

Revised 9/24/04

San Juan FOREST PLAN & AMENDMENTS

Original Forest Plan – ROD signed Sept. 23, 1983

Amendment #14 – the Timber Amendment/Amended Forest Plan – ROD signed May 15, 1992; (contains all thirteen earlier Amendments); supercedes the original Plan.

Amendment #15 – signed Feb. 21, 1992 -- changes direction for Animal Damage Management activities on the Forest.

Amendment #16 – signed Oct. 10, 1992 -- adjustments to the budget requirement made to incorporate changes to the timber program goals, objectives, & standards & guidelines issued through Amendment #14.

Amendment #17 – Dec. 1992 -- approval of the route for the TransColorado Natural Gas Transmission line on the San Juan.

Amendment #18 – Dec. 1992 -- adjustment of management area prescriptions and designation of Falls Creek Archeological Area.

Amendment #19 – Feb. 24, 1994 -- established management direction for the newly acquired Piedra Valley Ranch Lands.

Amendment #20 -- signed April 9, 1997 -- Prescribed Fire Plan.

Amendment #21 – signed August 3, 1998 -- Wilderness Management Direction.

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Juan
National
Forest

701 Camino Del Rio, #301
Durango, CO 81301
303-247-4874

Reply to: 1920

Date: July 1, 1992

Subject: Forest Plan Amendment No. 15

To: Rangers and Staff

Enclosed is a copy of Forest Plan Amendment No. 15, changing direction for Animal Damage Management activities on the Forest.

Please distribute to all personnel to post to Forest Plans.

Sincerely,

William T. Sexton
WILLIAM T. SEXTON
Forest Supervisor

JUL 02 1992

	RANGER
	REC/LANDS STAFF

JUL 02 1992

✓	RANGER
✓	REC/LANDS STAFF
✓	RANGER STAFF
✓	TIMBER STAFF
✓	WILDLIFE STAFF
	AD/STAFF
	ENG. STAFF

SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

FEBRUARY 21, 1992

AMENDMENT NO. 15

<u>Page Code</u>	<u>Superseded</u>	<u>New</u>
III-29	01	01
III-30	02 deleted entirely	

Description and Reason for Amendment

This amendment changes the direction for Animal Damage Management activities on the Forest. The Forest Plan had permitted the Forest Supervisor to allow lethal preventative ADM measures. The Forest Plan had also allowed aerial gunning, and denning. These measures are removed from the Forest Plan by this amendment. Actual changes in the wording of the Plan are as follows:

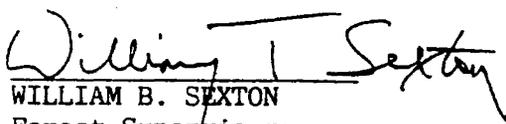
III-29

01 Manage animal damage in cooperation with the State Wildlife Agencies, Fish and Wildlife Service, other appropriate agencies, and cooperators to ~~prevent~~ ~~or~~/reduce damage to other resources, and direct control toward ~~preventing~~ ~~damage~~/or removing only the offending animal.

III-30 Deleted:

~~02/Allow/denning/or/aerial/gunning/only/for/the/purpose/of/animal/damage
control/and/under/the/following/conditions/
///a/Methods/are/specified/in/the/Forest/Animal/Control/Plan//
///b/Denning/and/aerial/gunning/is/done/by/an/authorized/individual/and
///c/The/permit/is/issued/by/the/state/for/aerial/gunning/~~

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Forest Service manual 1952.2, a Forest Interdisciplinary Team had conducted an analysis, documented by an Environmental Assessment. Based on that analysis, I have determined that this amendment will have no significant effect on the quality of the human environment. I have also determined that this is not a significant amendment of the Forest Plan.


WILLIAM B. SEXTON
Forest Supervisor

2/21/92

United States
Department of
Agriculture
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Forest
Service

San Juan
National
Forest

701 Camino Del Rio, #301
Durango, CO 81301
303-247-4874

Reply to: 1920/1950

Date: October 10, 1991

Subject: Amendment Number 16 to the Forest Plan

Location: San Juan National Forest, Colorado

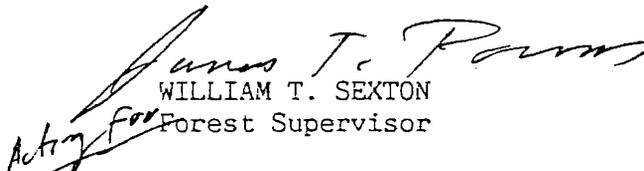
It is my decision to amend the San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

This amendment changes Table III-1, Projected Average Annual Outputs, Expenditures, and Returns -- the portion of the Table that specifically displays the budget required to implement the Forest Plan.

These adjustments to the budget requirement are made to incorporate changes to the timber program goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines issued through Amendment #14 of the SJNF Land and Resource Management Plan (July, 1992).

Also following annual review of the table, we have found several instances where the budget required to implement specific Forest Plan objectives is in need of adjustment. These findings are based on eight years experience implementing the Plan and the interdisciplinary team finding that the budget programmed is not adequate to meet the overall desired future condition stated by the Plan.

A copy of the amendment is enclosed. I have determined that there is no significant effect on the human environment from this action. The action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in accordance with FSH 1909.15, Sec. 31.1a (a)(2)


WILLIAM T. SEXTON
Acting For Forest Supervisor

enclosure: Amendment #16

SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

October 1992
Amendment No. 16

Table III-1

<u>Page Code</u>	<u>Superceded</u>	<u>New</u>
IIIa-4	0	0

Line item change to Amended Forest Plan (issued 7/92), Total Budget line of Table IIIa-1, column 3. Change total budget for time period 1991-2000 from 10,986 to 11,454. This entry is expressed in thousands of 1978 constant dollars.

Forest Plan Data File

FOREST PLAN DATA FILE IS ATTACHED. CHANGES FROM FY-1991 DATA FILE ARE HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH PEN AND INK CROSS OUTS AND SUBSTITUTION OF REVISED COST FIGURES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS.

WILLIAM T. SEXTON
Forest Supervisor

Date: October 10, 1992

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Juan
National
Forest

701 Camino Del Rio, #301
Durango, CO 81301
303-247-4874

Reply to: 1920

Date: January 15, 1993

Subject: Forest Plan Amendments 17 and 18

To: Rangers and Staff

Enclosed are copies of Forest Plan Amendments 17 and 18. Please post them to all copies of the amended Forest Plan, Appendix J.

Amendment 17 - approval of the route for the TransColorado Natural Gas Transmission line on the San Juan

Amendment 18 - adjustment of management area prescriptions and designation of Falls Creek Archeological Area.

Sincerely,


WILLIAM T. SEXTON
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures

LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST

AMENDMENT NUMBER 17

DECEMBER, 1992

Reason for this Amendment

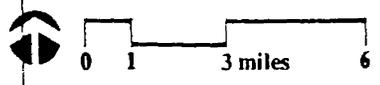
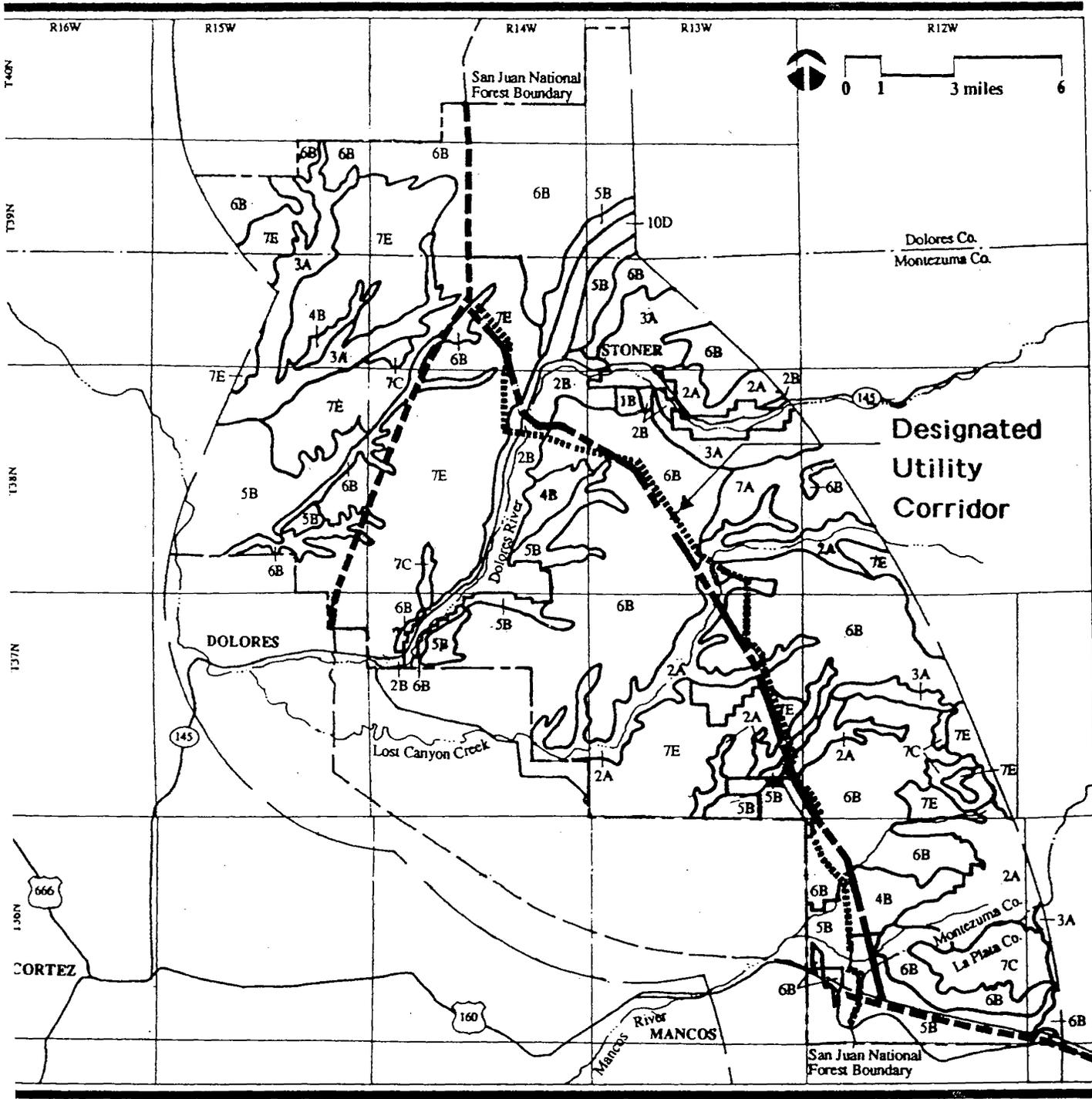
This amendment is necessary to reflect the approval of the TransColorado Natural Gas Transmission line route on the San Juan National Forest. A portion of the route is not in a designated utility corridor for major pipelines as required to be consistent with the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This amendment designates the non-designated portion of the route on the San Juan National Forest as a management prescription 1D utility corridor for buried utilities (including pipelines) and adds additional forest direction for utility corridors to management prescription 1D.

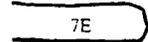
The attached map (Exhibit I) shows the designated general location of the utility corridor. The buried utilities (including pipelines) corridor generally follows an existing 345 kV powerline corridor. The location of the corridor has been reviewed on-the-ground and is documented in the detailed TransColorado project survey maps which are on file.

Add additional forest direction for management prescription 1D to the Forest Plan. Insert in Chapter III, page III-103 at the end of general direction for "Rights-Of-Way and Land Adjustments" additional general direction requirements which read as follows:

- 04 All location placement of utility facilities in corridors shall consider the following:
- a. The most efficient use of the total space available for all potential facilities in the general corridor, particularly in constrained terrain where the minimum separation space will be used.
 - b. Throughout the corridor, facilities should be as consolidated as possible to allow for additional facilities and to minimize disturbance while still meeting visual management objectives.
 - c. Exclusive use of ROWs should not be granted. Compatible facilities may be located in a shared ROW, particularly in sections of the corridor that have constrained terrain.

Approval of this amendment is documented in the Record of Decision for the TransColorado Gas Transmission Project final EIS. Analysis for the amendment is documented in Appendix A of the TransColorado final EIS.



-  Requiring New Corridor Designation
-  Utility Corridor for 345 KV Transmission Line Only (Management Area ID)
-  Designated Utility Corridor (Management Area ID)
-  Forest Plan Management Area

**UTILITY CORRIDOR
DESIGNATED FOR
BURIED UTILITIES**

**San Juan
National Forest**

EXHIBIT I

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Juan
National
Forest

701 Camino Del Rio, #301
Durango, CO 81301
303-247-4874

Reply to: 1920

Date: December 23, 1992

Subject: DECISION MEMO - Amendment Number 18 of the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Location: San Juan National Forest, Colorado

This amendment adjusts management area boundaries in the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) on the Animas District of the San Juan National Forest. According to regulation, "the Forest Supervisor May Amend the Forest Plan" (36 CFR 219.10(f)).

Management Area definitions (primary management emphasis):

- 3A -- provides for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities
- 5B -- provides for management for big game winter range
- 10C -- provides for special interest areas

Scope of Amendment #18

The attached map (1/2" scale) depicts the mangement area changes made by Amendment #18 on the Animas Ranger District.

I have reviewed the project file and have decided to change the management emphasis on approximately nine hundred-seventy (970) acres of National Forest lands on the Animas Ranger District. The Amendment changes four hundred (400) acres presently designated 5B (Big Game Winter Range) and five hundred-seventy (570) acres designated 3A (Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation) to 10C (Special Interest Areas). In addition, the Amendment designates five hundred-thirty (530) acres of the newly acquired Hidden Valley Ranch as 10C to form a fifteen hundred (1500) acre Special Interest Area that is designated the Falls Creek Archaeological Area.

Under a 10C (Special Interest Areas) designation, we will manage the area to provide emphasis on its outstanding archaeological, scenic, and historical characteristics. I believe this emphasis can best protect these values and provide for public enjoyment and educational opportunities.

Scoping and public involvement

In 1988, Congress directed the National Park Service to evaluate proposals for establishing an Anasazi National Monument in southwestern Colorado. In September 1989, the Park Service completed its study of alternatives. The site evaluation criteria consisted of: (1) outstanding resource example; (2) exceptional interpretive value; (3) public opportunities/scientific study; and (4) high degree of integrity.

The Durango Rock Shelters met all four of the evaluation criteria.

Following the Park Service study, the Forest Service, through the efforts of hundreds of concerned citizens, was able to acquire public ownership the 530 acre Hidden Valley Ranch. Acquisition of this ranch tied together isolated parcels of Forest lands already identified as having significant archaeological value. (See the project file for the list of individuals and organizations that helped make the acquisition of Hidden Valley Ranch possible.)

The Animas Ranger District recruited an ad hoc committee to make recommendations to the Forest Service on management options for the newly acquired land. The Committee was made up of nine representatives of organizations whose efforts were instrumental in enabling the Forest Service to acquire the land. The Committee recommended that the Forest Service manage the Hidden Valley Ranch and some of the surrounding National Forest System lands as an archaeological area.

Amendment #18 adopts the recommendations of the ad hoc committee.

Reasons for categorically excluding the proposed action

This action falls under Category Number 7, in Section 31.1b (categories established by the Chief) of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 - Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook. This action will have little or no environmental effect on either the physical or biological components of the environment. The action does not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Therefore, this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

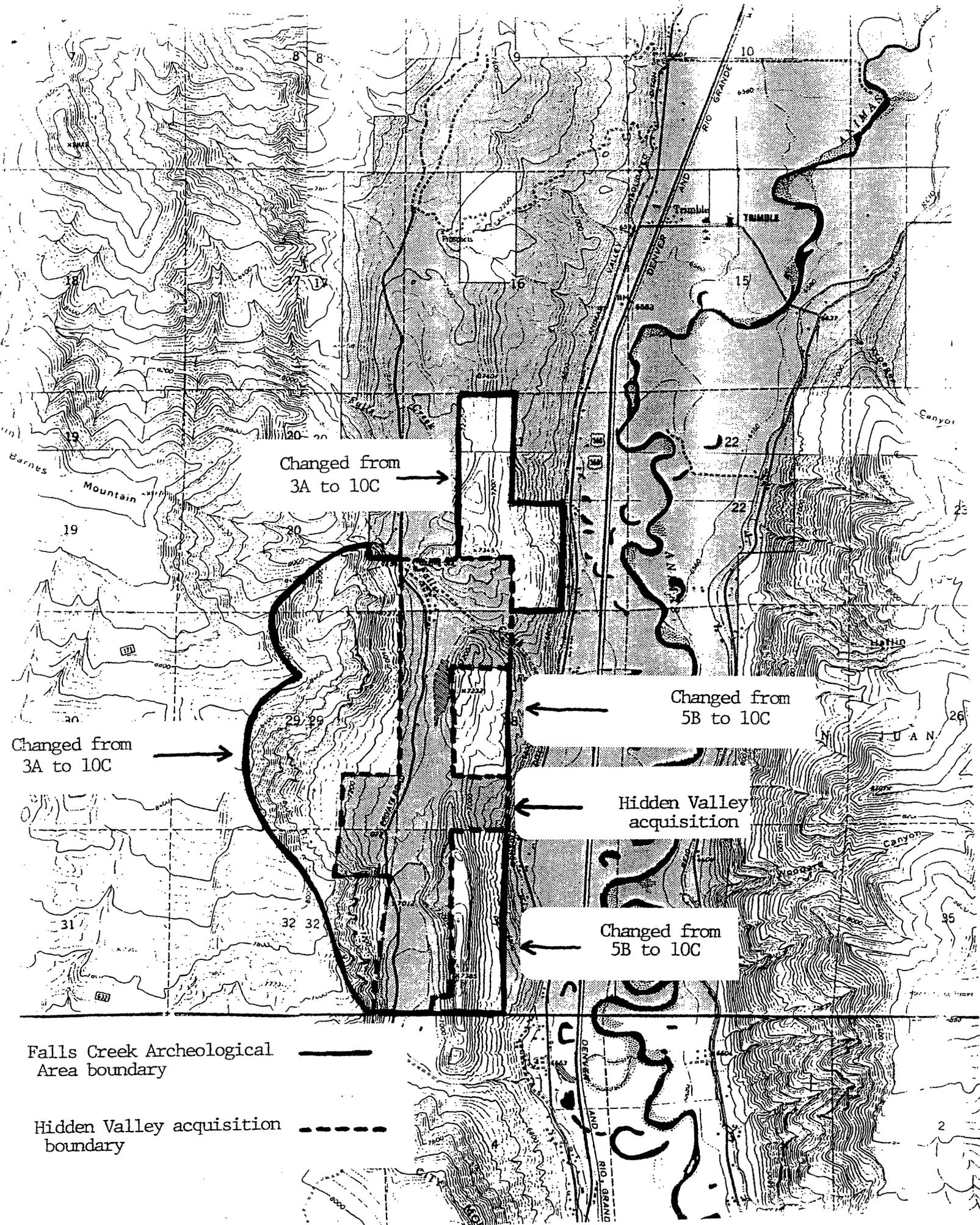
Findings required by other laws

Regulations permit amendments that may result in either significant or nonsignificant changes to the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)). I have determined that the proposed changes are not significant according to 40 CFR 1508.27 in "context" or "intensity" and as stated in Forest Service Manual 1922.51(2) "Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management."

Floodplain, wetlands, prime lands, threatened and endangered species, minerals, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and the proposed management emphasis area will provide more sensitive management of these resources.

Implementation date

The implementation of this decision may take place seven days following date of publication of this decision in the Durango Herald (local newspaper) as specified in 36 CFR 217.10 (a).



Changed from 3A to 10C →

→ Changed from 3A to 10C

← Changed from 5B to 10C

← Hidden Valley acquisition

← Changed from 5B to 10C

Falls Creek Archeological Area boundary ———

Hidden Valley acquisition boundary - - - - -

**SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**FEBRUARY 1994
Amendment No. 19**

*Page
Code*

Superseded

New

Description and Reason for Amendment

This amendment is needed to establish multiple use management direction for Piedra Valley Ranch lands purchased by the U.S. Forest Service from the Nature Conservancy and additional Piedra Valley Ranch lands donated by the Nature Conservancy to the U.S. Forest Service.

This amendment defines the various management prescriptions under which portions of these newly acquired lands will be managed. Management of this area will be as delineated on the attached map and as described below:

- Manage the Piedra Canyon area under 10D prescription (wild and scenic river eligibility area).
- Manage the Canyon Slopes/Ice Cave Ridge area under 3A prescription (emphasizes semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities).
- Manage the Sally's Overlook area under 7E prescription (emphasizes wood fiber production and utilization on gentle slopes).
- Manage Plains/Range area, excepting frosty bladderpod sites, under 4B prescription (emphasizes wildlife habitat management for one or two indicator species).
- Manage sites where the frosty bladderpod occurs within the Plains/Range area under 10C prescription.

This amendment recommends designation of all 10C prescription areas on these newly acquired lands as a Special Botanical Area called the O'Neal Hill Botanical Area. This Special Botanical Area will be managed in accordance with the 10C management prescription direction, standards and guidelines which are attached and made part of this amendment, upon such designation by the Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region.

I have determined that this is not a significant amendment of the Forest Plan. Approval of this amendment is documented in the associated environmental Assessment and Decision Notice for Piedra Tract Land Acquisition.



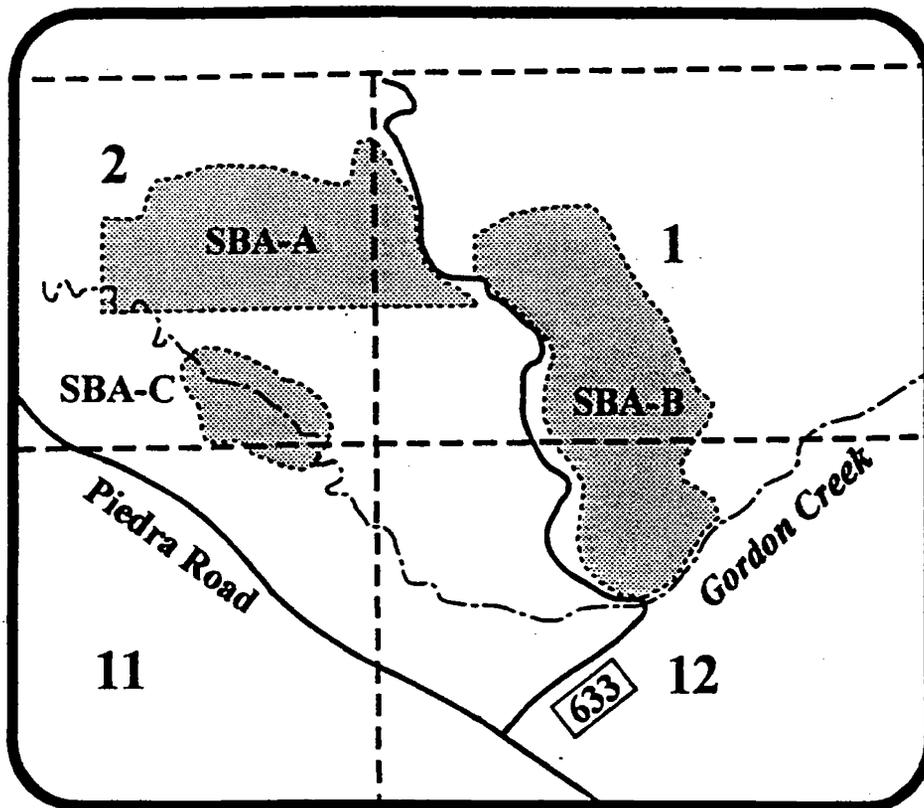
MICHAEL G. JOHNSON
Acting Associate Forest Supervisor

2/24/94
Date

EXHIBIT "A"

USDA Forest Service
San Juan National Forest

O'NEAL HILL BOTANICAL AREA
Archuleta County, Colorado



T.
36
N.

R. 3 W.

----- Boundary of Botanical Area
SBA = Special Botanical Area
SBA-A = approx. 100 acres
SBA-B = approx. 140 acres
SBA-C = approx. 30 acres



PRESCRIPTION FOR MANAGEMENT AREA 10C
(Provides for Special Botanical Areas)

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION SUMMARY

General Description and Goals:

The O'Neal Hill Special Botanical Area will be managed for the goal of protecting and maintaining habitat and populations of the globally rare Frosty Bladder Pod, Lesquerella pruinosa, also known as the Pagosa Springs Bladder Pod.

**MANAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES**

**GENERAL
DIRECTION**

**STANDARDS &
GUIDELINES**

**Range Resource
Management**

01 Livestock grazing will be prohibited in Units A and B of the Special Botanical Area.

02 Livestock grazing will be allowed in Unit C of the Special Botanical Area as long as it does not adversely affect the unique plant community and habitat within the Special Botanical Area.

03 Prohibit range improvement activities within all units of the Special Botanical Area

04 Control of noxious weeds will be accomplished by mechanical methods only. Use of herbicides is not allowed within any unit of the Special Botanical Area. Use of herbicides in adjacent areas will be allowed as long as they do not adversely affect the unique plant community and habitat within the Special Botanical Area.

a. Unit C of the Special Botanical area may be excluded from grazing if grazing is adversely affecting the unique plant community or habitat within the area.

a. Salting grounds, drift fences, and water developments in adjacent areas will be located to draw livestock away from the Special Botanical Area

**Special Use
Management**

01 Use special use permits or cooperative agreements to authorize and document scientific activity.

02 Review future special use applications to insure that they will not adversely affect the Special Botanical Area.

**Silvicultural
Prescriptions**

01 Prohibit tree removal or cutting activity within the Special Botanical Area.

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION 10C

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	GENERAL DIRECTION	STANDARDS & GUIDELINES
Mining Law Compliance and Administration	01 Pursue withdrawal of the Special Botanical Area. In the event that withdrawal is not made, supervise activities of claimants to insure minimum impact on Frosty Bladder Pod populations and habitat.	
Mineral Leasing	01 Prohibit surface occupancy within the Special Botanical Area.	a. Subsurface activity will be allowed only if it does not adversely affect Frosty Bladder Pod populations or habitat.
Visual Resource Management	01 Meet stated visual quality objectives.	a. Do not exceed an adopted visual quality objective of preservation.
Dispersed Recreation Management	<p>01 Discourage or prohibit any public use which contributes to impairment of the Frosty Bladder Pod populations or habitat.</p> <p>02 Prohibit motorized vehicle use (except snow machines on snow) off National Forest system roads and trails to protect Frosty Bladder Pod populations and habitat. Monitor snow machine use and take appropriate action if damage is perceived.</p> <p>03 Permit and encourage use by scientists and educators through consideration of special use applications.</p>	<p>a. Discourage or prohibit overnight camping.</p> <p>a. Do not allow construction of new roads or trails unless they accomplish interpretive objectives for the Frosty Bladder Pod.</p>

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION 10C

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION 10C

**MANAGEMENT
ACTIVITIES**

**GENERAL
DIRECTION**

**STANDARDS &
GUIDELINES**

Recreation Site Construction 01 Prohibit construction of developed recreation sites.

Wildlife Habitat 01 Prohibit any direct habitat manipulation.

DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
PRESCRIBED FIRE PLAN

SAN JUAN/RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to evaluate and describe the environmental effects of a proposal to use fire, both natural and prescribed, as a management tool within the Prescribed Fire Area, which consists of the San Juan/Rio Grande National Forest (SJ-RG NF's) and surrounding San Luis Valley and San Juan Resource Areas of the Bureau of Land Management.

The Prescribed Fire Area will be designed to re-establish the use of fire in the ecosystem and provide the prescribed natural fire processes to play a more active role in meeting ecosystem management objectives and desired conditions.

The Prescribed Fire Area is currently managed under the following land-use plans; the San Juan National Forest (SJNF) Plan, The Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) Plan, the 1985 San Juan/San Miguel and San Luis Valley Resource Management Plans and Final Environmental Impact Statements, and the 1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan.

Separate Decision Notices will address the San Juan/San Luis Valley Resource Areas.

II. SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The scoping process for the project was utilized to gather information regarding the potential environmental effects and issues surrounding the proposal.

In October 1996, initial scoping started for the Prescribed-Fire Plan. There was a general mailing of 400 letters, along with articles and legal notices in surrounding newspapers. The scoping period lasted for 30 days, and 35 responses were received. Additional comments pertaining to prescribed fire were also taken from input for the Rio Grande Forest Plan Revision, study groups from the San Juan Plan Revision and Wilderness-planning comments from the Weminuche, South San Juan, and Piedra Areas. Additional public notification of the project occurred through the San Juan/Rio Grande NEPA Project Update published quarterly since the project began.

III. ISSUES

Smoke Production and Air Quality - This issue involves four different aspects. First is the potential to further degrade visibility on the SJ-RGNF's and the San Juan - San Luis Valley Resource Areas. Second, some publics become irritated by smelling smoke, seeing smoke, breathing smoke over long periods of time, and having smoke in their homes. Third, there is a segment of the public that has respiratory problems which are aggravated by the irritants in the wood smoke. Fourth, public safety along travel corridors is a concern.

Heritage Resources - There is a concern about the damage to prehistoric and historic cultural resources. Potential impacts include flammable properties and associated features such as cabins, homesteads and prehistoric ruins containing exposed beams or other flammable materials; and properties that might be vulnerable to damage by fire, such as rock art, friable stone features, etc..

Personal Safety and the Wildland/Urban Interface - There is a concern for the safety of both Forest Service/Bureau of Land Management personnel and the public who may be in the vicinity of active prescribed natural fires. The effects of smoke exposure on individuals are also a safety health concern. There is a concern fire could burn or threaten private lands, local communities, and improvements. There is an opportunity to manage the increasing rural/urban interface, using prescribed fire, to reduce the risk to private property and personal safety, while reducing unnatural fuel accumulations to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

Management Ignited Fires (MIF) - There is a concern the prescribed natural fire will need to be supplemented with management ignited fire to reach Forestwide fire Management objectives.

Grazing - There is a concern over the loss of range improvements, fences, corrals, and cabins. There is concern about a reduction in permitted livestock in order to support prescribed fire management objectives, as well as a concern about a potential forage loss for both livestock and wildlife.

Program Funding, Support and Qualifications - There is a concern that funding levels will not support the implementation of a Prescribed Natural fire program. There is a concern that there is not a large enough pool of available, qualified personnel to fill positions in the prescribed fire organization.

Public Acceptance and Support - There is a concern that public acceptance, support and understanding of the need of prescribed natural fire is lacking to implement a prescribed fire program.

Recreation and Visual Resources - There is a concern that fire could temporarily affect recreation opportunities and visual resources. There is a concern that management ignited fires within the Wilderness are not strictly natural, and should not be available as a management tool.

Fire Suppression - There is a concern that past fire suppression activities and current fire suppression policies have resulted in, and

would continue to cause, unnaturally high fuel loads, high tree densities, increased risk of insect and disease epidemics and increased risk of wildfire in some vegetation types.

Soil and Watershed Health - There is a concern that fire could affect soil and watershed conditions by reducing vegetative cover, resulting in soil erosion and mass soil movement. Sites with poor revegetation potential are of particular concern.

Biodiversity - There is a concern regarding the effects of fire on vegetation in general, and specifically on rare plant or unique ecological components such as the old growth stands in the proposed Martinez Creek and other Research Natural Areas.

Commercial Timber and Fuelwood - There is a concern fire could affect fuelwood cutting and regeneration in timber stands and alter stand stocking levels. There is a concern about the possible implementation of salvage logging after prescribed natural fires.

IV. ALTERNATIVES

Two action alternatives and a "no action" alternative were developed to analyze effects and address the issues which had been identified.

Alternative I. No Action.

Under this alternative, present fire management practices will continue. All natural ignitions would be suppressed as dictated in the Appropriate Response Strategy (Control, Confine, or Contain) determined by agencies standards. Only management-ignited fires will be used to meet resource objectives and reduce hazard fuels. Individual analysis would still be conducted for all planned MIF projects, as in the past.

The Control strategy is implemented in critical weather conditions or fuel conditions, when fires will result in unacceptable resource damage or unacceptable public risk. This strategy calls for fast, aggressive control actions. Confine and Contain strategies include surveillance; confining a fire between natural barriers such as bluffs, streams, trails, and roads; or line construction to inhibit the spread of the fire.

Alternative II. Combination of Prescribed Natural Fire (PNF) and Management Ignited Fire (MIF).

A combination of both prescribed natural fire and management ignited fire will be used in the Prescribed Fire area to meet resource Management objectives, reduce fuel hazards, and emphasize the natural role of fire. Appropriate Response Strategy will continue to be used on fires not designated prescribed natural fires. Low elevation vegetative types with short fire intervals would receive emphasis for prescribed natural fire and management ignited fire.

Alternative III. Prescribed Natural Fire in Wilderness.

All natural fires in Wilderness will be designated as prescribed natural fires, as long as life and property are not jeopardized. Outside Wilderness, Management ignited fire, Prescribed natural fire, and Appropriate Response Strategy would be used.

V. DECISION AND RATIONALE.

Based on the environmental analysis our decision is to implement Alternative II. This decision is based on the following factors:

The selected alternative provides the most suitable solution to meeting the purpose and intent of the San Juan/Rio Grande National Forest and the San Juan/San Luis Valley Resource Areas fire management objectives. It provides for the shortest time frame for restoring fuel and vegetative conditions to their pre-european settlement state, while reducing the risk of escape and damage to other resources, and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires. This alternative will contribute to meeting desired conditions in our ecosystems. There will be no long term or widespread impacts to threatened, endangered and sensitive wildlife and plant species. Of the alternatives considered, the selected alternative comes the closest to duplicating the natural role fire conditions under which the flora and fauna evolved. Similarly the character and natural appearance of the landscape will be better managed under the selected alternative than the other alternatives considered.

Alternative I was not selected because the appropriate suppression strategy does not meet the desired objective of returning fire to its natural role. This alternative will result in heavy fuel buildups throughout the PNF Area, and large high intensity fires will result. High intensity fires will not meet desired conditions in the ecosystem.

Alternative III was not selected because it would not meet the desired conditions in a timely or environmentally sensitive manner. Designating all natural fires in the wilderness could increase the potential for high-intensity wildfires to spread to and affect the vegetation on lands adjacent to Wilderness.

VI. FINDINGS OF COMPLIANCE.

Results of Consultation

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service - threatened or endangered species

The list given to the San Juan/Rio Grande National Forest and the San Juan/San Luis Valley Resource areas listed several species of concern. The Biological Evaluation prepared for the project determined that there would be "No Effect" or "Effect/Beneficial Effect" on those, and no further consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required.

The requirements of section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act are being met under the terms of a Programmatic Agreement between the San Juan-Rio Grande National Forests. The San Juan Resource Area, the San Luis Resource Area, The State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. This agreement specifies a process for the protection of cultural resources including historic, prehistoric, and Traditional Cultural Properties during the course of a prescribed natural fire.

VII. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT.

Two terms are important to this discussion. An Irreversible commitment of resources results from actions altering an area to the extent that it cannot be returned to it's undisturbed condition through perpetuity or for a long period of time; or it is a commitment which completely utilizes a non-renewable resource. Irretrievable commitments are changes induced in the environment which cannot be called back, including lost production or lost use of renewable resources due to the passage of time.

After reviewing the environmental assessment, I have concluded that Alternative II will not significantly impact the physical or biological components of the human environment. There are no irreversible nor irretrievable commitments. Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The content of the proposed action relative to the nation, the region, and the affected interests indicates that:

Evaluation of Significance:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

Beneficial and adverse impacts are discussed in the Environmental Consequences section of the analysis (chapter 4). Impacts are primarily confined to the Forest/BLM-wide Prescribed-Fire Plan area, The SJ-RG NFs, and surrounding BLM lands. This proposal contains no significant adverse impacts.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Personal safety is addressed in the Prescribed-Fire Plan, general provisions. Active fire and the exposure to smoke are the two primary concerns affecting public health and safety. Summarized in the mitigation measures (page 30) are the precautions to be taken to minimize the risk.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area (proximity to cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas).

The proposed action will take place entirely within the SJ-RG NFs and the surrounding Bureau of Land Management Resource Areas. Numerous prehistoric and historic heritage resources are found within the Plan Area. All of these resources will be protected per the heritage resources guidelines on page 31-32. No significant effects are anticipated.

4. The degree to which the effects on the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the proposal on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial; there is agreement that the effects are predictable and not significant.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Possible effects on the environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management experience using PNF allows the prediction of effects with a high degree of certainty.

6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future action.

The proposed action represents a common protocol that land management agencies implement in wildernesses throughout the National Forest System. This proposal extrapolates our experience in wilderness for use outside wilderness.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with cumulative significant impacts.

The cumulative acreage burned is not estimated to exceed 20,000 acres annually, or only about 0.2% of the total project acreage.

8. The degree to which the action adversely affects sites listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

There is no planned direct PNF/MIF activity to adversely affect sites listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Methods are described in the analysis to protect these sites. No significant effects are anticipated.

9. The degree to which the action may affect Endangered or Threatened species or their critical habitats.

A Biological Assessment has been prepared and a finding of "not likely to adversely affect" (positive beneficial effect on) Endangered or Threatened or habitats has been determined.

10. Whether or not the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law protection of the environment.

The selected alternative meets Federal, State and local laws for air, water, cultural resources, and threatened and endangered and meets the National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements.

VIII. APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulation at 36 CFR 215.7. Any written appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Elizabeth Estill, Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region, P.O. Box 25127, Lakewood CO 80225-0127, within 45 days following the date of publication of notice of decision in the Durango Herald. Appellants are required to simultaneously send a copy of the Notice to Appeal to James B. Webb, at 701 Camino Del Rio, Durango, CO 81301. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14

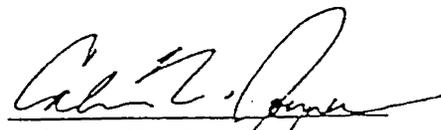
For further information contact Mark Lauer, SJ/RG National Forest, 701 Camino Del Rio, Durango CO 81301, (970) 882-7296.

IX. IMPLEMENTATION.

The implementation of this decision may take place immediately after the appeal period has ended.


James B. Webb
Forest Supervisor
Responsible Official

4/9/97
Date


Calvin N. Joyner
Associate Forest Supervisor/BLM Area Manager

4/9/97
Date



San Juan-Rio Grande National Forests Wilderness Management Direction

Decision Notice

Introduction

An Environmental Analysis (EA) that discusses alternatives for management of Wilderness areas and the Piedra Area within the San Juan-Rio Grande National Forests (SJ-RG NFs) is available for public review in the Forest Supervisor's Office at 701 Camino Del Rio in Durango, Colorado and at 1803 W. Highway 160 in Monte Vista, Colorado. This Decision Notice documents the Deciding Officer's decisions about the proposed action identified in the EA.

Background

The SJ-RG NFs contains five congressionally designated Wilderness areas, and the Piedra Area, a congressionally designated area to be managed for its wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The SJ-RG NFs are designated as the lead Forests for implementing management direction for the Weminuche and South San Juan Wilderness Areas and the Piedra Area. Within this document, "wilderness" includes all three areas and "Wilderness" (capitalized) refers to congressionally designated Wilderness. Other Wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs are the Lizard Head, La Garita, and Sangre de Cristo. The lead Forests for these units are the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison NFs (for the Lizard Head and La Garita) and the Pike and San Isabel NFs (Sangre de Cristo).

Weminuche Wilderness

This is the largest wilderness in Colorado at 499,771 acres (334,776 acres on the San Juan National Forest [SJNF] and 164,995 acres on the Rio Grande National Forest [RGNF]). Stretching across the Continental Divide from Stony Pass on the north to Wolf Creek Pass on the south, the Weminuche contains three summits more than 14,000 feet in elevation and many more over 13,000 feet. Elevations range from 7,910 to 14,083 feet. It is an area of rugged mountain beauty, with spectacular peaks, broad glacial valleys, and pristine lakes. The Weminuche is one of the most visited Wilderness areas in Colorado and is popular with both hiking and horseback visitors. There are more than 490 miles of trail, and access to two trailheads is via the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which offers a unique entry to the wilderness environment.

South San Juan Wilderness

Located in south-central Colorado this wilderness encompasses the eastern extent of the San Juan Mountain range, including a segment of the Continental Divide. The South San Juan contains 164,563 acres (75,640 acres on the SJNF and 88,923 on the RGNF). The South San Juan includes a variety of bottomlands, canyons, and glaciated uplands. Trademarks of the area are high, open

parks and remote landscapes. Visitor use is higher on the Rio Grande portion of the Wilderness, but is lower overall than in other nearby Wilderness.

Lizard Head Wilderness

This wilderness is situated in the far western end of the San Juan Mountains and comprises most of the San Miguel range. It is 41,496 acres in size and contains approximately 278 acres of private land. Approximately half of the wilderness area is located on the Uncompahgre portion of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests and the other half is located on the SJ-RG NFs. The area contains three of Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks and is popular with hikers, horse users, and mountain climbers.

Sangre De Cristo Wilderness

The newest addition to the Forest's wilderness areas was designated in 1993 with the passage of the Colorado Wilderness Act. This 218,922-acre wilderness is located on the Pike-San Isabel National Forests and the SJ-RG NFs, with approximately 120,080 acres located within the SJ-RG NFs. This wilderness encompasses the Sangre de Cristo Range, a long and narrow range in southern Colorado, and contains four 14,000-foot peaks.

La Garita Wilderness

Located in south-central Colorado and encompassing the La Garita Mountains, this 129,626-acre wilderness was first designated in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Additional acres were added in 1980 by Public Law 96-560 and again in 1993 with the Colorado Wilderness Act. Approximately 50,180 acres of the wilderness are located on the SJ-RG NFs, while the remaining acreage is on the Gunnison National Forest. Lying astride the Continental Divide, the mountainous terrain rises to San Luis and Stewart Peaks, both over 14,000 feet.

Piedra Area

While not officially designated as Wilderness, the Piedra Area is a congressionally designated area to be managed so as to retain its existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Piedra Area is 60,387 acres. It is lower in elevation than Wilderness areas on the Forest and encompasses large tracts of ponderosa pine communities, which are not as common in higher elevation Wilderness areas on either Forest.

Existing Direction

Appendix 3 of the EA displays the principal laws, regulations, and policies governing National Forest Wilderness. The primary legislation specific to Wilderness is the Wilderness Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-577). The Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) for the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests also contain direction for management of Wilderness areas.

Purpose and Need

Forest Plan direction for wilderness was developed in 1985 and 1993 for the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests, respectively. The RGNF revised its Plan in 1996, but limited the scope of changes in their Wilderness management direction, due to the ongoing planning efforts documented in this assessment.

During the intervening decade since the original plans were published, Colorado has become one of the fastest growing states in the nation. The significance of southwest Colorado as an outdoor mecca has increased, as have the amount and type of visitation to backcountry areas. The Weminuche, South San Juan, and Piedra Area together comprise the largest block of designated Wilderness and roadless area in Colorado. The Weminuche is one of the most visited Wilderness areas in the state. The increase in the amount and types of recreation use has affected wilderness in ways that were not anticipated in the original plans. There is a need to review existing LRMP direction for management of recreation use, to address changes in recreational use patterns, and to preserve the wilderness character of these areas.

Since development of the original Forest Plans for the SJNF and RGNF, additional research and information have become available to guide wilderness managers in preserving the wilderness condition. Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) is a planning tool that enables wilderness managers to define acceptable wilderness conditions and then develop standards, guidelines, indicators, and management actions to meet acceptable conditions.

Public Involvement

Public participation in this planning process began when the Weminuche Wilderness Study Group formed in September of 1993. The study group process allowed interested citizens to participate in monthly study sessions for two years to learn about wilderness conditions and comment on various aspects of wilderness management. The study group process brought together various interest groups and individuals. The meetings were held throughout the year, except during the summer, and were open to everyone. Suggestions from the study group process represented a range of opinions and ideas. Although the group concentrated on the Weminuche Wilderness and Piedra Area, the ideas developed by the group have direct application to wilderness management throughout both Forests. This input was used to develop the issues and alternatives presented in this document.

In February of 1996, a formal scoping document was sent to over 800 people and organizations, requesting comments on the proposed amendment to wilderness management direction. The Forest received 262 written responses to this request, as well as petitions signed by 320 individuals. Input from the scoping document was also used in developing alternatives.

Public open houses were held in the communities of La Jara, Durango, Creede, and Pagosa Springs, Colorado, as well as in Chama, New Mexico, to obtain input for the proposed Forest Plan amendment. Over 140 people attended these sessions.

In June of 1997 the Initial Environmental Assessment for the Wilderness amendment was issued. Approximately 150 copies of the EA were sent to individuals and organizations that had requested

copies or that had provided input into the document. Comments were received from 35 individuals and organizations. Input was accepted through December of 1997. Appendix 4 of the Environmental Assessment summarizes the input received and describes Forest Service responses to the input. Final decisions were based on the input received.

Decision Needed

The decision needed is to determine which set of actions and directions best meets the intent of the Wilderness Act for management of Wilderness resources on the Forests. The decision-maker is charged with meeting the intent of the Act while provide opportunities for wilderness-dependent activities to occur.

The proposed action, by clarifying management direction, falls within the Forest Supervisor's authority as described in FSM 1922.04b and FSM 1922.51. As the Deciding Official for this direction, the Forest Supervisor may choose to:

- Select the proposed action as described in the EA;
- Modify the proposed action;
- Select another alternative; or
- Select the no-action alternative and defer changes in direction to a later date.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative C and the associated standards, guidelines, and management actions described in the Wilderness Management Direction Environmental Assessment for the SJ-RG Nfs.

This decision amends the SJ-RG NFs Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP) as follows:

- Adds wilderness management goals to LRMP goals.
- Changes Management Area definitions and locations.
- Adds wilderness management standards and guidelines for management areas and Forest-wide.
- Defines thresholds and possible management actions within wilderness when thresholds are exceeded.
- Adds wilderness monitoring requirements.
- Adds wilderness management area map to LRMPS.

Specifically, Alternative C will:

- Improve wilderness qualities while maintaining recreation opportunities. To allow for the improvement of wilderness resource conditions, Alternative C increases the number of acres in the Pristine and Primitive Management Areas (MAs).

- Set standards and guidelines for recreation use which, when implemented, may result in a decrease in existing use in areas where standards are exceeded.
- Define and relocate (spatially) Wilderness MAs for the Weminuche and South San Juan Wilderness Areas and the Piedra Area.
- Describe specific wilderness management direction for all wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs. Direction for MAs will be amended to incorporate new standards and guidelines that better measure, monitor, and maintain wilderness conditions.
- Use Management Area locations for the La Garita and Sangre de Cristo Wilderness that were defined in the recently approved Rio Grande National Forest Land Management Plan. For the Lizard Head Wilderness, the current Forest Plan MA locations will remain the same, however, the definitions will be changed to the new equivalents which are described in the Environmental Assessment.
- Define a subclass of the Pristine MA as 1.11a. This subclass defines some high-elevation basins within the Weminuche Wilderness that are destination areas and the user-defined, non-system travel corridors leading to them. These areas will be managed as Pristine MAs, however to allow for higher use levels, the MA crowding standards are modified.
- Reduce the total number of people allowed within a group to fifteen (15) for all Wilderness Areas on the SJ-RG NFs and the Piedra Area, except the Piedra River, however, the total number of people and stock within a group will remain consistent with current direction of twenty-five (25) people and/or stock. For river-running groups on the Piedra River the group size will be a maximum of twenty (20) people.
- Institute new camping restrictions prohibiting overnight camping in the Twin Lakes Basin (near Needle Creek Basin in Weminuche Wilderness) and camping only in designated sites at Rainbow Hot Springs (Weminuche Wilderness) and Little Emerald and Emerald Lakes (Weminuche Wilderness). Use of campfires will be prohibited in Vestal Basin (Weminuche Wilderness).
- Institute new regulations prohibiting camping within 100 feet of water sources unless exceptions are justified by terrain or specific design. Dogs will be required to be under voice command and control at all times.

Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative A - No Action - Continue current management

Alternative A represents the current management direction found in the SJNF LRMP developed in 1983. The RGNF LRMP was revised in 1996 and contains Wilderness management direction for that Forest's Wilderness areas.

Current management direction would continue. Direction within the SJNF LRMP describes four MAs. The Transition MA is not contained within the Action Alternatives. The Transition MA specifies standards for wilderness portal areas that exceed standards and guidelines described in the Action Alternatives. The number of acres allocated to non-wilderness MAs would not change. Several areas now allocated as Wilderness as a result of the 1993 Colorado Wilderness Act, do not have Wilderness MAs assigned to them because current direction has never been amended. Continuation of management under this alternative will allow for increased crowding, larger group sizes, and no change in restrictions.

Alternative B - Maintain wilderness qualities while retaining recreation opportunities

Alternative B responds to issues raised regarding the amount of recreation use allowed within the Wilderness. This alternative addresses the significant issues in two ways. First, the existing MAs are amended to clarify standards, guidelines, and indicators to allow wilderness qualities to be maintained. Second, the location and number of acres of MAs which favor higher densities of recreation use (generally, Primitive and Semi-Primitive), are emphasized more than the other action alternatives, to allow for expanded recreation opportunities. Some people would prefer to have fewer restrictions on the amount of recreation use allowed within Wilderness and the Piedra Area. This alternative would allow larger group sizes for both commercial and noncommercial activities. Of the Action Alternatives, this alternative allows for higher densities of recreation use.

Alternative D - Improve wilderness qualities with emphasis on solitude and protecting unique ecosystems

This alternative seeks to move wilderness areas as a whole toward a more pristine condition by moving areas previously within Primitive or Semi-Primitive MAs to the Pristine MA. The intent is to reduce human influence to the maximum extent possible, by restoring conditions and providing outstanding opportunities for solitude throughout the areas analyzed. This alternative also amends existing MAs to incorporate new standards and guidelines to better measure, monitor, and maintain wilderness conditions. MAs within the Weminuche, South San Juan, and Piedra Area, are limited to Pristine and Primitive only. Group sizes are limited to no more than ten (10) people, with a total combination of people and stock not to exceed fifteen (15).

Basis and Reason for My Decision

The factors that lead me to select Alternative C are:

A. Response to Issues and Concerns

Human Effects on Wilderness Ecosystems

There is a concern that the amount and types of human use that are occurring are influencing or disrupting the natural conditions and processes that take place within wilderness. Alternative C addresses this issue by developing desired conditions, and standards and indicators for recreation use which can be monitored to determine if desired conditions are being met. Alternative C best meets the need of providing for desirable levels of recreation use while protecting the wilderness

resource. In addition, Alternative C will provide for regulations that protect important wilderness resources such as riparian areas.

Habituation of black bears and mountain goats to humans is more prevalent and can be partially attributed to an increase in the number of visitors and to inadequate handling of food and trash by visitors. Alternative C will reduce the potential for habituation of goats by prohibiting camping in the Twin Lakes area where the mountain goat population has had the most human contact. In addition, the proposed management actions which reduce crowding and campsite densities should help the situation with black bears.

Stocking fish in high mountain lakes has long been a source of concern and controversy. The types of species being used for stocking and which lakes are stocked or not stocked are the major issues. The effects of non-indigenous species on natural ecosystems and processes, and the impacts of additional recreation fishing pressure on high-altitude lakes and streams contribute to the concern. Many lakes were barren (of fish species) prior to settlement. Now that stocking has occurred in these lakes, there is a concern as to how this has affected natural conditions. For many wilderness users, the opportunity to see and catch fish is an important part of their wilderness experience, and the loss of this opportunity would have a negative impact on their experience. Alternative C addresses this issue by reaffirming the need to cooperatively work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to develop a joint stocking plan for wilderness lakes. Stocking of lakes within Wilderness will be addressed on a case-by-case basis and where stocking is necessary will generally be done with native cutthroat species.

Exotic plant species, including noxious weeds, are increasing within the wilderness and competing with native species. Alternative C will provide for monitoring of populations of noxious weeds and recommends treatment alternatives.

Human Effects on Wilderness Experience Opportunities

The amount and types of recreation use that are occurring are affecting the kind of wilderness experience that some people want. Crowding, noise, user conflicts, impacted campsites and trails, trail and camp encounters, group size, and litter can all affect the wilderness visitor's experience. Alternative C will set standards for encounters on trails and at campsites. If standards are exceeded than appropriate management actions will take place as outlined in the environmental assessment.

Large groups, both commercial and noncommercial, have an adverse effect on some users experience. The amount, frequency, and location of large-group encounters have an impact on people's wilderness experience. Alternative C reduces existing group size that is presently allowable from 25 people to 15 people for all areas within wilderness except the Piedra River. River outfitters expressed a concern that a reduced group size on the Piedra River could affect the safety of their operations. I have modified the original group size restriction to establish a group size of 20 for river-running activities on the Piedra River to meet these concerns.

The amount and behavior of domestic dogs are concerns. Dogs that are not under control can harass wildlife, and noise from barking affects the wilderness experience of others. Alternative C will implement a regulation that requires dogs to be either on a leash or respond to voice commands.

The amount and type of regulations that wilderness visitors encounter during their trip are a concern to some. Many individuals feel that having to obtain a permit to visit a wilderness area would be an

unnecessary restriction on their freedom to use and enjoy wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs. Alternative C does not require that a quota permit system be immediately implemented. Under the guidelines within this alternative a monitoring system will be put into place to determine the amount of use that is occurring within wilderness areas and what effects this use is having on wilderness conditions. Thresholds are established which spell out as clearly as possible when more restrictive measures, such as a permit system, would be necessary. It is my intent to use the least restrictive measures first to meet the standards and guidelines described in the plan. If more restrictive measures are needed, they will be used only as thresholds are exceeded.

Recreational-Stock Effects on Wilderness Resource

Some people feel that recreational-stock use within wilderness significantly impacts wilderness conditions, including trails, campsites, riparian areas, and meadows. Native plants are being adversely affected by the amount of grazing that is occurring from recreational stock. My decision to select alternative C should result in improvements to native vegetation that is being grazed by recreational stock. Standards will be put in place that protect native plant species and riparian areas.

Recreational-stock use is common within wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs. Recreational stock is frequently used because of the large distances involved and because of the high incidence of horse ownership in the surrounding areas. Many stock users have expressed concern about restrictions on the use of stock, which they feel would adversely affect their way of experiencing the wilderness. Alternative C does not specifically restrict the use of recreational stock on any trails or areas within Wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs. The alternative does, however, establish standards and guidelines for riparian areas and meadows which could result in the reduction or prohibition of recreational-stock grazing or restraining of stock within these areas.

Response to Management Goals

Goals for wilderness management were developed during the creation of the amendment. The goals were developed through input from interested publics, Forest Service personnel, and from the Wilderness Act. The SJ-RG NFs will use these goals in developing management direction for wilderness areas on the Forests:

- Manage wilderness so that changes in the ecosystem are primarily a consequence of natural forces, or within a range of natural variability and succession.
- Maintain wilderness in a natural and untrammled condition while accommodating human uses.
- Provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and a primitive and unconfined recreation experience.
- Sustain wilderness as a place of peace, solitude and sanctuary.
- Preserve natural resources for their inherent ecosystem and biological diversity values and for scientific research purposes.
- Provide the opportunity for challenge and risk.

- Minimize long-term impacts caused by human uses.
- Sustain natural and indigenous life forms.
- Protect and preserve historic and cultural resources found in wilderness.

I determined that Alternative C best meets the intent of all of the goals outlined above. While some alternatives may meet an individual goal better than others, Alternative C represents the best opportunity we have to meet the interrelated intent of the goals described. With the implementation of Alternative C wilderness conditions will be improved and recreation use will continue at a level that will protect wilderness resources and provide outstanding opportunities for an unconfined recreation experience.

Decisions Not Included

Not all decision related to wilderness management are contained within this Decision Notice. Examples of other site-specific decisions that are or will be addressed in other documents include:

- ▶ Trail reconstruction and construction
- ▶ Recreation capacity
- ▶ Special-use permit allocations
- ▶ Range allotment management decisions

Tiering

The Regional Forester approved the FLMPs for both the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests. These documents discuss wilderness land allocations and other direction related to wilderness management. When direction is not amended through this decision, the FLMPs still provides the basis for overall wilderness management on both Forests. The FLMPs, as amended, and their respective EISs are both incorporated here by reference.

Findings Required by Laws and Regulations

This decision complies with the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans and with the National Forest Management Act. This Act requires documentation of the following specific findings:

Consistency with Forest Plans

The FLMPs provide general guidance for Wilderness use and management. This amendment clarifies and provides more specific direction for management of wilderness. This decision amends the existing wilderness direction found in the Rio Grande NF LRMP and the San Juan NF LRMP.

Consistency with Other Laws and Regulations

Appendix III of the EA displays the principal laws, regulations and polices governing National Forest Wilderness. The primary legislation specific to Wilderness is the Wilderness Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-577). This amendment is in compliance with the laws and regulations.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After reviewing the Environmental Assessment, I have concluded that the alternatives will not significantly impact the biological and physical components of the human environment. Thus, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. The content of the actions selected relative to the nation, the region, and affected local interests indicates that:

Evaluation of Significance.

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

There will be beneficial impacts. This amendment will improve wilderness conditions for all wilderness areas on the SJ-RG NFs. Desired conditions have been developed which help determine what kind of wilderness conditions that we and the public desire for the future. Implementation of management actions described in the EA will help maintain standards and guidelines.

There will be adverse impacts to some users of wilderness if limitations or regulations are needed to help meet wilderness standards described in the EA. These limitations could result in lower recreational use in some areas and the movement of some commercial outfitter-guide services from areas that exceed crowding standards or other recreational use standards. Some stock users may not be able to graze in areas that they have previously used because of impacts to vegetation from grazing.

The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

This amendment will not affect the environment in a manner that is harmful to public health or safety. Certain management actions may actually improve public safety from a standpoint of reducing bear-human contacts, improved sanitation measures, and reduced opportunities for conflict.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to cultural resources, scenic areas, wild and scenic river corridors and critical ecological areas.

This amendment does not address Wild and Scenic River Corridors. Because of the management direction to preserve wilderness resources the actions described in this amendment will not adversely affect scenic areas, cultural resources or critical ecological areas.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

This amendment process has incorporated public involvement from the beginning stages. While some of the proposed management actions may be controversial if implemented, the effects of implementation, whether adverse or beneficial, to the resources are not. No substantial scientific information was introduced during the lengthy scoping period that would demonstrate that any of the effects disclosed are highly controversial.

The degree to which possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The selected alternative will not affect the human environment in ways that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. We believe the environmental risks are known. The interdisciplinary team, relying on public involvement, scientific research, and past experience made reasoned predictions on effects.

The degree which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principal about future considerations.

This decision does not preclude or set a precedent for the consideration of other future management activities other than those described in the decision. We will analyze other future actions within the area when proposed.

Whether the action is related to other actions with insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

We have considered cumulative, direct and indirect effects of the alternatives and there is no indication of significant (40 CFR 1508.27) adverse effects to the environment.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause a loss of scientific, cultural or historic resources.

This amendment does not propose any management actions that will adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects that are eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places. This amendment meets the intent of the Wilderness Act to preserve and protect historic structures and sites.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

The standards, guidelines and management actions contained in the environmental assessment are designed to protect and preserve species that are covered under the Endangered Species Act. Actions that are proposed are all designed to reduce or eliminate potential adverse effects on Endangered Species.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The selected alternative meets Federal, State and local laws for air, water, cultural resources, and threatened and endangered species, and meets the National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements.

Implementation

This decision will not be implemented sooner than 30 days after the legal notice appears in the local newspapers of record. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the direction contained in this decision will vary. Regulations will need to be written, information developed, and signing provided to begin implementation.

As a long-range management guide for wilderness the LRMP amendment is a programmatic document and does not make site-specific project decisions or set specific resource outputs. During implementation, when various projects occur, they will be performed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Many of these actions will be tiered to the LRMP EISs and this EA pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

Appeal Rights

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any written notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, "Content of a Notice of Appeal," including the reasons for appeal. The Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Lyle Laverty, Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region, no later than 45 days after the date of the legal notice of this decision in the Durango Herald, a newspaper published in Durango, La Plata County, Colorado.

The Regional Forester approves any significant amendments to the FLMP's while the Forest Supervisor may approve non-significant amendments. My determination of non-significance is appealable under 36 CFR 217.

Appeals may be submitted to:

Lyle Laverty, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region
P.O. Box 25127
Lakewood, CO 80225-0127

Appellants must submit two copies of a Notice of Appeal when the Notice is more than ten pages in length. Any appeal of my decision does not halt implementation of this direction. Requests to stay the approval of this Amendment, prepared pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.9, shall not be granted. However, where a project or activity would be implemented before an appeal decision could be issued, the Regional Forester will consider written requests to stay the implementation of that project pending completion of the review of the Amendment appeal.

The Wilderness Direction Amendment may be implemented 30 days after notification of this decision by legal notice in the Durango Herald.

For further information contact Jim Upchurch, San Juan-Rio Grande National Forests, 701 Camino Del Rio, Durango, CO 81301, (970) 385-1209.


JAMES B. WEBB

August 3, 1998
Date

Forest Supervisor
San Juan-Rio Grande National Forests
