



Northwest Resource Advisory Council Field Manager Updates February 2024

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.