



An Informational Briefing

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre
and Gunnison National Forests

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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 off-highway vehicle use.

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

Forest Facts for Fiscal Year 2010

Headquarters	2250 Highway 50 Delta, CO 81416
Number of employees	150 permanent employees 120 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, four 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
- The GMUG has recently added Cabin Rentals to its variety of recreation experiences afforded to citizens. Six cabin rental units are available for reservation, Silesca, Black Bear, Moose Manor, Aspen Leaf, Oak and Ponderosa, with others planned for future rental opportunities.

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
- Green cutthroat trout

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





Wildlife and Fish Habitat

Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat restoration and enhancement is a key activity on the GMUG. In 2010 approximately 20 miles of road were closed on the Uncompahgre Plateau and an additional 4 miles on the Paonia Ranger District. These closures enhanced over 2,200 acres of wildlife habitat. Prescribed fire was used to enhance habitat on an additional 1,000 acres on the south end of the Uncompahgre Plateau, Pine Mountain and in Taylor Canyon. Partners in these efforts include Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Habitat Protection Program (HPP) of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Target species include mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, and Bighorn sheep. Surveys were conducted for several management indicator, threatened and endangered, and sensitive species including Abert's squirrel, goshawk, American marten, bighorn sheep, Gunnison sagegrouse, Colorado River and greenback cutthroat trout. Of particular interest is a partnership project with Gunnison County and HPP examining the effectiveness of prescribed burning in enhancing Gunnison sagegrouse habitat. The Forest also entered into a two-year study with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to examine the movement patterns of bighorn sheep above Ouray. Twelve to 15 satellite collars were purchased and will be fitted to wild sheep in the fall of 2010. Collars have also been fitted to domestic sheep in the San Juan Mountains to determine whether or not wild and domestic sheep could be interacting.

Two low-water fords were constructed on East Terror Creek in cooperation with Oxbow Mining corporation. These fords were design to facilitate aquatic organism passage and to allow floodplain function. Target species include greenback cutthroat trout (threatened) and bluehead sucker (FS sensitive) and approximately 7 miles of habitat became accessible to the target species. Two challenge cost-share agreements benefiting aquatic species were executed. The first was with Colorado Division of Wildlife to establish Aquatic Nuisance Species watercraft inspection stations on Taylor Reservoir. Crews were stationed at the Marina from 0500 to 2200 hrs seven days a week. The Forest also purchased and installed barricades with signs on every road accessing the shoreline reminding boaters of the requirement to launch their boats at the marina. The second challenge-cost share agreement was with Bear Ranch LCC and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to construct a fish friendly diversion structure on Filmore Ditch which gets it's water from Deep Creek on the Paonia RD. Greenback cutthroat trout enter the ditch during the irrigation season and later become stranded and die when the water is shut off in late fall. The new structure, which will be completed in late September or early October, is designed to keep all fish greater than 6 inches our of the ditch. The structure was designed by engineers from the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Materials were purchased with FS appropriated dollars and through a grant provided by FWS. Personnel at Bear Ranch is fabricating and installing the structure. Monitoring will be completed pre- and post implementation to determine it's effectiveness.

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.

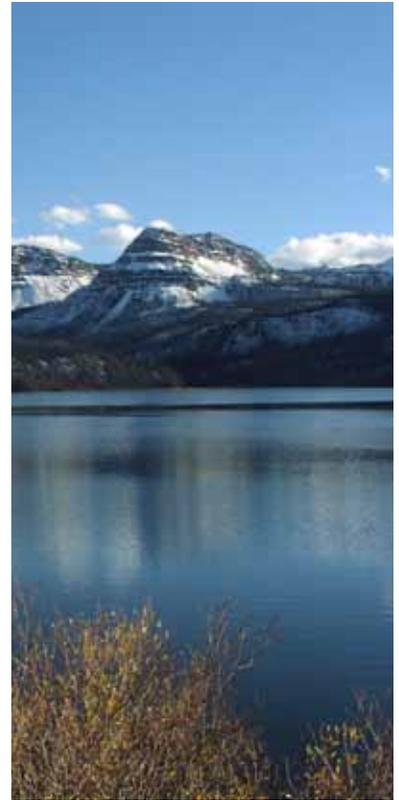
The most prominent values sustained by water originating on the GMUG include drinking and agricultural water supplies, as well as aquatic threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

Additionally, work to identify fens across the Forest is ongoing. Aerial photos were used to identify potential fens and in 2010 field crews continued the inventory work that began in 2009. Field inventories were completed on over 370 potential fen locations encompassing about 3400 acres. Forest-wide, the field survey provides data and information on fens/wetlands for over 49,000 acres of the GMUG. These results helped to: identify where there are high concentrations of fens; to distinguish between fens and wetlands in areas that were photo-interpreted; and to provide important information and data to use on projects where fens may occur.

Forest Management and Timber

In FY2010, the GMUG accomplished numerous forest vegetation management projects that were designed to improve forest health. This includes stands that were impacted by spruce and douglas-fir bark beetles, western spruce worm, mountain pine beetle and sudden aspen decline to high levels of ladder fuels or trees lacking in diversity of species and range on the landscape. Specific accomplishments include:

- Administration of 24 large timber sale contracts (18,000 CCF) on about 1500 acres.
- Numerous small timber sale contracts and commercial and personal use permits totalling 6,000 CCF on about 500 acres.
- Preparation and offer of 29,000 CCF dead and green sawtimber, fuelwood and biomass treatments on 2,400 acres.
- 6,815 acres of integrated fuels treatment, including machine cutting/treatment and prescribed burning.
- Environmental assessment planning for future treatments and forest health projects for 15,000 acres of commercial harvest and 35,000 acres of mechanical cutting/treatment and prescribed burning over the next 5 years.
- Accomplished 400 acres of tree planting in burned areas and certified 229 acres of planned natural regeneration in former harvest areas.
- Collected 30 bushells of cones to maintain adequate seed inventory for tree planting.





- Accomplished 495 acres of thinning in young, forested stands to maintain vigor and health.
- Accomplished 1,500 acres of integrated fuels treatments
- Performed post-harvest monitoring on 3,133 acres to validate environmental conditions and actions were consistent with NEPA decisions and mitigation.
- Performed 7,500 acres of focused spruce beetle, douglas-fir beetle and SAD pre/post treatments.
- Established 184 acres of fencing to monitor big game browsing effects on aspen regeneration in harvest areas.
- Were awarded a \$10 million dollar grant through Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Grant to treat 166,000 acres of land on Uncompahgre Plateau over the next 10 years.

Range



The GMUG provides 159 active grazing allotments to 226 permittees (ranches) in Colorado. About 57,500 cattle, 277 horses and 26,700 sheep were permitted to graze on approximately 2.6 million acres of the GMUG in FY 2010. In September the Forest completed environmental analysis for all allotments on the Rescissions Act grazing schedule. Livestock grazing is now NEPA sufficient for all grazing allotments on the Forest. Additionally, 3,000 acres on the Forest were treated to eliminate noxious weeds, with about 80% of these acres accomplished through partnerships, grants and agreements. Despite treatment efforts across the Forest, field inventories illustrate expansion of several noxious weed species such as sulfur cinquefoil, diffuse knapweed and oxeye daisy in 2010.

Land Acquisition and Ditch Bill



The GMUG has worked extensively to acquire key lands within the Forest. In 2010, 588 acres of former patented mining claims lands were acquired in the Ophir area by TPL on behalf of the Forest. It is anticipated that the Forest will close on an additional 49 acres of these same lands prior to the end of the FY to bring the total to 637 acres. Future plans include the acquisition of additional properties. Additionally, two land exchanges projects have been completed this fiscal year—the Adventure Experiences and Taylor River exchanges. These total 401 acres of lands that are now in federal ownership. In addition, progress on Ditch Bill Easements includes 14 cases resolved, with a remaining 30 cases in progress. The Forest began with a total of 525 cases to process.

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 to respond to the DRMS with conditions for use of NFS lands on 12 coal mining permit actions ranging from exploration drilling, ventilation shaft construction, water monitoring and methane drainage, and completed compliance inspections on over 100 coal-related surface facilities. The GMUG also provided conditions to the BLM for a coal exploration license.

The GMUG continues to participate in the North Fork Coal Working Group, a 10-year-old community collaborative group which addresses coal issues in the North Fork Valley.

The GMUG also manages natural gas development which currently includes 21 natural gas well, operated by seven natural gas companies. The GMUG participates in a Natural Gas Collaborative Group hosted by Delta County, that includes representatives from local counties, environmental interests, industry, private landowners and the BLM. GMUG minerals administrators presented gas program information at public forums hosted by local environmental interests.

The GMUG, in cooperation with the BLM, is in the process of preparing an environmental analysis on potential leasing of about 3,700 acres of land for geothermal development.

In 2010 we responded to a new locatable minerals plan of operations for baseline study work as well as performed compliance inspections on 10 existing locatable minerals operations. The GMUG administers about 30 mineral material sites which provide sources of rock, sand and gravel for in-service use, local counties, BOR and CDOT, and provide sources of landscaping rock for the general public.

In FY 2010 the GMUG began processing a locatable minerals plan of operation submitted by U.S. Energy Corp. for geotechnical baseline investigations and water sampling with the Carbon Creek, Splains Gulch and Mt. Emmons areas to assess the feasibility of situating possible mine-related structures.

In coordination with the State of Colorado, 21 hazardous openings such as adits and shafters were closed on the Ouray and Gunnison Ranger Districts.

Work on the Carbonero Tailing site, an abandoned mine lands site, located near the town of Ophir in San Miguel County is nearly complete. The objective was to remove impacts from previous mine tailings on human health and the environment. Additionally, the Forest and Idarado /Newmont Mining have entered into an agreement to develop an engineering report and cost analysis for the mill tailings on lands administered by the Forest in the Telluride Valley Floor.

In the geology program, the GMUG began a paleontological resource inventory which resulted in identification of 2 new fossil find sites on the Forest in 2009. On-going paleontology inventory, working with Mesa State College students, has yielded numerous fossil finds. Additionally, a geologic road log has been completed for the Imogene Pass area (an extremely popular recreation route) to add to the existing interpretive collection on the Forest.

Fires

In Fiscal Year 2010, the GMUG experienced 17 wildfires that burned a total of 2,190 acres. Forest employees supported 70 fires on 2,929 acres of multi-jurisdictional fires within the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit as well as additional fires on the Grand Valley Ranger District administered out of the Upper Colorado River Fire Management Unit. Additional accomplishments include: completion of annual preparedness reviews; sponsorship of the Fire Academy; and implementation of the Wildfire Decision Support System.





FY 2010 was the third year that the GMUG was able to manage wildland fire for multiple objectives. A total of 4 wildland fires were managed for resource benefits this year. The Forest completed approximately 6,815 acres of hazardous fuels reduction treatments utilizing both mechanical and prescribed fire treatments.

Travel Management

The GMUG completed the Gunnison National Forest Travel Management Plan in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management. The Forest is transitioning to implementation of the Plan and continues to place emphasis and priority on travel management across the Forest. Implementation of the Grand Mesa Travel Management Plan is substantially complete and implementation of the Uncompahgre Plan was a point of emphasis and priority for FY2010. The Grand Mesa Mechanized travel plan (e.g. mountain bikes) was completed this year and implementation of it is likewise underway.



Volunteers in 2010

The GMUG National Forest has an active volunteer program. In 2010, 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, resource monitoring, wildlife habitat projects, Visitor Center interpretive programs, cultural/heritage PIT projects and much more..



In 2010, the GMUG hosted volunteer efforts and accomplishments resulting in over 13.4 person years (24,063 hours) of donated time and services by 1,142 persons that were valued at over \$409,590 (including YCC youth).

Partnerships

The GMUG has approximately 170 active cooperator groups who contribute over \$2,376,646 toward work on national forest lands and programs. Some examples of those partnerships include the Ute Learning Garden Project, San Miguel County Alpine Ranger Program, San Miguel Bike Alliance, Western Slope Four-Wheelers, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association, the Grand Mesa Nordic Council, CSU, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Colorado Mountain Club, Thunder Mountain Wheelers, Uncompahgre Watershed Coalition, GEC and Oxbow Coal, Uncompahgre Valley Trailriders, Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association, 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 to the State who then distribute these funds to the Counties in which national forest lands lie. These receipts are distributed through the Secure Rural Schools Act and help support roads, schools and environmental protection on County and federal lands. Payments to the GMUG counties for 2009 totalled \$4,089,719.
- 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). The state of Colorado received \$24,267,593 in PILT funds for FY 2010.

Awards

The GMUG submitted thirteen projects and/or partnership efforts for Regional recognition in FY2010. Five of those nominations were selected by the Region for “Honor Awards.” They were: the City of Grand Junction Municipal Watershed Group as the Water Partnership of the Year; Delta County resident Walt Blackburn as the Recreation Partner of the Year; the Terror Creek Sudden Aspen Decline Study Project for Forest and Grassland Health Emphasis, and Forest Service employees Linda Bledsoe (Grand Valley Ranger District) for her expertise in water emphases and Sally Crum (Forest Supervisor’s Office) for her expertise in Multi-Cultural work with the Ute Indian Tribes.

Two of these awardees went on to be recognized at the national level by the Secretary of Agriculture-The Grand Junction Munciple Watershed Group and Sally Crum, GMUG archaeologist.

