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**August 16, 2010**

## BLM in the Spotlight

### City of Durango Protects Forested Watershed with State, Federal Funding

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**DURANGO, Colo.** – The water winding its way down Junction Creek, a scenic tributary of the Animas River to the north of Durango, Colo., doesn't end its journey there. After the creek meanders past the ponderosa pine forests of Durango's Dalla Mountain Park, it transports runoff to the Animas River, which in turn flows into the larger San Juan River.

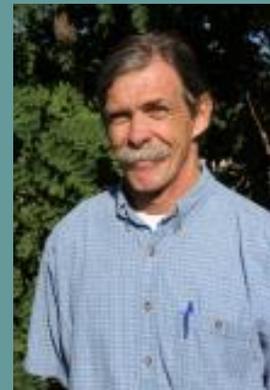
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Bob Hurley

This watershed provides recreation, irrigation and fresh water to many Four Corners communities. As a result, forest management activities conducted near Dalla Mountain Park have in part focused on minimizing negative impacts to the watershed. To protect a forested watershed, catastrophic wildfire must be prevented; this can be a challenge in an area primed for just such a fire.

"Dalla Park is in a historic high-frequency fire regime, but we've missed a lot of fire cycles there," said Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist Craig Goodell of San Juan Public Lands Center. Despite a history of regular, low-intensity fires, he says no large wildfires have burned in the area for more than 125 years.

Intense wildfires lead to severe runoff and soil erosion due to the resulting lack of ground cover, soil water repellency and sterile soils. These high rates of runoff and erosion can greatly lower water quality in nearby streams, and ultimately clog reservoirs downstream with sediment.

Yet the risk for heavy post-fire runoff and sediment erosion into Junction Creek – not to mention the immediate wildfire risk to Durango residents – has recently been reduced, thanks to funding from Colorado's Forest Restoration Pilot Program administered by the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS).

### **A High Risk for Wildfire**

Durango residents utilize Dalla Mountain Park for hiking, walking dogs, mountain biking and rock climbing. Sandwiched between Bureau of Land Management (BLM) acreage to the northeast and private land to the southwest, the 176-acre park sits in a classic wildland-urban interface zone. Until recently, the park was cloaked in a thick understory of flammable Rocky Mountain juniper and Gambel oak – vegetation that could have set the stage for a catastrophic wildfire.

Officials with the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department, which manages the park, knew they needed to implement fuels reduction projects in the park to protect the community and water supply. The city began fuels reduction efforts in the park using two BLM grants in 2006, and was able to treat approximately 16 of the targeted acres. The next year, the city applied for Forest Restoration Pilot Program funding through the CSFS and in 2008 received a Community Forest

## **Employee Spotlight**

### **Introducing BLM Colorado's New Royal Gorge Field Office Fire Management Officer**

The Bureau of Land Management in Colorado welcomes Bob Hurley as the Fire Management Officer for the Royal Gorge Field Office and San Carlos District of the Pike San Isabel National Forest.

Bob started his federal career on the Arapahoe/Roosevelt National Forest on an engine in 1976 while working on his forestry degree at Colorado State University. After graduating, he went on to work as a forester for the State of Alaska from 1979-1984. Bob also worked as a BLM Smokejumper from 1987-2004. Most recently, he served as the Fire Management Officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Fort Apache Agency in Arizona.

Outside of his work with the fire program, Bob enjoys hiking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing with his wife Michelle.

"Last November we hiked in Nepal to Everest Base Camp," Bob said.

They also climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in 2004. Bob is looking forward to discovering all of the new adventures that Colorado has to offer.

Restoration award to reduce fuels in the park along its trail system. With additional grant funding received in 2009, the park utilized more than \$46,000 in Forest Restoration grants in 2008-2009 to treat additional acreage, matched by more than \$25,000 from the city and another \$10,000 awarded by the BLM (overall, a 43-percent match).

"With the economic downturn heavily impacting local budgets, the City of Durango must leverage local resources with outside funding in order to continue to undertake fuels reduction and healthy forest initiatives around the community," said Kevin Hall, the parks, open space and trails development manager for the city.

The Forest Restoration Pilot Program allows the state to fund projects that demonstrate a community-based approach to forest restoration. Projects funded by this program, which the CSFS administers, focus on protecting water supplies and related infrastructure, as well as restoring ecosystem function in forested watersheds. Forest management efforts may range from thinning and fuels reduction to replanting trees.

Goodell says one reason Dalla Mountain Park was awarded grant funding was that the project complements an adjacent BLM project in which 700 acres of forest are being thinned to reduce potential fire intensity. The similar Dalla Park project next door increased the potential effectiveness of this BLM project, according to Goodell.

"We get more bang for our buck when we treat across boundaries," he said.

## Going Light on the Land

The city contracted the Southwest Conservation Corps to complete the Dalla Mountain Park treatments, employing hand crews to minimize soil disturbance in the watershed. Although non-mechanized thinning is more expensive and time consuming than operations using heavy equipment, CSFS Durango District Forester Kent Grant says that it has a much lighter impact on the ground, which is important when watershed protection is one of the ultimate project goals.

The corps hand-thinned the scrub oak and juniper beneath the ponderosa pine overstory, and pruned or removed some pines. Cut wood was donated to La Plata County's needy, chipped by city workers or assembled in slash piles. The CSFS Durango

## Ask BLM

### What are the three distinct categories of solid mineral production on public land in Colorado?

1. locateables
2. leaseables
3. saleables

Locateables include minerals like gold, silver, copper, molybdenum and uranium.

Coal and sodium are also available for mineral leasing. Leases are issued for specific periods of time, and the lessee pays an annual rental fee, and royalties on the minerals produced.

Common sand, gravel, and other construction and landscaping materials are available to the public through material sales at fair market value, or through free-use permits to local, county, and state government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

If you have something you want to learn about, "Ask BLM" at [Colorado\\_News@blm.gov](mailto:Colorado_News@blm.gov)



district burned the piles in a demonstration for the community, with assistance from the Durango Fire & Rescue Authority and San Juan Public Lands Center.

"This was an important milestone because it was the first time the city had done a prescribed burn on its mountain park or open space properties. The burn went smoothly, so prescribed fire will likely be used again in the future when appropriate to do so," said Grant.

In 2008-2009, more than 37 acres were treated at Dalla Mountain Park using Forest Restoration Pilot Program funding. More acreage is slated for treatment in the next one to two years.

### **Watershed Now Braced for Fire**

"If there is a significant wildfire in Dalla Mountain Park, it should now be less intense and less likely to become a devastating crown fire," said Grant. "Hence it would have a limited impact on the Junction Creek and Animas River watersheds."

Hall says that the Forest Restoration Pilot Program grants have been critical to completing the Dalla Mountain Park project, and that the City of Durango intends to continue using grant funding to prevent local watersheds from experiencing an excessive build up of fuel. Grant agrees that maintaining a more open, historical forest composition is essential for Durango's rural parkland.

"Trees and especially brush will come back in, and dry fuels will keep accumulating on the forest floor," said Grant. "It's important to keep up what we've done to ensure effectiveness over the years."

For more information about funding opportunities for projects that enhance Colorado forests and watershed health, visit [www.csfs.colostate.edu](http://www.csfs.colostate.edu), and [www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM\\_Programs/fire.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/fire.html).

## **Places to Visit**

### **Mosquito Pass**

#### **Location**

10 miles northwest of Fairplay, Colorado.

#### **Description**

This beautiful, high-alpine tundra supports significant biodiversity and has been designated a BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern. There are several small parcels of BLM land here, with unique geologic formations and 18 rare plant species. Remains of historic mining buildings can also be seen along the way.

#### **Directions**

From U.S. Highway 285 at Fairplay, turn north on State Highway 9, go about 3 miles to Alma Junction, and then turn west on Mosquito Pass Road. The road continues on to Leadville (on U.S. Highway 24), with the total distance between Fairplay and Leadville being about 22 miles.

#### **Visitor Activities**

Four-wheel driving, geologic sightseeing, rare plant viewing, historic site, hiking, mountain biking, and wildlife viewing.

#### **Special Features**

The Mosquito Pass road crosses over the Continental Divide (elevation 13,185 feet) and through high-alpine tundra, home to ptarmigans, pikas, marmots, and bighorn sheep. Among the rare plants that can be found in the area are Penland alpine fen mustard and Weber saussureas.

#### **Permits, Fees, Limitations**

High clearance four-wheel drive vehicle recommended. The road over the pass is closed from approximately October to June.

#### **Additional Information**

## In the News

### **Artist Christo's Colo. plan stalls (Aug. 13, 2010)** DENVER -

Eighteen years after Christo and his late wife envisioned hanging huge fabric panels over the Arkansas River, the artist said Thursday he's not going to think about his next step if federal regulators don't support the idea.

**Portions in Dominguez-Escalante NCA considered for 'wild and scenic' river** (Aug. 13, 2010) The Bureau of Land Management Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) announces the release of the Final Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report for the BLM Uncompahgre Planning Area, as well as the opportunity to participate in the determination of suitability phase.

**Utah man sentenced for artifact looting (Aug. 6, 2010)** SALT LAKE CITY - A Utah man who once bragged about taking American Indian artifacts from federal lands avoided jail time Thursday after a federal judge said he decided to show leniency after reading letters from the man's two daughters.

**Iraq Veterans Protecting Carbondale from Wildfire (Aug. 5, 2010)** It's a 27-acre stretch of wild land just north of Carbondale known to go up like a tinderbox during wildfire season. In

**Wyoming State Fair To Feature Wild Horses (Aug. 3, 2010)** CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Owners of wild horses will show off their mounts at the Wyoming State Fair later this month in Douglas.

## Recent Press Releases

- [BLM Colorado Oil and Gas Lease Sale Nets Over \\$2 Million \(08-12-10\)](#)
- [BLM seeks public input on plan for Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area \(08-11-10\)](#)
- [BLM Uncompahgre Resource Management Plan Advisory Group to Meet \(08-11-10\)](#)
- [Collecting Artifacts, including Arrowheads, from Public Lands is Illegal \(08-09-10\)](#)
- [BLM Front Range Resource Advisory Council to meet \(08-10-10\)](#)
- [Well's Water Flow Contained \(08-09-10\)](#)
- [Free WAG Bags offered for river campers Saturday \(08-09-10\)](#)

The area is closed from September–June. At other times, there is limited access to the area.

### **Contact Information**

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- [BLM, Mesa County and Grand Junction rescind fire restrictions \(08-05-10\)](#)

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