

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests  
2012 Annual Report

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### A Message from the Forest Supervisor

This past year (2012) has been full of activities and accomplishments on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests. It was a year of transition for me and as the new Forest Supervisor and I am continually inspired by the beauty and diversity of the almost 3 million acres of National Forest System Lands that comprise the "GMUG."

I have also been impressed by the passion, commitment and contributions of our partners, communities and volunteers who contribute so much to help us manage these amazing landscapes and to accomplish our Mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

My staff and I are excited about the work planned for 2013, including our continued efforts to manage for Healthy Forests and Ecosystems, support high quality watersheds and implement Forest Restoration activities across the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests.

This is a summary report to highlight some of the Forests' accomplishments. I hope you find it informative and useful. For more information on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, visit us at: [www.fs.usda.gov/gmug](http://www.fs.usda.gov/gmug).

On behalf of the employees on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests...Scott Armentrout, GMUG Forest Supervisor.

## Forest Facts for Fiscal Year 2012

Headquarters:	2250 Highway 50 Delta, CO 970.874.6600
Number of Employees:	148 Permanent Employees 122 Temporary Employees
Ranger Districts:	Grand Valley (Grand Junction) Gunnison Norwood Paonia Ouray (Montrose)
Elevations:	6,000 feet to 14,000 feet
Total NFS Acres:	2,975, 647
Wilderness Acres:	556,936
Roadless Area Acres:	901,100
Annual Visitors:	2,285,800
Miles of NFS Trails:	3,531
Miles of Motorized Trails:	1,027
Miles of NFS Roads:	3,397
Ski Resorts:	Crested Butte Mountain Resort Powderhorn Telluride
Miles of Streams:	3,600
Number of Campgrounds:	58+
Counties:	Delta, Garfield, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, Saguache, San Juan, San Miguel

## Recreating in the Great Outdoors

### Campgrounds:

A prospectus for the operation of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests' campgrounds was developed and advertised. The concession contract was awarded to Recreation Resources Management of America for five years.

Columbine Recreation Area was completed. This project constructed a new recreation facility for motorized users on the Uncompahgre Plateau including: designated camping sites, parking areas and two toilets, a parking/staging area for OHV users allowing for easy access to adjacent designated routes and riding opportunities.

Lottis Creek Recreation Area was reconstructed. This project constructed: 23 new camp sites with RV hook-ups, two host units, a day use picnic site, new water systems for the campground, one single and five double-unit accessible toilets, and improved river access, parking and a nearby trailhead.

### Wilderness:

Air Quality Monitoring Plans were developed for the LaGarita, West Elk, Lizard Head, Mount Sneffels, Raggeds, Uncompahgre and Fossil Ridge Wildernesses.

The GMUG in partnership with Sheep Mountain Alliance sponsored two free, public Wilderness presentations featuring Mr. Roderick Nash, author of the best-seller, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

Invasive species inventories were completed for Lizard-head, LaGarita, Uncompahgre and Sneffels Wildernesses.

Outfitter-guide and other campsite/use areas were inventoried; trash and unwanted material was removed from high-use areas on the 14,000 foot peaks in the Uncompahgre and La Garita Wildernesses.

### Trails:

Maintenance and reconstruction work continued on numerous Forest trails through grants, partnerships, volunteers and Forest Service crews totaling approximately 798 miles of trail maintenance.

The Thunder Trails Project was approved and includes the design of 18 miles of new motorized, single-track trails and a new trailhead to be constructed in 2013.



Construction on the parallel trail along the Divide Road on the Uncompahgre Plateau continued with an additional 19 miles constructed.

Additional trail work (summer/winter) through partnerships included: ski trail grooming and hosting by Nordic Council on Grand Mesa; OHV trail and route maintenance by Thunder Mountain Wheelers and Western Slope 4 Wheelers; Trail construction/reconstruction with Western State University and Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association.

**Conservation Education:**

Three high school interns were hired with a teacher/leader to work on various forest monitoring projects for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLP). The students documented how plants respond to forest health treatments.

The GMUG hosted a booth during *National Skier Safety Week* at Crested Butte Mountain Resort featuring Jr. Snow Ranger activities and a winter ecology classroom visit and field trip on Grand Mesa. Students learned to cross-country ski and about animal adaptations to winter, snow ranger work and avalanche safety.

Approximately 160 days of conservation education and community outreach programs were provided to approximately 3,360 persons.

**Heritage Resources:**

Site surveys and evaluation recordings were accomplished through the “Passports in Time-Our Ancient People of the Cochetopa and the Sanford Basin Mining.” Over 30 participants donated 900 hours.

Other project accomplishments include:

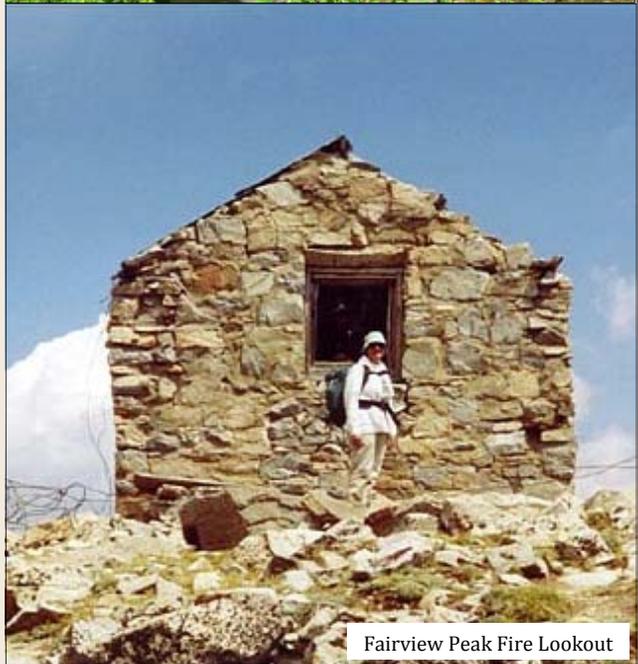
- Restoration of the shake roof on the Fairview Peak Fire Lookout (the oldest lookout in Colorado).
- Restoration through fencing and furnishing the historic Alpine Ranger Station.
- Completion of a structural assessment at the Neosha Mine to guide future stabilization efforts.
- Alpine Tunnel-the first railroad tunnel through the Continental Divide (1882) installation of: eighteen interpretive panels; an entrance kiosk replicating the timber framing within the tunnel; repair of the turntable platform and establishment of pathways.



Slate River-Washington Gulch



Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Students



Fairview Peak Fire Lookout



Alpine Tunnel Kiosk

Forest staff processed: 75 requests for cultural resource inventory; recorded 65 new sites, re-evaluated 25 previous sites and completed inventory on approximately 4,000 acres.

**Tribal Consultation:**

The Forests consult with the 3 Ute Tribes on forest activities quarterly regarding proposed projects.

Tribal consultation allowed a small excavation to obtain “Carbon 14” dates on maize and other perishable materials from one of the Forests’ desert rock shelter sites providing better data for the well-known Basketmaker Culture of the Four Corners area.

**Wildlife & Fisheries Resources:**

Wildlife, fish and rare plants management including their restoration and enhancement, is a key activity on the GMUG. The GMUG hosts a variety of flora and fauna, including approximately 55,000 elk, 143,000 deer, 520 Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, 150 desert bighorn sheep and a 150 moose on the Grand Mesa.

**GMUG-Federal Threatened & Endangered species:**

Mexican spotted owl Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly  
Colorado hookless cactus Canada lynx

**GMUG- Special Species:**

Gunnison sage grouse Boreal Owl Bald Eagle  
Black bear Mountain Lion Pine Marten  
Peregrine falcon Several plant species

**GMUG-Aquatic sensitive species:**

Colorado River cutthroat trout Roundtail chub  
Bluehead sucker Boreal toad  
Greenback cutthroat trout

Surveys and monitoring were conducted for several species including Abert’s squirrel, goshawk, American marten, bighorn sheep, Gunnison sage-grouse, Colorado River greenback cutthroat trout and several threatened and endangered plants.

The tenth year of monitoring the Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly populations, numbers and genetic status was completed, in cooperation with Western State College. All colonies appear to have a stable population trend.



Ute Tribe youths view rock art on Forest



Moose on the Mesa



Gunnison Sage Grouse



Pika in the Alpine

**Wildlife Habitat Accomplishments:**

Mechanical treatment of vegetation helped reduce hazardous fuels and enhanced wildlife habitat on about 2,000 acres in pine, aspen, oak and pinion-juniper stands.

10 miles of fire line was constructed to prepare 3,500 acres for prescribed burn in 2013 to enhance wildlife habitat.

40,000 acres of wildlife habitat were enhanced in conjunction with travel management activities. The Forest, in association with the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, Gunnison County, private landowners and the Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse working group completed a Candidate Conservation Strategy for the Gunnison sage-grouse.

**Fisheries Habitat Accomplishments:**

Culvert inventory on perennial fish-bearing streams was completed Forest-wide for aquatic organism passage and floodplain issues. About 400 culverts were inventoried. Six culverts were replaced with open-bottom arch structures to simulate a natural stream channel.

In partnership with Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff performed inspection of watercraft for Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) on Taylor Park Reservoir from 5 AM to 11 PM, seven days a week. Monitoring also occurred on two lakes on the Grand Mesa.

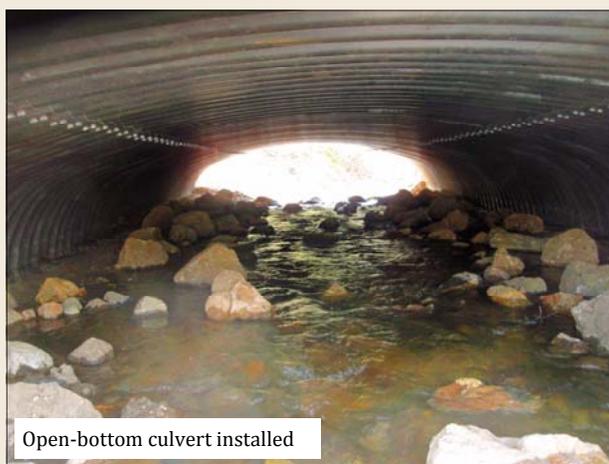
GMUG personnel worked with CPW to treat tributaries to Woods Lake and the reservoir, to remove non-native fish. About 200 adult and sub-adult cutthroat trout were moved to the Lake resulting in fifteen acres of lake and 5 miles of high quality habitat restoration.

The final phase of the Deep Creek Restoration project (a partnership with CPW and Bear Ranch, LCC) was completed to protect a pure strain cutthroat trout population resulting in approximately 6 miles of high quality habitat.

The second year of the Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Program included four students conducting monitoring on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The students gathered and analyzed data and job-shadowing Forest Service employees for six weeks.



Bull Elk



Open-bottom culvert installed



Successful kids fishing day!



Rainbow trout on the Gunnison Ranger District

## Forest Management and Timber

The Forest accomplished a variety of forest vegetation management projects that were designed to maintain or move toward restoring forest health and resiliency, while also providing forest products for personal-use and to supply wood to support the local wood products industry.

Rapidly increasing populations of spruce bark beetle are evident at high elevations on the southeastern part of the Forests and to a lesser degree on the Grand Mesa. Douglas-fir bark beetle has steadily increased at mid-elevations across the Forests.

Sudden aspen decline (SAD) continues to be evident among low elevation aspen stands.

### **2012 Accomplishments:**

<b>Vegetation Treatment</b>	<b>Acres or Volume (ccf)</b>
Timber Volume Sold	52,287 ccf
Timber Volume Harvested	24,125 ccf
Timber Volume Under Contract	73,890 ccf
Forest Health Treatment	2,585 acres
Pre-Commercial Thinning	197 acres
Site Preparation & Tree Planting	105 & 487 acres
Stewardship Contracts	3
Hazardous Fuels Treatment-Combined	4,267

## Rangeland Management

The GMUG has the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest range program in the Rocky Mountain Region and emphasizes use of the best rangeland science available; working cooperatively with ranchers, agency specialists and the public, to meet multiple resource objectives; and monitoring to validate vegetation management objectives.



Tree regeneration Survey



Tree planting inspection



Noxious weed control



Range discussion-stock ponds

The GMUG permits domestic livestock grazing on 159 active grazing allotments to 216 livestock operations in Colorado. Approximately 53,549 cattle, 261 horses and 30,118 sheep were authorized to graze on about 2.6 million acres of the Forest.

The Forest managed 365,000 acres of grazing to standard and improved range vegetation on 17,462 acres.

A significant issue on some rangelands was the very warm, dry spring and early summer, resulting in temporary changes to grazing rotations and stocking levels in order to manage the grazing resource.

### **Noxious Weed Management:**

The noxious weed program is administered through the range program and provides invasive species treatment and management support.

Approximately 1,724 acres of National Forest System lands were treated to eliminate noxious weeds within rangelands, forested areas, utility rights of way, along roads and trails, timber harvest areas and mechanically treated areas. About 840 acres of this was accomplished through partnerships, grants and agreements

### **Land Acquisition and Ditch Bill**

The Forests have a continuing acquisition program utilizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program and land exchange processes.

The GMUG acquired an additional 1000 acres of land in the Red Mountain Pass area through the acquisition of Standard Metals Corporation lands.

Using the Townsite Act the Forest Service was able to sell 24.1 acres of land to the community of Ouray for the Ice Climbing Park.

The Forest Service purchased 300 acres of mining claims near the community of Ophir, Colorado and a 160 acre parcel on the side of Mount Sneffles (the only remaining private land parcel within the Mount Sneffles Wilderness).

The Forests completed processing the remaining Ditch Bill easements, totaling 535 cases addressed.



Grazing allotment management



Ophir area overview



Bull Elk Ditch

## **Energy and Minerals**

### **Coal:**

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 three underground coal mines in the North Fork Valley.

The Forest Service completed compliance inspections on over 100 coal-related surface facilities; and issued concurrence decisions on two coal lease modifications.

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

### **Natural Gas:**

The GMUG manages surface-use associated with natural gas development. There are 21 natural gas wells operated by seven natural gas companies on the Forests.

The GMUG also participates in a Natural Gas Collaborative Group hosted by Delta County

### **Mineral Materials:**

The GMUG administers about thirty mineral material sites that provide sources of rock, sand and gravel for in-service use, local counties, other agencies and landscaping rock for the general public.

Two separate environmental analyses and a pit development plan were completed for the Columbine Pass gravel pit on the Uncompahgre Plateau and for five mineral material sites.

### **Mining:**

Closures were established for hazardous openings near the Augusta Mountain area and projects were developed to stabilize Lower McIntyre Gulch and Morning Star Mines adit closures.

The GMUG initiated actions at the Akron Mine and Mill Tailings Site (located in the historic Tomichi Creek Mining District) to reduce threats posed by water discharging from the mine adit and surface-water runoff flowing onto the site.



Natural gas pipeline installation



Drilling for methane drainage wells



Abandoned mine adit discharge

The Forest Service processed a Plan of Operation to drill nine exploratory holes for copper and molybdenum by Tomichi Resources, LLC.

## **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.

The GMUG completed the *Inventory of Fens Report* that provides a more comprehensive assessment of the abundance, characterization and distribution of fens on the GMUG for use in for land management decisions and planning.

The Forest developed and implemented several watershed restoration projects in the Marshall Creek priority watershed and other watersheds where invasive species (vegetative and aquatic) have been eradicated to improve watershed condition.

The Forest Service entered into a cooperative agreement with the Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies to monitor and study snowmelt and snow hydrology in the Senator Beck Basin study area on Red Mountain Pass.

GMUG staff participated in three local watershed coalitions, served as the Forest Service liaison to both the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers' Roundtable Committees and provided support to Colorado Water 2012 Program to help educate and inform the public on water use and water management issues.

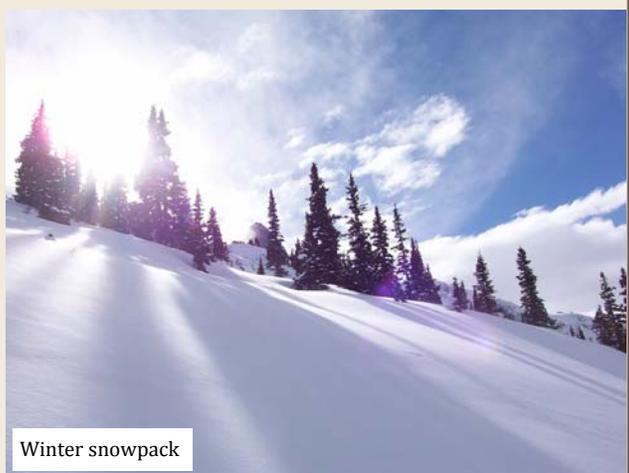
## **Wildland Fire and Fuels Treatment**

The GMUG experienced 35 wildfires totaling 243 acres. The majority of fires were lightning-caused; the others were human-cause or unknown origin.

The Forests accomplished fuels treatment on 4,267 acres using prescribed fire and mechanical treatments.



Woods Lake



Winter snowpack



Forest fire-fighters



Prescribed fire underburn

Forest employees supported multiple fires locally, regionally and nationally through the Upper Colorado and Montrose Interagency Fire Management Units.

## **Travel Management**

Travel Management Plans provide a focus and framework for a forest travel system that meets: public needs for access and enjoyment of the forest; environmental needs for wildlife and fish habitats, clean water, and other resources; assists restoration of healthy forest and rangelands; and is maintainable over time

Travel management and planning is a system that is continually being refined to be responsive to both public and environmental needs.

Implementation of the Forests' three travel management plans (TMPs) continued and included:

- Installing about 360 signs on roads and trails;
- Identifying road and trail status and allowed uses;
- Installing 14 kiosks to provide user information and identifying roads and trails available for public use and for what types of use;
- Closing routes that were identified for this action in the TMPs; and
- Publishing Motor Vehicle Use Maps for all three forests that identify the motorized trails and routes for public use and any changes that are made in the travel system from year to year.

The Forests provide approximately 1,027 miles of motorized trails; 951 miles of mountain bike trails, over 3000 miles of roads and provided over 10,160 hours of visitor contacts for information/education and law enforcement.

## **Partnerships**

The GMUG has approximately 98 active cooperator groups and individuals who contributed over \$2 million in cash, non-cash and in-kind services annually:

- OHV, hiking & horse clubs
- Non-profit groups, permittees & local governments
- Fish & wildlife groups, grazing organizations
- Mountain bike and winter sports groups
- Industry, environmental & education organizations



Travel management implementation & signing



Travel management information & education contacts



Mountain-biking on Forest trail



Citizen monitoring training and implementation

## Volunteers in 2012

Numerous projects were completed using volunteers including campground cleanup and maintenance, road and trail maintenance, snowmobile and cross-county ski trails grooming, monitoring, wildlife habitat projects, interpretive programs, cultural/heritage projects and much more.

The GMUG hosted volunteer efforts resulting in over 25 person-years (45,223 hours) of donated time and services that were valued at over \$985,416.

Fifty percent of volunteers were age 55 and older; 22% were age 31-54; 22% were age 14-24; 2% were age 25-30.

## Benefits to Colorado

The GMUG provides millions of dollars to Colorado's economy through multiple sources ranging from mining and energy development to recreation and tourism. Telluride, Crested Butte and Powderhorn ski resorts, several historic districts and world-class Rocky Mountain recreation opportunities attract visitors to the Forests and provide economic support to the area.

The Forest Service makes payments to the State that are then distributed 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 totaled \$3,275,246.

Under Title II of the Secure Rural Schools Act, the GMUG Resource Advisory Committee has recommended and the Forest approved over 30 projects totaling over \$1,000,000 to date.

The Federal Government makes payments to units of local government as proxies for property taxes on the land base of federal land managing agencies. Delta, Gunnison, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties received \$ 5,662,476 in Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) for FY 2012.



Smokey and Woodsy greet their friends



Fall Colors



US Pro-Cycle Challenge -Telluride