

CANYON CLARION

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

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www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html

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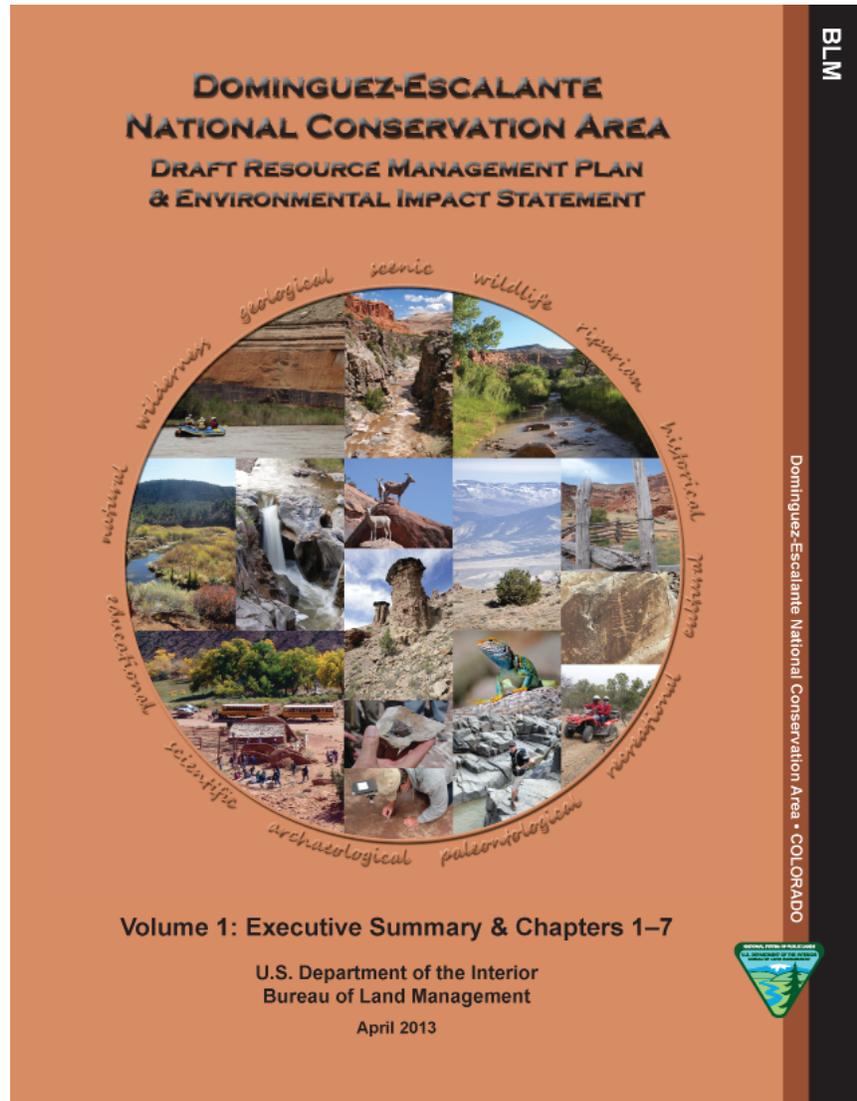
Draft Resource Management Plan released for public comment

The Bureau of Land Management released the draft resource management plan/environmental impact statement for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area on May 17, 2013, and is soliciting public comments. The public comment period lasts through August 22, 2013).

The draft RMP is one of several steps in the Dominguez-Escalante NCA planning process mandated by Congress in the area's enabling legislation: the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (see diagram on page 2). The BLM, which is the steward of this public land and responsible for protecting it, consulted extensively with the public and many different constituents, including the Dominguez-Escalante NCA Advisory Council, tribal governments, the State of Colorado, other federal agencies, and county and city governments, to write the draft RMP. The draft RMP outlines five alternatives for managing the NCA in accordance with the requirements of the Omnibus Act, which states the following (Section 2402):

The purposes of the Conservation Area are to conserve and protect for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations...the unique and important resources and values of the land, including the geological, cultural, archaeological, paleontological, natural, scientific, recreational, wilderness, wildlife, riparian, historical, educational, and scenic resources of the public land; and... the water resources of area streams, based on seasonally available flows, that are necessary to support aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial species and communities.

Because it explores several possible management strategies in considerable detail, the draft management plan is a large and complex document (more than 1,000 pages). A practical way to review the plan is to read the Executive Summary and Introduction, then choose which



sections to look at, depending on personal interest. This is especially easy to do with the online version, which allows the reader to quickly locate and link to pertinent sections directly from the table

of contents: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html.

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Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area • COLORADO

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The Executive Summary explains the purpose of the draft RMP, includes a brief overview of the planning process, and provides short descriptions of the five management alternatives. Chapters 2–4 contain detailed descriptions of the possible management strategies and how they could affect the qualities and resources of the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. The appendices describe the scientific methods used to inform and develop the various alternatives, and they also provide other information of a technical or practical nature. They include a

travel management plan (Appendix N), a wild and scenic river suitability report (Appendix O), the maps referred to in the draft RMP (Appendix R), and the text of the Omnibus Act (Appendix Q). Hyperlinks within the online document allow easy navigation to maps and other

blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html, and hard copies are available for public viewing in the BLM's Grand Junction Field Office (2815 H Road, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506, (970) 244-3000), Uncompahgre Field Office (2465 South Townsend Avenue, Mon-

“Public input has been and will continue to be essential to the planning process”

sections.

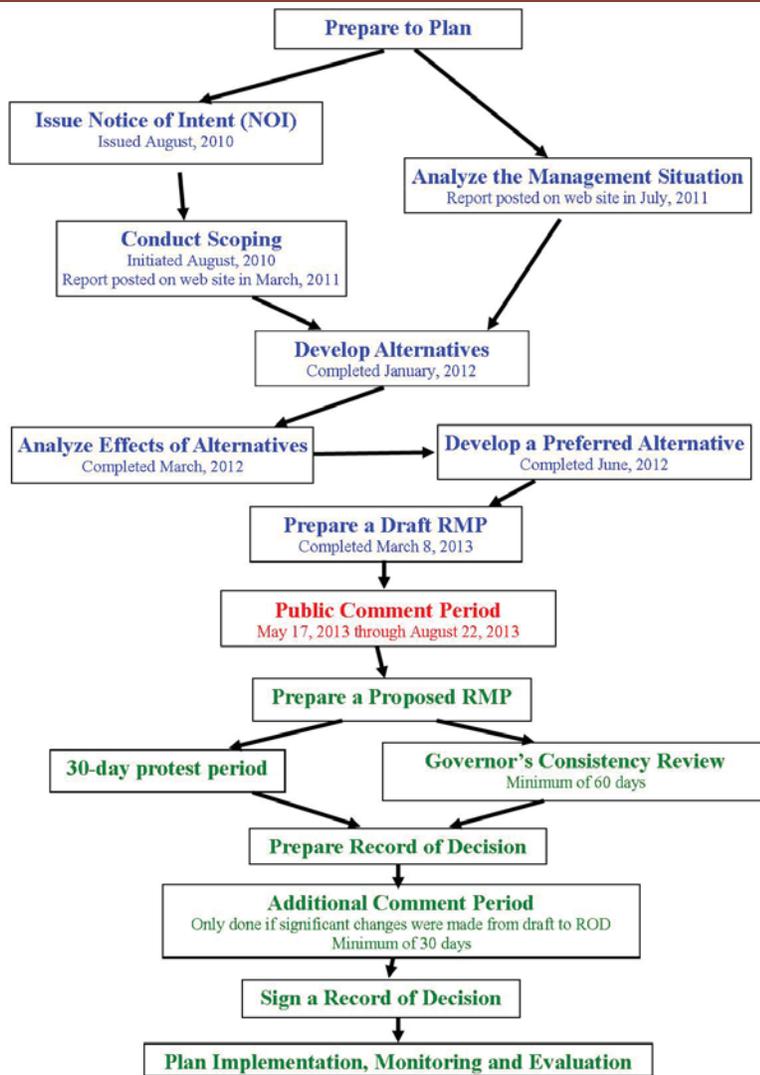
The draft Dominguez-Escalante NCA RMP is available online at [http://www.](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html)

trouse, Colorado 81401, (970) 240-5300), and at public libraries in Grand Junction, Delta and Montrose. The plan is also available on compact disk, and free copies of the CD can be obtained at the Grand Junction or Uncompahgre field offices, or by attending one of the open houses (see box on page 3 for dates and times).

The public comment period for the draft management plan is a vital part of developing the best strategies for fulfilling the BLM's mission to protect and conserve the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. “Public input has been and will continue to be essential to the planning process for developing management strategies for the Dominguez-Escalante NCA, so that the BLM remains responsive to the needs and desires of the people who use this valuable resource,” says Ben Blom, planning team lead for the draft RMP.

Comments can be submitted online at the website mentioned above, by email to dencarp@blm.gov, by FAX to (970) 244-3083, or by mail to the Grand Junction Field Office. Please see the note below for an important disclaimer regarding your comments.

FLOW CHART OF THE PLANNING PROCESS



The diagram above depicts the different stages of development for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan. The blue boxes represent completed steps, the red box represents the current step, and the green boxes represent future steps (courtesy of Ben Blom, BLM Grand Junction Field Office).

NOTE

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

What can you do to help shape future management decisions?

Developing an RMP and appropriate management strategies depends greatly on input and involvement from many different groups of people who value the resource—the stakeholders. The BLM seeks input at various stages in the planning process (see diagram on page 2). If you hike, bike, float, ride an ATV or a horse, take photographs, go bird watching, hunt, trail cattle, conduct scientific research, or otherwise value the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area, you are a stakeholder. Your involvement is the key to making sure the resources you value continue to be managed appropriately for the benefit of future generations.

Meet the people who wrote the plan

One of the best ways to get involved in the decision-making process for Dominguez-Escalante NCA is to attend one of two BLM-sponsored open houses. At these events, you can meet and talk with BLM staff members who are knowledgeable about your area of interest, view maps of the individual resources within the NCA, obtain fact

sheets and copies of the plan on CD, and listen to presentations. See the box below for the schedule of upcoming open house meetings.

Commenting is crucial

Your comments are essential for the BLM to understand how to best manage the resources in the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. Examples of questions to think about when reading the draft RMP are:

- Which management strategy (alternative) best protects the resources or uses that are important to me and allows me to enjoy and benefit from them?
- Is there another management strategy that isn't included in the draft RMP that would better protect and/or enhance the resources and uses I value while still adhering to the purposes of the NCA, as stated in its enabling legislation, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (see Appendix Q of the plan)?

Comments can be submitted online at http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html, by email to dencarp@blm.gov, by FAX to (970)

244-3083, or by mail to the Bureau of Land Management, Grand Junction Field Office (2815 H Road, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506). Please see the note on page 2 for an important disclaimer regarding your comments.

Advisory Council members represent your interests

Another great way to get involved in shaping future management decisions for this area is to work with the Dominguez-Escalante NCA Advisory Council. The Council is a group established by the area's enabling legislation (section 2407) to "advise the Secretary with respect to the preparation and implementation of the management plan." Council members include representatives from local governments, recreational users, user groups, environmental organizations, and livestock grazing permit holders. The Council has been instrumental in the development of the alternatives outlined in the draft RMP.

You can work with the Advisory Council by attending their meetings,

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

Open houses for the Dominguez-Escalante draft RMP will be held on the following dates:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Address</u>
June 17, 2013	4:30--7:30 p.m.	Colorado Mesa University Center	1100 North Avenue, Grand Junction, CO 81501
June 19, 2013	4:30--7:30 p.m.	Bill Heddles Recreation Center	530 Gunnison River Drive, Delta, CO 81416

Next Advisory Council Meeting:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Address</u>
June 26, 2013	3:00--6:00 p.m.	Bill Heddles Recreation Center	530 Gunnison River Drive, Delta, CO 81416

For further information about open houses and other meetings, or to check for changes to the above schedule, visit our website at: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html, or call the Grand Junction Field Office at (970) 244-3000.

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which are open to the public, or by contacting individual members directly. More information about the Council and a list of members with their contact information as well as an up-to-date schedule for future Council meetings can be found on the Advisory Council website: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp/DENCA_Resource_Advisory_Council.html.

Now is the best time to participate

The best time to participate in shaping the future of the resources that are important to you is now, in the formative stages of the RMP, before anything has been finalized. For more information on how to get involved and provide input, visit the Dominguez-Escalante NCA RMP website at http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html, or call the Grand Junction Field Office at (970)-244-3000.



Bighorn sheep study planned

In spring 2013, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, began a desert bighorn sheep habitat utilization study in the Dominguez-Escalante NCA. This study is similar to one already underway in McInnis Canyons NCA, but with some important differences: The Dominguez-Escalante study will use GPS collars and focus on habitat use rather than population estimates.

The purpose of the Dominguez-Escalante study is to obtain information on population and population changes, mortality, predation, seasonal use areas, movements from subgroup to subgroup and other behavior, and the effects of environmental and other stressors. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologist Brad Banulis, who oversees the study, this information will help managers better understand how desert bighorn sheep use the Dominguez-Escalante landscape and will assist them in making decisions

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An interview with Katie Stevens

A graduate of the environmental studies program at Montana State University, Katie Stevens has been the manager for McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area for four years and the manager for Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area for three years (since designation). Prior to that, she worked in the BLM's Montana State Office on issues related to land use planning, environmental compliance, energy and the greater sage-grouse. Recently, she was promoted to field manager of the BLM's Grand Junction Field Office.



CC: What did you like best about being NCA manager?

KS: One of the most meaningful things was just how special the places themselves are, and the experiences I was able to have, being out and working in them. Some of the things I saw [included] different wildlife, being out in the canyons when storms came through, seeing things that a lot of folks don't have the chance to see. I really enjoy talking about what it means to be an NCA, how there are only 23 of these special places nationwide, and about how our mission in the NCAs complements and fits our overall BLM mission.

But I think my favorite thing was probably connecting with people who cared about it. There are so many volunteers in Grand Junction, people who give a ton of time to places that they recreate in, and that I think was one of the most interesting things, just figuring out what different people were hoping to get when they went outside, and then what they

wanted to know to be good community stewards. That was always really interesting to me, the questions that they asked, the information they wanted. It's really fun to see how much people talk with each other about the places they go and what they like to do and just the way that recreation binds people together here. I enjoyed all that.

CC: Is there anything particular about Dominguez-Escalante that you found to be very special to you or that you liked the best?

KS: One of the most interesting things was just how many people wanted to be involved, you know, right away, the immediate interest in it, and in the future, and the number of people who come to meetings.

CC: Are there any good spots in Dominguez-Escalante that you really treasure?

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Bighorn study, cont'd

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about public uses and herd management that promote a healthy, self-sustaining bighorn sheep population.

According to Banulis, bone fragments, petroglyphs and pictographs provide evidence that herds historically occupied the present home range that includes Dominguez-Escalante, although there are no records of indigenous bighorn sheep after the 1880s settlement of the area. The current herd was reintroduced from 1983 to 1991, and its population is now estimated at a little more than 150 individuals, primarily in Roubideau, Escalante, Dominguez and Unaweep Canyons.

For this study, Colorado Parks and Wildlife personnel will trap an equal number of male and female sheep, collect biological data, and place GPS collars on them. The GPS units will allow data from the collars to be automatically entered into a computer, reducing the need for field personnel and the overall cost of the program, and allowing researchers to conduct GIS analysis and generate maps of herd habitat use areas and herd movement patterns. The collars will be marked to allow for easier identification of individual sheep. Colorado Parks and Wildlife will periodically conduct aerial and ground surveys to collect information about the herd that is not provided by the collars. The study will last for the lifetime of the collars, which is about three to five years.

For more information about this study, contact Brad Banulis, Terrestrial Biologist, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, 2300 S. Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401 or call (970) 252-6051.



Desert bighorn sheep in Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area

Katie Stevens interview, cont'd

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KS: I love Little Dominguez Canyon, walking up along the stream, and Big Dominguez, of course, and then I really like Escalante Canyon and all the history, [and] certain high parts of the Wilderness along the route of the old Gunnison Pack Trail. And then I really like taking the four-wheel-drive road up and over, between Divide Road and Cactus Park, [and] crossing by the Escalante Forks and connecting up onto the Forest Service land around Love Mesa and coming back around to Delta.

“Generally, people have supported these designations, because they feel like it gives them more certainty about how the areas will be taken care of”

CC: Are there any special challenges that you think the D-E NCA has at this point?

KS: I think it's a special challenge to balance the value that people place on the area today, how they enjoy using the area when visitation is still fairly low, with the need and opportunity to plan for the future, when visitation will increase and more demands will be placed on the resources. We want our management to respond as visitation increases, to anticipate it without being behind the curve. We also want to respond to the values that the public thinks are special today. For example, there are some really unique aspects of the agricultural use that occur in the NCA, relating to the long homesteading and ranching history of the area, and it's an opportunity for recreationists to learn about those uses

and their place in the region and in the west.

But it does take the ability to bring some different expectations about how the recreation environment will look once you get here.

CC: The public has been in on it from the beginning, right?

KS: Right. There has been a lot of good conversation...I think there was a lot of interest in it having a defined future as opposed to just being managed as regular BLM land, with quite a bit of important community consensus building and dis-

cussion prior to the NCA's designation. Generally, people have supported these designations, because they feel like it gives them more certainty about how the areas will be taken care of in the future and lets them decide what uses will continue to be important at the same time. So I would say there was and continues to be a pretty good community effort around this.

CC: What are the most important things you would like people to know about the NCAs?

KS: Just the importance of people continuing to be out, and continuing to care about these places. I think that's going to be really important for both the management plan and for the continued development of that sort of future...for Dominguez, I think that one of the key success factors for the planning effort is how much attention we've had; it's really helpful.

CC: Is there anything else you would like to add?

KS: I hope people's willingness to be engaged continues once the plan is out. I know it will, because this is the point people have been trying to get to for the last two years. I hope people continue to think and talk with us about how they'd like to see Dominguez managed, because we're going to do a better job when that's the case.

