



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area
Grand Junction Field Office
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Grand Junction, Colorado 81506
<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/mcnca.html>

In Reply Refer To:

1114 (CO-134)

June 6, 2011

Dear Reader,

The attached EA analyzes our proposal for managing overnight camping down the Ruby-Horsethief stretch of the Colorado River, which runs through McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA). As described in our recent news release announcing the public comment period for this EA, we're offering one final opportunity for public review and comment before I make a decision on whether to approve the proposed action.

I know that many of you have provided your input to us over the past two years, and we used that input to develop the proposed action described in this EA. To provide an example of the depth of this public exchange, we held seven separate discussions with the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area Advisory Council, briefed the Mesa County Commissioners four times, held three public meetings, and made three presentations to commercial guides and outfitters. On busy weekend days, our park rangers contact up to 400 individuals, and many of these people talked with us about the conditions they were seeing, the shortcomings of the voluntary registration system, or the potential permit system.

From a recreation perspective, our Resource Management Plan for this area, completed in 2004 with extensive public input, notes that Ruby-Horsethief should provide visitors with opportunities to enjoy the closeness of family and friends, enjoy exploration, escape everyday responsibilities, enjoy mental and physical rest, and savor canyon-country aesthetics in a naturally-appearing red walled river canyon. During our conversations with the public, many people told me that this stretch of river is important to them, and that the voluntary registration system doesn't work with the level of visitation we're seeing today—that it's difficult and stressful to head downriver without knowing whether another party will have

claimed their campsite when they arrive. We have also noticed problems with unlimited camping and its associated problems of human waste, loss of riparian vegetation, and people chopping up trees for firewood.

The Proposed Action described in this EA would replace the voluntary registration system with a requirement to hold a permit and camp only in designated sites. Under the proposed action, our supply of campsites would number 35, with 6 camps per weekend night reserved for commercial outfitters, and 29 sites available to private boaters. When those sites are full, no more permits would be issued for those days.

We've heard that people value flexibility in being able to float this stretch of river. Under the proposed action, we would start by permitting Fridays and Saturdays only, and allowing visitors to self-issue permits Sunday-Thursday. If use exceeds certain visitation levels on weekdays, we would move to a full-week permitting system. The trigger for when that would happen is described in the EA.

Finally, we mention fees in this EA. The BLM must go through a separate, specific process in order to consider and approve a fee, and that remains to be done. However, I wanted to use this EA as a way of starting the dialogue about a fee proposal.

The purpose of this plan is to lay out the primary structure of the permit system. Some of the details, including the mechanics of the lottery system to distribute commercial use, would be worked out with our outfitters over the remainder of this year, if this proposed action is approved.

We know this stretch of river is important to many of our visitors. Thank you for the input you've provided to date, and for any comments you might provide based on this draft of our EA.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie A. Stevens". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie A. Stevens,
McInnis Canyons NCA Manager