

# Ouray Ranger District



*“Crown Jewel of the San Juan Mountains”*



## **Ouray Ranger District Landbase Information:**

The GMUG National Forest is comprised of 3,161,912 acres of National Forest System lands. Of these lands, the Ouray Ranger District manages over 450,000 acres.

## **The District encompasses lands within the following Counties:**

Montrose, Ouray, Mesa, Delta and Hinsdale. Most of our work is with Ouray, Montrose, and San Miguel Counties. We support the cities of Montrose, Ridgway, and Ouray.

The Ranger District Office is located in the town of Montrose, Colorado at 2505 S. Townsend and we are collated with the BLM Montrose Field Station. We share office space, personnel, and coordinate on

Other facilities that the Ranger District supports are several administrative sites including Silesca, 25 Mesa and Jackson Guard Station soon to be come part of a Cabin Rental Program.

## **Noteworthy Facts and Accomplishments about the Ouray Ranger District and its personnel:**

- **Description** - The Ouray District includes portions of the Uncompahgre Plateau and the San Juan Mountains. The Uncompahgre Plateau rises to 10,000 feet and water draining from the top has cut gorges and canyons along the sides of the plateau. Two of these drainages, the Roubideau and Tabeguache, are managed as wilderness, with no mechanized use. The Roubideau is located on the Ouray District. The Unaweeep/Tabeguache Scenic and Historic Byway follows the Dolores River Canyon on the west side of the Uncompahgre Plateau.
  - The San Juan Mountain Range has four peaks over 14,000 feet and another 100 peaks over 13,000 feet in elevation. It includes the Uncompahgre, Mount Sneffels, and Lizard Head Wilderness Areas. Portions of the Mount Sneffels and Uncompahgre Wildernesses are located on this district. The Owl Creek Pass Road is a scenic loop from Montrose on Highway 50 to the Cimarron Road to Silver Jack Reservoir, over Owl Creek Pass and west to Ridgway. This area gives access to trailheads and areas for dispersed camping. Ouray offers access to many four-wheel drive opportunities on primitive mining roads.
- **Recreation** - Popular recreation activities include hiking, hunting, fishing, developed and dispersed camping, four-wheel driving, sightseeing, picnicking, mountain biking, horseback riding, mountain climbing, backpacking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

- **Climate** - Summer high temperatures in the National Forest areas reach into the 70s and 80s, with warmer and drier weather in the lower elevations. Evenings are cool, with temperatures that can often dip into the 30s. Afternoon summer thunderstorms are common. Snow is possible at any time of year in the highest elevations. The high elevation roads and trails are often not clear of snow until at least mid-July. The relative humidity is quite low throughout the year. Winter lows can dip well below zero, though daytime temperatures are normally in the 20s to 30s. Much of the precipitation comes in the winter, when heavy snow can be expected in most forest areas.
- **Location** - The Ouray Ranger District is divided into two sections. It encompasses a portion of the Uncompahgre Plateau to the southwest of Montrose. The district also includes a portion of the northern San Juan Mountains around the town of Ouray.
- **Awards** - Regional Forester's Award for outstanding partnership with Ouray County in coordinating growth and development issues in 2007. The Red Mountain Task Force was the recipient of one of the 2004 Regional Forester's award.

## PROGRAM SUMMARIES

### Administration and Visitor Information

- Our Visitor Information Staff manages a Multi-agency complex, consisting of USDA Forest Service, DOI Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Southwest Interagency Fire/Dispatch Center.
- We are home to over 86 permanent federal employees.
- We provide services to an influx of visitors since our Visitor Center is located on US HWY 550, the main highway south through Montrose to Telluride and Ouray.
- We not only sell Forest Service national forest maps and wood permits, but also BLM maps, wood and rock permits/vegetative contracts, National Park passes and our Interpretive Association's product.
- Our administrative staff supports all resource disciplines.

## Fuels and Fire Suppression

- The Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU) is the focal point for coordinating the mobilization of resources for wildland fire and other incidents throughout the West Central portion of Colorado. Located in Montrose, CO, the Unit also provides Intelligence and Predictive Services related-products designed to be used by the internal wildland fire community for purposes of wildland fire and incident management decision-making.
- The Montrose Interagency Dispatch Center is divided geographically into three Fire Management Zones, the Gunnison Zone (East), the Norwood Zone (West), and the Ouray Zone (Central). Each Zone is responsible for all the public lands in their domain regardless of ownership.
- Fire managers use prescribed fires - that is, fires that are intentionally ignited under predetermined conditions by trained fire personnel - to help restore and maintain ecosystem health. Fire managers have greater control over the impact of fire to the ecosystem on prescribed fires than on wildfires because they can time and plan the conditions for burning. As a results, prescribed fires are often used to achieve specific resource objectives, such as habitat improvement, fuels reduction, and overall range and forest restoration
- NORWOOD ZONE Roughly 1.5 million acres. Combined, the BLM and USFS accomplish an average of 6-8 prescribed burns per year for a total of 2,000-3,000 acres.
- OURAY ZONE Roughly 2.5 million acres. Combined, the BLM and USFS accomplish an average of 6-8 prescribed burns per year for a total of 2,000-4,000 acres.
- GUNNISON ZONE Roughly 2.25 million acres. Combined, the BLM and USFS accomplish an average of 6-8 prescribed burns per year for a total of 5,000-8,000 acres.

## Timber and Silviculture

- This program is zoned between the Ouray and Norwood Ranger districts and consists of five permanent employees. Program highlights:
- Reforestation of the 2002 Burn Canyon burn: Annually plant about 400 acres of ponderosa pine. Burn rehabilitation is the subject of a community-based monitoring project that has been in existence since 2003.
- Timber stand improvement: 400 acres of precommercial thinning in ponderosa pine plantations established in the 1980's. Fuels reduction through stewardship contracting: we currently have two fuels reduction efforts on the Uncompahgre Plateau. Both involve commercial timber harvest, mechanical treatments, and broadcast burning of timber stands adjacent to major power transmission lines with the objective of reducing the likelihood of severe damage to electrical grid infrastructure from wildfire. The power industry has provided considerable financial resources to these efforts.
- Forest restoration: The district is currently involved in a forest restoration project on the Uncompahgre Plateau. Participants include the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute headquartered at Colorado State University; the Uncompahgre Plateau Project, a collaborative local group comprised of interested citizens, environmental groups, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the BLM, the power industry, and Forest Service.
- Sudden aspen decline: the timber program is preparing a commercial timber sale in several sudden aspen decline-affected stands. The project involves the implementation of a monitoring strategy designed to help answer questions on the degree to which clearcutting can stimulate regeneration as a function of intensity of decline. San Miguel County and a local environmental group will provide assistance in conducting monitoring activities.
- Timber sales: through the small sales salvage program, the district provides wood to a number of small timber businesses as well as to the public through the fuelwood program. This helps reduce hazardous fuels on the landscape. The large sales program

provides about 5,000 ccf annually to mills in Delta, Montrose, and Mancos, Colorado.

## **Recreation/Trails/Travel Management/Recreation Special Uses/Wilderness**

### **Ouray Area**

- **Yankee Boy Basin** is a popular recreation destination within the Canyon Creek Stewardship Area. The Basin is nestled between tall mountain peaks approximately 7.0 miles out of Ouray, CO. Alpine flowers, waterfalls, abandoned mines and mills are but a few of the spectacular sights. In traveling to Yankee Boy Basin, you will see Camp Bird Mine, Revenue Mine, and the old townsite of Sneffels. A camping fee program is in place in this area. Two miles past the Sneffels townsite, the road gets rockier and much rougher. A high clearance 4-wheel drive vehicle is required from this point.
- July and early August are favorite times to view entire fields of blue Colorado columbines, red Indian paintbrush and yellow buttercups. Accessibility: There is one accessible restroom in Canyon Creek, however there are no other accessible facilities or trails in the area.
- **Bear Creek National Recreation Trail** was designated in 1978. The trail is 4.2 miles long and follows a historic miner's trail that served as an alternative route to the toll road between Ouray and Silverton. It follows a steep narrow ledge in the Bear Creek drainage. In places, the trail is less than 2 feet wide with a steep drop-off on one side.
- In addition to the Bear Creek Trail, there are many other exciting trail opportunities around Ouray. For trail descriptions, photographs, and reports on current trail conditions visit the Ouray Trail Group website. The Trail Group is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation and safe public use of Ouray County Trails. In cooperation with the Forest Service, they contribute many hours of volunteer work maintaining trails and installing trail signs. They publish a map and trail guide to over 70 Ouray area trails entitled *Hiking Trails of Ouray County*.

## **Uncompahgre Plateau**

- Recreation use on the Uncompahgre Plateau has been evolving rapidly over the past decade. In addition to the traditional fall hunting use, the area is seeing increasing use by visitors on mountain bikes, motorcycles, and ATV's. The District has been successful in obtaining State OHV grants to support a 4-5 person trail crew who maintains more than 90 miles of motorized trails in the area. We are working closely with a coalition of OHV and mountain bike groups to develop an improved network of trails in the area.

## **Cimarron Area**

- The Cimarron River drainage has both developed and dispersed camping opportunities. Three developed fee campgrounds are managed under our concessionaire, Recreation Resource Management.
- Dispersed camping in this area poses a management challenge because many of the sites are within sensitive riparian habitat. The District will begin closing a few dispersed sites this summer with the objective of completing a more comprehensive recreation analysis of the Cimarron drainage next year.
- Beaver Lake Trail is an accessible trail around the Lake with several fishing sites. We plan to develop this day use site into a fully accessible site with accessible parking and a restroom.

## **Uncompahgre Wilderness**

- Uncompahgre Wilderness spans more than 99,000 acres on the Uncompahgre National Forest and 3,400 acres on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Elevations range from 8,400 to 14,000-plus feet. This Wilderness contains 150 miles of foot and horse trails. Trails lead into the wilderness from trailheads located in the West, Middle, and East Forks of the Big Cimarron River. The Big Blue Trail, beginning south of the campground by the same name, also is a major route into the Wilderness. Additional trails enter the wilderness from the vicinities of the towns of Ouray and Lake City.

- While the lowest elevations of the Uncompahgre Wilderness may be snow free starting in June, the normal snow-free conditions are from mid-July to early September. Points of interest include: Uncompahgre Peak (14,309 ft); Wetterhorn Peak (14,015 ft); Matterhorn Peak, Coxcomb Peak, Silver Peak, Slide Lake, and Big Blue Creek.
- Trails to the 14,000-foot peaks in this wilderness and most other wildernesses are heavily used. You may not find solitude on them. High use of these trails creates a heavy impact on fragile landscapes. Please stay on established trails. A true wilderness experience would more likely be found in less popular areas of the wilderness.

### **Recreation Special Uses**

- The District administers 40 outfitter-guide permits for activities ranging from winter activities such as ice climbing, snowmobiling, and nordic skiing to summer/fall activities involving rock climbing, backpacking, horse tours, jeep tours, hunting, and fishing.
- Permits are issued annually for 1-3 day recreation events such as trail runs, archery shoots, motorcycle events, and several jeep rallies.

### **Developed Recreation**

- The district manages eight campgrounds, several in partnership with Recreation Resource Management and the Public Lands Partnership. In 2007 over 500 volunteer hours accomplished campground renovations.
- The district manages approximately 400 miles of trails in partnership with the Ouray Trail Group, Uncompahgre Trail Riders, Western Slope 4-Wheelers, Thunder Mountain Wheelers and Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA).

### **Fish, Wildlife and T,E,S**

- Forest Fisheries work located here on Ouray Ranger District, but also provide fisheries support and project work for Ouray, Grand Valley, Norwood, Paonia, and Gunnison RDs. Fisheries biologists

conduct fisheries work on 3.1 million acres of National Forest Lands. Work includes the following:

- Annual stream and lake enhancement targets
  - Approximately 8-14 miles of stream enhancement per year
  - Approximately 10-17 acres of lake enhancement per year
- Annual aquatic inventory and monitoring program
  - Approximately 10 miles of Colorado River cutthroat trout inventory and monitoring
  - Approximately 10-30 miles of aquatic MIS species monitoring
  - Approximately 20-30 miles of stream inventory and monitoring work
  - Inventoried over 300 stream crossings on Forest for fish passage assessment and improvement program
- Work collaboratively with many partners including: Colorado Division of Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Work collaboratively with Colorado Division of Wildlife under the Colorado and greenback conservation plans to protect and enhance the distribution and abundance of Colorado River and greenback cutthroat trout throughout the Forest.
  - Colorado River cutthroat trout reclamation project scheduled in 2009.
- Stream Flow Protection work with land owners, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Department of Water Resources consistent with GMUG Pathfinder and Forest Service/CO Department of Natural Resources Water Management MOU.
- Participate in several education events for schools and the communities surround Montrose.

## **Roads and Engineering**

- The Ouray Ranger District has about 633 miles of roads, of which there about 264 miles of level 3 and 4 automotive roads, 251 miles of level 2 primitive roads.
- The District is largely split between the Uncompahgre Plateau Division and the Mountain Division. The Uncompahgre Plateau area

is closest to Montrose in about a southwest direction. The Mountain area is that area around Ouray, and including the Cimarron area east of Ridgway.

- We have one 4-WD road under the Adopt-a-Road program. The Western Slope 4-Wheelers has adopted Poughkeepsie road in the Red Mountain Pass area.
- Road maintenance is handled by both county and Forest road crews. We work with essentially four counties. They maintain all of our level 3 and 4 roads and some level 2 roads under road maintenance agreements with the counties. Our Forest road crew does the rest of the roads and follows up on anything the counties do not get done to bring the roads up to standard.
- We have a series of seasonal gates on our major Forest access routes to control traffic during springtime melt-off and to protect groomed snowmobile routes.

## **Lands**

- The Ouray Ranger District completed the purchase of over 8,000 acres of private lands consisting of patented mining claims in the Red Mountain area. Work on this acquisition began in 2002 and was completed in 2007, and involved the help and cooperation of several partnerships, including the Trust For Public Lands and the Red Mountain Task Force. Additional information is below.
- In 2007 the GMUG completed a land exchange to acquire a key property for access on the Galloping Goose Trail near the Ophir Loop (near Telluride). In addition, the exchange enabled the Arapaho National Forest to acquire a private land parcel that formed a wedge between the Forest and Rocky Mountain National Park to facilitate management in the area.

## **Red Mountain Land Acquisition Project, 2001-2007**

- Partnership with the Red Mountain Task Force and the Trust for Public Land and other interest groups.
- Purchased from 15 different owners ranging from a large mining company to private individuals.

- 8000+ Acres acquired including hundreds of patented mining claims or portions of patented claims.
- Total Purchase price of just over 12 Million.
- Ironton Park 806 acres were negotiated and purchased solely by the GMUG.

**The purchase included:**

- Iron Fen
  - Crystal Lake and Dam
  - Water rights for Crystal Lake
  - Lynx Habitat
  - ROW's essential to accessing the high country east of Hwy 550.
- Remedial Action Plan Property of the Red Mountain Project - More than one hundred claims may come available to the FS for purchase in 2011 if the hazmat actions have been a success.
  - Hundreds of private inholdings remain in the form of Patented Mining Claims and other larger parcels.
  - Ouray Hydro Plant Penstock SUP - Ouray Ice Park Recreation SUP: Interests in both will be transferred to the City of Ouray when the Ouray Townsite Project is complete.

**Minerals and Geological Resources**

- Portions of two geo-physical exploration surveys (2D seismic and gravity) will occur in 2008 on the plateau portion of the district.
- Administering 1 locatable mineral Plan of Operations (Grizzly Bear mine), which is in interim reclamation phase.
- Cooperating with the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety in the closure of ten hazardous mine features in 2008 and 2009. Fifteen additional sites have been identified for future remediation.
- Preliminary Assessment and Site Investigation (PA/SI) are scheduled for 2008 to characterize abandoned mine related hazards in Gray Copper Falls and Upper Corkscrew basins in the San Juan mountain portion of the district.
- Dry Mesa Dinosaur Quarry specimens continue to draw international interest and requests for examination (curated by

the BYU Earth Science Museum). Future graduate research at the site is likely.

- Cooperating with the Grand Junction Geological Society to delineate and characterize remnant river terrace deposits located near the spine of the Uncompahgre Plateau for possible Special Interest Area designation.

### **Watershed Resources**

- Developed an MOU with Colorado State University to identify fen restoration needs and the testing & evaluation of restoration techniques, "Pirate Ship fen" restoration is scheduled for implementation in 2009.
- Through a Special Use Authorization, the district supports the study of dust impacts on snow melt mechanics and alpine ecosystems at "Senator Beck Basin". It is the only site dedicated to the examination of snow systems in the U.S., and is a "Sentinel Site" for monitoring the effects of global climate change on the southwestern U.S.
- Active participant in the annual Montrose School District "Water Festival" field day for all 5<sup>th</sup> graders.
- 2008 restoration project to address dispersed camping impacts to the riparian zone along the Big Cimarron River, at Rowdy Lake, and East Dallas Creek.

### **Range Management and Noxious Weeds**

- 40,000 AUM's
- 24 active allotments; 28 permittees
- Rescissions Act complete on 9 active allotments on Uncompahgre Plateau and 1 allotment in the Mountain Division; in progress for 14 remaining active allotments plus 7 vacant allotments
- Noxious weed reimbursable agreement funding in place with Western Area Power; Tri-State Generation
- Cooperative noxious weed treatment agreements in place with Ouray and Montrose Counties
- Active weed treatment program; annually treat about 100-150 chemical acres and inventory about 500 acres