

A

Fire Management Units

Areas where fire is not desired at all.

General description:

This category includes areas where mitigation and suppression is required to prevent direct threats to life or property. It includes areas where; fire never played a large role historically in the development and maintenance of the ecosystem, or because of human development fire can no longer be tolerated without significant loss, or where fire return intervals are very long.

Fire Mitigation Considerations:

Emphasis should be focused on prevention, detection, and rapid suppression response and techniques that will reduce unwanted ignitions and threats to life, property, natural and cultural resources.

Fire suppression considerations:

Strategy allows for aggressive fire suppression activities. Virtually all wildland fires would be actively suppressed and no fire is prescribed except as required to combat an immediate threat to firefighter or public health and safety.

Fuel treatment considerations:

Non-fire fuel treatments employed. Unit costs for prescribed fire would be too prohibitive to implement efficiently. In order to help mitigate the effects of fire, hazard fuels reduction (manual/mechanical) and pile burning of resulting slash may be employed.

Whitewater Desert

A-130-01

Location: This FMU is located south of the community of Whitewater on either side of Highway 50. It is the valley floor west of the Grand Mesa slopes and extends to the rim of the Gunnison River canyon. This area totals 110,881 acres including 44,798 acres of BLM administered lands, 66,057 acres of private land, and 26 acres of state land.

Characteristics: This FMU consists of rolling desert hills cut by drainages such as Whitewater Creek, Kannah Creek, Indian Creek, and Deer Creek. The elevation varies from 4,657 ft. on the valley floor along the Gunnison River up to 6,200 ft. at the eastern boundary. Soils in this area are for the most part, developing on Mancos shale, shale alluvium, or basaltic surface floats over the shale. Most of the soils are clayey, saline and alkaline. This area has numerous roads and four wheel drive trails leaving the private lands and Highway 50 crossing BLM lands. Uses in this unit include livestock grazing, limited natural gas development and dispersed recreation. Antelope are found in this unit. The private lands within this unit are experiencing private home site development.

Water Quality: The northern portion of this unit lies within the Watson Creek and Sink Creek watersheds tributary to the Colorado River. The balance of the unit is within the Callow Creek, Kannah Creek and Deer Creek watersheds which are tributary to the Gunnison River. These streams have intermittent to perennial flow. Most flow is generated from spring snowmelt, however flood flows result from summer thunderstorms. Watson and Sink Creeks are virtually dry when they leave the unit. Reaches of Whitewater Creek, a tributary to Kannah Creek, and Kannah Creek dry up during the summer from irrigation withdrawals. Water quality data collected by the BLM, USGS, and BOR on these tributaries to the Gunnison River indicate high levels of total dissolved solids (salinity) primarily because of elevated levels of sodium, calcium, bicarbonate, and sulfate ions. This chemistry is consistent with Mancos shale derived soils. While no data are available for Watson and Sink Creeks, quality is projected to be similar to the other streams within the FMU. The state of Colorado has classified the tributaries to the Colorado River aquatic life warm 2, recreation 1b, and agriculture, and the Gunnison River tributaries aquatic life warm 2, recreation 1a, water supply, and agriculture. The 303(d) list, a listing of impaired waters, includes Kannah Creek for selenium, and the 303(d) monitoring and evaluation list includes the tributaries to the Colorado River for sediment

Riparian: Riparian vegetation in the area for the above mentioned riparian areas would include both Fremont and Narrowleaf Cottonwoods, some willow, and possibly sedges and rushes.

Fire in these desert riparian ecosystems could lead to degradation of the riparian system. This is in part due to water being diverted for irrigation, which is out of BLM's control. These withdraws create a lack of water and necessary soil moisture for riparian plants to recover and seedlings to establish from a wildfire disturbance. These lower desert ecosystems that do not have the capability to function at their potential, due to water controls, should be protected from fire if possible.

Vegetation: This is a desert shrub community dominated by the salt desert community plus a mix of juniper, greasewood, and sagebrush. A portion of this area has a

moderate to high composition of cheatgrass. The south end of the unit supports a salt desert shrub/grassland community.

Cultural: The following cultural resource classes are found within this FMU, CR-0 Minimal Value/Minimal Risk north of Highway 50 and C-2 Moderate Value/Moderate Risk south of the highway along the Gunnison River.

Fuels and Fire Behavior: Much of this area in most years does not have the fuel quantity or continuity to allow for fire spread.

Fire History: Most human starts tend to be abandoned campfires.

Fire Regime/Condition Class:

The salt desert shrub community of the Whitewater and Kannah Creek area is generally in a condition class 3 due to the abundance of cheatgrass and the potential conversion of the vegetation communities to cheatgrass. While the sagebrush and juniper stands in the area are within their NRV, due to the potential for conversion of these stands following disturbance they are considered to be in a condition class (CC) 2

Values at risk:

Water quality – The FMU is a significant producer of sediment, salinity and selenium. Maintaining or increasing vegetative cover key to controlling saline sediment production.

Aquatic Habitat – The wet areas, springs, seeps, and ponds in this unit provide aquatic habitat for various species.

Cheney Reservoir, Whitewater, Indian and Deer Creeks provide oasis relief across this desert FMU for wildlife. While by most standards these riparian areas are narrow and patchy, they are surprisingly rich. Beavers, quail, pheasants, screech owls, deer, bears all make use of these patches. Cheney Reservoir historically contained a fishery, but no fisheries currently exist. However, there is aquatic life, e.g., wood ducks, Great Basin spadefoot toads. Efforts should be made to protect the integrity of the bank plants and the water resources from wildfire and fire-fighting disturbances.

Wildlife (Desert Shrubland) – Greasewood, four-winged saltbush, shadscale, Gardner's and mat saltbushes, rank in that order, from tallest to shortest and in that same order for value to wildlife from most to least. Wildfires destroy shrubs and replace them with cheatgrass. The exception is Greasewood, a vigorous resprouter. Cheatgrass, in turn, increases the flammability of the plant community to intensify its dominance on the landscape. Other outside factors such as the widening of US Highway 50 and increasing housing development limit pronghorn antelope movement, leaving them with less tolerance for habitat degradation. These facts form the rationale for full fire suppression is prescribed for the desert. The Juniper stands in the desert should be protected to provide wildlife habitat and scenic value.

Special Status Species – Table III.D.5 gives the status of each species, locational information, and provides the fire suppression prescriptions for the species in this unit. The plants are listed by scientific name. The species of concern in this FMU are bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, Yuma myotis bat, northern leopard frog, and *Sclerocactus glaucus*. All known locations for rare plants are in the BLM GIS system to insure

protection/avoidance during fire suppression efforts. In addition, this unit supports State Potential Conservation Areas, which are listed by unit, in (Appendix 1B).

Cultural Resources: The area has a low density of Archaeological and Historic Resources that are eligible or potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Greatest sensitivity is anticipated in the woodlands overlooking the Gunnison River. Sites at risk in all three categories, (A), (B), and (C-2 and C-3) have been recorded. The greatest risk is from surface disturbing suppression activities anywhere in the unit which may best be mitigated during post fire evaluation and ESR project work.

General – The basalt cobble strewn landscape makes for “bone-jarring”, exhausting cross-country travel for fire crews in vehicles.

Communities at Risk: The town of Whitewater and private homes within this unit need protection.

Location: This FMU is located southwest of Grand Junction known as Glade Park (See Map A-130-02 Urban Interface Grand Junction & Glade Park). This area totals 78,953 acres encompassing 61,941 acres of private lands; 14,636 acres of BLM administered lands, 1,415 acres of Colorado National Monument NPS lands and 961 state lands. All National Parks lands will be managed in conjunction with BLM lands. BLM lands are widely scattered in this unit.

Characteristics: This FMU consists of terrain that varies from rolling sagebrush plain to mesa with rugged canyon slopes. The elevations range from 4,700 ft at the lowest location on the northeastern boundary to 8,799 ft near “the Fruita Reserve”. Within COLM, this FMU can be defined as the area below the geologically prominent precambrian bench that extends from the East (Grand Junction) entrance to the monument to the West (Fruita) entrance.

Water Quality: The western portion of the FMU is within the Little Dolores Creek watershed, which is tributary to the Colorado River. The primary tributaries include ClarkWash, Jefferson Canyon, Miller Canyon, Cruse Canyon, Sieber Canyon, and Twentyeight Hole Wash. These systems are dry most of the year but flow does occur in spring from snowmelt and then again during the summer from convective storms.

While no water quality data exist for these tributaries, quality is projected to be similar to Coates Creek. Those data indicate the streams have a calcium bicarbonate type water, with low total dissolved solids (average 264 mg/l). The state of Colorado has classified these streams use protected for aquatic life warm 2, recreation 1a, and agriculture. Little Dolores River, and tributaries are not included on either the 303(d) or 303(d) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) list, suggesting water quality standards are currently being met.

The eastern portion of the unit is within the Gunnison River and Colorado River watersheds. Primary tributaries to the Gunnison include Ladder Creek and Billings Canyon. Colorado River tributaries include Monument Canyon, Wedding Canyon, Fruita Canyon, Ute Canyon, Red Canyon, Echo Canyon and No Thoroughfare Canyon which have ephemeral flow patterns but during the summer convective storms can produce significant flash flood events. There are also various seeps and springs where water quality is a concern. Little water quality data are available for these tributaries, seeps and springs because they are essentially dry. The state of Colorado has classified these drainages use protected for aquatic life warm 2, recreation 2, water supply and agriculture. The 303(d) list includes these tributaries because of selenium impairment.

Riparian: Cottonwoods line the ephemeral systems mentioned above. The Little Dolores Rivers system and intermittent streams in COLM contains willows and other riparian plants that would probably respond adequately to wildfire, with seedling regeneration and sprouting of established vegetation.

Vegetation types here range from shadscale desert at the lowest northeast edge, sagebrush and piñon-juniper at varying densities at the lower and middle elevations to mountain shrub and aspen at higher elevations. A few ponderosa pine stands occur at the southern end of the FMU. A small remnant stand of manzanita is present in COLM.

Cultural: The following cultural resource classes are found within this FMU: CR-1 High Value/ High Risk.

Recreation and permitted uses: Uses include livestock grazing and dispersed recreation. BLM's Mud Springs camp ground is found in the south side of the FMU. Hikers and some horseback riders access COLM from trailheads in this FMU (Monument Canyon, Liberty Cap, Ute Canyon, Echo Canyon, No Thoroughfare Canyon and the historic Serpents Trail). The lower portion of the historic Rim Rock Drive is in this FMU. The drive is heavily used by recreational motorist, bicyclists and is an important commuter and commercial access into the Glade Park community. The Devils Kitchen Picnic Shelter, also on the National Register of Historic Places, is a popular day-use area.

Public infrastructure includes NPS facilities such as entrance stations, trailhead kiosks, interpretive signs, utility systems and a Qwest Communications right-of-way (ROW) for an aerial telecommunications line that services the Glade Park Community. Under the terms of the ROW permit, Qwest is responsible for fuel reduction to protect the line and poles to help reduce fire effects on this utility service.

Generally, on BLM lands, limited dispersed recreation in upper elevations during big game seasons; intensive dispersed recreation on Wilderness Front Country

The sagebrush communities within this unit are historic habitat for Gunnison sage grouse and, at Little Park, it is key to the critical deer winter range. These plant communities are currently lacking a desirable understory, which reduces the usefulness of these sites. Fire can be a useful tool to help improve plant diversity, but some past wildfire have allowed cheatgrass to dominate the burnt area. Range fire is not recommended on potential sage grouse habitat.

Fire History: The Glade Park area has a history of a high number of fires, including a significant number of large fires, both human and lightning caused. Some of the large fires on the west side of the unit are fires that started in Utah and escaped into Colorado. COLM has a history over the past several decades of low numbers of mostly single-tree fires. Fire Regime/ Condition Class: There are a number of fuels treatment projects that have been completed in this unit. Generally, the area in a CC 2, with some of the sage parks moving to a CC 3 due to Piñon-Juniper (P-J) encroachment.

Values at Risk:

Aquatic Habitat: All wet areas, springs, seeps, streams and ponds found in this unit are to be protected.

Special Status Species – Table III.D.5 gives the status of each species, locational information, and provides the fire suppression prescriptions for the species in this unit. The plants are listed by scientific name. The species of concern to this FMU are Gunnison sage-grouse, northern goshawk, fringed myotis bat, northern leopard frog, Great Basin spadefoot toad, *Aletes latilobus*, and *Astragalus linifolius*. All known locations for the rare plants and animals as well as any State Potential Conservation Area in this unit are in the BLM GIS system to insure protection/avoidance during fire suppression efforts.

Piñon-Juniper – There are large stands of commercial grade P-J on Glade Park. Because these stands are close to main roads they have visual as well as wood product value. Fire should be excluded from these sites. Use of mechanical means for fuel reduction may be appropriate and this may include fuel wood cutting.

Aspen: Aspen needs open areas to regenerate. Stands of aspen could be allowed to burn in order to re-establish this species. The exception is at Mud Springs Campground.

Riparian: Fire in these systems could be detrimental to Cottonwoods that line these ephemeral systems. Wildfires in these systems need to be evaluated on a case by case basis with the resource advisors. The Little Dolores Rivers system would probably respond adequately to wildfire, with seedling regeneration and sprouting of established vegetation.

Recreational and infrastructure resources including transportation corridors, utility systems, Qwest ROW, Mud Springs CG, Devils Kitchen Picnic Shelter, COLM entrance stations, and historic structures should all be protected.

Qwest Communications has a permitted right-of-way (ROW) for an aerial telecommunications line that services the Glade Park Community. This ROW extends through three FMUs (A-02, B-05 and D-05) Under the terms of the ROW permit, Qwest is responsible for fuel reduction to protect the line and poles to help reduce fire effects on this utility service.

Cultural Resources: The BLM surveyed areas in the south and west areas have a high density of Archaeological and Historic Resources that are eligible or potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Sites at risk in all three categories, (A, B, and C), have been recorded (see Chapter 3.1.1) and unrecorded properties are likely to exist. The COLM section of this FMU has had minimal survey but the areas that have been surveyed indicate a high density of archeological and historic resources that are eligible or potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Sites at risk in all three categories (A, B and C) have been recorded (see Chapter 3.1.1). COLM has identified several archeological sites in this FMU, including rock art panels that require protection. Historic resources in COLM relate to the Civilian Conservation Corps era and many locally significant structures. The Serpents Trail, Devils Kitchen Picnic Shelter and Rim Rock Drive are on the National register of Historic Places. The greatest risk is loss of burnable cultural sites. Fuel reduction around cultural resources would help mitigate fire affects. The greatest threat to cultural resources is from surface disturbing suppression activities that may best be mitigated by avoidance of known properties during suppression, and during post fire evaluation and ESR project work.

Communities at Risk: There are a number Glade Park dwellings that are found on private lands throughout this FMU. High value homes in the Redlands section of Grand Junction has developed right up to the boundaries of COLM and BLM lands. Protection of these private residents in these areas will be number one priority.