

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032-EA

August 2014

Black Ridge Trail Construction

Location: Gunnison Gorge Wilderness

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area
2465 South Townsend Avenue
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Bureau of Land Management
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2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032 EA

PROJECT NAME: Black Ridge Trail Construction

PLANNING UNIT: Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

6th Principle Meridian: T15S R93W, sec. 31, 32

New Mexico Principle Meridian: T51N R8W, sec. 7; T51N R9W, sec. 12

APPLICANT: BLM

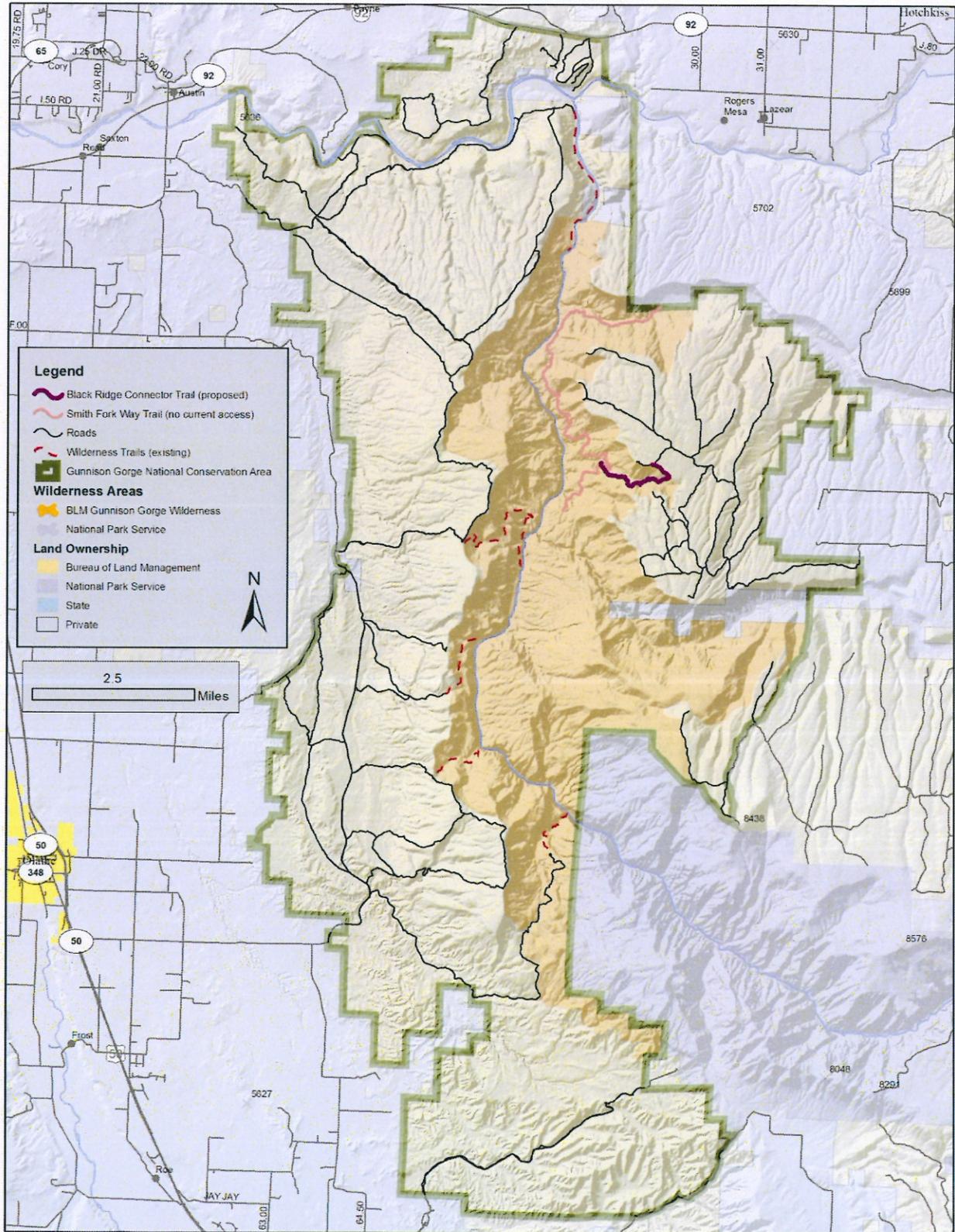
INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (GGNCA) has prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to disclose and analyze the environmental effects of constructing approximately 1.8 miles of hiking/equestrian trail in the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness.

Trail access into the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is currently via four trails on the west side of the wilderness and two trails that enter the wilderness from the north along both shorelines of the Gunnison River. There is one trail on the east side (Smith Fork Trail), which is an old mining route that only connects to private land in Smith Fork Canyon. There is no publicly accessible trail on the east side. (See Figure 1.)

The GGNCA Resource Management Plan (RMP) (November 2004) directs BLM to construct a primitive trail to connect the Smith Fork Way Trail with overlooks on the eastern rim of the wilderness.

Figure 1. Overview of Gunnison Gorge NCA and Wilderness



PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION:

The purpose of the action is to implement decisions in the Gunnison Gorge RMP. The need for the action is to provide for public foot and equestrian trail access into the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness from the east side of the canyon.

Decision to be made:

The BLM will decide whether to approve the construction of a new hiker/equestrian trail in the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness connecting the east rim of the gorge with an existing trail (Smith Fork Way) within the wilderness.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action: BLM proposes to construct approximately 1.8 miles of wilderness trail connecting the Black Ridge area with the existing Smith Fork Trail (figures 2 and 3). The trail would be suitable for hiking and equestrian use, and closed to motorized and mechanized use.

Design Features:

1. All trail construction would be completed with hand tools suitable for use in wilderness: (i.e. no motorized tools and no wheeled methods of conveyance [e.g., wheel barrows]).
2. Limit trail crew size to 12 at each work location in the wilderness.
3. Construct the trails with treads of 24 inches or less in width.
4. Construct the trail to follow natural contours where possible to result in minimum disturbance to soil.
5. Design the trail route to minimize disturbance to woody vegetation.
6. Employ sustainable trail construction practices.
7. Trailhead parking for hikers would use existing informal parking sites among the trees along the canyon rim. Equestrians with horse trailers would park adjacent to an existing corral in the same vicinity (See Figure 4). If parking impacts begin to expand, low wooden fencing, boulders or other low, visually-unobtrusive barriers would be used to constrain the parking.
8. Complete all trail construction between July 15 and May 15 to avoid impacts to migratory birds.
9. To the extent possible, observed reptiles will be avoided by trail building activities and will not be intentionally harmed. Any incidental observations of midget faded rattlesnake or milk snake during construction will be documented (photos and GPS location) in the project case file(s).
10. Monitor new trail sections for weeds and treat as needed.

No Action Alternative: The trail would not be constructed.

Figure 2. Proposed Action Project Area Detail

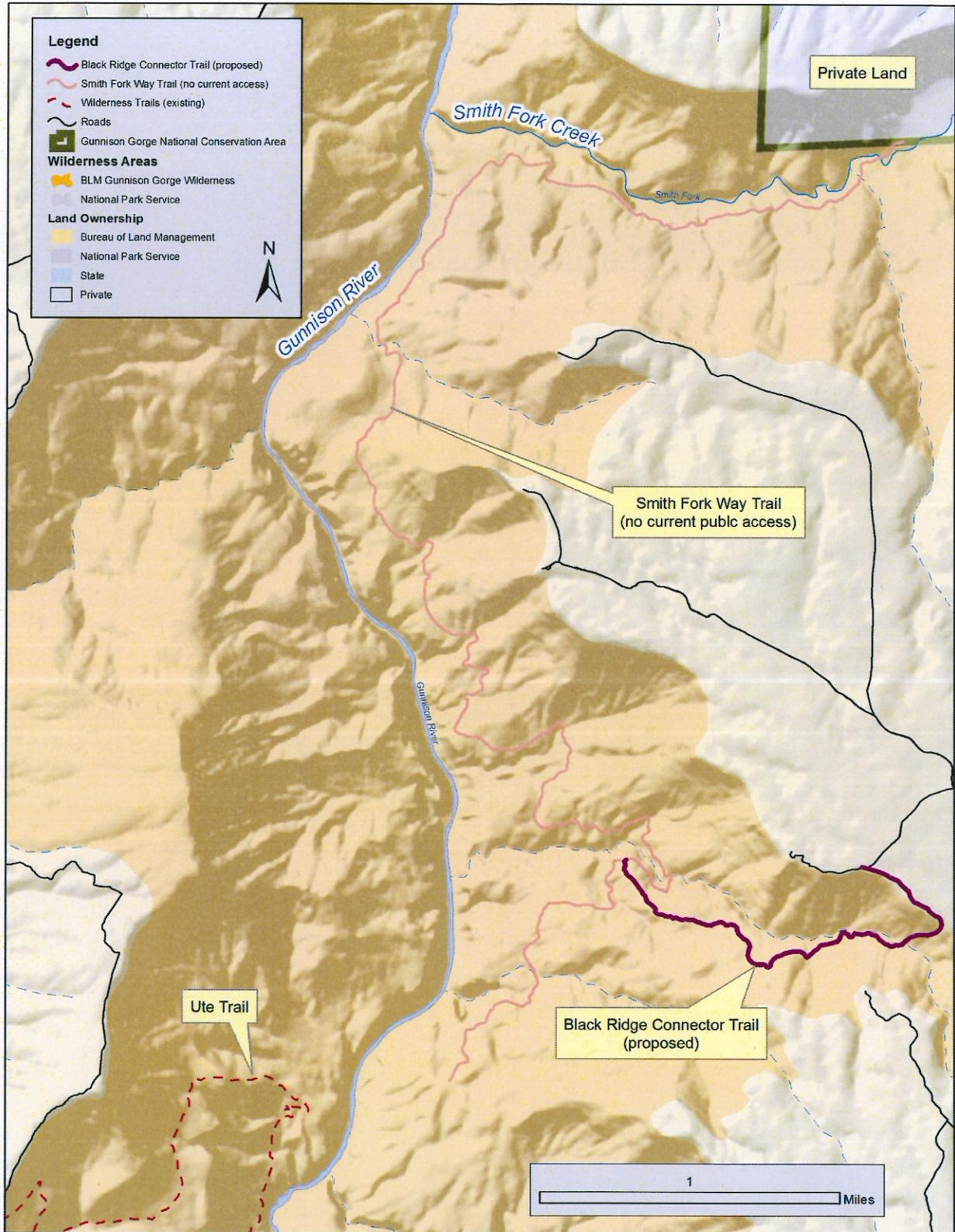


Figure 3. Proposed Action – Connector Trail

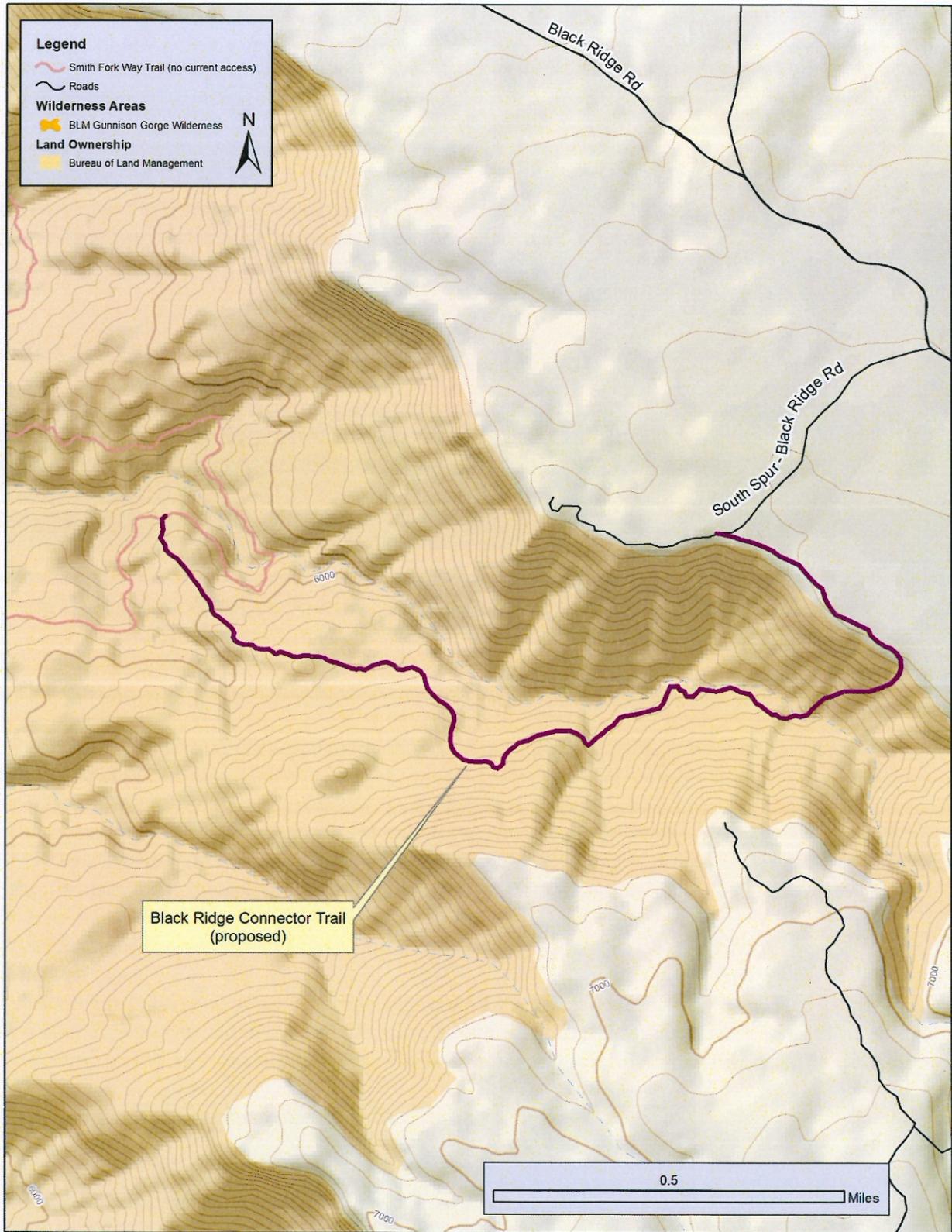


Figure 4. Trailhead Parking



SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES

Scoping letters were mailed to interested parties and the proposed action and maps were available for public review and comment on the Uncompahgre Field Office NEPA website. One comment was received. It was supportive of the proposed trail project, and stated that BLM should follow best management practices for construction of the trail to wilderness standards, including maintaining consistency with BLM Manual Section 6340 – Management of Designated Wilderness Areas.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5-3, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Wilderness Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: November 2004

Decision Number/Page: REC-1-99, page 2-44

Decision Language: BLM will construct primitive trail segments where needed to connect East Side overlook(s) to Smith Fork Way Trail to reduce user-created routes on Wilderness rim.

Relevant guidance from BLM Manual Section 6340, page 1-41:

- A. New trails may be constructed only if they are needed to preserve wilderness values and resources and will not significantly impair the degree of naturalness or solitude in the area. Trails must not be constructed with treads of more than 24 inches in width except where a wider trail is justified to protect the wilderness resource. Trails should follow natural contours where possible and result in minimum disturbance to soil and ground cover. Trail location and design standards should minimize the need for trail installations such as water bars.
- B. Where possible, trailhead/access points should be located well outside the wilderness boundary to reduce their impact upon the wilderness area.
- C. Construction techniques should always give first consideration to using native materials found within the wilderness (e.g. logs, rocks, etc.) A minimum requirements analysis will be used to determine the necessity of using any non-natural materials for trail construction (e.g. sawn lumber, plastic pipe, landscape fabric etc.)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT and ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter provides a description of the human and 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 Proposed Action. Cumulative impacts are shown at the end of this section

Potential effects to the resources/concerns in the table below were evaluated to determine if detailed analysis is necessary. Consideration of some elements is to ensure compliance with laws, statutes, regulation or Executive Orders that impose certain requirements upon all Federal actions. Other items are relevant to the management of public lands in general or to the BLM Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) in particular. Any element not affected by the proposed action will not be analyzed.

Elements	¹ Not Present	² Present / No Analysis Needed	³ Present / Requires Further Analysis	Rationale if not Analyzed
Air Quality		X		The project will involve minimal disturbance, is a small scale, and will not create emissions
ACEC		X		Trailhead parking and the top of the trail would be on the edge of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse ACEC. Parking would occur at existing pull-outs on the canyon rim or adjacent to an existing corral, therefore there would be no new disturbance within the ACEC.
Wilderness			X	
Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	X			Lands in the project area are in designated wilderness. Lands with wilderness characteristics according to BLM Manual Section 6310 are by definition outside of wilderness.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X			There are no eligible or suitable WSR river segments within or adjacent to the project.
Cultural		X		The area has been examined for Cultural Resource presence with negative results. The entire proposed trail is situated on slopes of greater than 30% and is exempt from further work under the provisions of BLM manual 8110.23b1
Native American Religious Concerns		X		There are none known or anticipated for this project.
Farmlands, Prime/Unique	X			There are no farmlands in the project area.
Soils		X		No specific erosion issues. Distance from river is sufficient.

Elements	¹ Not Present	² Present / No Analysis Needed	³ Present / Requires Further Analysis	Rationale if not Analyzed
Vegetation		X		Vegetation will not be damaged to a level of concern.
Invasive, Non-native Species		X		Design features include weed mitigation measures. Weed impacts would not be at a level that needs analysis.
Threatened and Endangered Species	X			T&E plant or animal species are not within the project area.
Migratory Birds		X		Potential habitat for some migratory birds species. Design Features remove impacts to breeding. Recreation user use of trail post construction would not have measureable effects to species. See TES WILDLIFE AND PLANTS REPORT in project record.
Wildlife, Terrestrial		X		Wildlife species may be present, but construction activities as designed would not have measureable effects to species. See TES WILDLIFE AND PLANTS REPORT in project record.
Wildlife, Aquatic	X			Ephemeral drainage; distance to perennial water source is greater than ½ mile.
Wetlands & Riparian Zones	X			There are not any riparian zones or wetlands potentially affected by the project.
Floodplains	X			There are not any floodplains potentially affected by the project.
Water -- Surface	X			Ephemeral drainage; distance to perennial water source is greater than ½ mile.
Water -- Ground		X		The project is a small linear scale, and would not have an effect on ground water.
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	X			No power equipment or machinery being used.
Environmental Justice		X		The project will not disproportionately impact minority or low income populations.
Socio-Economics		X		The project is not expected to have socio-economic impacts to the degree that detailed analysis is needed.
Access			X	

Elements	¹ Not Present	² Present / No Analysis Needed	³ Present / Requires Further Analysis	Rationale if not Analyzed
Transportation	X			There are not any transportation concerns or impacts.
Cadastral Survey		X		There is not any nearby private lands. Cadastral markers would not be impacted.
Realty Authorizations	X			There are not any realty authorizations in the project area.
Range Management		X		The project would not impact livestock grazing or rangeland management.
Forest Management	X			The project is not in a forest or woodland database, and would not impact this resource.
Fire		X		The project would not impact the incidence of fire, and would not impact the ability to control fire.
Noise		X		There could be some noise from hand tool use during trail construction, and some noise from public use of the trail. Noise would not be impacted to the degree that detailed analysis is needed.
Recreation			X	
Visual Resources		X		The Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is managed to Visual Resource Management Class I standards. With the design criteria in place, the trail would be substantially unnoticeable and would not impact the visual quality of the area, and would not impact the visual rating.
Geology and Minerals		X		The trail and trail construction would not impact geology or minerals.
Paleontology		X		There is not any foreseeable impact to paleontology.
Law Enforcement		X		Law enforcement would not be impacted to the degree that detailed analysis is needed.

¹Not present: the element is not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions.

²Present but no analysis needed: the element may be present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required.

³Present and requires further analysis: the element is present and requires further analysis because:
 1) analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or

2) analysis of the issue is necessary to determine the significance of impacts.

WILDERNESS

Affected Environment:

The Gunnison Gorge Wilderness (17,770 acres) comprises the center of Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. It extends from the boundary with Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness (National Park Service) in the south, to about a mile and a half north of Smith Fork Creek. It includes all BLM lands within the canyon of the Gunnison Gorge from rim to rim (see Figure 1). It includes approximately 11 miles of the Gunnison River.

Trail access into the wilderness is from four trails on the west side and two trails from the north:

- Westside trails – located within easy driving distance from Montrose, Olathe and Delta
 - Chukar Trail – hiking and horse access to the river; primary access point for boaters to float the Gunnison River through the wilderness; designated hiker camps
 - Bobcat Trail – short, steep hiking access to the river; not suitable for horses or dogs; designated hiker camps
 - Duncan Trail – short, steep hiking access to the river; not suitable for horses; designated hiker and boater camps
 - Ute Trail – longest trail from the west rim to the river; hiking and horse access; designated hiker, boater and equestrian camps
- Northside trails – located within easy driving distance from Delta, Hotchkiss and Paonia
 - West River Trail – parallels the Gunnison River on the west bank from the confluence with the North Fork of the Gunnison River, south and into the wilderness for about a half mile; used primarily by walk-wade fishers
 - North Fork to Smith Fork Trail – parallels the Gunnison River on the east bank from the confluence with the North Fork of the Gunnison River, south and into the wilderness for about a mile and a half; terminates above Smith Fork Canyon; used primarily by walk-wade fishers

The east side of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is within easy driving distance from Hotchkiss, Paonia and Crawford. One trail (an old now-closed mining road), the Smith Fork Trail, leads from private land in Smith Fork Canyon along the rim of the inner Gorge for about six miles to the south within the wilderness (see Figure 2). There is no public access to Smith Fork Trail. While there are roads leading to its edge, providing spectacular views of the Gunnison Gorge, there are no publicly accessible trails into the wilderness on the east side.

All roads on BLM lands adjacent to the wilderness on the east side are within the Gunnison Sage Grouse Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and are closed to motorized and mechanized travel between November 30 and May 15 each year.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action –

Under the proposed action approximately 1.8 miles of trail suitable for hiking and horse use would be constructed. With a maximum tread width of 24 inches, the anticipated footprint of the new construction would be about 0.44 acres. Because of the narrow, natural tread of the proposed trail, and because it contours along the slopes of a remote side-drainage, the new trail would be substantially unnoticeable from vantage points in the wilderness.

The proposed Black Ridge Trail would begin near a corral along the South Spur of Black Ridge Road adjacent to the wilderness boundary and would terminate at the junction with the Smith Fork Trail (Figure 3), which would provide public access to an additional six miles of trail (Smith Fork Trail) along the rim of the narrow inner-gorge.

Because of the remoteness of the east side access roads from populated areas, the seasonal road closures, and lack of access to the river it is anticipated that visitor use would be fairly low. BLM estimates that use numbers would be at most half that of the Bobcat Trail, the least busy wilderness trail on the west side. Wilderness permit data show that Bobcat receives about 200 hikers per year, so the proposed Black Ridge Trail would see around 100 visitors per year.

The low level of visitation would meet the standards for the Social Setting prescribed in the Resource Management Plan for Recreation Management Zone MU1-3 Outer Wilderness Canyon Area - outer canyon above inner Gorge on east and west sides (up to 3 encounters with other groups; average group size of 2-3 people).

The trail would provide enhanced administrative access to this area of the wilderness. BLM field staff would have increased ability to patrol and monitor the wilderness in the vicinity of both the proposed trail and the existing Smith Fork Trail.

Effects to Wilderness Character:

The proposed trail would be a development and would have a small negative effect on the undeveloped quality of the wilderness. The miles of maintained trails in the wilderness would increase from 17 (current) to 19.

The trail would increase opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation by providing trail access to a large part of the wilderness that is currently inaccessible by trail to the public.

Because there would be an increased chance of encountering other people as a result of the proposed trail, some opportunities for solitude for people who may currently enter the area for off-trail experiences would be lost. At the same time, more people (particularly equestrians) would have opportunities to experience solitude in this part of the wilderness who would not otherwise use the area without trail access. This would result in a small net increase in opportunities for solitude.

If monitoring of the trail indicated an increase in weeds, the resulting treatment would have a negative effect on the untrammeled quality in the immediate vicinity of the trail. However, since the trail footprint is small (< ½ acre) the effect on the untrammeled quality relative to the whole wilderness would be negligible.

The design criteria built into this project would ensure the protection of the natural quality of the wilderness.

No Action Alternative –

No changes to the wilderness would occur. RMP decision REC-1-99 would not be implemented.

ACCESS

Affected Environment:

Trail access into the wilderness is from four trails on the west side and two trails from the north. See the Wilderness section for additional information.

The east side of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is within easy driving distance from Hotchkiss, Paonia and Crawford. See the Wilderness section for more information on access from the east side.

There are no private lands in the vicinity of the project area.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action –

The public would have access to 1.8 miles of new (proposed) trail, plus 6 miles of existing trail (Smith Fork Trail) that currently have no public access.

Access to private lands, rights of way and range operations would be unchanged.

No Action Alternative –

There would be no change to public access to the wilderness. There would be no change to access to private land, rights of way or range operations.

RECREATION

Affected Environment:

Recreational use of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is primarily focused on activities in the river corridor. Primary activities are fishing, boating (both straight-up whitewater trips and float-fishing trips), and camping along the river. Hiking and horseback use is mostly for the purpose of accessing the river, since the river within the wilderness can only be accessed via wilderness trails.

The exception to this is use of the Bighorn Trail, which does not access the river. It is lightly used and provides hiking and equestrian access, with expansive views, on the west side of the wilderness along the rim of the inner gorge between Bobcat and Duncan trails.

There is one trail – Smith Fork Trail – on the east side of the wilderness that runs for about six miles along the rim of the inner gorge. It has excellent views of the wilderness, including views

down into the narrowest part of the inner gorge known as the “miracle mile,” an area of the most concentrated series of rapids in the wilderness. However, since it can only be accessed from private land, there is no public access to the Smith Fork Trail.

Environmental Consequences:

Proposed Action –

The proposed trail would provide the only hiking and equestrian trail access to the east side of the wilderness. In addition to the 1.8 miles of proposed trail, by providing connectivity to the Smith Fork Trail it would open up hiking and equestrian opportunities along an additional six miles of trail.

As noted in the Wilderness section, the proposed Black Ridge Trail would see around 100 visitors per year. The low level of visitation would meet the standards for the Social Setting prescribed in the Resource Management Plan for Recreation Management Zone MUI-3 Outer Wilderness Canyon Area - outer canyon above inner Gorge on east and west sides (up to 3 encounters with other groups; average group size of 2-3 people).

Since neither the proposed trail nor the Smith Fork Trail provide access to the river, this project is unlikely to affect recreational use or experiences in the river corridor.

No Action Alternative –

There would be no changes to recreational opportunities or use patterns.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY

Cumulative impacts are the environmental impacts that could result from the implementation of the Proposed Action, when added to the impacts from all other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities, regardless of who is conducting such activities. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor, but collectively significant, actions taking place over a period of time. The cumulative effects analysis considers the geographic scope of the cumulative effects and past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

Past Actions

Most wilderness trails existed at the time of designation of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness. Bighorn Trail (1.5 miles) was constructed on the west side of the wilderness to provide hiking and equestrian access in 2011. This action increased mileage of designated wilderness trails from 15.5 to 17 miles.

Present Actions

The proposed trail project would increase the mileage of designated wilderness trails from 17 to 19 miles. By connecting to the Smith Fork Trail the project would open up hiking and equestrian opportunities along an additional six miles of trail; publicly accessible trail mileage would increase from about 11 miles to 19 miles within the wilderness.

Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

RMP decision REC-1-99 allows for more than one new section of trail to be constructed from east side overlooks to the Smith Fork Trail. It is possible that other sections of trail (in addition to the one currently proposed) could be constructed in the future.

Summary

The proposed increase in mileage of designated wilderness trails within the wilderness, along with the potential for limited additional trail construction in the future could have cumulative impacts on recreation and wilderness character. Opportunities for wilderness recreation would increase. As discussed in the "Wilderness" section of this document, there would be a minor trade-off between qualities of wilderness character. More constructed, designated trail would lead to a small decrease in the "undeveloped" nature of the wilderness, while at the same time opportunities for "primitive and unconfined recreation" would increase somewhat. In all, cumulative effects would be minor.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW: The following BLM personnel have contributed to and have reviewed this environmental assessment.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Area of Responsibility</u>
Edd Franz	Outdoor Rec Planner	Wilderness; Recreation; Access
Glade Hadden	Archaeologist	Cultural
Jedd Sondergard	Hydrology	Soils, Water
Amanda Clements	Ecologist	Vegetation
Missy Siders	Wildlife Biologist	TE&S, Migratory Birds, Wildlife
Bruce Krickbaum	NEPA Coordinator	NEPA, Document Review

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032 EA

Project Name: Black Ridge Trail Construction

Location: Gunnison Gorge Wilderness

Applicant: BLM

Background

The BLM Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area has completed Environment Assessment (EA) # DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032, which analyzes the effects of constructing 1.8 miles of hiking/equestrian trail within Gunnison Gorge Wilderness.

BLM provided a public scoping and comment period from May 28 through June 30, 2014. BLM received 1 comment, which was addressed in the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032 EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The proposed action includes design features to reduce impacts.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The Gunnison Gorge Wilderness (17,770 acres) comprises the center of Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. It extends from the boundary with Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness (National Park Service) in the south, to about a mile and a half north of Smith Fork Creek. It includes all BLM lands within the canyon of the Gunnison Gorge from rim to rim (see Figure 1). It includes approximately 11 miles of the Gunnison River.

The east side of the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness is within easy driving distance from Hotchkiss, Paonia and Crawford. One trail (an old now-closed mining road), the Smith Fork Trail, leads

from private land in Smith Fork Canyon along the rim of the inner Gorge for about six miles to the south within the wilderness (see Figure 2). There is no public access to Smith Fork Trail.

Construction of the proposed trail would provide public trail access to the eastern portion of the wilderness, and to the currently inaccessible Smith Fork Trail.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Beneficial impacts:

Recreational opportunities would be increased by providing trail access into the eastern portion of the wilderness for both hikers and equestrians. By constructing 1.8 miles of new trail, access to an additional 6 miles of existing, designated trail would be gained. Wilderness character would be enhanced for the quality of “outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.” The project would also improve BLM’s ability to administer the wilderness by providing administrative trail access for the purposes of wilderness monitoring.

Adverse impacts:

Increasing the mileage of constructed trails in the wilderness would have a slight adverse impact on the quality of the “undeveloped” character of the wilderness. The trail would have a footprint of less than ½ acre.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

The project would have no adverse effect on public health and safety. Hikers and equestrians using the trail would experience moderate physical and mental health benefits.

3) Unique Characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The project is located within Gunnison Gorge Wilderness, which in turn is within Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area. A part of the project is located adjacent to the Gunnison Sage Grouse Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

This project is not likely to be controversial. Only one scoping comment was received, and it was in support of the project.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects of trail construction and use are well understood, and risks to the human environment are low.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Trail construction projects are routine. This project is highly unlikely to lead to future actions with significant effects. The proposed action in itself would not trigger any future actions.

7) *Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The proposed action was analyzed in relation to other actions in the “cumulative effects” section of the EA. The cumulative effects were found to be insignificant.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

Internal scoping and analysis and external scoping indicate that the action would have no effect on any of the concerns listed above.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.*

While Gunnison sage grouse is neither threatened nor endangered, it is a species of concern. Internal scoping revealed that the project area is near, but outside of, Gunnison sage grouse critical habitat. The project would have no adverse effect on Gunnison sage grouse.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action is consistent with federal, state and local law. It would violate no requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and Wilderness Resource Management Plan (November 2004); and 3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Authorized Official:



Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

8/20/14
Date

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401**

Decision Record

(DOI-BLM-CO-S054-2014-0032 EA)

DECISION: It is my decision to approve construction of approximately 1.8 miles of wilderness trail connecting the Black Ridge area with the existing Smith Fork Trail. The trail will be suitable for hiking and equestrian use, and closed to motorized and mechanized use.

MITIGATION MEASURES: Mitigation is not needed. The decision includes the following design features, which must be implemented.

1. All trail construction will be completed with hand tools suitable for use in wilderness: (i.e. no motorized tools and no wheeled methods of conveyance [e.g., wheel barrows]).
2. Limit trail crew size to 12 at each work location in the wilderness.
3. Construct the trails with treads of 24 inches or less in width.
4. Construct the trail to follow natural contours where possible to result in minimum disturbance to soil.
5. Design the trail route to minimize disturbance to woody vegetation
6. Employ sustainable trail construction practices.
7. Trailhead parking for hikers would use existing informal parking sites among the trees along the canyon rim. Equestrians with horse trailers would park adjacent to an existing corral in the same vicinity. If parking impacts begin to expand, low wooden fencing, boulders or other low, visually-unobtrusive barriers would be used to constrain the parking.
8. Complete all trail construction between July 15 and May 15 to avoid impacts to migratory birds.
9. To the extent possible, observed reptiles will be avoided by trail building activities and will not be intentionally harmed. Any incidental observations of midget faded rattlesnake or milk snake during construction will be documented (photos and GPS location) in the project case file(s).
10. Monitor new trail sections for weeds and treat as needed.

MONITORING: Monitor construction activity to ensure the trail is constructed appropriately. Monitor for weeds post-construction.

RATIONALE: The trail will provide foot and horse access to the east side of the Gunnison Gorge NCA. The GGNCA Resource Management Plan directs BLM to construct a primitive trail to connect the Smith Fork Trail with the eastern rim of the wilderness.

COMPLIANCE WITH MAJOR LAWS:

The decision is in compliance with applicable laws, regulations and policy, including the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICAN IMPACT:

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was prepared, based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Gunnison Gorge NCA Resource Management Plan; and 3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

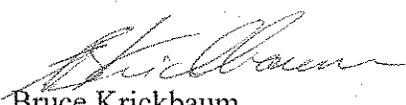
PUBLIC COMMENT:

Scoping letters were mailed to interested parties and the proposed action and maps were available for public review and comment on the Uncompahgre Field Office NEPA website. One comment was received. It was supportive of the proposed trail project, and stated that BLM should follow best management practices for construction of the trail to wilderness standards, including maintaining consistency with BLM Manual Section 6340 – Management of Designated Wilderness Areas. This comment was addressed in the EA.

APPEALS:

Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, you have the right of appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.400. Appeal and stay procedures are outlined in Form CO-050-1842-1.

NAME OF PREPARER: Edd Franz

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:  Bruce Krickbaum

DATE 8-19-14

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL



Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

DATE SIGNED

8/20/14