



Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests Issues Update July 2008

Forest Plan Revision – The GMUG released the proposed Forest Plan in March 2007. On March 30, the Northern California U.S. District Court enjoined the USDA from implementing the 2005 Planning Rule. The Agency developed and released the 2008 Planning Rule in 2008. The GMUG will continue plan revision under the 2008 Rule and anticipates issuing the Proposed Forest Plan after completion of the Colorado Roadless EIS in 2009.

Gunnison Travel Planning – A route-by route travel planning effort in the Gunnison Basin and Paonia areas is continuing. This is a joint effort with the BLM. Scoping is complete and the Team is developing alternatives. Issuance of the draft travel plan is anticipated in August 2008 for public review and comment. The Gunnison travel management decision and FEIS is anticipated to be complete in late 2008 or early 2009.

MVUM Maps: The GMUG issued Motor Use Vehicle Maps (MVUMs) for the Grand Mesa and Uncompahgre areas in summer 2007. These maps are the information and enforcement tool for travel management; however, they are not “stand alone” maps and are best used in coordination with the Forest Recreation Map. The maps are posted on the Forest Service website and available for free at forest offices. The second issue of MVUM maps was printed in 2008 and are available to the public. The Forest continues to implement travel management decisions made in the Uncompahgre and Grand Mesa Travel Management Plans.



Standard Mine Cleanup Efforts- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the GMUG National Forest are working together to implement superfund cleanup of the Standard Mine within the Ruby Mining District near Crested Butte, CO. Silver mining activity began in the southern Ruby Mining District in 1874. Standard Mine was one of three largest producing silver mines in the area. Operations ceased in 1966 and the mine was abandoned. The surrounding land is national forest.



Contamination (primarily water and heavy metals) from former mining operations spills off the claims onto the USFS land. Elk Creek flows through the mine site and along the surface, depositing heavy metals into Coal Creek which runs through Crested Butte until it meets the Slate River. The Crested Butte municipal drinking water intake is on Coal Creek. Substantial remedial work was accomplished during the summer of 2007 and is anticipated to continue in 2008 after EPA provides support to the democratic national convention.



Recreation Facility Master Planning (RFA)– Recreation facility analysis is one of the tools that, with the help of the public, communities and the private sector, will help the GMUG National Forests manage recreation facilities to provide sustainable, affordable, quality recreation experiences. The GMUG can no longer manage and maintain all the recreation facilities that lie on the Forest. The Forest took a hard look at recreation facilities to make recommendations about which facilities can be maintained over time, what improvements or repairs are needed, and how to best maximize a range of recreation experiences and operational efficiencies. A draft Five Year Proposed Plan

of Work (PPOW) was posted on the Forest’s website. A 60-day public involvement period began in October 2007 and ended in December. The Forest reviewed the comments and suggestions received and has posted a revised five year POW on the Forest website. Implementation of the POW is planned to begin as funding allows.

Aspen Decline- Areas of aspen on the GMUG Forest are wilting, declining and incurring mortality on a large scale. The decline is thought to result from severe drought conditions in 2002, followed by contributing insect and disease infestations. In some cases, root systems are also dead, preventing the restoration of aspen stands. In



the Terror Creek area, aerial survey data indicates an increase from 220 acres affected in 2005 to 5669 acres in 2007– an exponential increase over 3 years. An applied silvicultural assessment, in partnership with Rocky Mountain



Research Station and CSU, to learn more about treating aspen stands is planned to begin this summer and last 2 years in the Terror Creek Basin. Other treatments are planned in the Wolverine Analysis Area.

Hunter Reservoir – The Forest is developing an EIS to expand Hunter Reservoir. Ute Water Corp. is proposing this project to help meet the water needs of a growing Grand Valley area. The Army Corp of Engineers is a cooperating agency. One of the associated issues the Forest is working on is a strategy to protect fens through an assessment and the development of Best Management Practices.

Administrative Facility Conveyance Program- Congress passed legislation to allow Forests to convey (by competitive bid) administrative lands that are no longer needed . Sales receipts are retained on-Forest and used to construct needed facilities or to reduce backlog maintenance needs. The Meeker Street Warehouse administrative site (Delta) was sold by competitive bid in November 2007. An EA for the sale of Coon Creek Administrative Site is complete and the Forest is working to market the sale and determine the best method for competitive bidding with the goal of conveying the property this Fall.



Cabin Rental Program– The GMUG will be offering a new recreation opportunity for forest visitors, the “Cabin Rental Program.” Members of the public will be able to rent national forest cabins with family and/or friends and experience a little piece of national forest history through “ranger station living.” The Forest plans to provide the opportunity to rent nine different cabins in five different locations on the GMUG. Users will be able to reserve the cabins in advance and the rental fees will vary based on the site, space and length of stay.

Gas Exploration – The Forest continues to manage gas exploration activities. SG Interests and Gunnison Energy have indicated they plan to submit APDs for 5-10 wells in the Muddy Creek area, east of Paonia this summer. Plains Exploration and Production Company (PXP) will conduct exploration drilling on up to 32 wells at 5 sites (pads) in the Hightower area east of Collbran.

Bull Mountain Natural Gas Pipeline – The BLM, White River and the GMUG NFs analyzed a proposal to construct a 25.5 mile, 20-inch gas pipeline from the Paonia area to Silt. The selected route crosses 8.33 miles of inventoried roadless. The pipeline uses a portion of an existing pipeline corridor and requires additional clearing within the construction ROW. The project is in litigation; however, efforts to seek a temporary injunction against construction of the pipeline have been rejected by the Courts and construction is underway.



Deer Creek Shaft & E-Seam Methane Drainage Wells – The Forest prepared an EIS for a ventilation/escape shaft and 132 methane drainage wells on the West Elk Coal Mine. Venting (for safety) of methane gas into the air is an issue of concern about increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to the public; however, the venting is necessary for the safe operation of the mine. Project implementation is expected to being in fall 2008.

West-wide Energy Corridor Programmatic EIS- The Departments of Energy, Commerce and Defense, Agriculture and the Bureau of Land Management released for public review and comment, a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) proposing to designate energy transport corridors on federal lands in 11 western states.



The 2005 Energy Policy Act created a mandate for federal agencies to designate the energy transport corridors ranging from 3500 feet to 5 miles in width. On the GMUG the PEIS proposes the energy corridor run south of Gunnison near Blue Mesa Reservoir northeast-ward to Monarch Pass. Another leg of the corridor crosses on national forest lands over the Uncompahgre Plateau. San Miguel County is particularly concerned about their involvement and the location of the corridor. Gunnison County has likewise raised concerns.

What's New-What's Happening?



Leadership Change(s): Charlie Richmond, GMUG Forest Supervisor has been on detail for the past two months (May and June) to Washington, D.C. as the liaison between the Forest Service Washington Office and the Department of Agriculture. In Charlie's absence, Kendall Clark, GMUG deputy Forest Supervisor, has been "holding down the fort." Now Charlie is back and Kendall is leaving to become the Forest Supervisor on the Carson National Forest in Region 3. Kendall is looking forward to her new position and the challenges ahead, but will miss the GMUG. We will miss her and we wish her well in her new assignment.

New Employees: Its that time of year when new faces appear across the Forest. Temporary employees are on and working in the field and things are 'a happening!' We have some new permanent employees on the Forest as well. Take some time to get to know them and wish them **WELCOME!** They are:

Jane Jones, Ouray RD VIS; **Bernice White**, Norwood RD VIS; **Edna Upton**, SO Administrative Support Technician; **Ryan McCulley**, MIFMU IA Module Assistant; **Dayle Funka**, Norwood Forestry Technician (weeds); **Chris Foreman**, Grand Valley Forestry Technician (trails); **Ken Kaighn**, SO Engineering Wage Supervisor.

GMUG Management Review: During the week of July 21st, the GMUG will undergo a "Regional Management Review" by the Regional Forester and Directors in the Rocky Mountain Region. This is an opportunity for the Regional Forester and/or his deputies to come to the forest and visit with employees, partners, local and regional government representatives and to learn more about the issues and challenges facing the GMUG, its stakeholders and its resources. Prior to the review, the Forest Leadership Team and employees were surveyed about their concerns and issues. A team of about 15 regional staff will be in the field and Forest Offices visiting with employees and evaluating the Forest.



Charlie Richmond - Forest Supervisor
Kendall Clark - Deputy Forest Supervisor

**Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre &
Gunnison National Forests**
2250 Highway 50
Delta, CO 81416-2485
970.874.6609