

United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Royal Gorge Field Office

3028 E. Main Street

Cañon City, CO 81212

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2015-0063

Shelf Road Rock Climbing Area – Campground Expansion

July, 2015



IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Shelf Road Rock Climbing Area – Campground Expansion

PLANNING UNIT: Shelf Road Climbing Area

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: New Mexico PM; T16S, R70W Sections 27 and 33

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND:

Shelf Road has been established as a rock climbing area since the early 1990's, seeing approximately 18,000 user days annually according to BLM estimates. In close coordination with the American Mountain Foundation, the BLM developed a management plan to address impacts associated with the dramatic increase in rock climbing use. This included the need for day-use parking, two campgrounds, restrooms, and established access trails. These facilities were installed in 1995 and have not been expanded or had added amenities since that time.

In 2014, the BLM estimated the site saw 52,053 visitor days. Staff observations reflect this increase in use regularly reporting issues with exceeding campsite supply, exceeding parking capacity and complaints about quality and quantity of restroom facilities. That same year the Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI) conducted a study, partly to determine visitor satisfaction with the site. Their study indicated that in general people were satisfied with their recreation experience at the site but additional amenities were desired including restrooms and campsites. Several other comments were provided suggesting current sites were too close together resulting in conflicts between visitors.

PURPOSE AND NEED:

The purpose of the document is to address visitor feedback for improved visitor services at the Shelf Road Climbing Area, including the Banks and Sand Gulch Campground. The need arises from the nearly tripled increase in visitor use since facilities were originally installed in 1995. Staff observations indicate an increase in impacts to resources and a decrease in visitor satisfaction as a result of lack of adequate facilities related to the level of recreation use.

PROPOSED ACTION

The BLM proposes to make modifications to the Shelf Road Rock Climbing Area. The general concepts of the changes being proposed are outlined below. It should be noted that final engineered designs developed prior to construction may alter details such as restroom location, number of sites, or site layout. All improvements would be designed to lie as lightly on the land as possible and to blend with the natural environment. Colors and textures of restrooms would be carefully selected to fit with the site. New campsites would follow the same regulations for fee amount and number of vehicles and people per site. Increases in fees are not being considered through this proposed action. The additional sites would be fenced to exclude grazing.

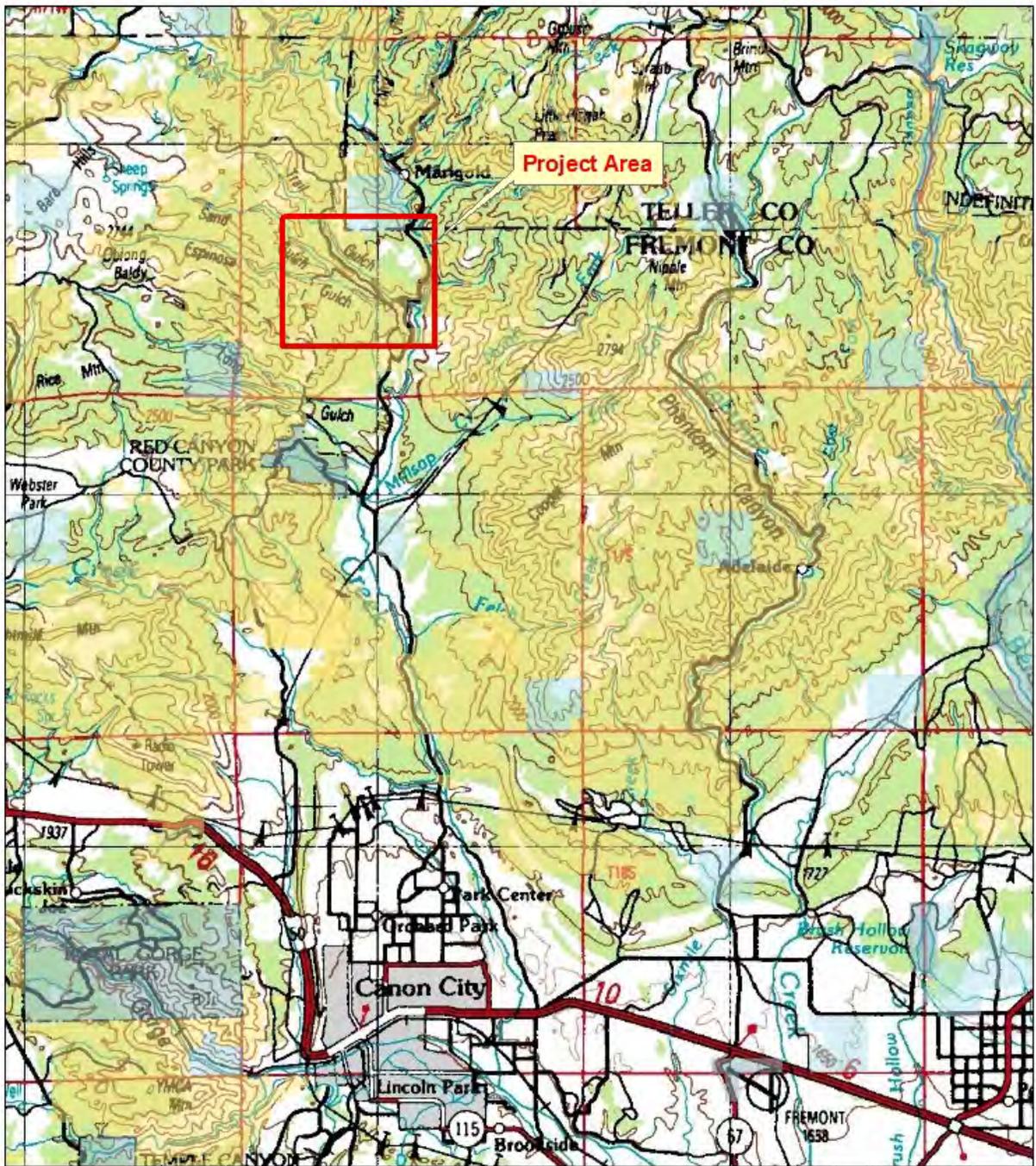
The BLM proposes to make the following changes to the Shelf Road Rock Climbing Area.

- For both the Banks and Sand Gulch expand the current day-use parking area to accommodate more vehicles.
- If funding is available install a vault toilet in the day-use parking area at the Banks Campground.
- Construct additional campground spur roads and add approximately 10-15 campsites to both The Banks and Sand Gulch Campgrounds. Depending upon funding and demand, sites could be developed slowly over time. Priority for development would be given to the Banks Campground where there is higher visitor demand.
 - Campsites would be equipped with a fire ring, picnic table, and tent pads where needed to adequately stake a tent.
 - Design of campsites would allow vehicle access in a response to visitor desires for vehicles to be part of their camp setup and not having to repeatedly walk back and forth.
 - Sites would be designed primarily for tent camping and not to accommodate large RVs or long trailers. Some sites would be designed to accommodate short trailers, especially at Sand Gulch where the access road is more conducive for trailer use.
 - Based on feedback, campsites would be further spread out than current sites.
 - Where feasible larger sites would be added to accommodate large groups. Consideration would be given to have these available through a reservation system. The fee would be the same as group sites.
 - Install a 2 stall CXT Toilet at both the Bank and Sand Gulch.
 - At the Bank Campground a host site would be developed. Attempts would be made to have an on-site volunteer campground host that could provide visitor information and additional amenities for visitors.
- A supplemental rule would be developed to delineate where camping is limited to designated sites and dispersed camping is not allowed. The boundary of this area is shown on the map #2 below.
- Current sites at both campgrounds would be evaluated to determine if changes could be made to reduce the overall proximity. This could include removing sites or combining sites. For all sites that are removed they would be replaced with additional sites so there would still be a net gain of 10-15 sites at each campground.
- Overflow camping would be allowed in vehicles in the day-use parking area and tents within a defined area directly adjacent to the day-use parking area only when all of the campsites are full. Fire rings may not be constructed or used for overflow camping. Signing and information pertaining to the rules would be provided. A fee would not be charged at this time since no facilities would be provided other than proximity to a restroom. If a fee is warranted for overflow camping the business plan would need to be updated and there would be additional opportunity for public input.
- If demand exceeds available parking and campsites 20 days out of the year for three consecutive years then additional parking and campsites would be considered. Additional

review by staff would be warranted.

As components of the project are finalized BLM would conduct site specific resource surveys as needed. Depending upon final design additional review and surveys may be required. Construction activities 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. Any equipment used for construction would be washed prior to being brought onto site to minimize the spread of noxious weed species. An adequate spill kit and shovels would be onsite during project implementation when gasoline powered equipment is used. Seeds used for any post construction reclamation work would be certified weed-free.

If paleontological resources are discovered during construction all construction activities would cease and BLM specialists would be brought in to advise and supervise. The site will be monitored by a paleontologist, qualified to hold a Paleontological Resource Use Permit on a cyclic basis of every 5 years to minimize any impact to protected fossil resources. The purpose of monitoring would be to identify and remove any exposed fossil resources from construction to reduce the chances of fossil theft. A qualified paleontologist shall also be present during any construction that would encounter bedrock.



Shelf Road Rock Climbing Area-Campground Expansion

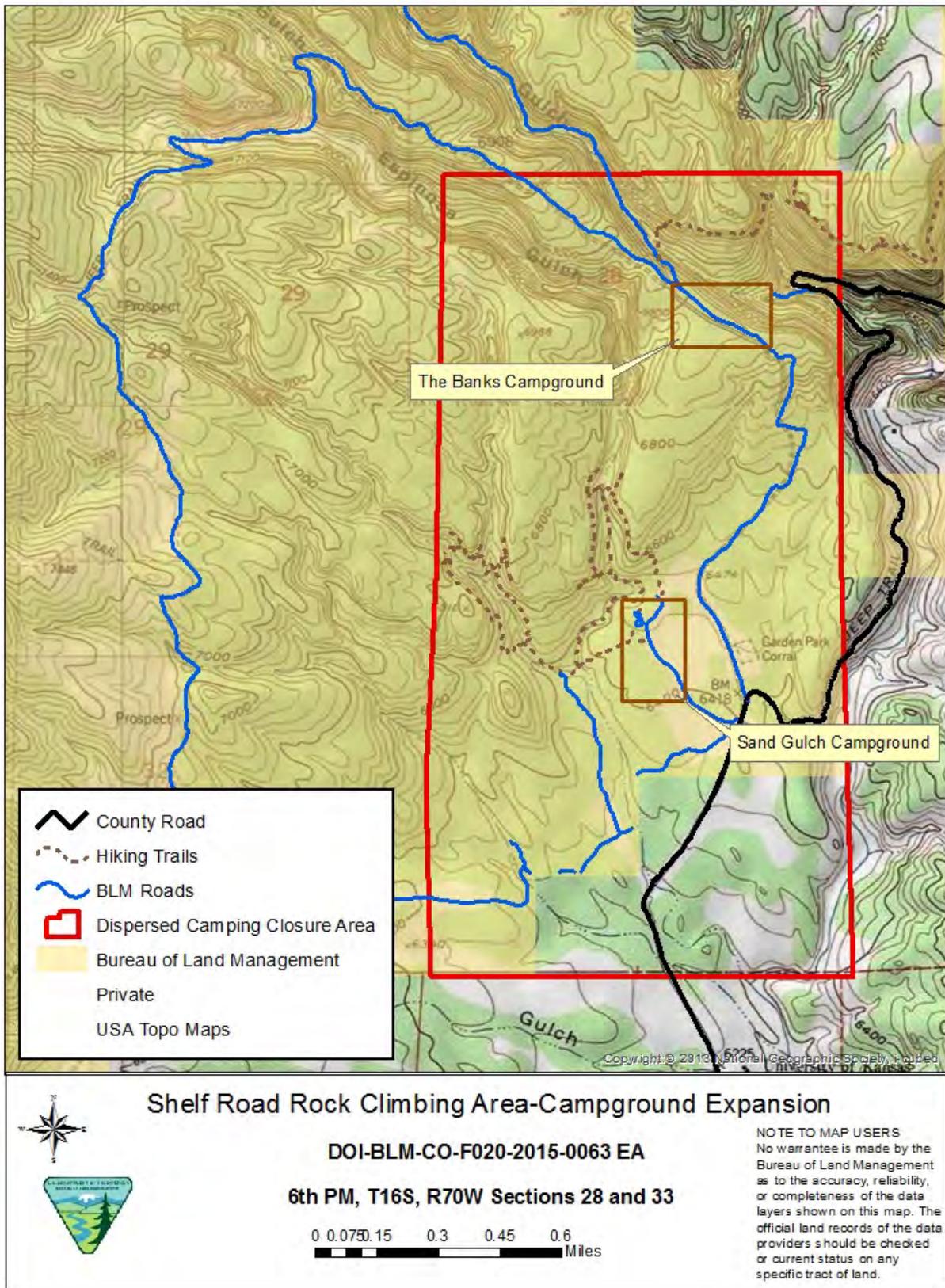
DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2015-0063 EA

6th PM, T16S, R70W Sections 28 and 33

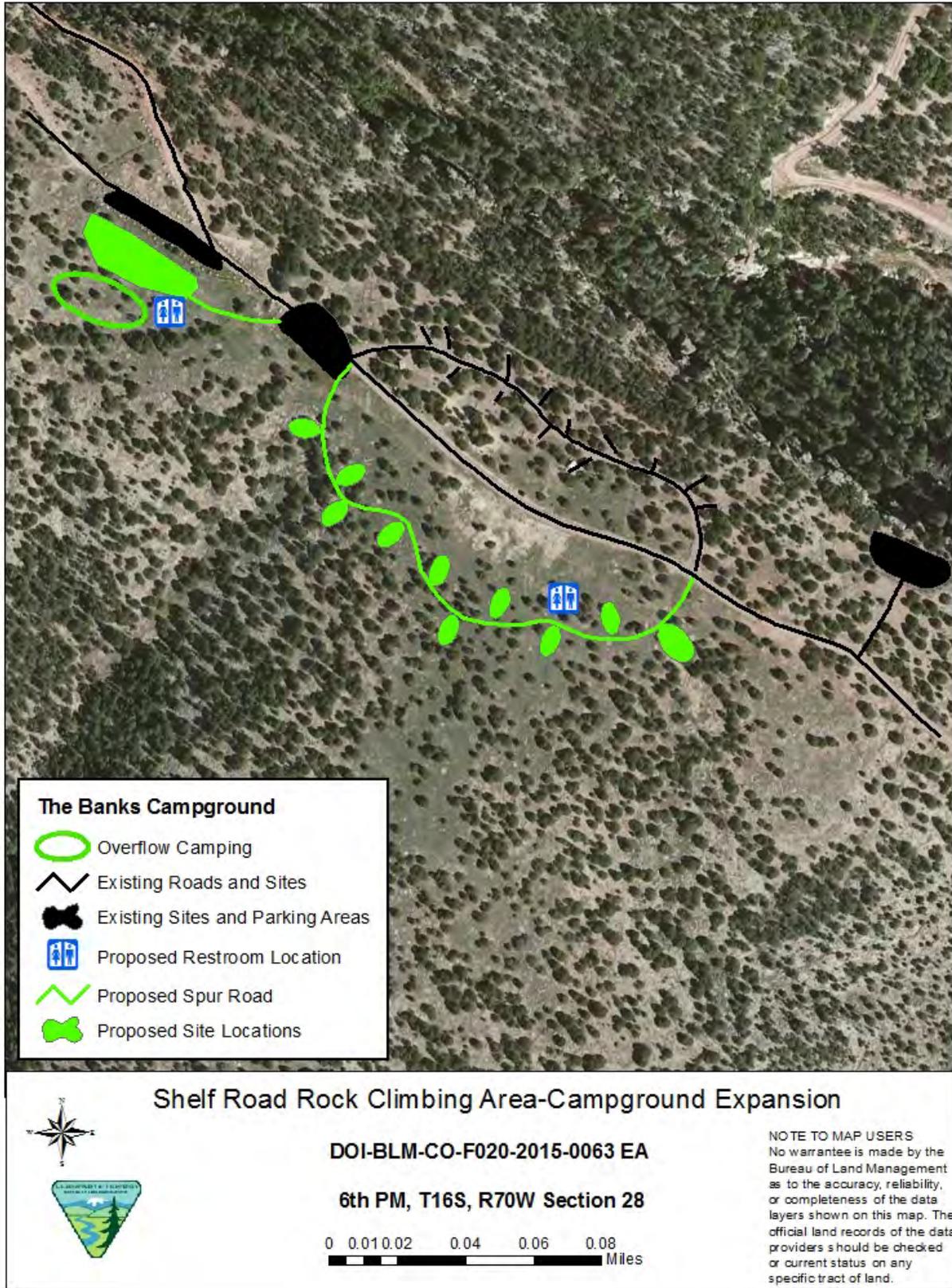


NOTE TO MAP USERS
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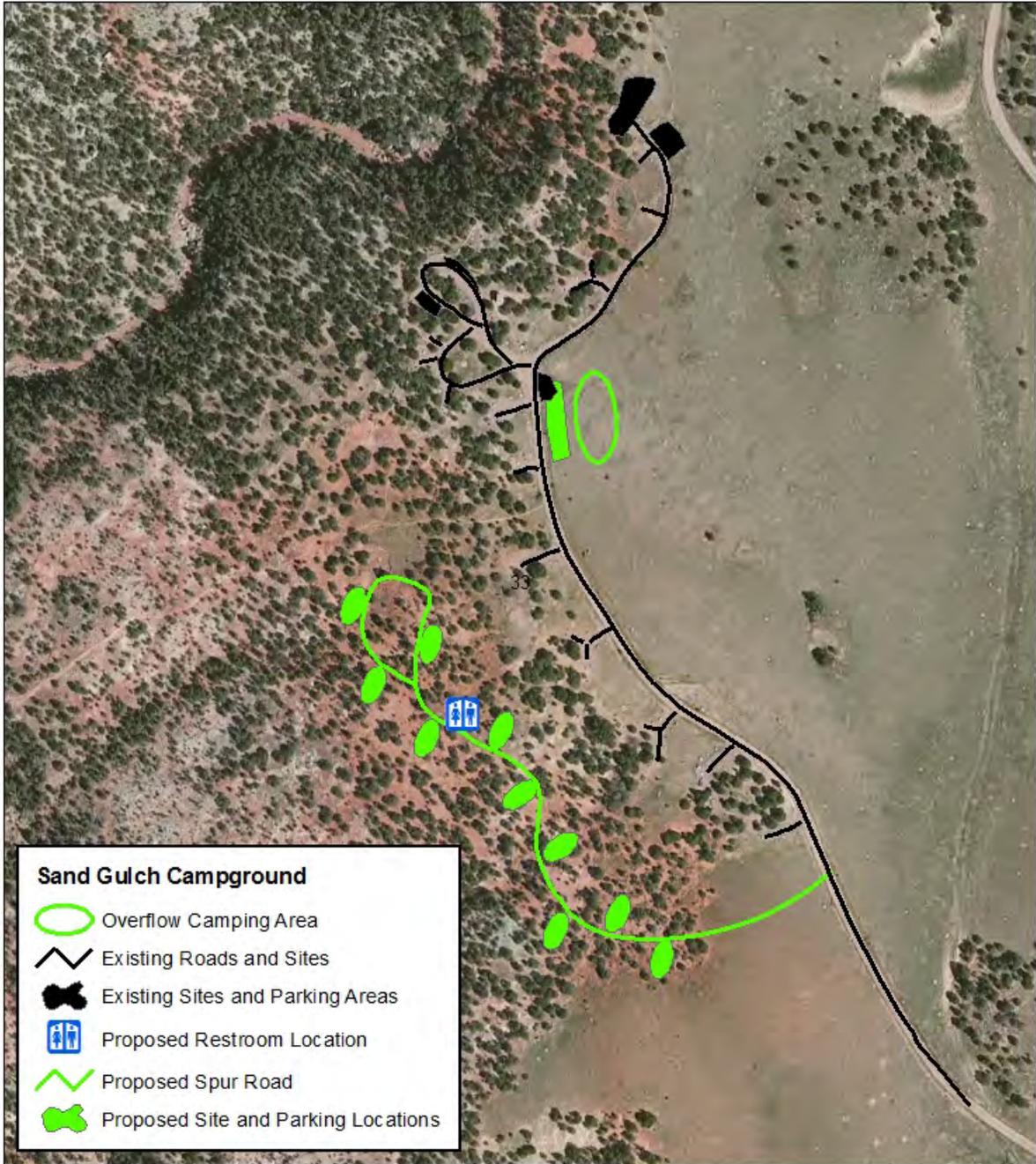
Map #2 – Dispersed Camping Closure Area



Map #3 – Banks Campground Detail



Map #4 – Sand Gulch Campground Detail



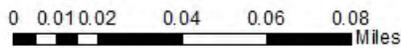
Sand Gulch Campground

-  Overflow Camping Area
-  Existing Roads and Sites
-  Existing Sites and Parking Areas
-  Proposed Restroom Location
-  Proposed Spur Road
-  Proposed Site and Parking Locations

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