

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Royal Gorge Field Office  
3028 E. Main Street  
Cañon City, CO 81212**

# **Environmental Assessment**

## **Guffey Gorge Management Plan**

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0040 EA

February, 2013



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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT TITLE: Guffey Gorge Management Plan

PLANNING UNIT: Gold Belt Sub-Region #5

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Park County, Sixth Principal Meridian,  
T. 15 S., R. 71 W., Section 9 NE ¼ NE ¼

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management, Royal Gorge Field Office

### **1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

BACKGROUND: Guffey Gorge (aka Paradise Cove) is a popular cliff jumping and swimming location along Colorado's Front Range. The area is an 80 acre site located within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Front Range District's Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) (see maps 1 and 2). Guffey Gorge is surrounded by private land with Park County Road 102 providing legal access. Until 10 years ago, recreational use of this area was light, and the area was primarily used by local residents for picnicking, hiking, fishing, rock climbing, and swimming.

Recreation areas are categorized by setting classes with different component parts. The shift in use in Guffey Gorge has changed the setting from a primitive or backcountry type setting where few visitors were present, the landscape was natural and facilities were minimal. Opportunities for solitude and sensing a connection with nature were historical attributes of Guffey Gorge. Recreational use of the area has increased significantly over the past 10 years – resulting in a setting resembling a front country class. The visitor can expect to encounter many human contacts, worn surface vegetation and resource damage. The increased human impacts have also caused user conflicts and safety hazards for visitors and surrounding public landowners.

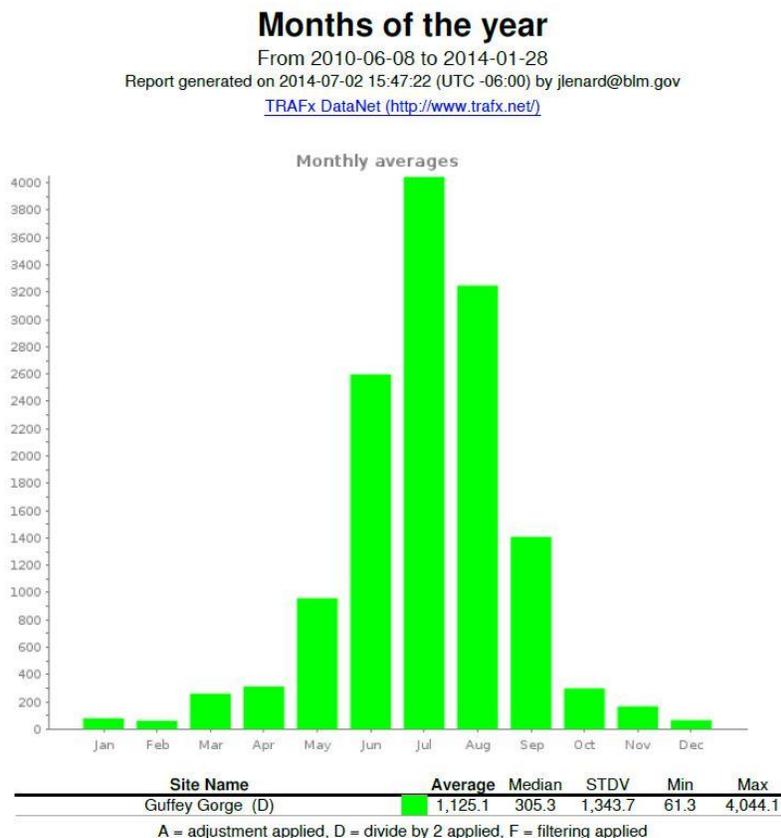
To address these impacts, the Environmental Assessment (EA), CO-200-2005-0096 (Guffey Gorge Use Restrictions and Motorized Vehicle Barriers) and the corresponding Decision Record (dated 12/15/05) authorized placement of boulders to prevent motorized vehicles from driving and parking on the section of land across from the current parking area. The EA authorized supplementary rules, restricting recreation use to reduce resource impacts to the site.

Recreational use was changed to “day use only.” The EA's Decision Record prohibited glass containers, prohibited possession and discharge of fireworks, prohibited recreational target shooting (including paintball use), and required the public to keep the area free of trash and personal equipment. The supplementary rules allowed enforcement of illegal actions. Since that time, the visitor numbers continued to increase.

The internet and social media portray Guffey Gorge as one of the premier swimming holes and cliff jumping areas in Colorado and the United States. Due to the internet advertisement and recreational draw, many people travel from Colorado’s Front Range to Guffey Gorge. The BLM collected traffic counter data, and reported an average number of 12,000 visitors per summer season (see figure 1). The data reflect that the busiest months within Guffey Gorge are June, July, and August. Recent data peaked at 6500 visitors for the month of July, 2014.

With the crowds, the social setting has shifted dramatically. Through informal onsite interviews, average group size is 4 to 6 people. Typically, one member of the group had visited the site in the past and brought the rest of the group. Alcohol and drug use is commonly observed by staff. The atmosphere consists of large crowds, parties, foul language, and noise. This has displaced local visitors, families and individuals looking for a quiet setting. Signs request visitors to remove their own trash but many times it is left on site. A significant amount of trash is removed after each weekend.

**Figure 1 Traffic Counter Data Showing Monthly Visitation Averages**



Human waste associated with the high volume of use is an ongoing concern for the site. Staff observation reports solid human waste, toilet tissue and feminine products behind trees and shrubs. Water quality testing was completed after a high use weekend. Results did not reflect higher than average human waste. However, it remains a concern and beginning in 2013, a portable toilet has been provided in the parking area during the summer months. Although the

toilet is provided, the location is approximately a 10 minute walk so many visitors still choose to find a place close to the swimming hole.

The primary parking area is located on the south side of County Road 102 and has a maximum occupancy of approximately 13 vehicles. This location requires visitors to cross the road on top of a hill that has limited sight distances. There have been several informal reports of close-calls with visitors crossing the road weighed down with items such as coolers and chairs.

**Figure 2 Existing parking area on a summer day**



Visitor use levels continue to exceed parking capacity with up to 80 cars. Following a coordination meeting the BLM and the Park County Sheriff department, signs were improved for no parking areas and enforcement increased. With the lack of parking on the south, visitors began parking in a grove of trees on the north side of the road. Parking on the north side of the road provided a noticeable decrease in illegal parking and safety issues with people crossing CR 102. It also reduced the visibility of cars from neighboring property owners making it feel less congested. However, the user created entrance into this north parking area has very poor sight distances with a steep and abrupt entry slope. The north parking area's soils have become compacted, and the area has experienced vegetation loss.

A trail guides people from the parking area and continues over 2 steep hills into the swimming hole. In the past, the trail had served as a good access while visitor numbers were minimal. As the user volume increased, soil became impacted along the trail, and the trail began to erode. Multiple routes are visible from all different directions. Improved access for the increase in Search and Rescue calls was requested. In 2006 and 2008, volunteer projects attempted to stabilize and formalize the social trail. The trail was re-routed to reduce erosion problems. The trail improvements also allowed easier access for extraction of injured persons.

### **1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the EA is to identify an overall recreation management plan for the Guffey Gorge area. Visitation numbers have increased to a point where key resources are being negatively affected and the social atmosphere has shifted to an undesirable state. The main goal is to reduce current human impacts and prepare for potential future impacts with a flexible strategy. The

flexibility is built through an adaptive management plan and allows the BLM to respond to the dynamic use of the recreation area as it occurs. The management plan needs to address the following goals:

Goal 1: Reduce risks to public health and safety

- a. Define a plan for parking to reduce the risks associated with the location of the trailhead entrance.
- b. Reduce the level of human waste at the site and provide long-term funding strategies for waste and trash removal if necessary (i.e. paying for portable toilets or vault toilet pumping/installation).
- c. Reduce the level of alcohol consumption that boosts unsafe actions in the cliff jumping/ swimming hole.

Goal 2: Reduce the impacts to resources

- a. Reduce the amount of soil erosion and vegetation loss by evaluating vehicle parking patterns and foot traffic.
- b. Reduce the impacts to visual resources associated with vehicles parking along the roadside.
- c. Work toward managing capacity as the number of visitors in the area continues to increase.

Goal 3: Identify strategies to fund the necessary increase in management that the site requires

- a. Reduce costs to government to manage the site through a user fee and/or partnership opportunity.
- b. Ensure that the fee charged is affordable and commensurate with areas offering similar settings and experiences.

Goal 4: Continue to provide recreational opportunities for visitors in a manner that does not significantly impact other resources or recreation uses and provide the settings to meet visitor's desired outcomes.

- a. Maintain a setting that allows visitors to meet identified desired outcomes including connecting with nature, escape from the pressures of life, and spending quality time with family. This desired setting was expressed during visitor assessment meetings that included 25% of the local population. The majority support protection of the scenic features and landscapes, and expressed that controls, enforcement and monitoring would be needed to achieve this.
- b. Establish clearly defined enforceable rules for the area and allowed uses that anticipate changes in recreational strategies and are responsive to the identified desired outcomes.

The need for the action stems from compliance with Royal Gorge RMP (1996) regarding recreation management, to ensure the continued availability of BLM administered lands for a diversity of resource-dependent, outdoor recreation opportunities and the multiple use and sustained yield mandate of Section 302a of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

## **1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE**

The BLM will decide whether to implement the Guffey Gorge Management Plan based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). Based on the range of alternatives contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA), the BLM will determine the best alternative to manage recreation visitation in Guffey Gorge, based on the goals and objectives identified above. The BLM may choose to: a) implement the project as proposed, b) implement the project with modifications/mitigation, c) implement an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not implement the project at this time.

## **1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW**

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Area, Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: May, 1996

Decision Number/Page: 5-86, page 2-5-16;  
5-90, page 2-5-17

Decision Language:

5-86: Recreation will be managed to provide for:

- A variety of recreational opportunities and setting;
- Facility development will be accomplished to reduce user conflicts and to improve visitor health and safety.

5-90: Various actions will occur to enhance recreation:

- Upland recreation opportunities emphasizing a balance between resource protection and tourism;
- Coordination with various volunteer and user groups;
- Monitoring and visitor contacts to ensure visitor safety; resource protection; and visitor information availability

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

## **1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES**

NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted: In preparation of the Proposed Action and Alternatives, the BLM consulted a number of agencies, groups, adjacent land owners, and publics. Information was presented to the BLM Resource Advisory Council (RAC) at the Guffey Gorge site. Meetings with Park County Commissioners and Park County Sheriff have occurred on numerous occasions. The Proposed Action and notice of scoping was posted on the Royal Gorge Field Office NEPA website for 60 days, while the public had an opportunity to comment.

Issues Identified - The following issues were identified through the internal and external scoping process.

- How will the BLM modify the management of Guffey Gorge to reduce visitor use, reduce health and human safety concerns, and reduce environmental impacts, while still providing a primitive to backcountry type of recreation setting?
- How can the BLM manage the site to provide improved opportunities for recreational use as well as provide for a family friendly atmosphere?
- Overcrowding of the site and the type of recreational activities within the site has affected the setting of the area. By continuing to allow for unlimited visitor use there would be an increase in safety concerns. This will also increase the conflict between the adjacent land-owners and visitors to Guffey Gorge. How does the BLM plan on identifying the carrying capacity of Guffey Gorge, and manage visitors to that capacity?
- How will the BLM manage for more enforcement and monitoring to Guffey Gorge to ensure rules are being followed and resources are being protected?

## **CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. The Proposed Action and alternatives were identified based on a number of issues recognized through BLM staff monitoring of the site, concerned members of the public, local neighbors and partner agencies. The proposed action and alternatives were developed to meet the previously identified goals and objectives found earlier in this document and in response to comments received during scoping. Alternatives that do not meet the identified goals and objectives were considered but not analyzed in detail.

### **2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL**

#### **2.2.1 Proposed Action**

The BLM proposes to develop a management plan for the Guffey Gorge area that addresses the issues and concerns associated with too many visitors at the site and the change in visitation trends focused on partying and alcohol consumption. Proposed management strategies include the following:

- Ban the possession of alcohol at the site
- Implement a permit system with an associated fee
- Develop a parking area to the north side of CR 102, including restroom facilities
- Require dogs to be on a leash
- Maintain the access trail in a backcountry setting
- Continue Pack-it-in Pack-it-Out education and messaging

Details of these changes are outlined below including adaptive management strategies.

This plan proposes a number of management strategies in an attempt to continue to allow family friendly visitation while mitigating impacts to resources and the displacement of visitors. It is understood that these strategies may not be as effective as desired and modifications to the area management may be necessary. For this reason, the proposed plan is designed to be fluid and will rely on monitoring and coordination with stakeholders to identify changes in management strategies that can be quickly adopted and put into place. These are identified as adaptive management strategies throughout the Proposed Action.

Alcohol Ban –Per direction provided in the Royal Gorge RMP the BLM is directed to provide safe, high quality recreation opportunities, protect the public and protect the resources. An alcohol ban will help maximize those goals by shifting the setting to a family friendly atmosphere while improving aspects of health and human safety. A supplemental rule to ban the possession of alcohol would be written. This restriction would include the entire 80 acre parcel including the parking area.

In association with the alcohol possession ban there would be an increase in the presence of law enforcement at the site to enforce the rule until there is voluntary compliance by visitors.

Permit System and Fee – In order to provide the needed management of this site and reduce impacts to resources the BLM would implement a Recreation Use Permit (RUPs) system along with an associated fee at Guffey Gorge. RUPs are most frequently used in the BLM to authorize short-term, individual and group recreational use of recreation facilities, commonly known as “fee sites.” All fees generated from the permit would go to the management of the site covering costs such as toilets and custodial services, parking area improvements, user education, monitoring, reclamation, trail maintenance and law enforcement.

The process to establish a fee as outlined in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) would be followed including development of a business plan and opportunity for public comment. The business plan analyzes anticipated management costs, different fee structure scenarios, and potential revenue ultimately outlining the proposed fee structure. The FLREA process also directs that any fees are reasonable when compared to similar activities. The fee structure and payment mechanism would be designed to be affordable and convenient. The fee and services could be effective year round or only during the busiest months, May-September. The fee structure could be revised if warranted in the future. All revisions would follow established policies.

Adaptive Management – If monitoring indicates that the social carrying capacity is still being exceeded the permit system could limit the number of visitors to the site through a reservation system. The public would have the opportunity to comment prior to this change being implemented.

Parking Management- The Proposed Action would formalize the user created parking area located on the north side of County Road 102 on the Park/Teller County line and would include installing a vault toilet. Initially the north parking area would be small and focused on the current area of use. Steps can be taken to minimize the visual impacts of additional structures and randomly parked vehicles. Designated parking would pull vehicles into a smaller space taking advantage of the natural screening provided by the ponderosa. With a well-designed trailhead parking area, pedestrian and vehicle traffic can be managed.

Parking area construction would include designated parking stalls within the North side meadow that is currently being used by vehicles (see figure 3). The parking area would be sloped for water drainage and would include a combination of cut and fill. Road base or similar material will be used to stabilize the surface. Structures would be installed to minimize impacts from run-off such as drainage channels and rip-rap. The site would be designed to blend with the surrounding area to the greatest extent possible by minimizing the removal of trees and vegetation, placing top soil on cuts and fills and leaving vegetation adjacent to the county road to provide screening. The entry or exit from the county road would be designed so that the cut into the bank would be minimal. The entry/exit would blend with the surrounding landscape by placing rocks found on location so the characteristic landscape is repeated. To address safety entering and leaving the site, a formal entrance would be constructed in a location that allows for adequate site distances. The design for parking would provide formal designated sites and be designed in such a way that visitors would only be able to park in these designated sites. The vault toilet would be in a location that is least visible to the casual observer and its color and

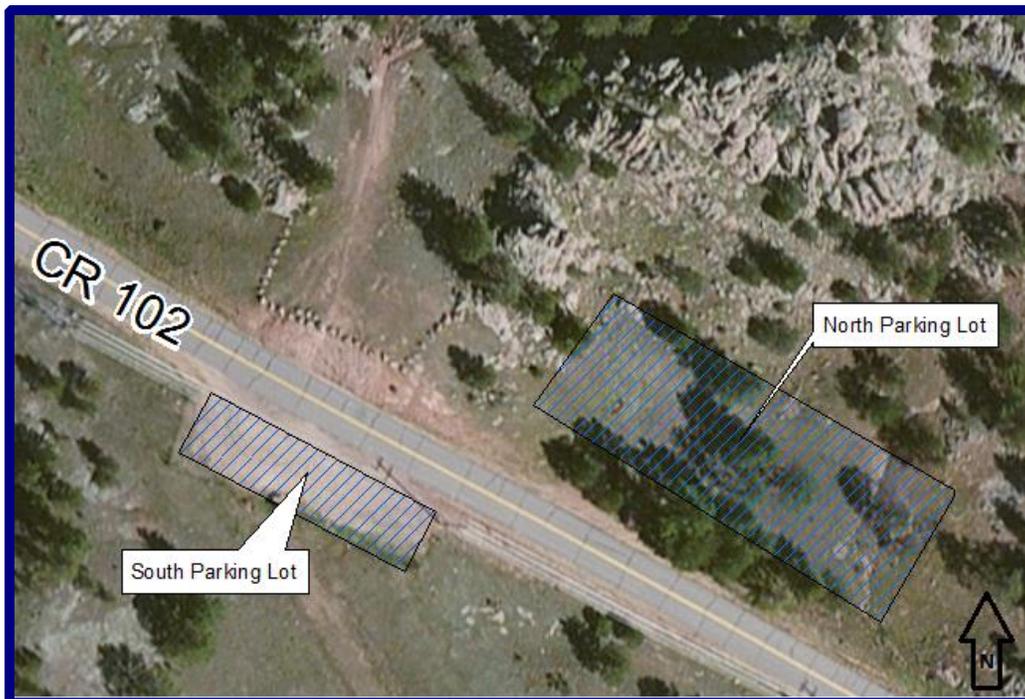
design would blend with the surroundings. If the installation of a vault toilet is not feasible portable toilets would continue to be provided. If guard rails are added, the color should not detract from the landscape character. Placement and color of additional structures such as signs, informational kiosks, picnic tables, trash receptacles and a fee collection tube would be designed to blend with the natural surroundings.

This formal parking area would serve as the main parking area and the south parking would remain open and allow for overflow of parking. The BLM would work with Park County to install signs clearly identifying designated parking and restrictions of parking on the roadway. A supplemental rule would be implemented to prohibit parking outside of these designated areas.

Construction requiring vegetation disturbance would be avoided from May 15 through July 15. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. If construction requires gasoline powered equipment, an adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite.

Adaptive Management- Depending upon ongoing visitation levels and parking demand management of parking could be modified. This could include closing parking on the south side of CR 102, providing only a small parking area on the north side, and expanding the north parking lot. Guard rails along CR102 to prevent parking on the road could also be considered.

**Figure 3 Overview of North Parking lot**



**Figure 3 Proposed Site for North Parking lot**



Dogs on Leash– Uncontrolled dog use at the site contributes to the overall management issues. It is proposed that a supplemental rule be developed requiring dogs to be on a leash at all times. Education of visitors would include responsible dog ownership ethics.

Adaptive Management – If monitoring indicates that dog use continues to be a problem at the site banning dogs could be considered.

Access Trail Management – Maintenance of the access trail would be ongoing in a manner that maintains the backcountry setting while protecting resources and discourages off-trail travel. A trail from the north side parking would also be established leading from the north parking area to the main access trail. The trail should direct visitors in a single path to eliminate the existing scattered routes. All attempts would be made to use native appearing materials and non-invasive barriers and minimal signing. If motorized equipment is used for trail maintenance/improvement an adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite.

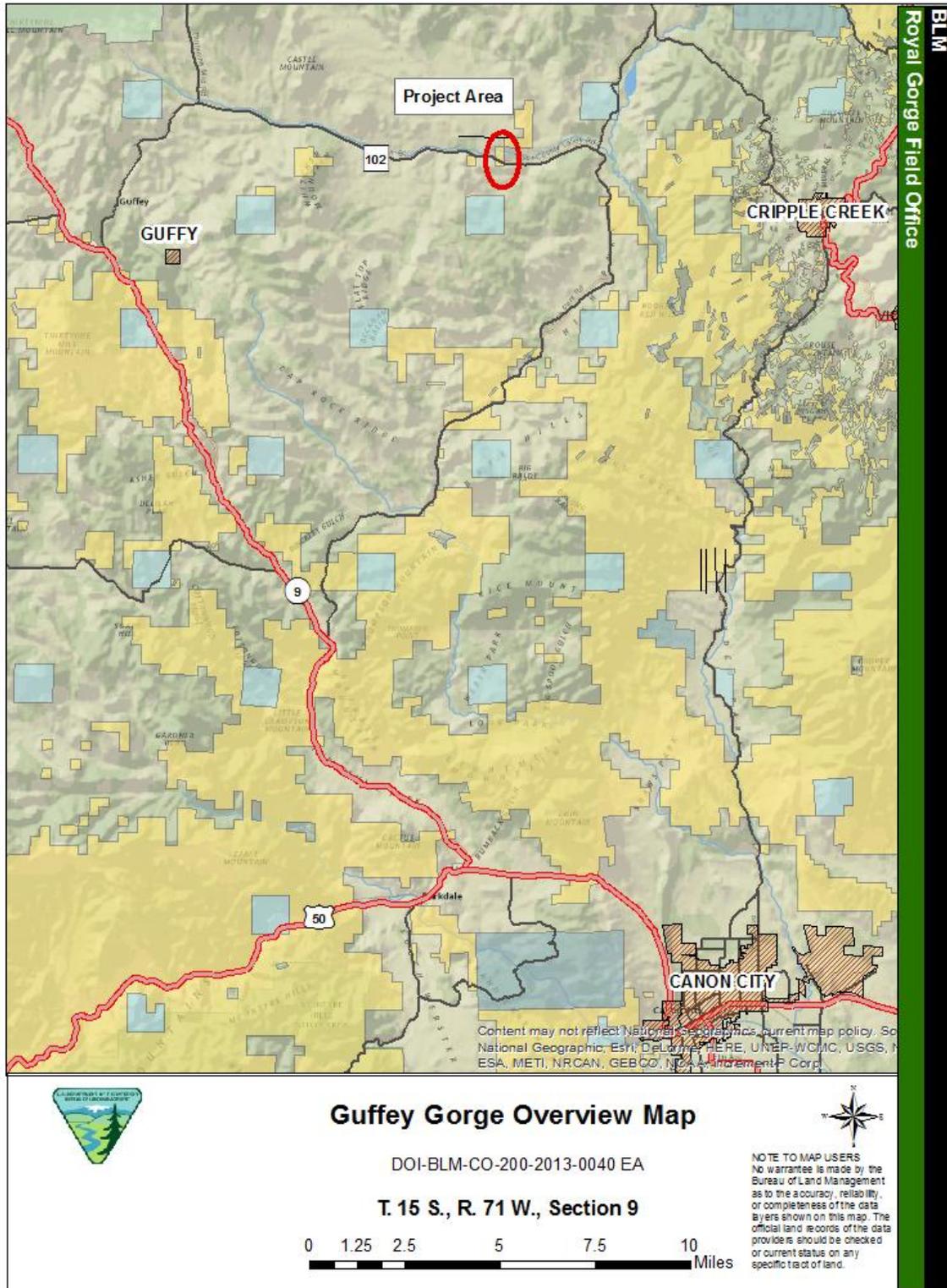
Adaptive Management – Barriers, handrails, and signs could be installed if less invasive management strategies continue to be non-effective, off-trail travel continues to occur and safety concerns are evident.

Trash Management – User education would focus on the pack-it-in pack-it-out ethic. Users would continue to be encouraged to carry out their trash and bring extra bags to pick up after others at the site. Trash receptacle and services would be provided at the trail head.

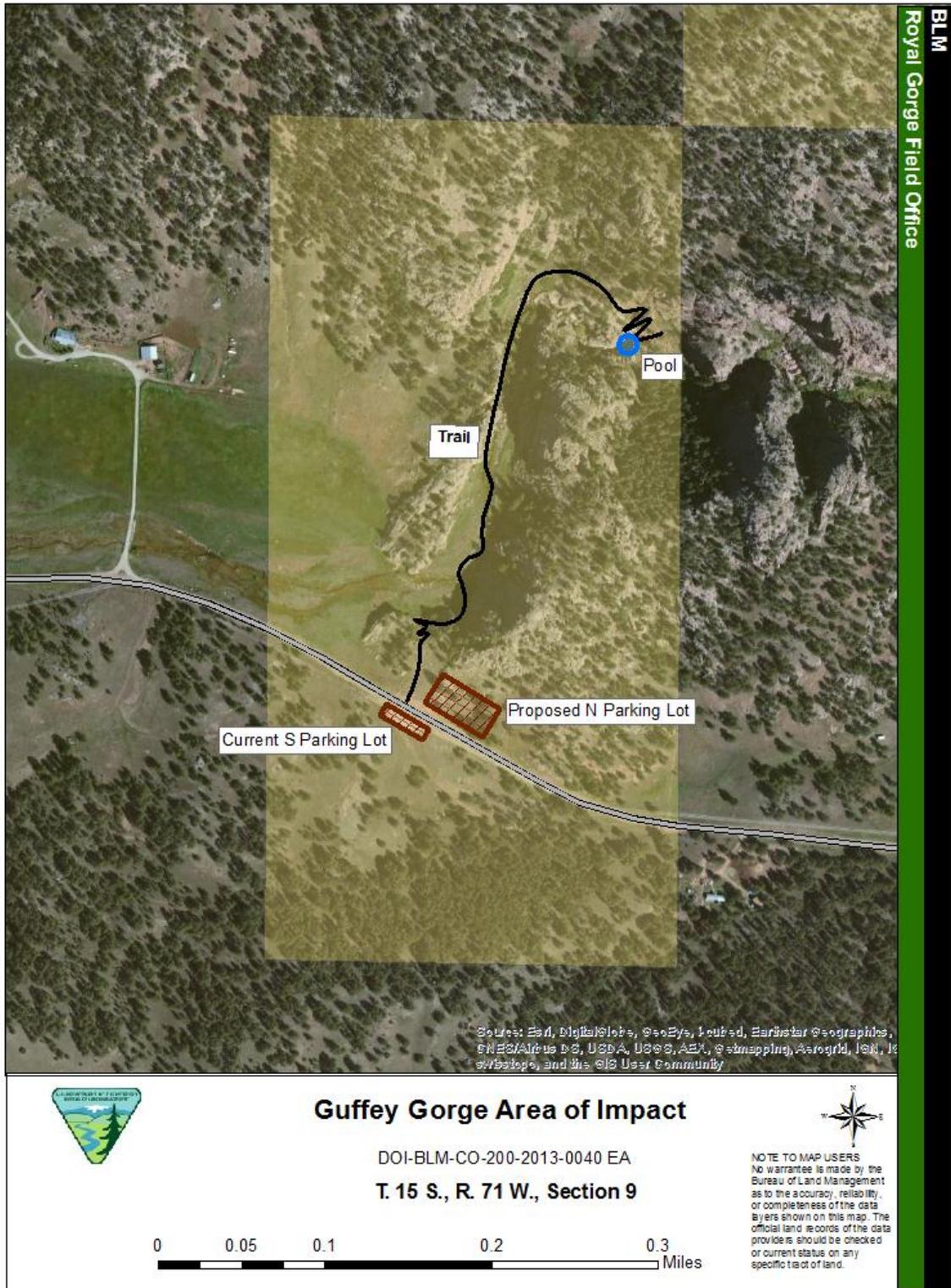
General Management Actions

- BLM would establish partnerships with local law enforcement, other agencies, and groups to assist with ongoing management of the site.
- Monitoring would focus on compliance with management plan actions and associated reduction in impacts to resources and other visitors. Data would continue to be collected regarding use levels, types of use, visitor demographics, and visitor satisfaction.
- Applications for commercial recreation activities would only be considered if they met or assisted in meeting the established management objectives of the site.
- Regular monitoring combined with ongoing coordination with stakeholders including Park County Sheriff would be used to determine if changes are occurring at unacceptable levels and what the course of action should be. If solutions are not readily available, the parcel could be closed to visitors either temporarily or permanently.
- Options would be explored to look at other entities taking over management of the site. This could include a range of options including but not limited to recreation and public purpose lease with another agency that could provide better on site management controls.
- Hiring a concessionaire to manage the site would be evaluated if BLM was approached by a willing party. If a concessionaire contacted the BLM, research on insurance feasibility and liability would need to be accomplished. Additional NEPA analysis would need to be completed before allowing a concessionaire to operate in Guffey Gorge.

Map 1 Overview of Guffey Gorge area



Map 2 Area of Impact in Guffey Gorge



### **2.2.2 No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative there would be minimal changes from current management. The north parking area would not be formalized but visitors would still be allowed to park in this area since it is within 300' of the access road as allowed per BLM's Resource Management Plan. The entrance would not be re-located and the site would not be leveled. Rip-rap or other run-off control structures would not be installed.

Ongoing maintenance and visitor contacts at the site would continue to occur at current levels as funding and staff time is available. This includes providing a portable toilet and annual trail maintenance. Trash services could also be provided. Agreements with other agencies to assist with law enforcement could also occur under this alternative if funding is available.

An alcohol ban and a permit with a fee structure would not be implemented.

Changes within the county road right-of-way could still occur if this action were chosen. This could include installing signs regarding parking and installing guard rails to prevent people from parking along the road.

### **2.2.3 Alternatives**

#### **Alternative B**

Alternative B is nearly identical to the Proposed Action except the alcohol ban and dogs on leash requirement would be considered as adaptive management strategies; not initial changes in management. Under Alternative B a recreation use permit (RUP) and associated fee would be put in place. Changes to the parking, sanitation, and trail access would be the same as the Proposed Action. The General Management Actions as defined in the Proposed Action above would also apply in Alternative B. Not included in the primary action list are the alcohol ban and rules for keeping dogs on leash.

Alternative B Adaptive Management Plan – Monitoring would occur throughout the busy use season and an end of season review would occur annually to determine if capacity levels have been exceeded. Visitor use, trash removal, alcohol related problems, and dog issues will be evaluated. If BLM's goals and objectives are not being met, further steps would be taken to add a supplemental rule to ban alcohol or increased management for dogs.

#### **Alternative C**

Alternative C would permanently close Guffey Gorge to public use. If this alternative was selected, signs would be installed, boulders would be placed across the north parking entries and the south parking area would be fenced. This alternative would also require an increase in law enforcement presence at the site to enforce the closure. Other education efforts would likely be needed to make the public aware of the closure.

Per BLM policy closures and restrictions that are longer than 24 months in duration must be accomplished through the land use planning/land use plan amendment process. If this alternative were selected the BLM would amend the RMP to reflect this closure following all applicable processes.

## **2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL**

Several alternatives to managing the site have at various times and places been brought up to the BLM. These alternatives include:

- Destroying the site
- Not allowing parking on the north side of CR 102
- Allow parking on the north lot of CR 102, and remove the parking lot on the south side
- Installing a gate and locking the site during non-visitation hours
- Temporary closure until issues are mitigated
- Designate the area as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

The decisions to not analyze these alternatives are expanded upon below.

Destroy Site – Destroying the site so it is no longer an attractive recreation destination was brought up during the scoping period. Alternative C, closure of the site, would result have a similar end result by reducing the visitor numbers to none. A closure was analyzed in detail.

North Parking Lot Closure – One alternative considered but eliminated would be to not allow parking in the informal area on the north side of CR102 and limit parking to the current formal area. This alternative was eliminated because it would not meet the stated goal of reducing safety concerns relating to parking and people crossing the road as directed by the RMP. It has been demonstrated that the level of public demand for the site exceeds the current available parking and ticketing vehicles has not been a deterrent to visiting the site.

South Parking Lot Closure – Another consideration was to formalize the north parking area as described in the proposed action and close the existing parking area on the south side of CR102. This was not analyzed in detail because at this point in time it is unclear how much of the parking demand would be met by the north parking area alone, so this alternative may not meet the stated safety goals. The proposed action directs that the BLM would conduct monitoring to indicate if demand is being met and future actions could warrant closing the south parking lot or limiting it to emergency vehicles only.

Locked Gate – It was suggested that the site have a gate that is opened and closed during allowed visitation hours. This alternative would not be compatible with the desired backcountry setting of the site requiring a high level of management controls and was therefore not analyzed in detail.

Temporary Closure – A comment suggested that the BLM implement a temporary closure at the site until management measures are implemented. This suggestion was considered but not analyzed because the health and human safety issues are being addressed through identified alternatives. The proposed action calls for a closure if other management actions are not successful and Alternative C considers closing the site permanently.

ACEC – A proposal that was suggested and would not be considered is to place Guffey Gorge in an ACEC designation. The designation of ACECs occurs at the Resource Management Planning level and is outside the scope of this document.

## CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

#### 3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review

The following table is provided as a mechanism for resource staff review, to identify those resource values with issues or potential impacts from the proposed action and/or alternatives. Those resources identified in the table as impacted or potentially impacted will be brought forward for analysis.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Air Quality</u> <i>Ty Webb, Chad Meister, Melissa Hovey</i>	TW, 9/11/14	The proposed actions should have no negative impacts to air quality in the area.
<u>Geology/Minerals</u> <i>Stephanie Carter, Melissa Smeins</i>	SSC, 9/23/14	There are geologic and mineral resources present, however, this project will not have a direct adverse impact to the resource.
<u>Soils</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 10/20/14	Complete analyses in the <a href="#">Soils</a> section
<u>Water Quality</u> <u>Surface and Ground</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 10/20/14	Complete analyses in the <a href="#">Water Quality</a> section
<u>Invasive Plants</u> <i>John Lamman</i>	JL, 09/30/2014	See affected environment.
<u>T&amp;E and Sensitive Species</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 9/17/2014	There is a golden eagle and peregrine nest site located within one mile of the action area. However, the distance and lack of a sight line will result no effect to these sites as a result of the proposed action.
<u>Vegetation</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	CC, 9/25/14	See affected environment.
<u>Wetlands and Riparian</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG 9/19/2014	See affected environment.
<u>Wildlife Aquatic</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	DG 9/19/2014	See affected environment.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<b><u>Wildlife Terrestrial</u></b> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 9/17/2014	See affected environment.
<b><u>Migratory Birds</u></b> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 9/17/2014	See affected environment.
<b><u>Cultural Resources</u></b> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MT, 9/17/2014	See affected environment
<b><u>Native American Religious Concerns</u></b> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MT, 9/17/2014	Although aboriginal sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect, no possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see Cultural Resources section, above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.
<b><u>Economics</u></b> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 9/8/14	There are virtually no impacts to the economics of individuals or the region stemming from the implementation of the proposed management plan.
<b><u>Paleontology</u></b> <i>Melissa Smeins, Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 9/23/14	This project will not have an adverse impact on these resources.
<b><u>Visual Resources</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS, 10/29/2014	See affected environment.
<b><u>Environmental Justice</u></b> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 9/8/14	The proposed action affects areas that are rural in nature. The land adjacent to this parcel is open rangeland, as a result, there are no minority or low-income populations in or near the project area. As such, the proposal will not have a disproportionately high or adverse environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.
<b><u>Wastes Hazardous or Solid</u></b> <i>Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 9/23/14	Not present.
<b><u>Recreation</u></b> <i>Linda Skinner</i>	LS, 10/29/14	See affected environment.
<b><u>Farmlands Prime and Unique</u></b> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	CC, 9/23/14	There are not prime or unique farmlands within the proposed project area.
<b><u>Lands and Realty</u></b> <i>Greg Valladares, Rich Rotte</i>	RAR, 10/21/2014	There is an authorization for an underground fiber optic line adjacent to the county road and an overhead power line. Coordinate construction activities with utilities.
<b><u>Wilderness, WSAs, ACECs, Wild &amp; Scenic Rivers</u></b> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 9/25/2014	Not present.
<b><u>Wilderness Characteristics</u></b> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 9/25/2014	Not present.

<b><u>Resource</u></b>	<b><u>Initial and date</u></b>	<b><u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u></b>
<b><u>Range Management</u></b> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	CC, 9/23/14	There are no impacts to range management from the proposed action.
<b><u>Forest Management</u></b> <i>Ken Reed</i>	KR, 9/4/14	No impacts to forest management or forest health. All large ponderosa pine in the parking lot construction area should be left for shade and cover.
<b><u>Cadastral Survey</u></b> <i>Jeff Covington</i>	JC, 10/30/2014	The proposed action should have no negative impact on the boundaries. There are several private surveys in the area that have not been verified through a cadastral survey
<b><u>Noise</u></b> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 9/8/14	Noise along with general disturbance issues are addressed in the recreation analysis.
<b><u>Fire</u></b> <i>Ty Webb</i>	TW, 9/11/14	The proposed actions will have no impact on fire management.
<b><u>Law Enforcement</u></b> <i>Steve Cunningham</i>	SC, 10/24/14	See affected environment.

The affected resources brought forward for analysis include:

- Soils
- Water Quality
- Vegetation
- Wetlands and Riparian
- Wildlife Aquatic
- Wildlife Terrestrial
- Migratory Birds
- Cultural Resources
- Visual Resources
- Law Enforcement
- Recreation
- Lands and Realty

## **3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES**

### **3.2.1 SOILS (includes a finding on standard 1)**

Affected Environment:

The Proposed Action aims to formalize the parking area on the north side of CR 102 and provide continued trail maintenance for foot trails leading to the swimming area.

*North CR 102 Parking Area:*

More than 90% of the proposed parking lot would be on Bushpark very gravelly loam, warm 8 to 40 percent slopes. The parent material consists of slope alluvium derived from volcanic breccia. Depth to a root restrictive layer is 10 to 20 inches to lithic bedrock. The natural drainage class is well drained, while the runoff class is very high. This soil is neither flooded nor ponded, and has very low available water storage in its profile. This soil is in the shallow pine (R048AY240CO) ecological site.

The Proposed Action seeks to formalize the approximately 1 acre parking area to limit future resource impacts and safety issues. Recently, the undeveloped lot has experienced soil compaction, vegetation loss, and some erosion near the county ROW. The entrance/exit to the parking area has developed a sharp, slightly rutted incline that is worsening from unformalized drainage and vehicle traffic. Vehicles exiting the parking area often lose tire traction attempting to get onto CR 102 quickly and safely.

*Foot Trails:*

The area designated for foot traffic is on Cathedral-Rock outcrop complex, 20 to 60 percent slopes. The parent material is slope alluvium derived from gneiss and/or granite and/or sandstone. Depth to a root restrictive layer is 10 to 20 inches to lithic bedrock. The natural drainage class is well drained while the runoff class is very high. This soil is neither flooded nor ponded, and has very low available water storage in its profile. As with the Bushpark, the Cathedral-Rock complex is in the shallow pine (R048AY240CO) ecological site.

The formal trail throughout most of the site is effective, and shows little/no signs of soil damage. However, the portions of the trail on the steepest slopes – one nearest the entrance, and one leading from the bottom of the pool area to the cliff jumping ledges – show the most deviations of foot traffic, and highest susceptibility of future impacts. These unmaintained trails remove vegetated cover, compact soils, and loosen rocks, possibly creating conditions that increase erosion and sediment loads to the stream.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Formalizing the parking area would increase the runoff potential to downstream areas by removal of vegetation, and hardening remaining surface areas. Continued maintenance of foot trails would not impact soil resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: For the parking area, ensure properly a properly graded plane (at least 3 – 5%), and armor the drainage ditch along CR 102 with rip rap. Minimize vegetation loss wherever possible. For the foot trails: allowing in this EA for more substantial forms of foot trail guidance (handrails, signs, etc.) to be part of the trail system gives the BLM more options to mitigate potential impacts on the aforementioned steep slope sections.

Cumulative Impacts: The Headwaters Four mile Creek watershed (HUC 12: 110200020105) is a low density, rural area. Four miles upstream of the Pool is a small housing subdivision that has approximately three miles of dirt roads. This is the only substantial development upstream in the watershed. The parking area is situated on higher ground in relation to West Fourmile Creek. It is not anticipated to receive large, erosive flows in a normal year. Developing the parking lot would increase runoff to downstream areas, but is not expected to substantially alter local soils to downstream areas.

#### Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative B would have the same impacts as the Proposed Action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Mitigation measures under Alternative B would be the same as for the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts would be the same as discussed in the Proposed Action.

#### Alternative C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative C, closure of Guffey Gorge, would not further impact soil resources and would allow for vegetative regrowth, ultimately reducing erosion and sedimentation.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: No mitigation would be necessary.

Cumulative Impacts: The closure of Guffey Gorge would result in recovery of soil resources in the currently impacted areas.

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: A No Action decision would enable user designated impacts to soil compaction and drainage from parking areas. Foot trails would still require trail maintenance as users deviate from trails.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: BLM may maintain the drainage ditch in the current informal parking area in addition to the foot trail maintenance.

#### Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Upland Soils:

Upland soils are currently meeting standards in areas away from public usage. Specifically, the trail and parking lots don't meet standards. The north parking lot soils are most likely being damaged currently by vehicles and would be reshaped under the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would harden these sites and try to concentrate usage to focus impacts to a smaller area.

### **3.2.2 WATER (SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER, FLOODPLAINS) (includes a finding on standard 5)**

Affected Environment:

The Proposed Action involves West Fourmile Creek, a small perennial stream that flows through the Guffey Gorge. This waterway is designated for agriculture, primary contact recreation (swimming), water supply, and aquatic life cold 1 and is fully supporting of these standards (CDPHE, 2012, [Colorado 305\(b\) report appendices](#)). Currently, it is not listed as impaired by any state or federal agency. Water quality parameters of concern on West Fourmile Creek include E. Coli and sediment loads. The mean annual precipitation for this area is 14 – 17 inches per year.

In 2013, three water quality sampling points were selected by BLM to establish baseline conditions for E. Coli: UP1 – (upstream point #1) is located on West Fourmile Creek just below the fence near the upstream private/BLM boundary. Pool – is located at the center of the downstream outlet of the plunge pool itself. DP1 – (downstream point #1) is located on West Fourmile Creek near the downstream private/BLM boundary.

Sampling was first completed on August 26, 2013 after a high use weekend. UP1 had 11 colonies/100 ml, the Pool had 4 colonies / 100 ml, and DP1 had 38 colonies / 100 ml. Sampling was repeated on September 17, 2013 after a period of heavy rainfall and moderate use. UP1 had 3 colonies/100 ml, the Pool had 15 colonies / 100 ml, and DP1 had 20 colonies / 100 ml. Sampling was performed a third time the following year on September 8, 2014 after another rainy weekend that likely only saw moderate to low use. UP1 had 3 colonies/100 ml, the Pool had 11 colonies / 100 ml, and DP1 had 3 colonies / 100 ml.

Water quality tests in 2013-14 have shown that the enumerated levels of E. Coli were well below the state accepted standard for recreation of 126 colonies / ml.

The trail leading to the pool area requires regular repairs as visitors are often walking off trail. These unmaintained trails remove vegetated cover, compact soils, and loosen rocks, possibly creating conditions that increase erosion and sediment loads to the stream.

### Environmental Effects

#### Proposed Action

**Direct and Indirect Impacts:** The Proposed Action is expected to maintain water quality at current levels. Current E. Coli levels are well below state water quality standards and are not likely to increase as a result of the Action. Continued trail maintenance would not negatively impact sedimentation to West Fourmile Creek. Formalization of the user created parking lot will harden surfaces, and has the potential of increasing flows to downstream areas. However, it is not expected to noticeably alter local hydrology and downstream water quality.

**Protective/Mitigation Measures:** None required

**Cumulative Impacts:** The Headwaters Four mile Creek watershed (HUC 12: 110200020105) is a low density, rural area. Four miles upstream of the Pool is a small housing subdivision that has approximately three miles of dirt roadways. Bordering the Guffey Gorge property at UP1 is a cattle ranch that is likely contributing E. Coli to the waterbody, but data presented above suggest the levels are within the acceptable range. Downstream of DP1 are more private ranch lands. Upstream and downstream land users are not seen to have great impacts on one another, and cumulative impacts as a result of the Action are not expected to alter this.

## Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative B would have the same impacts as the Proposed Action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Mitigation measures under Alternative B would be the same as for the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts would be the same as discussed in the Proposed Action.

## Alternative C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative C, closure of Guffey Gorge, would not further impact water resources and would allow for vegetative regrowth, ultimately reducing erosion, sedimentation and possible human contamination.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: The closure of Guffey Gorge might result in a minor beneficial impact to water quality in the watershed as vegetation and soils recover; however due to the localized nature of the site and minor impact currently, any changes would be negligible at the watershed scale.

## No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: A No Action decision would enable user created impacts to water quality and drainage from parking areas and the trail. Foot trails would still require trail maintenance as users deviate from trails.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: BLM should maintain the drainage ditch in the current informal parking area in addition to the foot trail maintenance.

## Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Water Quality:

Currently, West Fourmile Creek is meeting water quality standards and is not expected to change appreciably as a result of the Proposed Action or any of the other alternatives.

## **3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

### **3.3.1 INVASIVE PLANTS\***

Affected Environment: Invasive plants known to occur within a seven mile radius of the project boundary include: Leafy spurge, dalmatian toadflax, yellow toadflax, Canada thistle, white top, and musk thistle.

### Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Parking lots commonly become infested with invasive plants that can then be spread to other areas.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Surfacing the parking lot with packed road base is recommended to reduce establishment of invasive plant species. Equipment used to create the north parking lot in the proposed action should be washed prior to entering the project area to remove any plant materials, soil, or grease. Areas disturbed by project implementation will be monitored for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list. Identified noxious weeds will be treated.

Cumulative Impacts: None

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Vehicles would continue to park in the area of the proposed north parking lot but would likely have less traffic due to the informal nature of the parking. Soil disturbance of the area would be less but erosion would be unmanaged. Impacts would be similar to proposed action but less.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Same as Proposed Action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: None

Alternative C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The likelihood of new invasive weed infestations would be greatly reduced.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: None

\*Invasive plants are plants that are not part of (if exotic), or are a minor component of (if native), the original plant community or communities that have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the site if their future establishment and growth are not actively controlled by management interventions, or are classified as exotic or noxious plants under state or federal law. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants.

### **3.3.2 VEGETATION (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: The primary vegetation in the area consists of vegetation common on Douglas Fir and Dry Shallow Pine ecological sites. Grasses such as mountain muhly, Arizona fescue, parry oatgrass, needle-and-thread grass, pine dropseed, prairie junegrass, western wheatgrass, blue grama, squirreltail and elk and sun sedges are native to the site. Shrubs and half-shrubs such as fringed sagebrush, currant, mountain mahogany, rabbitbrush and plains prickly pear are also present. Ponderosa pine trees occupy the project area.

Environmental Effects

### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Damage to overall vegetative resources is not great at this time. However, unrestricted parking and camping tend to be destructive to vegetative resources in the area and will impact vegetation over time. Parking tends to crush herbaceous vegetation and live trees are often damaged by firewood collection as dead wood becomes scarce. The proposed action to create and slope a parking area as well as manage run-off will greatly reduce the potential for long term damage to vegetative resources in the area.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitoring should occur during high recreational visitor volumes to ensure compliance with goals as outlined.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this Alternative, less recreational monitoring or management would occur in this area. This would most likely result in continual negative impacts to the vegetation resources in the heavily used areas. Increasing visitor use and some vegetation degradation from trampling will continue.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: This area will need to be monitored as recreational visitors and activities are likely to increase with this Alternative.

### Other Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative B would be similar to the proposed action in that parking, littering/sanitation, and trail access would still be managed, allowing for some improvement to the vegetation resource. Alternative C would allow for the vegetation resource to recover throughout the proposed project area as the area would permanently be closed to public use.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Similar to proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

### Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities:

Public land Health Assessments for this parcel were completed in September, 2001 as part of the Fourmile Creek and Upper Fourmile Creek Watersheds and again in 2010. The assessments indicated that overall, this parcel was meeting applicable health standard for plant and animal communities. However, there are relatively small, localized areas where vegetation has been disturbed by vehicle parking or the high amount of unmanaged recreational use

### **3.3.3 WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on standard 2)**

Affected Environment: The site where most physical work will take place is around the parking lot and is removed from the riparian area of West Four Mile Creek. Other actions within this document are geared more toward visitor behavior than addressing resource impacting issues. Riparian and aquatic resource management is not the central focus of the issues at hand, but there is wildlife disturbance and trampling at a short reach of West Four Mile Creek. The access trail maintenance does have some positive overlap however with riparian resource management. The

small BLM-managed section of this creek is unique in that it drops from higher elevation hay ranches upstream, meanders through the rock formations at Guffey Gorge, feeds the sink hole where many people swim, and continues downstream through lower elevation hay ranches. The increasing recreational activities and the public's disrespect of this unique system have resulted in a partially damaged riparian resource for a short distance.

### Environmental Effects

#### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed action to create and slope a parking area as well as manage run-off will not directly impact the riparian system as wetlands are far-removed from the parking area. Constructing restroom facilities, requiring dogs to be on leash, maintaining the access trail in a backcountry setting, and continuing littering education and messaging will all positively impact the riparian area. These positive impacts include: 1) better optimizing the allowance for growth and regrowth of hydrophilic species in order for the riparian zone to withstand typical flood flows, 2) a cleaner, healthier system, and 3) better habitat for fish and amphibians.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitoring should occur during high recreational visitor volumes to ensure compliance with goals as outlined.

Cumulative Impacts: Managing and implementing the proposed rules will keep the riparian zone at this location in a proper functioning condition.

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this Alternative, less recreational monitoring or management would occur in this area. This would most likely result in continual negative impacts to the riparian system for the short reach heavily used. Increasing visitor levels and some riparian degradation from trampling continues.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: This area will need to be monitored as recreational visitors and activities are likely to increase with this Alternative.

#### Alternatives B and C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternatives B and C would be similar to the proposed actions in that parking, littering/sanitation, and trail access would still be managed, better allowing for a continued properly functioning riparian system with some improvement to the riparian system anticipated.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Similar to proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts: Similar to proposed action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Riparian Systems: The overall length of BLM riparian resource is in a relatively good condition. The Proposed Actions best sustains the local

area in a direction to maintain the BLM Riparian Land Health Standards over a No Action Alternative. All Alternatives continue however to impact a small area by the swimming hole.

### **3.3.4 WILDLIFE AQUATIC (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: (see also Riparian and Wetlands section 3.3.4) West Four Mile Creek is perennial with fish and amphibians known to be in the vicinity, but not studied at the location of the proposed action. Leopard frogs inhabited this general region, but they have become less abundant overall throughout Colorado over time. Fishing occurs downstream where the creek gains tributary waters and is larger and also influenced by Wrights Reservoir water supplies. Some angling may occur in the actual vicinity, but the base flow of the stream can be very low with fish likely only being in some of the larger plunge pool as the stream cascades through the gorge. The high volume of recreational activities in this area may be negatively influencing amphibian populations through human disturbance, but the actual extent of habitat degradation at this point in time is small over the total BLM reach length, and typically the best habitat for amphibians is not flowing water. It is more likely amphibians migrate through the corridor along the stream, more than occupy the flowing sections, but certainly the human disturbance of the standing water pool is high.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Proposed Action would positively impact aquatic wildlife populations in this riparian area. Less disturbance to the system as visitors and dogs remain on the trail and properly dispose their trash creates a healthier habitat with reduced nutrient loads, and a lower risk of weeds and disease introductions.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitor that rules and regulations are being followed.

Cumulative Impacts: Managing and implementing the proposed rules will keep the riparian zone at this location in a proper functioning condition and optimize aquatic habitat variables.

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this Alternative, fish and amphibians that may currently inhabit this system continued to be disturbed with less attempt to sustain what is generally good habitat given upstream irrigation withdrawals.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitoring must occur during high recreational visitor volumes to see if other areas of the creek are being disturbed.

##### Alternatives B and C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Similar to proposed action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Similar to proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts: Similar to proposed action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: The Proposed Action will have positive impacts on plant and animal communities above the No Action Alternative and will help sustain public land health standards for plants and animals. All alternatives continue however to impact a small area by the swimming hole.

### **3.3.5 WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on standard 3)**

Affected Environment: As described, the impacts as a result of the proposed action, no action alternative, and alternative B will cause a similar outcome with respect to wildlife. The action area occurs within a riparian corridor that is not dissimilar to many others in the area. Species that are expected to be affected by the recreational use of Guffey Gorge are more likely to be small in size: rodents, reptiles, lagamorphs, etc. The habitat types present include the riparian corridor created by West Fourmile Creek, the cliff complexes surrounding the creek, and the ponderosa pine stand located near the parking area. The action area is small in size relative to acreage and not dissimilar to many other sites in the surrounding area.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The activity is an authorized use of public lands and has occurred and will be likely to continue to occur if the no action alternative is selected. The proposed action, no action alternative, and alternative B will not alter the current situation with respect to wildlife. The presence of people along the trail and near the plunge pool will likely remain the same post implementation. Therefore, no impacts beyond the current situation are expected as a result of implementation of these actions.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Same as above.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Same as above.

##### Alternatives B and C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The best scenario for wildlife is to close the site to public use. This alternative will remove all disturbance associated with people, providing a natural setting. This alternative will improve the condition of habitat for all wildlife species present.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: There will no impact to these standards.

### **3.3.6 MIGRATORY BIRDS**

Affected Environment: As described, the impacts as a result of the proposed action, no action alternative, and alternative B will cause a similar outcome with respect to wildlife. The action area occurs within a riparian corridor that is not dissimilar to many others in the area. The yellow warbler is the species most commonly found in deciduous foothills riparian systems followed by American robin, northern flicker, house wren, warbling vireo, song sparrow, western wood-pewee, and broad-tailed hummingbird.

Along south facing slopes, the habitat type is primarily pinyon pine and juniper. Open areas of mountain grassland are interspersed throughout the area and mountain shrubs such as gambel oak, currant and mountain mahogany are abundant, especially on south slopes. Pinyon-juniper habitat supports the largest nesting bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West. The richness of the pinyon-juniper vegetation type, however, is important due to its middle elevation. Survey tallies in pinyon-juniper are similar in species diversity to the best riparian. Several species are found in the pinyon-juniper habitat and include: black-chinned hummingbird, gray flycatcher, Cassin's kingbird, gray vireo, pinyon jay, juniper titmouse, black-throated gray warbler, Scott's oriole, ash-throated flycatcher, Bewick's wren, mountain chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, and chipping sparrow.

Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found along north facing slopes and adjacent to riparian areas. These sites are very dry and warm areas, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. Mature ponderosa pine forests on dry sites are open, with mature trees achieving wide separation as they compete for limited soil moisture. Grassy ground cover is maintained by frequent low-intensity fires. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir. Birds typical of these habitat types include Merriam's turkey, Williamson's sapsucker, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, band-tailed pigeon, Grace's warbler, flammulated owl, red-breasted nuthatch, violet-green swallow, western tanager, and chipping sparrow. These sites also include small areas of aspen habitat and mountain grassland habitat.

A unique feature present to this area is the cliff complexes that are located adjacent to West Fourmile Creek that provide the proper substrate for cliff nesting species. There is a known golden eagle and peregrine falcon nest site located within one mile of the project area.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

**Direct and Indirect Impacts:** The activity is an authorized use of public lands and has occurred and will be likely to continue to occur if the no action alternative is selected. The proposed action and alternatives will not alter the current situation with respect to wildlife. The presence of people along the trail and near the plunge pool will remain the same therefore a no effect as a result of the proposed action is expected.

The peregrine nest site was active in 2012 and the Golden eagle nest site was active in 2013. However, due to the distance and the obscured sightline to the proposed action, no effect to the nest sites is expected as a result of the proposed action.

The construction of the parking lot and toilet facilities will require earth moving and vegetation clearing; therefore, this action may take migratory bird nests if it occurs during the nesting season (May 15 – June 15).

Protective/Mitigation Measures: To be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and USFWS required by Executive Order 13186, BLM must avoid actions, where possible, that result in a “take” of migratory birds. Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum 2008-050, to reduce impacts to Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC), no habitat disturbance (removal of vegetation such as timber, brush, or grass) is allowed during the periods of May 15 - July 15, the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. The provision will not apply to completion activities in disturbed areas that were initiated prior to May 15 and continue into the 60-day period.

An exception to this timing limitation will be granted if nesting surveys conducted no more than one week prior to vegetation-disturbing activities indicate no nesting within 30 meters (100 feet) of the area to be disturbed. Surveys shall be conducted by a qualified breeding bird surveyor between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. under favorable conditions.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Same as above.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Same as above.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

#### Alternatives B and C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The best scenario for wildlife is to close the site to public use. This alternative will remove all disturbance associated with people, providing a natural setting. This alternative will improve the condition of habitat for all wildlife species present.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

### **3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

#### **3.4.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Affected Environment: A single prehistoric site is present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect [see Reports CR-RG-03-53 (P) and CR-RG-13-123 (N)]. Although site 5PA.2244 was recorded during cultural resources inventory CR-RG-03-53, it is not eligible for the National

Register of Historic Places, and therefore, does not qualify as a historic property. Therefore, no historic properties will be affected by the proposed undertaking.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.  
Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.  
Cumulative Impacts: None

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.  
Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.  
Cumulative Impacts: None

##### Alternatives B and C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None.  
Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.  
Cumulative Impacts: None

### **3.4.2 VISUAL RESOURCES**

Affected Environment: The location of Guffey Gorge BLM public land is along a county road and visible from the road for a length of approximately one mile. Vehicles are moving through the area at a maximum speed of 45 mph. The area's vegetation consists of low grasses and ponderosa pine situated among rock outcroppings. The treed areas are broken up by expansive open meadows used for ranching. The surrounding area is classified as a Class III Visual Resource Management (VRM) site. Under this classification, the objective is to partially maintain the existing character of the landscape. Currently, the visual landscape surrounding the trailhead has been altered by the loss of vegetation due to vehicles parking in a small meadow to the north side of the road. The south side of the road has a road base type parking area that is approximately 150 feet in length. Various user created routes are apparent from pedestrians accessing the area from the scattered parking patterns. Each summer, the BLM supplies a portable toilet for visitors to use.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Vehicles are already parking in the north side area in a disorganized manner; pulling up on the banks and between the rocks. Unsightly trash left by visitors hangs from the fence posts and is piled in parking areas. The portable toilet that is provided is bright blue in color. The addition of a formalized parking area and vault toilet identified in the Proposed Action could improve the existing character of the landscape by blending them with their natural surroundings.

Steps can be taken to minimize the visual impacts of additional structures and randomly parked vehicles. Designated parking would pull vehicles into a smaller space taking advantage of the natural screening provided by the ponderosa. With a well-designed trailhead parking area, pedestrian and vehicle traffic can be managed.

The entry or exit from the county road should be designed so that the cut into the bank would be minimal. The entry/exit would blend with the surrounding landscape by placing rocks found on location so the characteristic landscape is repeated. The color and design of the vault toilet should blend with the surroundings. If physically possible, placement of the toilet would be in a location that is least visible to the casual observer. If guard rails are added, the color should not detract from the landscape character. The trail from the north side parking should direct visitors in a single path to eliminate the existing scattered routes. Placement and color of additional structures such as signs, informational kiosks, picnic tables, trash receptacles and a fee collection tube would be designed to blend with the natural surroundings.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: none  
Cumulative Impacts: none

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The no action alternative would allow visitors to continue the current behavior causing loss of vegetation by vehicles parking in random patterns. This disturbance is highly visible. The braided trail patterns are also noticeable to the casual observer passing by in a vehicle. The piles of trash on this section of road would continue to be picked up as staff has time to do so.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Behavior patterns would continue to erode the visual landscape.

Cumulative Impacts: none

#### Other Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Alternative B would result in the same effects as the Proposed Action. Alternative C would change the existing character of the landscape with the addition of extra boulders to block entrances and closure signs. This alternative would not be much different visually than the Proposed Action with its additional signs and structures.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Complete closure would require fencing or boulders along the highway along with closure signs. This would not blend well with the open natural landscape.

Cumulative Impacts: none

### **3.4.3 LAW ENFORCEMENT**

#### Affected Environment:

##### **PARKING**

Current levels of visitation combined with existing parking availability result in frequent instances where dozens of vehicles illegally park on both roadsides for up to a quarter mile in each direction. This illegal parking occurs on most days when the area weather is conducive to outdoor activity. This illegal parking occurs on a straight portion of roadway which lies between

two curves with poor sight lines, and near the crest of a hill. Since the roadway is only a two lane road, illegally parked cars narrow the travel lanes and sight lines to a point where it creates a very real public safety concern.

There are two areas currently being used for legal parking, one is an improved gravel lot on the south side of County Road 102 immediately across from the trailhead, the other is a user created parking area in the trees on the north side of the road just east of the trailhead.

Existing travel management for the area allows motorized vehicles to drive on existing routes and within 300 feet of existing routes for the purposes of parking. Park County Road 102 is considered an existing route, and both parking areas including the user created one are within 300 feet of the road.

There are many challenges associated with enforcing parking regulations using the current tools available to law enforcement. Federal violation notices must be written to the driver of the vehicle who is not necessarily the registered owner of the vehicle. Because of this it is necessary for federal law enforcement officers to wait at the illegally parked vehicle until the driver arrives. Since much of the visitors leave the Guffey Gorge area at roughly the same time when the weather cools off they tend to arrive at their vehicles in a large crowd. This creates the challenge for the law enforcement officer to try and contain as many drivers of illegally parked vehicles as they can in a short time. Usually this is only a handful of drivers. If law enforcement is able to locate the driver for an illegally parked vehicle and issue a federal violation notice to them, the current collateral forfeiture amount is based on the state fee schedule which is currently \$15 for the parking violation plus a \$25 dollar processing fee. Since many drivers arrive in a car with multiple occupants who have typically driven at least an hour to the site, the slim possibility of receiving a \$40 fine appears to be a worthwhile risk to take, as there has been no perceived impact when violation notices have been issued. Creating a supplemental rule which prohibits parking outside of designated areas would allow the BLM to set the collateral forfeiture to an amount which would likely discourage violations.

## DOGS

Off leash dogs have been observed on many occasions running at large and disturbing visitors by fighting with each other, digging through other peoples personal possessions, and urinating and defecating in many areas frequented by visitors. Current BLM leash regulations only manage dogs in developed recreation sites, which Guffey Gorge is not. BLM law enforcement staff does not currently possess the regulatory tools to effectively manage this issue.

## ALCOHOL

Current visitation levels combined with a large amount of consumption of alcohol by persons of legal age has resulted in an atmosphere resembling a large college beach party including large crowds, amplified music, and floating 'beer pong' tables. Common impacts of alcohol consumption include lowered inhibitions, a need to use the restroom, poor judgment, lack of concern for others, creation of large amounts of trash and driving under the influence. Since the swimming area is at the bottom of a steep trail and the portable restrooms, by logistical necessity are located approximately ½ mile away near the highway many people with lowered inhibitions and diminished judgment choose to relieve themselves very close to the swimming area. It is very common to find piles of human waste and toilet paper on the surface of the ground behind many of the trees immediately adjacent to the actual swimming area. This issue

is both a public safety concern as well as a resource protection concern. This behavior is enabled by the consumption of alcohol.

It is not uncommon for the large party crowds to loudly yell profanities in the presence of families and children. It is also common for the large crowds to listen to amplified music with profane lyrics regardless of the presence of families and children. These behaviors have a negative impact on the visitor experience of the families and children who are visiting the site. This behavior is enabled by the consumption of alcohol.

One of the primary attractions of Guffey Gorge is a cliff jumping site which provides the opportunity to jump from cliffs ranging from 30 feet to 90 feet into a very small pool of water. Participating in this activity while under the influence of alcohol increases the risk of injury to the jumper and swimmers in the water below. This clear public safety concern is enabled by the consumption of alcohol.

One result of consuming large amounts of alcohol is the creation of many empty cans, bottles, and boxes which is a resource protection concern. As a result of reduced inhibitions and poor judgment brought on by alcohol consumption, many of these empty containers end up being left behind by visitors. The resulting trash collects in the area until it is picked up by BLM employees or helpful citizens. The amount of trash left on site has dramatically increased as visitation has increased and become more of a party atmosphere. A large amount of broken glass has been observed in the area. Since many of the visitors are barefoot when they are in the area, this is a serious visitor safety concern. A majority of the broken glass observed in the area is from broken alcohol beverage containers.

Guffey Gorge is located approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes from Colorado Springs, 1 hour and 45 minutes from Pueblo, and 2 and a half hours from Denver in a vehicle. Since a large portion of the visitors consume alcohol during their visit, there is a serious public safety concern of people driving under the influence of alcohol after visiting the site. Complicating this issue is the fact that Guffey Gorge exists at the far south eastern edge of Park County, and most traffic leaves the area to the east on their way to Colorado Springs or the Denver Metro area. Additionally much of the visitors leave around the same time of day in large groups as soon as the weather cools off. Due to its location away from major highways and population centers, and the rush of many vehicles leaving the area at once, there are limited law enforcement resources to conduct DUI enforcement patrols.

#### BOUNDARY CONCERNS

At the downstream end of the swimming area is the eastern public land boundary. There is no marking indicating this boundary exists. It is likely many of the current visitors are leaving the public land when using the area. Posting this boundary would reduce instances of visitors trespassing onto adjacent private land.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Designating the Guffey Gorge area as a Special Area will provide the BLM with the management tools necessary to effectively manage the area to protect visitors and the resources.

##### Alcohol:

Implementation of a supplemental rule prohibiting possession or consumption of alcohol beverages in the Guffey Gorge Special Area would provide BLM law enforcement staff the tools needed to effectively manage for visitor safety and resource protection. BLM law enforcement would be able to reduce the amount of large party groups which collectively contribute to a non-family friendly atmosphere where loud music, profanity, and risky behavior are common. BLM law enforcement would also be able to effectively manage the large amount of litter left behind at the site, much of which is empty alcohol containers and boxes including broken glass.

#### Permit System and Fee:

Implementation of a Recreation Use Permit (RUP) requirement to use the site during the busiest times of the year would provide BLM law enforcement staff a mechanism to ensure delivery of the rules and regulations of the site to each visitor who purchases a RUP.

#### Parking:

Creating a formalized designated parking area on the north side of County Road 102 along with a supplemental rule requiring parking only in designated areas would give the BLM Law Enforcement staff the tools to effectively enforce parking outside of the designated area.

#### Sanitation:

Implementation of a supplemental rule requiring dogs to be kept on a leash at all times when in the Guffey Gorge Special Area would provide law enforcement the required tools to effectively manage off leash dogs which are currently leaving dog waste in many parts of the area where visitors frequent and running at large which is a disturbance to many visitors and can be a visitor safety concern when they fight with other dogs.

During initial implementation of a supplemental rule there would be a need for additional law enforcement resources which would be detailed in from other locations.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Supplementary rules will address the issues related to parking, dogs, and alcohol.

Cumulative Impacts: The addition of supplementary rules to would help to alleviate issues identified in the proposed action.

#### No Action Alternative

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts:

The No Action Alternative would continue with existing practices. Parking would continue to occur all along County Road 102 and BLM law enforcement would not have the necessary tools to effectively manage the parking concerns. The No Action Alternative would not limit the possession or consumption of alcohol. Possession and consumption of alcohol will continue to contribute to large amount of litter, unsafe behavior, and a party atmosphere which is inconsistent with management goals for the area. The No Action Alternative would not limit dogs off leash, therefore the current situation of dogs-at-large related problems would continue.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: The No Action Alternative would not allow Law Enforcement to effectively manage issues in the area and the problems would continue at the current rate or potentially worsen.

#### Alternative B

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Not including the alcohol ban and dogs on leash requirement supplemental rules would not provide BLM law enforcement staff the tools needed to effectively manage the issues associated with dogs running at large and the possession and consumption of alcohol beverages mentioned elsewhere in the document. Having these issues included only as an adaptive management strategy would allow conditions to continue to further degrade to a point where it is determined these steps are necessary. Based on current conditions at the site, BLM law enforcement does not currently possess the management tools needed to effectively manage the site.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: Issuing supplemental rules for only some of the issues would allow Law Enforcement to manage some issues. The problems associated with alcohol and dogs would continue and potentially degrade to unacceptable levels before being dealt with.

#### Alternative C

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts:

Due to the popularity and wide spread social media messaging of the site, a permanent closure of Guffey Gorge to public use would require a large coordinated effort between BLM law enforcement staff and other law enforcement agencies. Enforcing a closure would likely require an extended operation entailing multi-month saturation patrols over the course of several years during peak visitation time. These patrols would occur at the detriment of conducting law enforcement patrols across the rest of the RGFO. Additional Law Enforcement Rangers would be required to be detailed in from other field offices during these operations, the expense of these details would be incurred by the RGFO and would be a significant budgetary impact.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts of the identified issues would be reduced to none over time.

## **3.5 LAND RESOURCES**

### **3.5.1 RECREATION**

#### Affected Environment:

Guffey Gorge has significantly increased in popularity and visitor use within the last 10 years. Recreation activities such as swimming, picnicking, hiking, and cliff jumping are the primary attractions for visiting Guffey Gorge. Internet websites and social media posts promote Guffey Gorge as the best swimming hole and cliff jumping location on the Front Range of Colorado. It is estimated that there are 12,000 visitors annually. One of the main goals of the Bureau of Land Management, stated in the Purpose and Need section of this document, is to continue to provide recreational opportunities for visitors. Continued recreational use must be managed in a way that

does not significantly impact other resources or recreation uses and provide the settings to meet visitor's desired outcomes.

To define the desired outcome for Guffey Gorge, the Bureau of Land Management solicited feedback from visitors and near-by land owners through visitor assessment studies. Responses indicate the desired outcomes include: a place to have an enriched feeling of nature and connection to the surrounding environment; and users desire a place to visit and build bonds with friends and family by sharing the recreational experiences that Guffey Gorge provides. These desired outcomes can be achieved in the current setting however, as a result of overcrowding in the small location; there are also adverse outcomes including an increased disregard to other visitors, and noticeable increase of human impacts to the natural landscape. These settings can be split into three components; social, operational and physical.

Visitors desiring a backcountry type of social setting that offers opportunities for solitude have been displaced during the summer months of high visitor use. During that time, the social setting of Guffey Gorge is primarily a front country setting where the visitor can expect to encounter as many as 150 human contacts and their impacts on the ground are highly visible. The parking lot is typically full, with as many as 80 additional vehicles parked on the roadside. Within Guffey Gorge, the cliffs form a natural amphitheater around the swimming hole where sounds and actions from all other visitors within the area are audible and visible.

Alcohol and drug use are prevalent within Guffey Gorge, and the risky behavior associated with alcohol and drug consumption is a safety concern, as well as affects other visitors experience at the site. Visitors commonly bring their dogs to Guffey Gorge. Visitor conflicts have arisen from dogs being off leash, as well as created a health and safety issue from dog waste and other dog interactions. People traveling from the parking lot to the access trail typically cross Park County Road 102. The interaction between people driving CR 102 and Guffey Gorge visitors are high in numbers, and have become a concern for near-by private land owners. Scoping comments and informal conversations with visitors and near-by private land owners suggest that a decreased number of contacts with others, an alcohol ban, and a dog on leash rule would allow for an increased fulfillment of desired recreation outcomes.

The physical setting of Guffey Gorge ranges from front country to middle country. Although the site is easy to access and travel is on paved roads, the water hole is accessed by foot only. At the parking lot, there are features such as maintained county roads, utility lines, modified landscapes, a portable restroom facility, and a kiosk. Near the water hole, there are no such amenities, and the only landscape modifications are a few signs, and a developed trail.

At this time, the operation setting for Guffey Gorge ranges between middle country and back country. Some management controls are set in place at the parking area, such as a kiosk to inform visitors of rules and regulations and a portable toilet for human waste disposal. Regulations prohibit glass, no overnight use, no target shooting, and no open fires. It is expected that visitors follow the regulations and also pack out their own trash. Comments from visitors and surrounding landowners suggest that this setting is in need of altering to achieve desired recreation outcomes.

## Environmental Effects

### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: To achieve the stated goals found within the Purpose and Need section of this document, the Proposed Action has outlined management strategies. The proposed changes will affect the operational, social, and physical settings of Guffey Gorge.

Goals for Guffey Gorge identified by the BLM include reducing risks to public health and safety, reducing the impacts to resources, and continuing to provide recreational opportunities for visitors in a manner that does not significantly impact other resources or recreation uses while providing the settings to meet visitor's desired outcomes. In order to meet the stated goals, management changes need to be made to reduce the visitor impacts to the site.

The biggest management change would affect the operation setting of the site. The proposed changes would implement more restrictions, increase education and enforcement, as well as provide improvements to the parking area. Some of these changes would occur through a new requirement for obtaining a permit and paying an associated fee. These operational changes will be viewed in a spectrum of ways. Most of the visitors desire minimal rules and restrictions while participating in their activity. Many visitors, at the same time, see the need for additional rules and enforcement in order to reduce conflicts between visitors, decrease concerns for health and human safety, and ultimately reduce the fear that the area might be closed to recreation. Improvements on the parking lot and the trail access will be a welcome change reducing public health and safety concerns. Alcohol bans or restrictions at a similar BLM site in Oregon have created a more family friendly atmosphere, reduced noise issues and other visitor complaints, and improved visitor behavior. It is expected a similar outcome will occur at Guffey Gorge. Restricting dogs to only be on leash will reduce health and safety concerns as well as reduce user conflicts. For some visitors, the increase in rules and restrictions will greatly impact their desired outcomes to the point that they may be displaced from the site entirely.

It is expected that with the change in operation settings, social settings will be altered. The permit system with an associated fee, and potentially a reservation system is expected to reduce the number of visitors during the busiest months. With a reduction in the number of contacts, the social setting shifts back toward the backcountry setting expressed as the desired setting goal. For visitors with the expectation of a "free use area", they may react adversely to the permit system and not visit the area. If it is determined that the permit and fee would be in effect for part of the year, more visitors may visit the area during the "unpermitted" time of the year. This could displace the users accustomed to visiting Guffey Gorge during the slow months.

Implementation of an alcohol ban will significantly change the current social settings of Guffey Gorge. The alcohol ban will have positive effects on desired recreation outcomes for some visitors. Prohibiting alcohol will help alleviate poor judgment and behavior that creates safety hazards for the recreating public. The alcohol ban will reduce conflicts between users, reduce noise, reduce trash and provide a family friendly atmosphere. Driving under the influence of alcohol is a concern that would be eliminated, reducing the threat to public safety. On the other hand, for some visitors, the alcohol ban may have a negative effect on their desired recreation

outcomes and these visitors may be displaced to other locations that offer similar recreation opportunities.

Finally, the proposed action would alter the physical settings of Guffey Gorge. The desire is to maintain the appearance of a natural setting while managing the area. All structures and improvements around the parking area would be designed in a way to not be intrusive to the eye, and designed to reduce conflicts with vehicles along CR 102. A new kiosk location and fee-tube would be designed to blend in well with the natural features. The parking area will have designated parking stalls, a hardened surface, and erosion control features. The parking improvements will enhance the recreation experience, by providing safe, well managed parking. This improvement along with a vault toilet may be perceived as unnecessary by some visitors, neither enhancing nor reducing their recreation experience. Another improvement to the access trail has been proposed and would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape by using natural materials. The improvement of the trail will achieve BLM's stated goals for reducing risks to public health and safety and reducing impacts to resources. Trail improvements would enhance some visitor's experience to access the trail. Others may experience a less positive recreation experience if significant changes to the physical setting occur.

The change in settings associated with the proposed action could indirectly impact other swimming holes in the Front Range, if users are displaced. This could result in increases in the number of contacts per outing at other sites however, it is assumed that the level of displacement would be relatively low and this indirect impact would be negligible.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None  
Cumulative Impacts: None

#### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The No Action Alternative would partially meet the stated goal of continuing to provide recreational opportunities for visitors in a manner that does not significantly impact other resources or recreation uses and provide the settings to meet visitor's desired in Guffey Gorge. However, without the changes in rules for the area it is anticipated that conflicts between users would continue to occur and some visitors would realize undesired outcomes while recreating at Guffey Gorge. Through this alternative you would not see the same type of displacement due to a change in operation setting and most visitors would likely achieve their desired outcomes. The social setting would remain the same as it currently is and visitors who wish for fewer contacts would likely be impacted. Risky behavior that occurs from alcohol and drug consumption will continue to increase, and continue to be a health and safety risk. By not requiring a permit and an associated fee it can be assumed that visitors would realize fewer enforcement/education contacts and a reduction in services such as trash services or portable toilets if other funding was not available.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None  
Cumulative Impacts: None

#### Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The direct and indirect impacts would be the same as the proposed action as related to the fees and facilities provided. This alternative addresses the safety issue by providing the parking area on the north side of the road and adding toilet facilities at the entrance. Trash collection and regular maintenance of facilities would occur in this alternative. Adaptive management would still be available in this alternative for limiting numbers of visitors, parking, and trail improvements if it is determined that changes are needed.

Alternative B does not address changes to the desired social setting. Without the alcohol ban, displacement of families and visitors looking for a quiet place to connect with nature will continue to occur. This alternative also allows dogs to continue to run off-leash contributing to potential conflicts between visitors.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None  
Cumulative Impacts: None

#### Alternative C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: This alternative would have the greatest impact of all the alternatives on the recreational opportunities. Guffey Gorge is unique in the opportunities that it offers, hence the level of demand. If closed to recreation use, this unique opportunity would no longer be available and thousands of users annually would be displaced. This displacement could result in indirect impacts to the recreational cliff jumping and swimming areas, as former Guffey Gorge visitors may look for other locations. This could result in more contacts per outing for visitors in other areas as use is concentrated potentially limiting visitors ability to achieve their desired recreation outcomes.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None  
Cumulative Impacts: None

### **3.5.2 LANDS AND REALTY**

Affected Environment: There is an authorization for an underground fiber optic line adjacent to the county road and an overhead power line.

#### Environmental Effects

##### Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Parking lot construction could result in damage to utilities.  
Protective/Mitigation Measures: Coordinate construction activities with utilities.  
Cumulative Impacts: None

##### No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None  
Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

##### Alternative B

Same as proposed action

Alternative C

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Cumulative Impacts: None

### **3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY**

When Guffey Gorge was an unknown primitive site used only by the local community, it was a single user created trail with very little vegetation disturbance. A visitor could expect solitude when visiting the area.

Over the past 10 years, the effect of human impacts in Guffey Gorge has become more evident. Numerous user-created trails lead from the two parking areas and from various places along the roadway. In addition to the trails, vegetation is sparse where the vehicles park. Due to the terrain at the swimming hole, visitors are contained in a small area; therefore the human impacts are also localized. Trash, noise, human and dog waste is evident to all visitors. Given the localized setting, families intermix with partying college students creating a social setting that has displaced many visitors.

Visitation is not expected to decrease in the future on its own. Without management tools in place the human impacts would continue to degrade the physical resources. The social setting continues to shift to a party atmosphere and is not as conducive to families.

**Soils** The Headwaters Four mile Creek watershed (HUC 12: 110200020105) is a low density, rural area. Four miles upstream of the Pool is a small housing subdivision that has approximately three miles of dirt roads. This is the only substantial development upstream in the watershed. The parking area is situated on higher ground in relation to West Fourmile Creek. It is not anticipated to receive large, erosive flows in a normal year. Developing the parking lot would increase runoff to downstream areas, but is not expected to substantially alter local soils to downstream areas.

**Water** The Headwaters Four mile Creek watershed (HUC 12: 110200020105) is a low density, rural area. Four miles upstream of the Pool is a small housing subdivision that has approximately three miles of dirt roadways. Bordering the Guffey Gorge property at UP1 is a cattle ranch that is likely contributing E. coli to the water body, but data presented above suggest the levels are within the acceptable range. Downstream of DP1 are more private ranch lands. Upstream and downstream land users are not seen to have great impacts on one another, and cumulative impacts as a result of the Action are not expected to alter this.

**Wetlands and Riparian Zones** Managing and implementing the proposed rules will keep the riparian zone at this location in a proper functioning condition.

**Wildlife and Aquatic** Managing and implementing the proposed restrictions will keep the riparian zone at this location in a proper functioning condition and optimize aquatic habitat variables.

**Law Enforcement** The addition of supplementary rules to would help to alleviate issues identified in the proposed action.

## **CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

### **4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS**

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Please see Interdisciplinary Team Review list for BLM Participants

### **4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED**

N/A

## CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 1996. Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. Front Range District. Canon City, Colorado.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. 2012. [305\(b\): Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report](#).

# **Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

## **DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0040 EA**

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

### **RATIONALE:**

**Context:** Guffey Gorge (aka Paradise Cove) is a popular cliff jumping and swimming location along Colorado's Front Range. The area is an 80 acre site located within the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Front Range District's Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO). Guffey Gorge is surrounded by private land with Park County Road 102 providing legal access. The volume of visitors to the site has increased to levels that negatively impact health and safety, vegetation, and trash. The quiet character of the area that used to offer opportunities for solitude has shifted to a busy, overcrowded area. Many of the visitors come to the area to party, displacing families looking for a place to connect with nature. The preferred alternative would implement an adaptive management plan to focus on resource impacts by developing a parking area on the north side of CR 102, install restroom facilities, improve the access trail, and continue Pack-it-in Pack-it-out education and messaging along with trash pickup service. In addition, changes in the social setting include implementing a permit system, banning the possession of alcohol at the site and requiring dogs to be on a leash.

Given these facts, the context of these actions will offer solutions to issues already occurring in Guffey Gorge. Locally, the area that is physically affected is a small 80 acre site but the traffic congestion on the rural county road affects most of the residents in the area. Considering most of the visitors travel a long distance to recreate, the fee regulations and stipulations will reach a regional level.

### **Intensity:**

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Guffey Gorge Management Plan Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

#### **Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:**

Considering the Proposed Action addresses resource concerns that are already impacting the area, the changes will be positive. In the short term, the construction of the parking area and toilet installation may have adverse impacts as noted in the soils, invasive plants, and vegetation resource comments, but should be mitigated with proper planning and monitoring. However, the effects of unrestricted parking also have negative impacts. The difference is that by restricting

the parking spaces over time, improvements will greatly reduce the potential for long term damage. The ban on alcohol would displace some users who come to the area to party. While displacing this type of visitor, it opens the area to those seeking a family friendly setting and the opportunity to connect to nature. Restrictions that keep dogs' on-leash would contribute positively to this type of setting. Dog owners would also be more aware of the location of excrement left so they can pack it out.

**Public health and safety:**

The Proposed Action addresses health and safety through the redesign of the parking area to the north side of the road eliminating pedestrian congestion on the blind hill that currently serves as a crossing point. The addition of a toilet facility will replace the portable toilet to continue reducing the amount of human waste on site. Banning alcohol will help alleviate unsafe choices made by inebriated visitors including driving home from the area.

**Unique characteristics of the geographic area:**

The area is not identified by any special designations (e.g. WSAs, ACEC, W&S rivers, Prime and Unique Farmland or other unique characteristics).

**Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:**

The potential for controversy associated with the effects of the proposed action on resource values is low. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects on the resource values on public land by the proposed action.

**Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:**

There are no highly uncertain effects or unique or unknown risks associated with the proposal.

**Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts:**

The Proposed Action addresses many issues that are similar to those found in other areas, primarily addressing impacts to an area of intense use. The decision is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions. The decision does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

**Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:**

The Proposed Action is intended to reduce impacts already occurring. The resources identified some minor impacts that are affected by the Proposed Action. Cumulative impacts were noted to have an effect on soils, water, wetlands and riparian, wildlife and aquatic and law enforcement. The minor cumulative impacts listed are well offset by the improvements and environmental benefits of the proposed action.

**Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:**

No scientific, cultural or historic properties will be affected by the proposed action.

**Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:**

The activity is an authorized use of public lands and has occurred and will be likely to continue to occur if the no action alternative is selected. The proposed action will not alter the current situation with respect to wildlife. The presence of people along the trail and near the plunge pool will likely remain the same post implementation. Therefore, no impacts beyond the current situation are expected as a result of implementation of these actions.

**Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: Linda Skinner

SUPERVISORY REVIEW:

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: \_\_\_\_\_  
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDICES:

ATTACHMENTS: