

## Questions for D-E NCA Advisory Council to Consider for each zone of the NCA

*“The Council shall advise the Secretary with respect to the preparation and implementation of the management plan.”*

*-Public Law 111-11—March 30, 2009*

### Overarching Questions (general topics addressed by the Advisory Council throughout the process)

1. Is the range of alternatives adequate?
2. What other public process steps should the BLM undertake, if any, to compile needed information?
3. What factors or criteria should BLM consider in identifying a Preferred Alternative? (later-post-August)

### Suggested discussion questions for Zone 3: Recreation

1. **Should the BLM consider making a commitment for recreation in this zone?**

#### ***Steps to answer this question:***

- a. Is there demand for such a commitment?

#### Comments provided to BLM:

*“As a SRMA this area could become a great place to recreate and explore”*

*“The Cactus Park, Gibbler Mountain and Gunnison Bluffs areas offer excellent settings for a mountain biking SRMA”*

*“Zone 3 is used by many, many families, especially families associated with-- OHV use. This area needs to be managed as a motorized recreation area because that is what it is.”*

*“An area is needed for OHV usage for future increase in recreation and to prevent over-usage in other areas.”*

*“Although I drive to different areas of the NCA, I would prefer minimal motorized access, and more protection of resources (especially in the Cactus Park area) from motorized travel.”*

If the answer to question 1 is yes, then proceed to question 2. If the answer to question 1 is no move on to next zone or issue.

**2. What types of commitments for recreation could the BLM make in this zone?** There could be multiple types of commitments, which could be included as alternatives in the plan.

***Steps to answer this question:***

- a) What demands exist for recreation in this zone?

Comments provided to BLM:

Regarding the type of experience:

“Place emphasis on Cactus Park as an ATV use area”

“Zone 3 is used by many, many families, especially families associated with-- OHV use. This area needs to be managed as a motorized recreation area because that is what it is.”

“The Cactus Park, Gibbler Mountain and Gunnison Bluffs areas offer excellent settings for a mountain biking SRMA... In developing a new trail system XXX encourages the use of stacked loops that provide a range of experiences for all user levels. Including the development of expert only trails designed for the truly advanced riders who enjoy the extra challenge of technical trails or long distance rides.”

“There is a growing need for more motorized trails to accommodate the growth of this form of recreation. Perhaps make this area an SRMA. Loop trails offer the greatest opportunity for fulfillment of the riding experience.”

“ATV trails need to be established prior to any other routes as this is an ATV emphasis area. The ATV community has been steered to this area and there are currently very few ATV trails on local BLM lands. Zone 3 is used by many, many families, especially families associated with-- OHV use. This area needs to be managed as a motorized recreation area because that is what it is.”

“ATVs bring more money into the area than bicycles. The Cactus Park area needs to be managed for motorized users.”

“Would prefer designated areas for a trail system to be built, not only connecting point A to point B, but with loop system access. Of course, as with most Mtn. Bike trails in the areas they would be open to hiking, running and horseback riding”

“Although we are primarily interested in developing shared use non-motorized trails, we do support some shared used motorized singletrack development. The concept of shared use for all users of singletrack sounds good in theory, but in reality many non-motorized trail users will avoid motorized trails if they see heavy use by motorcycles, or equestrians will avoid trails heavily used by mountain bikers. Careful planning must be done to minimize user conflicts.”

“Please create more quiet walking recreation opportunities in the DENCA outside of the wilderness area.”

“Manage the NCA for more quiet recreation areas.”

“Areas have potential of community involvement and economic value for events, such as national and state ATV campaigns, motorcycle, vintage and modern events (endure, trials, dual sport, touring), jeep and 4WD jamborees.”

Regarding camping:

“Designation of the existing through routes and the establishment of a developed campground will go a long way to reduce the impacts and retain the recreation opportunities. In addition, a developed campground will help accommodate the foreseeable increase in visitors as the Bangs Canyon and Tabaguache Trail improvements come on line.”

“The plan should include analysis of those sites to determine which if any should be closed because they are problematic - such as ones that are too close to water, too close to historic or geological features (such as an overhang), too close to combustible materials (moving the fire ring may be a sufficient fix) or too close to other dispersed camping spots. The BLM may have other criteria for rating a dispersed camping spot as problematic. For those dispersed camping spots the plan deems viable, the plan should also have a schedule for adding signage to each of these sites. Vehicle accessible dispersed camping can

then be limited to officially designated spots and thus allow the BLM to supervise and control the creation of new sites.”

“Keep dispersed camping”

Once demand for a particular recreational activity and/or experience is identified, proceed to b, c, d and e

- b) What limitations would impact the ability of the BLM to make a commitment to this particular recreational experience in this zone? (Think about the BLM’s mandate to conserve, protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the NCA)
- i. Cultural Resources
- Surveys in the area have revealed a high density of cultural sites
    - One survey was conducted on 580 acres in Zone 3 in 2010
      - Found 16 sites (8 prehistoric, 4 historic and 4 multicomponent), of which 6 were determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places and 1 was determined to “need data”
      - Found 61 “isolated finds”(57 prehistoric, 3 historic and 1 both historic and prehistoric), of which none were determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places
    - This includes sites that continue to hold spiritual and traditional value to Native Americans
    - There are sites in this zone that are currently being degraded from usage and visitation in the area (remember that the routes in this zone have never been surveyed)
    - Increasingly, cultural staff looks to preserve heritage areas as opposed to just the sites themselves. The protection of heritage areas helps preserve the visual landscape in a way that enables the public (as well as Native Americans) to reconnect with the past. Other uses of such areas may include opportunities for traditional uses by Native Americans.

ii. Special Status Species

- Colorado hookless cactus is found primarily in the Gunnison Bluffs / Dominguez North area in this zone
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program identified an A-ranked occurrence of Grand Junction milkvetch in Cactus Park.
- A large part of Zone 3 is mapped as historic range of Gunnison sage grouse. Sage grouse from the Piñon Mesa population may be using this area as winter habitat. These birds are sensitive to noise, habitat fragmentation and habitat quality.
- Desert bighorn sheep primarily use the Gunnison bluffs / Dominguez north and nine mile hill area of Zone 3. The construction of new routes and increased usage in this area could impact the herd.

iii. Vegetation and Wildlife

- The sagebrush and mountain shrub communities in this zone provide important habitat for many species of wildlife (including big game like elk and deer).
- The construction of routes and usage of existing routes in otherwise un-fragmented habitat has an impact on many species of wildlife
- Ponderosa pine is most common in this zone within the NCA. These trees provide important habitat for many species of wildlife and hold cultural value for Native Americans.

iv. Topography and soils

- Soil erosion has been a problem in parts of Zone 3. Much of the soil in this zone is fragile and erosive. In some parts of this zone, this could make sustainable trail construction difficult (particularly in the higher elevations in Zone 3).
- Deep canyons and gulches are common in the Jack's Canyon, Farmers Canyon, Gibbler Gulch and upper Big Dominguez areas of Zone 3. Most existing routes avoid these canyons and gulches.
- The rim running parallel to the Gunnison River would be a major impediment to trail development below the rim.

v. Access issues

- Access is primarily via the Cactus Park and Divide roads
- Public access via the Tabeguache Trail at Whitewater is uncertain as the trail hits Highway 141 on private land.

c) What would the costs and tradeoffs be for the BLM to make this commitment?

d) What partnership opportunities would enable the BLM to make this commitment? Has a demonstrated commitment been made by these partners?

- OHV and mountain biking community groups have expressed interest in partnerships with the BLM
  - These partnerships could include assistance with trail construction, trail maintenance and monitoring

e) Is management for this particular recreational experience feasible/reasonable?