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News Release

BLM Colorado

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BLM Releases Draft Management Plan for Land and Mineral Estate Managed by Uncompahgre Field Office in Southwest Colorado

MONTROSE, Colo. –The Bureau of Land Management’s Uncompahgre Field Office today announced the release of a draft plan for managing BLM-administered surface land and mineral estate in southwestern Colorado. The Draft Resource Management Plan Revision (RMP) features a wide range of alternatives reflecting different visions for administering these lands and seeks public review and comment to help refine the draft into a final plan to guide the overall management of these resources for the next two decades. The 90-day comment period on the draft will begin on June 3, 2016, with the publication of a Notice of Availability by the Environmental Protection Agency.

“We have worked with partners in 25 communities to develop the range of alternatives in this draft plan, including a community vision for the North Fork Valley,” said Dana Wilson, Acting BLM Uncompahgre Field Manager. “These are some of the public’s most spectacular landscapes, from canyon country to the foothills of the West Elk Mountains and Grand Mesa, providing recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, forage for grazing and energy resources.”

The Draft RMP will guide the management of about 675,800 acres of BLM-administered surface lands and 971,220 acres of federal mineral estate. Up to 2,650 jobs and \$565 million in regional economic production could be generated annually from these public lands, including recreation, agriculture and energy development.

The plan analyzes the impacts of a wide range of possible alternatives. The BLM is required to identify a Preferred Alternative, but any of the management actions analyzed in these alternatives could become part of the Proposed RMP, which BLM will develop after analyzing the public comments on the Draft RMP.

The Proposed RMP for the Uncompahgre Field Office is scheduled for release in 2017. The BLM’s Preferred Alternative emphasizes balancing resources and resource use among competing human interests, land uses and the conservation of natural and cultural resource values while sustaining and enhancing ecological integrity across the landscape, including plant, wildlife and fish habitat. This alternative incorporates a balanced level of protection, restoration, enhancement, and use of resources and services to meet ongoing programs and land uses.

The Uncompahgre Field Office currently operates under the 1985 San Juan/San Miguel RMP and the 1989 Uncompahgre Basin RMP. These plans typically last about 20 years and are revised to address changing environmental conditions and technological developments and to determine if management decisions contained within them are still current and adequate.

The BLM began the formal public scoping process for this draft plan on February 25, 2010, with the publication of the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*. The initial public scoping period closed March 29, 2010. The BLM hosted seven open houses to provide the public with opportunities to become involved, learn about the project and the planning process, meet the Uncompahgre Draft RMP team members, and offer comments. During the initial public scoping period, the BLM received 214 unique written submissions containing 2,496 separate comments. The issues identified during public scoping and outreach helped refine the development of alternatives for consideration in the Draft RMP.

This draft RMP also incorporates changes that have occurred since public scoping in 2010: the Gunnison Sage-Grouse has been listed as threatened; coal, oil and gas activity in the planning area have decreased due to market forces; and the North Fork oil and gas sub-alternative has been analyzed within the RMP framework.

With respect to mineral development activities, the preferred alternative generally maintains the total area open to oil and gas leasing, however, it increases the area subject to no surface occupancy or controlled surface use stipulations in order to ensure that the development that occurs happens in a manner that protects important resource values. For the Draft RMP does not consider new areas for coal leasing, but the estimate of potential coal resources in the area has increased as compared to the RMP currently in place based on new information regarding the extent and recoverability of the coal resources in the planning area. This revised resource assessment does not impact production estimates, given that the vast majority of the newly identified coal resources are not in areas currently under production, are not of high quality and likely not economically recoverable. Production estimates were used to consider the impacts of potential greenhouse gas emissions, which have become increasingly important considerations in public land management decisions.

Additionally, the plans do not authorize any specific leases or mining operations; any new coal leases would require environmental reviews specific to the particular lease application. The purpose of the RMPs is to provide balanced management of all of the resources in the area including wildlife habitat, ranching, recreation, conservation and mineral development. Several other processes, as well as compliance with Secretarial Order 3338, which orders a comprehensive review of the federal coal program, would be necessary before any additional coal leasing could occur.

In addition to [Secretarial Order 3338](#), the Interior Department is working separately to pursue additional reforms to the federal coal program. These include proposals – such as the Stream Protection Rule – to address the environmental impacts of coal mining – and the Office of Natural Resource Revenue valuation rules – to make sure American taxpayers are getting a fair return on the coal resources managed by the federal government.

During the 90-day public comment period on this Draft RMP, the Uncompahgre Field Office is hosting six public open houses to provide information and an opportunity to comment on the draft plan. Members of the public can stop by anytime between 6-8 p.m. on the following dates at the following locations:

- Monday, June 20, at Ouray County 4-H Events Center, 22739 Hwy. 550 Ridgway, CO 81432

- Tuesday, June 21, at Naturita Public Library Conference Room, 107 W 1st Ave., Naturita, CO 81422
- Wednesday June 22, at Hotchkiss High School Commons Area, 438 Bulldog St., Hotchkiss, CO 81419
- Tuesday June 28, at Delta Center for the Performing Arts Community Room, 822 Grand Ave., Delta, CO 81416
- Wednesday June 29, at Montrose County Fairgrounds Friendship Hall, 1001 N. Second St., Montrose, CO 81401
- Thursday June 30, at Wilkinson Library Program Room, 100 W. Pacific Ave., Telluride, CO 81435

Written comments will be most effective if they are specific to the proposal or analysis and are received by Sept. 1, 2016. Please submit comments by email to uformp@blm.gov or by mail to the BLM, Uncompahgre Field Office, 2465 S. Townsend Ave., Montrose, CO 81401.

The plan and associated environmental documents are available at http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/ufo/uncompahgre_rmp.html (or www.uformp.com). For more information, contact Gina Jones, National Environmental Policy Act Coordinator, at gmjones@blm.gov or (970) 240-5300.

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

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