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BLM UNCOMPAHGRE FIELD OFFICE RMP PLANNING FACT SHEET

Visual Resource Management

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The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) is revising the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Uncompahgre planning area. The Uncompahgre RMP will provide detailed information about the current state of resources on public lands within the planning area, and set forth a plan of action for managing those resources for the next twenty or so years under the BLM's dual mandate of *multiple use* and *sustained yield*.

WHAT IS VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT?

The BLM's *visual resource management* (VRM) system provides a way to inventory and analyze scenic values in order to determine appropriate levels of management. VRM serves as a tool to identify and map essential landscape settings in line with public preferences and recreation-related experiences now and in the future. The VRM system helps to ensure that actions taking place today will benefit the visual qualities associated with BLM landscapes, while protecting those visual resources for the future.

Management classes are assigned based upon the visual resource inventory, as well as consideration for other land uses.

BLM VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY CLASS OBJECTIVES

Class I: Preserve existing character of landscape; level of change to characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

Class II: Retain existing character of landscape; level of change to characteristic landscape should be low.

Class III: Partially retain existing character of landscape; level of change to characteristic landscape should be moderate.

Class IV: Provide for management activities which require major modification of existing character of landscape. Level of change to characteristic landscape can be high.

The inventory consists of 1) a Scenic Quality Evaluation, 2) a Sensitivity Level Analysis, and 3) a Delineation of Distance Zones. BLM lands are assigned one of four classes based on these three components.



THE LAY OF THE LAND

The planning area falls within two physiographic provinces (the Colorado Plateau and Southern Rocky Mountains), and as a result, has diverse topography, geology, soil, flora, and fauna. The topography ranges from lowland riparian along the Dolores River (4,706 feet) to red rock desert to pinyon- juniper woodland up to sub-alpine forest on Storm King Mountain (11,449 feet).

The area features extensive stretches of rugged terrain, deep canyons, spectacular river valleys, dramatic cliffs and mesas, and other prominent geologic features, and supports a variety of vegetative communities, including desert scrub, riparian, sagebrush parks, pinyon-juniper woodlands, mountain shrub, and ponderosa pine and fir-spruce forests.

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AN INCREASE IN VISUAL IMPACTS

Impacts to visual resources in the planning area are increasing due to an outdated and incomplete VRM tool and increased use of the planning area's resources. Growing pressure is being placed on visual resources as a result of activities such as fire management, utility corridors, roads and trails, communication sites, pipelines, mineral development, livestock grazing, water tanks, and subdivisions. Public concern is also on the rise regarding preservation of visual and scenic qualities for open space, recreation, and as a backdrop for residential areas.



VISUAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

In response to increasing concerns from local communities, as well as with outdated and incomplete data in the existing RMPs, a VRM inventory and assessment of the planning area has been completed with input from adjacent communities and local, state, and federal agencies. The assessment is currently available to review at the Montrose Public Lands Center.

MANAGEMENT ADEQUACY

Current visual resource classes were prescribed in the 1985 and 1989 UFO RMPs. The classes are now insufficient to be used as a management tool because of data inconsistencies and the outdated nature of the class designations. With increases in land use and tourism, scenic values and visual open space has become more important. Current VRM objectives have been maintained in some areas, while other areas are experiencing degradation. Preservation of sensitive viewsheds will continue to compete with other land use allocations and impacts, including urban and energy development, infrastructure needs, recreation, and various other surface activities.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Because of the Uncompahgre RMP revision, all land within the planning area was reevaluated and assigned a Visual Resource Inventory Class. While visual values are important, they will not be the only element considered when establishing management direction. Final VRM objectives and boundaries will result from and reflect resource allocation decisions made in the RMP.

All resource allocation decisions will be weighed so as not to create conflicts managing values which the RMP seeks to promote. For example, when land use is not discretionary, such as in areas with valid existing rights, the use must be allowed, but its effect on visual quality can be minimized through mitigating measures.

In accordance with the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), VRM classes should correspond to recreation management objectives and setting prescriptions for recreation management zones within Special Recreation Management Areas. In addition, the RMP revision will need to address BLM guidance requiring all wilderness study areas to be managed as VRM Class I areas.

The BLM wants your input...

- **How should the BLM manage sensitive viewsheds and corridors?**

UFO Planning Webpage:
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