

3.10 RECREATION

3.10.1 Regional Overview

The vast and varied landforms within the VPA accommodate many recreational uses. With two major rivers and several small mountain ranges, this area attracts recreational users from the Uintah Basin, as well as from western Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah's heavily populated Wasatch Front. Recreation's rise in popularity has presented challenges to managing outdoor recreation to accommodate demand, while ensuring the health of the resources that are essential to its existence.

The basic units of recreation management are the Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and the Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). An SRMA is a designated area where recreation is emphasized. Extensive Recreation Management Areas are areas where recreation is unstructured and dispersed, where minimal recreation-related investments are required, and have minimal regulatory constraints. The VPA is divided into two ERMAs: the Diamond Mountain ERMA, and the Book Cliffs ERMA. Within the Diamond Mountain ERMA are four SRMAs: Browns Park, Red-Mountain-Dry Fork, Nine Mile and Pelican Lake. No SRMAs are present in the Book Cliffs ERMA.

3.10.1.1 Diamond Mountain ERMA

The Diamond Mountain ERMA provides a wide variety of recreation opportunities. While in the past, the majority of recreation has occurred within the SRMAs, additional areas are now more heavily used as recreation activity choices change. Four state parks (Steinaker Reservoir, Red Fleet Reservoir, Starvation Reservoir, and the Utah Field House of Natural History) are within the Diamond Mountain ERMA and together draw approximately 160,000 visitors a year to the region.

3.10.1.1.1 Browns Park SRMA

The Browns Park SRMA encompasses the Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam (from the Ashley National Forest boundary to the Utah-Colorado state line) and is approximately 23 miles in length and 2 miles wide. River recreation, camping, fishing, and sightseeing are the primary recreational opportunities in Browns Park. There is an increasing interest in OHV, hiking, cycling, and equestrian use. The John Jarvie Historic Ranch is located within the Browns Park SRMA and provides a historic recreation resource for the area. The ranch accommodates approximately 15,000 visitors each year and is considered a major attraction within the Diamond Mountain ERMA.

3.10.1.1.2 Pelican Lake SRMA

Unlike many of the more remote recreation resources in the Diamond Mountain ERMA, Pelican Lake is in close proximity to Vernal and is heavily used by the semi-urban population of the Uintah Basin. The most popular activities on Pelican Lake are boating and fishing. Management of the SRMA has become more challenging as the population in Vernal continues to increase, bringing with it greater numbers of users and more conflicts between different recreational activities.

3.10.1.1.3 Red Mountain-Dry Fork

The Red Mountain-Dry Fork SRMA lies approximately 12 miles northwest of Vernal and is open year-round. Access to the area is by paved road. The area is primarily used by OHV recreationists, hunters, campers, mountain bikers, and for general day use. Rock art is also present in the area.

3.10.1.1.4 Nine Mile Canyon

The Nine Mile Canyon SRMA is located at the western boundary of the VPA, and is a popular tourist destination. Noted as having the highest concentration of rock art site in the U.S., services are available, but limited, within the canyon and camping is not allowed. Travel through the canyon is along a narrow, unpaved road suitable for most passenger and small recreational vehicles. Nine Mile Canyon is protected by the Antiquities Act, which prohibits excavations or acts that may injure or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruins, dwellings, or other structures.

3.10.1.2 Book Cliffs ERMA

The Book Cliffs ERMA consists of the southern and eastern areas of the VPA. The White River flows from the Colorado border to a confluence with the Green River and is used heavily between April and June. Other resources within the Book Cliffs ERMA include rock formations and geologic points of interest, including Duck Rock, Goblin City Overlook, and Fantasy Canyon. OHVs are common in the vast southern portion of the Book Cliffs ERMA. Hunting and wildlife viewing are also major activities in this area of the VPA.

The potential for conflict between recreational activities and non-recreational activities is a concern in the Book Cliffs ERMA. Oil and gas exploration and development is an expanding industry, with development occurring primarily in the Book Cliffs portion of the VPA. Additionally, more than 40 commercially permitted recreational-activity businesses use these lands, along with big and small game hunters, OHV users (using vehicles such as sand rails, two-stroke cycles, 4 wheelers, and rock crawlers), sightseers, mountain bikers, hikers and horse riders.

3.10.2 Recreation Types

3.10.2.1 Trails

In November 2001, the Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University (USU) prepared an analysis of public sentiment towards trails with a statewide telephone survey. Results were compiled for the Uintah Basin sub-area. Results of the survey indicated the following:

- Hiking was the most mentioned activity.
- OHV riding was mentioned second.
- Horseback riding was mentioned third.
- Only 47% of trail users in the Uintah Planning District indicated they would support the use of additional public funds for motorized trails.
- Over 79% of trail users support the use of additional public funds for non-motorized trails.

- A clear majority of the general population believes that trails provide economic benefit for local communities.

Using the data collected through USU, the Governor’s Initiative on Trails established a goal to increase trail facilities throughout Utah. A working group to help establish priority areas for trail development focused on three major trails in the Uintah Basin:

- Dry Fork Flume, a non-motorized trail approximately 19 miles long.
- Outlaw Adventure OHV Trail, a motorized trail approximately 47 miles long.
- Vernal Canals – several non-motorized trails constituting 47 miles of total trail length.

3.10.2.2 Off-Highway Vehicles (OHVs)

The number of OHVs used in the VPA has grown in the last 10 years. According to Utah State Parks and Recreation, the number of statewide permits issued between 1988 and 1998 has grown from 20,000 to 70,000. There has been a 294% increase in registration since 1997, and annually, 30% have been first-time buyers. As identified by the National Management Strategy for Motorized Off-Highway Vehicle Use on Public Lands, the growth of OHV use can be attributed to the following:

- Greater public interest in unconfined outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Rising disposable income, fostered by a healthy domestic economy, for use on recreational pursuits.
- Advances in vehicle technology that enabled motorized OHV users to reach previously inaccessible areas.
- The rapid growth of the West’s cities and suburbs, whose expansion and population growth has brought Westerners closer to once-remote public lands.
- A population with an increasing median age with changing outdoor recreational interests.

Extensive research has been conducted over the last several years to attempt to designate certain areas as appropriate for OHV use. This process is a long-term, ongoing effort to ensure resource protection while allowing a variety of recreation opportunities.

Areas that receive the most OHV use within the VPA are day-use areas accessible by the Vernal population. Presently, the areas of highest OHV use are: 1) Buckskin Hills, north of the town of Vernal; 2) Jensen Hills; 3) the Raven Ridge area, which is south of the east Highway 40 and east of the old Bonanza Highway; and 4) the Glen Bench ATV area north of Fantasy Canyon (an unofficial designated site, where people are directed to go to minimize intensive use of other more sensitive areas). Major visual, soils/watershed, and vegetation degradation is occurring in some areas.

3.10.2.3 Hunting and Wildlife Viewing

Hunting and wildlife viewing are widespread throughout the VPA. Concentrated areas occur in the Book Cliffs ERMA and Pariette Wetlands . Big game hunting in the Book Cliffs and on Diamond Mountain is generally an extended recreational activity (5-12 days) because of the

limited number of tags and the excellent hunting opportunities that the area provides. Public access to the Diamond Mountain public lands is limited because of private ownership.

3.10.2.4 Scenic Drives

Four popular scenic drives, including Scenic Byways and Backways and one Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byway, are within the VPA, typically promoted by the Dinosaurland Travel Board. The four routes are Nine Mile, Jones Hole, and Browns Park Backways and the Flaming Gorge Drive through the Ages National Scenic Byway. Other scenic routes would include the Dinosaur National Monument Park Highway, the state park roads into both Red Fleet and Steinaker Reservoirs, the Book Cliff Divide Road, and the day-use area accessing the Ashley National Forest up Dry Fork Canyon.

3.10.2.5 River Recreation

Two major rivers provide the resource for river recreation- the Green River, and the White River. Since the last BLM planning efforts (in 1985 for the Book Cliffs, and 1994 for Diamond Mountain), commercial river recreation clients and river user days have remained relatively constant, while casual use has been increasing by approximately 5% annually.

3.10.2.5.1 The Green River

Along the Green River, the BLM administers and collects fees for all of the commercial river permits in three major river sections: the Flaming Gorge Dam to Little Hole (Section A), Little Hole to Indian Crossing (Section B), and Indian Crossing to the Utah/Colorado state line (Section C). Permits are required for commercial boating, while boating for personal use from the Flaming Gorge Dam to the Dinosaur National Monument at Lodore Canyon does not require a permit. The bulk of commercial use, approximately 75 boats per day, occurs between the Flaming Gorge Dam and Little Hole (all of which is administered by the Ashley National Forest).

The most apparent conflict on the Green is between different recreational activities. It is not uncommon to have commercial and private rafts, single kayaks, and drift boats on the same stretch of river simultaneously floating past shore fisherman. The noise from larger groups on the rafts can interfere with the peace and solitude sought by the fishermen. Use along the shore is primarily by fishermen.

3.10.2.5.2 The White River

The White River within the Book Cliffs ERMA is also a major resource for commercial and non-commercial boating. Approximately 2,000 people visit this stretch of the White River each year. The most popular section of the White River is from the Bonanza Bridge to the Enron take-out, a distance of 32 river miles.

Several visual resources exist in this section of the White River, providing additional recreation opportunities. One of the recreational and visual resources along the river is the Goblin City Overlook, a lookout point approximately 800 feet above the White River. The view is primarily eastward through a series of high ridges, which have features resembling towers, spires, and turrets.

The confluence of the Green River and White River occurs within the boundary of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation. The Reservation requires a permit for river use and for take-out through any of their property.

3.10.2.6 Boating/Swimming

Although most reservoir recreation occurs on the state park facilities of Steinaker and Red Fleet Reservoirs, Pelican Lake also receives heavy use from boaters. Activities on Pelican Lake include motorized and non-motorized boating and picnicking. There is intense fishing for bluegill and bass, especially on spring weekends, and up to 70 boats may use the BLM boat ramp daily. Swimming in Pelican Lake is strongly discouraged due to the threat of bacterial and parasitic skin infections.

3.10.3 Management Strategies

Within the VPA, and nationally, OHV areas are designated as open, limited, or closed. An open designation allows intensive OHV use where there are no compelling resource protection needs, user conflicts, or public safety issues. An area designated as limited restricts OHV use to meet specific resource management objectives. Limitations may occur on number or type of vehicles, time and season of use, or specific roads. An area is designated as closed to protect resources, ensure visitor safety, or reduce user conflicts. Within the VPA there are 787,859 acres open to OHV use, 887,275 acres that are limited, and 50,388 acres that are closed (see Figure 28).

3.10.4 Socioeconomic Considerations

Recreation is an important component in the quality of life for Uintah Basin residents. In addition to providing recreation opportunity in close proximity to their homes, these residents enjoy a healthy tax base drawn from tourism.

Each year, the Utah Travel Council researches tourism tax dollars spent in each county. A study completed in 2000 shows that tourism has positively impacted the economics of each county in the VPA. Duchesne County experienced a 9% increase in total tax revenues (Table 3.10.1). Total tourism-related spending increased by 6.4%. Uintah County experienced a 6% increase in tax revenue. Total tourism spending increased by 1.6%. Daggett County experienced a 3.3% increase in tax revenue. Total tourism spending increased by 1.9%. The average increase in tax revenue between 1999 and 2000 for the State of Utah was 4%.

County	Total Tax Revenues	Percent Change
Duchesne	\$85,639	9.0%
Uintah	\$334,519	6.0%
Daggett	\$69,246	3.3%

Source: Utah Travel Council (2000)

While benefits are measurable, each county has indicated additional stress on infrastructure because of growing tourism. Visitors to the area recreate on BLM property but also depend on the cities and counties for the provision of basic services, such as law enforcement and

emergency fire and health services. Each county has stated that the burden should be shared with the BLM.