



Upper Colorado River District

❖ Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVO – Silt)

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Supplemental EIS/RMP Amendment for Oil & Gas: CRVFO and GJFO are planning to complete a Supplemental EIS to address issues related to analysis of downstream greenhouse gas emissions and the range of alternatives for acres available for leasing under their 2015 RMPs and Records of Decision. This may be done through a combination of a BLM team with support from a contractor managed by the Colorado State Office. The BLM has selected a contractor to assist with the SEIS and is currently in the early/pre-analysis stage of work including considering a range of leasing alternatives.

East Fork Cattle Grazing Permit Renewal NEPA: The CRVFO has wrapped up several years of monitoring and project work intended to help track and improve riparian conditions in the East Fork Cattle Allotment prior to completing NEPA to renew grazing permits. These efforts were part of an agreement between the BLM and permittees in 2017. Despite these efforts, riparian conditions have not improved to the levels identified by the BLM and this will make the NEPA more challenging. The CRVFO would like to engage the RAC with this project moving forward.

CRVFO Implements New and Expanded Mountain Bike Trails: This past spring and early summer, BLM worked with partners including Rifle Area Mountain Bike Organization, Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association, City of Rifle, Garfield County and CDOT to complete Phase 1 of the Grand Hogback mountain bike trail system. This included constructing 7 miles of single-track mountain bike trail that was approved in 2020 to reduce recreation conflicts in the Hubbard Mesa area, as well as a new/expanded trailhead. A grand opening was held in June with partners. During the spring and summer, the BLM worked with our partners at the Town of New Castle to complete construction of 10 miles of new trail approved in the New Castle ERMA in 2020.

Sutey Ranch Project Implementation: The CRVFO continues to implement the Sutey Ranch Management Plan approved in April 2019. Goat grazing was again used to target reducing invasive species, reducing fuels and fire risk, and improving wildlife habitat. The field office successfully worked with the Red Hill Council and Roaring Fork Mountain Bike Association on aligning and constructing a 3.2-mile segment of mountain bike trail used as an alternate access trail to the Red Hill SRMA. In the fall of 2021, the field office is surveying along an irrigation ditch in advance of an engineering design for future replacement of the open ditch with a pressurized pipe and sprinkler system. The BLM used a contractor to construct an expanded parking lot that accommodates horse trailers and install a vault toilet at the newly expanded



Trailhead. The Field Office wildlife biologist installed three photo stations where Suteiy visitors can engage in a citizen monitoring program by taking and uploading cellphone photos to help document on-the-ground changes via time-lapse.

Work with Livestock Permittee on Virtual Fence Network: The CRVFO worked with longtime Eagle County cattle permittee Pat Luark to build and test a virtual fence (“vence”) network designed to help keep livestock out of sensitive areas such as sage-grouse habitat. They worked closely with the BLM and Vence Corporation to coordinate the first trial of this technology on the field office. To date he has collared 140 cattle, which he trained with the technology on his ranch before turning them out on one of his BLM allotments. Final results are still pending, but we believe this technology holds a lot of promise. For his vision, Pat was nominated for and a successful recipient of a national Sagebrush Steppe Stewardship Award, which presented during the Public Lands Council annual meeting this fall.

Mid-Continent Quarry Proposed Expansion: Rocky Mountain Industrials, Inc. (RMI, formerly RMR) submitted a plan of operation modification which proposes expansion of the Mid-Continent Quarry. The proposed quarry expansion would enlarge the quarry footprint from about 20 acres to more than 300 acres and potentially increase truck traffic from about 20 trips a day to more than 450 trips a day. The potential expansion has raised significant concern from the City of Glenwood Springs, Garfield County, and the community. In addition to the major visual concerns, the City and others are concerned about impacts to the area’s hot springs, as well as their tourism base in general.

A number of studies are needed to inform the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the proposal. A mineral exam, called a Determination of Common Variety (DCV), is one key study needed. The DCV is a thorough and detailed study that will provide BLM the necessary information to make a legally defensible determination on whether RMI’s limestone mining claims should be managed under 1872 Mining Law regulations for locatable minerals or saleable minerals and gravel. The DCV has had multiple delays and the BLM anticipates completion of the DCV around mid-2022. Following the DCV, the BLM will complete an Environmental Assessment to whether there are significant impacts of drilling water quality monitoring wells for a hydrologic study that is needed to better understand the impacts of the proposal on underground water resources. Other studies for the EIS include standard biological/cultural surveys, a cave/karst study, and an ethnographic study for the project area. The EIS was previously projected to begin as early as the fall of 2021. However, the delay with the DCV is also delaying the EIS.



❖ **Grand Junction Field Office (GJFO) including McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (MCNCA) and Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (DENCA)**

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COVID Response: The public area of the office is open to a limited number of visitors and about 75 percent of staff are teleworking several days a week. We expect high visitor use at recreation sites to continue and plan to keep recreation sites open to the public. We have adjusted Special Recreation Permits and events to be consistent with COVID restrictions.

Pine Gulch Fire: The Pine Gulch Fire was started by a lightning strike on July 31, 2020, approximately 18 miles north of Grand Junction. On August 27, the Pine Gulch Fire became the largest wildfire in Colorado State history, surpassing the Hayman Fire that burned near Colorado Springs in the summer of 2002. In October, both the East Troublesome and Cameron Peak fires surpassed the Pine Gulch Fire in size. Suppression repair has been completed and rehabilitation is ongoing. The BLM prepared an Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation plan for the Pine Gulch Fire, which burned approximately 139,000 acres. The plan outlines emergency stabilization and rehabilitation strategies to address resources impacted by the fire.

Over the past year much progress has been made on the implementation of the Pine Gulch Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan. The plan addressed numerous issues and concerns. The following was accomplished during Fiscal Year 21:

Weeds:

- Between October and February approximately 225,025 lbs. of seed were purchased through the BLM national seed buy. In addition to that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) donated 15,000 lbs. of seed to enhance the seed mix for wildlife habitat. The CPW seed mix was mixed with the BLM seed mix to provide a higher seeding rate to areas identified by CPW and BLM as important wildlife habitat within the Pine Gulch Fire burn area. Aerial seeding of 22,000 acres was completed in February following a snowstorm. Additionally, fire line was reseeded on both federal and private land. This work was accomplished with the fire crew during the winter and early spring.
- Monitoring of the seeding began in late August/early September to capture the first full growing season following the fire. A total of 20 plots were established in FY21 (10 plots within the seeded area of the fire, and 10 paired plots outside of the seeded area). These plots will be visited and reread each year.
- In May/June a 2-person weeds crew was hired and dedicated to inventorying and treating weeds around the Pine Gulch burn perimeter. The crew surveyed and treated



approximately 3500 acres of land, focusing on existing roads that were used by the fire crews. Some of the species targeted were Russian knapweed, spotted knapweed, whitetop, hounds tongue, and different variations of thistle. Weed inventory and treatment will continue for the next several years.

Livestock Grazing:

- A grazing closure order was issued January 22, 2021. The closure is in effect for all BLM lands that were burned or seeded for a minimum of two years to allow for recovery and seedling establishment.
- Fence damage was not as extensive as first thought. BLM is working with permittees to repair and replace fencing as needed. BLM has purchased fencing supplies and will be working with permittees to repair allotment fencing over the next year. Due to range improvements being assigned to grazing permittees, it was determined that contracting fence repairs would not be necessary and would allow permittees more flexibility for repairs while adhering to BLM guidelines.

Recreation trail damage:

- On the western side of the fire fencing was installed along the county road to help prevent cross-country travel. Fencing was also installed on either side of trail limiters to help enforce seasonal wildlife closure in the area. New directional and trail signs were installed to replace burned signs in the Pine Gulch area. Trails were monitored for excessive erosion and work plans made to fix problem areas. The OHV program was able to provide sign installation through their grant program. A trail dozer was awarded by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife OHV program to the Grand Junction Field Office. Major rework of the trails is slated for 2022, which will be aided by the new trail dozer.

Debris flows and road damage:

- Initial funding covered culvert & road repair and maintenance inventory. Due to the aerial seeding contract being under budget BLM was able to allocate some of the savings to a contract for road and drainage maintenance and improvement. This contract will provide basic road maintenance in FY22.
- Rain events over the fire have led to numerous debris flows in the first year. Road and culvert repair will continue to be a need across the 192 miles of roads within the Pine Gulch fire.

Managing Livestock During Drought: In February 2021, letters were sent to all livestock operators to provide early notice that continued drought and associated reduction in forage production could result in the need to reduce permitted numbers. The intent of this early



notice was to provide operators time to make potential adjustments to their operation. Range staff have been meeting with permittees this fall to verify drought conditions within areas of the field office. Use recommendations are determined based on-site visits to each allotment. Our lower elevation country is being impacted the most by the ongoing drought and several permittees have agreed to reductions or complete non-use of their permits this winter.

Mountain Island Ranch: The Grand Junction Field Office nominated Mary Conover and Kenyon Fields of the Mountain Island Ranch for the Colorado Riparian Association's 2021 Riparian Hero Award for their outstanding stewardship of the Little Dolores River. The ranch is authorized to graze on the 59,000-acre Mountain Island grazing allotment which is a consolidation of 11 allotments and is comprised of 19 pastures spanning a 24-mile by 14-mile area on Glade Park, southwest of the city of Grand Junction. A portion of the allotment also lies within the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area that includes the Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness.

In 2018 MIR embarked upon a riparian restoration pilot project to eradicate tamarisk and remove Russian olive along the Little Dolores River with the goal of determining efficient, cost-effective methods of removal of invasive species, and native vegetation response. The pilot study would ultimately result in a multi-year watershed-wide restoration project spanning private and public land boundaries. The Ranch's vision created a collaborative riparian restoration effort that brought together numerous partners including but not limited to: River's Edge West, Western Colorado Conservation Corps, Steve and Jeanne Wenger, Mountain Island Ranch, and the BLM.

In 2021 MIR added a hydrological restoration element to the project with the construction of post-assisted-log structures (PALs) in the Little Dolores River. The objective of the PALs is to slow the water, increase infiltration, create pooling for wildlife and trees, raise the water table to reconnect the stream with the floodplain, trap sediment, and reduce erosion. Again, MIR approached the BLM about continuing the watershed-wide restoration efforts across jurisdictional boundaries. The PAL structure project brought additional partners to the table and builds upon the riparian restoration that began in 2018.

Due to their stewardship and innovative work Mountain Island Ranch was unanimously selected by the Colorado Riparian Association for the award. The award was presented at the 2021 Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference. The Grand Junction Field Office appreciates this opportunity to recognize and reflect on Mountain Island Ranch's commitment to riparian restoration, partnership building, and wildlife habitat stewardship.

Use of e-Bikes on Non-Motorized Trails: The BLM is taking steps to increase opportunities for e-bikes on public lands per guidance in both Secretarial Order (SO) 3376 - Increasing Recreation Opportunities through the use of *Electric Bikes* and BLM Information Bulletin (IB) 2020-003. The final rule took effect on December 2, 2020. Under the new rule, any decision to exempt e-bikes or to allow e-



bikes on designated trails closed to motorized use will require a formal planning process. Currently, BLM is considering expanding access to e-bikes to trails within the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Special Recreation Management Area. GJFO developed a draft NFD Master Trails Plan, including 32 miles of additional trails and trail reroutes. The public had an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan, with a formal 30-day public scoping process ending September 20, 2021.

North Fruita Desert (18 Rd) Campground and Event Staging Area: GJFO implemented a campground fee increase in the fall of 2020. The BLM awarded a contract to start construction at the new event and camping area and work began during the summer of 2020. A new access road, event parking, and 53 new campsites have been constructed. Beginning October 4, 2021, advance reservations for all developed camping in the North Fruita Desert Campgrounds can be made through [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov). At the Upper Campground, reservations can be made up to six months in advance of their stay or using a mobile device once they arrive at the campground. Campsites in the lower campground and event area will be available on a first-come first-serve basis.

Palisade Plunge Singletrack Trail: The entire 32-mile trail is open. A ribbon cutting and event was held on July 23, 2021. This project is an exceptional addition to the Grand Valley recreational opportunities and will continue supporting economic development for the area. The Palisade Plunge is an exciting outdoor experience for locals and visitors. Project partners include Mesa County, the Town of Palisade, City of Grand Junction, Grand Junction Economic Partnership, U.S Forest Service, Powderhorn Ski area, and the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association. The partners were recently honored with a “Great Places in Colorado” designation from the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Zone L Salinity Project and Travel management: GJFO completed travel management route designations for the majority of the field office in 2015. Route designations for Zone L (North Desert) were deferred to enable the BLM to gather missing data and to allow for closer collaboration with the public in designing the future route system. Erosion data collection was completed in 2020. These data were used to determine the amount of erosion occurring in areas without roads and trails, and erosion occurring from roads. Additionally, areas were evaluated to determine where erosion was more likely to be occurring within Zone L. This analysis will help determine the proper route density to achieve an erosion rate in Zone L that are within one standard deviation of the upland erosion rate. The analysis will help identify areas where routes will produce the least amount of erosion and sediment delivery to the waterways.

The primary benefit of this project will be to quantitatively measure and calculate soil erosion rates on 114 square miles, determine appropriate road densities, and calculate sediment reduction rates from reducing, maintaining, or rerouting roads and trails in the area north of Interstate 70. Now that the data collection is complete, appropriate management actions can



be taken. The BLM can use this information, along with public input, to design a route system that meets resource and recreation interests in the Zone L area.

Land Tenure Actions:

- Hallock Homestead (D-E NCA): In partnership with Western Rivers Conservancy, BLM acquired an approximately 135-acre inholding in October of 2020. Located along the Gunnison River and within the Dominguez-Escalante NCA, the Hallock Homestead parcel improved public access to some unique bottomlands just upstream from Grand Junction. The property boasts significant river frontage, water rights, and beautiful cottonwood galleries.
- Crow Bottom (MCNCA): In partnership with The Conservation Fund, BLM acquired the Crow Bottom parcel in June of 2021. An approximately 177-acre inholding along the Colorado River and within McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area that boast some remarkable cottonwood galleries and enormous potential for riparian and bottomland restoration.
- Meridian Junction (D-E NCA): In partnership with Western Rivers Conservancy, BLM is working to acquire a 26-acre inholding along the Gunnison River within the Dominguez-Escalante NCA to improve the management of riparian habitat and public access.
- Cheney (Grand Mesa Slopes): In partnership with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, BLM is working to acquire a 480-acre inholding along Highway 50 between Grand Junction and Olathe that will secure public access to Cheney Reservoir and other public lands in the Kannah Creek area.
- Latham Property The Conservation Fund is working in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to acquire the 1,600 acre Latham property, within and on the edge of the South Shale Ridge ACEC. Accessible by a county road, BLM's acquisition would improve and secure public access, expand recreation opportunities, protect wildlife habitat, and preserve historic sites.

CR 200: High Lonesome Ranch (HLR), a large ranching operation in Garfield County, locked a gate on their property boundary on Garfield County Road 200, which blocked motorized public access to large tracts of BLM-administered public lands.

In 2015, Garfield County requested HLR to remove the gate to allow public access. A dispute ensued and HLR filed a lawsuit against the county to acquire quiet title to the road. Garfield County filed a counterclaim, which alleged the road is a Revised Statute 2477 right-of-way, arguing that they hold prescriptive rights to the road from the gate to the BLM tracts.

In 2020 a Federal judge ruled in favor of Garfield County and ordered HLR to remove it's lock and gate, allowing public access to the BLM. The road remains open currently. BLM roads not



included in the court decision remain closed to public motorized use pending an appeal. The new access that CR 200 provides allows for expanded foot and horse access on the administrative routes.

Special note: Much of the land along the road and BLM property that the road accesses was burned by the 2020 Pine Gulch Fire.

❖ **McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area**

❖ Collin Ewing, NCA Manager, (970) 244-3000, cewing@blm.gov

Rabbit Valley Campgrounds: The BLM installed metal fire grates, picnic tables, and two restrooms in approved campground campsite locations during 2020. The Federal Register Notice for charging fees for camping, which will provide maintenance funds, is under review at BLM Headquarters and is expected to be published this fall. The BLM continues constructions of campsites and facilities throughout Rabbit Valley.

Ruby-Horsethief Canyon Colorado River camping permits: River trips on the Colorado River from Loma to Westwater, through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons, have become increasingly more popular. Due to crowding, BLM began requiring a permit with fees for camping in 2013. Rafters, canoeists, kayakers, and jet boaters can obtain camping permits on [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov). A permit is required year-round, but fees are only charged April through October. Day use does not require a permit. Since 2013, use has increased from approximately 11,000 visitors to 28,000 in 2020. Most of the growth is during weekdays and between April and October. The BLM estimates the number of campsite reservations is still only about 50% of capacity, so there is still room to grow without negatively impacting resources or recreation experiences. Due to unfulfilled capacity, the BLM will be accepting applications for new river outfitters.

Greening STEM Demonstration project: McInnis Canyons National Conservation area was chosen as the BLM's one NEEF (National Environmental Education Foundation) Greening STEM Demonstration project site. This included the site receiving funding to work with partners including Colorado Canyons Association and the Palisade Insectary to address management needs and education goals. The project engaged high school students in addressing invasive weed issues along the Colorado River. See videos produced by NEEF for the project here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZCsEmOnpVII7KFKpi0X6izh-BXvdpvsL>.



❖ **Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA)**

❖ Collin Ewing, NCA Manager, 970-244-3000, cewing@blm.gov

Gunnison River Campsite Designation and Permit System: The BLM implemented a decision from the 2017 D-E NCA RMP to require overnight boaters on the Lower Gunnison River, from Delta to Whitewater, to obtain a permit. BLM staff updated signage and conducted outreach regarding the change with places like Mountain Buzz and American Whitewater. For now, the BLM has implemented a free, self-issued, permit that is filled out on-site. We estimate compliance at 50-70% and expect compliance to increase with additional education and outreach.

Moving forward, the BLM will refine the permit system, implement a reservation system, designate river campsites, and develop an allocation for permitted outfitters. Staff spent over 50 days in the field conducting outreach to the public on input to the planning process. Staff also contacted river outfitters and collaborated with partners like Colorado Canyons Association to outreach through social media. BLM drafted a proposed action for campsites along the Gunnison River and will begin public scoping on the proposal during the fall of 2021.

Cactus Park Special Recreation Management Area: The 2017 D-E NCA RMP designated the Cactus Park Area as a Special Recreation Management Area targeting family friendly motorized trail riding and associated camping. The BLM is currently working with Western Slope ATV Association (WSATVA) on projects to improve recreation opportunities and protect sensitive resources in the area. WSATVA received a motorized trail grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to conduct archaeological surveys on the proposed new Ponderosa Loop Trail. In addition, the BLM is working on layout and design of the Farmers Canyon Trail reroute. This will reroute users outside the mule deer winter range that is closed to travel during the winter to protect mule deer. The BLM anticipates planning to be complete by the winter of 2021-2022. The Gibbler Gulch Trail Crossings Environmental Assessment analyzed several reroutes of the popular Gibbler Gulch ATV Trail. The reroutes will decrease sediment contributions to an intermittent creek and improve trail access during higher water levels. In addition, the project designates approximately one mile of trail as open to ATV, motorcycle, bicycle, equestrian and foot travel. The newly designated trail is on lands BLM recently acquired through purchase using the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The new trail ends at a historic cabin on the acquired public land that will be available for heritage tourism and interpretation. The BLM anticipates signing the Decision in March of 2021 with implementation, in partnership with Western Slope ATV Association, in the fall of 2021.



Northwest District

❖ **Little Snake Field Office (LSFO – Craig)**

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Large Transmission Line (update): TransWest Express and PacifiCorp's Gateway South: Both TWE and GWS plan to obtain a Notice to Proceed in the first quarter of 2022, with construction starting near the middle of 2022. The Field Office will be reviewing revised GRSG mitigation plans in the fourth quarter of 2021, Historic Properties Treatment Plan (HPTP) implementation is underway and multiple treatments have been completed, additional treatments may occur before weather ends this field season, HPTP treatments will be completed by spring 2022, Micro-Sited Mapping Plan of Development, coordinating with the companies on biological resources surveys and geotechnical drilling, and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics mitigation.

Travel Management Planning (update): The Decision Record for Travel Management Area 2 was signed on August 6, 2021. The Decision Record for Travel Management Area 1 is now being finalized. Area 3 will be finalized in 2022. By way of a reminder, the Little Snake Field Office has been engaged in detailed, route-by-route travel management evaluation since the completion of the Resource Management Plan Revision in 2011. The RMP made area designations and directed the LSFO to develop implementation level decisions for approximately 4,700 miles of routes. Three EAs for three Travel Management Areas 1, 2, and 3 have been reviewed by the public and are now ready for Decision Records.

Outcome Based Grazing (update): The Little Snake Field Office was selected as one of 11 demonstration projects in six states to pilot the BLM's Outcome Based Grazing program. Outcome Based Grazing offers a more collaborative approach when issuing grazing authorizations between the BLM and its partners within the livestock grazing community. The purpose of this project is to improve BLM's management of grazing on public lands by offering livestock operators greater flexibility in livestock management with greater consideration to economic flexibility and specific goals and outcomes of rangeland resources. Decreasing the response time to changing field conditions is one of the primary goals of the demonstration project. The proposed action is currently out for review with the Affected Interests for the subject allotments through November 30th.

Sand Wash Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area: The Sand Wash Basin Herd Management Area is located 45 miles west of Craig, Colorado. The HMA encompasses 157,730 total acres, of which 154,940 acres are managed by the BLM, 1,960 acres are privately-owned inholdings, and 840 acres are managed by the State of Colorado. The Appropriate Management Level for wild horses in the Sand Wash Basin Herd Management Area was set by the Little



Snake Field Office Resource Management Plan (2011) as a population range of 163-362. This population range was also reaffirmed with the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Resource Management Plan Amendment (2015). In September 2021, 733 horses that were determined excess per 43 CFR 4720.1 were removed from inside and outside of the HMA. A follow up aerial population inventory estimated that there are approximately 320 horses remaining within the HMA. Over the winter of 2021/2022, the LSFO will begin the process of developing a ten year plan to increase reliance on bait-trapping and continued application of PZP contraception to ensure more sustainable population levels in the long term.

Pleasant Valley Fish Habitat Improvement Project: In September 2021, the Little Snake Field Office in coordination with the Yampa Valley Stream Improvement Charitable Trust completed a project to improve the fishery and angler experience on $\frac{3}{4}$ miles of the Yampa River on public lands just below the Sarvis Creek State Wildlife Area. This project was implemented after more than five years of planning involving Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Routt County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the stream improvement consultant FlyWater. The project created 17 new pools to provide fish holding areas, individual and clustered boulders to provide in-stream cover for fish, and several large wood structures built from natural timber to create hiding habitat for juvenile fish. This wood will also provide increased organic material important for aquatic insects, which are the primary food source for trout. The project includes enhanced access for all users by adding two wide platforms that can be used for fishing and are easier to reach for people that would otherwise have difficulty navigating the relatively steep stream banks found along most of the reach.

Craig Chamber of Commerce Agreement: The Little Snake Field Office has entered into an Assistance Agreement with the Craig Chamber of Commerce to focus on recreational development and economic relief in Moffat County. The Chamber will be working with a contractor as part of a community planning effort to develop Recreation Area Management Plans for South Sand Wash Basin and Little Yampa Canyon Special Recreation Management Areas. As well as building stakeholder and non-profit capacity within the Craig community and Moffat County focused on recreation and conservation. The BLM and Chamber are also developing the Northwest Colorado Outdoor Coalition as part of the state of Colorado's Partnership in the Outdoors initiative.

❖ **White River Field Office (WRFO – Meeker)**

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Rangeland Management / Wild Horses: The White River Field Office (WRFO) completed an aerial flight census in the spring of 2021 within the locations of known wild horses both



inside and outside the Piceance East Douglas Horse Management Area (PEDHMA). The estimated number of wild horses following the census is 1,324-1,677. It is important to note that this census was done prior to foaling which averages 20% increase annually. This increased our estimates to 1,589-2,012 horses. WRFO conducted an emergency gather following the Oil Springs fire in West Douglas HA where a total of 457 Horses were removed from the range. WRFO is also currently working on a private land bait trap to gather up to 63 wild horses, this is in response to several letters from private landowners who have requested that WRFO gather some of the wild horses that are negatively impacting their private land. To date WRFO has trapped and removed 15 wild horses from this effort. Following this year's gather efforts, the WRFO estimates that there are still an estimated 1,117-1,540 wild horses still on the range. Lastly, the WRFO has recently completed two NEPA documents to allow for the gathering of wild horses to appropriate management levels (AML), which is 135 to 235 animals. These NEPA documents are ten-year documents and allow for us to use all the tools available to complete this task and analyzed and approved the use of fertility control techniques that will assist in the management of the AML.

Livestock Grazing and Drought Conditions: The White River Field Office (WRFO) is aware and concerned about the current drought conditions that are affecting our area. The WRFO has been proactive in working with the ranching community by having the staff personally reach out to every single permit holder. These conversations focus on what the permittee plans to do to ensure we maintain a healthy landscape for all resources. The WRFO continues to have an open line of communication with all permittees to ensure we are doing everything possible to maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Mineral Development / Oil and Gas Development: The White River Field Office (WRFO) currently completes the oil and gas processing for all three field offices (Kremmling Field Office (KFO), Little Snake Field Office (LSFO), and the WRFO within the Northwest District Office. There are approximately 4,000 active oil and gas wells located within the Northwest District Office (approximately 3,400 in WRFO, 300 in LSFO, and 200 in KFO), The largest oil and gas workload within the district is currently located within the WRFO. In 2021, the WRFO's workload included processing a total of 172 Applications for Permits to Drill (APD) (169 in WRFO, 3 in LSFO, and none in KFO). In 2022, the WRFO has completed 3 APDs in WRFO, and is actively working on beginning the review process for an operators multi-year plan of development for approximately six multi-well pads. In addition to the processing of APDs the field office processes approximately 2,000 sundry notices annually. The WRFO also completes the oil and gas inspection and enforcement covering all three field offices as well. The WRFO anticipates completing over 370 total oil and gas inspections (265 within WRFO and 105 within LSFO and KFO planned). Currently, WRFO has two active drilling rigs on two separate company well pad



locations. In 2021, WRFO also completed two draft lease sale EAs but due to the hold on leasing no lease sales were completed. WRFO is currently working with the COSO to prepare the first quarter lease sale in conjunction with Royal Gorge Field Office.

Mineral Development / Solid Minerals (Nahcolite): The Piceance Creek Basin of Colorado contains North America’s only known significant deposit of nahcolite (sodium bicarbonate), commonly known as baking soda. Natural Soda LLC is currently the only company taking advantage of this world class resource and as a result, is North America’s second largest producer of sodium bicarbonate. Through deep wells, the naturally occurring sodium bicarbonate is obtained by solution mining by essentially injecting and pumping hot water to dissolve and recover the resource. Natural Soda produces pure, natural sodium bicarbonate from its extensive nahcolite leases which cover more than 9,400 acres at their processing facility located in the Piceance Creek Basin. Natural Soda LLC has 77 employees between the manufacturing plant and the warehouse facility in Rifle. An additional 11 full time contract employees are utilized to transport packaged sodium bicarbonate from the manufacturing plant to the Rifle warehouse as well as transportation of bulk product to the West Rifle rail transloading facility. Natural Soda produces approximately 240,000 tons of sodium bicarbonate annually. This versatile chemical is widely used and found in food, personal care products, animal feed, pool care, and many industrial applications.

Travel Management: The BLM issued the Decision Record approving the Travel Management Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment on June 14, 2021. The decision provides access for diverse recreational opportunities, including off-road motorized areas and places for high-quality big game hunting in non-motorized areas. Most of the lands managed by the field office (1.29 million acres) would allow motorized and mechanized travel on designated routes. Two small areas (26 acres) near the Towns of Meeker and Rangely would be open to cross-country motorized travel to allow for the development of a future OHV skills training course and continued public use of a unique hill climb feature. Two other proposed open areas would be managed as limited to designated routes until the BLM completes additional consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. Twelve areas (80,200 acres) would continue to allow non-motorized access, including nine areas where non-motorized big-game hunting would be emphasized. The six Wilderness Study Areas within the WRFO (79,900 acres) would also continue to be managed as non-motorized areas. The next step in travel management planning within the WRFO is the detailed, route-by-route evaluations and designations for use, where they will continue to involve the cooperating agencies, other stakeholders, and the public.

Land Tenure Adjustments / Buffalo Horn Land Exchange: In January 2021, the BLM issued a decision to approve a land exchange with Buffalo Horn Properties, LLC that will convey 14 parcels of Federal lands in Rio Blanco and Moffat Counties in the Strawberry Creek area (total



of 2,652 acres) to acquire one parcel of non-Federal lands in Rio Blanco County in the Smith Gulch area (total of 1,327.06). (Note: Land exchanges are balanced based on appraised values rather than acreage.) The BLM will also accept Buffalo Horn's offer to donate four parcels of non-Federal land in Rio Blanco County (totaling 508.2 acres) that are isolated "inholdings" between the non-Federal exchange parcel and other BLM-managed public land. The BLM received three protests of the decision (from Cody Barnes, Brandon Siegfried, and Colorado Wild Public Lands) which the BLM Colorado State Office is currently reviewing.

Land Tenure Adjustments / CNCC Shooting Range: The BLM is preparing to publish a combined Notice of Intent and Notice of Reality Action to announce its proposal to sell 3.73 acres of BLM public lands in Rio Blanco County to Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) to resolve inadvertent, unauthorized use of public lands. CNCC previously leased this parcel of public land for the operation of a shooting range. The lease expired in 2006 and the shooting range is currently operating without a lease. In 2008, the BLM issued direction to dispose of developed shooting ranges on public lands through direct sale (the agency-preferred method) or by patent through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. In 2017, CNCC applied to purchase the parcel containing its shooting range from the BLM. The amendment would add the parcel containing CNCC's shooting range to a list of public lands identified for disposal, making the land available for direct sale to CNCC. Under a direct sale, the 3.73 acres of land would be sold to CNCC for no less than fair market value, as appraised by the Appraisal and Valuation Services Office of the Department of the Interior (\$25,000). The shooting range facility serves local communities by providing a resource for law enforcement education and training at CNCC, along with local police, sheriffs, and federal agencies for qualifying their law enforcement personnel.

Land Tenure Adjustment / Sale of 6 Parcels in Strawberry Creek and Grand Hogback Areas: The BLM is preparing to publish a Notice of Realty Action proposing a non-competitive direct sale of two parcels of public land and a modified competitive sale of four parcels, totaling 400 acres. Two parcels totaling 200 acres are in Garfield County along the Grand Hogback about 20 miles north of Rifle. Four parcels totaling 200 acres are in Rio Blanco County in the Strawberry Creek area about five miles north of Meeker. The parcels represent less than 0.03 percent of the 1.5 million-acres of BLM lands managed by the White River Field Office and have no public access. The parcels are also specifically identified (by legal description) in the 1997 RMP as available for sale. The White River Lodge nominated the parcels for the sale. Two of the parcels are surrounded by private land owned by White River Lodge and would be offered through a direct sale to the lodge. The remaining four parcels would be offered through a modified competitive sale in which bidders are limited to adjacent landowners with legal access, which includes the White River Lodge. The land would be sold for no less than the fair-market value as appraised by the Department of the Interior's Appraisal and Valuation Services Office



(minimum of \$400/acre). The sale would be for the surface only. The federal government would retain the mineral rights. White River Lodge is reimbursing BLM for its staff time processing this sale.

Realty Infrastructure Projects / Gateway South: In December 2016, the BLM issued a Record of Decision to approve the Energy Gateway South Transmission Project which includes the construction of a 416-mile 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line which spans Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah. The Field Office continues to review and provide feedback on the individual plans of development and other construction and mitigation plans required by the original EIS for the project. Gateway South is hoping for a notice to proceed by the end of 2021 with construction beginning in June 2022.

Realty Infrastructure Projects / Change in Alignment for Gateway South Powerline across Raven Ridge ACEC: The Gateway South transmission line within Colorado traverses the Little Snake and White River Field Offices. In March 2021, PacifiCorp submitted an application to the BLM to re-route a short segment (approximately 2.9 miles) of the approved (but not yet constructed) powerline at the Colorado/Utah border. The proposed alternative route would avoid having to either move or cross the existing Western Area Power Administration's Bears Ears to Bonanza 345kv transmission line. The proposed alternative would involve spanning the Raven Ridge Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) which would require an amendment to the RMP. The BLM is currently preparing an EA-level RMP amendment to evaluate this proposal.

Realty Infrastructure Projects / TransWest Powerline: In December 2016, the BLM issued the Record of Decision to approve the TransWest Express Transmission Project. The Field Office continues to review and provide feedback on the individual plans of development and other construction and mitigation plans required by the original EIS for the project. TransWest is hoping to have a notice to proceed in May of 2022 with construction to begin in summer 2022.

Realty Infrastructure Projects / Wolf Creek Reservoir: In January 2021, the Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District (RBWCD) was approved for a conditional water right of up to 66,720 acre-feet (AF) for the proposed Wolf Creek dam and reservoir along the White River between Rangely and Meeker. The RBWCD is considering both an off-channel location and a mainstem location as the primary alternatives for the dam and reservoir. Both alternatives would require a right-of-way from the BLM. The BLM would also need to amend the RMP to consider changes in management in this area. The BLM completed a formal pre-application meeting with the RBWCD in March 2021 but has yet to receive an application from the RBWCD. If/once an application is received, then the BLM would begin work on preparing an EIS-level RMP amendment to evaluate the proposal. It is expected that the BLM would be the lead Federal



agency and that the EIS would be prepared in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (which is responsible for issuing a permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act).

- ❖ **Kremmling Field Office (KFO – Kremmling)**

- ❖ Bill Mills, Field Manager, (970) 724-3001, wmills@blm.gov

Blue Valley Land Exchange: The BLM proposes to exchange nine parcels, totaling 1,489 acres of Federal lands managed by the BLM in Grand County, Colorado for nine parcels totaling 1,830 acres of non-Federal lands in Summit and Grand counties, Colorado, owned by Galloway, Inc., the owners of the Blue Valley Ranch (BVR). The exchange results in a net gain of 341 acres of public land. In July 2021, the Kremmling Field Office published the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was publicly available for 30 days. During the public availability period numerous comments were received both in support and against the land exchange. Comments were consistent with what BLM received in response to the Draft EIS. The strongest support in favor of the land exchange was received from Summit County Commissioners, Grand County Commissioners, Trout Unlimited, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Next steps are for BLM to issue a decision and Notice of Decision which is currently being routed through BLM to DOI leadership. The decision will initiate a 45-day protest period.

Upper Colorado River (UCR) Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP): The Upper Colorado River SRMA is very popular, hosting approximately 95,000 visitors each year. These numbers are collected from commercial outfitters' use reports and Recreation Use Permits collected at Pumphouse, Radium, and State Bridge Recreation sites. Private boaters' use of the river has grown steadily, increasing by 567%, from approximately 7,274 in 2000 to approximately 48,556 in 2016. Over that same period, commercial use has reflected greater up and down variation, ranging from a low of 29,449 in 2005 to a high of 44,639 in 2016. In 2019, the Kremmling Field Office issued an Environmental Assessment to implement the UCR RAMP. Over the past two years, the Kremmling Field Office has completed numerous projects in support of this initiative and in the Spring of 2022 will introduce the supporting Business Plan to the RAC for establishing or increasing fees for sites developed or improved as part of the RAMP.

Hebron Mobile Air Quality Station: The Hebron area in North Park has active oil and gas exploration and development. Currently, flaring of natural gas occurs at several well pads due to the absence of a pipeline to transport the gas out of the park. In the early spring of 2021, Ajax Analytics located a portable station to measure benzenes in the Hebron area. The Ajax site was located to the northeast of the proposed location and was a solar powered station. In late July, Ajax Analytics removed their equipment due to renewed oil and gas activity on the east slope. The BLM Colorado State Office supported continued monitoring and is proposing moving



a portable station to Hebron to monitor the air quality for approximately three years. The proposed air quality station would be located to the north of Jackson County Road 34. The station would be constructed on the northwest aspect of the slope, with the meteorological tower top being visible from the county road. The station would be located at the site for approximately 3 years.