

CANYON CLARION

DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA & DOMINGUEZ CANYON WILDERNESS PLANNING NEWSLETTER

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BLM

Planning process makes significant gains

During the past year, the planning process for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area took many significant steps toward creating a Draft Resource Management Plan. Members of the D-E NCA Advisory Council, representatives from Cooperating Agencies and tribal governments provided input to BLM staff for the year's progress.

Key milestones

The Scoping Summary Report in February and the Analysis of the Management Situation in July were important steps. The scoping report summarized input from surrounding communities, public agencies, businesses and organizations about how they would like to see the area managed. The AMS analyzed the current condition of resources and identified opportunities to update management of the D-E NCA.

Taken together, the scoping and AMS reports provided a basis for understanding D-E NCA issues. All subsequent work in the planning process is founded on these two documents. These documents are especially critical to the development of draft alternative management plans, which are currently underway.

The two reports are posted on the D-E NCA website, together with a wide range of maps, meeting minutes and presentations. The BLM also prepared nine editions of the D-E NCA newsletter "Canyon Clarion," which are available online or in hard copies at the field offices.

People

Continued on page 2



Above, kayakers pull aside to Escalante Creek's bank in the Potholes area, to scout the rapids below. The Potholes attract extreme kayakers during the spring runoff.

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area • COLORADO



Continued from page 1

The 10-member D-E NCA Advisory Council came together for the first time in 2011 after being established by the Secretary of the Interior to provide recommendations to Bureau of Land Management planners in developing the Resource Management Plan for the NCA and Wilderness (2009 Omnibus Act). The Advisory Council includes members appointed to represent special interest categories established by the Omnibus Act. The council started with 10 members, but two members withdrew and will be replaced in 2012. The Council held 15 meetings to provide input and participated in two field trips in 2011.

For much of 2011, the Advisory Council learned about the NCA and planning process using information summaries, maps, scientific data, public comments and statistical data. Early in 2011, the council examined the planning process; a recreation survey conducted by the National Resource and Land Policy Institute of Colorado Mesa University; the Wild & Scenic River program; Zone 1 (the Hunting Grounds); Zone 2 (Gunnison River corridor); Zone 3 (Cactus Park); Zone 5 (Escalante Canyon and canyons southwest of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness and Wagon Park); D-E NCA's cultural and historical resources and Zone 4 (the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness); bighorn and domestic sheep issues; different approaches to recreation management and wildlife issues. Along the way, Advisory Council members provided the BLM with feedback and questions that the planning team incorporated into draft management proposals.

Council members participated in two field trips to learn about the NCA's recreation and natural resources – a spring raft trip down the Gunnison River and a winter motorized tour through Cactus Park and Gibbler Gulch.

Private individuals and representatives of special interest organizations (hiking, horseback riding, motorized recreation, etc.) consistently attended Advisory Council meetings. Public comments provided the council and BLM planning staff with new information and fresh perspec-



By the numbers

2: major reports (scoping summary and Analysis of the Management Situation)

15: Advisory Council meetings, alternating between Delta and Grand Junction

2: field trips (Gunnison River raft trip, ATV ride through Cactus Park)

2: contracts awarded

5: Cooperating Agency meetings (providing input)

3: socio-economic workshops

3: tribes consulted

9: newsletters providing general information on the planning process



tives.

The public also helped the BLM build a comprehensive inventory of trails and roads – vital to development of a travel management plan for the NCA.

Late in the year, the Advisory Council began to review a draft range of alternatives (a series of potential management plans developed by BLM planning staff). That focus is expected to extend into 2012.

The planning process's formal Cooperating Agency representatives were also active last year. They met five times to learn about the planning process and provide

input on travel management and other areas where they have jurisdiction by law or special expertise. The city governments of Grand Junction, Delta and Montrose; the county governments of Mesa, Delta and Montrose; and the Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Colorado Water Conservation Board have all provided representatives to assist the BLM in developing the RMP.

The BLM met with the Southern Ute and Uintah and Ouray Reservation tribes for formal consultation, and coordinated with tribal liaisons for the Ute Mountain Ute throughout 2011.

Workshops and other meetings

The BLM hosted three workshops to explore the socio-economic issues associated with D-E NCA. During these workshops, the BLM exchanged information with participants on the economic impact of public lands on area communities. Discussions covered less tangible relationships with the NCA's resources, such as the quality that recreation adds to daily life. BLM planning staff also attended a series of Wild and Scenic River stakeholder meetings in Delta.

Contracts

The BLM brought on two contractors to help move specific pieces of the planning process forward. Alpine Archeology, of Montrose, will compile a summary report about cultural resources in D-E NCA, drawing from data in the two field offices. The summary report will serve as a starting point for all future archeological and historical surveys in D-E NCA.

EMPS Inc., of Boulder, will analyze the environmental impacts of the alternative management approaches. EMPS Inc. is currently writing the resource management plans for the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre field offices.

Coming Up

BLM planning staff are preparing three draft chapters of the D-E NCA Resource Management Plan, including:

- Chapter 1, a basic introduction.
- Chapter 2, a detailed explanation of proposed management alternatives.

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

- Chapter 3, data and information on the current situation and conditions within D-E NCA.

The consulting firm of EMPS Inc. will use the above information to analyze environmental impacts of the management alternatives.

The draft impact analysis will become Chapter 4 this summer. BLM planning staff will then develop a draft preferred alternative – probably composed of bits and pieces of the earlier range of alternatives. The draft preferred alternative is due in spring.

The draft RMP will be released for public comment in late 2012 for 90 days. The Draft RMP/EIS will be revised as needed to respond to public comment.

Shortly thereafter, the BLM will release the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for D-E NCA.

Council transitions from learning to providing feedback

The Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Council has entered a new phase of work. It will meet twice in January to accomplish the task of reviewing preliminary alternatives information developed by Bureau of Land Management planning staff.

The council recently received alternative management ideas – a stage in the development of the draft Resource Management Plan – about the NCA's resources, uses and special designations.

The range of four preliminary alternatives includes:

- A no action alternative, or continuation of current management,
- A natural processes management approach,
- An active management approach for biological resources, with more restoration and vegetation treatments to achieve a “very good” condition and finally
- A commitment to trail-based recreation in some areas, paired with active management for biological resources, to achieve a “good condition.”

In January, the council will meet on Jan. 4 and Jan. 25 – both in Grand Junction, in order to thoroughly review the range of management alternatives.

That review will assist the BLM in identifying the need for any additional edits or clarifications to the alternatives.

Public comments

Two questions emerged during public comment at the December meeting, that bear on process. One motorcycle recreationist asked how the BLM would consider additional trails that have been documented since the travel planning process closed several months ago.

A Whitewater resident asked why the public isn't receiving copies of all materials under review by the council. Steele

and Stevens explained that the planning process needs a fixed set of travel management information to work with, and can't work effectively with a continually growing and changing set of data. They also noted that the planning process requires feedback from the council throughout the planning process, to prepare the Draft RMP for public review, but that all information will be shared with the public through public review and comment on the Draft RMP in 2012.

Jan. 4 feedback

Council members Tamera Minnick, Steve Acquafresca, Oscar Massey and Delta County Commissioner Doug Atchley reported January 4 that they questioned the desirability of considering a management alternative that relies on natural processes.

They also questioned the possibility of closing riparian areas to trailing cattle. The group did not consider it realistic to move vegetation health from “good” to “very good.” Instead, they recommended a focus on trends, rather than specific end results.

Council members Joe Neuhof and Mike Wilson made recommendations about wilderness management. They had questions about whether power equipment could be used to install climbing bolts -- it can't. They also suggested the need for access to the wilderness boundary.

Council members Bill Harris and Katie Steele made recommendations about the management of cultural resources. Harris is inclined to think that NCA cultural resources need interpretation and education programs.

He believes heritage tourism could have impacts on cultural resources that are fragile and easily damaged. Escalante Canyon could be overrun by visitors, so BLM needs management changes to be triggered by bigger visitor numbers.

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January 25, 2012
3-6 p.m.
Mesa County
Courthouse Annex
544 Rood Avenue
Grand Junction, CO

The Advisory Council
will focus on
recreation,
livestock grazing, and
Areas of Critical
Environmental Concerns

