

**DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

RED CANYON TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Norwood Ranger District
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests

Montrose County, Colorado

BACKGROUND

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the proposed Red Canyon Travel Management Project. The boundaries of the project area are defined by Old Highway 90 on the west, the Divide road on the north, Little Red Canyon on the east, and the Hanks Valley/Old Highway 90 spur roads on the south. The project area includes National Forest system lands within the Red Canyon, Little Red Canyon, and States Draw area of the Uncompahgre Plateau. One 40-acre parcel of private land is located within the project area, and other parcels of private land are located adjacent to the project area. The project area lies entirely within Montrose County, Colorado.

In March of 2002 the GMUG National Forest completed a six-year process of public involvement and analysis to revise the Travel Plan for the Uncompahgre National Forest. Travel management decisions were made for the Forest at two levels. The first level addressed area-wide uses during the summer and winter. Currently all motorized and mechanized travel in the summer is restricted to designated routes. Certain areas of the Forest are also closed to all motorized and mechanized travel during the winter months to protect big game animals while concentrated on their winter range. The second level addressed route-specific decisions of what routes would be designated and maintained for public use, and what uses are allowed on those designated routes. Seasonal restrictions also apply to certain motorized and mechanized routes on the Forest to protect natural resources and to prevent physical damage to selected Forest roads.

Travel Management Decisions on a large geographic area focus on the designation of allowable uses on specific routes and/or areas. Although it provides a baseline for future work on specific areas and routes, the decision does not include any substantial ground disturbing activities. Levels of treatment for decommissioning activities of transportation facilities fall into varying levels:

- Level 1 – Leave as is, do nothing on the ground.
- Level 2 – Install signs – “Facility Closed”.
- Level 3 – Natural Barricades. Camouflage the road template by placing slash on the road surface or dropping small trees to impede traffic.

- Level 4 – Physical Barricades. Permanent steel gates, buck and pole fences, rock blockades, or planting trees.

- Level 5 – Rip and Seed. Constructing earth barricades and water bars. Seed with native species. No re-contouring of the road prism.
- Level 6 – Re-contouring road prism (slopes and shoulders) and seed with native species.
- Level 7 – Removal of cross drains (culverts, rolling dips) and unstable fills.
- Level 8 – Removal of stream crossing structures (culverts).

Area-specific Travel Management decisions and treatment levels 1-4 generally do not require additional environmental analysis to implement. Even though an additional NEPA decision document is not required, those treatments are carried out in accordance with Forest Service specifications and designs to avoid environmental impacts. Treatment levels 5-8 involve ground-disturbing activities that will require an additional site-specific NEPA decision document to identify the level of decommissioning necessary to implement the Travel Plan Record Of Decision (ROD) and to provide the project design standards necessary to avoid adverse environmental impacts.

All levels of treatment and site-specific seasonal travel restrictions included in the 2002 Travel Plan ROD that are applicable to the Red Canyon project area were included in this Environmental Assessment to provide a complete analysis.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Implementation of the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan is an ongoing process. Within the project area this decision includes a variety of roads that provide a base transportation system and three motorized trails. Several local access roads and spurs associated with the base transportation system have been identified for decommissioning, while others are identified as routes that would be established as part of a single-track motorized trail system.

Two of the three single-track trails in the project area have been established. These trails include the Hornet trail and the Aspen trail. The Hornet trail is presently a single-track motorcycle trail that begins near the Antone Spring campground, crosses old Highway 90 near the head of Red Canyon, and ends at the States Draw road (FSR 549). The Aspen trail is a single-track motorcycle loop trail south of the Divide road (FSR 402) and east of the States Draw road. An extensive network of user-developed ATV trails has developed within the vicinity of the Aspen trail and the upper Red Canyon trail. A user-developed single-track trail has also developed connecting the Aspen trail to the Red Canyon trail through States Draw. Based on the resource damage occurring from off-route travel,

improperly designed user-developed trails, and the extensive ATV use occurring on closed roads and the trails designated as single-track trails, there is a need to decommission a variety of unauthorized routes and redesign access to the Hornet trail and Aspen trail to manage for the permitted uses in this area.

The 2002 ROD also identified two sections of the Red Canyon trail as proposed routes (please refer to the Uncompahgre ROD map for the Plateau Division, available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/>). Forest Service recreation managers and resource specialists have inventoried the Red Canyon trail system identified in the 2002 ROD and recognized several resource concerns. This trail is a user-developed trail that evolved from ATV's connecting previously closed temporary logging roads and livestock trails with sections of new construction on very steep slopes. As established, this trail is causing resource damage and is continuing to be utilized and expanded in several directions by ATV's. There is a need to establish this trail as a seasonal-use single-track motorcycle trail as identified in the 2002 ROD. Sections of this trail need to be redesigned or re-routed to meet Forest Service design standards to establish a safe and sustainable route for the type of use permitted in the 2002 ROD.

Red Canyon is an important big game security area and provides valuable elk calving grounds for this portion of the Uncompahgre Plateau. These values were recognized in the Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan analysis and the 2002 ROD includes a seasonal restriction on the Red Canyon trail system to mitigate adverse impacts of motorized recreational use on big game animals. The continued unauthorized use by ATV's and proliferation of unauthorized trails within the project area is having an adverse effect on elk calving and big game habitat effectiveness. There is a need to reduce the density of open roads and motorized trails, and to effectively manage seasonal use of the Red Canyon trail system to mitigate impacts to elk calving and improve big game habitat effectiveness within the project area.

DECISION

I have reviewed the EA and Project Record, including the Response to Comments, the Biological Evaluation, the Biological Assessment, and the Management Indicator Species Assessment. It is my decision, based on consideration of the EA and public comments, to proceed with implementation of Alternative 4.

The primary considerations in the design of the proposed action and alternatives were the need to implement the Travel Plan. This alternative follows a proposed route identified in the 2002 ROD. By utilizing much of the existing trail, it reduces the amount of new construction. In contrast to the proposed action, it provides trail diversity and a more challenging ride for users. There will also be less effect on the Hornet Trail. The new section of trail can be constructed to Forest Service standards, while the existing section can be rehabilitated.

Alternative 4 would utilize a combination of signing, gates, trail construction and rehab, road and trail decommissioning, and law enforcement to implement the 2002 Record of

Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan. Roads and trails within the project area would be designed and managed for the types of uses and seasons specified in the 2002 ROD. Construction of the Red Canyon trail would be completed on the current/proposed route to bring it into Forest Service design standards. This alternative was developed in part to respond to the opportunity to provide more single-track trails within the project area that would provide a more challenging ride to motorcycles and bicycles on the Red Canyon trail.

As shown on the map for Alternative 4, the travel routes included in the 2002 ROD include the Base Transportation System and three single-track trails. As previously described, roads included in the Base Transportation System are the Divide Road (FSR 402), Old Highway 90 (FSR 540), Highway 90 spur 1a (FSR 540.1a), Hanks Valley Road (FSR 512), Hanks Valley spur 1h (FSR 512.1h), and Hanks Valley spur 2c (FSR 512.2c). All of the roads included in the Base Transportation System would continue to be managed and maintained for the uses specified in the 2002 ROD.

Three single-track trails would be completed and maintained in this Alternative. All three of these trails would remain designated as single-track trails open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Red Canyon trail has restrictions on the season of use for motorcycles. Under the 2002 ROD it is open to motorcycles from the Fourth of July weekend through the Labor Day weekend each year. The Hornet trail and Aspen trail have no seasonal use restrictions on motorcycles.

Two sections of the Red Canyon trail are identified as proposed motorcycle trail in the 2002 ROD (see map of 2002 Travel Plan Decision). Additional work on the ground would be conducted to complete the construction of the Red Canyon trail to meet Forest Service standards. The lower proposed section of trail currently meets Forest Service standards. However, the steep section of the existing trail off the end of the States Draw ridge does not meet Forest Service design standards and current uses are causing resource damage. Under this alternative, the existing steep section would be replaced with switchbacks to maintain the current/proposed trail alignment. Approximately 0.5 miles of new trail construction and 0.3 miles of trail rehab work would be required to complete this section of the trail.

The existing Hornet trail and Aspen trail would not be affected by the completion of the Red Canyon trail as proposed in this alternative. However, additional work on the ground would be necessary to designate and limit use of the single-track trails to the approved uses and to prevent other unauthorized uses within the project area. Alternative 4 includes the construction of four squeeze gates that would be designed to allow motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers to pass through while preventing ATV's and full-size vehicles from entering the trail. This alternative also includes the construction of two full-size gates that are designed to prevent any vehicle from entering a trail while providing the livestock permittee full-size vehicle administrative access to his sheep camps in the area. In addition, the proposed action includes installation of one cattle guard trail crossing to allow motorcycles and bicycles to cross the range fence separating the two grazing allotments without having to stop, while preventing cattle from crossing

the fence. The specific locations for the gates and cattle guard are shown on the map for Alternative 4. Additional signs are needed on all three trails to properly mark the location of open routes and permitted uses for the public.

Within the project area a total of 5.8 miles of Level 3 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be closed by placing natural debris such as slash, rock, or logs on the road template in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Materials used as debris to camouflage the road template would be located on and adjacent to the road that is decommissioned. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 1.0 miles of Level 4 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be physically barricaded with permanent gates, fences, and/or rock barricades in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 4.3 miles of Level 5 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel, and rehab the existing steep section of the Red Canyon trail. Level 5 decommissioning includes ripping, disking, and seeding the full length of the roadbed, and placing debris such as rock and slash on the road to further impede traffic and camouflage the road template. Earth barriers and water bars would also be constructed to impede traffic and provide drainage. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species.

The specific locations of the routes to be decommissioned are shown on the project map. The Treatment Level shown on the map would be applied to the routes specified in accordance with Forest Service design standards. The schedule of implementation would be coordinated with other ongoing management activities within the project area. Administrative access for livestock permittees would be authorized through applicable permits and operating plans. The routes decommissioned in this project will be monitored by the Forest Service to determine if the design standards were properly implemented, and to assess the effectiveness of the type of treatment used to meet project objectives. If monitoring determines there are corrective actions necessary, those actions will be implemented as soon as possible. If the treatment method utilized does not effectively meet the travel management objective for the route, the Forest Service will increase the Treatment Level to meet those objectives as soon as possible.

COMPLIANCE WITH OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

To the best of my knowledge Alternative 4 meets requirements under NFMA, NEPA, ESA, and all other applicable laws and regulations.

PROJECT DESIGN STANDARDS MADE PART OF THIS DECISION

In response to management standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan and the significant issues identified for the proposed action, project design criteria were developed to alleviate potential resource impacts and to facilitate administrative access. The project design criteria and administrative actions are necessary to implement the selected alternative.

1. To avoid impacts to water quality, aquatic species, and wildlife, road and trail decommissioning will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service design practices and standards.
2. Seed mixes for revegetation of road closures and obliteration will consist of native plant species appropriate for the ecological site as directed in the revegetation management policy for the GMUG National Forests.
3. Any invasive species or noxious weed infestations resulting from this project will be monitored and treated in combination with control efforts that may take place within the project area.
4. The Forest Service will manage administrative access into the project area. The livestock permittees will be provided administrative access to roads and trails behind the locked gates in accordance with the terms and conditions of their Grazing permit and Annual Operating Plan.
5. Motorcycle squeeze gates will be installed on single-track trails to allow free passage of motorcycles, mountain bikes, horses, and hikers, while preventing access to ATV's and other larger vehicles.
6. Squeeze gates or OHV cattle guards will be installed where trails cross range fences to allow free passage of motorcycles, mountain bikes, horses, and hikers while preventing cattle from crossing the fence.
7. The Forest Service will provide periodic maintenance of the gates, control fences, and trail cattle guards in combination with maintenance of the overall trail system in cooperation with interested public user groups.
8. The Forest Service will enforce travel management regulations as part of the overall Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan and monitor the effectiveness of the road closure methods and designated trail use within the project area through the EMS process. Problems identified within the project area will be documented and corrected as soon as possible.
9. Additional signing will be installed to clearly identify trail routes and the types of uses and permitted seasons of use of those trails.

10. Additional educational kiosks with travel management and trail use etiquette information will be installed at trailhead parking areas. Parking areas will be monitored for the need for further improvements such as hardened, formal parking areas to reduce resource damage.
11. Do not cut trees with nest cavities during decommissioning activities. When cutting dead-standing trees, fallers should carefully examine selected trees for cavity nesting activity.
12. To avoid adverse impacts to the northern goshawk, activities should not occur within ¼ mile of an active nest from March 1 to July 31 if those activities would cause nest failure or abandonment.
13. Any road decommissioning or continued use of the old logging road in the head of Red Canyon Creek must maintain the integrity of the Kelley Creek ditch easement and any improvements that may occur at that location.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The alternatives considered in detail are described below. The No Action alternative is required under NEPA, and would implement actions currently authorized in the 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan within the project area. The other alternatives were developed by the project Interdisciplinary Team to describe the current condition on the ground, and to meet the purpose and need for the project in response to the significant issues identified. There were two other alternatives considered but eliminated from further review.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is developed to describe the current condition on the ground, and the administrative actions necessary to comply with the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. As shown on the map of Alternative 1, existing routes within the project area include the Base Transportation System, three single-track trails, and a variety of other routes.

Roads included in the Base Transportation System are the Divide Road (FSR 402), Old Highway 90 (FSR 540), Highway 90 spur 1a (FSR 540.1a), Hanks Valley Road (FSR 512), Hanks Valley spur 1h (FSR 512.1h), and Hanks Valley spur 2c (FSR 512.2c). All of the roads included in the Base Transportation System would continue to be managed and maintained for the uses specified in the 2002 ROD.

Existing trails within the project area include the Red Canyon trail, Hornet trail, and Aspen trail. All three trails are currently designated as single-track trails open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Red Canyon trail is open to motorcycles from the Fourth of July weekend through the Labor Day weekend each year. The Hornet trail and Aspen trail have no seasonal use restrictions on motorcycles.

Two sections of the Red Canyon trail within the project area are identified as proposed motorcycle trail in the 2002 ROD (see map of 2002 Travel Plan Decision). Additional work on the ground would be necessary to complete the construction of the Red Canyon trail to meet Forest Service standards. The steep section of trail off the point of States Draw Ridge needs to be replaced with switchbacks to maintain the current/proposed trail alignment. New trail construction and rehab work on the existing steep section is outside the scope of the 2002 ROD. Additional NEPA would be required to complete this section of the proposed route.

Minor trail maintenance activities would continue to occur on all three trails. However, no work would be done on the ground to improve these trail systems or to prevent unauthorized ATV and other vehicular use.

Under this alternative, all other routes identified for decommissioning within the project area would be administratively closed to public travel. All 10.7 miles of the other existing routes identified on the map would be removed from the transportation atlas and Motor Vehicle Use Map. No work would be done on the ground to physically decommission the routes to prevent unauthorized use. Law enforcement would continue to enforce the closures identified in the 2002 ROD and the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

Alternative 2

The No Action Alternative is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and would implement actions currently authorized in the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. These actions include signing of designated routes to show uses allowed, the closure of routes using various means, the decommissioning of selected routes, and the construction or reconstruction of still others (ROD page 28). Simple actions necessary for the designation and closure of routes are covered by the 2002 ROD and may proceed with no further study. These actions require minimal ground disturbance and include signing, gates, and Decommission Levels 1 through 4.

As shown on the map for Alternative 2, the approved travel routes included in the 2002 ROD include the Base Transportation System and three single-track trails. As previously described, roads included in the Base Transportation System are the Divide Road (FSR 402), Old Highway 90 (FSR 540), Highway 90 spur 1a (FSR 540.1a), Hanks Valley Road (FSR 512), Hanks Valley spur 1h (FSR 512.1h), and Hanks Valley spur 2c (FSR 512.2c). All of the roads included in the Base Transportation System would continue to be managed and maintained for the uses specified in the 2002 ROD.

Existing trails within the project area include the Red Canyon trail, Hornet trail, and Aspen trail. Two sections of the Red Canyon trail within the project area are identified as proposed motorcycle trail in the 2002 ROD (see map of 2002 Travel Plan Decision). Additional work on the ground would be necessary to complete the construction of the Red Canyon trail to meet Forest Service standards. The steep section of trail off the point

of States Draw Ridge needs to be replaced with switchbacks to maintain the current/proposed trail alignment. New trail construction and rehab work on the existing steep section is outside the scope of the 2002 ROD. Additional NEPA would be required to complete this section of the proposed route. The lower proposed section of trail currently meets Forest Service standards.

All three of these trails would remain designated as single-track trails open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Red Canyon trail has restrictions on the season of use for motorcycles. Under the 2002 ROD it is open to motorcycles from the Fourth of July weekend through the Labor Day weekend each year. The Hornet trail and Aspen trail have no seasonal use restrictions on motorcycles.

Additional work on the ground would be necessary to designate and limit use of the single-track trails to the approved uses and to prevent other unauthorized uses within the project area. Alternative 2 includes the construction of five squeeze gates that would be designed to allow motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers to pass through while preventing ATV's and full-size vehicles from entering the trail. This alternative also includes the construction of two full-size gates that are designed to prevent any vehicle from entering a trail while providing the livestock permittee full-size vehicle administrative access to his sheep camps in the area. The specific locations for these gates are shown on the map of Alternative 2. Additional signs are needed on all three trails to properly mark the location of open routes and permitted uses for the public.

Within the project area a total of 9.7 miles of Level 3 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be closed by placing natural debris such as slash, rock, or logs on the road template in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Materials used as debris to camouflage the road template would be located on and adjacent to the road that is decommissioned. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 1.0 miles of Level 4 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The road identified would be physically barricaded with a permanent gates, fences, and/or rock barricades in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

The specific locations of the routes to be decommissioned are shown on the project map. As shown on the map legend, there are two levels of decommissioning that include a combination of gates, decommissioning, and signing. The Treatment Level shown on the map would be applied to the routes specified in accordance with Forest Service design standards. The schedule of implementation would be coordinated with other ongoing management activities within the project area. Administrative access for livestock permittees would be authorized through applicable permits and operating plans. The

routes decommissioned in this project will be monitored by the Forest Service to determine if the design standards were properly implemented, and to assess the effectiveness of the type of treatment used to meet project objectives. If monitoring determines there are corrective actions necessary, those actions will be implemented as soon as possible.

Alternative 3 – Proposed Action

The proposed action would utilize a combination of signing, gates, road and trail decommissioning, trail relocation/construction and rehab, and law enforcement to implement the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan. As shown on the map of Alternative 3, this alternative includes the relocation of the upper section of the Red Canyon trail. The new trail location would overlap a portion of the Hornet trail, then utilize an old logging road on the bench above Red Canyon to avoid the steep section of trail that does not meet Forest Service specifications. The upper section would be decommissioned and removed from the trail system. This alternative also includes the installation of two squeeze gates, two full-size gates, one cattle guard trail crossing, and four levels of road/trail decommissioning.

As shown on the map of Alternative 3, the travel routes included in the 2002 ROD include the Base Transportation System and three single-track trails. As previously described, roads included in the Base Transportation System are the Divide Road (FSR 402), Old Highway 90 (FSR 540), Highway 90 spur 1a (FSR 540.1a), Hanks Valley Road (FSR 512), Hanks Valley spur 1h (FSR 512.1h), and Hanks Valley spur 2c (FSR 512.2c). All of the roads included in the Base Transportation System would continue to be managed and maintained for the uses specified in the 2002 ROD.

Three single-track trails would be completed and maintained in this Alternative. The relocation of the upper portion of the Red Canyon trail would result in changes to the current trail system. All three of these trails would remain designated as single-track trails open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Red Canyon trail has restrictions on the season of use for motorcycles. Under the 2002 ROD it is open to motorcycles from the Fourth of July weekend through the Labor Day weekend each year. The Hornet trail and Aspen trail have no seasonal use restrictions on motorcycles.

Two sections of the Red Canyon trail are identified as proposed motorcycle trail in the 2002 ROD (see map of 2002 Travel Plan Decision). Additional work on the ground would be necessary to complete the construction of the Red Canyon trail to meet Forest Service standards. The lower proposed section of trail currently meets Forest Service standards. However, the steep section of the existing trail off the end of the States Draw ridge does not meet Forest Service design standards and current uses are causing resource damage. To avoid the steep section of trail, the upper portion of the Red Canyon trail would be relocated off the top of the States Draw ridge. The new trail route would utilize the eastern portion of the existing Hornet trail and the existing old logging road that is located on the bench above Red Canyon. Level 5 techniques would be used to

decommission the existing route on top, as well as the steep section off the end of the ridge.

The Hornet trail would be shortened in length and maintained as single-track trail that would be open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Hornet trail would originate at the Antone Spring Campground and end at old highway 90. The short section (0.1 mile) from old highway 90 to the new Red Canyon trail location would be obliterated using Level 7 decommissioning techniques. This would provide separation of the Hornet and Red Canyon trails, and prevent unauthorized use by ATV's.

The Aspen trail would continue to be maintained as a single-track trail open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. Route locations and permitted uses would not be affected by the proposed action.

Additional work on the ground would be necessary to designate and limit use of the single-track trails to the approved uses and to prevent other unauthorized uses within the project area. The proposed action includes the construction of four squeeze gates that would be designed to allow motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers to pass through while preventing ATV's and full-size vehicles from entering the trail. This alternative also includes the construction of two full-size gates that are designed to prevent any vehicle from entering a trail while providing the livestock permittee full-size vehicle access to his sheep camps in the area. In addition, the proposed action includes installation of one cattle guard trail crossing to allow motorcycles and bicycles to cross the range fence without having to stop, while preventing cattle from crossing the fence. The specific locations for the gates are shown on the map of Alternative 3. Additional signs are needed on all three trails to properly mark the location of open routes and permitted uses for the public.

Within the project area a total of 5.8 miles of Level 3 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be closed by placing natural debris such as slash, rock, or logs on the road template in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Materials used as debris to camouflage the road template would be located on and adjacent to the road that is decommissioned. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 1.0 miles of Level 4 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be physically barricaded with permanent gates, fences, and/or rock barricades in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 3.9 miles of Level 5 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel, and rehab the existing steep section of the

Red Canyon trail. Level 5 decommissioning includes ripping, disking, and seeding the full length of the roadbed, and placing debris such as rock and slash on the road to further impede traffic and camouflage the road template. Earth barriers and water bars would also be constructed to impede traffic and provide drainage. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species.

A total of 0.1 mile of the existing Hornet trail would be decommissioned near the intersection with old highway 90 using Level 7 decommissioning techniques. Level 7 includes the removal of the existing culvert and fill material at the Red Canyon creek crossing and reshaping the cut and fill slopes of the old logging road. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species.

The specific locations of the routes to be decommissioned are shown on the map for Alternative 3. The Treatment Level shown on the map would be applied to the routes specified in accordance with Forest Service design standards. The schedule of implementation would be coordinated with other ongoing management activities within the project area. Administrative access for livestock permittees would be authorized through applicable permits and operating plans. The routes decommissioned in this project will be monitored by the Forest Service to determine if the design standards were properly implemented, and to assess the effectiveness of the type of treatment used to meet project objectives. If monitoring determines there are corrective actions necessary, those actions will be implemented as soon as possible. If the treatment method utilized does not effectively meet the travel management objective for the route, the Forest Service will increase the Treatment Level to meet those objectives as soon as possible.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 would utilize a combination of signing, gates, trail construction and rehab, road and trail decommissioning, and law enforcement to implement the 2002 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest travel plan. Roads and trails within the project area would be designed and managed for the types of uses and seasons specified in the 2002 ROD. Construction of the Red Canyon trail would be completed on the current/proposed route to bring it into Forest Service design standards. This alternative was developed in part to respond to the opportunity to provide more single-track trails within the project area that would provide a more challenging ride to motorcycles and bicycles on the Red Canyon trail.

As shown on the map for Alternative 4, the travel routes included in the 2002 ROD include the Base Transportation System and three single-track trails. As previously described, roads included in the Base Transportation System are the Divide Road (FSR 402), Old Highway 90 (FSR 540), Highway 90 spur 1a (FSR 540.1a), Hanks Valley Road (FSR 512), Hanks Valley spur 1h (FSR 512.1h), and Hanks Valley spur 2c (FSR 512.2c). All of the roads included in the Base Transportation System would continue to be managed and maintained for the uses specified in the 2002 ROD.

Three single-track trails would be completed and maintained in this Alternative. All three of these trails would remain designated as single-track trails open to motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. The Red Canyon trail has restrictions on the season of use for motorcycles. Under the 2002 ROD it is open to motorcycles from the Fourth of July weekend through the Labor Day weekend each year. The Hornet trail and Aspen trail have no seasonal use restrictions on motorcycles.

Two sections of the Red Canyon trail are identified as proposed motorcycle trail in the 2002 ROD (see map of 2002 Travel Plan Decision). Additional work on the ground would be conducted to complete the construction of the Red Canyon trail to meet Forest Service standards. The lower proposed section of trail currently meets Forest Service standards. However, the steep section of the existing trail off the end of the States Draw ridge does not meet Forest Service design standards and current uses are causing resource damage. Under this alternative, the existing steep section would be replaced with switchbacks to maintain the current/proposed trail alignment. Approximately 0.5 miles of new trail construction and 0.3 miles of trail rehab work would be required to complete this section of the trail.

The existing Hornet trail and Aspen trail would not be affected by the completion of the Red Canyon trail as proposed in this alternative. However, additional work on the ground would be necessary to designate and limit use of the single-track trails to the approved uses and to prevent other unauthorized uses within the project area. Alternative 4 includes the construction of four squeeze gates that would be designed to allow motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers to pass through while preventing ATV's and full-size vehicles from entering the trail. This alternative also includes the construction of two full-size gates that are designed to prevent any vehicle from entering a trail while providing the livestock permittee full-size vehicle administrative access to his sheep camps in the area. In addition, the proposed action includes installation of one cattle guard trail crossing to allow motorcycles and bicycles to cross the range fence separating the two grazing allotments without having to stop, while preventing cattle from crossing the fence. The specific locations for the gates and cattle guard are shown on the map for Alternative 4. Additional signs are needed on all three trails to properly mark the location of open routes and permitted uses for the public.

Within the project area a total of 5.8 miles of Level 3 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be closed by placing natural debris such as slash, rock, or logs on the road template in accordance with standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Materials used as debris to camouflage the road template would be located on and adjacent to the road that is decommissioned. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 1.0 miles of Level 4 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel. The roads identified would be physically barricaded with permanent gates, fences, and/or rock barricades in accordance with

standard Forest Service specifications and designs. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species appropriate for the site. Travel management signs would be placed at the beginning of each road.

Within the project area a total of 4.3 miles of Level 5 decommissioning would be utilized to close existing routes to unauthorized travel, and rehab the existing steep section of the Red Canyon trail. Level 5 decommissioning includes ripping, disking, and seeding the full length of the roadbed, and placing debris such as rock and slash on the road to further impede traffic and camouflage the road template. Earth barriers and water bars would also be constructed to impede traffic and provide drainage. Areas of disturbed ground would be seeded with a mix of native plant species.

The specific locations of the routes to be decommissioned are shown on the project map. The Treatment Level shown on the map would be applied to the routes specified in accordance with Forest Service design standards. The schedule of implementation would be coordinated with other ongoing management activities within the project area. Administrative access for livestock permittees would be authorized through applicable permits and operating plans. The routes decommissioned in this project will be monitored by the Forest Service to determine if the design standards were properly implemented, and to assess the effectiveness of the type of treatment used to meet project objectives. If monitoring determines there are corrective actions necessary, those actions will be implemented as soon as possible. If the treatment method utilized does not effectively meet the travel management objective for the route, the Forest Service will increase the Treatment Level to meet those objectives as soon as possible.

Two additional alternatives were considered in the Environmental Assessment but were eliminated from further analysis because they would involve significant changes to current management direction for the project area and are outside the scope of this decision. The following is a brief description of each alternative considered and the rationale for eliminating it from further analysis.

PAPA Alternative

During the public comment period, the group called Public Access Preservation Association (PAPA) submitted an alternative to the Forest Service proposed action, and requested that their alternative be incorporated into the analysis and released for public comment and review for this project.

The PAPA alternative would maximize recreational opportunities within the project area by establishing both single-track and ATV loop trail systems that utilize existing routes. No road or trail decommissioning would occur. Seasonal restrictions on motorized use within the project area would be modified to extend the season of use.

Under this alternative the Hornet trail #139.1A would remain unchanged. The Red Canyon trail would not be relocated, but additional work would be done on the ground to bring it up to Forest Service standards. This work includes the construction of a new

single-track switchback trail on the steep section of the upper Red Canyon trail. The Red Canyon and Hornet trails would receive single-track gates and signage at FSR540/Hwy 90 south and 540/Hwy 90 north near Antone Springs campground.

A new ATV trail would be designated utilizing the existing old logging road that is now located on the bench above Red Canyon. This trail would continue across Red Canyon utilizing existing route FSR 512.1h and connecting with FSR 512 Hanks Valley road and 512.2c, FSR 540.1a over to old Hwy 90. Another ATV route would be added to the system utilizing FSR 549 to FSR 565 to form a loop off of the Divide road.

The trails in the Red Canyon and States Draw area would be open from June 1st through October 1st.

Rationale for Eliminating This Alternative from Further Analysis

Comments specific to the single-track trails included in the proposed action have been considered and incorporated into the development of Alternative 4. The suggested ATV loop that would utilize FSR 549, FSR 565, and the Divide road is part of the Base Transportation System identified in the 2002 ROD for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan and is already open to full-size vehicles, ATV's, motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. Limiting use of these roads to ATV's would not be consistent with the 2002 ROD or meet the access needs for management of the National Forest.

Other elements of the PAPA Alternative have been eliminated from further analysis. Additional ATV trails proposed within the project area and the modification of the seasonal motorized use restriction of single-track trails are not consistent with the 2002 ROD, and are beyond the scope of this analysis. In March of 2002 the Forest Service completed a six-year process to revise the travel plan for the Uncompahgre National Forest. The 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) provides the Forest-Level Area and route-specific direction for travel management on the Forest. This EA addresses the environmental effects of implementing that decision within the project area. The addition of the proposed trails would require a similar NEPA process and public involvement effort to amend the 2002 ROD.

Authorize ATV Use of Existing Single-Track Trails

This Alternative would allow ATV's to travel on the same trails as motorcycles, bicycles, horses, and hikers. ATV's currently utilize many of these trails. Under this alternative there would be no effort to limit ATV use of the Red Canyon, Hornet, or Aspen trails, except during the seasonal closure of the Red Canyon trail. All other decommissioning activities included in the proposed action would occur to reduce the densities of open roads and motorized trails, and to eliminate unauthorized use of these user-developed and administratively closed routes.

Rationale for Eliminating This Alternative from Further Analysis

Opening the single-track trails to ATV's is not consistent with the 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, and is beyond the scope of this analysis. Single-track motorized and mechanized trails are very limited on the Forest. The conversion of the three single-track trails within the project area to ATV trails would require additional NEPA and public involvement to amend the 2002 ROD.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping was conducted to solicit public and agency input to the proposed action, and to help determine issues and concerns associated with the proposed action. To facilitate this, the general public was notified of the proposed action in the Schedule of Proposed Actions for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests beginning in the fourth quarter of 2006. Also, the Norwood Ranger District published a Legal Notice in the Telluride Daily Planet on November 23, 2006 notifying the public of the Red Canyon Travel Management project and the opportunity to comment on the proposed action. In addition, a personal scoping letter was sent to 27 interested and affected individuals, organizations and agencies on November 21, 2006 to solicit input to the proposed action.

During the 30-day scoping period people were given the opportunity to submit comments through the mail, e-mail, FAX, telephone, or to deliver them by hand. As a result of one comment letter, the Norwood District Ranger wrote a letter of response to an individual who submitted comments and requested additional information on the proposed action and other concerns he had expressed. Another individual contacted the Norwood Ranger District several times and also submitted written comments as the representative of Public Access Preservation Association (PAPA). Also during the 30-day comment period, a bulletin was posted on the internet at off-road.com notifying members of various motorized organizations about the Red Canyon Travel Management project and encouraging them to provide comment to the Forest Service to change the 2002 Travel Plan Decision for the Red Canyon project area and to support the PAPA alternative. This internet site generated most of the comments received on this proposal.

During the 30-day scoping period a total of 103 comments were received, and another 3 written comments were received after the scoping period ended. The majority of the comments were in response to the internet site rather than the scoping letter. They requested changes in the 2002 ROD. As such, they are outside the scope of the decision to be made.

As a result of the comments received from livestock grazing permittees, the Forest Service Range Conservationists for both the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts met with the permittees that have grazing permits within the project area to discuss the proposed action and clarify information provided in their written comments. One of the permittees is also the owner of the 40-acre parcel of private land within the project area. In general, the permittees support the Forest Service proposal to implement the 2002

ROD but have concerns about the need for motorized access for the operation and maintenance of their grazing permits. The landowner did not express any concern with access to his private property.

As a result of the comments received from various motorized users and groups, the Forest Service met with members of the PAPA, the Motorcycle Trail Riders Association, and Thunder Mountain Wheelers in Montrose, Colorado on the evening of January 23, 2007. The objectives of the meeting were to provide the representatives of these organizations with background information on the 2002 Travel Management Plan for the Uncompahgre National Forest, to discuss the NEPA involved with that decision, and explain the project-level decisions to be made in the Red Canyon project area in the context of the Forest-level Travel Plan decision. Extensive discussions also occurred at the meeting to clarify the purpose and need for the project, the Forest Service proposed action, and the PAPA alternative. In general, the representatives at the meeting do not support the Forest Service proposal to implement the 2002 ROD, and feel that it is a flawed plan that needs to be revisited to accommodate the increased demand for motorized recreation.

Following the meeting in Montrose, the Forest Service received a request for additional information from the PAPA representative under the Freedom Of Information Act. The request focused on providing a copy of all public comments received to date for the Uncompahgre Plateau Red Canyon area project proposal. The Forest Service provided the information requested.

Other comments received from non-motorized groups and individuals supported the Forest Service proposal to implement the 2002 ROD, and they had specific comments on the proposed relocation of the Red Canyon trail, the proliferation of unauthorized trails and ATV use of single-track trails, and effective methods of implementing the ROD.

The project Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) met on February 20, 2007 to review and analyze the comments received from the public. Appendix A contains the Response to Comments.

The project ID Team reviewed the proposed action for consistency with direction in the 1991 Amended GMUG National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), the 2002 Record Of Decision for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, and other applicable laws, Forest Service policy, and existing permits. Resource specialists also conducted field reviews and provided the reports necessary to determine potential impacts to heritage and biological resources.

Upon receiving an invitation, the District Ranger attended a meeting with PAPA on the evening of March 13, 2007 in Telluride. Approximately 25-30 members were present. During the meeting a variety of recreation issues and projects were discussed, including the Red Canyon Travel Management project. The group restated the belief that the 2002 ROD is flawed and should be changed, and supported the PAPA alternative submitted earlier. When asked how many members had read the scoping letter, approximately 6 people indicated they had.

On June 29, 2007 the District Ranger and three members of the project ID Team went on a field trip with members of PAPA to review the existing and proposed routes and uses within the project area. Members of the PAPA present reiterated their desire to have the Forest Service change the 2002 ROD to allow for increased motorized use as presented in the alternative they previously submitted during scoping. They also discussed the possibility of adaptive management, or a “pilot project,” to examine the effects of a change in the implementation of the ROD. The District Ranger agreed to consider proposals from the group.

The following issues were used to evaluate the proposed action:

Completion And Proper Use Of Single-track Trails. The 2002 Record Of Decision for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan has designated three single-track trails within the project area. Additional work needs to be done to finish construction of the Red Canyon trail, and to designate and limit use of all single-track trails to the approved uses and to prevent other unauthorized uses within the project area.

Red Canyon Trail Alignment. Numerous comments were received on maintaining the current/proposed Red Canyon trail alignment instead of relocating it to an old logging road on a bench on the east side of Red Canyon. People would prefer that the Forest Service replace the steep section of trail off the end of States Draw ridge with properly designed switchbacks to meet Forest Service design standards, and rehab the existing route, instead of relocating the trail. This route offers a more challenging ride and has less effect on the other single-track trails in the area.

Livestock Permittee Access. Motorized access is needed by the livestock permittees for operation and maintenance of their grazing permits. The type of road decommissioning included in the decision will have various effects on motorized access. The permittee on the Red Canyon Sheep Allotment needs to have full-size vehicle access to his sheep camps on States Draw ridge.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety.

3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. There are no significant historical or cultural resources, no park lands, no prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, and no wild and scenic rivers within or near the project area.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial.

Public comments were received on travel management within the project area. However, I will not be making any decisions about what roads and trails will be maintained on the Forest travel system, or what uses will be allowed on those routes within the project area. The Forest Supervisor of the GMUG National Forests already made those decisions in the 2002 Record Of Decision (ROD) for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan.

5. The Forest Service has had considerable experience with the decommissioning/closure methods described in the EA. The effects of what is proposed are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
6. The action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The same decommissioning/closure methods are used routinely across the National Forest System each year.
7. Cumulative actions considered in the analysis are described in the project EA and evaluated in Chapter 3. This analysis is also tiered to the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects described in the Environmental Impact Statement and Supplemental EIS for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan. The project Interdisciplinary Team has found that the cumulative effects of the proposed action, considered together with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the project area are not significant.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, as none exist in the area. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Forest Service prepared a combined Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation (BA/BE) and determined there would be “no adverse effect” to any listed species. No effect determinations do not require Section 7 consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The BA/BE also determined there would be no impact to the majority of Forest Service sensitive species. There are some impacts to individuals anticipated from the project, but there will be no loss of species viability or trend toward federal listing.

A Management Indicator Species (MIS) report was also prepared to determine potential effects to MIS within the project area. The project is designed to benefit the Rocky Mountain elk, the GMUG National Forest MIS for travel management. There would be no impact to any other MIS.

10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment.

NFMA FINDINGS AND FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The selected alternative is consistent with the 1991 Amended Land and Resource Management Plan for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, the 2002 Record of Decision for the Uncompahgre National Forest Travel Plan, and all other applicable laws, regulations, policies, and other direction. The selected alternative is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on pages III-2 through III-5, and with Management Area direction for the Management Areas within which the activities will occur.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed in pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7, and must meet all requirements of 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the Telluride Daily Planet. To be eligible to appeal this decision on this project, an individual or group must have provided a comment or otherwise expressed interest in this project during the formal comment period.

The publication date of the legal notice in the Telluride Daily Planet is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal (36 CFR 215.15 (a)). Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals may be delivered by the following means:

For delivery services or hand delivery to a physical street address

Appeals Deciding Officer
740 Simms Street
Golden, CO. 80401
Attn: Appeals

Office hours are 8:00 to 4:30.

For email delivery of an appeal: appeals-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us.

Electronic appeals must be in Microsoft Word, Word Perfect or plain text file format.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Craig Grother, Norwood Ranger District, at 970 327-4261.

JUDY SCHUTZA
District Ranger
Norwood Ranger District

Date

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