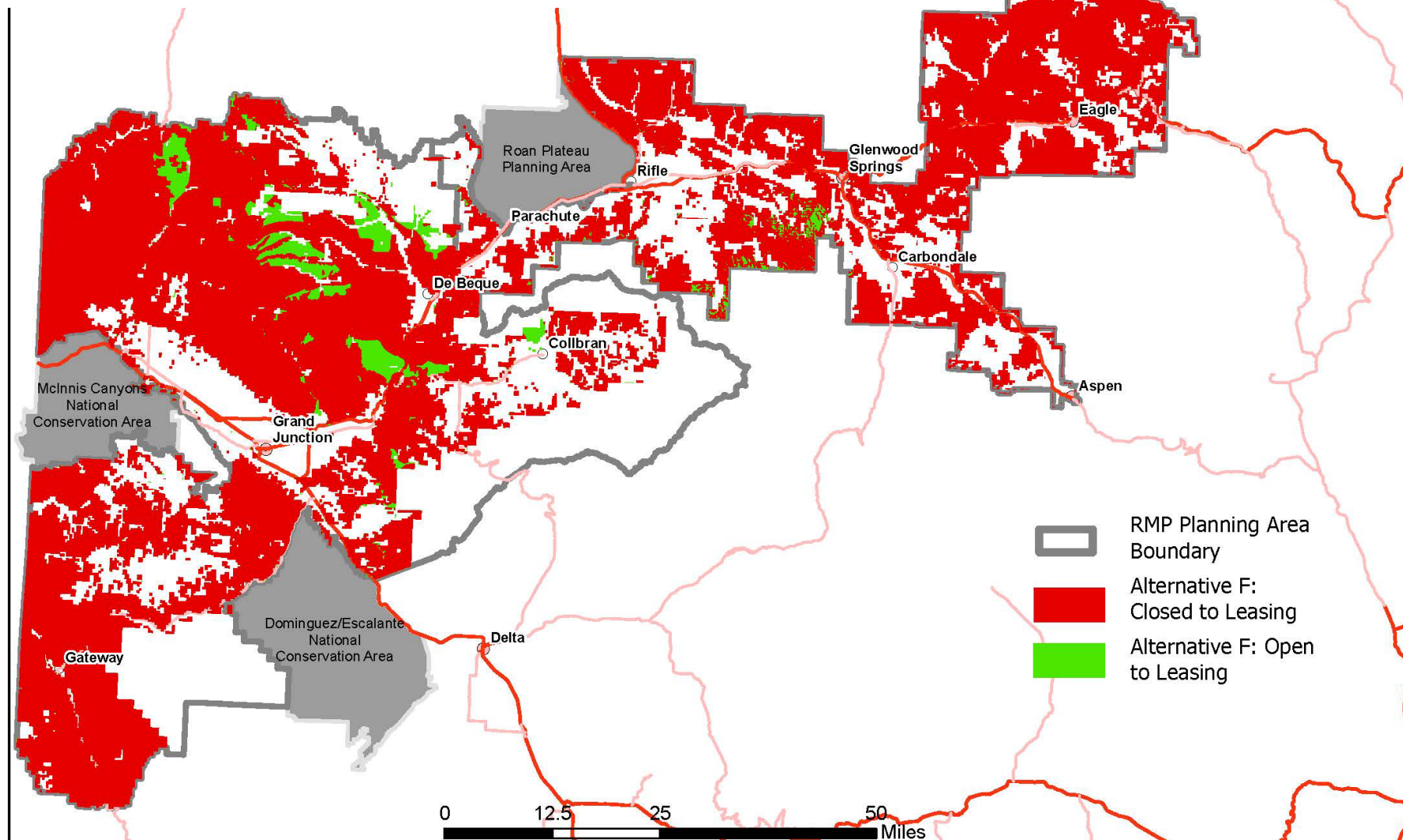


Areas Closed to Oil & Gas Leasing (Alt E – Preferred D-SEIS)





Areas Closed to Oil & Gas Leasing (Alt F – Scoping)





Feedback from Public on D-SEIS

BLM received 346 letters/unique submissions from the general public and from the following organizations, agencies, and elected officials:

Government Agencies and Elected Officials

City of Glenwood Springs, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Eagle County, GMUG National Forest, Mesa County, National Park Service National Trails Office, Pitkin County, Rep. Diana DeGette, Rep. Lauren Boebert, Rep. Doug Lamborn, Rep. Ken Buck, Rep. Dan Newhouse (WA), Rep. Dan Crenshaw, Routt County Commissioners, Town of Palisade, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 8

Organizations

350 Colorado, Colorado Jewish Climate Action, Amphibian Refuge, Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado, BlueRibbon Coalition, Center for Biological Diversity, Citizens' Climate Lobby, Colorado Farm & Food Alliance, Colorado Offroad Trail Defenders, Colorado Wildlands Project, Colorado Wildlife Federation, Inc., ColoradoWild, Cosmic Garden, DHM Design, Environment Colorado, Grand Valley Audubon Society, Grand Valley Citizens Alliance, Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition, National Association of Royalty Owners, Rocky Mountain Chapter, NW Colorado Resource Advisory Council (personal letter from RAC member), Protegete Piceance, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Roaring Fork Audubon, Roaring Fork Food Alliance, Save West Mamm Creek Coalition, Slow Food Western Slope, The Mountain Pact, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Wilderness Society, Village Smithy, Western Energy Alliance, West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association, Colorado Oil and Gas Association, Western Environmental Law Center (on behalf of Center for Biological Diversity, Citizens for a Healthy Community, Conservation Colorado, Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper, Rocky Mountain Wild, Sierra Club, Waterkeeper Alliance, Western Colorado Alliance, Western Watersheds Project, WildEarth Guardians, Wilderness Workshop), Western Slope Group, Western States and Tribal Nations Natural Gas Initiative, Wilderness Workshop



Preferred Alternative in the Draft SEIS

- The identification of a preferred alternative does not constitute a commitment or decision in principle, and there is no requirement to select the preferred alternative in the ROD.
- The identification of the preferred alternative may change between a draft EIS and final EIS.
- Various parts of separate alternatives that are analyzed in the draft can also be “mixed and matched” to develop a complete alternative in the final as long as the reasons for doing so are explained.



Preparation of Final SEIS

- BLM's written response to substantive public comments will be an appendix in the Final SEIS
- BLM has developed a new alternative (Alt G) as the Proposed RMP
- Internal administrative draft of the Final SEIS is currently being reviewed by the Cooperating Agencies



Overall Project Schedule

Completed Milestones	End Date
Publish NOI	June 2022
Publish Scoping Report	September 2022
Public Comment on Draft SEIS	November 2022

Upcoming Milestones	Estimated End Date
Complete Consultations (ESA, NHPA, Tribal)	May 2024
Publish Final SEIS	June 2024
Public Protest	July 2024
Governor's Consistency Review	August 2024
Protest Resolution Report	August 2024
Issue Two Records of Decision	October 2024



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Questions?



Castle Peak

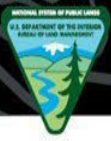


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Updates to the Western Solar Plan

Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement





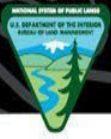
Why is BLM Updating Solar Planning?

- Guide solar proposals to better locations:
 - Identify solar application areas with fewer resource conflicts, more development interest and overall improved likelihood of success.
 - Exclude areas with known sensitive resources
- Address changes since 2012:
 - Growing interest and competitive cost for renewable energy
 - Advancements in photovoltaic (PV) and battery technology
 - Increased development interest in northern states
 - National goals to increase renewable energy generation



Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510Gemini>



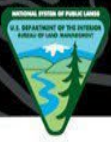


Key Elements in Updated Western Solar Plan

2012 Western Solar Plan - <i>No Action Alternative</i>	2023/2024 Draft Programmatic EIS - <i>Action Alternatives</i>
6-state planning area (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah)	11-state planning area (Previous 6-states + Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming)
Created discrete “Solar Energy Zones” and conditionally allowed development on other lands through a variance process	Identifies broad areas open to applications which will be subject to site-specific screening and further analysis
Applies to solar projects 20 megawatts or larger	Applies to solar projects 5 megawatts or larger
Allows development in areas with 5% slope or less	Alternative 1 removes the slope limitation; Alternatives 2-5 allows development in areas with 10% slope or less
Limits development in areas with solar intensity less than 6.5 kWh/m ² /day	Removes limit for development based on solar intensity
Identified exclusion criteria to make certain areas off-limits	Builds on 2012 exclusion criteria by adding and strengthening
Created programmatic design features to mitigate impacts for all solar projects	Updates and additions made to programmatic design features

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
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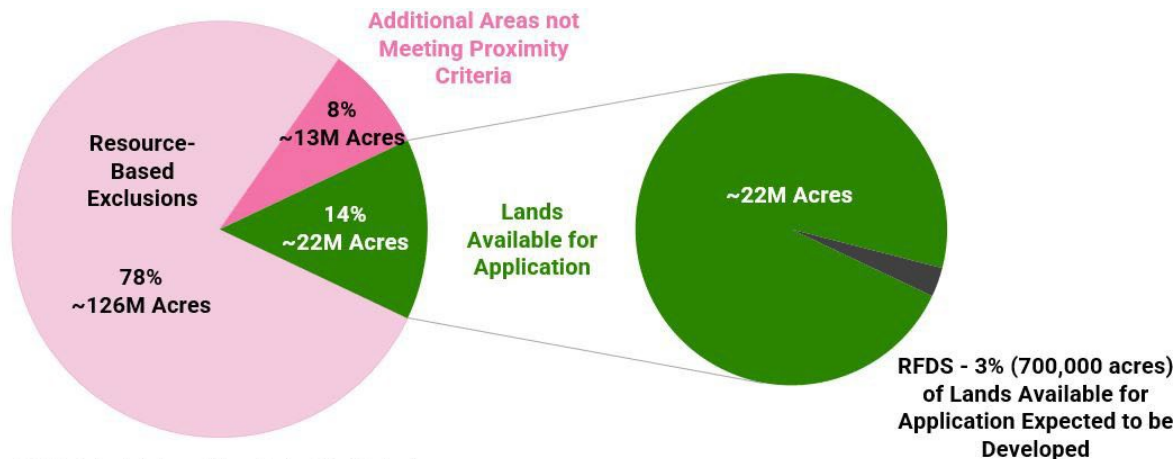




Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario

- Based on acres needed to meet renewable energy goals through 2045
- Same scenario regardless of alternative
- Based on “*Solar Futures Study*” (Department of Energy)
- **Anticipates about 700,000 acres of BLM-administered lands**

RFDS Relative to Preferred Alternative



BLM-Administered Lands in 11-State Area

State	RFDS, Estimated BLM Area Developed by 2045 (acres)
Arizona	198,210
California	109,972
Colorado	45,207
Idaho	89,574
Montana	5,387
Nevada	48,119
New Mexico	11,123
Oregon	51,387
Utah	39,793
Washington	71,781
Wyoming	27,255
Total	697,809

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
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BLM's Preferred Alternative – Alternative 3, Close to Transmission

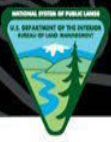


Transmission line on public lands in California, source: BLM

- Guides applications to lands with lower resource conflicts that are also closer to existing and potential transmission
- Seeks to avoid and minimize land disturbance and reduce habitat fragmentation, resource degradation, and environmental and cultural resource impacts
- Provides broad land area to support siting for 20-year development scenario
- Supports national renewable energy goals
- **Final Plan can incorporate aspects within the range of all alternatives**

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>





Design Features

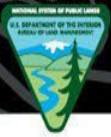
- Design features are project requirements that have been incorporated into all the alternatives to avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse impacts.
- The proposed design features in the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS would update the design features established through the Western Solar Plan that are currently in effect
- Design features are presented in Appendix B of the Programmatic EIS, and address all of the resource areas evaluated. They include requirements for specific plans to address resource-specific impacts.

Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy (includes Nesting Bird Management Plan)
Decommissioning and Site Reclamation Plan
Dust Abatement Plan
Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Plan
Health and Safety Plan
Lighting Plan
Spill Prevention and Emergency Response Plan
Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan
Threatened and endangered species protection plan
Transportation Plan
Traffic Management Plan
Vegetation/Weed Management Plan
Worker Education and Awareness Plan (WEAP)

Individual Plans Required for Projects through
Updated Design Features

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>





Requirements for Further Environmental Analysis

- This Programmatic EIS:
 - Builds a consistent framework to have solar proposals avoid areas with high levels of resource conflicts
 - Identifies areas with fewer known resource conflicts
 - **Does not** affirmatively designate particular areas as suitable for development
 - **Does not** approve any solar project
- Project-specific screening and detailed analysis will be required to:
 - Ensure consistency with the applicable land use plan
 - Conduct detailed environmental review
 - Consider Areas of Special Concern, resource-related impacts, public concerns, and proximity to important resources



Sweetwater Solar Facility, Wyoming. Source: BLM

Even in areas identified as available for application, BLM may not approve solar applications.

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>





NW Colorado specifics

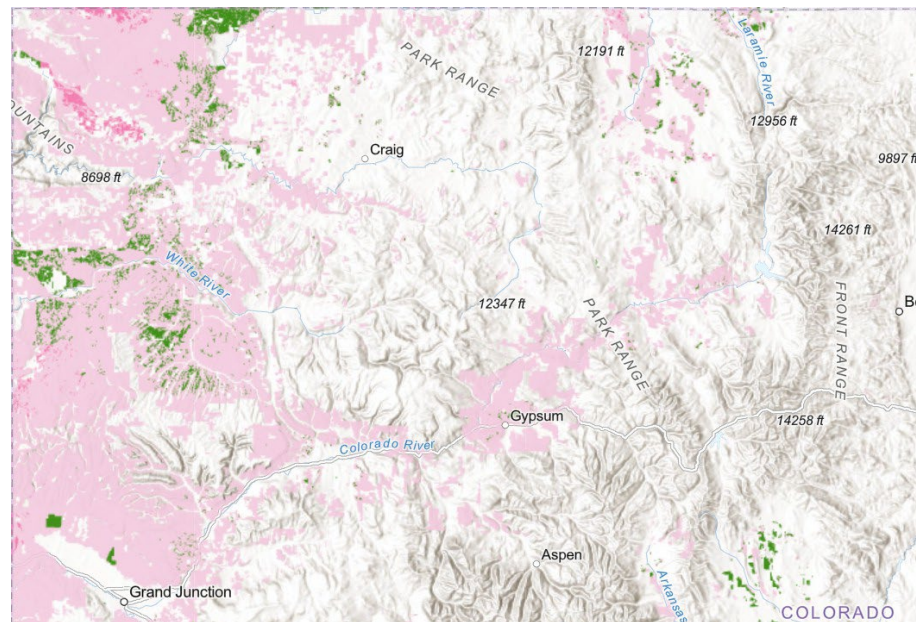
• No Action:

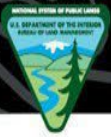
- Mostly excluded due to Solar Insolation
- Grand Junction Solar Emphasis Areas are open for solar, as are some "Variance" lands on in Roan Plateau area.



• Preferred Alternative

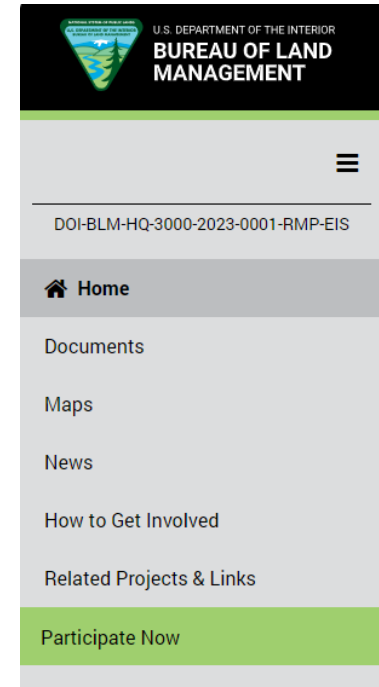
- 7% of lands Available for Application (green) - 550,000 acres
- Available Lands in every field office





Providing Effective Comments for the Utility-Scale Solar Programmatic EIS

- Limit comments to the 11 states evaluated in the EIS.
- Provide information relevant to the resource areas evaluated in the EIS.
- **Provide input on the 5 action alternatives – including elements from all alternatives to be adopted in a Final Plan.**
- Provide input on the identified exclusion criteria or design features.
- Provide information about how solar energy development might impact your lives (consider access to recreation, cultural and Tribal concerns, job opportunities, housing, community cohesion, livestock grazing and rangelands, environmental justice communities, etc.)



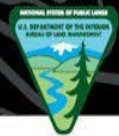
Public Comment Period open through April 18, 2024

- Comment on the BLM Project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>
 - Use the QR code to view the project website and provide comments on the Draft EIS



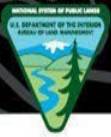


Action Alternatives	Alternative 1 (Resource-Based Exclusions Only)	Alternative 2 (Resource-Based Exclusions and >10% Slope)	Alternative 3 (Transmission Proximity)	Alternative 4 (Previously Disturbed Lands)	Alternative 5 (Previously Disturbed Lands and Transmission Proximity)
What lands are open to application for solar energy development?	Solar application areas are all lands in 11-state planning area except for the excluded areas described below.	Solar application areas are lands in 11-state planning area except for the excluded areas described below.	Solar application areas are lands within 10 miles of existing and/or planned transmission lines >100 kV except for the excluded areas described below.	Solar application areas are previously disturbed (which have diminished resource integrity) except for the excluded areas described below.	Solar application areas are previously disturbed lands (which have diminished integrity) within 10 miles of existing and/or planned transmission lines >100 kV except for the excluded areas described below.
What lands are excluded from solar energy development?	No slope-based exclusion	10% Slope Exclusion applies to Alternatives 2-5 as a general resource protection measure.			
	Resource-Based Exclusion Criteria are applied to all Action Alternatives. For example, exclusion criteria would prohibit solar energy development in all designated and proposed critical habitat areas for species protected under the ESA or in BLM National Conservation Lands.				
What about remaining lands that are not solar application areas or excluded under resource-based exclusion criteria or the slope restriction?	Not applicable (no remaining lands)	Not applicable (no remaining lands)	No development outside of these areas. Remaining areas are excluded.		
Do design features apply to the solar application areas?	Design Features are applied to all Action Alternatives. Design features are project requirements incorporated into the alternatives to avoid, minimize, and/or compensate for adverse impacts. For example, an ecological design feature could require turning off all unnecessary lighting at night to limit attracting wildlife, particularly migratory birds.				



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Plannin g Area State	BLM Planni ng Area	No Action Alternative			Alternative 1		Alternative 2		Alternative 3			Alternative 4			Alternative 5		
		Prior ity Are as	Lands Available for Application (variance areas in six state area)	Exclusio n Area s	Lands Available for Application	Resourc e- Based Exclusio n Areas	Lands Available for Application	Resourc e- Based Exclusio n Areas	Lands Available for Application	Exclusion Areas		Lands Available for Application	Exclusion Areas		Lands Available for Application	Exclusion Areas	
										Resourc e- Based Exclusio n Areas	Additional Areas Not Meeting Transmission Proximity Criteria		Resourc e- Based Exclusio n Areas	Additional Areas Not Meeting Disturbe d Lands Criteria		Resourc e- Based Exclusio n Areas	Additional areas Not Meeting Transmission Proximity or Disturbed Lands Criteria
Arizona	12,109,337	198,948	2,861,429	9,048,960	4,886,293	7,223,044	3,285,400	8,823,937	2,292,321	8,861,753	955,263	887,183	8,823,937	2,398,218	725,628	8,861,753	2,521,955
California	4,150,345	0	117,933	4,032,412	1,145,205	3,005,140	220,088	3,930,257	157,698	3,932,003	60,664	116,417	3,930,257	103,671	89,258	3,932,003	129,084
Colorado	8,354,306	22,038	135,548	8,196,717	2,281,931	6,072,374	813,551	7,540,775	548,225	7,561,299	244,782	329,854	7,540,755	483,697	235,270	7,561,299	557,738
Idaho	11,774,992	0	7,055,043	4,719,949	2,650,929	9,124,063	1,835,601	9,939,392	1,473,202	10,005,023	296,767	942,187	9,939,392	893,414	866,830	10,005,023	903,139
Montana	8,043,025	0	4,011,886	4,031,139	1,229,774	6,813,252	715,863	7,327,163	209,796	7,328,457	504,772	513,232	7,327,163	202,631	149,389	7,328,457	565,179
Nevada	47,272,125	61,834	6,863,590	40,346,702	18,332,220	28,939,905	12,371,628	34,900,497	6,988,748	35,096,891	5,186,487	2,424,286	34,900,497	9,947,342	1,587,446	35,096,891	10,587,789
New Mexico	13,493,392	29,716	3,915,370	9,548,306	6,301,088	7,192,304	5,000,154	8,493,238	2,987,559	8,525,548	1,980,285	1,765,014	8,493,238	3,235,140	1,301,315	8,525,548	3,666,529
Oregon	15,718,197	0	10,965,383	4,752,813	2,553,861	13,164,335	1,125,451	14,592,746	714,957	14,611,765	391,475	408,071	14,592,746	717,380	308,340	14,611,765	798,093
Utah	22,767,896	17,659	1,815,742	20,934,494	9,883,743	12,884,153	6,562,857	16,205,038	3,768,382	16,273,746	2,725,767	1,938,117	16,205,038	4,624,740	1,570,779	16,273,746	4,923,370
Washington	437,237	0	412,062	25,175	355,229	82,008	125,135	312,103	106,458	312,103	18,676	94,975	312,103	30,159	81,211	312,103	43,923
Wyoming	18,047,498	0	9,139,769	8,907,717	5,417,541	12,629,957	4,124,996	13,922,502	2,980,130	13,971,708	1,095,661	1,779,148	13,922,502	2,345,848	1,444,249	13,971,708	2,631,541
TOTAL	162,168,351	330,195	47,293,756	114,544,384	55,037,816	107,130,534	36,180,723	125,987,628	22,227,475	126,480,296	13,460,580	11,198,484	125,987,629	24,982,238	8,359,715	126,480,295	27,328,341



Resource Areas Addressed in the Solar Programmatic EIS

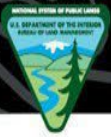
- Acoustic Environment
- Air Quality
- Climate Change
- Cultural Resources
- Ecological Resources
 - Vegetation
 - Aquatic Biota
 - Wildlife
 - Special Status Species
- Environmental Justice
- Geology and Soil Resources
- Hazardous Materials and Waste
- Health and Safety
- Lands and Realty
- Military and Civilian Aviation
- Minerals
- Paleontological Resources
- Rangeland Resources
 - Livestock Grazing
 - Wild Horses and Burros
- Recreation
- Socioeconomics
- Specially Designated Areas and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
- Transportation
- Tribal Interests
- Visual Resources
- Water Resources
- Wildland Fire



Figure from Solar Programmatic EIS Visual Resources Analysis



Please provide your
comment on the Draft
Solar Programmatic EIS,
at:
[https://eplanning.blm.gov
/eplanning-
ui/project/2022371/510](https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510)

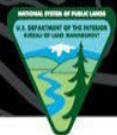


Exclusion Criteria

- Exclusion criteria identify lands that would be excluded from solar energy application under each of the action alternatives based on the presence of certain resources
 - BLM has identified 21 different exclusions in the Draft Programmatic EIS
 - Areas excluded will change over time as land use plans are revised or amended
 - Maps for the action alternatives reflect exclusion criteria to the extent that GIS data is available
 - Some resource exclusions remain unmapped due to information sensitivity or lack of GIS data
 - There is also an exclusion for slope – increased from 5% to 10% from 2012 plan
- 2012 Western Solar Plan exclusion criteria were reviewed and updated based on:
 - BLM experience in permitting and monitoring
 - Public and cooperating agency input, including updated information on resources and technology

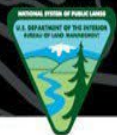
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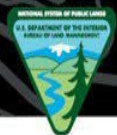


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Exclusion No.	Exclusion Type	Description	Exclusion Status for Alternatives Analysis
1	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)	All ACECs identified in applicable land use plans.	Mapped
2	Threatened and Endangered Species	All designated and proposed critical habitat areas for species protected under the ESA (https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/critical-habitat). Known occupied habitat for certain ESA-listed species, based on current available information or surveys of project areas.	Partially mapped
3	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	All areas for which an applicable land use plan establishes protection for lands with wilderness characteristics.	Partially mapped
4	Recreation	Developed recreational facilities and all Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs) identified in applicable land use plans.	Mapped
5	Habitat Areas	Dixie valley toad habitat, Wyoming toad habitat, and Carson wandering skipper habitat. All areas where the BLM has agreements with USFWS and/or state agency partners and other entities to manage sensitive species habitat in a manner that would preclude solar energy development, including habitat protection and other recommendations in conservation agreements/strategies.	Unmapped
6	Greater Sage-Grouse and Gunnison Sage-Grouse	Greater sage-grouse and Gunnison sage-grouse habitat as identified for exclusion in applicable land use plans.	Mapped
7	Land Use Designations	All areas designated as no surface occupancy (NSO) in applicable land use plans. All ROW exclusion areas identified in applicable land use plans. All ROW avoidance areas identified in applicable land use plans to the extent the purpose of the ROW avoidance is incompatible with solar energy development.	Mapped
8	Desert Tortoise	All desert tortoise translocation sites identified in applicable resource management plans, project-level mitigation plans, or Biological Opinions.	Unmapped
9	Big Game	All big game migratory corridors identified in applicable land use plans to the extent the land use plan decision prohibits utility-scale solar energy development. All big game winter ranges identified in applicable land use plans to the extent the land use plan decision prohibits utility-scale solar energy development.	Unmapped
10	Natural Areas and Other Conservation Areas	Research Natural Areas and Outstanding Natural Areas identified in applicable land use plans. All Backcountry Conservation Areas identified in applicable land use plans.	Partially mapped

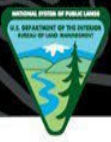


Exclusion No.	Exclusion Type	Description	Exclusion Status for Alternatives Analysis
11	Visual Resources	Lands classified as visual resource management (VRM) Class I or II throughout the 11-state planning area and, only in Utah (and small parts of Arizona and Colorado), some lands classified as Class III in applicable land use plans.	Mapped
12	National Scenic Byways	All National Scenic Byways, including all BLM Back Country Byways (BLM State Director approved) identified in applicable BLM land use plans, including any associated corridor or lands identified for protection through an applicable land use plan.	Unmapped
13	National Recreation, Water, or Side and Connecting Trails	All Secretarially designated National Recreation Trails (including National Water Trails) and Connecting and Side Trails identified in applicable BLM and local land use plans, including any associated corridor or lands identified for protection through an applicable land use plan.	Unmapped
14	National Conservation Lands	<p>All units of BLM National Conservation Lands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Monuments National Conservation Areas and other areas similarly designated for conservation, including Cooperative Management and Protection Areas, Outstanding Natural Areas, Forest Reserves, and National Scenic Areas. National Trails System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All National Scenic and Historic Trails designated by Congress, trails recommended as suitable for designation through a congressionally authorized National Trail Feasibility Study, or such qualifying trails identified as additional routes in law, including any trail management corridors identified for protection through an applicable land use plan, Trails undergoing a Congressionally authorized National Trail Feasibility Study will also be excluded pending the outcome of the study. National Wild and Scenic Rivers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, including any associated corridor and lands identified for protection through an applicable river corridor plan (or comprehensive river management plan). Absent a river plan, protection corridors are ¼ mile to either side of the river from the ordinary high- water mark, unless otherwise provided by law. Areas outside a designated wild and scenic river corridor when the project would “invade the area or unreasonably diminish” the wild and scenic river’s river values. All segments of rivers determined to be eligible or suitable for Wild or Scenic River status as identified in applicable land use plans, including any associated corridor and lands identified for protection through an applicable land use plan. Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas 	Mapped



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

Exclusion No.	Exclusion Type	Description	Exclusion Status for Alternatives Analysis
15	National Natural Landmarks	National Natural Landmarks identified in applicable land use plans, including any associated lands identified for protection through an applicable land use plan.	Mapped
16	National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)	Lands within the boundaries of properties listed in the NRHP, including National Historic Landmarks, and any additional lands outside the designated boundaries identified for protection through an applicable land use plan.	Partially mapped
17	Tribal Interest Areas	Traditional cultural properties (TCPs) and Native American sacred sites that are identified through consultation with Tribes and recognized by the BLM or that are the subject of a Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM and a Tribe or Tribes.	Partially mapped
18	Old Growth Forests	Old Growth Forests identified in applicable land use plans.	Unmapped
19	Lands Previously Found to Be Inappropriate for Solar Energy Development	Lands found to be inappropriate for solar energy development through a prior environmental review process.	Mapped
20	Acquired Lands	All lands acquired by the BLM using funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund or the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, as amended (Public Law 105-263).	Mapped
21	State- or Area-Specific	In Nevada, lands in the Ivanpah Valley, Coal Valley, and Garden Valley. Area surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park consistent with Public Land Order No. 7923. Rio Grande Natural Area (as established by Public Law 109-337).	Mapped



Requirements for Further Environmental Analysis



BLM Restoration Landscapes

- Areas of Special Concern were identified based on input from the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), cooperating agencies, and BLM subject matter experts
- Appendix H presents 4 categories of Areas of Special Concern: BLM Restoration Landscapes, Oil and Gas Lease Areas, Big Game Use Areas, and NPS Areas of Special Concern
- Developers would propose avoidance and/or other mitigation measures for projects that intersect with these areas

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>





What is Socioeconomic Analysis?

ASSESSMENT OF:

- Social, economic, and environmental justice conditions within the 11-western states
- Potential for changes in these conditions by proposed planning updates

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

- Population size and distribution
- Demographics
- Lifestyles
- Orientation to natural resources and public lands
- Community characteristics (history, culture, values, resiliency, vulnerability)

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- How planning impacts may disproportionately and adversely affect low-income and minority populations and tribal communities

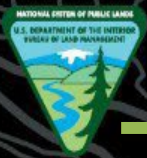
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

- Employment patterns and unemployment
- Industries and economic sectors
- Major local and regional employers
- Sources of income
- Role of BLM-managed lands in local or regional economy
- Payments to counties
- Potential financial impacts to communities
- Economic resilience and vulnerability

**We want to hear from
you!**

Please provide your comment on the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, at:
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510Gemini>





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

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

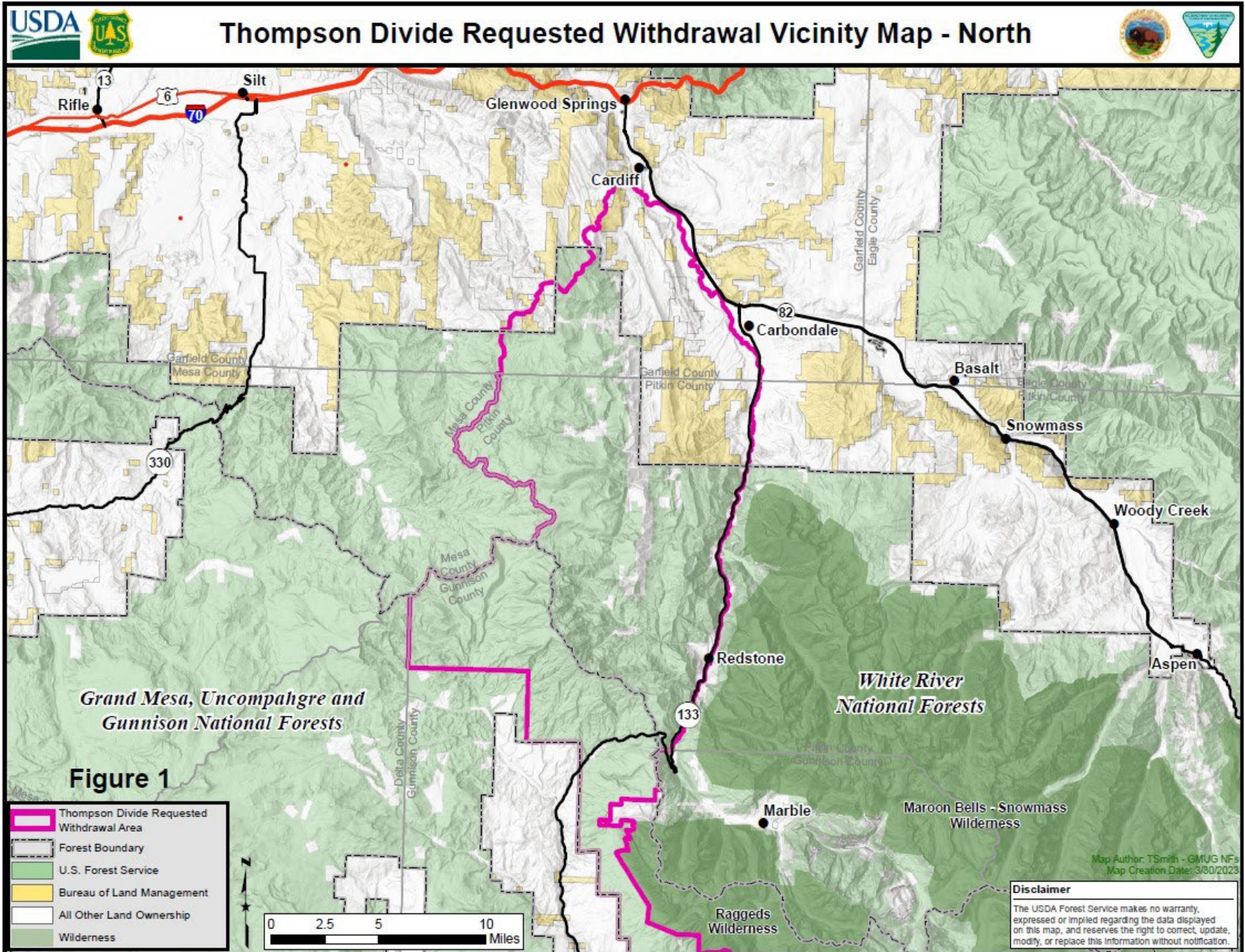
NW RAC Presentation Feb 2024

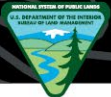




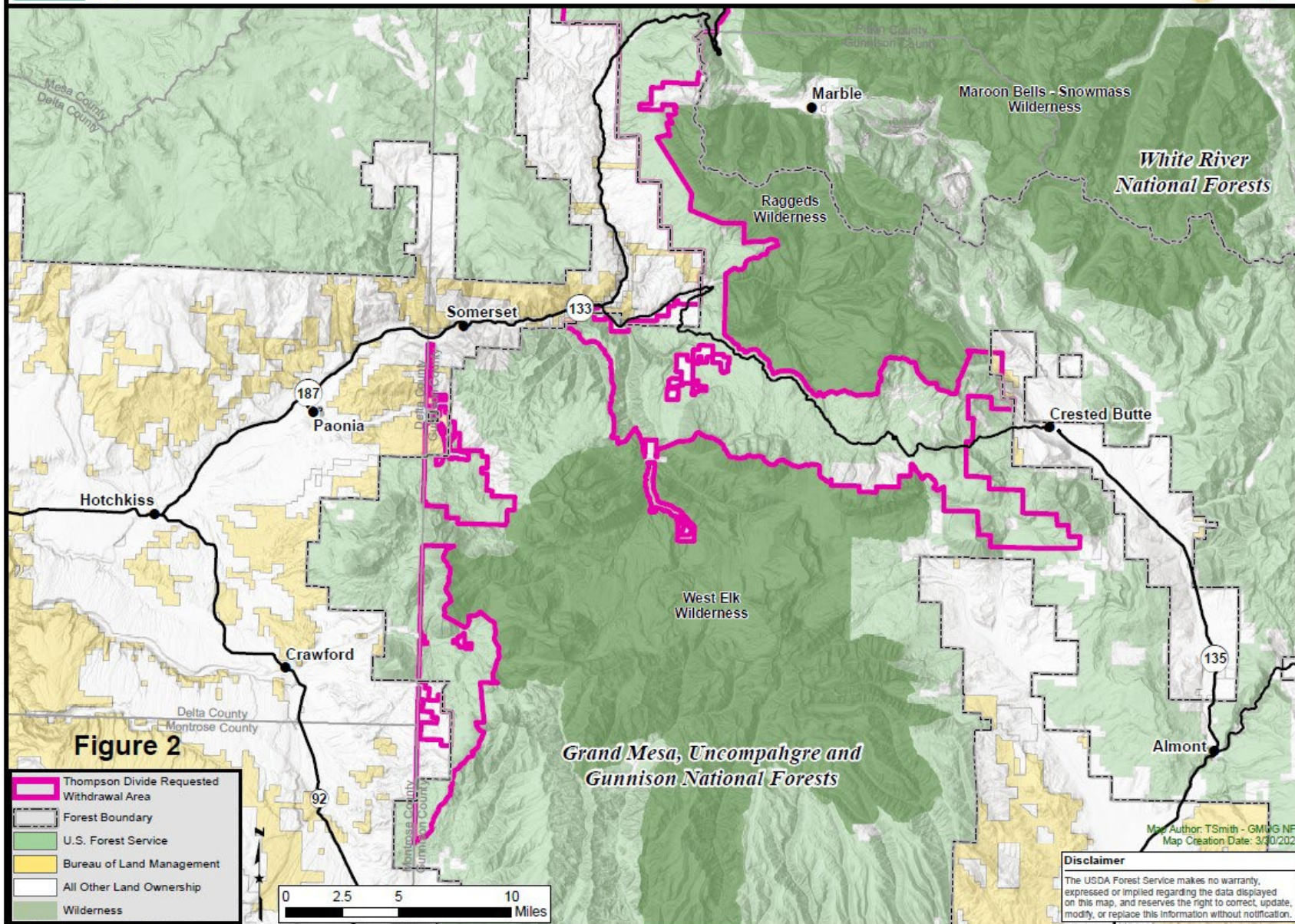
Thompson Divide Withdrawal

- Approximately 200,518 acres of National Forest System lands
- Approximately 15,465 acres of BLM lands
- Approximately 8,721 acres of reserved federal mineral interest
- Approximately 35,562 acres of non-federal lands with no federal interest in the withdrawal area. These lands would not be subject to the withdrawal unless they are subsequently acquired by the United States
- Garfield, Gunnison, and Pitkin Counties





Thompson Divide Requested Withdrawal Vicinity Map - South





What is a Withdrawal?

Withdrawal means withholding an area of Federal land from settlement, sale, location, or entry under some or all of the general land laws, for the purpose of limiting activities under those laws in order to maintain other public values in the area or reserving the area for a particular public purpose or program. 43 CFR 2300.0 5(h)



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

- **The requested withdrawal would be subject to valid existing rights.**
- **Private surface and private minerals would not be affected.**
- **Land management activities such as recreation, grazing, vegetation management, etc. would not be affected.**



Withdrawal Authorities

- **The Secretary of the Department of the Interior approves or denies most withdrawals**
- **The Bureau of Land Management (an agency within the Department of the Interior) is responsible for administering the withdrawal process**
- **The Forest Service will prepare an environmental analysis as part of the withdrawal process. The BLM will be a cooperating agency in the environmental analysis.**

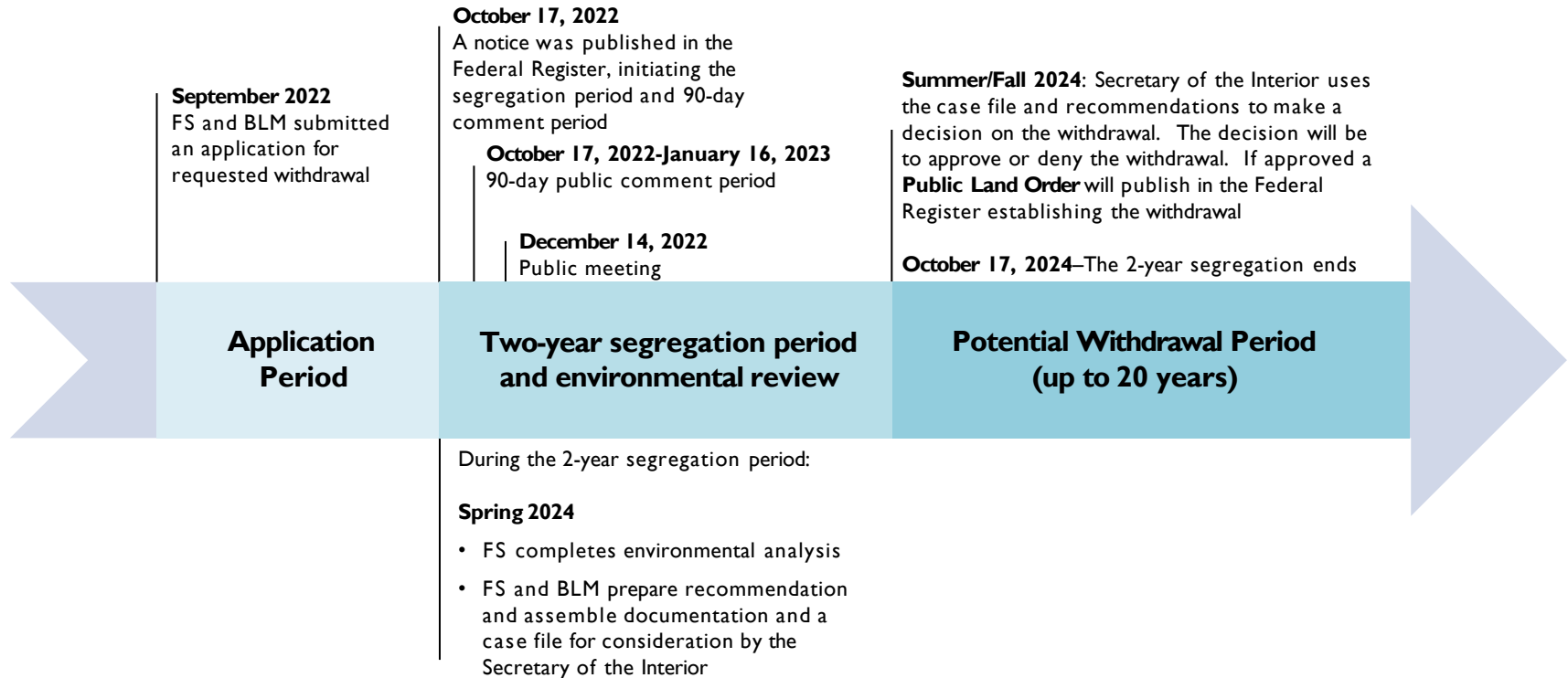


Thompson Divide Withdrawal

The purpose of the requested withdrawal is to protect and preserve cultural, agricultural, ranching, wildlife, air quality, recreational, ecological, and scenic values in the Thompson Divide area of Colorado from potential impacts from exploration and development of federally owned minerals.



Withdrawal Process and Key Dates





For Additional Information

Elysia Retzlaff, Project Manager

elysia.retzlaff@usda.gov

Visit the project page at

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=63679>



What is a Withdrawal?

- **A withdrawal closes or withholds Federal land from certain public land laws and/or mineral laws so the land can be dedicated to a certain public purpose or protect public resources**
- **A withdrawal limits certain activities to maintain/protect public resources in the area**
- **Each withdrawal is unique to address specific purpose(s) needed for the withdrawal**



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

- **White River National Forest (78,472 acres)**
- **Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (122,046 acres)**
- **Bureau of Land Management (15,465 acres)**
- **Garfield, Gunnison, and Pitkin Counties**



Withdrawal Authorities

- The authority to withdraw public lands is provided under Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act ([FLPMA](#)) of 1976, as amended
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regulations for withdrawals are provided under Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 2300 (43 CFR Part 2300)



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

If granted, the requested withdrawal would withdraw (close) the lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the public land laws; location and entry under the US mining laws; and leasing under mineral and geothermal leasing laws for 20 years.



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

If granted, the requested withdrawal would withdraw (close) the lands from **settlement, sale, location or entry under the public land laws;** location and entry under the US mining laws; and leasing under mineral and geothermal leasing laws for 20 years.

- **A withdrawal would prohibit the disposition of Federal land (e.g., sale or exchange) for the duration of the withdrawal**



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

If granted, the requested withdrawal would withdraw (close) the lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the public land laws; **location and entry under the US mining laws**; and leasing under mineral and geothermal leasing laws for 20 years.

- Applies to locatable minerals that are subject to disposition under the Mining Law of 1872, as amended. Locatable minerals include, but are not limited to, gold, silver, platinum, precious gems, uranium, rare earth minerals, etc.
- Surface and subsurface estates would be closed to disposition under the mining laws. No new mining claims could be located.



Thompson Divide Withdrawal

If granted, the requested withdrawal would withdraw (close) the lands from settlement, sale, location or entry under the public land laws; location and entry under the US mining laws; **and leasing under mineral and geothermal leasing laws** for 20 years.

- Leasable minerals are minerals that are subject to disposition under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands of 1947, and the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970. Leasable minerals are typically oil, gas, coal, and geothermal occurrences.
- A withdrawal from “leasing under mineral and geothermal leasing laws” means the subsurface estate is closed and no new leases would be issued.



Next Steps and Timeline

- **Forest Service completes environmental analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (June 2023-March 2024)**
- **Forest Service and BLM assemble withdrawal documentation/case file and prepare recommendations for consideration by the Secretary of the Interior (March-April 2024)**
- **Secretary of the Interior uses the case file and recommendations to make a decision on the withdrawal (Summer/Fall 2024)**

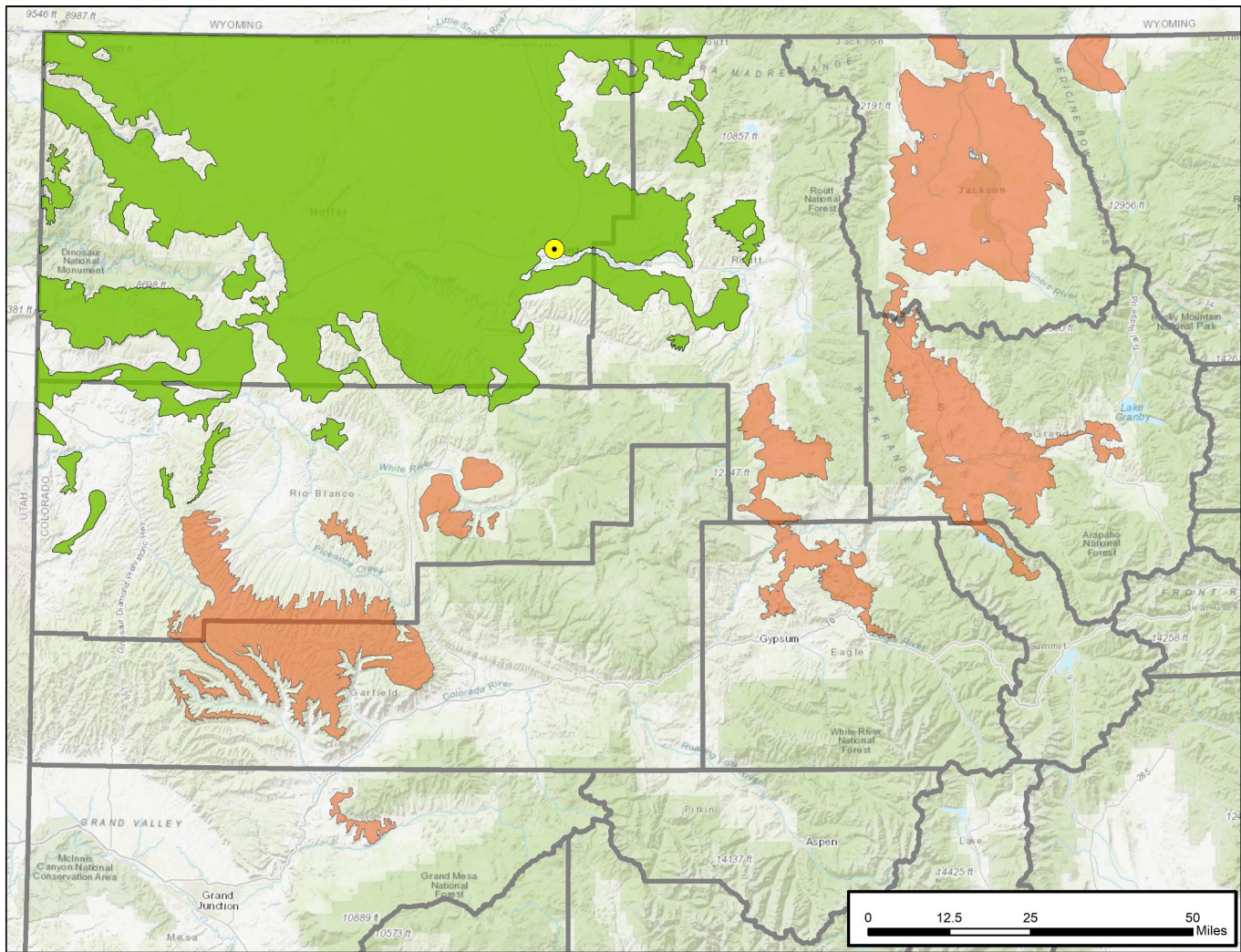
Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Population: Current Status and Review of Wildfire Impacts

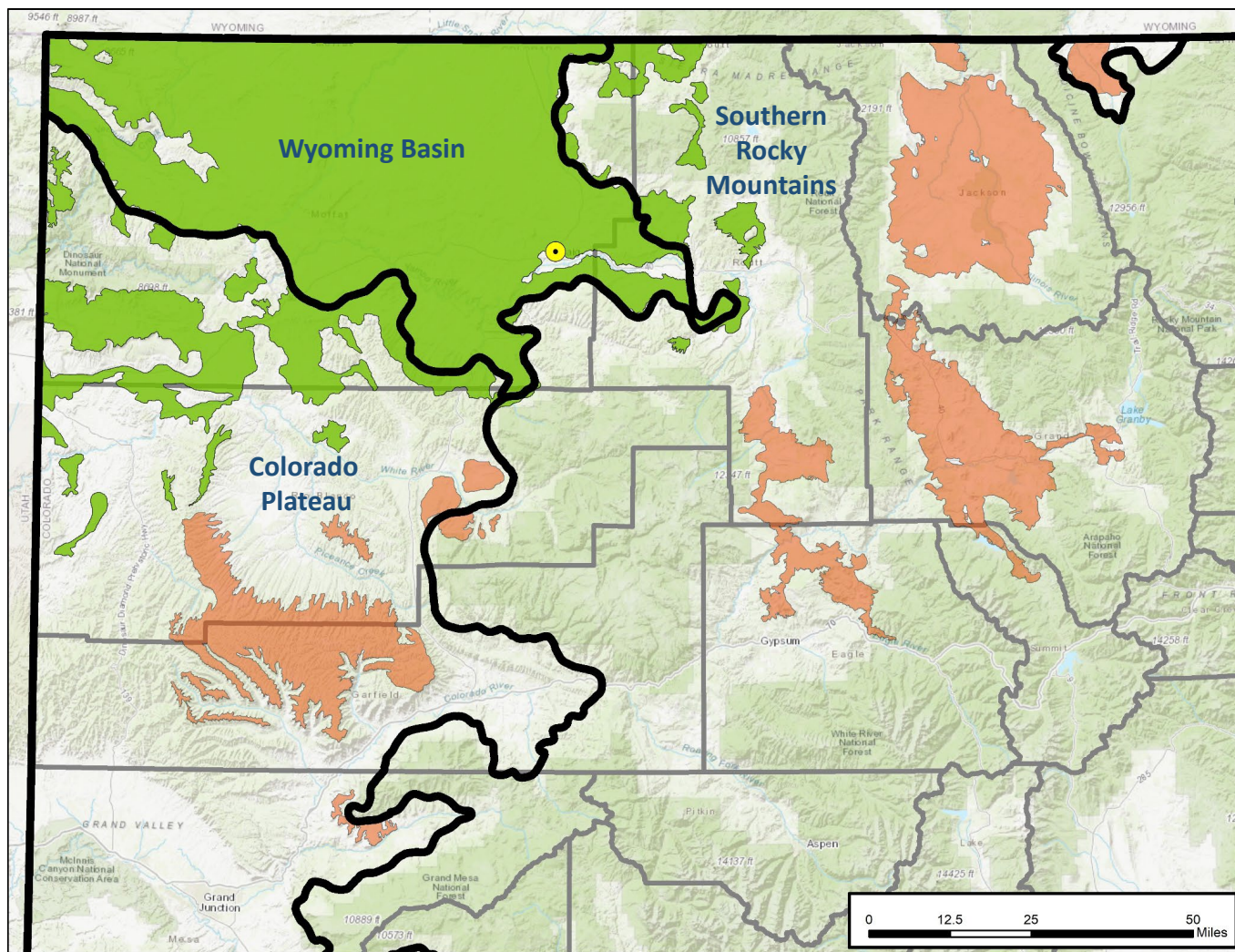
Presented by: Brian Holmes, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Northwest RAC Meeting, Craig, CO - February 28, 2024



Outline

- Introduce the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-grouse Population, including distribution, ecology, and population trend.
- Review current research on greater sage-grouse and fire across the West.
- Describe some case studies on greater sage-grouse and fire in northwest Colorado.





Greater Sage-grouse Habitat in Northwest Colorado

- Elevation Range: ~5,500 to 8,800 feet
- Precipitation Zone: ~10 to 28 inch annual precipitation
- Vegetation Associations:
 - Wyoming Big Sagebrush
 - Mountain Big Sagebrush
 - Silver Sage/Rabbitbrush/Bitterbrush
 - Sagebrush-Mixed Mountain Shrub (Serviceberry/Oak/Snowberry)
 - Low/Alkalai/"Chicken" Sage
 - Sagebrush/Saltbush/Mixed Desert Shrub



Axial Basin
May 2023
~6,400 ft
13 – 15 inch precip zone



Sand Wash Basin
May 2022
~6,300 ft
9 – 11 inch precip zone



Lily Park
June 2011
~5,700 ft
9 – 11 inch precip zone



Bitterbrush SWA

June 2016

~6,300 ft

11 – 13 inch precip zone



Cantling Creek/East Gibraltar Area

October 2015

~7,500 ft

25 – 27 inch precip zone

Soldier Creek/Roan Plateau Area

September 2010

~8,800 ft

23 – 25 inch precip zone



Crooked Wash

June 2011

~6,200 ft

13 – 15 inch precip zone





Blue Gravel Watershed/Great Divide Area

April 2022

~6,800 ft

17 – 19 inch precip zone



G Flat/Cold Springs Mountain Area

April 2011

~7,200 ft

13 – 15 inch precip zone



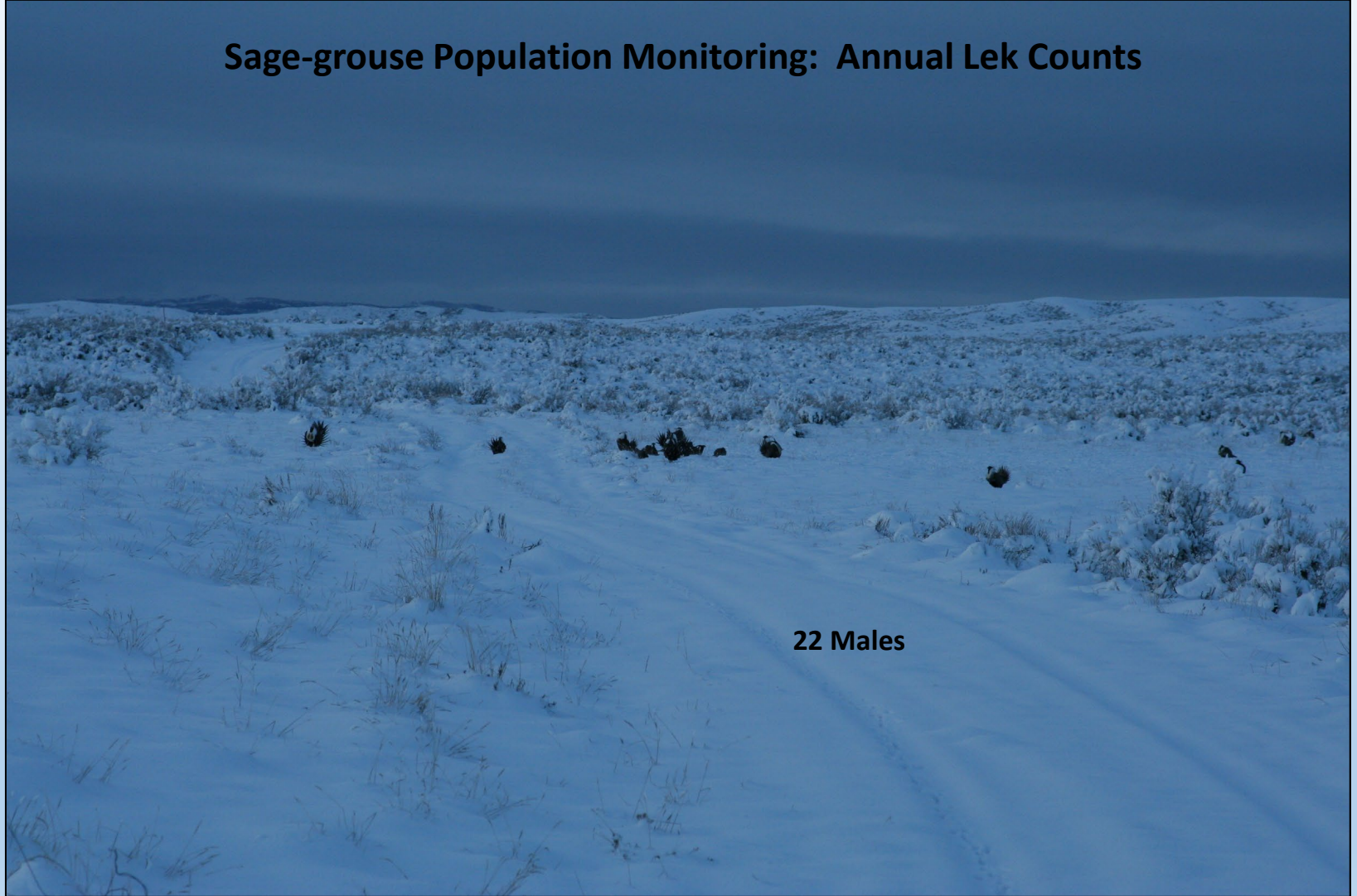
Pot Creek Area/Utah State Line

July 2013

~6,800 ft

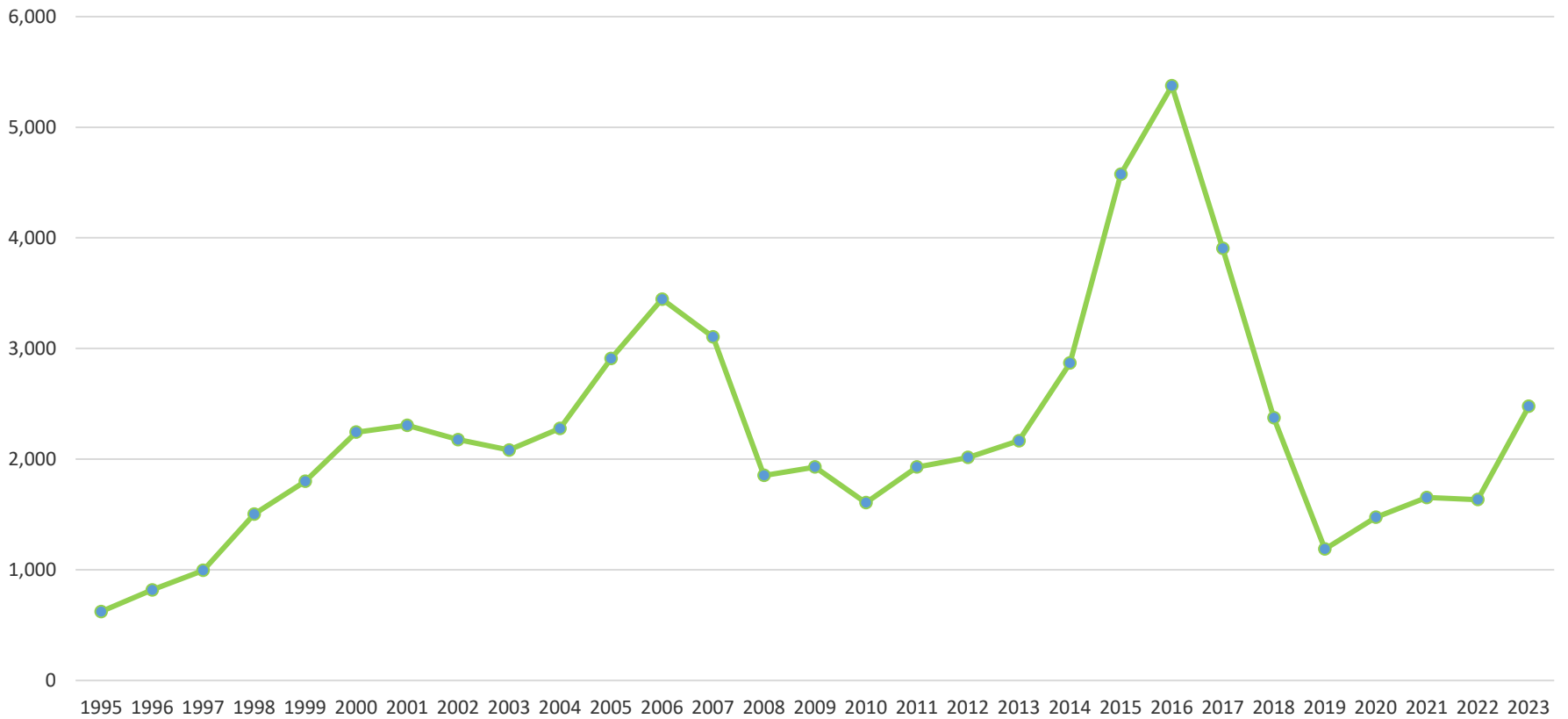
13 – 15 inch precip zone

Sage-grouse Population Monitoring: Annual Lek Counts



22 Males

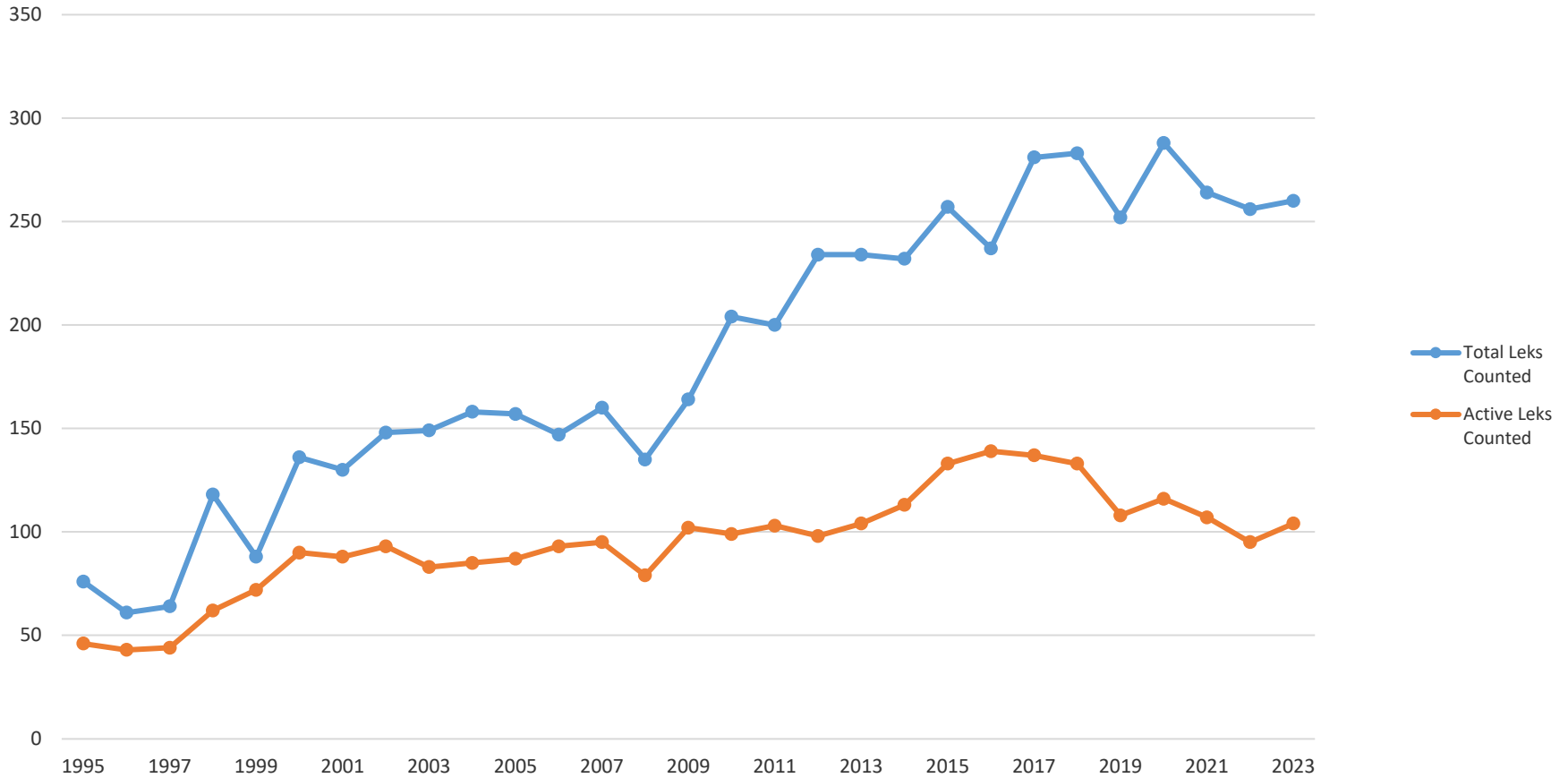
Northwest Colorado Population - Total Males

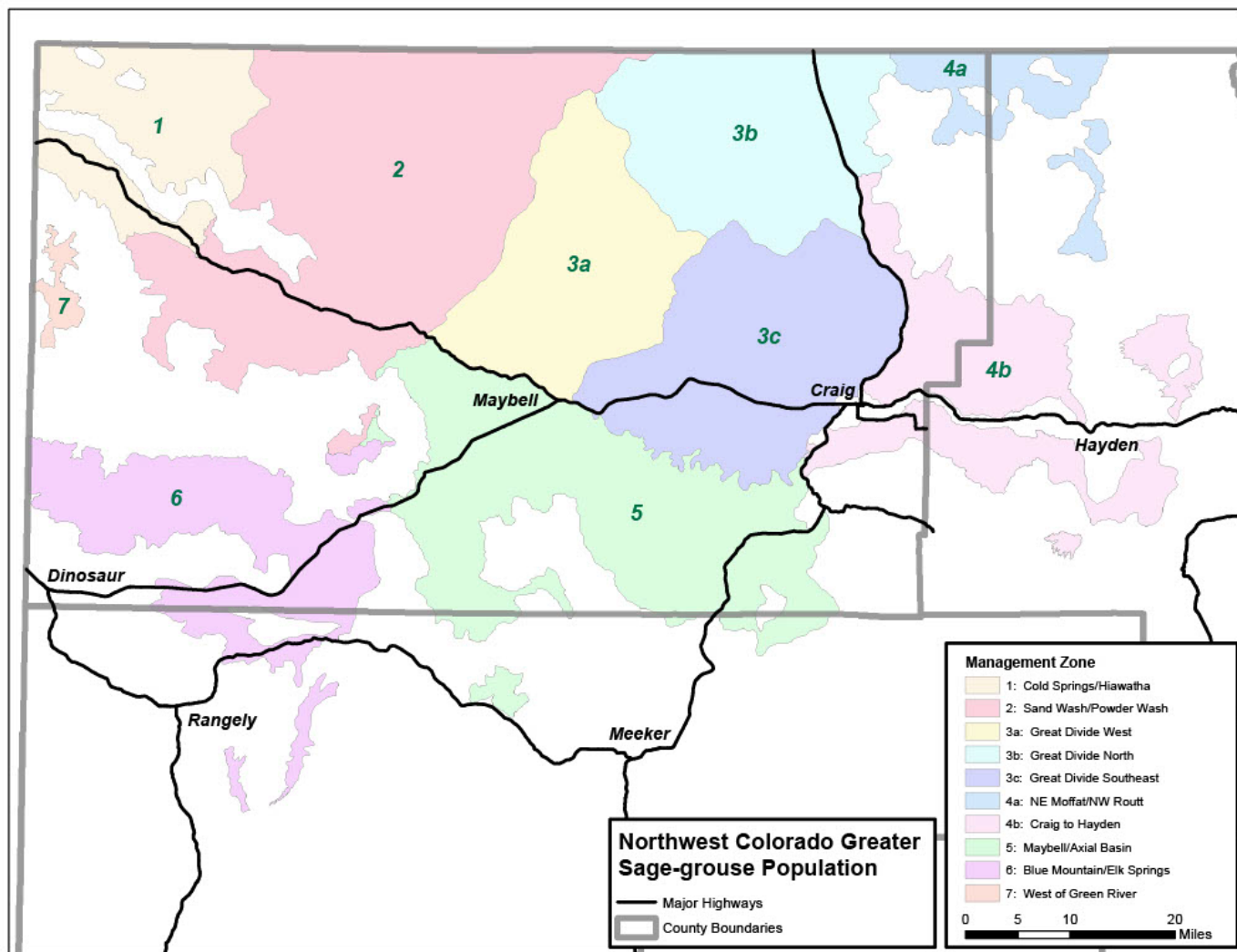


Northwest Colorado Population - Males Per Active Lek

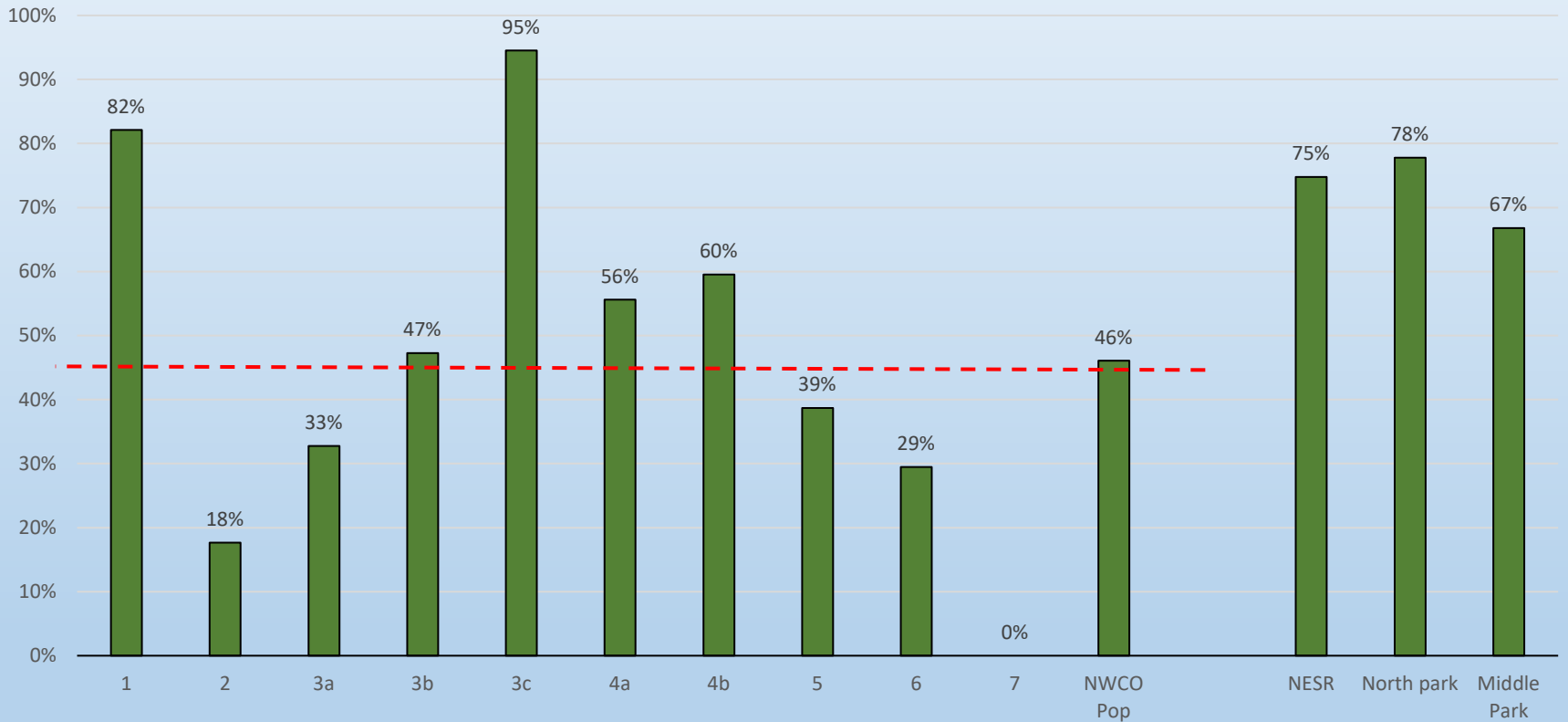


Northwest Colorado Population

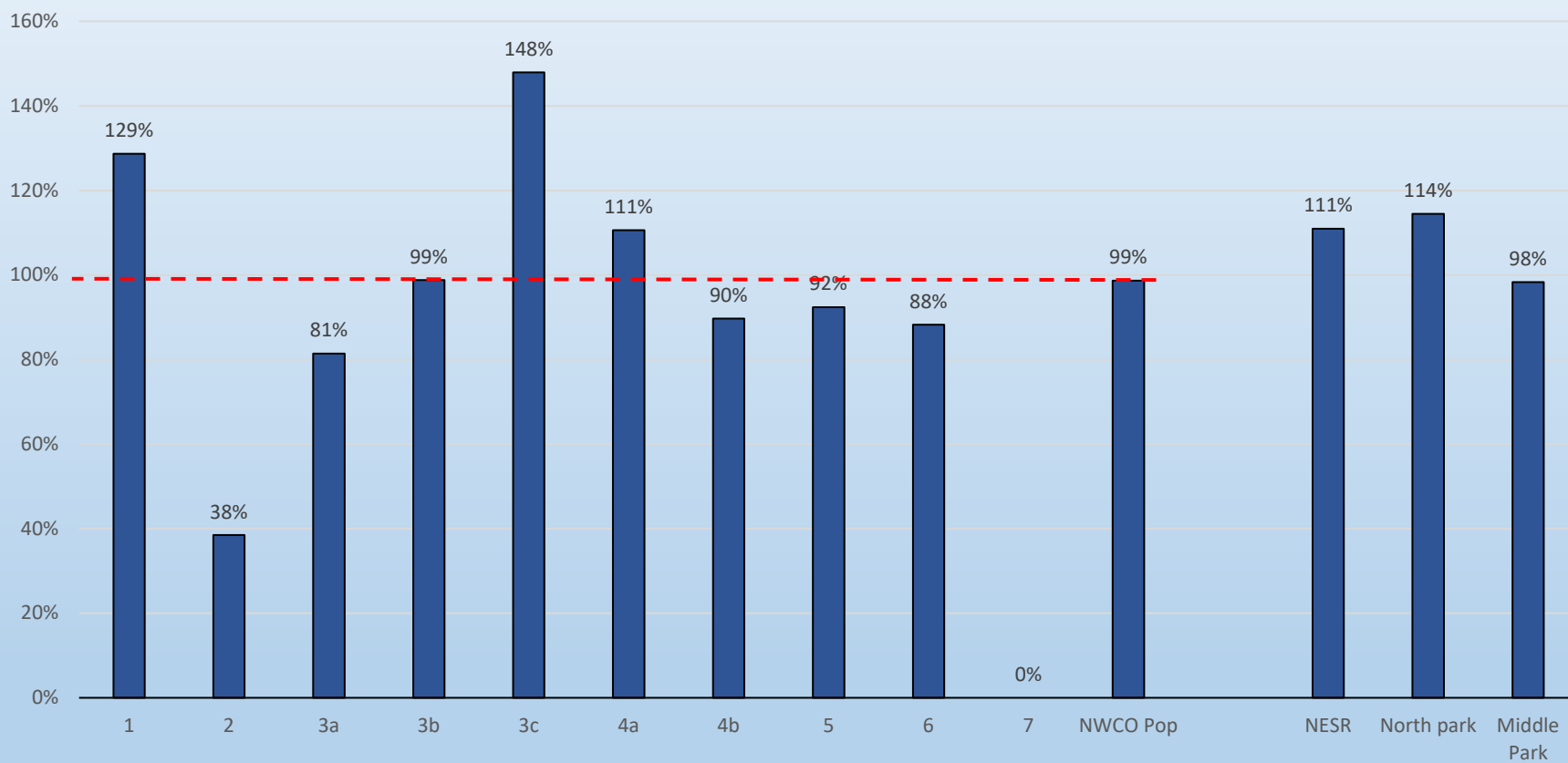


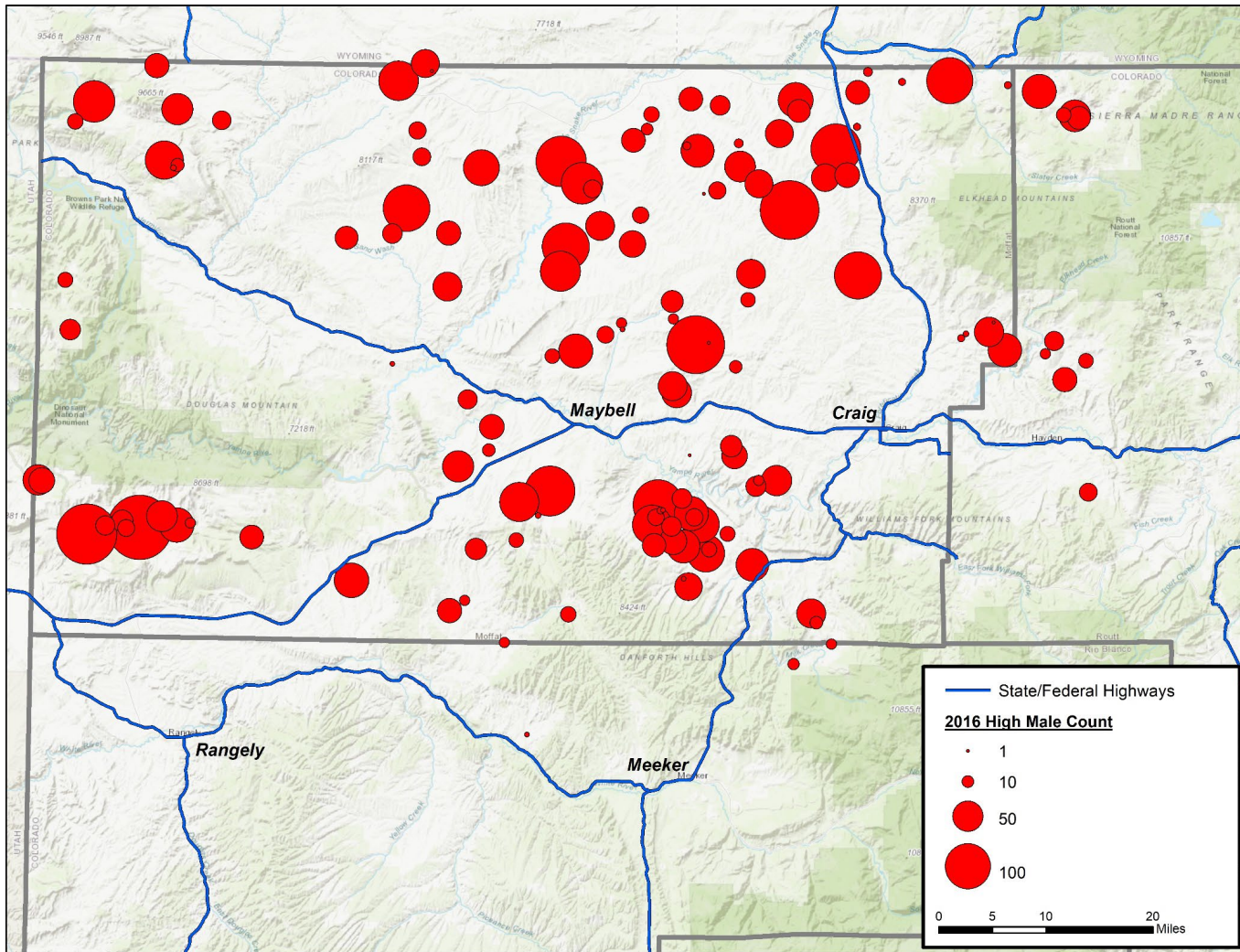


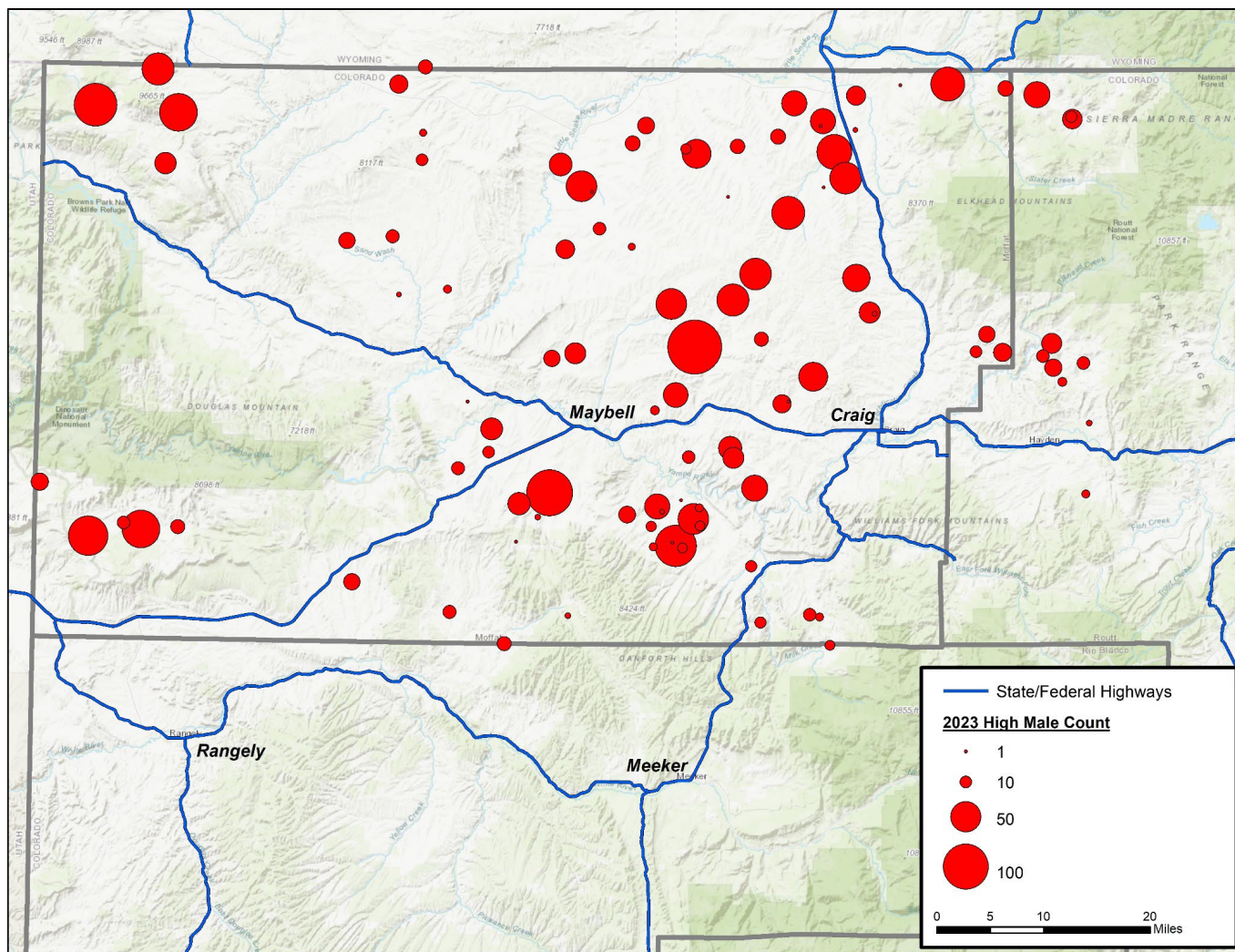
2023 Lek Count - Percent of Recent (2016) Peak



2023 Lek Count - Percent of 8-year (2016-2023) Average







Greater Sage-grouse and Fire



Greater Sage-grouse and Fire

2010 Alkalai
Fire

6 Years Post-
Burn



Greater Sage-grouse and Fire



Recent Research on Greater Sage-grouse and Fire

- Fischer et al. (1996) *Journal of Range Management* - Idaho
- Pyle and Crawford (1996) *Journal of Range Management* - Oregon
- Connelly et al. (2000) *Wildlife Society Bulletin* - Idaho
- Nelle et al. (2000) *Journal of Range Management* - Idaho
- Beck et al. (2009) *Restoration Ecology* - Idaho
- Rhodes et al. (2010) *Journal of Wildlife Management* - Oregon
- Bates et al. (2011) *Natural Resources and Environmental Issues* - Oregon
- Lockyear et al. (2015) *Journal of Wildlife Management* - Nevada
- Foster et al. (2019) *Journal of Wildlife Management* - Oregon/Nevada
- Riginos et al. (2019) *Ecosphere* - Utah
- O'Neil et al. (2020) *Global Change Biology* - Nevada/California
- Dudley et al. (2021) *Fire Ecology* - California/Nevada
- Dudley et al. (2022) *Ecosphere* - California/Nevada
- Geronimo et al. (2022) *Restoration Ecology* - Idaho/Oregon
- Poessel et al. (2022) *Ecology and Evolution* - Idaho/Oregon
- Stephens et al. (2023) *Ecology and Evolution* - Idaho
- Tyrrell et al. (2023) *Nature – Scientific Reports* - Nevada/California

Research Findings – Greater Sage-grouse Habitat

- At xeric, Wyoming big sagebrush sites both prescribed burning and wildfire resulted in a decrease in habitat suitability for GRSG
 - Forb cover was generally similar between burned and unburned plots
 - Insect abundance was generally similar between burned and unburned plots, but some studies found decreases in certain groups important in GRSG diets
 - Sagebrush cover was dramatically reduced at burned sites and took a long time to recover (generally >10 years)
 - Grass cover did increase at many study sites, but so did cheatgrass and some nonnative annual forbs at some sites
- At more mesic, mountain big sagebrush sites prescribed burning and wildfire had a less dramatic effect on habitat suitability for GRSG
 - Forb cover did generally increase at burned sites, including forbs known to be important in GRSG diets
 - Grass and litter cover (necessary for nest concealment) generally increased at burned sites
 - While sagebrush and other shrub cover did immediately decrease at burned sites, post-fire recovery of sagebrush was more rapid at mountain big sagebrush sites
- Condition of the community prior to fire was generally a strong predictor of post-fire recovery to a desirable community and habitat suitability for GRSG

Research Findings – Greater Sage-grouse Habitat

- Essentially all authors working in more xeric, Wyoming big sagebrush communities concluded that prescribed fire was not an appropriate management tool for increasing GRSB habitat suitability

“No benefits for sage grouse occurred as a result of burning sage grouse nesting and brood-rearing habitats.” (Nelle et al. 2000)

“Our research did not support the contention that fire may enhance sage grouse brood-rearing habitat.” (Fischer et al. 1996)

“...we recommend that managers avoid burning Wyoming big sagebrush to enhance sage-grouse habitat...” (Beck et al. 2009)

Research Findings – Greater Sage-grouse Populations

- Researchers found an ubiquitous negative affect of large fires on GRSG vital rates, including:
 - Male lek attendance declined in burned areas relative to unburned control areas
 - Nest survival decreased in burned areas relative to unburned control areas
 - GRSG in fire affected areas had lower adult female survival

***“...wildfire has strong and immediate impacts to two key life stages of [GRSG] and underscores the importance of fire suppression and immediate restoration following wildfire events.”
(Tyrrell et al. 2023)***

“...sage-grouse continue to use fire-affected habitat in the years immediately following wildfire and sage-grouse experienced lower nest survival and adult female survival than other populations during the same period.” (Foster et al. 2019)

2010 Alkalai Fire



2014 Alkalai Fire



2008 Mayberry Fire...5 Years Later





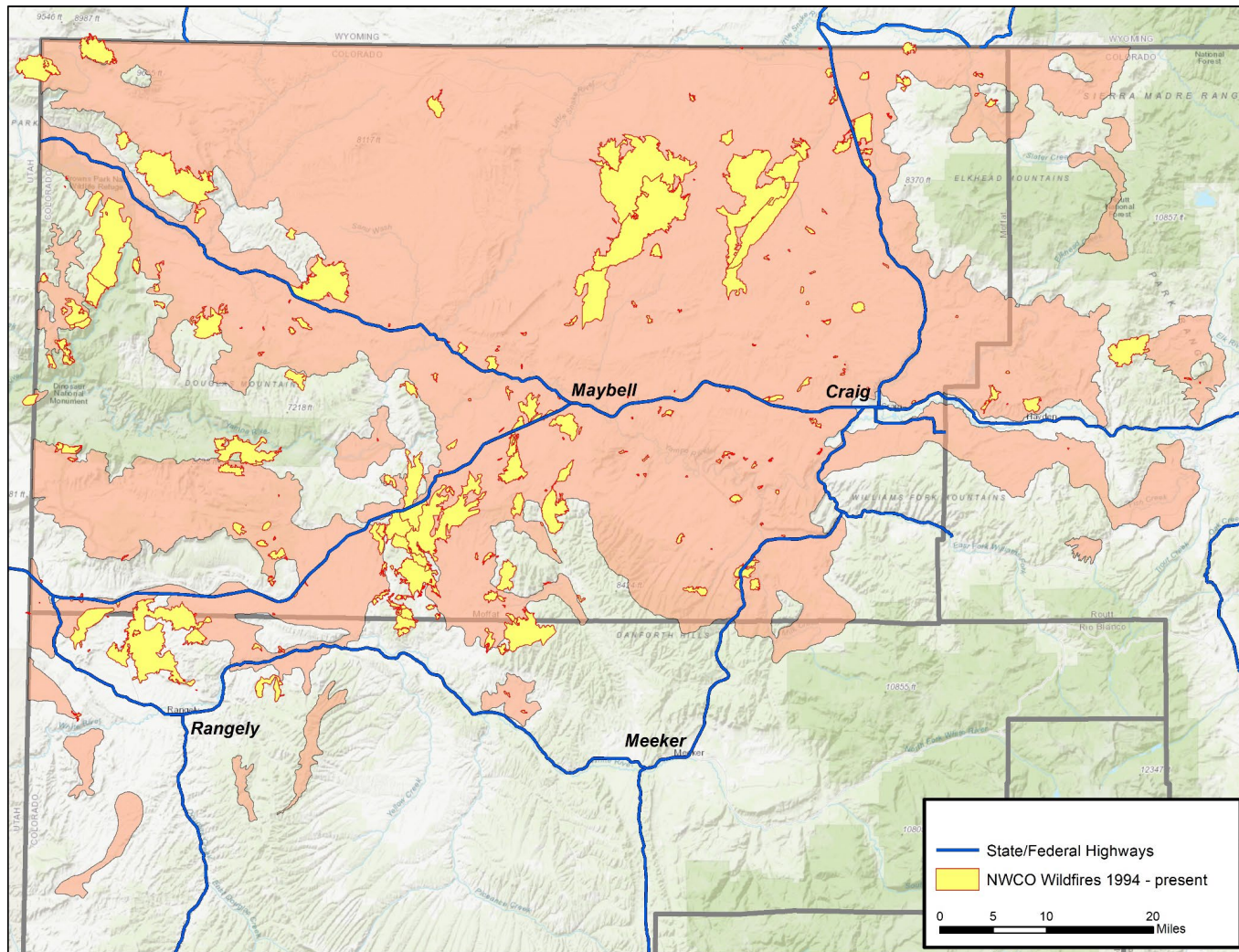
Photo: USGS
(Nevada)

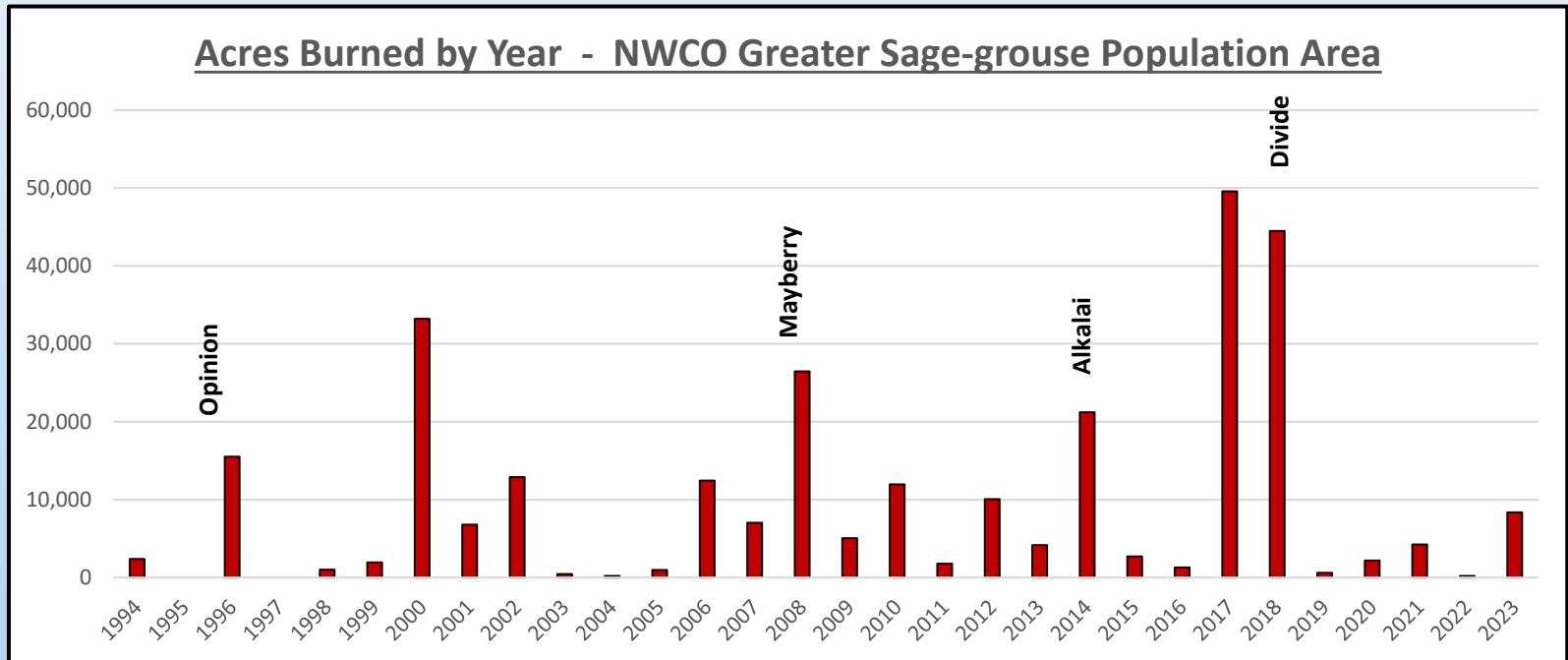




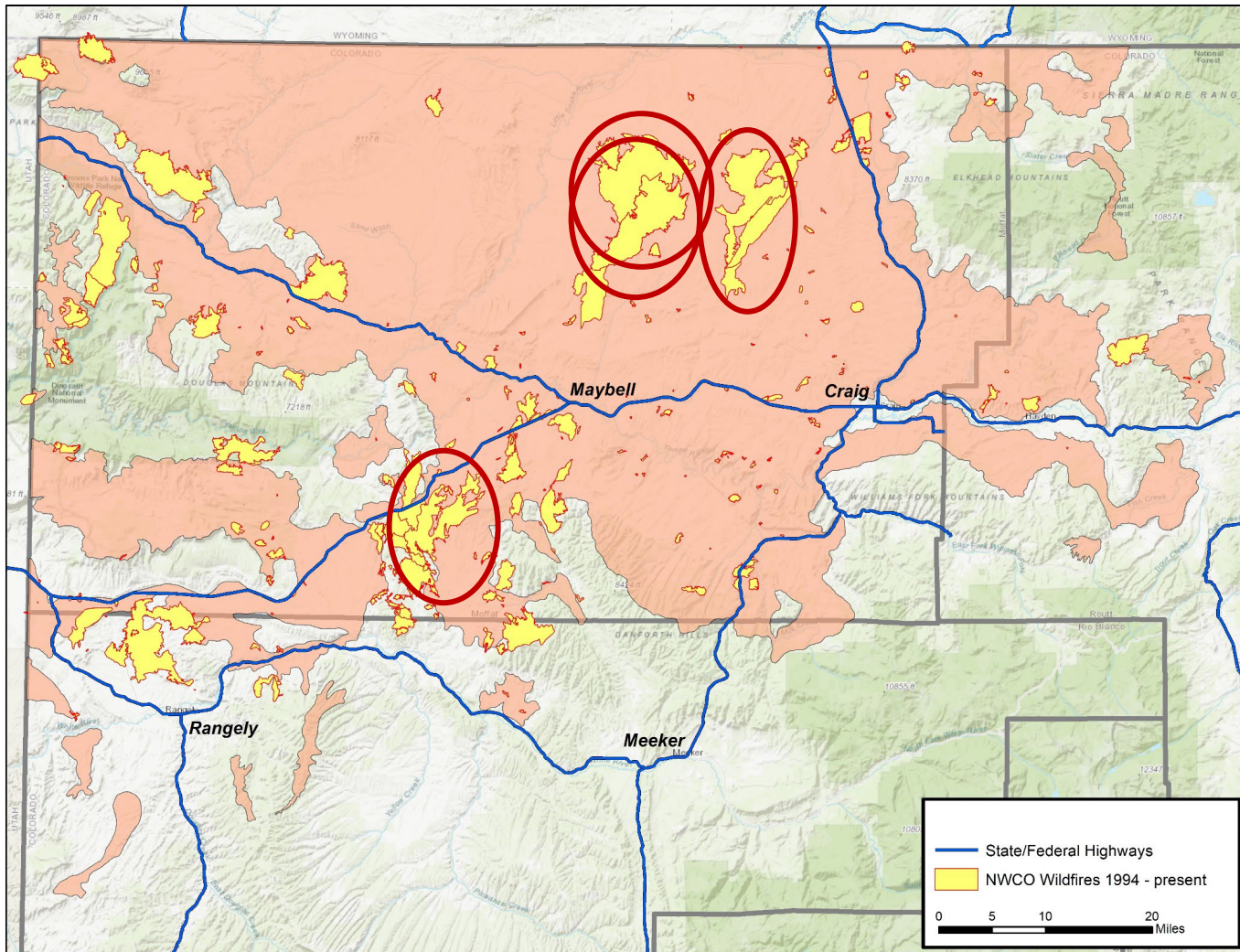
1994 to
Present

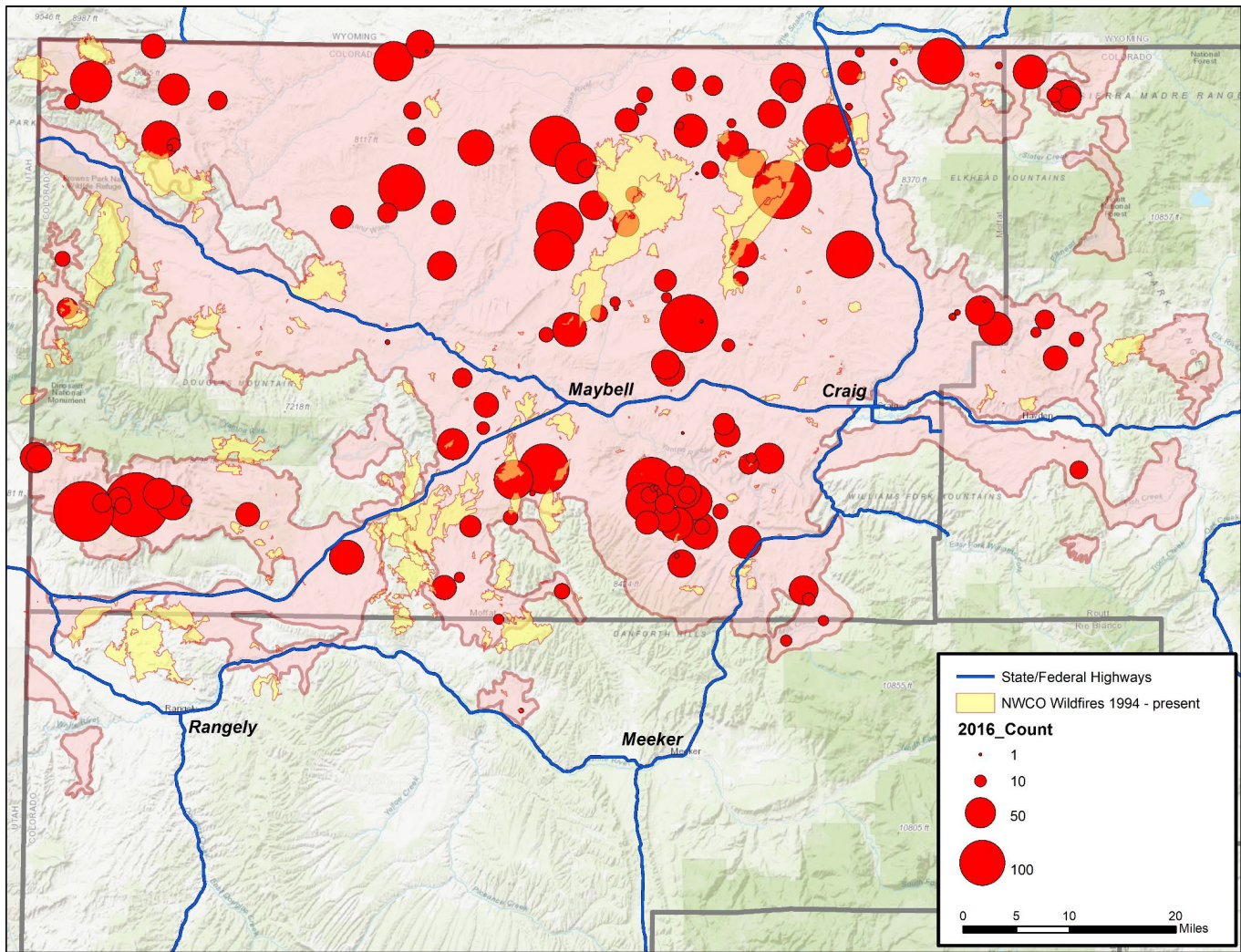
~290,000
Acres

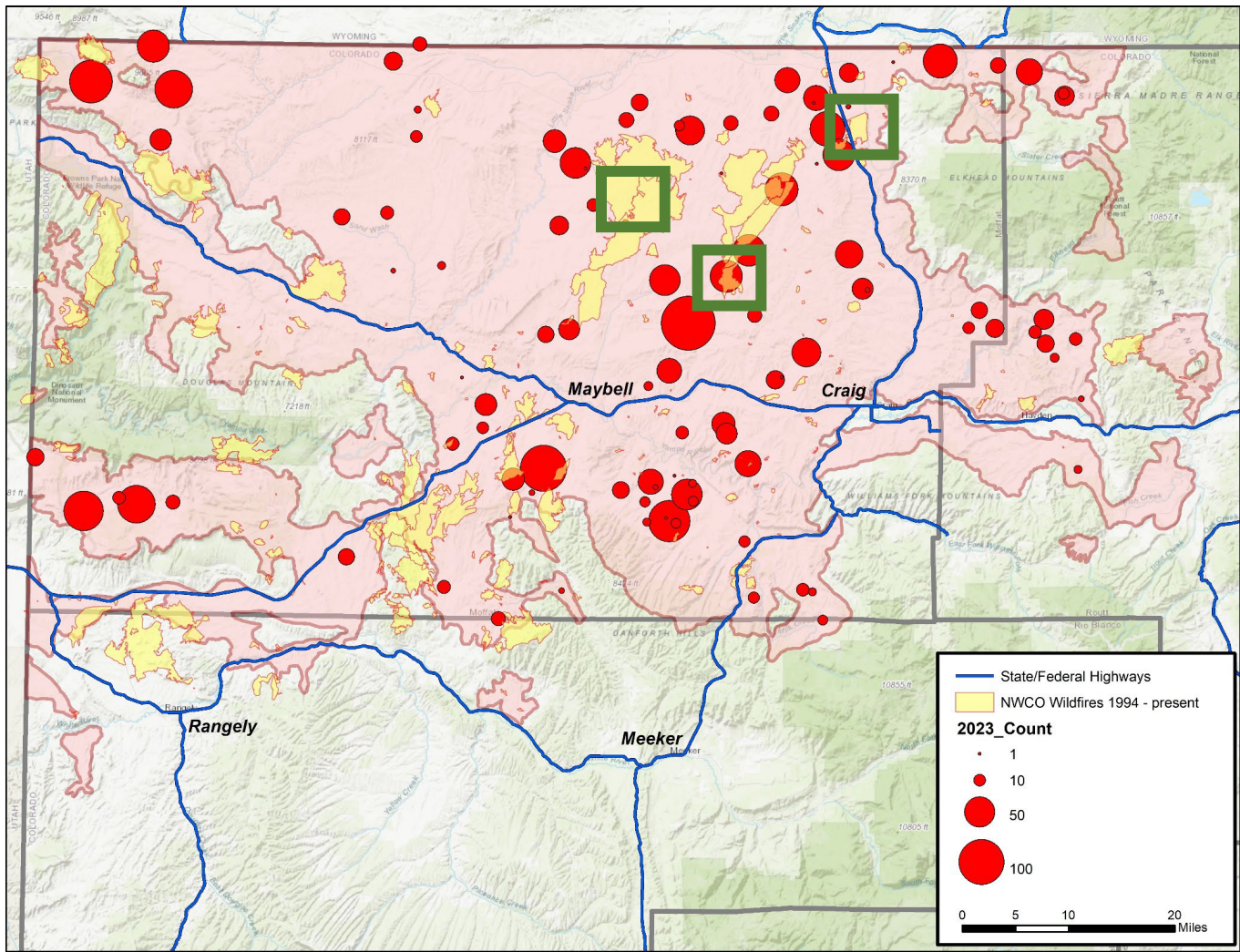


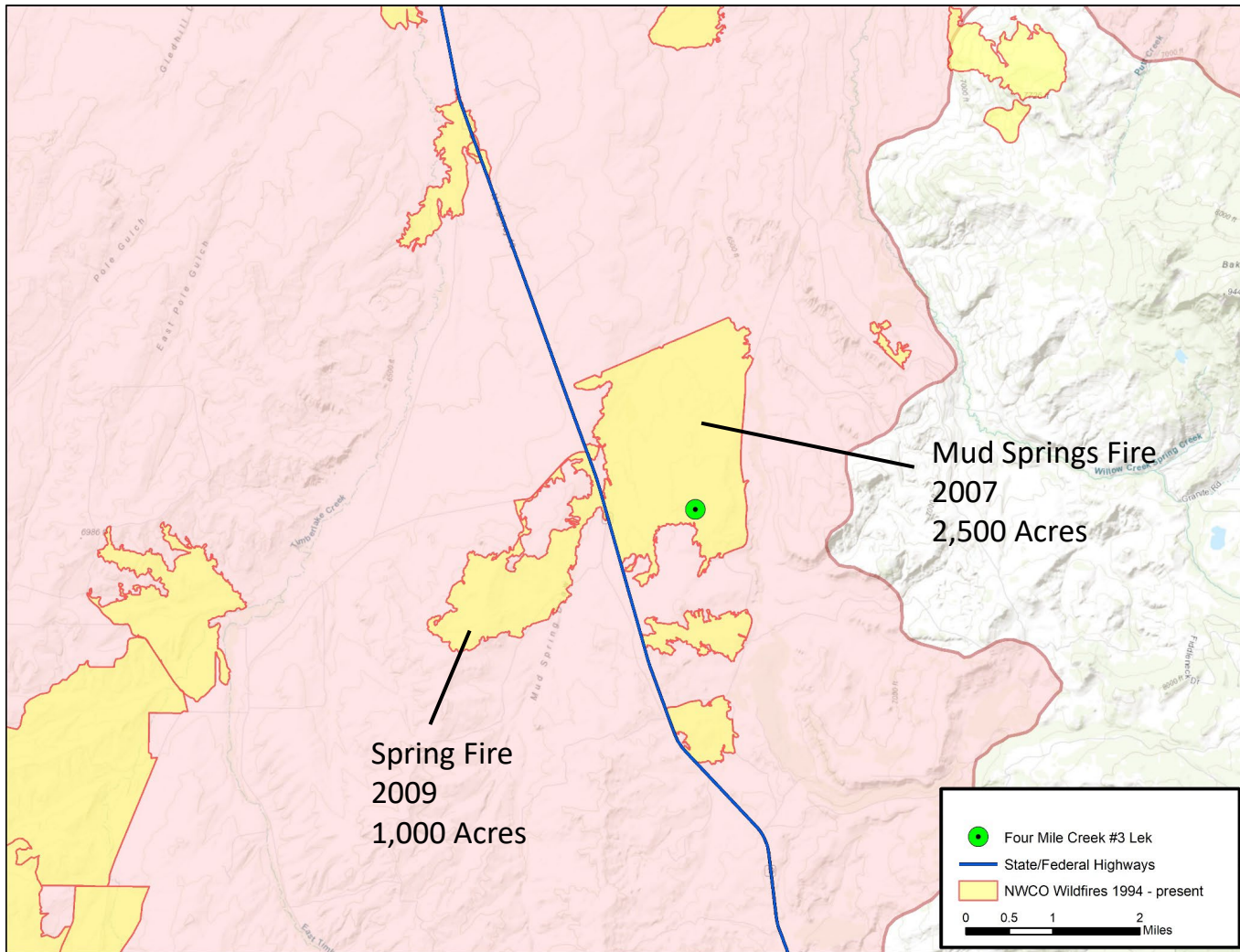


Fires 10,000+ Acres in Core GRSG Habitat

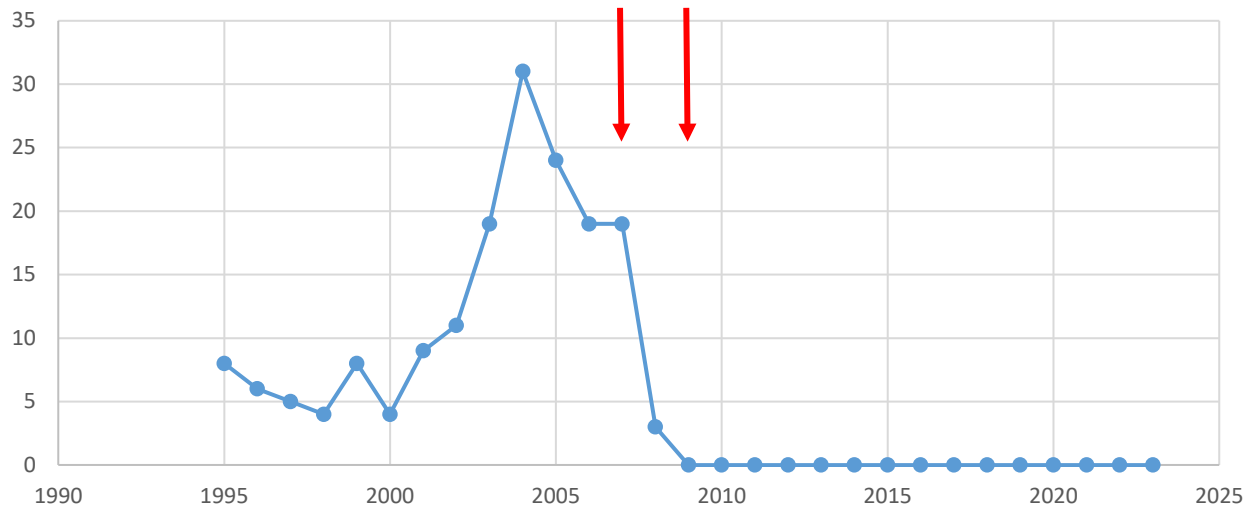


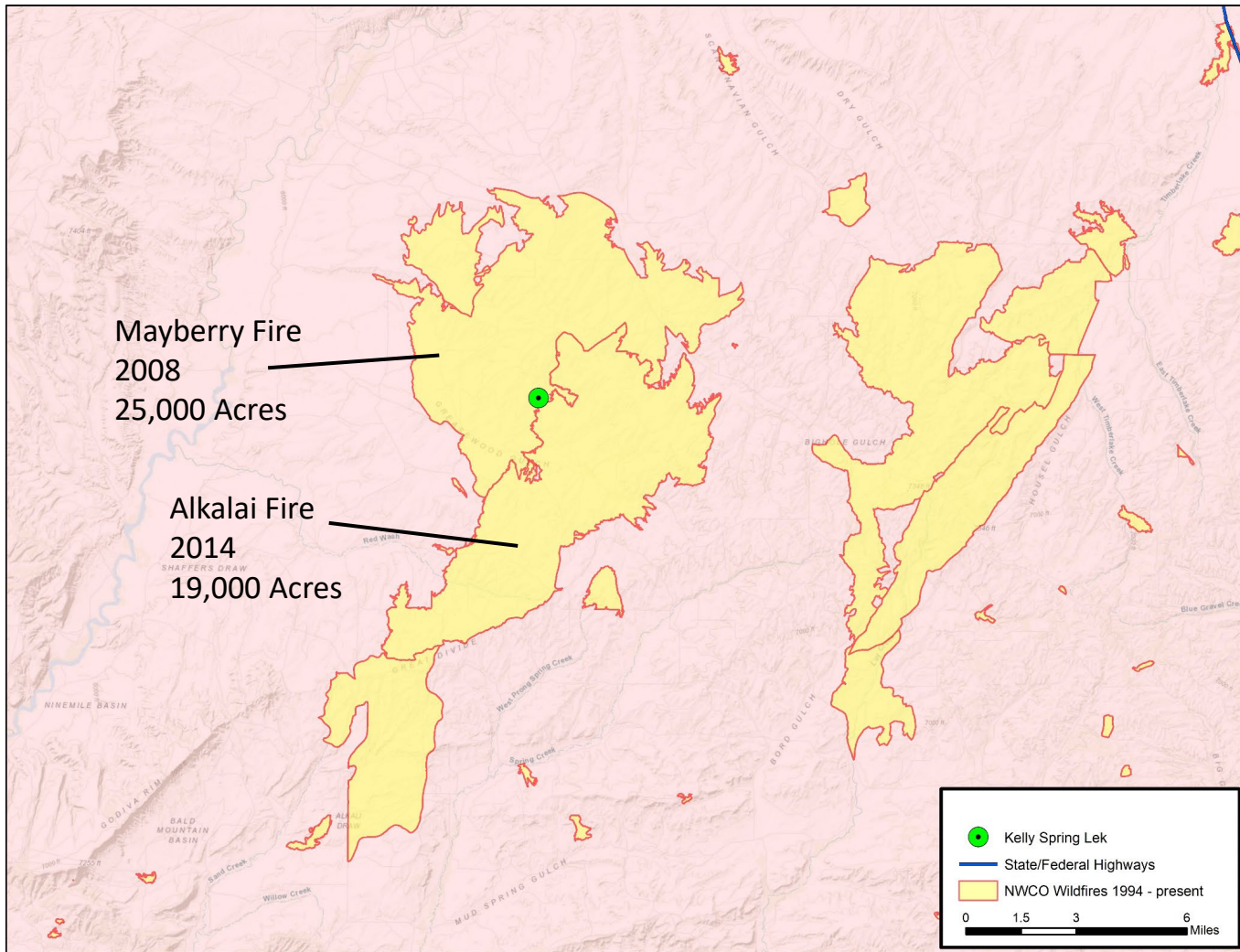




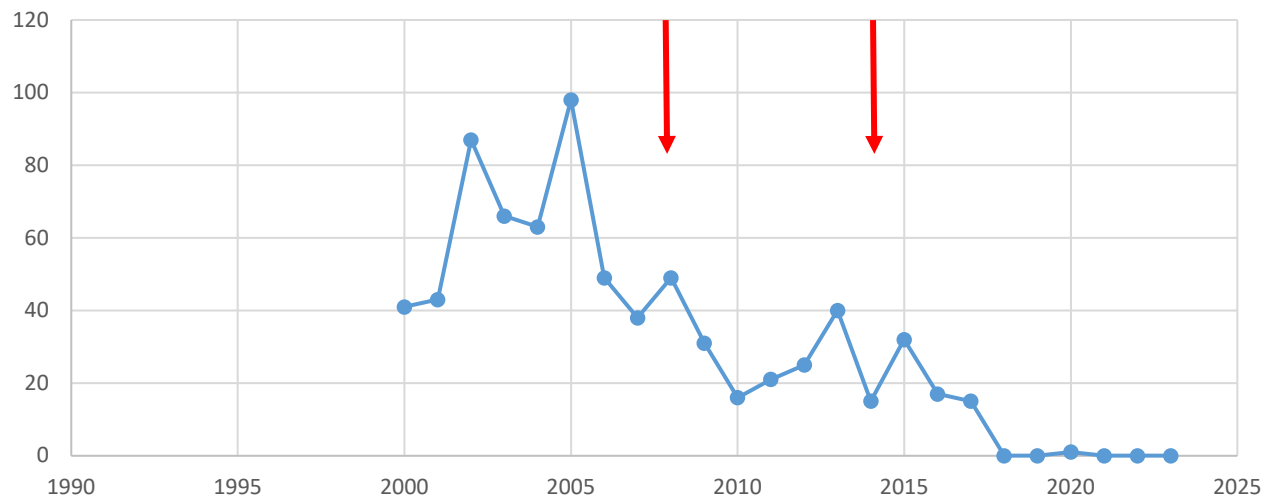


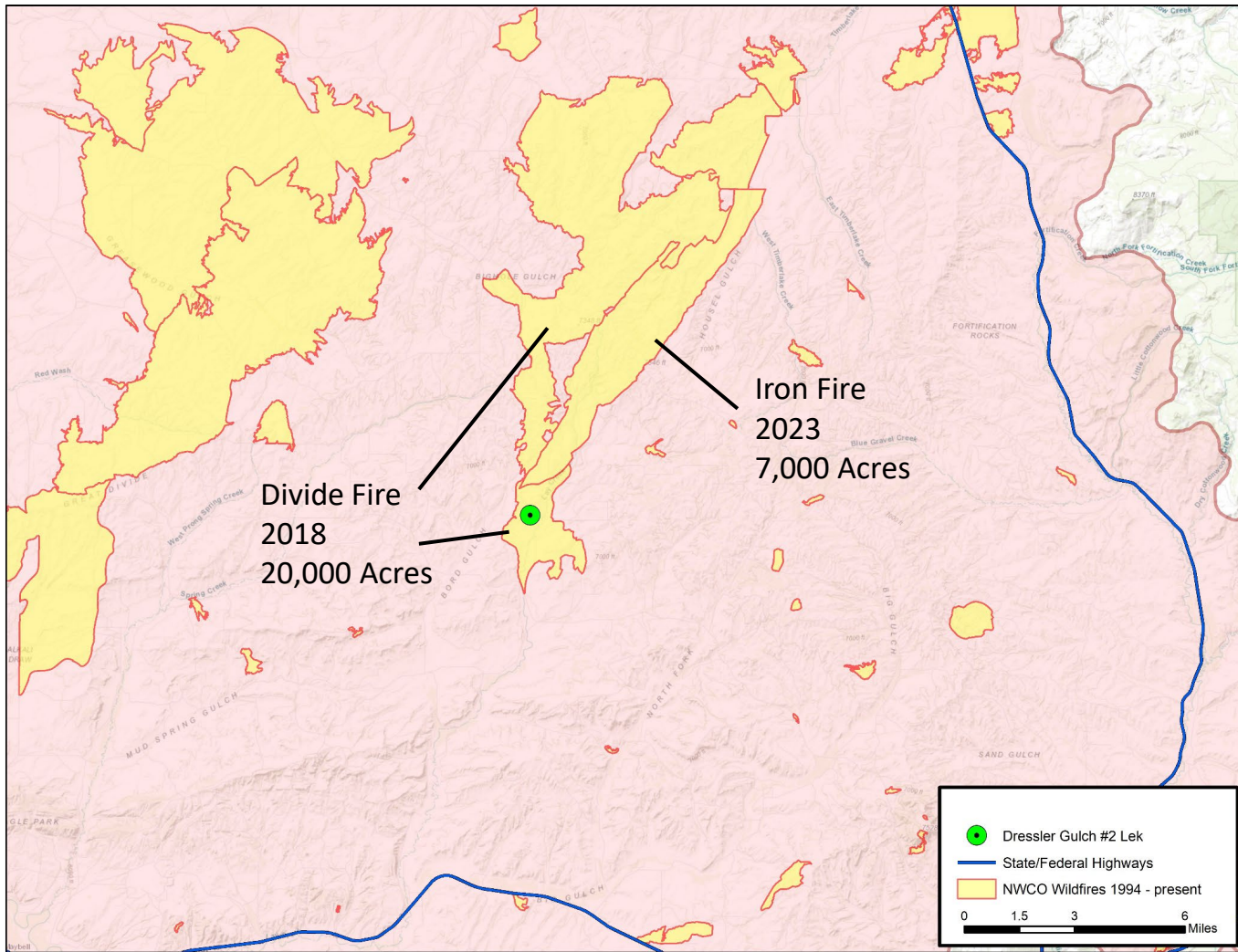
Four Mile Creek #3



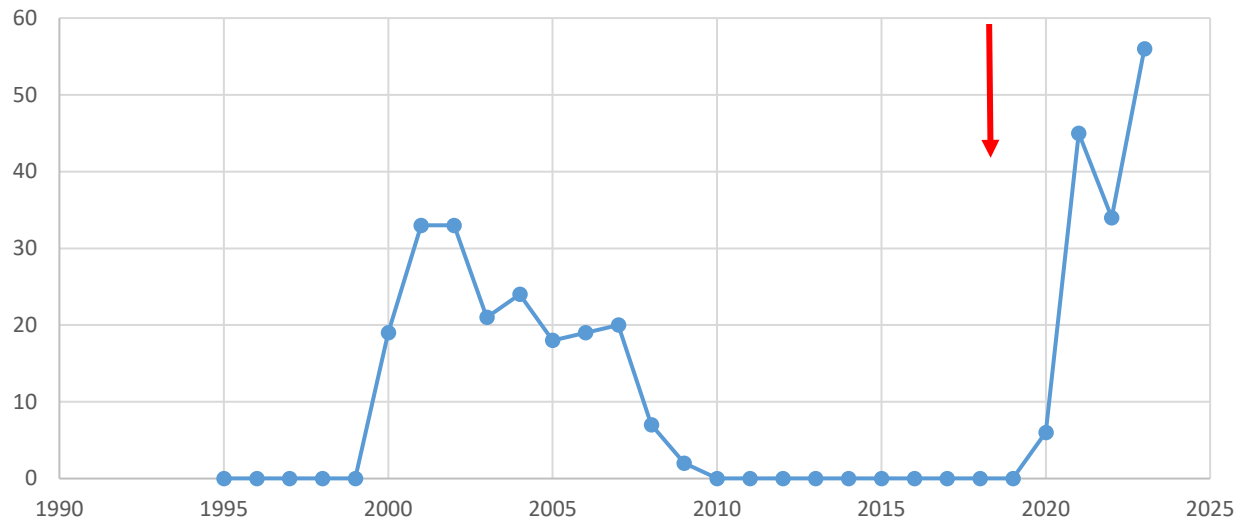


Kelly Spring





Dressler Gulch #2



Conclusions

- Greater sage-grouse in the Northwest Colorado Population occupy a diverse suite of sagebrush-dominated habitats that span three ecoregions.

Conclusions

- GRSG in the Northwest Colorado Population occupy a diverse suite of sagebrush-dominated habitats that span three ecoregions.
- Population indices (lek count data) show that GRSG numbers in the Northwest Colorado Population fluctuate through time with recent peaks and troughs at a roughly 10-year interval.
- Numbers remain robust across a large geographic area, although the recent low point (in 2019) was the lowest documented in 25 years of monitoring.

Conclusions

- GRS in the Northwest Colorado Population occupy a diverse suite of sagebrush-dominated habitats that span three ecoregions.
- Population indices (lek count data) show that GRS numbers in the Northwest Colorado Population fluctuate through time with recent peaks and troughs at a roughly 10-year interval.
- Numbers remain robust across a large geographic area, although the recent low point (in 2019) was the lowest documented in 25 years of monitoring.
- Research across the West has shown that large fires are essentially universally negative influences on GRS habitat and population vital rates.
- Diverse research has also concluded that prescribed fire in xeric Wyoming big sagebrush communities are not an appropriate management tool if GRS habitat is a resource of concern.

Conclusions

- Wildfires have affected ~250,000 acres of GRSG habitat in the Northwest Colorado Population over the past 30 years.
- There have likely been localized negative affects of these fires on GRSG habitat suitability and population performance, but so far these events have not been catastrophic as has been documented in the Great Basin.

Questions?





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

Field Manager Updates

Northwest District

Kremmling Field Office (KFO – Kremmling)

Steve Leonard, Field Manager, (970) 724-3002, sleonard@blm.gov

Supplemental Rules- Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO), Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO), Kremmling Field Office (KFO), and the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) in northern Colorado are publishing a proposed supplementary rule in the Federal Register for a 60-day public comment. The rule would implement decisions related to resource protection and public health and safety issues that were addressed in each field office resource management plan. Each unit has proposed rules that address specific concerns and general rules that apply to all four units. All four sets of rules are being announced through the same process to avoid concurrent, redundant processes.

The BLM will accept public comments on the draft supplementary rule for 60 days from publication in the Federal Register (March 25, 2024). Public comments on the proposed rule should be specific, confined to the issues pertaining to the rule, and should explain the reason for any recommended changes. The BLM would also appreciate feedback on the clarity of the rule. Comments may be submitted through the ePlanning website at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/90071/510>

North Park Restoration Area- The Kremmling Field Office will receive 5 million dollars for investment in aquatic, riparian, wetland and terrestrial habitat improvements, fuels reduction and invasive species management will preserve historic and cultural sites and enhance recreational opportunities. The Kremmling Field Office will initiate the following projects in 2024 for the North Park Restoration area.

Bolton Draw Meadow Restoration- Zeedyk rock structures and other process-based methods to stop the gully advancement and help detain runoff across the mesic meadow. Phase II would continue the initial work.

North Sand Creek protective fencing- North Sand Creek is a 303d listed stream for sediment. Fencing will reduce impacts from OHV use induced sediment.

Mansfield Draw Fen- Continue management of a restored fen that supports pale blue-eyed grass, saline variation of a rich fen with five springs within the fen. After restoration work, an electric fence has been used each grazing year to protect the mire head with quagmire. Trespass livestock have required additional restoration work, leading to the need of a permanent fence around the water sources.

Travel Management Plan Implementation (TMP)- Accelerated implementation of the 2015 TMP to close cross country route proliferation. Seeding of native species including forbs will benefit overall land health and important sage grouse habitat. Small acreages have been completed to date.

Virtual fencing- The Kremmling Field Office is working with the Arapahoe Wildlife Refuge to initiate virtual fencing allowing the reduction of cross fencing which impacts wildlife.

Hebron Air Quality monitoring- The Hebron area in North Park has active oil and gas exploration and development. The air quality station continually monitors weather, visibility, particulate matter, ozone, and nitrogen dioxide concentrations. From June 2022 to October 2022, samples were collected for Volatile Organic Compound lab analysis, until the funding ran out under the contract modification. The KFO used North Park Restoration Area money to restart the toxic monitoring, sampling six months of the year, especially during the winter months which are yet unsampled. The station is planned to remain at the site for at least two more years and current station conditions are publicly available online.

Blue Valley Land Exchange- The BLM issued a Notice of Decision to exchange nine parcels, totaling 1,489 acres of Federal lands managed by the BLM in Grand County, Colorado for nine parcels totaling 1,830 acres of non-Federal lands in Summit and Grand counties, Colorado, owned by Galloway, Inc., the owners of the Blue Valley Ranch (BVR). The exchange results in a net gain of 341 acres of public land. In July 2021, the Kremmling Field Office published the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was publicly available for 30 days.

During the public availability period numerous comments were received both in support and against the land exchange. Comments were consistent with what BLM received in response to the Draft EIS. The strongest support in favor of the land exchange was received from Summit County Commissioners, Grand County Commissioners, Trout Unlimited, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The decision initiated a 45-day protest period.

The protest period ended March 2, 2023. Twenty-one protests were received with some of them being large in scope. The BLM is preparing responses to the protests and expects to finish later this spring.

Fuels Project FY23 Fuels EA (3,500 acres)-Fuels reduction and Hazard Tree Removal in the Blacktail, Cow Creek, Little HO, McQueary, and San Toy project areas has an expected implementation summer of 2024, pending the outcome of archeological surveys.

White River Field Office (WRFO – Meeker)

Bill Mills, Field Manager, (970) 878-3800, wmills@blm.gov

Meeker Mustang Makeover (MMM)-This year's MMM will take place August 23-24, 2024, at the Rio Blanco Fairgrounds in Meeker. The pickup day for selected trainers is April 27, 2024. Fifteen under saddle and ten yearlings will be available to trainers, and an additional eight to ten wild horses for adoption at the pickup event. The WRFO continues to partner with MMM to provide assistance with this and future events planning and processing adoption applications.

Adoptions- Additional adoption events in 2024 include Rocky Mountain Horse Expo in Denver March 17th, Greeley May 26th, Castle Rock June 8th, and the Montrose Wild to Mild event July 25th.

Inventory- WRFO conducted an aerial population inventory of wild horses December 11-13, 2023. A statistical analysis of the population survey is pending.

Gather- WRFO conducted a gather and removal of excess wild horses from the West Douglas Herd area in September 2023. 122 animals were captured and removed during that operation. WRFO is planning to conduct a gather of excess animals from within and outside the Piceance-East Douglas HMA in the fall of 2024.

Oil and Gas Development- The White River Field Office (WRFO) processes the oil and gas for all three field offices in the Northwest District (Kremmling Field Office (KFO), Little Snake Field Office (LSFO), and the WRFO). There are approximately 4,000 active oil and gas wells located within the Northwest District Office (approximately 3,400 in WRFO, 300 in LSFO, and 200 in KFO). The largest oil and gas workload is located within the WRFO.

Currently, WRFO has processed 65 Applications for Permit to Drill (APD) and has 30 pending APDs which are part of three operators' multi-year plans of development. The other two offices currently do not have any APDs, however, we anticipate the submission of APDs in both FO's during FY 2024. There are currently two active drilling rigs located in the Piceance Basin with plans of perhaps increasing that number to 4 by the end of the year.

The WRFO witnesses approximately 40 to 50 well plugging annually. Currently, the FO is working with Chevron USA to complete the plugging and closure of the Wilson Creek Field.

The WRFO processes approximately 2,500 sundry notices annually across the three field offices. The WRFO also completes the oil and gas inspection and enforcement covering all three field offices. In 2024, WRFO anticipates completing over 370 total oil and gas inspections (265 within WRFO and 105 within LSFO and KFO planned). The FO is currently working through a cooperative agreement to plug three orphan wells in FY 2024 and is working to secure funding for reclamation work to be completed on 5 orphan wells (2 in WRFO and 3 in LSFO).

Solid Minerals- The White River Field Office oversees the Natural Soda's mineral development of sodium bicarbonate located within the Piceance Basin. The WRFO recently approved the development of two new solution wells for continued development of their sodium lease.

Buffalo Horn Land Exchange- In January 2021, the BLM issued a decision to approve a land exchange with Buffalo Horn Properties, LLC that will convey 14 parcels of Federal lands in Rio Blanco and Moffat Counties in the Strawberry Creek area (total of 2,652 acres) to acquire one parcel of non-Federal lands in Rio Blanco County in the Smith Gulch area (total of 1,327.06). (Note: Land exchanges are balanced based on appraised values rather than acreage.) The BLM will also accept Buffalo Horn's offer to donate four parcels of non-Federal land in Rio Blanco County (totaling 508.2 acres) that are isolated "inholdings" between the non-Federal exchange parcel and other BLM-managed public land.

The BLM received three protests of the decision which the BLM Colorado State Office is currently reviewing. Colorado Wild Public Lands Inc. filed an appeal of the decision to IBLA and BLM has been working to provide necessary information to IBLA for the lawsuit.

Carbon Sequestration- The WRFO has received an application for a carbon sequestration project located within Rio Blanco County. The site is being proposed to inject up to 750,000 metric tonnes (MMt) of CO₂. The proposal would inject CO₂ below the Mancos Shale at a depth between 12,000 and 15,000 feet. The project would issue a subsurface pore space right-of-way for 150,000 acres. The proposal will also include surface infrastructure including injection facilities as well as pipelines to connect the CO₂ sources to the injection facilities. The Applicant has currently requested BLM place a hold on this project.

PacifiCorp Gateway South- The WRFO continues to assist with the variance work associated with the continued installation work of this project. It is currently anticipated that construction will continue through the fall of 2024.

TransWest Express- Along with the Gateway South project, the TransWest Express (TWE) was issued a Record of Decision to approve the TWE Project which is a 735-mile 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line which spans Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and ends in the southern portion of Nevada. The TWE project has received a notice to proceed for geotechnical and non-surface disturbing pre- construction activities within Colorado. TWE does not plan on beginning construction in Colorado in 2024.

Wolf Creek Reservoir- The WRFO continues to work on evaluating the proposed Wolf Creek Reservoir project. In September 2022, the BLM solicited input from the Northwest Resource Advisory Council (RAC) about whether to provide an opportunity for early public engagement (prior to publishing the Notice of Intent) for the Wolf Creek Reservoir Project.

Input from both the RAC and the public was that this engagement would be beneficial. To better understand the perspectives of a diversity of interests and identify the best methods for future engagement, the WRFO then worked with the BLM's Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution Program (CADR) to hire an impartial third-party neutral consultant (The Langdon Group) to engage in conversations with a wide range of interests connected to this proposal in spring 2023. Input received was then summarized in a Situation Assessment report (which is posted on ePlanning).

The BLM hosted three public meetings to discuss the results of the Situation Assessment in September 2023. In January 2024, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issued a jurisdiction determination which clarified that the Wolf Creek Reservoir Project would require a Department of Army permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act (which also then requires a water quality certification from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment under section 401 of the Clean Water Act).

The BLM remains the lead Federal agency for preparing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) however the BLM and USACE intend to issue a joint Notice of Intent (NOI), EIS, and Record of Decision. ePlanning project site:

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanningui/project/2021544/510>

Riparian Restoration Projects- The White River Field office completed 4 NEPA projects on several different perennial tributaries within the field office. The focus of these NEPA projects was to implement Beaver Dam Analogs, or BDA's. Like beaver dams, BDAs are engineered to eventually fail after a couple years. Additionally, the quantity of BDAs is more important than the quality, as a complex of BDAs can exert a larger influence on a river than one individual dam.

BDAs often attract beavers to colonize the area, where they will maintain and live in human-built dams. These structures temporarily inundate the floodplain, increase aquifer recharge, reduce sediment load, and improve water quality. The in-stream structures work to restore the creek's connectivity with its floodplain, thus aid in reestablishing/improving healthy and robust riparian plant communities.

The structures are considered temporary with an expected life span of approximately five years but depend on hydrologic conditions encountered. The placement of in-stream structures; modifications of the stream bed and/or banks is intended to enhance, rehabilitate, and re-establish the natural stream meanders. Ideally, beavers that currently inhabit these perennial systems downstream of the project area will move upstream, inhabit, and maintain the structures for a longer term. The structures will be designed with un-treated wooden posts and utilize native plant material collected at or near the project site. Structures will be installed in the active stream inundation area. Wooden materials and tools, such as a hydraulic post pounder will be transported by UTV adjacent to, but outside the wetland area.

Workdays are planned to continue work already completed on the Yellow Creek drainage in the spring of 2024. State funding, as well as national work agreements have made this type of riparian work a priority.

Little Snake Field Office (LSFO - Craig)

Kymm Gresset, Field Manager, (970) 826-5089, kgresset@blm.gov

PacifiCorp Gateway South- Gateway South (GWS) construction started in June 2022. The CO portions for pad sites, foundations and anchors are 100% completed. 96% of structures are erected and 62% of wire has been strung. Reclamation efforts have occurred on pad and pulling and tensioning sites with more this year. Construction has halted over the winter except for cultural work at the Little Snake Substation. Energization of the line in the fall of 2024 is to be determined.

TransWest Express- TransWest Express (TWE) received their Notice to Proceed (NTP) on April 10, 2023. TWE is a 732-mile, a high-voltage transmission line that will extend from south-central Wyoming through northwestern Colorado and central Utah, ending in southern Nevada. TWE will deliver electricity generated by the largest onshore wind generation project in North America.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics- NFWF has awarded the grant money collected for compensatory mitigation funds for authorized impacts of the GWS Transmission Project to LWC lands in Colorado. Two proposals related to LSFO were awarded \$3.2 million dollars and \$1.9 million dollars respectively. The awards were made for proposals from two consulting firms in conjunction with partners and collaboration with the field office.

The Cross Mountain project is in early stages of identifying proposals and is slated to begin cultural surveys this spring as well as support on water rights. The other proposal with Logan Simpson on Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and LWC wilderness lands throughout the field office will begin this year.

Greater Sage Grouse Funds- 15 million dollars was tentatively awarded to 6 projects from the Greater Sage Grouse Mitigation for GWS, leaving over 3 million. These projects are in restoration and proposed acquisitions and conservation easements.

Outcome Based Grazing Pilot Project- In 2023, LSFO issued Colorado's only grazing authorization within BLM's Outcome-Based Grazing Pilot Program (OBGA). In February 2024, BLM Colorado Range Lead Laria Lovec, Todd Graham and Katie Mickeljohn of Ranch Advisory Partners presented this project during a symposium at the 2024 Society for Range Management Annual Meeting in Sparks, NV.

Sand Wash Herd Management Area- LSFO and NWD staff completed a Determination of NEPA Adequacy to approve the construction of permanent bait traps within the Sand Wash HMA. Materials are purchased and construction is expected to begin in Lake Draw pending completion of maintenance and upgrades to the access road. The bait traps are part of a strategy to remove smaller numbers of horses on a more frequent basis, help facilitate ongoing fertility control efforts, more consistently maintain the herd size within the Appropriate Management Level (AML) over time and reduce the need for large scale helicopter gathers.

BLM also met with a member of the Sand Wash Advocate Team who informed us of sufficient donations for them to purchase an RV to replace the old, deteriorating BLM-owned RV that is used to support PZP darting. The LSFO is supportive of this effort and will look at additional improvements to the site which may include installations of a gravel pad to park the RV on. Wild Horse Warriors is requesting \$75,000 from the State of Colorado and would use the money to complete improvements at Coffeepot Spring and re-drill the well at Sheepherder Springs.

Wild Horse Refuge- In 2023, Pat Craig of the Wild Animal Sanctuary purchased approximately 17,000 acres of the former Rio Ro Mo Ranch with the intention of creating The Wild Horse Refuge as a home for titled former wild horses. The 17,000 acres serves as qualifying base property for, and is intermixed with, approximately 5,000 acres of public land across three grazing allotments. Pat has applied for and acquired the grazing preference for these allotments and will be working with LSFO staff for an application to change the class of livestock on the authorizations from sheep and cattle to horses. Pat has retained the services of a range consultant to aid in crafting a management plan suitable for the resources on the allotments and the LSFO is currently analyzing his proposed management. LSFO expects to issue a proposed decision in 2024.

Upper Colorado River District (UCRD)

Supplemental EIS/RMP for Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) and Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO):

The CRVFO and GJFO continue to work on the court ordered Supplemental EIS to address issues related to analysis of downstream greenhouse gas emissions and the range of alternatives for acres available for leasing under their 2015 RMPs and Records of Decision. The public comment period for the draft supplemental EIS ended on November 1, 2023. The BLM received a total of 373 total letter submissions (366 unique submissions). The BLM responded to those comments and is circulating an administrative draft of the Proposed RMP/Final Supplemental EIS for Cooperating Agency review (through February 2024). The BLM expects to release the Proposed RMP/Final Supplemental EIS for the public protest period (30 days) and Governor's consistency review (60 days) in summer of 2024. A Record of Decision is anticipated in fall 2024. ePlanning project site: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2016085/510>

Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) including McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA) and Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (DENCA)

Christina Stark, Acting Field Manager, (970) 244-3027, cstark@blm.gov

Managing Livestock During Drought- The Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) continues to work closely with permittees on drought related issues. The office has billed for approximately half of the use authorized on grazing permits and anticipates this trend to continue. Our lower elevation country is being impacted the most by the ongoing drought. We anticipate further policy guidance from HQ this year on determining the beginning and end of droughts and how to utilize available data to make management decisions.

Low Elevation (Desert) Rangeland Management- GJFO is looking for the most innovative methods to manage rangelands; specifically, rangelands that have converted to cheatgrass from past management. GJFO has had many low elevation rangelands transition over the years to be cheatgrass dominated and is working on developing a best management practices plan for rangelands that are in this state.

This project would include looking at the most recent research studies done on cheatgrass rangelands and incorporating that information into a best practices management action plan. Mapping and identifying these areas with the best available data would also be part of this project to help management identify which rangelands to focus management on and what would be the best course of action. The project deliverable will be a report that will help prioritize where and how the office can be most effective at managing these areas to return them to perennial rangelands.

North Fruita Desert Trails Master Plan- In partnership with Mesa County and the City of Fruita, a grant was funded to build new trails approved the North Fruita Desert Trails Master Development Plan, which includes 32 miles of new trails and trail reroutes and authorizes the use of Class 1 e-bikes on current and future trails in the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Special Recreation Management Area. The Mesa County Trail Crew, Western Colorado Conservation Corps, and volunteers began construction of the new trails and have completed approximately 12 miles of new singletrack trails. Phase 3 of planned campground construction will begin this summer adding 26 new campsites, additional bathrooms and new shade structures. Usage continues to grow, and campground fee receipts hit an all-time record last fall.

Bangs OHV trail planning and development- Approximately nine miles of new OHV trails (ATV, motorcycle and 4x4 rock crawling) routes were completed and opened to the public in 2022. Most of the construction was completed by OHV crews funded by Colorado Parks and Wildlife OHV grants. Planning is completed for another six miles of proposed OHV trails in the Bangs Special Recreation Management Area that was completed in the summer and fall of 2023.

Clifton Parcel- Mesa County has requested acquisition of a BLM disposal parcel located Clifton Colorado near 32 Road (Clifton parcel). The disposal process for this parcel is a multistage process due to an existing withdrawal on this parcel to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). Reclamation filed a Notice of Intent to relinquish approximately 31.10 acres of land withdrawn from the public domain as part of the Grand Valley Reclamation Project since they no longer have need for the entire 31.10 acres parcel.

Approximately 8.25 acres will remain withdrawn to Reclamation for project purposes that include the Government Highline Canal. The partial revocation is needed to open the land to appropriation under the public land laws, subject to valid existing rights, to facilitate a proposed land disposal. The BLM completed a categorical exclusion for the NEPA compliance for the revocation of the withdrawal. The Public Land Order was published finalizing the revocation and bringing the parcel back into BLM administration. The BLM is working on completing the disposal action to transfer the parcel to Mesa County.

Cheney (Grand Mesa Slopes)- In partnership with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, BLM is near closing on the acquisition of a 480- acre inholding along Highway 50 between Grand Junction and Olathe that will secure public access to Cheney Reservoir and other public lands in the Kannah Creek area. The acquisition is expected to be completed by April 7, 2024.

Monument Trail- The Grand Junction Field Office is working with the City of Grand Junction to process their requested right-of-way grant for the Monument Connector Trail, which is an extension of the existing Monument Trail bike path. The path extension would connect the Lunch Loops (Tabeguache) Trailhead to South Camp Road. The City of Grand Junction is also partnering with Colorado West Land Trust on this project. The BLM anticipates that a decision on this project will be completed March of this year.

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA)

Jenna Moore, NCA Manager (Acting until 3/2/24), jnmoore@blm.gov Amber

Koski, NCA Manager, 970-244-3000, akoski@blm.gov

Leave No Trace Gold Standard Site Designation- A Leave No Trace Gold (LNT) Standard Site recognizes public lands that implement the highest standard of onsite LNT programs including staff and volunteer training, educational materials, and additional resources. Before becoming a Gold Standard Site, each area undergoes a rigorous review process to gain the special status by showcasing its LNT offerings. To date, there are less than 20 sites across the nation that have received the Gold Standard designation - and only one of those is managed by the BLM. McInnis Canyons and Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Areas are the 2nd and 3rd BLM sites to join the ranks.

Rabbit Valley Campgrounds- The effort to implement the 2018 Rabbit Valley Camping plan was completed in 2023. Rabbit Valley now has 75 campsites in five different campgrounds, all of which are thoughtfully constructed and placed to facilitate visitor engagement in different activities while staying in this popular multi-use area. The free, self-issue Individual Special Recreation Permits which were required for overnight camping as of 2021 were superseded as of February 2023. Visitors wishing to engage in overnight camping in Rabbit Valley are now required to reserve one of the 75 campsites on Recreation.gov and pay \$20.00 per night.

The Future of the Kokopelli trail system- The 2004 Resource Management Plan for McInnis Canyons NCA called for additional future mountain bike trail development in the Kokopelli/Mack Ridge zone. Community partners from the Fruita Trails Initiative have developed a preliminary proposal for approximately 30 miles of additional trail, including conceptual trail alignments. The Fruita Trails initiative and Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association held a public meeting at Over the Edge Sports bike shop to get community feedback prior to refining their proposal to the BLM. Timing of the environmental review for this project will depend on the ability of the community partners to fund sensitive resource surveys, as well as other GJFO interdisciplinary team priorities.

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA)

Jenna Moore, NCA Manager (Acting until 3/2/24)

jnmoore@blm.gov

Amber Koski, NCA Manager, 970-244 3000, akoski@blm.gov

Leave No Trace Gold Standard Site Designation- A Leave No Trace Gold (LNT) Standard Site recognizes public lands that implement the highest standard of onsite LNT programs including staff and volunteer training, educational materials, and additional resources. Before becoming a Gold Standard Site, each area undergoes a rigorous review process to gain the special status by showcasing its LNT offerings. To date, there are less than 20 sites across the nation that have received the Gold Standard designation - and only one of those is managed by the BLM. McInnis Canyons and Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Areas are the 2nd and 3rd BLM sites to join the ranks.

Gunnison River Campsite Designation and Permit System- The BLM implemented a decision from the 2017 D-E NCA RMP to require overnight boaters on the Lower Gunnison River, from Delta to Whitewater, to obtain a permit in October 2023. BLM staff updated signage and conducted outreach regarding the change with places like Mountain Buzz and American Whitewater. For now, the BLM has implemented a free, self-issued, permit that is filled out on-site. Compliance is estimated at 50-70% and compliance is expected to increase with additional education and outreach.

BLM plans to implement the campsite EA in the spring of 2024, including mitigation for the Colorado hookless cactus and determining which cultural sites may be used for interpretation and education. The BLM anticipates that the campsites will be reservable on recreation.gov beginning in the 2025 river season, pending the approval of the D-E NCA Business Plan.

Gunnison River Camping Fees Business Plan- BLM has drafted a business plan that explores charging fees for camping in developed campgrounds and for camping permits on the Gunnison River. The fees generated within the D-E NCA will be used to maintain and improve recreation opportunities at the site of collection, per Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). We hope to seek a RAC resolution in Fall 2024. We are still interested in seeking solutions to make RAC input into this process efficient given that D-E NCA is partly in the areas covered by both the Southwest and Northwest RACs.

Cactus Park Special Recreation Management Area- The 2017 D-E NCA RMP designated the Cactus Park Area as a Special Recreation Management Area targeting family friendly motorized trail riding and associated camping. The BLM is currently working with Western Slope ATV Association (WSATVA) on projects to improve recreation opportunities and protect sensitive resources in the area. In 2023, the NCA OHV Crew worked with volunteers from Western Slope ATV Club and the Forest Service's State Trail Crew to complete one trail re-route and two stream crossing stabilization projects that needed the most attention.

Fence Construction Project- The Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) NCA recreation staff and NCA OHV crew supplied and shuttled material and provided oversight for the Western CO Conservation Corps' construction and installation of more than 400 linear feet of buck and rail fencing. This investment substantially improved the look and feel of Sawmill Mesa Road's spiderwebbing of undesignated social trails and unruly camp sprawl. The effect made it easier for motorized recreators to stay on designated trail systems.

Fuels Mitigation and Restoration Projects- BLM fire crews used prescribed fire to improve 44 acres in the Farmers Canyon area to protect ponderosa pine stands from high intensity wildfire and improve ecosystem function. Fuels also completed mechanical treatments of 433 acres and 213 acres of hand cutting within the Farmers Canyon project area as a part of a comprehensive strategy to improve Gunnison sage-grouse (GUSG) habitat. The objective was to remove pinyon and juniper in areas that have a well-established sagebrush understory and improve connectivity of the Pinon Mesa GUSG sub-population as well as restore sagebrush habitat, improve big game habitat, and lower potential for catastrophic wildfire.

In 2023, the Southwest District Fire/Fuels program managed a large wildfire for resource benefit near Escalante Canyon. Utilizing favorable containment features and aerial ignitions, firefighters on the Little Mesa Fire were able to achieve low/moderate fire effects on 3,390 acres in the D-E NCA. By facilitating the re-introduction of fire on this landscape, firefighters were able to reduce pockets of hazardous fuel loading and help re-invigorate the grass/shrub understory in sagebrush parks utilized by big game and other wildlife.

Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO – Silt)

Larry Sandoval, Field Manager, (970) 876-9000, lsandoval@blm.gov

Proposed Rock Crawling Trail in the Silt Mesa ERMA- The CRVFO has been partnering with the Hi Country 4 Wheelers to designate a new 1.2-mile out-and-back rock crawling trail in the Silt Mesa ERMA, approximately 2.5 miles north of the Town of Silt. The proposed trail would be within a naturally restricted draw that is approximately 12 to 15 feet wide and incorporate natural tread, gravel and boulder features, and slickrock uplifts. No major construction would be needed due to the unique nature of this trail type. Cultural and paleontological surveys have been completed. Public scoping for the proposal is expected to start in the next few weeks.

New Expanded Campground Fees and Day Use Fee at the Wolcott Day Use Site- The CRVFO will begin implementing its new campground fee structure for six campgrounds in Eagle and Pitkin counties and charging a \$5 day-use fee at the Wolcott Day-Use Site on the Eagle River near Wolcott when the facilities open this spring. The new structure was published in the Federal Register in August 2023, and the new fees took effect in February 2024.

The NW RAC provided important review and comments and approved the fee proposal in June 2019. To account for inflation or other economic changes, the fee structure will be reviewed annually against a consumer price index. Fees could be increased or decreased in \$2 increments if supported by the index. The fees collected will be used specifically to manage these sites. The CRVFO will begin charging \$20 a night at the Prince Creek, Catamount, Lyon's Gulch, and Pinball campgrounds. There had been no fee at these sites. The previous \$10 per night fee at Gypsum and Wolcott campgrounds will increase to \$20. The CRVFO will charge \$4 per person at group camping sites at Gypsum, Pinball, Lyon's Gulch and Prince Creek campgrounds.

Upper Colorado River SRMA Carrying Capacity Study- The CRVFO and KFO hired a contractor to conduct a carrying capacity study on the Upper Colorado River SRMA to determine current and future trends of visitation and uses and identify current and potential future impacts to Recreational Setting Characteristics identified in each office's RMP.

The study will include interviews with various stakeholders, observational studies, analyses of existing facilities, and a compilation/review of existing data. The contractor will conduct observational studies at various locations including Pumphouse, State Bridge, Two Bridges, and Catamount and on-river inventories this summer. The results will be provided in a report by December 2024.

Integrated Fuels and Habitat Improvement Projects- The CRVFO is in various stages of planning and implementing several integrated vegetation management projects to improve wildlife habitat and reduce fuels including the following:

Ongoing Projects with BLM Staff and Women's Fire Crew- 1) The West Elk Ridge project north of New Castle and Silt is a collaboration with CPW's Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) involving mastication and lop and scatter work. 2) Dry Hollow south of Silt is a mastication project. 3) Crews are re-treating the Cedar Mountain project north of Silt and Rifle. The original project was a collaboration with the Mule Deer Foundation, Muley Fanatic Foundation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and HPP. Work on these projects will continue based on crew availability until complete.

Cultural Inventories Contracted for Future Projects- 1) Sopris Mountain Ranch will be a cross boundary project with the USFS and private landowners south of Basalt. It will include a combination of mastication and prescribed fire with expected 2025 implementation. 2) Antelope Creek near McCoy will be a mastication project with 2025 implementation.

Good Neighbor Authority Projects with Colorado State Forest Service- 1) Bellyache Phase II – Dead, diseased, and dying mixed conifer will be removed from around a subdivision and important communication tower. Project will include biomass utilization. Potential implementation is fall 2024. 2) Cottonwood Pass Project – Cross boundary project with private landowners, USFS, and State Trust Lands to build a fuel break around the south side of Gypsum. Had the Lake Christine fire continued to burn, it could have reached Gypsum. Potential fall 2024 implementation. 3) King Mountain SRMA Proposed Treatments. Ongoing collaboration with the Colorado State Forest Service and stakeholders. Cultural survey contracted for first phase.

Prescribed Fire- 1) Bellyache Piles – Hoping to burn this spring as conditions allow. 2) Cottonwood Creek Rx, northwest of Eagle – Targeting an April 2024 window. 3) June Creek Rx, south of Silt and Uncle Bob Mountain – Likely a fall 2024 window.

Mechanical Mastication and Lop & Scatter- 1) Copper Spur Mx – PJ and sagebrush mastication project near McCoy with expected 2024 or 2025 implementation depending on funding. 2) Light Hill – Additional 150 acres of mastication in collaboration with HPP, planning on 2024 implementation. 3) The Crown – 300 acres of Gambel oak, sagebrush, and PJ mastication, planning on 2024 implementation. 4) Winter Ridge Maintenance – Maintain 300-1000 acres of greater sage-grouse habitat treatments near Burns in 2024.

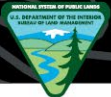
Mid-Continent Quarry Updates:

Noncompliance and Rock Fall- The BLM's work with RMI to address the Noncompliance Order that BLM issued last August for exceeding authorized acres (among other items) is ongoing following the large rockslide that occurred in January. In recent meetings with RMI, the company has indicated they will be submitting an updated Plan of Operations that will address the noncompliance and will include the results of the geotechnical studies that have been completed. BLM continues to work with the US Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety (DRMS) on the procedures to address the January rockfall.

DCV and Proposed Expansion- The Determination of Common Variety Report (DCV), which was initiated in Spring 2019 by BLM mineral examiners, has been completed and was signed on January 12th, 2024. While the DCV was being completed, the BLM required RMI to establish an escrow account and make monthly payments into this account so that the BLM could recover payments if the DCV determined that all or part of the limestone marketed by the Mid-Continent Quarry were not subject to disposal under the Mining Law. Now that the BLM has a completed DCV, the BLM will work with RMI to determine the disposition of the escrow account. The DCV Report will inform BLM's analysis of RMI's expansion proposal. BLM will determine appropriate management of the quarry based on the results of the DCV. This could include moving forward with the hydrologic baseline study and Ethnography to help inform a proposed expansion at the original or a reduced scale, or other potential paths.

Current and Forecasted Drilling Activity- Currently, there are no active drill rigs working in the CRVFO or GJFO. We do have an operator that has submitted APDs for 3 federal wells on one pad and 8 federal wells on another. In addition to drilling, the CRVFO has worked with a few operators to continue to plug wells. Plugging activity is expected to continue throughout the fiscal year in both CRVFO and GJFO. There is the potential to get a drilling rig for the GJFO and Uncompahgre Field Office in 2024.

Anderson Camp Direct Sale- The BLM is proposing to sell a 7.55-acre parcel in Eagle County to Sweetwater Rydev LLC, operator of Anderson Summer Camp. The proposed sale will resolve a more than 100-year-old inadvertent trespass and help the Anderson Summer Camp continue serving non-profit organizations and at-risk youth. The land is being sold for the fair-market value as appraised by the Department of the Interior's Office of Valuation Services. The purchasers will reimburse BLM for its staff time processing this sale. A Notice of Realty Action was published on 12/21/2023 in the Federal Register and had a 45-day public comment period on the proposed sale. The comment period ended on February 5th, 2024, and there were two comments received in support of the sale. The sale may be completed as early as May 2024.



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

Public Comment



1 Comment Received via email

[EXTERNAL] public comment on federal register

o <bk1492@aol.com>

Wed 2/14/2024 12:18

To: Emerson, Jubal (JD) <jemerson@blm.gov>; speakerjohnson@mail.house.gov <speakerjohnson@mail.house.gov>;
tom.kean@mail.house.gov <tom.kean@mail.house.gov>; info@peta.org <info@peta.org>; info@idausa.org <info@idausa.org>;
info@cok.net <info@cok.net>; info@mercyforanimals.org <info@mercyforanimals.org>

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

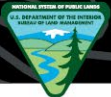
the people are insisting that no wild horses or burros be helicopter or run out of this natinal site and that our natinal site be preserved and protected for the benefit of all usa citizens, not just the ones in the area. this natinal site is for all american citizens and we need to preserve nad protect the nature and wildlife of the site to the fullest ability.the machinations that blm uses to kill nature are in fact animal abuse and mployees who engage in any animal abuse should be in jail for ten years minimum. the natin is being scammed by abuse at our natinal sites, i am asking for an investigation of this site to see what manhandling and marauding is gonig on with this national site that belongs to 335 million americans. far too often our agencies are in fact bloated with pals who bribe. please have a crimial invesiationi on this knid of abuse to the citizens of this country. this cmoment is for teh public record. please receipt. b ker bk1492@aol.com



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Closing Remarks

Your Public Lands – 245 Million Acres of Possibilities



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