



Topic: Coal Mining Under the Proposed Colorado Roadless Rule

Background:

Five of the eight national forests in Colorado may have coal resources within their boundaries: the Pike/San Isabel, Routt, White River, San Juan, and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests. Two of the five coal fields on the GMUG, Somerset and Grand Mesa, are estimated to have 1.6 billion tons of in-place coal resources and 1.2 billion tons are estimated within the roadless areas. In addition, the Durango Known Recoverable Coal Resource Area on the San Juan National Forest contains an estimated 1.5 billion tons, some in roadless areas.

Only the GMUG currently has active coal leases and on-going production. Three underground mines (West Elk, Bowie #2 and Elk Creek) produce coal from private lands and from leases on federal lands. These three mines produce about 15 million tons of coal per year, approximately 40% of the total coal production in Colorado. Coal from these mines meets the definition of compliant and super-compliant coal reserves according to the Clean Air Act. The coal has high energy value (Btu), low sulphur, ash and mercury content, and is desirable for use in the generation of electricity. Most of this coal is shipped to the Eastern U.S.

The 2011 proposed rule has identified about 20,000 acres of the CRAs on the GMUG as the North Fork coal mining area for specific management. There are 4,000 acres of the total 20,000 acres in CRAs that are currently under lease.

Summary of Proposed Rule Direction:

- The Colorado rule prohibits road construction for coal mining within CRAs, except in the North Fork Coal Mining area on the GMUG, where temporary road construction would be allowed as needed for coal exploration and coal-related surface activities.
- The above temporary roads may also be used for collecting and transporting coal mine methane. Buried infrastructure, as needed for the capture, collection, and use of coal mine methane, would be required to be located within the rights of ways.
- If any of these temporary roads are within a native cutthroat trout catchment or identified recovery watershed, road construction would be required not to diminish, over the long-term, conditions in the water influence zone and in the native cutthroat habitat.
- Road use would be limited to coal mining use, Forest Service administrative use, and fire, emergency or law enforcement personnel.
- All roads would be required to be decommissioned when no longer needed or upon termination or expiration of a contract, authorization, or permit, whichever is sooner.

Changes from the 2008 Proposed Rule

- The North Fork coal mining area in the 2011 proposed rule excludes 9,000 acres (the Currant Creek area) that was included in the 2008 proposed rule due to public concerns.

Additional Information

- There are no upper tier acres within the North Fork coal mining area in either alternative 2 or 4.