



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Field Manager Report

April 2025

Gunnison Field Office (GFO)

Note: Topics below are labeled either “**Status Update**” or “**New Update**” to help identify items that have changed from the previous report.

Field Office Staffing Update

GFO continues to struggle to fill out its Table of Organization. Budget challenges, the moratorium on hiring, and long-term vacancies have conspired to keep Gunnison at a 40% vacancy rate. In cooperation with other Southwest District field offices, Gunnison has been working to see where resources could be traded back and forth to triage the most critical workloads.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Domestic Sheep Grazing EIS Proposed Decisions - Status Update

On August 27, 2021, the BLM Southwest District Office released two proposed decisions for the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Domestic Sheep Grazing Permit Renewals. Both decisions were protested by multiple groups and individuals for a variety of reasons. The project area is located in Gunnison, Hinsdale, and Ouray counties and includes nine grazing allotments on 65,710 acres of public land.

In accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the Southwest Resource Advisory Council voted on September 8, 2022 to create a subcommittee to analyze domestic sheep grazing in bighorn sheep habitat on BLM-managed high alpine allotments outside of Silverton, Colorado. The Sheep Grazing Subcommittee held six public meetings at the Uncompahgre Field Office from March through August 2023 and presented their recommendations to the BLM on October 11, 2023.

With the recent requirement to add language concerning the introduction of wolves on the landscape, the planning staff will release the proposed final decisions when this is completed.

North Powderhorn Fuels Reduction Project - Status Update

The first DNA document tiered to the North Powderhorn project was recently signed by the GFO field manager and will take place in the Gray Ranch area of the Gunnison Field Office (GFO). The proposed action is to reduce hazardous fuels and promote forest health and resiliency in mixed conifer forests on 46 acres of land managed by GFO in the North Powderhorn project area. Activities would be focused on managing timber stands to greatly reduce western spruce budworm and Douglas-fir bark beetle; reducing understory tree mortality from western spruce budworm; promoting healthy regeneration of a healthy understory; promoting regeneration of ponderosa pine; and reducing excess

fuels while creating natural fuel breaks.

Lake San Cristobal Fuels EA – Status Update

The performance period for this contract EA was recently extended. The BLM ID Team is currently working with the contractor, EMPSi, to refine treatment areas, alternatives, and issues for analysis. The GFO Wildlife Biologist and students from Western Colorado University are currently conducting snowshoe hare studies.

The BLM is currently working with Hinsdale County, the Colorado State Forest Service, and West Region Wildfire Council to create a flyer about the Lake San Cristobal fuels project and potential funding to treat private lands directly adjacent to the project area.

Gunnison Weeds Treatment Project - Status Update

GFO is nearing completion of an environmental assessment (EA) to consider using 10 new chemicals in their integrated noxious and invasive plant management program within the Gunnison Resource Area to reduce adverse impacts associated with increases in noxious and invasive plants. The EA will tier to a 2016 PEIS that approved 3 new chemicals, and a 2024 PEIS that approved 7 new chemicals including indaziflam (Rejuvra) which provides up to 3 years of residual effectiveness at treating cheatgrass. The BLM has begun consultation with the USFWS on the Biological Assessment (BA) for Gunnison sage-grouse and anticipates a letter of concurrence from the USFWS with additional herbicides in critical Gunnison sage-grouse habitat.

Recreation

Alpine Loop - Status Update

GFO saw significant increases in visitor use on the Alpine Loop in the past year, particularly in July and August. Since 2018, there has been over 20% increase in visitation, with close to 400,000 people visiting the Alpine Loop annually. This has led to parking congestion at popular trailheads and stress on existing campsites and facilities. GFO is working closely with Hinsdale and San Juan counties to address these issues. We have financial agreements in place with both counties to provide law enforcement support and we piloted a wag-bag station at American Basin.

2025 will see a significantly scaled back plan of work that will focus on maintaining existing infrastructure in an effort to meet the public's expectations of public health and safety at our campgrounds and trailhead vault toilets.

The BLM is also moving forward with a long-term realty action (with the support of Hinsdale County) to acquire another 14 patented mining claims in Hinsdale County. A previous acquisition of 17 mining claims have already been purchased by the Wilderness Land Trust from the same willing seller. These private lands are adjacent to, or within the boundaries of wilderness study areas and these acquisitions would improve access to public lands and reduce the potential for development in and around our treasured lands on the Alpine Loop.

Developed Campgrounds - Status Update

Now that the necessary consultation and analysis has been completed, GFO has made fee campsites in the GFO reservable through Recreation.gov. GFO analyzed existing user fees at four campgrounds in the Gunnison area for consistency with criteria found in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. This analysis led to the preparation of a business plan recommending

regular fee increases in pace with fees charged at area campgrounds. The business plan was presented at the Southwest RAC meeting in Gunnison in October 2023. All four fee campgrounds can now take payment through the “Scan and Pay” App which interfaces with Recreation.gov. Campers with cell service can use this e-commerce solution to make their reservations while on vacation or at any other time with a computer or smartphone.

Mill Creek Campground expansion: GFO has entered the planning phase for expansion of the campground (between Lake City and Cinnamon Pass on the Alpine Loop) and has received preliminary blueprints to start developing our consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Hartman’s Rocks Campground infrastructure improvement: Last year, crews placed boulders for campsite protection and to keep vehicles on trails. A longer-term project to address significant head cuts and erosion in ephemeral drainage may be paused while GFO prioritizes its most critical work.

Pause on New Special Recreation Permit Issuance - Status Update

GFO had temporarily paused the issuance of new Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) while we conduct a programmatic EA for the administration and issuance of SRPs. The goals of the pause was to:

- Provide data to assist the BLM with identifying where we are over-permitted or have opportunities to increase permitting
- Assist the BLM with processing applications and unique permitting requests
- Provide consistency in defining authorized use areas and guidance for permit stipulations in critical wildlife areas and designated wilderness lands
- Help define the necessary “guard rails” to ensure we have compliance with regulations and resource needs while continuing to provide opportunities to support our communities and public land visitors.

Unfortunately, due to the shortage of staff, the GFO could not complete this work.

Reasonable modification for use of e-bikes – New Update

Following the issuance of BLM National Headquarters Information Bulletin 2023-050, the GFO has developed a process to consider and authorize the use of e-bikes on our non-motorized trails as a “reasonable modification” under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. GFO has now processed over ten applications submitted by individuals with stated disabilities that, when approved, allows them to operate an e-bike on our non-motorized trail systems.

GFO’s plan to conduct an environmental assessment to consider allowing unqualified e-bike use on any of our non-motorized trail systems was to complete the analysis over the winter but lack of staff resulted in GFO shelving the effort.

Lands and Minerals

Mineral Point Water Right Purchase - Status Update

The acquisition of the Mineral Point Ditch water rights have been completed. The purposed of the acquisition is to return the historically diverted water to Burrows Creek to maintain instream flows on Burrows Creek and the upper Animas River.

One of BLM’s objectives for Burrows Creek is to protect the Mineral Point Ditch flows that have been

redirected back to Burrows Creek. BLM is working collaboratively with Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) staff to develop a lease agreement that would allow the purchased Mineral Point Ditch water rights to be committed to instream use in Burrows Creek. If CWCB leases the water right, it could function to help satisfy this recommended instream flow appropriation.

A second BLM objective for leasing the Mineral Point Ditch water right to the CWCB is protect water quality benefits for Burrows Creek. The portion of the Burrows Creek watershed above the Mineral Point is not significantly affected by mining influenced water. Historically, relatively cleaner water that flowed down Burrows Creek during the snowmelt runoff period was diverted to the Uncompahgre River watershed and could not serve to dilute acid rock drainage and mining influenced water lower in the Burrows Creek watershed. BLM anticipates that the dilution effects of returning the leased water right to Burrows Creek will help protect and improve water-dependent values on Burrows Creek and the Animas River.

In February 2025, The Bureau of Land Management provided a letter to formally communicate its instream flow recommendation for Burrows Creek, located in Water Division 7. On March 19, 2025, the CWCB gave initial and unanimous approval to BLM's recommendation for instream flow protection on Burrows Creek. The next step in the process after the board's initial appropriation is that interested parties have until May 31 to file a notice to contest. If no notices are received, then the board can vote in July to finalize these appropriations.

Gunnison Field Office AML Projects

- Anaconda Mine near Gunnison to treat the soils around the former adit to try to revegetate the area.
- Roy Pray mine – maintenance of the drainage channel near Engineer Pass.
- Gnome Mine – Revegetation project in American Basin above the parking area.

Bonita Peak Mining District - Status Update

The Bonita Peak Mining District (BPMD) consists of historic mines and mining-related sources where ongoing releases of metal-laden water and sediments are occurring within the Mineral Creek, Cement Creek, and Upper Animas river drainages in San Juan County, CO. Many of these historic mines are located on public lands managed by the BLM, and 80% of the watershed is managed by the BLM.

The BLM, USFS, and EPA signed a joint memorandum of understanding (MOU) in July 2022 clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each agency. The goal of the MOU is improved cooperation between the agencies with respect to obligations of the EPA under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and BLM obligations under NEPA. The EPA is the lead agency for response actions on the private sites and the BLM is the lead for response actions on BLM-managed public lands.

Cleanup actions within the BPMD are ongoing by multiple agencies. BLM priority actions continue to focus on remediation, characterization of sites for remedy development, and operations and maintenance throughout BPMD. The majority of these sites are in the Cement Creek drainage and the Upper Animas River near its headwaters and are completed by contractors.

Projects for 2025 will include

- San Juan Chief Project – cleanup around the mill (historic architecture), revegetation, removal

of soils, traffic adjustments for health and safety.

- Forest Queen – installed borehole last year to drain the adit. This will occur in late spring or summer and a permanent drain will be installed. This water will continue to be treated through the iron terrace.
- Animas Forks - Clean up project – still in the planning phase to address lead contamination at the popular architectural attractions at Animas Forks.
- Prospect Gulch – revegetation project, potentially on hold due to BIL funding uncertainty.
- The EPA will also continue its planning work to construct a site-wide repository located on top of the large historic tailings piles north of the town of Silverton. They plan to complete work by the end of the 2025 field season and use the repository to store solid waste material derived from the water treatment plant.

Proposed Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Conveyance for Kendall Mountain Recreation Area - Status Update

The Town of Silverton applied to the BLM to acquire public lands managed as part of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area, under authority of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act of June 14, 1926 (44 Stat. 741), as amended and supplemented (43 U.S.C. 869 et seq) (R&PP Act). The purpose of the Act is to authorize acquisition or use of public lands by states, counties, municipalities, or nonprofit organizations for recreational or other public purposes.

The BLM portion of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area, located on public lands just east of Silverton, has been operated as a community ski area and recreation area under a BLM R&PP lease since 2001. The Kendall Mountain Recreation Area includes the BLM land and the adjacent town-owned Kendall Mountain Placer and Lackawanna Placer. In March 2001, the BLM classified and withdrew the subject public lands for lease and conveyance under the R&PP Act. The purpose of the classification and application for R&PP lease and potential conveyance was to allow for construction and operation of the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area.

The GFO is very close to completing the work required for the transfer of these lands to the Town of Silverton and is working on an agreement with the Town to accept the lands in an “as-is” condition, where the Town acknowledges contamination issues related to past mining history and releases the government of any future liability.