



# An Informational Briefing

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre  
and Gunnison National Forests

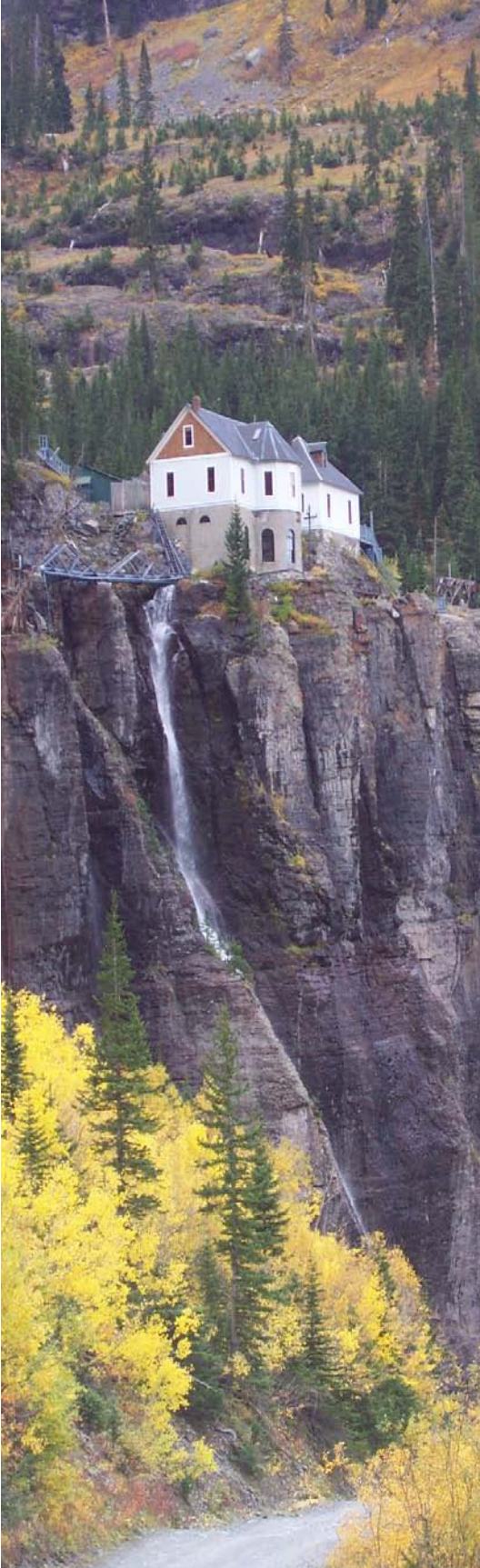
*October 2008*



## Forest Contacts:

Lee Ann Loupe, Public Affairs Officer  
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre  
and Gunnison National Forests  
2250 Highway 50  
Delta, CO 81416  
970-874-6717

Charlie Richmond, Forest Supervisor  
2250 Highway 50, Delta, CO 81416  
970-874-6685



## The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests – A History

The GMUG is comprised of three individual national forests that are administered as a single unit from the Forest Supervisor's Office in Delta, CO. However, this was not always the case. The Grand Mesa and Uncompahgre were joined in 1954, and the Gunnison was added in 1973. The earliest segment of the Forests, dubbed the Battlement Mesa Forest Reserve, was established in 1892.

Today, the three forests total 2.9 million acres, and approximately 3.4 million visitors experience recreation activities on the forests annually including downhill skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, backcountry camping, and OHV use.

The forests span nine counties, including Mesa, Delta, Montrose, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Ouray, San Miguel, Saguache and Garfield.

## Forest Facts for Fiscal Year 2008

Headquarters	2250 Highway 50 Delta, CO 81416
Number of employees	165 permanent employees 90 temporary employees in recreation and wilderness, timber, fire management and road maintenance
Number of ranger districts	5 (Grand Valley, Ouray, Paonia, Norwood and Gunnison)
Elevations	From approximately 6,000 feet to over 14,000 feet above sea level
Wildernesses	10 – Fossil Ridge, Powderhorn, LaGarita, Mt. Sneffels, Uncompahgre, Raggeds, West Elk, Lizardhead (The GMUG shares three Wildernesses with the White River National Forest. They are the Collegiate Peaks, The Raggeds and Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wildernesses.)
Potentially “Eligible” Wild and Scenic Rivers	Oh-Be-Joyful segments A and C and D, Slate River, West Elk Creek, Upper West Elk Creek, Tabeguache Creek, Cow Creek, Wetterhorn Creek, Wildhorse Creek, Dry Fork Escalante, Bear Creek, Lower Taylor River, Bridal Veil Falls, Ingram Falls
National Scenic or Historic Trails	Crag Crest National Scenic Trail upper and lower loop, Bear Creek National Scenic Trail, Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, American Discovery Trail, Old Spanish National Historic Trail
Scenic Byways	West Elk Scenic Byway, San Juan All American Byway (Skyway), Unaweep-Tabeguache Scenic Byway, Grand Mesa Scenic Byway, Silver Thread Scenic Byway, Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway



## Recreating in the Great Outdoors

Recreation opportunities are varied, and millions of visitors come to the GMUG to enjoy:

- Three ski resorts, three lodges, two organizational camps, one marina
- More than 58 campgrounds and 13 picnic areas
- 3,731 miles of system roads
- 3,531 miles of trails (hiking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, etc.)
- More than 300 lakes
- 3,600 miles of streams
- Roughly 150 permitted outfitters and guides
- A variety of historic mining sites, including the San Juan Mining Area, as well as the Alpine Tunnel Historic District that includes approximately 13 miles of the former Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad railbed across the Continental Divide.
- Six mountain peaks over 14,000 feet
- In 2008, the GMUG completed its comprehensive review and public effort to develop a proposed 5-year plan for Recreation Facilities Management.



## Wildlife Species of Interest

The GMUG is host to a variety of flora and fauna, including populations of approximately 55,000 elk, 143,000 deer, 520 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and 150 desert bighorn sheep. The GMUG is also home to a new moose herd on the Grand Mesa, with a population of more than 120.

Federal threatened and endangered species on the Forest include:

- Canada lynx
- Mexican spotted owl
- Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly
- Uinta Basin hookless cactus.

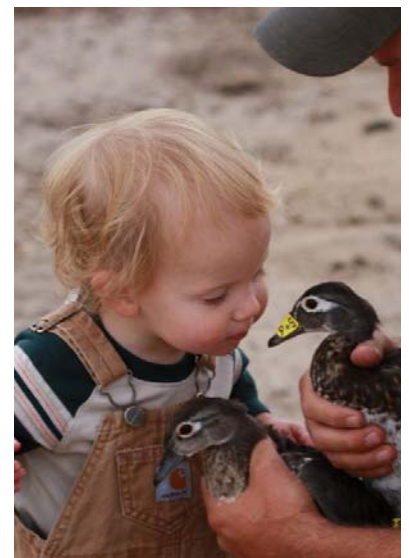
Special species the GMUG plays a role in helping to sustain:

- |                         |               |                  |
|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| • Gunnison sage grouse  | Boreal Owl    | Bald Eagle       |
| • Black bear            | Pine Marten   | Peregrine Falcon |
| • Several plant species | Mountain Lion |                  |

Aquatic sensitive species on or near the Forest include:

- Colorado River cutthroat trout
- Roundtail chub
- Bluehead sucker
- Boreal toad.

The GMUG provides most of the available habitat for the Colorado River cutthroat trout and the boreal toad in southwestern Colorado.





## Big Game

Hunting is a major economic factor to local communities and the state. Hunting is a popular sport pursued on the GMUG because of the varied habitat and large populations of game species on the Forest.

## Water Resources

Approximately 2.8 million acre-feet of runoff is generated annually from the GMUG, supporting approximately 3,600 miles of perennial streams and supplying about 11,650 surface acres of lakes and reservoirs. Water yield from the Forest provides water for both surface and groundwater drinking sources, a large number of agricultural and recreational uses, and supports cool and cold-water fisheries including rainbow, brown, brook and Colorado River cutthroat trout.

The Forest has a variety of forested and non-forested riparian areas and wetlands (approximately 100,000 acres total) and additional acreage associated with lakes and reservoirs occurring over a wide range of ecological settings.

The most prominent values sustained by water originating on the GMUG include drinking and agricultural water supplies, as well as aquatic threatened, endangered and sensitive species.



## Range

The GMUG provides 167 active grazing allotments to 213 permittees (ranches) in Colorado. About 54,000 cattle, 213 horses and 27,000 sheep were permitted to graze on 2.8 million acres of the GMUG in FY 2008.

## Forest Management and Timber

In FY 2008, the GMUG sold 30,576 CCF (hundred cubic feet) of timber. This included three large sales one of which was the first of its type, as aspen sale affected by sudden aspen decline advertised in urgent need of harvest. Numerous small sales and permits also contributed to the total volume sold on the GMUG in 2008. Small timber sales focused treatment on stands affected by a host of insect and disease agents including spruce beetle, spruce budworm and Douglas-fir beetle.

Additional accomplishments during fiscal year 2008 include:

- reforestation of 7,653 acres of national forest lands.
- 315 acres of timber stand improvements (tree thinning).
- 3,300 acres of pre-treatment silvicultural assessment for Sudden Aspen Decline.
- 300 acres of survey for Douglas-fir beetle.
- 769 acres of integrated fuels treatment.

## Land Acquisition

The GMUG purchased 111.5 acres of land (patented mining claims) in the Ophir Valley near Telluride in cooperation with the Trust for Public Lands and the town of Ophir.



## Energy and Minerals

The GMUG cooperates with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Colorado Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety (DRMS) and the federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM) to manage the operations of 3 underground coal mines in the North Fork Valley. The mines extract coal from federal coal leases under the national forest. Production from these mines represents about 40% of the coal mined in the state. The GMUG has the responsibility to evaluate various coal mining related uses of the forest, and in 2008 gave consent to 3 coal leasing actions and 2 exploration drilling projects, along with concurring to numerous other surface use proposals, including 2 methane drainage projects needed to maintain underground mine safety. In 2008, the GMUG worked with the Physical Resources staff to refine the overall understanding of the Forest Service role in the federal coal program. This resulted in changing the way the GMUG interacts with the DRMS and OSM during the coal mine permitting process. The GMUG continues to participate with the BLM, DRMS, OSM and other agencies in facilitating capture and use of coal mine methane where federal gas resources are involved.

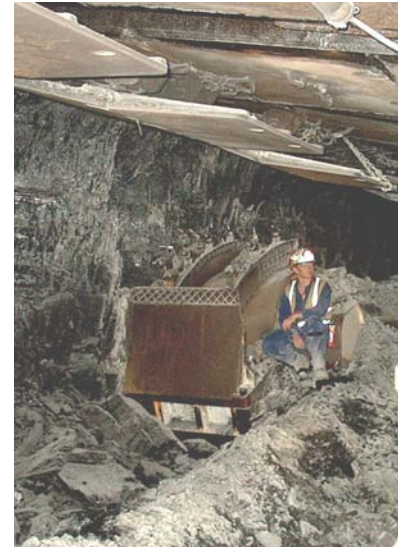
The GMUG also manages several natural gas projects which currently includes 21 natural gas wells. There are currently seven natural gas companies with operations on the GMUG. In 2008, the GMUG approved 2 seismic exploration projects, a 5-location 32-well drilling proposal, and a 1-location 4-well drilling application. Currently, the forest is reviewing 16 proposals for additional natural gas exploration and/or production wells.

The forest also worked with the Glenwood Springs Energy Office (BLM and White River NF) in implementing the Bull Mountain Natural Gas pipeline. In 2008 the agencies worked on litigation issues, and ultimately oversaw the construction of the pipeline.

## Fires

In Fiscal Year 2008, the GMUG experienced 29 wildfires that burned a total of 1,380 acres. Forest employees supported 48 fires on 152 acres of multi-jurisdictional fires within the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit.

FY 2008 was the second year that the GMUG was able to implement Wildland Fire Use. A total of 5 wildland fire use fires were managed this year. A total of 2,880 acres of Wildland Fire Use were treated to reduce fuels as well as to improve wildlife. The Forest completed approximately 10,046 acres of hazardous fuels reduction treatments utilizing both mechanical and prescribed fire treatments.





## Volunteers in 2008

The GMUG National Forest has an active volunteer program. In 2008, numerous projects were completed using volunteers and partnerships, including campground cleanup and maintenance on the Uncompahgre Plateau, trail maintenance across the Forest, jeep clubs working on roads and trails, snowmobile clubs grooming and maintaining trails, research study and monitoring, wildlife habitat projects and much more.

In 2008, the GMUG hosted volunteer efforts and accomplishments resulting in over 14.58 person years (26,236 hours) of donated time and services that were valued at over \$482,700, (including YCC youth).



## Partnerships

The GMUG has approximately 45 active cooperator groups who contribute over \$1,681,000 toward work on national forest lands and programs. Some examples of those partnerships include Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Back Country Sports Alliance, Colorado State University, Ouray County, Colorado Alliance for Environmental Interpretation, Ute Tribe, etc.



## Benefits to Colorado

The GMUG provides millions of dollars to Colorado's economy through multiple uses ranging from mining and energy development to recreation and tourism. Telluride, Crested Butte and Powderhorn ski resorts attract visitors from around the world and throughout Colorado to the forests. A series of three hut systems as well as three lodges, one marina, two organizational camps, dogsledding, whitewater kayak events, world-class hunting and a variety of festivals all bring visitors and their economic support to the area.

- The Forest Service makes payments of 25 percent of receipts (National Forest Fund receipts) to units of local government as proxies for property taxes on the land. Payments to the counties included in the GMUG for 2008 total \$1,146,276.
- The Federal Government makes payments to units of local government as proxies for property taxes on the land base of federal land managing agencies (PILT). Counties within the GMUG received \$4,279,423 in federal PILT funds for FY 2008.

