

# Zone 3: Cactus Park

*(Ninemile Hill, Cactus Park, Farmer's Canyon,  
Gunnison Bluffs, Dominguez Campground)*

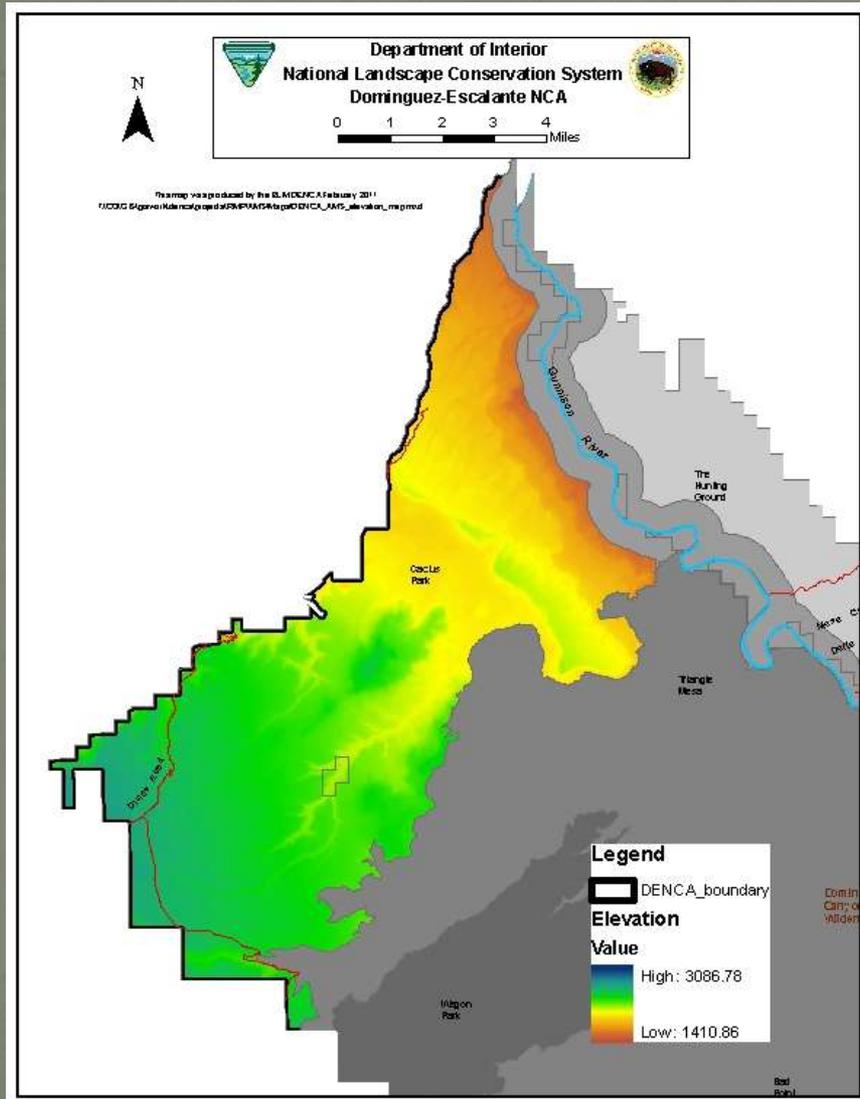
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Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area  
Advisory Council

July 6, 2011

Delta Center for the Performing Arts, Delta, CO

# Key data



- BLM land is 39,792 acres.
- Private in-holding is 160.5 acres.
- Ranges from 4,625 feet to 8,100 feet in elevation



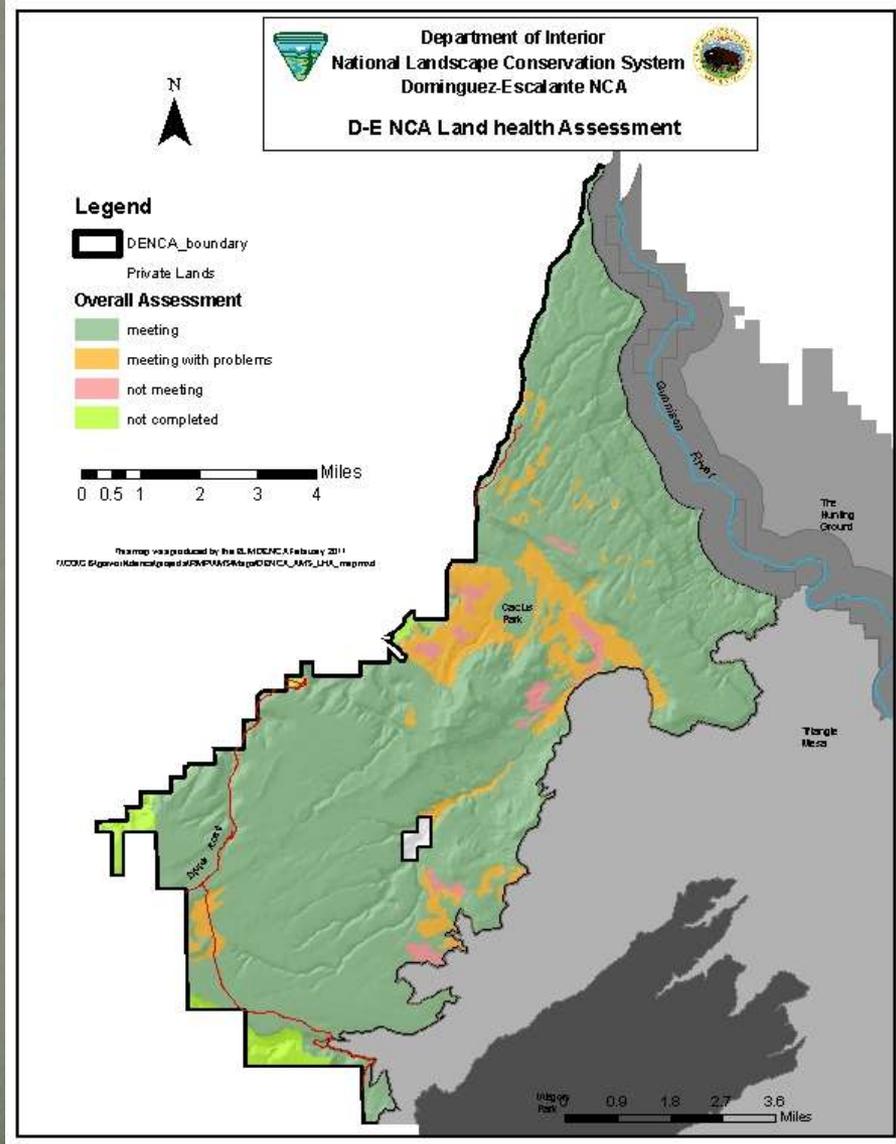
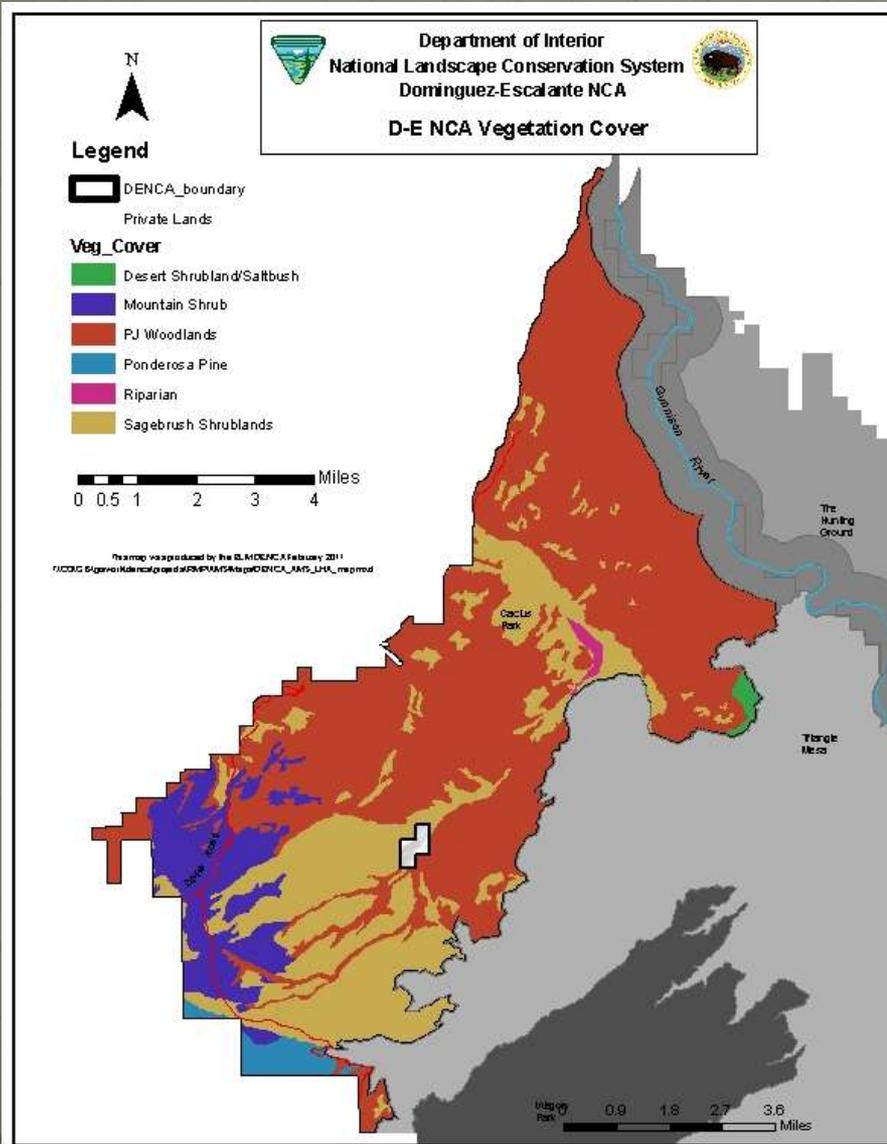
# Dino digs

Paleontological resources abound in Zone 3.

The skull of an Ankylosaurid --an armored type of dinosaur -- was found here last spring.

# Vegetation and vegetation treatments in Cactus Park

## Extensive Revegetation in Sagebrush Shrublands



## What are the causes of the problems?

•Livestock grazing (past and/or present)

•Drought

•Vegetation Treatments

•Altered fire regime

•Road and trail proliferation

## What are the problems?

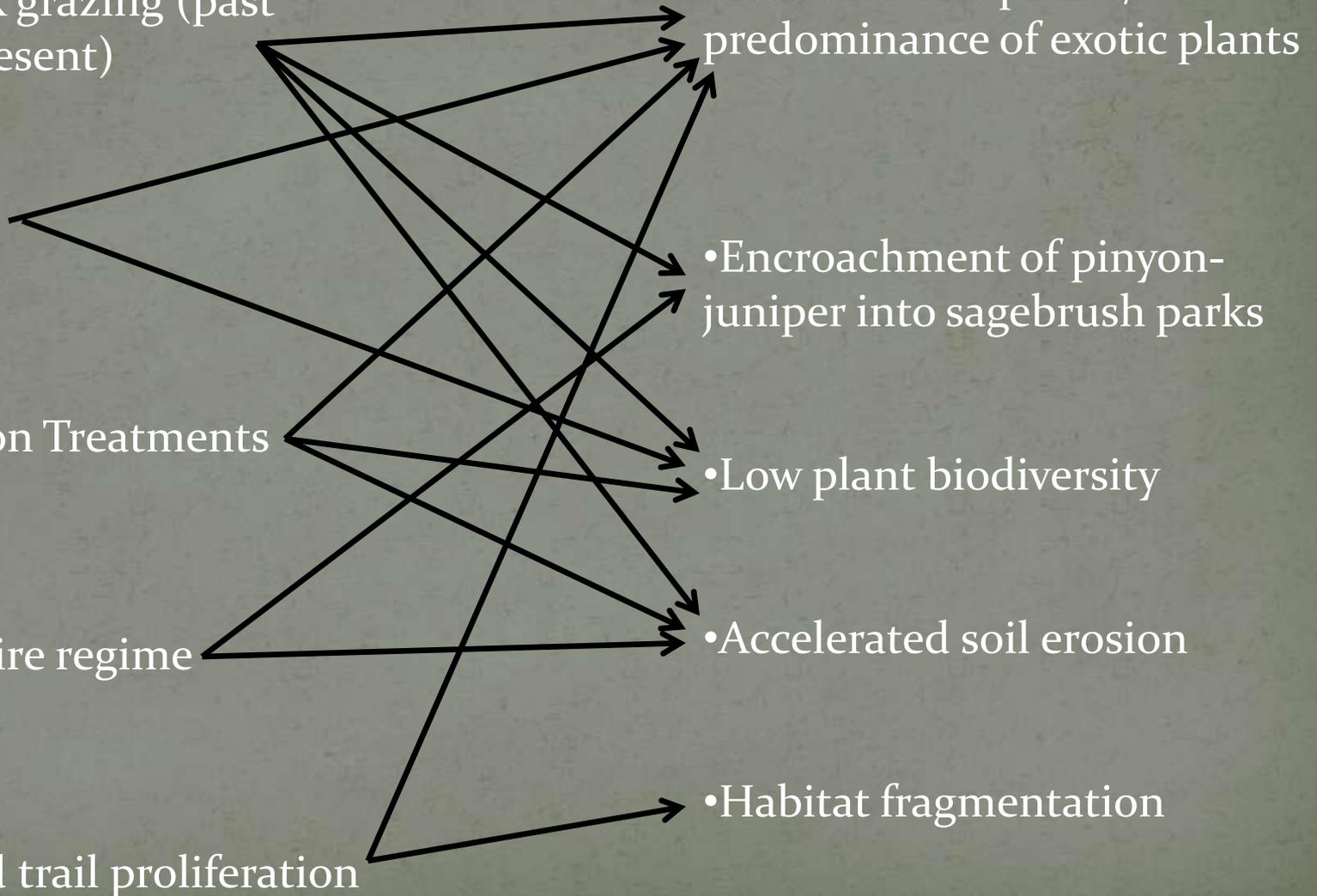
•Loss of native plants/  
predominance of exotic plants

•Encroachment of pinyon-  
juniper into sagebrush parks

•Low plant biodiversity

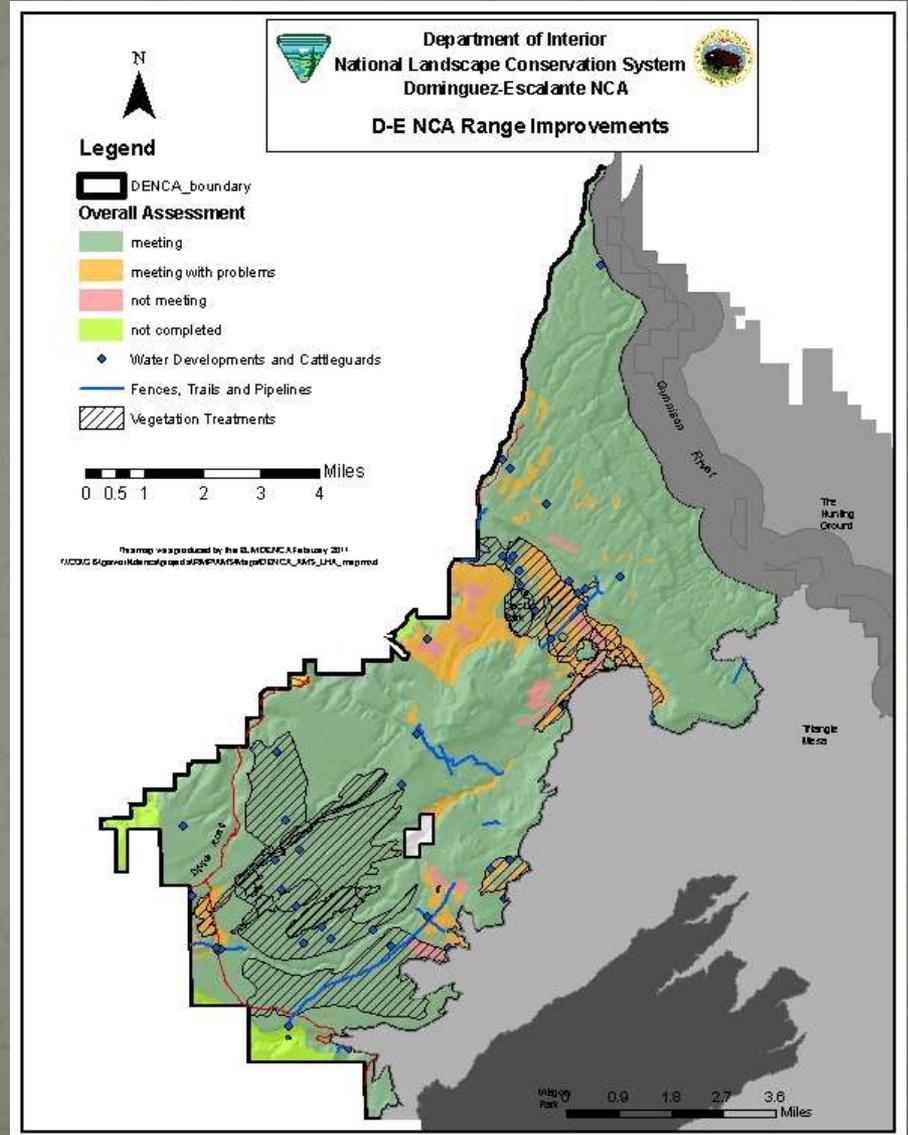
•Accelerated soil erosion

•Habitat fragmentation



# Livestock Grazing

- Gibbler Common is a cattle allotment that encompasses the vast majority of Zone 3
- The area has been intensively managed for livestock grazing since the late 1960s
  - Vegetation treatments
  - Water developments
  - Trails and fences
  - Corrals
- Allotment is divided into 6 pastures (3 are used in the spring, 3 are used in the fall/winter)



# Special Status Species in Zone 3 (C = confirmed within past 10 years, P = not documented but suitable habitat exists):

## Threatened and Endangered Species

- **Colorado hookless cactus (c)**

## BLM Sensitive Species

- **Gunnison sage grouse (c)**
- **Desert bighorn sheep (c)**
- **Grand Junction milk vetch (c)**
- **Naturita milkvetch (C)**
- **Northern goshawk (P)**
- **Bats (Allen's big-eared bat, Big free-tailed bat, Spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, Fringed myotis) (P)**
- **Midget-faded rattlesnake (P)**
- **Milk snake (P)**
- **Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (P)**
- **Brewer's sparrow (P)**



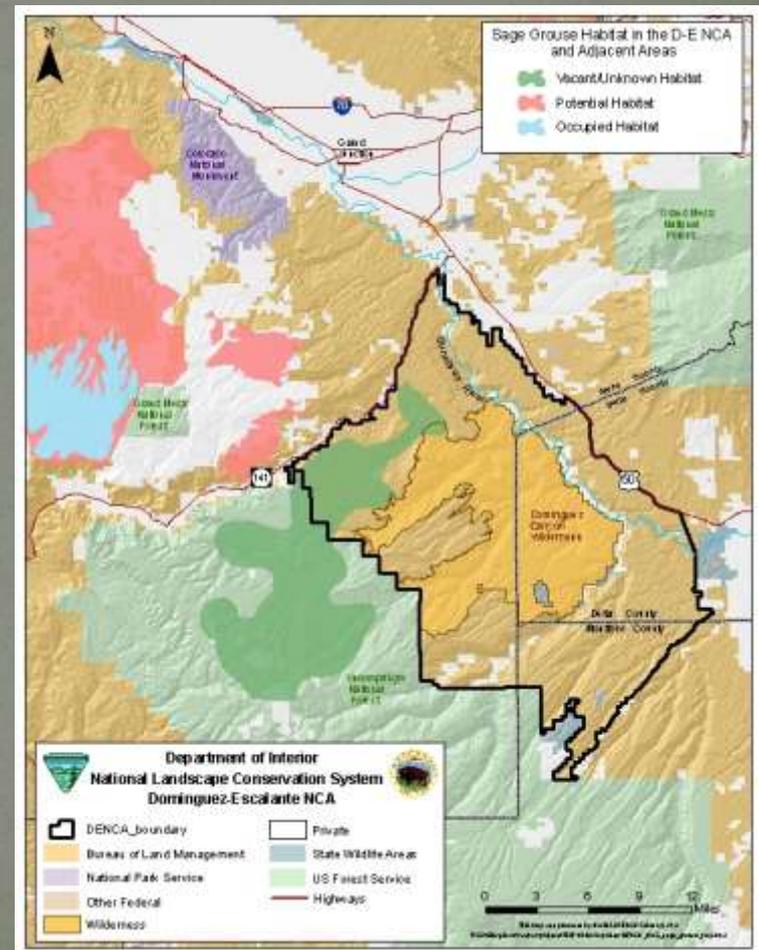
# Gunnison sage grouse habitat

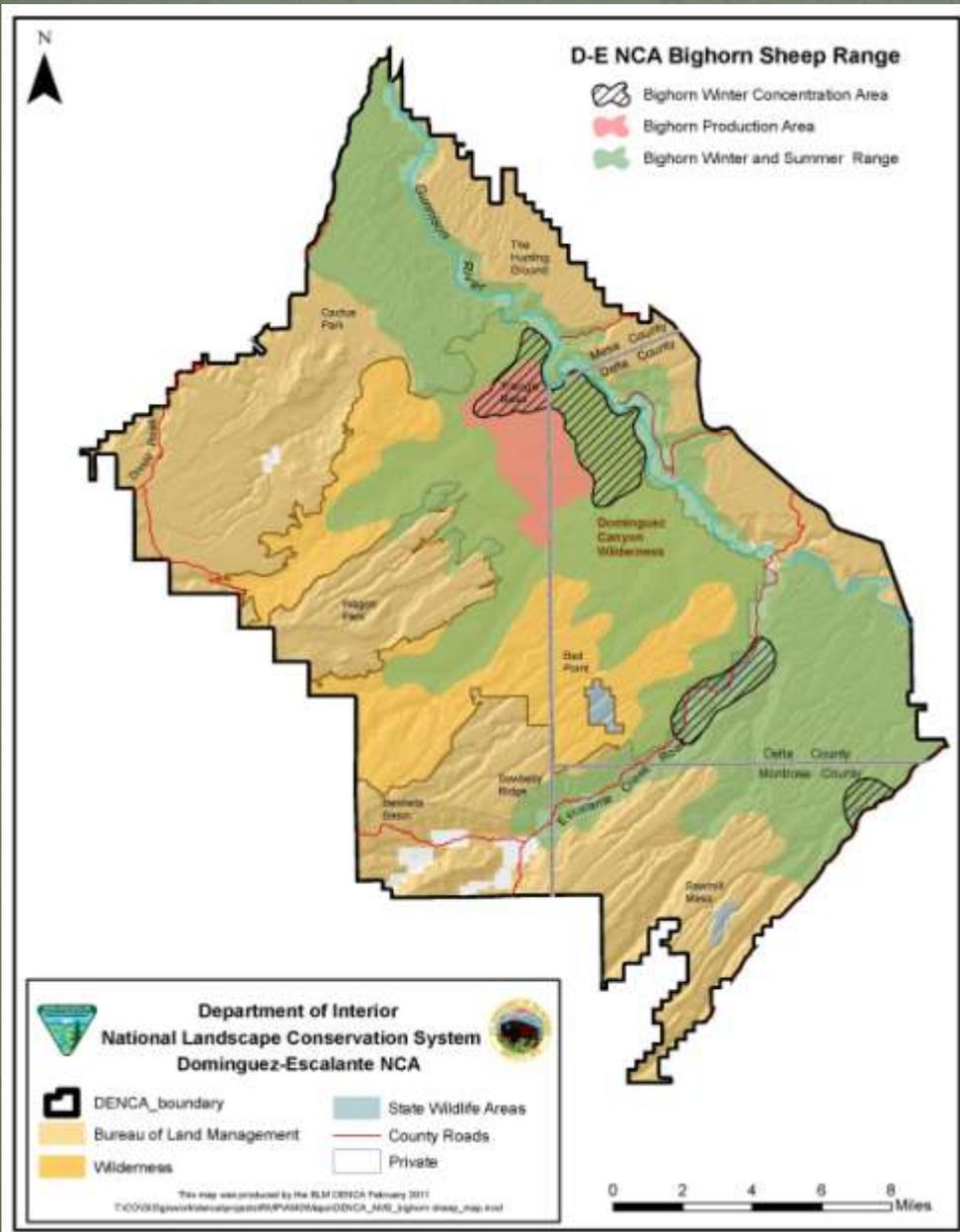
The Cactus Park area of the NCA is mapped as historic range for the Gunnison sage grouse.

The closest known population is on Pinyon Mesa. This population was augmented in 2010 with Gunnison sage grouse from the Gunnison Basin area.

These birds were equipped with radio transmitters.

One of these birds was documented on Horse Mesa in winter 2010, which may suggest the birds will use the area as winter habitat





# Desert bighorn

Winter and summer range lies across the northern half of Zone 3, between Cactus Park Road and the Gunnison River.



# Cactus Park = cultural sites



The Cactus Park zone contains Ute wickiups, culturally modified trees, deeply buried significant sites and rock art.

At left is a buried slab-lined hearth, 4055 BC to 3955 BC.

At right, a Ute student examines a culturally modified Ponderosa Pine.

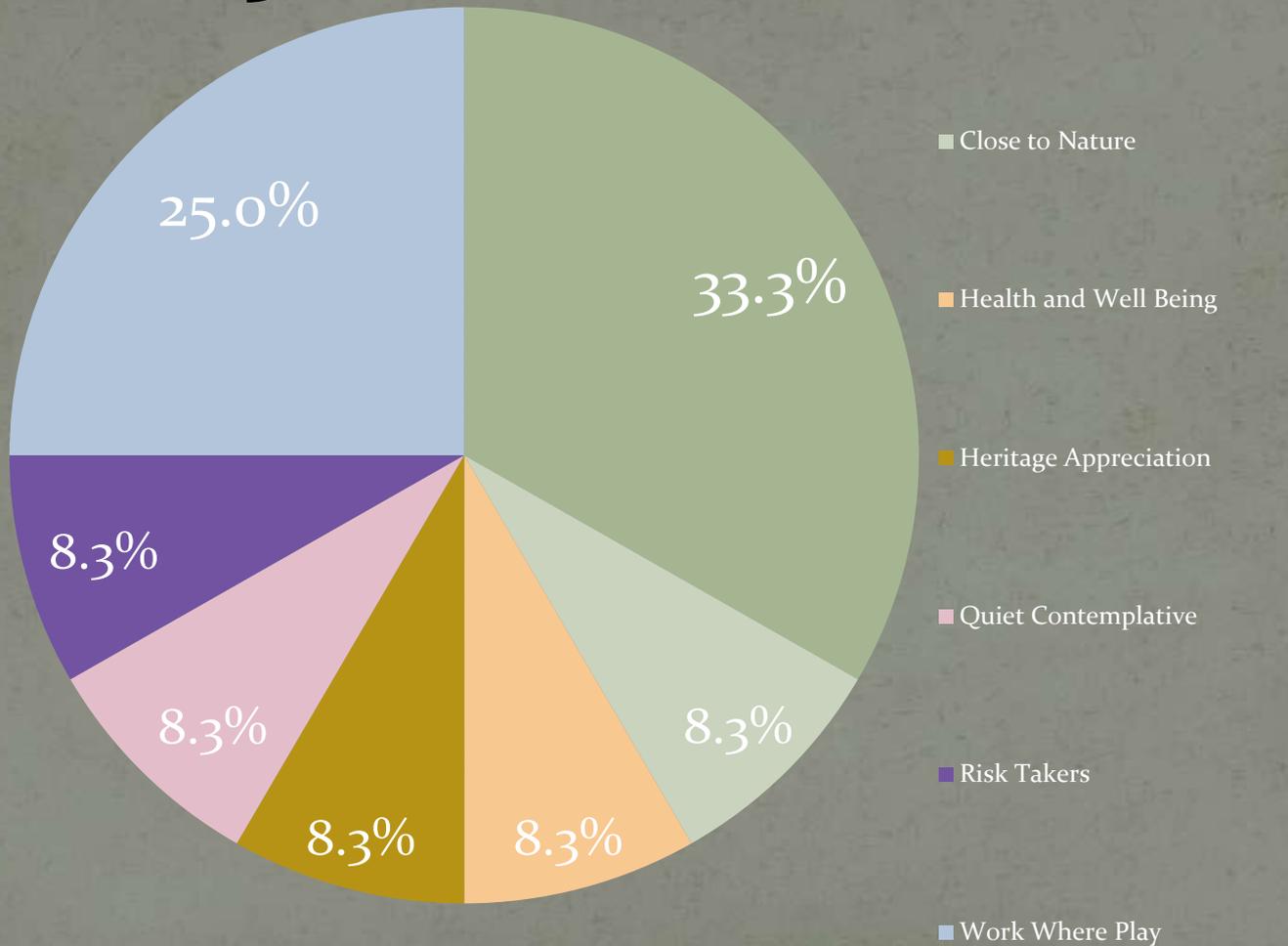


# A popular playground

- 50,000 visitors use this zone annually, approximately *half* of all recreation use in the NCA.
- Bouldering
- Scenic tours
- Hiking
- Camping
- Mountain biking
- Horseback riding
- Off-Highway Vehicles



# Zone 3 Recreation Mix



# Popular OHV trails



Scoping and recreation focus groups suggest that many members of the public would like to see the Cactus Park/Ninemile Hill area become an OHV emphasis area.

Cactus Park has a high density of OHV trails. Most trails were user-created and have sustainability issues.

Ninemile Hill, Cactus Park and Farmers Canyon are used primarily for OHV trail-riding recreation, with connections to additional trails on adjacent US Forest Service land.

Ninemile Hill is also popular for motorcycle trials riding.

# Hiking and Horseback Riding in Zone 3

- Equestrians and hikers enjoy the Cactus Park trails and trailheads that gives access to the Dominguez Wilderness.

- Public scoping comments suggested that the BLM provide additional quiet recreation opportunities in this zone.



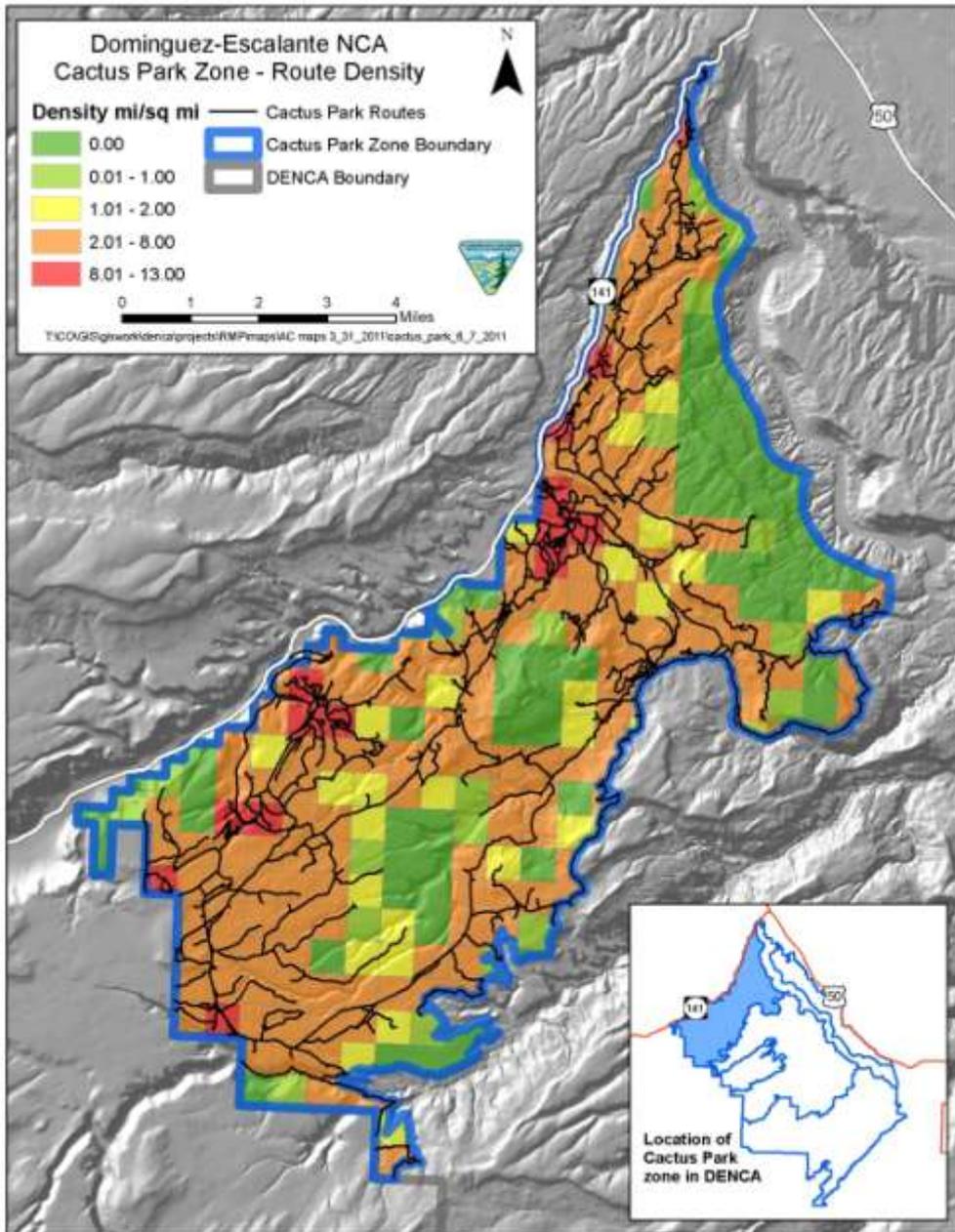


# Mountain Biking

The Tabeguache Trail is 144-miles long and connects Montrose with Grand Junction -- runs through Cactus Park.

Public scoping identified the following:

- The mountain biking community would like a new single-track trail system in Cactus Park, Gunnison Bluffs and Gibbler Mountain areas
- The emphasis would be on making the trails mechanized/pedestrian/equestrian, but some of these trails could be multiple-use motorized/mechanized/foot trails
- The mountain biking community would like to see an SRMA-type management approach for mountain biking in this zone



## Cactus Park Route Density

**High density** is Front Country, near the main roads. They include:

- Cactus Park Road
- Old Quarry

**Least traveled** areas are:

- Gunnison Bluffs
- Gibbler Mountain
- Gibbler Gulch

Why were the roads built:

- Livestock grazing
- Mining
- Paleontological exploration
- Flagstone quarry
- Fuel wood harvesting
- Recreation user-created

# Lands With Wilderness Characteristics (outside of federally designated wilderness and wilderness study areas)

## Background

- The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976) requires the BLM to inventory lands for their wilderness characteristics
- When the BLM finds lands that have wilderness characteristics, the BLM is not required to protect them as such
- BLM's responsibilities regarding wilderness inventory and management (outside of federally designated wilderness) is still in flux
- The BLM has received public comments identifying the area to the right as an area with wilderness characteristics that warrants additional protection



# Camping

- The majority of camping the Zone 3 is in dispersed, undesignated camp sites
- Dispersed camping is often associated with hunting, OHV riding, wildlife viewing and hiking
- Dominguez Campground is a popular site, featuring a rest-room, campsites, picnic tables and a trailhead for hikers and equestrians who want to venture down the Big Dominguez Canyon.





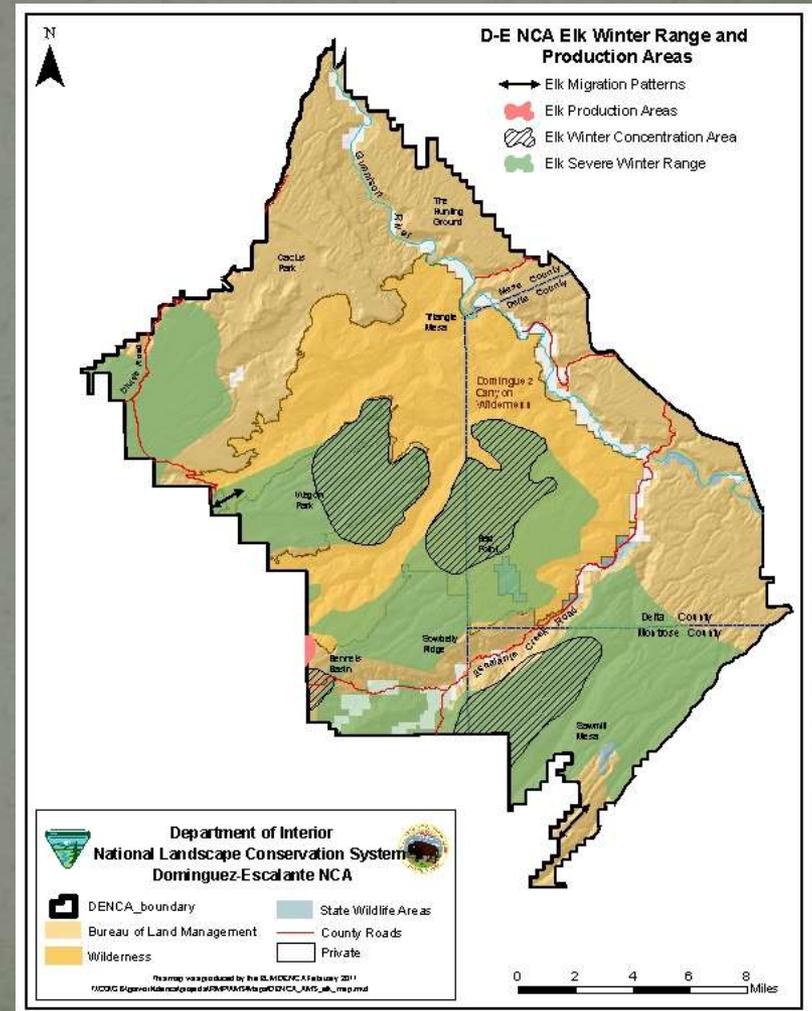
- Bouldering & multi-pitch climbing -- East Creek / Hwy 141.
- Bouldering -- sandstone blocks along lower East Creek.
- Multi-pitch climbs -- East Creek in Unaweep Canyon.

# Hunting

The higher elevations of Zone 3 are popular with big game hunters, particularly elk and deer hunters

Almost the entire NCA falls into Game Management Unit 62

Hunting season for big game varies each year but it generally begins in the end of August and lasts through November, with late season elk hunting extending through December



# Auto Touring: Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic Byway

Highway 141 bounds the northwest side of the NCA. It is the first leg of a scenic byway that sweeps south and then southeast, through Gateway, Naturita, Norwood and Placerville.

The 138-mile route has opportunities for plenty of hiking, biking, kayaking, off-highway riding, hunting and fishing.

