

# CANYON CLARION

DOMINGUEZ-ESCALANTE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA & DOMINGUEZ CANYON WILDERNESS PLANNING NEWSLETTER

BLM

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[www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca\\_rmp.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/denca/denca_rmp.html)

## Upcoming Meeting Dates

June 15: Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Training Room A, 544 Rood, Grand Junction

July 6: Delta Performing Arts Center, 822 Grand Ave., Delta

July 20: Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Training Room A, 544 Rood, Grand Junction

August 3: Delta Performing Arts Center, 822 Grand Ave., Delta

August 17: Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Training Room A, 544 Rood, Grand Junction



River rangers, Advisory Council members and other BLM staff floated down the Gunnison River last month, checking out camp sites and enjoying the spectacular scenery of giant walls, high water and the greenery of cottonwood galleries.

## Advisory Council studies Gunnison River issues

The Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (D-E NCA) Advisory Council was formed to advise the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in developing a resource management plan (RMP) for the D-E NCA. In an earlier meeting, the Council decided to use a zone-by-zone approach for recommendations. At their May 18th meeting, the Council focused on the Gunnison River corridor, or Zone 2 of the NCA.

At this point in the process, the Council is focused largely on gathering information. Council members are also asking questions and making suggestions about alternatives for the BLM's RMP.

### General Setting of Zone 2

Named after 1840s explorer Captain John W. Gunnison, the Gunnison River cuts through 33 miles of the D-E NCA, passing through the Morrison, Chinle and

Kayenta/Wingate formations.

The Gunnison flows are highly regulated by dams and diversions, including the Aspinall Unit dams that lie upstream from Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Riprapping and channelization on private lands along the river's banks also affect flow, which also impacts vegetation, fish, wildlife and recreation within the river corridor. The BLM will consider flow regimes and associated impacts in developing restoration strategies and other management approaches.

Tamarisk, Russian olive, Siberian elm, Russian knapweed, cheatgrass and reed canarygrass have replaced native vegetation on the riverbank. The combination of tamarisk and cheatgrass creates fuels for wildfires that burn with greater frequency and intensity, which creates the potential to lose galleries of native cottonwoods and willows.

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This stretch of the Gunnison includes designated critical habitat for two federally endangered fish species, and provides potential habitat for two additional endangered species. The river and river corridor also provide habitat for three fish species and eight additional wildlife and bird species considered to be “sensitive” by the BLM.

The river has attracted people for thousands of years. These people left behind petroglyphs, lithic work sites and old camps, as well as homesteader, early railroad and orchard sites.

River and riparian campsites are used by commercial and private river recreationists – canoeists, rafters and kayakers. Given the location of put-in and take-out spots, river runners can take

one-day, overnight and two-day trips. Petroglyphs and a waterfall are within an easy hike up Dominguez Canyon. That makes it the most popular camping spot on the river, with as many as 100 campers per night on busy weekends. The nearby Bridgeport footbridge also provides foot and horseback access to Dominguez Canyon. The Council heard from outfitters at this meeting about the effects that increasing visitation to Dominguez Canyon is having at the mouth of Dominguez, including crowding, a diminished “backcountry” setting and conflicts over popular campsites.

### Management issues

Based on information provided by the BLM and the public, the Council made the following initial recommendations for Zone 2:

- The BLM should continue to control invasive species to improve habitat.
- The BLM should consider the effects (and methods for reducing effects) of recreational use on cultural resources within the river corridor.
- The BLM should consider whether additional campsites should be provided at popular locations, and examine different methods for managing recreation use at popular sites.

The Council discussed different options including the potential to develop a permit system, or to establish criteria that would trigger a permit system.

Council members also wanted to learn more about motorized jet boat use, waterfowl hunting and recreational gold prospecting within the river corridor.

## Five Council members float down the Gunnison River

As a follow-up to their May 18 meeting, five members of the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Advisory Council rafted the Gunnison River to examine recreational facilities and natural features of the river corridor. The Council members were accompanied by Bureau of Land Management river rangers and D-E NCA staff. The five Council members were:

- **Katie Steele** of Grand Junction, NCA Chair, representing dispersed recreation and historic/ cultural resources (Katie also co-chairs the Colorado Riverfront Commission)
- **Bill Harris** of Montrose, NCA Vice-Chair and representative of mountain bikers and cultural resources
- **Tamera Minnick** of Grand Junction, Associate Professor of Environmental Science at Mesa State College
- **Terry Kimber** of Delta, representing hunters and general recreation
- **Mike Wilson** of Eckert, representing motorized recreationists.

The group floated from the Escalante bridge put-in to the Whitewater take-out in approximately six hours. The Gunnison River was running at 7,000 cubic-feet-per-second, which is typical of high spring run-off flows. Many islands in the river were either submerged or considerably shrunk in size by the high water.

Advisory Council members visited riparian campsites up-river and downriver from Dominguez Canyon. River rangers explained tamarisk removal and eradication projects at some



The Council river-runners enjoyed great weather, lots of sunshine and little wind on their trip. Here the group takes a break to inspect a riverside camp site. (Photos by Ben Blom)

camp sites, and noted the need for additional work at other sites.

The group observed avian wildlife (Western tanagers, mud swallows, cliff swallows, magpies, mockingbirds, red-wing blackbirds and a rare black phoebe) and several cultural features along the way (including game-drive walls and historic telegraph lines).

### *Travel management analysis begins in late August*

As of May 26, the BLM received 101 comments from the public, regarding travel management issues in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area. The comment period ended May 1, except for higher elevation routes that were inaccessible in spring.

The BLM is accepting comments for these defined higher-elevation areas until June 15.