

CANYON CLARION

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

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BLM



How many ways are there to manage the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area? That's the question for BLM planners, who are shaping four alternatives for impact analysis. After that, a preferred alternative will emerge.

Council explores alternative management options

In early November, Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Council members viewed resource management proposals in Grand Junction. All eight of the current members were in attendance, as well as members of the public.

BLM planning staff prepared four different potential management plans (known in the planning process as alternatives) for advisory council review. BLM staff presented draft management alternatives or scenarios of how various resources might be managed in the future. The BLM will evaluate and analyze these alternatives to determine how they would impact the environment (environmental impact analysis).

These management alternatives are based on:

- Public scoping comments

- Advisory council comments
- The Omnibus Act language
- Federal laws and regulations governing public lands, livestock grazing, archeology and more.

At this point, these alternatives are at the "advanced brainstorming" stage, and their primary function is to trigger input from the advisory council and cooperating agencies. The BLM anticipates changes to the alternatives based on that input. Local governments, tribes, BLM field offices, the BLM's Colorado State Office and the BLM's Washington Office will also provide feedback on the draft alternatives. Details in the alternatives will change through those various reviews.

The question before the council is: *Do the alternatives encompass the full range of options that should be considered?* The BLM has not yet developed the preferred alternative, which

Continued on page 2

Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area • COLORADO



Continued from page 1

is the alternative the BLM considers to best resolve the various planning issues. The BLM will develop the preferred alternative in early 2012 after review and discussion of the other potential management options. The BLM may also incorporate pieces and parts from the other potential management plans into its preferred alternative.

The BLM will provide opportunities for formal public comment next fall, when the public will have a chance to review the full range of resource management alternatives the BLM develops with the advisory council's and cooperating agencies' recommendations. Until then, the public will continue to have a chance to provide input to the advisory council regarding what they'd like to see in the alternatives.

Overview of alternatives

The BLM gave an overview of the broad themes of the four potential draft management plans, and then took a look at more specific management measures for geology and paleontology to give the council an example of how the alternative might be formatted and organized. The Advisory Council will receive more information about alternatives and how the alternatives would impact NCA purposes and uses in the weeks ahead.

Commonalities

The NCA will be managed across all alternatives for consistency with the NCA's guiding legislation, the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. The Act stresses conservation and protection of the "unique and important resources and values of the land" as the purpose of the NCA's designation. These resources and values are geological, cultural, archaeological, paleontological, natural, scientific, recreational, wilderness, wildlife, riparian, historical, educational and scenic, as well as the NCA's water resources. To meet the intent of the Act, these resources are to be conserved and protected across all alternatives. Tradeoffs between resources occur across the alternatives (e.g., managing more intensively for biological resources in one alternative and for recreation in another). However, significant degradation or exclusion of any of the NCA's purposes was not considered reasonable based on the founding legislation. All resource management plans contain a "No Action" alternative. This alternative is based on continuation of current management under existing guidance, and provides an environmental baseline by allowing the BLM to consider the impacts of current management for comparison. In the case of the NCA,



this current management scenario is based on guidance contained in the Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (1987) and amendments; the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan (1989) and amendments; the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009; and the BLM's Interim Management Policy for Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness (2010).

Other potential management approaches include:

- An alternative based on reliance on natural processes. Under this management approach, the BLM would allow natural processes to take their course in the NCA, and would rely more heavily on restrictions on allowable uses, as opposed to active management (e.g., treatments and projects).
- An alternative based on active management for biological restoration, with ambitious goals for improving the health of biological resources. This alternative would focus less on education/interpretation as a means of managing for and protecting cultural resources.
- An alternative based on active management for biological resources, while also developing a higher number of trail-based recreation opportunities and managing for a quality recreation experience.

Discussion

Discussions with council members explored the comparisons and contrasts between alternatives. The council explored the idea that under a natural processes management approach, there might be less of an emphasis on active fire suppression, while under the active management approach, the option of reseeding after a fire might allow for different suppression strategies.

The management approach that includes developing trail-based recreation may require more intensive, outcome-based, Special Recreation Management Area style management, but would also allow the BLM to more proactively manage recreation, anticipating and responding to increasing visitation before unacceptable effects are noted on the ground

The council and BLM staff discussed the ramifications of applying different management approaches to:

- Resource management
- Wilderness management
- Recreation, science and education
- Livestock grazing
- Special Designations, such as Wild & Scenic Rivers and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Terry Kimber reminded the Council that his understanding of "conservation" is maintaining the current situation.

Delta County Commissioner Doug Atchley emphasized that Delta County will be interested in reviewing alternatives to see how they differ in regard to maintaining current grazing opportunities—Delta County's support for the NCA was and is tied to the interpretation that NCA allows grazing to continue as it was at the time of designation. Private property rights for private landowners within the NCA is also an important theme for Delta County.

Katie Stevens explained that specific changes in grazing programs are more often made during the land health assessment and permit renewal process as opposed to the current RMP process. The BLM would only make major changes in grazing authorizations at the RMP level in situations where desired conditions cannot be achieved under any level of grazing.

Geology and Paleontology

Based on a suggestion from councilmember Tamera Minnick that the council start off by looking at a straightforward section, the BLM presented the potential range of alternatives for geology and paleontology to give the council experience in examining ways in which management can vary across different

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

alternatives.

For these two programs, many of the elements regarding how BLM would manage would be similar across alternatives, with the following exceptions:

- Self-guided vs. on-site interpretation: there are potential variations in how many resources the BLM would put into

Rec issues viewed during field trip to Cactus Park

On Nov. 19, members of the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Council visited Cactus Park to discuss the existing travel network and dispersed camping sites.

The tour and discussion included motorized recreationists, many of whom double as search and rescue team members. The tour also included five individuals who enjoy quiet recreation opportunities (hikers, horseback enthusiasts, a wildlife advocate, and representatives of local environmental and wilderness groups) and BLM staff.

The group enjoyed spectacular views during stops on Horse Mesa and overlooking the Gunnison Slopes. Participants consulted maps and discussed motorized and quiet recreation opportunities while riding trails and during periodic stops.

The Western Slope ATV Association, Mesa County Search & Rescue, All-Terrain Motorsports, Grand Valley Powersports and All Sports Honda assisted by providing transportation -- both all-terrain and utility terrain (side-by-side) vehicles. Council members Katie Steele, Tamara Minnick and Mike Wilson participated in the tour. Delta County Commissioner Doug Atchley also attended.



on-site interpretation (facilities, kiosks, signs).

- The level of encouragement provided for research: Tamera noted that areas will be more attractive for scientific research if there are no extra costs (in timing or funding) associated with permitting requirements.

Public discussion also focused on the dif-

ferences between commercial and private-use flagstone quarrying. Tom Derryberry, a motorized recreationist, noted that search and rescue operations in the wilderness can cost a great deal of money for mitigation efforts. He also spoke of the desire for motorized recreationists to be left alone.

The next council meeting will be Dec. 14 in Delta.



Above, field trip participants discuss recreation issues, including Tom Derryberry and BLM's Andy Windsor, at right. Below, Council chairman Katie Steele rides shotgun in a UTV (utility terrain vehicle) driven in the slick-rock country of Cactus Park.

Photos courtesy of Lee Gellat

