

# Business Plan for Royal Gorge Field Office Campgrounds

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## Bureau of Land Management Royal Gorge Field Office August 2023



Typical Site at Turtle Rock Campground



Typical Site at The Bank Campground



Typical Site at The Bank Campground



Typical Site at Sand Gulch Campground

# Draft Business Plan for Royal Gorge Field Office Campgrounds

## RECOMMENDATIONS, REVIEWS, AND APPROVALS

Recommended by:

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Outdoor Recreation Planner

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Date

Reviewed by:

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Assistant Field Manager

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Date

Approved By:

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Field Office Manager

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Date

This business plan was prepared pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (Public Law 108-447) and BLM recreation fee program policy. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the recreation fee program for campgrounds in the Royal Gorge Field Office.

## **Executive Summary**

The Royal Gorge Field Office proposes to implement an Expanded Amenity Fee at all of its camping facilities that provide the level of services required by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) to provide sufficient resources to manage the sites. Services include providing clean and sanitary facilities, appropriate locations and structures for campfires, and an agency presence. To cover current management and operations costs now and into the future over the approximate ten year life of this business plan three different fee structures are proposed. Basic level sites would initially be \$20/night for individual sites and \$40/night for group sites (where available). The rate would then be tied to the Consumer Price Index. This fee would apply to the Turtle Rock Campground and the Bank and Sand Gulch Campground initially. A primitive level site would be \$10/night per site with a cap of \$18/night over the life of the plan. This fee would apply to the Shavano, Burmac, County Road 304, Browns Grotto and Penrose Commons camping areas when facilities are installed following guidance found in the associated management plans. An overflow camping fee of \$10/vehicle, with a \$18/night cap, is also proposed to address management costs and resource impacts for periods of camping demand that exceeds campsite availability such as holiday weekends. This overflow fee would only be charged where the necessary level of facilities are provided and as indicated by management plans.

This business plan may be amended in the future if additional camping areas are developed within the field office. In accordance with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and BLM policies, the areas in this business plan currently meet or will meet the criteria for the BLM to charge a camping fee based on amenities provided and fees charged at comparable campgrounds in the geographic area. A fee will be set for all campgrounds managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office that offer similar amenities.

Recent data have shown significant increases in visitor use in the Royal Gorge Field Office over the last 12 years, with recreational visits increasing 47% from 2010 to 2022 (Recreation Management Information System). This does not include the use spike in 2020 associated with COVID 19. The camping fee will serve to move the campgrounds managed by RGFO toward desired natural resource and visitor use conditions. This business plan presents financial analysis of the field office's camping management operations, examines various financial scenarios based on visitation, and demonstrates how the revenue collected will improve camping management operations, resource conditions, and improve visitor experience.

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## Background and Authorities

This business plan was prepared in accordance with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), 2004 (P.L. 108-447, as amended), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recreation fee program policy and manual (Manual 2930 – Recreation Permits and Fees) and handbook (H-2930-1 Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook). FLREA provides the BLM current authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at Federal recreational lands and waters.

FLREA guidelines and the BLM 2930 Manual and Handbook require that each fee program have a business plan which thoroughly discusses fees and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in the Act. Business plans are to assist management in determining the appropriateness and level of fees, cost of administering fee programs, outline how fees will be used, and provide a structured communication and marketing plan. The primary purpose of the plan is to serve as public notification of the objectives for use of recreation fee revenues and to provide the public an opportunity to comment on these objectives.

Under FLREA, the BLM can charge an Expanded Amenity fee for the use of certain recreational facilities or services, which includes developed campgrounds. FLREA authorizes the BLM to retain Expanded Amenity Fees locally and outlines how revenues may be used for such things as facility repair, maintenance, facility enhancement directly related to public use, and operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program.

The laws and policy that provide authority for this Business Plan, including fee collection for campgrounds, are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), 1976**, [Public Law 94-579], contains BLM's general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principle uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM's authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.
- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), 2004**, repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM's authority to collect recreation fees in 2004. This current law authorizes BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, allows BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they were collected, and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. FLREA also established the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal Recreational Pass Program.
- **43 CFR 2930: Permits for Recreation on Public Land**
- **BLM Recreation Permits and Fees Manual 2930**
- **BLM Recreation and Fees Administration Handbook (2930-1 Handbook)**

Definitions of Standard and Expanded Amenities taken from FLREA and the BLM recreation fee program policy and manual for the area covered under this business plan:

- **Expanded Amenity Recreation Fees** cover specialized outdoor recreation sites and services including but not limited to developed campgrounds with at least a majority of the following amenities: (1) tent or trailer spaces, (2) picnic tables, (3) drinking water, (4) access roads, (5) fee collection by an employee or agent of the BLM, (6) reasonable visitor protection, (7) refuse containers, (8) toilet facilities, (9) simple devices for containing a campfire (Sec. 803.(g)(2)(A) of REA).

- **Additional Expanded Amenity** recreation facilities or services include rental of cabins, group day-use or overnight sites, binoculars or other equipment (Sec.803.(g)(2)(C) of REA); use of hookups for electricity, cable, or sewer (Sec.803.(g)(2)(D) of REA); use of sanitary dump stations (SEC.803.(g)(2)(E) of REA); and use of reservation services (Sec.803.(g)(2)(G) of REA).

The BLM strives to manage recreation opportunities sustainably. The goals for recreation on BLM-administered public lands are to serve the American people by:

- Improving access to a diversity of quality recreation opportunities;
- Ensuring protection of natural and cultural resources; and
- Providing recreation services for fair value.

This business plan will assist the Royal Gorge Field Office in meeting these recreation and visitor service goals. This plan covers both existing campgrounds operated by the field office that charge a fee, including Turtle Rock, and establish a business plan framework if additional facilities are built and/or upgraded to the level outlined by FLREA as identified in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan and the Penrose Commons Recreation Area Management Plan. This plan would be updated in the future if additional camping facilities are developed in the Royal Gorge Field Office.

## **Overview Royal Gorge Field Office Recreation Program**

The Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) is responsible for the management and stewardship of more than 660,000 acres of public land along the Front Range, south-eastern and south-central Colorado, including parts of the Arkansas River Basin. The RGFO lands include ecosystems from dry sagebrush steppes and canyons to alpine environments to the riparian zones along the Arkansas River. This vast and diverse landscape provides for equally diverse recreational opportunities. RGFO lands are a recreation destination for visitors from around the world.

The popular recreation sites within the RGFO include Guffey Gorge, Turtle Rock Campground and rock climbing area, Shelf Road climbing area, multiple high-profile trail systems and off-highway vehicle areas, Cache Creek area, and the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA). The Upper Arkansas River Valley has nationally significant natural resources. The Arkansas River has the most commercial rafting use of any river in the United States. In addition to rafting, visitors come to the Upper Arkansas region to fish, hike, mountain bike, rock climb, camp, and enjoy the scenery.

The RGFO currently manages three developed campgrounds, The Bank, Sand Gulch and Turtle Rock Campground. The Bank and Sand Gulch currently charge Expanded Amenity fees for camping and have reservable sites. A fee is currently not in place for Turtle Rock Campground. Additional campsites have been identified through recent planning efforts to address increased demand for camping. All of the campgrounds identified in this plan are in Congressional District 5 unless otherwise noted.

The RGFO recorded 4.6 million recreational visits in FY20 (RMIS), a 121% increase over FY19. Across the US during summer 2020, there was a major increase in outdoor recreation as Americans took advantage of public lands for pandemic-safe, socially-distance activities like hiking and camping (Leave No Trace, 2020 & Outdoor Industry Association, 2021). Based on national trends, it is reasonable to correlate the increase in recreational visits on RGFO lands in 2020 with effects of the pandemic. Survey research indicates many new participants in outdoor recreation during the pandemic intend to continue recreating after the pandemic, indicating that increases in recreational visits will likely continue (Outdoor Industry Association, 2021).

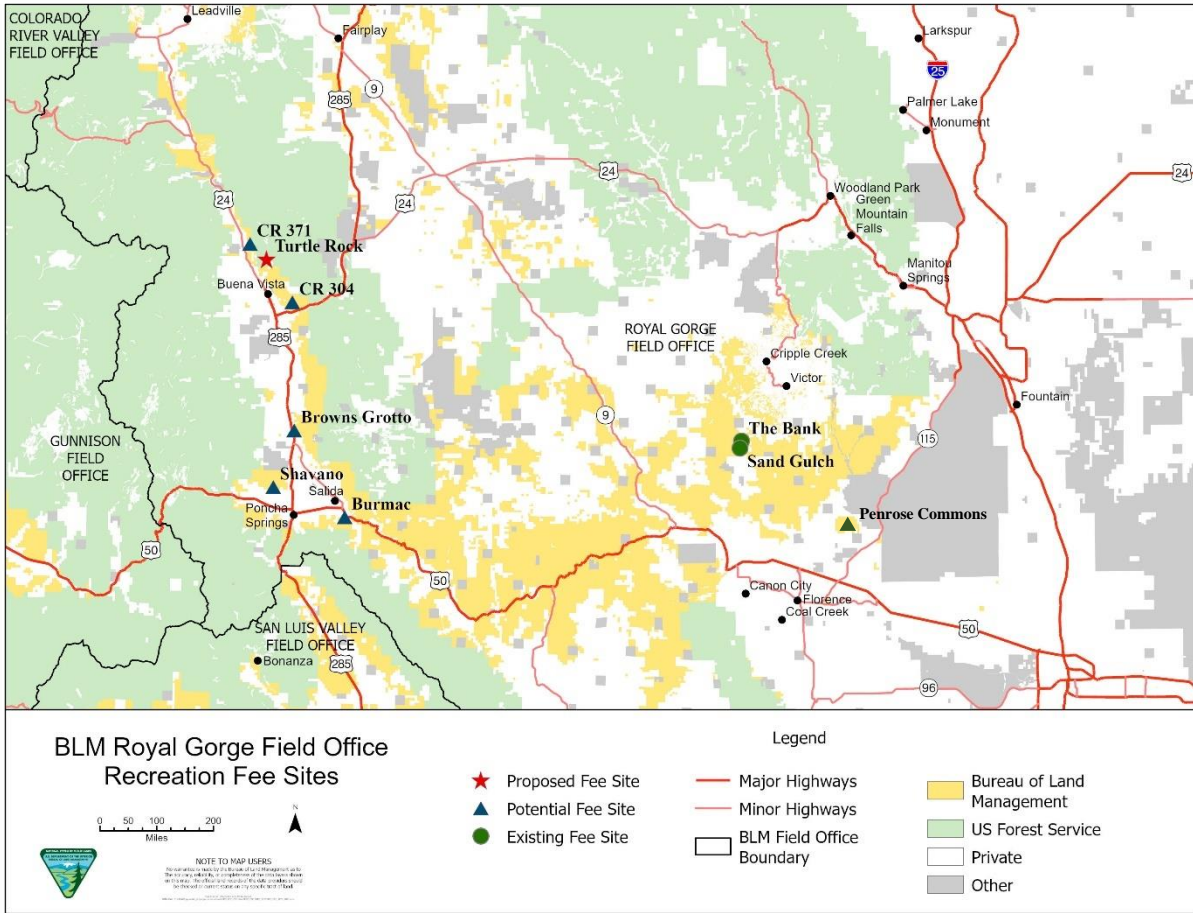


Figure 1-Overview Map of Royal Gorge Field Office



## Description and Background of Campgrounds/Camp Areas

### The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds

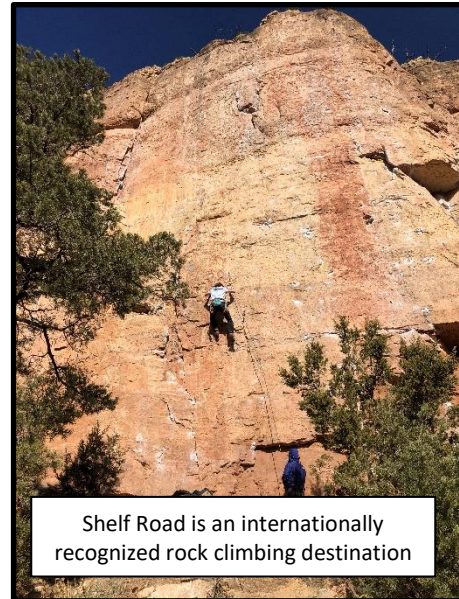
The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds are 12 miles north of Cañon City, Colorado. The campgrounds are within the Shelf Road Recreation Area, adjacent to the Gold Belt Tour Scenic and Historic Byway. The two campgrounds are located approximately one mile apart accessing a network of designated roads and trails and an extensive number of rock-climbing routes.

The Bank Campground was doubled in size in 2019 to include 33 standard individual campsites, two group sites, a camphost site, and a large day-use parking area with restrooms. Sand Gulch Campground has 16 standard individual campsites and one group site. An expansion project is planned to add sites and day-use parking at Sand Gulch in 2023. Campsites for both campgrounds are at the basic level and include a graveled area for a tent pad, kitchen area with picnic table and campfire grate, and a graveled parking space to accommodate one or two vehicles. Both campgrounds

have vault toilets, visitor information kiosks, fee stations, a gravel/improved access road, day-use parking and rock climbing access trails. The current fee is \$7/night for individual sites and \$14 for a group site. Due to recent fee tube theft both campgrounds are currently reservation only through the interagency approved Recreation.gov system. Field Office staff have been exploring options for electronic first-come first served campsites in combination with reservation only sites. The construction of overflow sites for peak use are also being considered.

Given the proximity to well maintained county roads and high volume of use the physical and social recreation setting of the site would be considered front-country to rural. The operational setting is also front-country with campground regulations and a campground host making contacts with visitors.

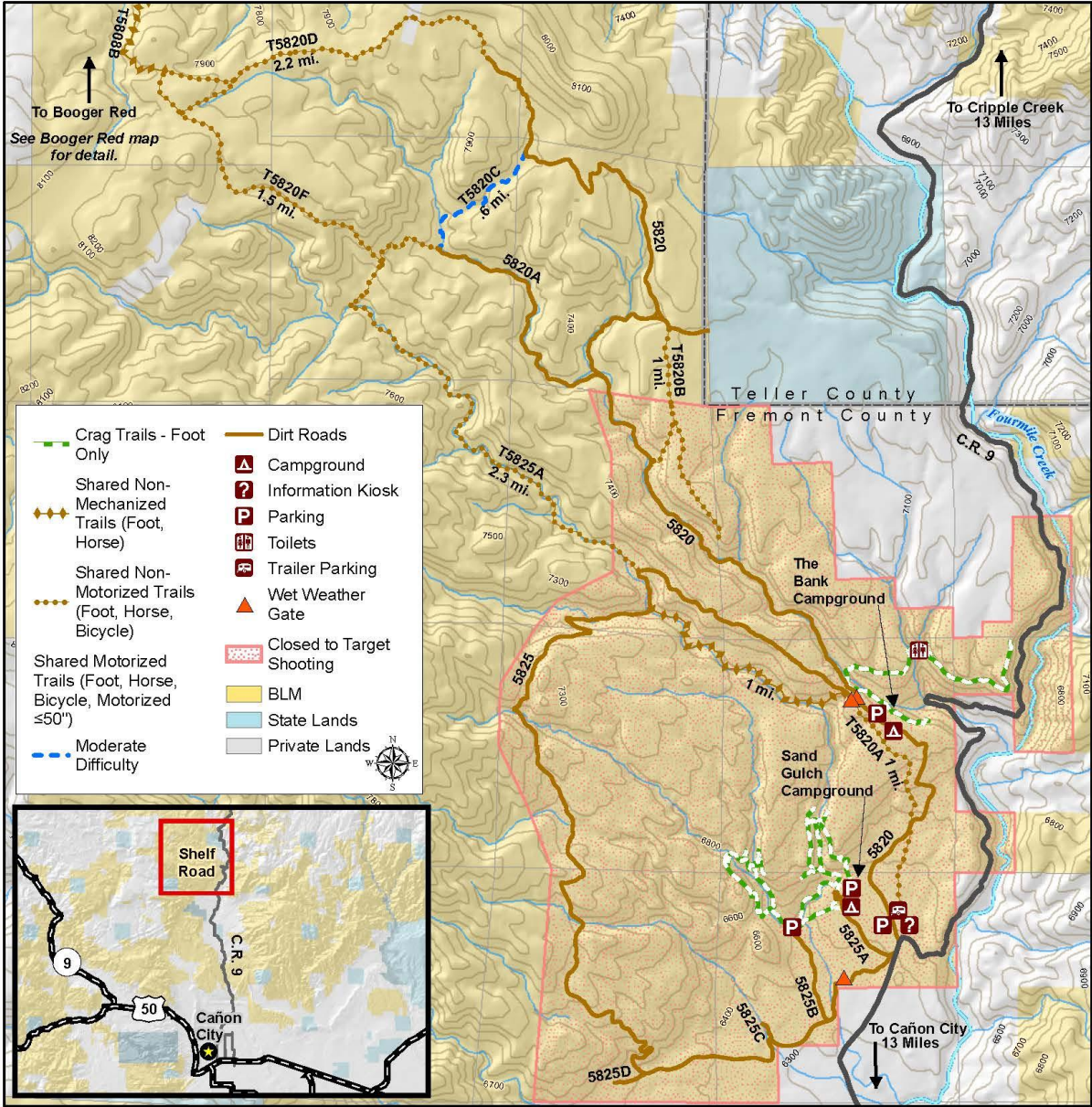
Shelf Road Recreation Area is managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office in partnership with the Pike's Peak Climbers Alliance and Rocky Mountain Field Institute. These non-profit organizations contribute time, money, and expertise to the management and maintenance of the area.



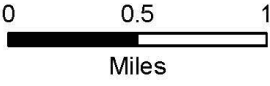

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**Shelf Road Recreation Area**

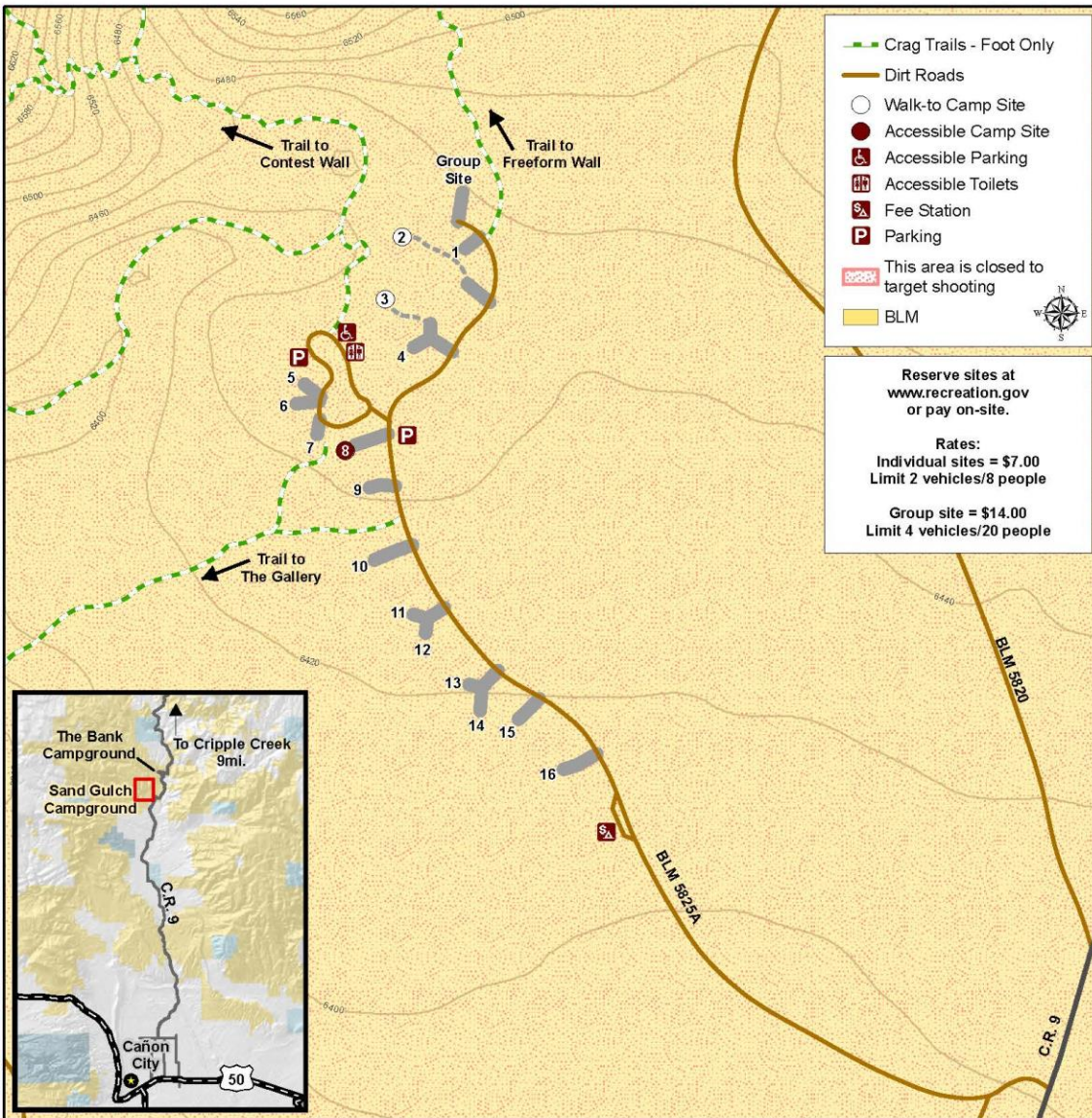


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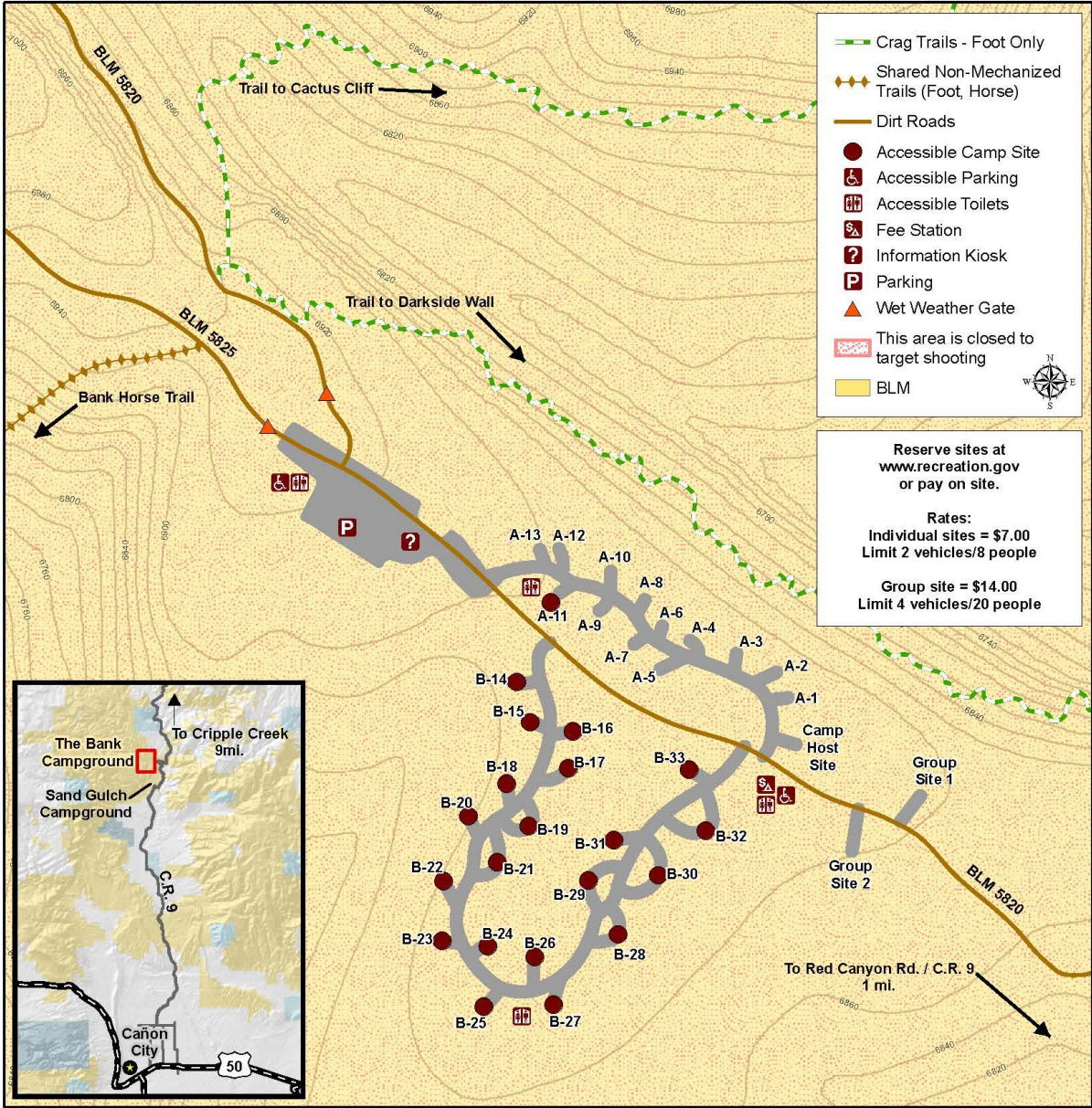
**Travel Limited to Designated Methods**

Figure 2-Overview Map of Shelf Road Recreation Area



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Figure 3-Map of Sand Gulch Campground



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Figure 4-Map of The Bank Campground

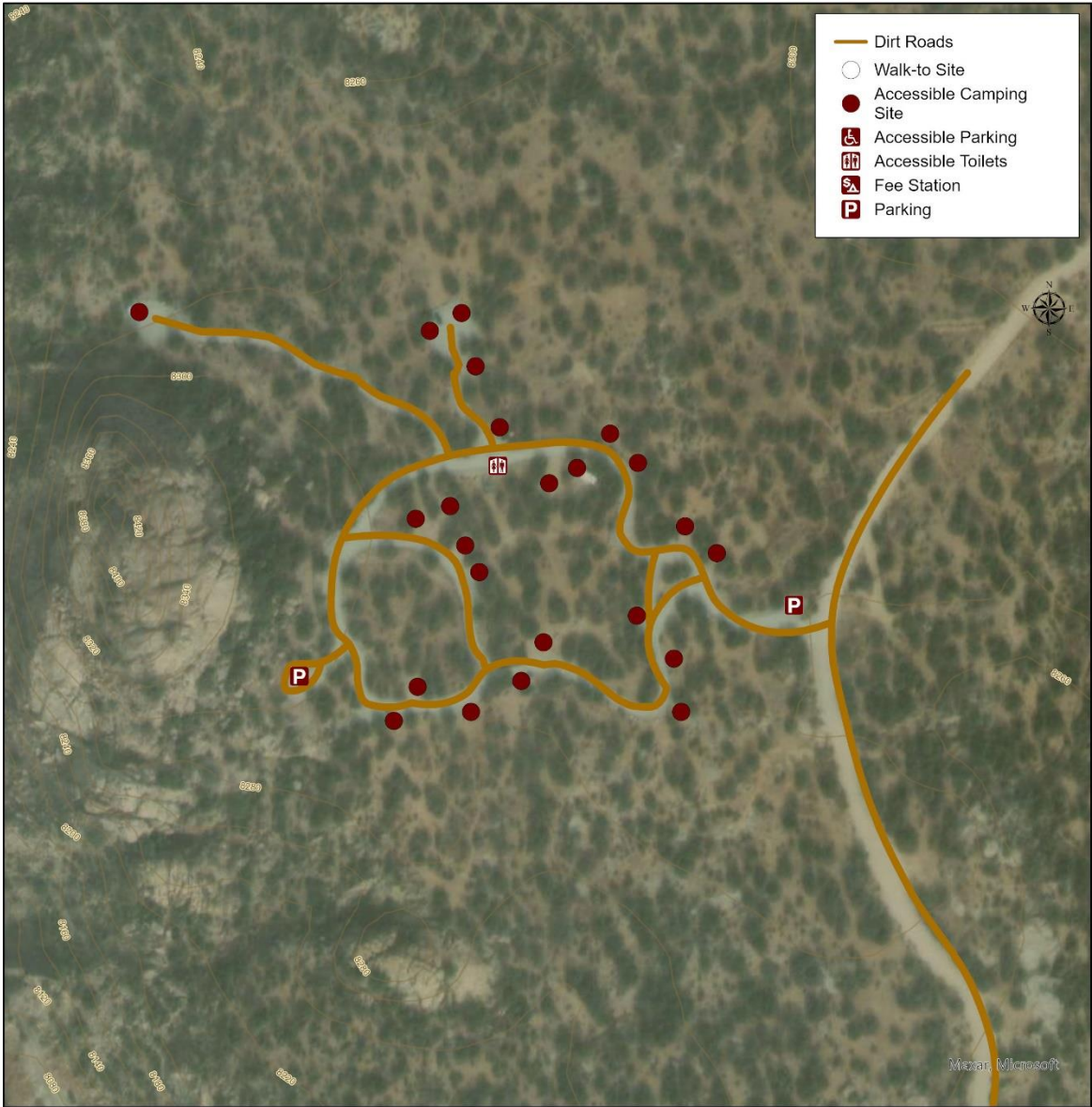
### Turtle Rock Campground

Turtle Rock Campground is located 3.5 miles north of Buena Vista off of Chaffee County Road 375. The campground is located within the Fourmile Travel Management Area, a popular destination for a multitude of recreation opportunities. The campground consists of 22 standard individual campsites, each with a marked numbered post, situated on the campground's gravel loop road. Each site has a metal, in-ground fire ring, and a picnic table. The campground has a permanent, double vault toilet. In summer 2022 a campground host has been on site. A day-use parking area within the campground accesses a popular rock-climbing area. Currently no fee is charged for the Turtle Rock Campground but it would be considered a basic level campground due to the level of facilities provided. Given the proximity to well-maintained county roads and high volume of use the physical and social recreation setting of the site would be considered front-country to rural. The operational setting has shifted over time with the addition of campground regulations and a campground host making contacts with visitors.

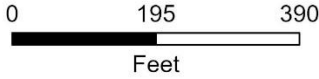


The Fourmile area is popular for a variety of activities and events

The campground is a basecamp for local recreational opportunities in the greater Buena Vista area. Visitors descend on the upper Arkansas River for water sports, especially white-water kayaking, rafting, and fly-fishing. The area is popular among rock climbers, drawn to the ease of access and range of difficulties among the routes. Visitors reported taking part in mountain biking, hiking, trail running, dirt biking, OHV-ing, and bird-watching. A key 20 year partnership with Friends of Fourmile provides volunteer assistance through observations, data collection, and on the ground project assistance for the area, including the campground.



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**Travel Limited to Designated Methods**

A row of six icons representing different travel methods: a car, a motorcycle, a bicycle, a horse, and a pedestrian.

Figure 5-Map of Turtle Rock Campground

## Shavano

The Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan Decision (signed February 2023) called for an increase in camping management in the Shavano area. Shavano is located near the town of Poncha Springs, Colorado off of Chaffee County Road 250, a primary US Forest Service access road. The area is relatively open and flat and has seen dramatic increases in dispersed camping volume and impacts over the past 5 years. Per the Camping and Travel Management Plan the current physical and social recreation setting of the area is primarily front-country to rural given the easy access from County Road 250 and the high evidence of use and high number of contacts a visitor experiences. The operational setting is closer to primitive or backcountry due to the lack of regulations in place for the area resulting in minimal regulatory signing and rare staff presence.

The BLM Shavano area has become a popular destination for those wishing to visit the greater Arkansas River Area with visitors participating in all the recreation activities that the area has to offer. There isn't one primary recreation activity for the area and a variety of camping setups are often found ranging from tents, van campers to large Class A motorhomes and 5<sup>th</sup> Wheels. Based on staff observations including conversations with visitors it appears that people visit the area for short stays as more of an overflow location to people wishing to maximize the 14 day stay limit while vacationing in the greater Chaffee County area. A number of people violate the law and attempt to reside in this area.

Per the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan, the overall camping management goal for the Shavano sub-unit is to adjust the facilities, visitor services and management controls to a more front country setting in alignment with the location and volume of use. Following camping monitoring and need for facilities; appropriate fees that are commensurate with the services provided and necessary to protect resources and public health will be pursued. The plan calls for phasing in the construction of camping loops and approximately 80 designated campsites and transition the site to provide essential support facilities such as restrooms, fire rings, information kiosks and a campground host site over time as funding allows and monitoring indicates. Fees would be commensurate with the facilities provided and start at the primitive level if warranted. Currently there is not a fee for camping in this area. The management plans calls for developing partnerships, including "Friends of" groups to assist with ongoing monitoring and management.

## Burmac

Increased camping management in the are referred to as Burmac is called for in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan. It is located near the town of Salida, Colorado off of Highway 50. Per the management plan, the area currently sees moderate to low levels of recreational camping but due to the proximity to Salida many areas within this sub-unit have become a popular destination for people wishing to illegally reside on public land. This has resulted in high volumes of trash, human waste and drug paraphernalia creating an unsafe environment for visitors and staff. BLM staff assumes that this environment has displaced what would normally be a high level of camping demand in association with the trail system and people visiting the greater area.

The overall camping management goal for this sub-unit per the management plan is to adjust the facilities, visitor services and management controls to a more front country setting in alignment with the location and volume of use. Near the Burmac Trailhead designate 10-15 campsites as terrain and topography allow and that are in close proximity to a restroom at the trailhead. Construct a larger trailhead as well as a vault toilet and consider overflow camping options in the design as well as additional campsites. Transition the Burmac area to provide essential support facilities such as restrooms, fire rings, information kiosks and a camp host following the monitoring plan. Appropriate fees that are commensurate with the services provided and necessary to protect resources and public health will be pursued. This would likely be at the primitive level initially. Currently there is not a fee for camping in this area. The management plans calls for developing partnerships, including “Friends of” groups to assist with ongoing monitoring and management. For Burmac, Salida Mountain Trails would likely be a key partner.

### CR 304 Trailhead

Increased camping management in the vicinity of the CR 304 Trailhead is called for in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan. Located near the town of Buena Vista, Colorado, the CR 304 Trailhead is off of Highway 285 and Chaffee County Road 304. Per the management plan, the recreation setting of this sub-unit is primarily front-country due to the ease of access, modified landscape, volume of people, visitor contacts and evidence of use. The operational setting is middle country to back country since travel management designations are in place allowing for regulatory signing. Kiosks contain maps and recreation information while brochures are also available for the area. Staff are infrequently present due to staffing limitations and workload.

The overall camping management goal for this sub-unit is to adjust the facilities, visitor services and management controls to a more front country setting in alignment with the location and volume of use. In the CR304 area do not designate any campsites West of the CR304 trailhead to minimize traffic and safety concerns. Attempt to designate 8-12 campsites in appropriate locations closer to the trailhead at the junction of CR304 and 376. This would follow the campsite criteria while installing management controls and facilities where necessary to protect resources including visitor facilities. Construct a larger CR304 trailhead as well as a vault toilet and consider overflow camping options and additional campsites in the design. Appropriate fees that are commensurate with the services provided and necessary to protect resources and public health will be pursued. This would likely be at the primitive level initially. Currently there is not a fee for camping in this area. A key 20 year partnership with Friends of Fourmile provides volunteer assistance through observations, data collection, and on the ground project assistance for the area, including this area.

### Browns Grotto

Increased camping management in the Browns Grotto area is called in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan. It is located between the towns of Salida and Buena Vista, Colorado off of Highway 285 and Chaffee County Road 194. The 500 acres of BLM land located along County Road 194 accesses Hecla Junction, the primary river take-out for Browns Canyon and designated fee site campground and day-use area. Hecla Junction is also one of two primary gateways to Browns Canyon National Monument. These 500 acres are outside of the National Monument boundaries.



The physical and social component of the setting for this area is primarily front-country due to the ease of access, modified landscape, volume of people, visitor contacts and evidence of use. The operational setting is back country since travel management designations are in place but the area has very little regulatory signing or evidence of management controls. Staff are infrequently present due to staffing limitations and workload.

Per the management plan, the overall camping management goal for this sub-unit is to adjust the facilities, visitor services and management controls to a more front country setting in alignment with the location and volume of use following monitoring and adaptive management. Improvements will be done in a professional and attractive manner aligning with its location as the entrance to Browns Canyon National Monument. 10-15 sites would be designated while directing future increased demand to other sub-units or non-BLM sites. Appropriate fees that are commensurate with the services provided and necessary to protect resources and public health will be pursued following monitoring and adaptive management. This would likely be at the primitive level initially. Currently there is not a fee for camping in this area. The management plans calls for developing partnerships, including “Friends of” groups to assist with ongoing monitoring and management. For Browns Grotto, Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area would be a likely partner as they manage the river recreation assets in this area and frequently travel in this area.

#### Penrose Commons – Draft Recreation Area Management Plan

Increased camping management in Penrose Commons is called in the Penrose Commons Recreation Area Management Plan (Draft). Penrose Commons (aka Penrose Chaining Area) is a 3,100-acre parcel of BLM managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office and surrounded by private lands in Fremont County, CO. Public access is from the south via Fremont County Road 127. Visitation has increased dramatically in recent years, impacting vegetation due to dispersed camping, changes in vehicle type to include Side by Side Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) and increased motorcycle use.

The physical and social component of the setting for this area is primarily front-country due to the ease of access, modified landscape, volume of people, visitor contacts and evidence of use. The operational setting is back country since travel management designations are in place but the area has very little regulatory signing or evidence of management controls. Staff are infrequently present due to staffing limitations and workload though additional staffing is warranted due to the high level of illegal behavior occurring at the site.

Per the management plan, the objective is to provide limited camping opportunities if it can be demonstrated that there is a tie to off-highway vehicle recreation and can continue to be provided in a manner that is free of trash and human waste, is commensurate with the amount of camping demand associated with off-highway vehicle recreation, season of use, the cost and ability to manage, and impacts to grazing operations including forage. The plan calls for limiting camping to designated sites that would eventually include a fire ring, barriers to prevent expansion and signposts. The plan also calls for installing restrooms and increased agency presence if monitoring warrants a need and charging an associated fee.

## Recreation Site Visitation

Similar to many recreation sites throughout Colorado, visitation to Royal Gorge Field Office has increased substantially over the past decade. Data supporting increased visitation numbers is summarized in this section from the BLM’s annual recreation management statistics, an automated traffic counter, annual surveys of the Fourmile Area, and two visitor use studies. In addition, this section addresses how the pandemic has affected recreational use.

Visitation to the Royal Gorge Field Office recreation sites is recorded annually in the BLM’s Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) database. The use at a specific site is captured as “visits” which equates to one person entering lands or waters managed by the BLM for the purposes of recreation. The BLM also reports “visitor days” which is a unit of measure the presence of a person in an area for 12 hours.

Visitation in RMIS is reported for the federal fiscal year, which runs from October 1 through September 30 of the following year. For example, fiscal year 2010 was October 1, 2009 through September 30, 2010. The RMIS visitation numbers are derived from multiple methods including records from recreation permits, such as campground fee envelopes, data from traffic counters, and simple observation.



Motorcycle Riding in Fourmile

Table 1 and Chart 1 show a slow increase in numbers between 2010 and 2018 and a jump in visitation in 2019 that continues to current times across the field office area. Chart 2 shows developed campground trends versus revenue collected in the field office. The RGFO had 4.6 million visits in FY20, a 121% increase from the previous year. This enormous increase in recreational visits is likely a function of the Covid pandemic. 2022 saw 2.2 million visits; a decrease from the 2020 spike but still up from pre-COVID levels.

*Table 1-Field Office Visits*

Fiscal Year	2010	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Visits (AHRA)	1,522,965	1,598,912	1,586,622	1,663,429 (815,651)	2,084,652 (882,443)	4,618,763 (1,073,203)	2,685,629 (1,085,725)	2,238,077 (1,152,907)
Visitor Days	572,229	739,267	752,487	940,969	993,573	1,725,698	1,327,679	984,676

Chart 1-Field Office Visits

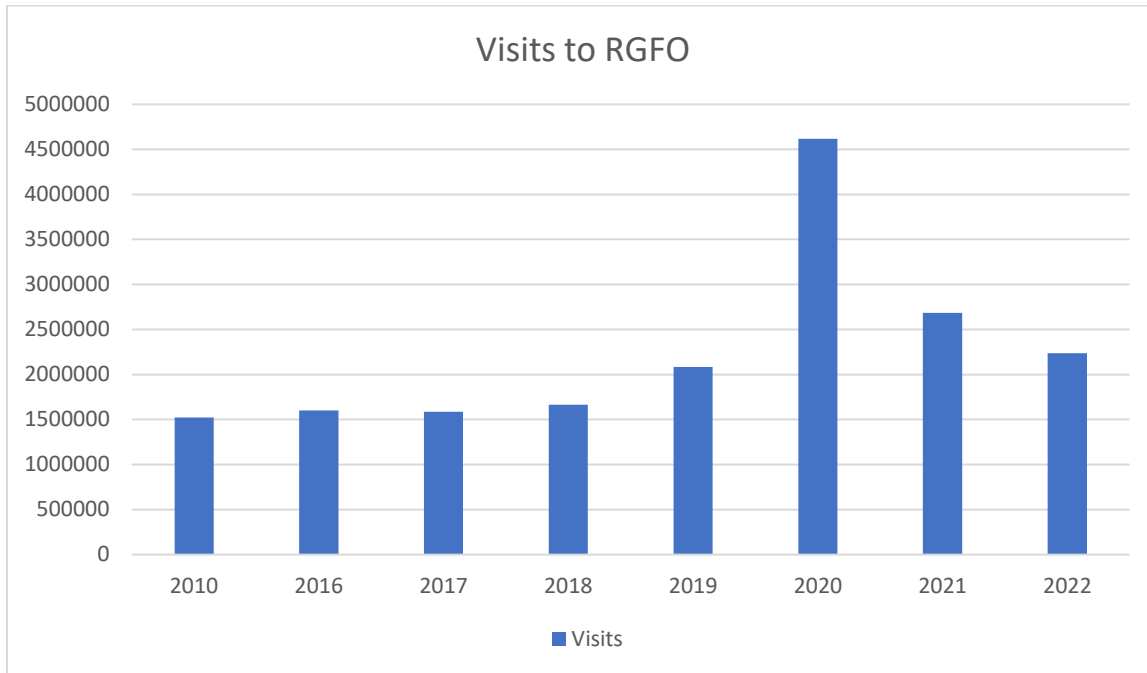
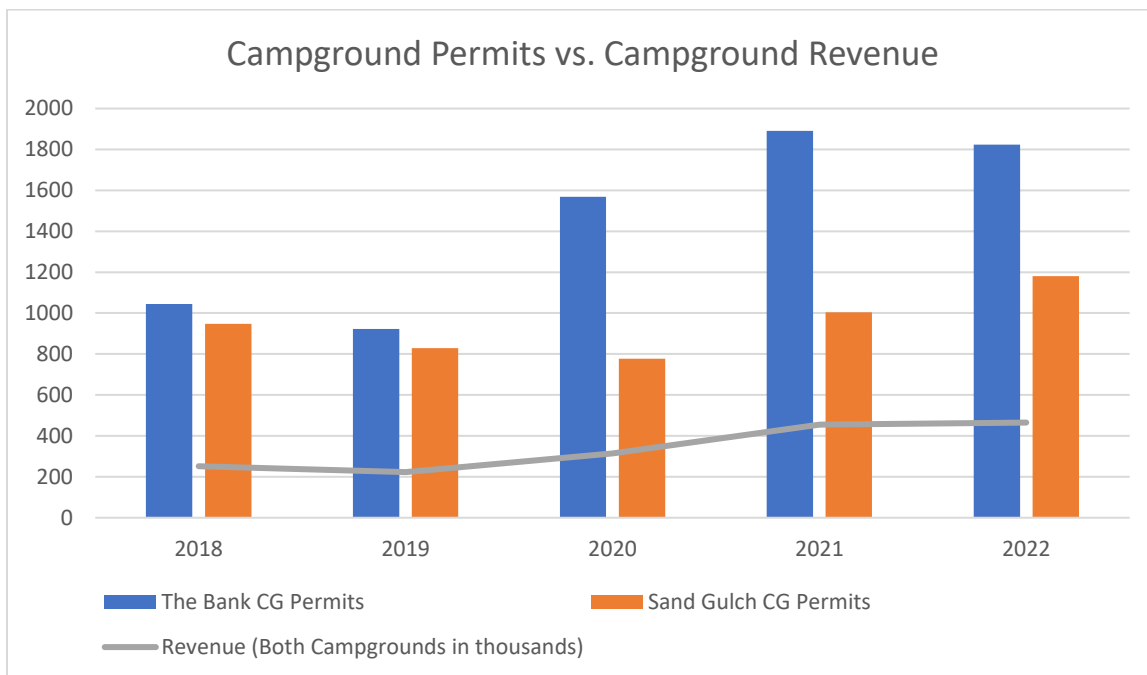


Chart 2-Campground Permits vs. Revenue Collected



\*Permit Numbers and Revenue estimates are only available for The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds.

\*\*In 2020 The Bank Campground was expanded from 13 sites to 33 sites

\*\*\*2021 a campground host was at The Bank Campground during the busy season

## Pandemic Effects on Outdoor Recreation

Early research on the effects of the Covid pandemic on outdoor recreation shows substantial increases in recreation on public lands. The 2020 Outdoor Industry Report found that there was an increase in new participants in outdoor recreation as Americans sought safe, socially-distant activities, and the study found the majority of these new participants reported they want to continue their new recreation activities after the pandemic (Outdoor Industry Association, 2021). These findings suggest that the major increases in visitation during summer 2020 are likely to persist.

## Anticipated Future Visitation

According to data from the Colorado State Demography Office, the population in Chaffee and Fremont Counties was 69,736 in 2021. Fremont County represents 71 percent of the total population in the two-county region, while Chaffee County represents 29 percent in 2021. The population in the two-county region has grown at a slower pace between 2000-2010 and 2010-2020, compared with 1990-2000. The two-county population increased an average annual rate of 3.3 percent between 1990-2000, compared with 0.4 percent between 2000-2010 and 0.6 percent between 2010-2020. Between 2020 and 2021, the two-county region grew 1.9 percent, or added over 1,300 people.

Over the next 10 years, population growth is expected in both counties. The projected annual average growth rate between 2020 and 2030 is lowest in Fremont County, at 0.2 percent. Chaffee County has a projected average annual growth rate of 1 percent. The projected total change in population in the two-county area over this period exceeds 3,000. By 2050, the projected population in Chaffee and Fremont Counties could reach over 75,300 people.

The growing population base in the area and across the two-county area is anticipated to drive demand for developed and dispersed recreation opportunities (NVUM study). As a result, visitation to the area over the next decade is projected to increase and may lead to demand for new and/or more accessible developed recreation sites.

*Table 2-Population Estimates*

Geography	Historical Population*					Rate of Population Change (AARC)				Projected Population		
	1990	2000	2010	2020	2021	1990 to 2000	2000 to 2010	2010 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2030	2040	2050
Chaffee County	12,684	16,242	17,809	19,476	20,099	2.5%	0.9%	0.9%	3.2%	21,456	22,384	22,886
Fremont County	32,273	46,145	46,824	48,939	49,637	3.6%	0.1%	0.4%	1.4%	50,001	51,215	52,427
Colorado	3,294,393	4,301,261	5,029,196	5,773,714	5,814,707	2.7%	1.6%	1.4%	0.7%	6,416,217	7,073,418	7,486,286

\*Data from 1990 to 2020 is derived from the Historical Census years and 2021 data is derived from the Colorado Demography Office intercensal estimates.

Source: Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office (2023).

## Current Amenities

The table below identifies the number of sites and types of amenities offered or potentially offered at each of the campgrounds/camp areas within the field office. For the existing campgrounds (The Bank, Sand Gulch and Turtle Rock) management includes regular patrols by BLM law enforcement and staff as well as routine maintenance and cleaning as well as campground hosts if available. For the proposed primitive camping areas (Shavano, Burmac, CR304, Browns Grotto, Penrose Commons); delineated sites with camping information, tent/trail space, fire rings, basic access roads, and portable toilets would be installed prior to implementing a primitive fee. The installation of these amenities would follow the monitoring and adaptive management strategies outlined in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan or any subsequent plans that address camping management. Primitive sites could become basic sites if monitoring and public demand indicate additional facilities are needed.

*Table 3-FLREA Campground Amenities and Fees*

\*Expansion Proposed, #of sites are approximate.

\*\*Proposed for primitive recreation facilities and fees if monitoring warrants

Campground	Sites/Fee	Group Site/Fee	Tent/Trailer Space	Picnic Tables	Drinking Water	Access Roads	Fee Collection	Visitor Protection	Trash	Toilet	Fire Rings
The Bank	33/\$7	2/\$14	Improved	Yes	No	Improved	Yes	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes
Sand Gulch	16/\$7	1/\$14	Improved	Yes	No	Improved	Yes	Yes	Proposed	Yes	Yes
Turtle Rock	22*/\$0	N/A	Improved	Yes	No	Improved	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	Yes
Shavano**	80/\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed
Burmac**	15/\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed
CR 304**	10/\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed
Browns **Grotto	15/\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed
Penrose Commons**	10/\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Proposed	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed
Overflow**	\$0	N/A	Proposed	No	No	Proposed	Yes	Proposed	No	Proposed	Proposed

## Current Operating Costs



Kiosk at The Bank Campground

Current operations and maintenance of a 15 site basic level developed campground in the RGFO with one double vault restroom costs approximately \$35,193 annually (Table 4). This includes staff salaries, camp hosts, vehicles, law enforcement, and operations costs such as toilet pumping and cleaning, cleaning of fire rings, ongoing road and site maintenance and 10% deferred maintenance reserves. Increased visitation has required more frequent cleaning, more supplies such as toilet paper, and maintenance as well as the need for an onsite presence in the form of a campground host.

A primitive campground would offer similar amenities as a basic level campground but lower levels of service. This would include less frequent staffing and law enforcement patrols, less frequent cleaning, non-improved or gravel sites, and potentially portable toilets instead of vault toilets. As a result this cost is lower but visitors would anticipate to receive a lower standard of care. Table 5 outlines that anticipated expenses of managing a primitive campground is \$19,521 annually.

The RGFO anticipates that costs will continue to rise as the costs of goods, services, and labor increase. The administrative costs related to collecting camping fees is estimated based on the use of an online electronic payment system. The RGFO plans to host camp area volunteers in the future to help with visitor orientation, cleaning, and general campground maintenance, and will compensate hosts with a stipend.

*Table 4-Basic Campground Management Expenses*

Cost Type (Averages, including benefits)	Estimated Cost/15 site Campground
Park Ranger Salary (maintenance, camp host support) 8 hours per week for 34 weeks @ \$33.43/hour (cost to government)	\$9,093
Vehicle - 1 days/week for 34 weeks @ \$100/day	\$3,400
Supplies (cleaning supplies, toilet paper, sign repair, etc...)	\$1,500
Services (toilet pumping = 3 pumps/year/ double vault @ \$600/pump)	\$1,800
Road/Site Maintenance	\$3,000
Campground Host Reimbursement \$400/month for 8 months	\$3,200
Law Enforcement 2 trips/month/site, 8 months @ \$5,000/month	\$10,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$31,993.00</b>
10% Reserve for Deferred Maintenance	\$3,200
<b>Total Cost Plus 10% Reserve</b>	<b>\$35,193</b>

*Table 5-Primitive Campground Management Expenses*

Cost Type (Averages, including benefits)	Estimated Cost/15 site Campground
Park Ranger Salary (maintenance, camp host support) 8 hours every other week for 34 weeks @ \$33.43/hour (cost to government)	\$4,546
Vehicle – 1 day every other week for 34 weeks @ \$100/day	\$1,700
Supplies (cleaning supplies, toilet paper, sign repair, etc...)	\$1,500
Services (portable toilet rental \$60/week)	\$2,040
Road/Site Maintenance	N/A
Campground Host Per Diem; \$400/month for 8 months	\$3,200
Law Enforcement 1 trips/month/site, 8 months @ \$5,000/month	\$5,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$17,986</b>
10% Reserve for Deferred Maintenance	\$1,798
<b>Total Cost Plus 10% Reserve</b>	<b>\$19,785</b>

## Fee Proposal and Rationale

This section provides a rationale for a change in the campground fee structure; either a new fee or an amendment to a fee. This rationale is based on changes in operational costs (realized and/or anticipated), a detailed comparison of the amenities provided and fees charged at a range of public and private campgrounds in the area, and financial models showing projected fee revenue generation.

The BLM's rationale for an Expanded Amenity Fees at existing and potential future campgrounds are outlined below.

### 1. Need

Recreational use within the RGFO, including camping, has increased considerably over the past 10+ years, as explained in the Recreation Site Visitation section above. As visitation has increased, pressure on the campground sites, toilets, nearby trails and natural resources has also increased. The BLM has increased frequency of pumping toilets, cleaning and patrols as a result of increased use of facilities.

Campgrounds are often full during peak use seasons and visitors often overflow onto adjacent public lands. Monitoring has indicated an increase

in vegetation loss and human waste associated with this level of camping demand. This use has increased the need for expansion of facilities as well as increased maintenance levels and visitor contacts. Additional camping regulations on adjacent lands have been put in place or are being considered to address the impacts to resources from this trend. This increased camping demand is impacting a larger portion of the field office's recreation budget allocated to camping facility management and maintenance. This in turn detracts from the agency's ability to provide maintenance of other non-fee recreation sites such as trails and dispersed camping. Introducing camping fees under the FLREA authority in these high camping demand areas will generate revenue to directly pay for cleaning, operations, and maintenance of camping facilities allowing the agency to continue to provide services at all of its recreation sites.

Observations have been documented by Friends of Fourmile for Memorial Day weekends over a 14-year time span. Their data indicates an annual 7% increase in visitation in Fourmile, which includes the Turtle Rock campground. This trend is likely indicative of greater trends in the region. Feedback in 2022 from BLM's Turtle Rock Campground Host indicated that the campground was full 100% of the nights starting Memorial Day Weekend and many evenings people camped illegally in day-use parking or creating new sites. The demand regularly exceeds the facilities currently provided.



Sand Gulch and The Bank Campground are located along the Gold Belt Scenic Byway



## 2. Comparison with Nearby Public and Private Campgrounds

In accordance with the BLM Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook (H-2930-1), the proposed fee increases are based on a comparative cost review of fees at existing private and public facilities (Table 6). This analysis reviews and compares campgrounds within the same service area each site that provide similar services, including US Forest Service and private campgrounds. The comparative analysis shows that current rates within the field office is inconsistent with local campgrounds with similar amenities.

*Table 6-Rates and Service Comparison of Regional Campgrounds*

Campground Name	Public/Private	# of Sites	Camping Fee	Campground Amenities						Notes
				Picnic Table	Fire Grate or Ring	Trash Collection	Potable Water	Toilet	Electricity	
Turtle Rock	BLM	22	n/a	X	X			X		Tent and RV sized sites.
The Bank Campground	BLM	30	\$7	X	X			X		Reservable, Tent and RV sized sites, two group sites.
Sand Gulch Campground	BLM	16	\$7	X	X			X		Reservable, Tent and RV sized sites, one group site
Penitente Canyon	BLM	15	\$11, Group \$20	X	X	X	X	X		Reservable. 2 group sites. Tent and RV sized sites
Zapata Falls	BLM	23	\$11, Group \$20	X	X	X		X		Reservable. 1 group site, Tent and RV sized sites
18 Road, North Fruita Desert	BLM	111	\$20, Group \$28	X	X			X		Reservable. 1 group site, Tent and RV sized sites
Railroad Bridge	CPW	14	\$28	X	X			X		Reservation only
Hecla Junction	CPW	23	\$28	X	X			X		Reservation only
Ruby Mountain	CPW	22	\$28	X	X			X		Reservation only
Dexter Campground	USFS (Rocky Mountain Rec Company)		\$20	X	X		X	X		\$7 day use fee if not camping
Mount Princeton Campground	USFS (Rocky Mountain Rec Company)	17	\$22	X	X		X	X		\$7 day use fee if not camping
Collegiate Peaks Campground	USFS (Rocky Mountain Rec Company)	56	\$22	X	X		X	X		\$6 day use fee if not camping, 2-night min stay on weekends
Arkansas River Rim	Private	38	\$40	X	X	X	X	X	X	Wifi, dump station, firewood for sale
Chalk Creek Campground	Private		\$42 (tent) \$67 (RV)	X	X	X	X	X	X	Store, P playground, Wifi, DVD rentals
Buena Vista KOA	Private	93	\$68+	X	X	X	X	X	X	Wifi, cabins
<b>Average Fee (Public)</b>			\$21							

### 3. Projected Revenue Scenarios

The collection of the proposed Expanded Amenity fee for a standard developed campground will generate revenue commensurate with visitation. Based on Colorado and national recreation trends, the RGFO anticipates visitation will continue to be high. Table 8 displays projections of revenue from the proposed camping fee, calculated for various scenarios of fee charged, occupancy rate, season length, and number of campsites. Per the estimates found in Table 7 and 8, the current operating cost of a standard campground in the Royal Gorge Field Office is approximately \$35,193 annually and a primitive campground is \$19,785. This cost is anticipated to rise in future years in association with inflation and increased visitation.

*Table 7-Projected Fee Revenue Scenarios*

Site Fee Scenario	Occupancy/ Compliance Rate	# Nights	Estimated Campground Revenue @ 15 sites/one restroom	Estimated Management Cost (Table 4)	Profit/Loss Estimate
\$7	87%	167	\$15,255	\$35,193	-\$19,938
\$10	87%	167	\$21,793	\$35,193	-\$13,400
\$15	87%	167	\$32,690	\$35,193	-\$2,503
\$20	87%	167	\$43,587	\$35,193	\$8,394
\$25	87%	167	\$54,485	\$35,193	\$19,292

# of nights is based on a six month visitation season. Occupancy/compliance rate is based on average occupancy rates from 2018-2022 at The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds during peak use seasons.

*Table 8-Actual Campground Fee Revenue 2022*

Campground	Current Site Fee	# of sites	Visitation	# of permits	% Occupancy*	Avg. Length of stay**	Actual 2022 Campground Revenue	Estimated Management Cost (Table 4)	Profit/Loss Estimate
The Bank	\$7	33	29,995	1,841	87%	2.45	\$31,644	\$42,152***	-\$10,508
Sand Gulch	\$7	16	22,998	1,230	87%	2.09	\$18,031	\$35,193	-\$17,162
Turtle Rock	\$0	22	unknown	n/a	98%****	unknown	\$0	\$35,193	-\$35,193

\*Based on actual fee revenue the occupancy/compliance rate for these campgrounds are closer to 87% for a concentrated 167 day season.

\*\*Calculated by dividing revenue by number of permits.

\*\*\*Management cost for the Bank Campground was calculated at the same cost for personnel, vehicle, host and law enforcement but tripled costs for cleaning supplies and vault toilet pumping of figures found in table 4. The Bank has 33 individual sites, two group sites and 5 vault restrooms.

\*\*\*\*Based on observations by campground host in summer 2022

Based on the various revenue fee scenarios (Table 6) and compared against actual fee revenue (Table 8) a current rate of \$10 per night is likely to result in a loss in all market conditions and demand levels. At \$15 per night it is estimated that a campground would be close to breaking even at an estimated \$2,503 annual loss. A \$20/night rate would provide an estimated \$8,394 annual revenue allowing for additional maintenance, staff support and reserves for market changes and cost inflation in current market conditions. When comparing actual FY 2022 revenue (Table 8) versus estimated expenses (Table 4) RGFO spent approximately \$27,670 allocated dollars to supplement the management of The Bank and Sand Gulch Campground and \$35,193 at the Turtle Rock Campground.

#### **4. Proposal to Change the RGFO Expanded Amenity Fee**

This review of the need, the comparison with other campgrounds in the area, and the models showing projected fee revenue and potential profit/loss inform the proposal to introduce a standardized Expanded Amenity camping fee for all campgrounds managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office based on the level of services provided.

From the analysis, a fee of \$20 per night for individual sites in a basic level campground and a \$40 group site fee would currently cover all estimated maintenance costs plus additional revenue to hedge against unanticipated events or changing market conditions. This fee would apply to the Turtle Rock Campground and an adjustment to the fee at the Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds. The table also shows anticipated revenue once Sand Gulch Campground is expanded to double the number of campsites.

A fee of \$10 per night is also proposed for developed campgrounds that provide primitive level of services. The analysis found that a campground that has lower levels of development and less frequent staffing still costs approximately \$20,000 per year to manage. A campground would fall into the primitive campground category if monitoring indicates toilets are necessary but only a portable toilet is provided, roads and tent pads remain unimproved and only minimal staffing is needed to minimally keep sites clean and sanitary. These would transition to a standard site if a vault toilet, increased staffing and improved sites and roads become necessary. This includes; Shavano, Burmac, CR304, Browns Grotto and Penrose Commons.

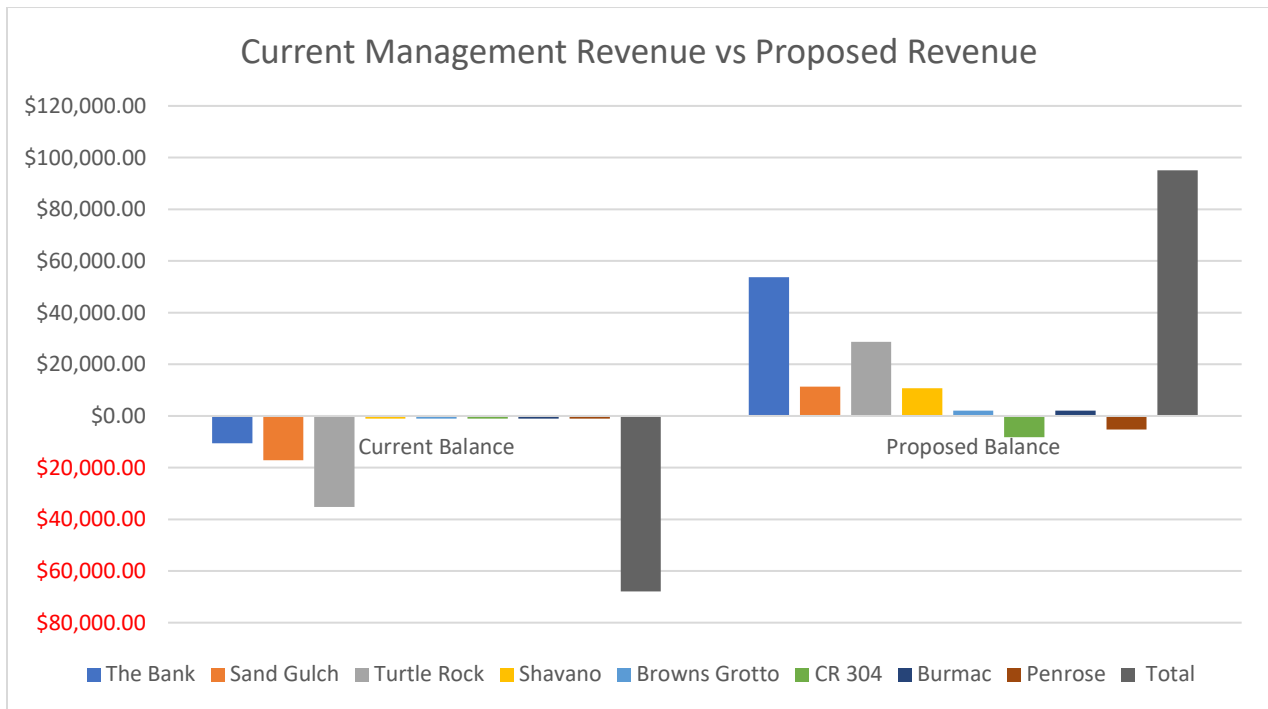
The field office also proposes a \$10/night overflow rate for facilities that offer this type of amenity. Visitors would be allowed to stay overnight in a designated overflow area only if the adjacent campground is full. Charging a reduced fee would contribute to maintenance of the facilities provided at the site, provide an option for overflow use and reduce resource impacts that would otherwise occur from dispersed camping. It is anticipated that overflow use would only occur during peak times such as holiday weekends or permitted events. Because of this limited and sporadic use, estimating revenue is not feasible and not included in the analysis.

To keep up with rising management and maintenance costs, the field office will implement the new fee structure and the following year will begin using the average annual Western U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI) to make future fee adjustments. The BLM will use the CPI the year after the collection of fees is implemented. When the increase or decrease reaches a \$2 increment the fees would be adjusted accordingly. For example, with a \$20 fee for individual campsites, a 10 percent increase in the Western U.S. CPI would lead to a \$2 increase in fees to \$22. Typically, the Western U.S. CPI increases approximately 3 percent a year. Thus, it would likely take 4 years to increase the fees by \$2. For group sites, a 25 percent increase in the Western U.S. CPI would lead to a \$1 increase. The BLM would return to the BLM Rocky Mountain District Resource Advisory Council (RAC) before each fee increase to update the RAC on successes and challenges in using the Western U.S. CPI.

Table 9-Estimated Campground Fee Revenue

Campground	Proposed Site Fee	# of sites	% Occupancy/ Compliance Estimate	# of nights	Anticipated Revenue	Estimated Management Cost (Table 4)	Profit/Loss Estimate	Revenue to Cost Ratio
The Bank	\$20	33	87%	167	\$95,891	\$42,152	\$53,739	127%
Sand Gulch	\$20	16	87%	167	\$46,493	\$35,193	\$11,300	32%
Sand Gulch Expanded	\$20	32	87%	167	\$92,986	\$42,152	\$50,834	120%
Turtle Rock	\$20	22	87%	167	\$63,928	\$35,193	\$28,735	82%
Shavano	\$10	80	87%	167	\$116,232	\$105,520	\$10,712	10%
CR 304	\$10	8	87%	167	\$11,623	\$19,785	-\$8,162	-41%
Burmac	\$10	15	87%	167	\$21,794	\$19,785	\$2,009	10%
Browns Grotto	\$10	15	87%	167	\$21,794	\$19,785	\$2,009	10%
Penrose Commons	\$10	10	87%	167	\$14,529	\$19,785	-\$5,256	-26%
Overflow	\$10	N/A	Unknown	N/A	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	
							Average	45%

Chart 3-Comparison of Current Revenue and Proposed Revenue



RGFO will use various e-commerce technologies, as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-010, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve, and pay for campsites and day use within the field office. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov. If the RGFO decides to make reservation services or other types of e-commerce options available in the future, an expanded amenity fee for reservation

services would be charged in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G).

Reservation services fees could range from \$0.50 to \$10.00 depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service fee is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. For visitors who wish not to pay the expanded amenity fee of reservation services the field office will attempt to continue to provide a blend of reservation and first-come first served options at each of the campgrounds. Other payment options may also be considered in the future as technology and software develops including onsite credit card payment systems or scan and pay as examples.

### 5. How Fees are Commensurate with Visitor Benefits

Visitor use, including camping, has increased dramatically over the last 10 years in the Royal Gorge Field Office, as seen in the document above. In general, costs of goods, services, and labor have also steadily increased over the last 10 years. Based on the amenities provided and comparisons with other campgrounds in and around the region offering similar amenities, the proposed camping fee would be commensurate with the benefits that visitors receive. In exchange for the fee, visitors receive a site that is free of human waste and litter where they can expect to have reasonable visitor protection in a natural environment with direct access to outstanding recreation opportunities.

The BLM installs facilities to support camping based on monitoring and in response to increased visitation that results in human waste, fire scars and fire restriction violations. The field office has also found a need for an increased staff presence to provide reasonable visitor protections in response to visitor complaints. This section reviews the amenities at each campground and the justification to collect the proposed expanded amenity fee.

*Table 10-Campsite Amenities FLREA Checklist*

Campground Name	Existing or Proposed	Campsite Amenities FLREA Checklist (must provide majority of items listed)								
		Tent or Trailer Space	Picnic Table	Drinking Water	Access Roads	Fee Collection	Reasonable Visitor Protection	Refuse Containers	Toilet Facilities	Fire Ring
<b>Turtle Rock (Basic)</b>	Existing	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
<b>The Bank Campground (Basic)</b>	Existing	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
<b>Sand Gulch Campground (Basic)</b>	Existing	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
<b>Shavano (Primitive)</b>	Proposed	X			Primitive	X	X		Primitive	X
<b>Burmac (Primitive)</b>	Proposed	X			Primitive	X	X		Primitive	X
<b>CR 304 (Primitive)</b>	Proposed	X			Primitive	X	X		Primitive	X
<b>Browns Grotto (Primitive)</b>	Proposed	X			Primitive	X	X		Primitive	X

<b>Penrose Commons (Primitive)</b>	Proposed	<b>X</b>			<b>Primitive</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>Primitive</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Overflow</b>	Proposed	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	

As shown in Table 10 above, existing campgrounds within the Royal Gorge Field Office provide 7 of the 9 amenities outlined in FLREA for an Expanded Amenity Site. Several sites are proposed for development in the Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan based upon monitoring and indicators that could result in the need to add additional facilities. These facilities would be installed to address human health and safety as well as resource impacts combined with a need for additional agency presence to provide reasonable levels of visitor protection. If facilities are installed, sites would be evaluated against the FLREA guidelines and the field office expanded amenity fee could be charged. These would start as primitive level sites and increase to basic level if monitoring indicates additional management is needed.

All campgrounds would also provide significant opportunities for outdoor recreation, which is listed under the amenities for a standard amenity fee, but merits acknowledgement here.

FLREA requires the camping fee be commensurate with amenities provided and comparable to campgrounds in the area. At present, the free camping at Turtle Rock and \$7 rate at The Bank and Sand Gulch Campgrounds is inconsistent with other campgrounds in the region with similar amenities. Comparable USFS campgrounds in the area, Collegiate Peaks Campground and Mount Princeton Campground, each charge \$22 per night, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife campgrounds charge \$28 per night. Other BLM-managed campgrounds in the region, Penitente Canyon and Zapata Falls, each charge \$11 per night. 18 Road Campground, outside of Fruita, Colorado and a major mountain bike destination with similar amenities, had a recent fee increase to \$20/night.

## 6. Preliminary Proposed Projects Using Recreation Fee Revenue

The following is an initial list of how the proposed recreation fee revenue would be used to continue to maintain and improve the field office’s expanded amenity fee sites:

*Table 11-Proposed Project and Improvements for Basic and Primitive Sites*

<b>Proposed Improvements</b>	<b>Basic Sites</b>	<b>Primitive Sites</b>
Providing trash services	X	
Based on monitoring and identifying the need, the BLM could consider adding extra campsites and day-use parking if demand warrants.	X	X
Develop campground host sites and recruit volunteers to assist with site management, including adjacent public lands. Provide per diem for hosts	X	X
Increase maintenance on access roads and area trails.	X	
Increase agency presence and visitor education and ethics at campgrounds and adjacent destination sites such as trails and climbing areas.	X	
Increase management and maintenance of adjacent dispersed campsites.	X	X
Increase response times to maintenance needs caused by flooding or other major weather events.	X	
Service contracts for septic pumping or portable toilet servicing.	X	X

Supplies including but not limited to cleaning supplies, toilet paper, hand soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, fuel for motorized equipment, paint, lumber, upkeep of mechanical equipment, etc.	X	
Maintain, improve, and replace recreation site infrastructure such as trails, information and interpretive signage, fire rings, picnic tables, restroom buildings, etc	X	
Provide maps, brochure development and reprints, and interpretive materials	X	

## Impacts of Fee Changes

The following is an overview of impacts on visitors and the environment, non-market values and benefits, impacts on local economies, as well as socioeconomic impacts from the establishment of fees.

### Impacts on Visitors and the Environment

High quality recreation opportunities in the area are valued by local communities, as well as statewide and nationwide visitors. Recreational opportunities, including camping on public lands, are major reasons many residents choose to live here. The BLM expects the demand for camping, and associated recreation on public lands, to only increase in the future. As area visitation increases, it often leads to negative natural resource impacts, such as more litter, human waste, and vegetation damage. It is becoming difficult to maintain the recreation sites in their current conditions and without fee revenues. Implementing fees at the proposed recreation sites would improve the quality of the visitor experience by supporting more amenities, increasing the presence of rangers, and enhancing education and outreach efforts. Fees ultimately help to enable responsible recreation, thus protecting the environment for present and future visitors.

### Nonmarket Values and Benefits

The term nonmarket values refer to the benefits individuals attribute to experiences of the environment or uses of natural and cultural resources that do not involve market transactions, and therefore lack prices. Examples include the perceived benefits received from wildlife viewing, hiking in a wilderness, camping in a semi-wild setting with friends and family, or recreational hunting. Nevertheless, such values are important to consider because they help tell the entire economic story. Estimates of nonmarket values supplement estimates of income generated from commodity uses to provide a more complete picture of the economic implications of proposed resource management decisions.

Numerous studies document that individuals are often willing to pay more than their actual costs for a particular recreational experience. This is termed *consumer surplus* or *net willingness to pay*, the amount an individual would have been willing to pay for an environmental benefit minus the amount actually expended.

For instance, hikers pay a market price for gasoline used to reach a trail but may pay nothing to use the trail itself. Similarly, campers may pay a fee for this activity, but may be willing to pay more due to the “free” economic benefit accruing to this experience. Any amount that a recreationist would be willing to pay to use this otherwise free or underpriced resource represents the nonmarket consumer surplus value of that resource to that consumer.

Nonmarket use values have been studied extensively for a wide variety of recreation “goods.” A recent study<sup>7</sup> commissioned by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) examined studies designed to measure consumer surplus for a wide variety of recreation activities that typically occur on USFS lands, including camping at developed sites. Although the examined studies show a large degree of variation across geographies, they do show considerable degrees of consumer surplus for the studied activities. Of interest to the current project, the authors determined that camping in



developed campgrounds, or sites with development amenities such as fire pits, electricity, toilets, picnic tables, and parking, on USFS land produced an average consumer surplus of \$35.28 per visitor day in the Rocky Mountain Region. This represents the amount of benefit campers are receiving above and beyond the actual fee charged. These average value estimates are what we would expect the economic benefit to be, conditional on available information and holding all else constant.

Although one may quibble with the various methodologies these studies employ, it is well documented that recreationists are deriving value well beyond the fees charged.

### Impacts on Local Economies

Chaffee and Fremont County's economies are heavily dependent upon tourism, and each county stands to benefit from more recreation opportunities. Visitor spending in Chaffee and Fremont Counties combined totaled \$271 million in 2022, supporting 2,600 jobs earning \$85.4 million in payroll and generating \$18.2 million in tax receipts (Dean Runyon Associates and Colorado Tourism Office, 2023). Additionally, recreation and tourism-related industries account for 20 percent of Chaffee and Fremont Counties combined total employment in 2021, compared with 14 percent in Colorado (Headwaters Economics BLM Socioeconomic Profiles). Many tourists and locals alike prefer to camp at public campgrounds and are looking for reasonably priced fee sites. The BLM proposes to expand provision of amenities in response to increased visitation and associated impacts. Thus, the establishment of more fee sites is an indicator of increased visitation which represents a boon to gateway communities and their local businesses. Visitors typically contribute to local economies on their way to and from public lands through the purchase of lodging and a variety of consumables (e.g., fuel, food, equipment, etc.). Facilities that meet the needs of visitors are likely to continue to attract visitation and result in an economic benefit to local communities and economy.

### Socioeconomic impacts, including low-income populations and environmental justice communities

Recreation on BLM-administered lands supported \$1.4 billion in economic output and 11,000 jobs in Colorado in fiscal year (FY) 2021. Colorado's 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) was developed in close collaboration with a wide range of partners to provide a shared vision for the future of Colorado's outdoors. Surveys conducted as part of SCORP are used to identify recreation participation in Colorado regionally and statewide for residents of the state. Studies found that 92% of all adult residents engaged in outdoor recreational activities in 2019.

The socioeconomic data on BLM recreation users is unknown; however, the U.S. Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring Program (NVUM) 2016 data provides detailed visitation socioeconomic data for nearby forests including the Pike-San Isabel forest adjacent to BLM-managed public lands. Over 69% of visitors traveled to these forests to recreate. The majority of visitors traveled from the nearby area. Specifically, over 56 percent of visitation is from the area within 75 miles, while 44 percent of visitation is from over 76 miles.

The NVUM study further asked visitors to report their household incomes by category. The following data was gathered:

*Table 12 - Annual household income of visitors traveling to Pike-San Isabel Forest*

<b>Annual Household Income Category</b>	<b>National Forest Visits (%)</b>
Under \$25,000	4.1
\$25,000 to \$49,999	21.9
\$50,000 to \$74,999	21.3
\$75,000 to \$99,999	20.2
\$100,000 to \$149,999	18.6
More than \$150,000	13.9

*Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.*

Many tourists prefer to camp at public campgrounds; capacity at adjacent National Forest campgrounds is exceeded for the majority of the camping season. These campers rely on BLM and private campgrounds as many cannot afford the high cost of hotel accommodations in the area or would prefer developed camping to dispersed camping. Those who vacation away from home are more likely to be above average in income and in particular, recreation visitors to the area have a higher-than-average income profile than the population at large. As indicated in Table 12 above, nearly 53% of household incomes exceed \$75,000 that are visiting nearby forests. Furthermore, BLM campgrounds offer a very low-cost alternative to staying in a hotel in the area (where prices can range from \$60 to over \$150 per room per night during the season). This low-cost alternative is particularly important at the group sites, where groups can enjoy the amenities of the area at a very low cost.

Impacts to low-income or minority populations are not expected to be significant, as there are other free dispersed camping areas managed by the BLM and the nearby US Forest Service’s Pike-San Isabel Forest. Furthermore, there are discounted rates (50%) for camping for seniors and those with disabilities. An environmental justice screening was completed for Chaffee and Fremont Counties. Based on U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) data as used by EPA’s EJScreen tool (U.S. EPA 2023; U.S. Census Bureau 2022), both counties have low-income populations that meet the criteria for being identified as having environmental justice populations compared with the state reference.

*Table 13 – Chaffee and Fremont counties environmental justice baseline data*

<b>Geography</b>	<b>Low Income**</b>	<b>Minority*</b>
Chaffee County	32.0 percent	15.5 percent
Fremont County	34.7 percent	21.7 percent
Colorado (Reference area) <sup>^#</sup>	23.6 percent	33.2 percent 36.5 percent (MGA)

\* EPA EJScreen: <http://www.epa.gov/ejscreen> (accessed 08/17/2023); BLM EJ Mapping Tool

<sup>^</sup> Headwaters Economics BLM EPS and SEP: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/tools/blm-profiles/> (accessed 08/17/2023)

<sup>#</sup> American Community Survey, 5-Year 2017-2021 Estimates: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table> (accessed 08/17/2023)

## **Public Involvement**

As part of this proposal to introduce new camping fees, the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office will conduct the following outreach efforts to notify the public of its opportunity to review and provide comments:

- Post the Draft Business Plan on the BLM National Recreation Site Business Plan website and solicit feedback. <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/permits-and-fees/business-plans>
- Issue a Press Release notifying the public about the opportunity to comment and notify management partners. Request management partners to spread awareness through their networks and social media presence.
- The Field Office will present the campground fee increase proposal to the BLM Rocky Mountain District Resource Advisory Council (RAC). The FLREA mandates that the appropriate Recreation RAC reviews all BLM recreation fee proposals prior to approval. Comments from both the public at large and the BLM RAC will be considered prior to approval of the Royal Gorge Field Office Campground Business Plan.

The BLM will post how collected recreation fees are spent on the BLM's fee website.

Prior to modifying camping fees in the future, the BLM will follow the process outlined in FLREA or any other applicable law or regulation regarding fees on public lands.

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