

**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-S050-2011-0011 EA

Location: T45N, R8W, sec. 3, 4, and 9 and T46N, R8W, sec. 22, 23, 26, 27, 34, 35 in Ouray County, CO

Project Name: Ridgway Comprehensive Travel Management Plan

Applicant: BLM, Uncompahgre Field Office

Background

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office has completed an Environment Assessment (DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2011-0011 EA) which analyses the impacts of implementing four different alternatives to address issues relative to travel use of public lands in the Ridgway Travel Management Planning Area, as well as the need for motorized and non-motorized travel for a variety of purposes, including for land management and recreational activities. The alternatives are three action alternatives (Proposed Action and Alternatives 1 and 2) and the No Action Alternative.

BLM provided a public scoping and comment period from March 30 through May 18, 2012. BLM received 47 comments, which were addressed in the EA. BLM also provided an additional comment period from December 11, 2012 to February 1, 2013 for the public to review and comment on the preliminary environmental assessment. BLM received 140 comments from a motorized group, a non-motorized group, interested individuals including adjacent landowners, and local, state, and federal governments. Some changes were made to the proposed action and route designations based on the comments received.

Consistent with the BLM's National Environmental Policy Handbook (H-1790-1), the FONSI only needs to make conclusions about the selected alternative or alternatives. Alternatives that are not selected do not need to be described in the FONSI. This FONSI is prepared for the Proposed Action and Alternative 1.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2011-0011 EA, I have determined that neither the Proposed Action nor Alternative 1 will have a significant effect on the human environment.

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 Ridgway travel management plan (TMP) includes three areas of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands that total approximately 1066 acres. The Ridgway Area is located approximately 3 miles north of the Town of Ridgway and is bounded on the north by Ouray County Road (OCR) 8, on the south by OCR10, on the west by U.S. Highway 550 and Ridgway State Park, and the east by private lands. There is also a total of 0.6 miles of County Road 10B located within the area which will not be affected by decisions made in this plan. The terrain of the area generally consists of drainages, narrow ridges, and mesa tops. The second area is the Ouray County Ridgway Gravel Pit Area located within the southern end of the Ridgway Area. County Road 10B is used to access the gravel pit. The gravel pit is authorized under a BLM Free-use Permit (FUP) to Ouray County. The third area is the BLM Uncompahgre Riverway Area located on the Uncompahgre River about ¼ of mile north of Ridgway, CO. The area is surrounded by private land and the Town of Ridgway property. There is a concrete trail running through the area starting at the town of Ridgway and going all the way to Ridgway State Park.

Due to increasing multiple use demands, user conflicts and issues related to recreational trails, private land access, rights-of-ways, utility corridors, wildlife protection and other resource impacts, BLM has determined that route by route planning would be beneficial to the area by providing active management and encouraging responsible use. The transportation network needs to be functional and meet multiple needs in this area, such as right of ways (ROWs), recreation, and protection and maintenance of quality winter habitat for big game and other wildlife species. Since the Ridgway area is also bounded on the west by Ridgway State Park/Bureau of Reclamation and the Uncompahgre Riverway area is bounded on the north by a Town of Ridgway property, the travel management plan needs to be consistent with the Town of Ridgway and Ridgway State Park/Bureau of Reclamation regulations, management, and travel designations.

Under the Proposed Action and Alternatives, the OHV designation would be changed to Limited to Designated Routes Yearlong or with Seasonal Restrictions.

The Proposed Action and Alternatives would also designate a system or network of routes. This action designates the specific routes for motorized and non-motorized travel, establishes conditions of use for designated routes (such as seasons of use), provides for rehabilitation of routes, and recommends the design and construction of facilities and improvements to support the Transportation Plan.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The beneficial effects of the Ridgway Travel Management Plan include the designation of routes, which is intended to dramatically slow the proliferation of user-created routes. This would slow the increase in resource impacts and habitat fragmentation occurring in this area. It will also provide support facilities for non-motorized users, which will help to distribute use and potential impacts.

Adverse effects include probable increased non-motorized use of designated routes that may result in soil compaction as well as the potential crowding of routes.

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

The designation of routes separates some of the conflicting recreational uses. Signing and maps will clearly define which uses will be allowed on each route, so that users can be informed of the potential safety hazards of using a particular route. Closing and rehabilitating certain routes will remove potentially hazardous routes from the route network. Designing and constructing support facilities will help distribute use, which will potentially create a safer and more enjoyable experience for all users.

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.

There are no prime or unique farmlands, Wilderness/WSAs or wild and scenic rivers in or near the planning area. The Ridgway area is adjacent to Ridgway State Park managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Bureau of Reclamation. The Uncompahgre Riverway area is adjacent to the Dennis Weaver Memorial Park managed by the Town of Ridgway as well as private land that contain conservation easements to protect wildlife and riparian areas. Proposed travel designation of routes that cross boundaries is consistent with management of the adjacent parks.

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

The BLM attended several public meetings, distributed maps for public consideration, solicited and received public comments, conducted some on-the-ground meetings, and held individual meetings and interviews to discuss and address the effects of the action on the human and natural environment.

While opinion differs on which alternative to select, effects on the quality of the human environment are not controversial. The Proposed Action and Alternative 1 fulfill the legal and regulatory mandates required of BLM to protect the public lands from significant resource impacts and provide a safer environment for the public. The Proposed Action and alternatives also provides travel opportunities that satisfy the goals and objectives established while reducing environmental effects in the long run, and resolve transportation issues identified by the public.

The Proposed Action and alternative 1 will restrict mechanized and motorized entry onto BLM lands from private lands (limited to designated routes) as well as restrict all public entry into the area during seasonal closures (December 1 to April 30), which could be controversial to some of the public, but receive support from many others. Effects do not result in a scientific controversy.

The EA follows established mandates outlined in the BLM national policy on Comprehensive Travel Management Planning, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and BLM Colorado standards for public land health.

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

The effects described in the EA are not highly uncertain. Limiting travel to designated routes is anticipated to improve the overall quality of the human environment. Sensitive areas, such as sensitive plant areas and wildlife winter range, would receive better protection.

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.

The Travel management Plan will not establish a precedent for future actions. By policy, all of the Uncompahgre Field Office will have travel management planning completed. The Ridgway Travel Management Plan is only one area that will receive travel management planning.

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

Analysis in the EA does not identify any individual or cumulatively significant environmental impacts. Adverse impacts occurring from current management (the no-action alternative) are expected to be reduced.

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.

Adverse effects to any National Register or otherwise eligible historic property were not identified during research or analysis for the EA.

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

Adverse effects to any endangered, threatened or federally protected species or habitats were not identified during research or analysis for the EA.

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

The Travel Management Plan will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement 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 or alternative 1, individually or in combination, will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the proposed action or alternative 1 are in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin Resource Management Plan, as amended; and 3) the proposed action or alternative 1 do not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Approved:

Barbara Sharrow
Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

5-10-13
Date