

# Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area Management Plan Project

USDA Forest Service  
Flaming Gorge Ranger District  
Ashley National Forest  
Daggett County, Utah, and Sweetwater County, Wyoming

## Introduction

The purpose of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area (FGNRA) Management Plan project is to provide additional management area-specific direction for the FGNRA and provide strategic guidance for future management, including the following:

- Maintaining and expanding recreational opportunities around the Flaming Gorge Reservoir to support local economies
- Conserving the scenic, scientific, historic, and other values that contribute to public enjoyment of the FGNRA
- Managing natural resources in a way that is compatible with the purpose for which the FGNRA was established

There is a need for the FGNRA Management Plan because the Ashley National Forest (ANF) Land Management Plan (LMP) does not provide sufficient management area-specific direction related to management of recreational concerns specific to the FGNRA. Prior to the signing of the record of decision for the ANF LMP in February 2024, management direction for the FGNRA included forest-wide direction in the 1986 ANF LMP, as well as an appendix in the 1986 ANF LMP with management area-specific direction. The 2024 ANF LMP provides forest-wide direction and limited management area-specific direction. The FGNRA Management Plan will tier to the 2024 ANF LMP.

The FGNRA is a popular destination for recreation, including fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and hunting. It is also home to a variety of wildlife, including bighorn sheep, elk, deer, and waterfowl.

The FGNRA is facing a number of management challenges, including the following:

- Increasing visitation and recreational demand
- Fragile desert ecosystems that are vulnerable to increased and unauthorized recreation
- Potential impacts on water quality and quantity
- Conflicts between different user groups

The FGNRA Management Plan would address these challenges by providing strategic guidance for future management of the FGNRA.

The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of three alternatives to meet the need for sufficient management-specific direction related to management of recreational concerns specific to the FGNRA.

This project was scoped prior to the Council on Environmental Quality Phase 2 regulation revisions; therefore, this document follows the format under prior Council on Environmental Quality regulations.

## **Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

Based on my review of all alternatives, I have decided to authorize a modified proposed action alternative, which would amend the ANF LMP with adoption of the FGNRA Management Plan with all management direction covered under alternative B in the EA (pages 9–25 in the EA) and the objective to pave Antelope Flat Road and construct three new group sites under alternative C in the EA (pages 9 and 20 in the EA). Alternative B consists of management direction from the ANF LMP and the management area-specific direction outlined in the FGNRA Management Plan (see EA, table 2-1). Alternative B includes more specific direction for recreation, given the increased recreational use that has occurred across the planning area.

Supplemental management approaches included in the ANF LMP would be applicable under all alternatives. These management approaches describe potential management strategies and coordination activities that may take place at the project or activity level to help maintain existing conditions or to achieve the desired conditions described in the plan. Management approaches specific to the FGNRA, as described in the FGNRA Management Plan, are applicable under all action alternatives.

To reflect the FGNRA Management Plan direction and to address the regulatory requirements at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.15(e), the 2024 ANF LMP will be amended to include an additional standard in the Designated Area section, as follows:

Standard (DA-ST-FGNRA)-02—Management direction for the FGNRA will follow both the FGNRA Management Plan and LMP direction to meet the missions and management goals established under Public Law 90-540, where applicable.

In addition, table 16 in the ANF LMP will be revised to reflect the adoption of the FGNRA.

When compared with the other alternatives, the modified proposed action alternative aligns with the purpose and need and the congressional direction establishing the FGNRA while balancing recreation and conservation resources. The modified proposed action would include more specific direction for recreation, addressing the increased recreational use that has occurred across the planning area. Additional plan components, such as objectives and goals that address developing and constructing new interpretive sites, designating new paddle trails, coordinating with other agencies in water-oriented recreation management and public safety requirements and needs, and collaborating with state and local stakeholders and agencies to upgrade existing infrastructure, would address changes to current conditions, emphasize collaboration with stakeholders, and more closely align with the congressional direction establishing the FGNRA. While this alternative would increase impacts on resources from additional recreational facilities, there is also additional direction to manage the other resources for which the FGNRA is designated (that is, the scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to the public's enjoyment).

This alternative meets requirements under the ANF LMP, congressional designation of the FGNRA (Public Law 90-540), the National Historic Preservation Act, plan amendment direction (36 CFR 219.13(a)), and specific substantive requirements (36 CFR 219.13(b)(5)).

While the no-action alternative provides management direction for resources within the FGNRA, it provides limited management area-specific direction related to management of recreational concerns specific to the FGNRA. Therefore, this alternative would not meet the project's need and was not chosen.

Alternative C contains all management direction that alternative B contains plus additional management direction that includes additional recreational development. However, the full alternative would not balance resources to the same extent as the modified proposed action alternative. Alternative C includes a guideline concerning limiting utility transmission infrastructure in the FGNRA to areas where infrastructure would not detract from the purpose for which the FGNRA was designated. This guideline would impact economic and social values; therefore, this component was not brought forward.

Additionally, alternative C includes an objective to install a wave attenuator at Antelope Flat. While this aligns with the recreational values for which the FGNRA was established, installing a wave attenuator would also increase the potential for impacts on the other resources for which the FGNRA was established, such as cultural resources, which have historic value. Therefore, alternative C was not chosen. However, Recreation and Facilities OB 05, "Construct three group sites within the national recreation area within the next 10 years of plan approval," and OB 06, "Pave Antelope Flat Road within 10 years," were brought forward under the modified proposed action alternative.

## **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered two other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 8 through 25.

### **Alternative A: No Action**

Under the no-action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the planning area.

### **Alternative C: FGNRA Management Plan with Recreation Emphasis**

Alternative C would include the management direction from the ANF LMP, as well as the management area-specific direction outlined in the FGNRA Management Plan. Most plan components would be the same as the management area-specific direction outlined in alternative B; however, alternative C would provide additional direction to focus on new and improved recreational opportunities in the FGNRA, including developing campgrounds.

## **Public Involvement and Scoping**

As described in the introduction, the need for this action arose in 2021, during the development of the 2024 revised ANF LMP. A proposal to develop a new management plan with direction for all resources and resource uses in the FGNRA, including direction relating to changed conditions, changes in visitation, and new recreational opportunities and settings, was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on January 1, 2023. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping from December 14, 2022, to January 13, 2023. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the Forest Service held two field trips prior to scoping for the public and stakeholders to view and discuss FGNRA sites and issues. The Forest Service also held three scoping meetings, two public workshops for alternatives development, and three public comment meetings.

Using the comments from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. The main issues of concern included increased visitation and recreational demand, increased vulnerability of fragile desert ecosystems from increased

and unauthorized recreation, and conflicts between different user groups (see EA page 1). To address these concerns, the Forest Service created the alternatives described above.

## Finding of No Significant Impact

In considering whether the effects of the proposed action are significant, the potentially affected environment and degree of the action’s effects must be analyzed.

The planning area in which effects from this FGNRA Management Plan would occur is the FGNRA. The FGNRA is in Daggett County in northeastern Utah and Sweetwater County in southwestern Wyoming. It covers 207,363 acres and includes the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and 91 water miles of the Green River.

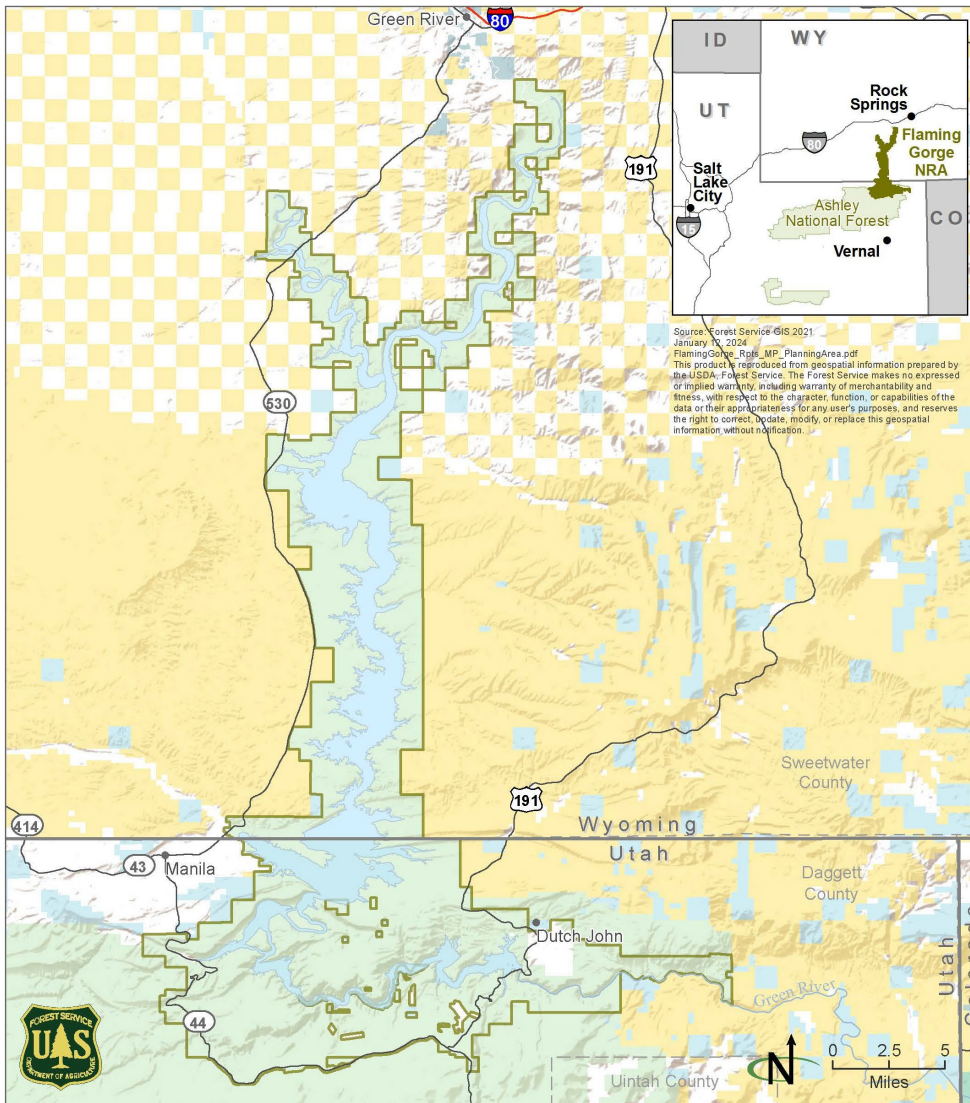


Figure 1-1, Planning Area

- Flaming Gorge NRA
- Private
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Local government
- US Forest Service

The FGNRA is a popular destination for recreation, including fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and hunting. It is also home to a variety of wildlife, including bighorn sheep, elk, deer, and waterfowl.

The FGNRA is facing a number of management challenges, including the following:

- Increasing visitation and recreation demand
- Fragile desert ecosystems that are vulnerable to increased and unauthorized recreation
- Potential impacts on water quality and quantity
- Conflicts between different user groups

The proposed action (the FGNRA Management Plan) would address these challenges by providing strategic guidance for future management of the FGNRA.

The proposed action would have the potential to affect, positively or negatively, recreationists, the local community, ranchers, and outfitters through impacts on resources and resource values.

### **Degree of Effect**

The effects of this project have been appropriately and thoroughly considered with an analysis that is responsive to concerns and issues raised by the public. The agency has taken a hard look at the environmental effects using relevant scientific information and knowledge of site-specific conditions gained from field visits. My finding of no significant impact is based on the degree of effects considered, using the following factors identified in 40 CFR 1501.3:

- 1) **Both short- and long-term effects.** Resources are analyzed for short- and long-term effects in chapter 3 (see EA pages 25-103). The modified proposed action would lead to short-term effects on transportation infrastructure during construction and maintenance; however, long-term beneficial effects on facilities and transportation infrastructure from improvements would move the condition of facilities and infrastructure toward desired conditions. Other short- and long-term effects on resource areas are discussed throughout chapter 3 (see EA pages 25-103).
- 2) **Both beneficial and adverse effects.** A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that overall the effects will be beneficial. Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action. Both beneficial and adverse effects were considered in chapter 3 (see EA pages 25-103).

The modified proposed action would have both beneficial and adverse effects on vegetation. The FGNRA Management Plan would include the desired condition that fire-affected and other disturbed areas would be managed to control the spread of invasive species, including cheatgrass and halogeton, throughout the FGNRA. This would have beneficial effects on vegetation quality and resiliency. The construction of additional recreational facilities would increase the volume of recreational use, which would have the potential to increase disturbances on vegetation. However, recreation would be limited to areas specifically designated as recreation sites; therefore, vegetation communities outside recreation sites would endure less disturbance from visitors.

Other beneficial and adverse effects on resource areas are discussed throughout chapter 3 (see EA pages 25-103).

- 3) **Effects on public health and safety.** There would be no significant effects on public health and safety; this is because expansion and improvement of recreational facilities and capacity under the

modified proposed action would provide for improved health and safety. There are no known hazardous materials present in the planning area or any other factors found that may have an adverse impact on public health or safety (see EA page 61).

- 4) **Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment.** The action would not violate Federal, state, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA pages 3-4). The action is consistent with the ANF LMP. Federal, state, and local interests were given the opportunity to participate in the scoping process during the public involvement opportunities. (See EA pages 3-4, 7, 25-103, and 104).

## Conclusion

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

### ANF LMP and National Forest Management Act

The ANF LMP establishes management direction for ANF. This direction is described in forest-wide and management area-specific standards. This decision to amend the ANF LMP with the adoption of the proposed FGNRA Management Plan, including the additional recreational objectives, is consistent with the intent of the ANF LMP's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages 9 to 88. The project conforms to the ANF LMP management direction, as described in chapter 2 of the ANF LMP. After reviewing the EA and the project file, my decision is in full compliance with the ANF LMP standards, guidelines, goals, and objectives (ANF LMP pages 9 to 88).

**Other National Forest Management Act Requirements**—I have determined the selected alternative is consistent with the provisions of the National Forest Management Act. See appendix D in the EA for further evaluation of the forest plan amendment and adherence to the National Forest Management Act's substantive requirements.

### Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation

In accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (16 United States Code 1531 et seq.), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed the FGNRA Management Plan and its effects on Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), and Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*). On August 26, 2025, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service issued concurrence with the Forest Service's determination of *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* for Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), and Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and determined that the plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and the Suckley's cuckoo bumblebee (*Bombus suckleyi*), both proposed species.

## Objection Summary

This project was subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process, also known as the objection process, as outlined in 36 CFR 219. The 45-day objection period was initiated with the publication of the

notice of the opportunity to object in the newspaper of record (the *Vernal Express*). The objection filing period ended on February 24, 2025.

The Forest Service received two eligible objection letters. Interested parties and objectors had the option to attend a virtual objection response meeting on June 12, 2025, to discuss objection issues. On July 7, 2025, the Deputy Regional Forester for the Intermountain Region, Christopher Carlson, issued a written response to the objection issues. This written response outlined the rationale for each response and contained instructions to the responsible official, as appropriate. The written response is the final decision by the U.S. Department of Agriculture regarding the objections.

The Deputy Regional Forester found that the final EA, FGNRA Management Plan, draft finding of no significant impact and decision notice, and associated planning record sufficiently addressed most issues raised through objection. For those issues that required additional clarification or modifications, the reviewing officer issued instructions to the ANF staff. These instructions remedied any concerns over potential violations of law, regulation, or policy raised during the objection period and are detailed here.

### **Modifications Made in Response to Instructions and Recommendations**

As instructed by the reviewing officer, modifications to the final EA (issued as an errata), FGNRA Management Plan, and the planning record have been completed as indicated below. The instructions are organized by topic and include a summary of the issue, the reviewing officer's conclusion, if needed to provide additional background on the instructions, the instruction, and a response with how the instruction was followed and where changes were made to documents. Some instructions required review of new information; others required clarifications in the final EA or modifications to plan components. In addition to instructions, the reviewing officer recommended other clarifications be completed; these are summarized below. All modifications fall within the effects considered across the range of alternatives and are responsive to issues identified in previous comment periods and during objections.

The following changes were incorporated based on objection instructions and recommendations:

#### ***Technical Issues for Correction or Clarification***

Issue Summary 1: The plan does not identify all general resource areas on maps (Utah Public Land Policy Coordination Office [UT PLPCO]).

Instructions: Verify data from table 7 and correct coloring error in the map (figure 5, page 18 in Final FGNRA Management Plan). Issue an errata with any corrections necessary for all instructions and make publicly available 508-compatible final versions of the ANF LMP and FGNRA Management Plan.

Response: Figure 5 in the final FGNRA Management Plan has been updated to correct the color error.

Issue Summary 2: There is no discussion on how the FGNRA Management Plan ties into the management direction from the ANF LMP or otherwise enhances what is already in place (Wyoming Coalition of Local Governments [WY CLG]).

Conclusion: There is a lack of documentation in the EA analysis as to how the 2024 ANF LMP and the FGNRA Management Plan are interrelated. There is a need to clarify the comparable direction in the 2024 ANF LMP with the FGNRA Management Plan. There is also a need to further clarify how the proposed programmatic amendment will modify the 2024 ANF LMP.

Instructions:

- Update table 2-1 in the EA to reflect the current plan direction in the 2024 ANF LMP.
- Clarify in the decision notice how the 2024 ANF LMP will be amended to reflect the adoption of the FGNRA Management Plan by the addition of a standard into the LMP’s FGNRA Designated Area section and an edit to table 16 of the LMP. These clarifications will address the regulatory requirements at 36 CFR 219.15(e). The proposed standard would direct ANF land managers to follow both the 2024 ANF LMP and the FGNRA Management Plan. For example:

Management direction for the FGNRA will follow both the FGNRA Management Plan and LMP direction to meet the missions and management goals established under Public Law 90-540, where applicable.

- In errata, update table 16, Designated Areas on the Ashley National Forest (LMP page 70) in the Designated Areas section to reflect the adoption of the 2024 FGNRA Management Plan.
- Revise the decision notice (page 2, paragraph 4) discussing the no-action alternative not being chosen because the LMP doesn’t “provide area-specific direction.” The 2024 ANF LMP does provide area-specific direction (2024 ANF LMP, chapter 3, pages 71–74).

Response: Footnotes have been added to table 2-1 in the EA to note current direction in the 2024 ANF LMP. Language has been added to this decision notice (pages 1–2) clarifying that the 2024 ANF LMP will be amended through the addition of a new standard, as specified above, and a note that the management for the FGNRA will follow both the FGNRA Management Plan and ANF LMP direction. The LMP amendment also includes an update to table 16 to reflect the adoption of the FGNRA Management Plan. Language on page 2 of the decision notice has been updated per instructions.

### *Recreation and Facilities*

Issue Summary 1: The plan must address impacts of solid waste generated within FGNRA on the City of Manila and other affected localities (UT PLPCO).

Conclusion: Terms such as “sanitation facilities” are not consistently defined for the purposes of utilizing plan components, such as management approaches, guidelines, etc. While the local government desires to have solid waste management specifically addressed for a single community, the scope of the plan involves more than one community, and plan components need to address the entire area as a whole. There is sufficient specific guidance (such as management approaches General 01, Public Safety 02, and Recreation and Facilities 05–06 and 15, and Recreation and Facilities Goals 01 and 02) in the plan to facilitate collaborative management of supporting infrastructure, in accordance with 36 CFR 219.4(b) (coordination with other public planning efforts), 36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(iv) (conditions, trends, and stressors), and 36 CFR 219.8(b) (social and economic sustainability) for solid waste and other cross-boundary issues as they arise. A later assessment of this particular issue could be implemented at the responsible official’s discretion.

Instruction: Define in the glossary the term “sanitation facilities” as used in the management approach Recreation and Facilities 06 (FGNRA Management Plan, page 54) to maintain a clear understanding with local stakeholders.

Response: The requested addition was made to the EA’s glossary; the EA and FGNRA Management Plan were updated to include a glossary definition for “sanitation facilities.”

Issue Summary 2: The plan does not contain sufficient guidance for aggressively seeking funding from a variety of sources for recreation and facilities (UT PLPCO and WY CLG).

Conclusion: There are desired conditions and goals included in both the FGNRA Management Plan and the 2024 ANF LMP that broadly address management for recreational facilities forest-wide and within the FGNRA. Specifically, both include several management approaches. Concerns about the level of funding are outside the scope of the planning effort, as the requirement is not to identify funding sources for FGNRA but to plan within the scope of the expected budget. Management approaches are optional plan content but can be used to “indicate the future course or direction of change, recognizing budget trends, program demands and accomplishments” (Forest Service Handbook [FSH] 1909.12, section 22.4). The current management approaches meet this guidance; however, the definition in the FGNRA Management Plan should be consistent with 36 CFR 219.7(f)(2) and FSH 1909.12 chapter 20, section 22.4.

Instruction: Management approaches should be described and defined in the FGNRA Management Plan with a single definition that is consistent with 36 CFR 219.7(f)(2) and FSH 1909.12, chapter 20, section 22.4.

Response: Language has been added to the decision notice related to use of management approaches, noting that these are not required but rather potential approaches. “Management approach” has been added to the EA glossary, and text has been revised for consistency.

Recommendation: Revise the decision notice to provide clarity regarding management approaches.

Issue Summary 3: The plan should add a mountain bike area near the Little Hole boat ramp as an additional mountain biking area due to existing use (UT PLPCO).

Conclusion: The objector requests an addition to the Recreation and Facilities objective 03, to include the addition of “hill north of Little Hole” in the list of locations where this objective could occur. However, 36 CFR 219.7(e)(1)(ii) does not require an exhaustive list of examples where an objective applies.

Instruction: Revise Recreation and Facilities objective 03 by removing theoretical examples. This objective is not the appropriate place to list all possible mountain biking complex areas. The objective to develop a complex over the life of the plan in collaboration with stakeholders allows the flexibility to prioritize and collaborate in accordance with other plan content.

Response: The objective (page 51) has been revised to remove examples following the instruction.

Issue Summary 4: Neither the EA nor the FGNRA Management Plan indicates why there is a difference in dispersed camping allowances between the states of Wyoming and Utah (UT PLPCO).

Conclusion: The 2005 Ashley National Forest Motorized Travel Plan decision for dispersed camping distances was followed in the FGNRA Management Plan. However, documentation of this compliance is lacking within the record.

Instruction: Add the 2009 Ashley National Forest Motorized Travel Plan Record of Decision to the project record.

Recommendation: In the errata, edit the sentence on page 26 in the FGNRA Management Plan to reflect compliance with the existing, approved travel plan, as follows: “Motorized dispersed camping is allowed only within 150 feet of designated roads and trails in Utah and 300 feet in Wyoming consistent with the 2009 Ashley National Forest Motorized Travel Plan (USFS 2009) and is limited to designated sections

that are shown on the Motorized Vehicle Use Map where significant impact to other resources is not likely to occur.”

Response: The 2009 Ashley National Forest Motorized Travel Plan’s Record of Decision was added to the project record. Text in the FGNRA Management Plan was revised on page 26 to cite Forest Service 2009, as suggested in the recommendation above.

### *Fire and Fuels and Vegetation Management*

Issue Summary 1: The Forest Service should amend the FGNRA Management Plan to identify management approaches encouraging fuel breaks other than along new and existing National Forest System routes (such as fuel breaks connecting with such routes), reducing tree densities, and encouraging the removal of biomass to reduce fuel loads and the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire (UT PLPCO).

Conclusion: The FGNRA Management Plan EA does explain in each alternative description that fire and fuels management direction from the ANF LMP (pages 29–33) applies to the FGNRA.

Recommendation: State in the decision notice more clearly that the FGNRA Management Plan tiers to the ANF LMP (see theme 1, issue 2). Specifically, regarding this objection, the ANF LMP (pages 29–33) describes fire and fuels management direction, which applies to the FGNRA.

Response: Language has been added to this decision notice (page 1) clarifying that the 2024 ANF LMP will be amended, through the addition of a new standard as specified above. Language has also been added to note that the management for the FGNRA will follow both the FGNRA Management Plan and ANF LMP direction.

### *Range Management and Interagency Coordination*

Issue Summary 1: The Forest Service should clarify how grazing will be managed between adjacent land management agencies (UT PLPCO and WY CLG).

Conclusion: Currently, interagency agreements between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, and the State of Utah help define the adaptive management approach that is implemented per the Forest Service grazing regulations at 36 CFR 222. Specific annual implementation is developed and documented in the Allotment Management Plan and Annual Operating Instructions.

Instruction: Ensure all grazing interagency agreements and memoranda of understanding are included in the project record.

Recommendation: Clarify that grazing will be managed for the protection and best utilization of the resource. Grazing uses an adaptive management approach, considering monitoring data and feedback from permittees. More specific grazing plans and practices will be addressed in the individual allotment management plans or annual operating instructions, or both, as appropriate, on an annual basis.

Response: Grazing interagency agreements and memoranda of understanding have been added to the project record. A footnote has been added to the FGNRA Management Plan (page 54) to clarify that for the portion of BLM allotments in the FGNRA, the BLM would follow the grazing plan direction in the 2024 ANF LMP.

### **Additional Changes**

In addition, changes were incorporated as a result of changes to regulation or policy that have occurred in the time period between publication of the pre-decisional decision notice and this final decision notice, as follows:

The environmental justice section was removed from the EA. Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (January 20, 2025), and a Presidential memorandum, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (January 21, 2025), require the Department of Agriculture to strictly adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (42 United States Code 4321 et seq.). Further, such order and memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (February 11, 1994) and 14096 (April 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such orders is a legal impossibility.

### **Implementation**

The FGNRA Management Plan becomes effective 30 days after publication of the notice of its approval in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.17(a)).

Approved by:

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Kristy Groves  
Forest Supervisor  
Supervisor’s Office  
Ashley National Forest

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Date

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