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Bureau of Land Management**

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-N02000-2015-011**

Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Permits

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U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Colorado
Kremmling Field Office
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BLM

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Identifying Information

Project Title: Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Permits

Legal Description: Grand, Summit, and Eagle Counties, Colorado, 6th P.M.;

T. 1 S., R. 81 W., Sec. 7, 18;

T. 1 S., R. 82 W., Sec. 12, 13, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 33;

T. 2 S., R. 82 W., Sec. 4, 5, 6, 7, 18;

T. 2 S., R. 83 W., Sec. 13, 24, 25, 26;

T. 1 N., R. 80 W., Sec. 19, 20, 29, 32;

T. 1 S., R. 80 W., Sec. 34, 35;

T. 2 S., R. 80 W., Sec. 2.

Applicant	Location	Activity
Arkansas Valley Adventures	Pumphouse to State Bridge	Shuttle guests, rental equipment & vehicles
Gore Range Expeditions dba Stand Up Paddle	Pumphouse to State Bridge	Shuttling guests & rental equipment
Adventures in Whitewater	Pumphouse to State Bridge, Green Mtn. Reservoir Dam to Confluence Recreation Site	Shuttling vehicles
Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides	Pumphouse to State Bridge	Float fishing and Floatboating when part of multi-sport trips
East Grand School District	Pumphouse to State Bridge	Floatboating for school activities

NEPA Document Number: DOI-BLM-N02000-2015-011-EA

1.2. Background

Upper Colorado River

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to analyze public demand for services provided by commercial outfitters and guides related to river operations including: floatboating, float fishing, and shuttle services within the Kremmling Field Office. Currently, 61 permittees are authorized for commercial river related operations on the Upper Colorado River. The 61 permittees hold a total of 71 permits- 40

floatboating permits, 30 fishing permits, and one shuttle permit- as some companies hold both a floatboating and fishing permit.

Outfitting activities are an essential tourism support service that assists visitors on public lands. Commercial outfitters play an important role in facilitating safe public use and enjoyment of recreational activities. Visitors who engage the services of river related outfitters include first time visitors to the area as well as repeat customers. Many are from out of state and are not familiar with river conditions, access, and/or climate. Most visitors do not have the equipment needed to participate in the outdoor recreation activities which they seek. In turn, the use of public land is vital to river permittees’ operations and their clients’ enjoyment.

The BLM Kremmling Field Office (KFO) established a moratorium on the issuance of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) in the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) beginning in 2001. The rationale for the decision to stop issuing permits in the SRMA was based on the determination of the permit administration capabilities of both the KFO and the Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO), formerly known as the Glenwood Springs Field Office (GSFO). This decision was reaffirmed in 2002, using the same rationale as the original 2001 decision. The 2002 decision extended the policy of not accepting applications for new permits in the SRMA until 2005. Since 2005, the KFO has not accepted new applications for SRPs within the SRMA.

The SRPs may be issued to applicants who fulfill the application requirements under current National BLM SRP policy and guidelines set by the Colorado BLM’s Northwest District Office. The table below displays the commercial user numbers and a five year average for the Upper Colorado River.

Commercial User Numbers from 2010-2014							
Location	Activity	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	5 year average
Gore Canyon	Floating	615	166	192	162	143	256
Pumphouse to State Bridge	Floating	33,155	38,680	36,396	30,908	32,795	34,386
	Fishing	2,599	1,851	2,535	3,265	3,290	2,708
Shuttles			2,544	3,262	3,223	3,551	3145 (4 year average)

*BLM KFO SRP Database, 2015

About 70-80% of the commercial outfitters boat from Pumphouse to Radium; the remaining outfitters continue on to either Rancho del Rio or the State Bridge Landing. Most of the

outfitters going between Pumphouse and Radium offer half day trips and usually stop at Warm Springs, Jump Rock, and occasionally the Cabin. Typically, on a full day trip, the outfitters will boat from Pumphouse to Rancho del Rio. The majority of the time they will stop at Radium to eat lunch. The van/bus drivers can bring all the food and lunch equipment to Radium, so the guides do not have to load and unload it from the boat. On occasion, outfitters will bring lunches for their customers and stop at Island or Benches for lunch.

Over the past four years, the BLM has monitored these lunch spots as well as other spots along the river. Monitoring includes GPS data of the disturbed areas, photos and detailed notes. Monitoring is usually completed in September of each year after most commercial and private boaters are finished for the season. No increase in the extent or the amount of disturbance in these sites has been found from commercial outfitter use. In 2011 and 2014, there was actually a decrease in disturbance at some of the spots because of high water preventing boats from accessing some areas of the banks. These sites were not used during high water and revegetated as the water levels lowered. Boaters did not use these sites because the vegetation was so dense and the campsites effectively disappeared.

Currently, around 300 commercial trips (including guides) camp overnight between Pumphouse and Catamount. This is between 1 to 1.5% of the total users (commercial and private) on the Upper Colorado River. Commercial outfitters are currently required to bring a portable toilet, firepan, and practice Leave No Trace ethics.

Private use on the Upper Colorado River from Pumphouse to State Bridge has been monitored over the past decade and the numbers have increased significantly. Before 2005, private users ranged from 6,500 to 10,000 people per year. During these years, there was little enforcement of the fees, so numbers may have been higher. From 2005 to 2007, the private user numbers doubled from 10,087 to 20,235. Between 2007 and 2011, the numbers stayed between 20,000 to 25,000 private users on the river between Pumphouse and State Bridge but BLM did not count season passes. In 2012, anyone purchasing a season’s pass was asked on average how many times a year they used the pass and on average how many visitors were with them each time. The number of season pass holders has been around 400 passes with approximately 5,000 user days for the past three summers. That is now being added to the total private user numbers as shown below. A majority of the private users camp overnight along the river in either designated camping sites or in dispersed sites.

Private Users Numbers from 2010-2014*							
Location	Activity	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	5 year average
Pumphouse-Rancho del	Floating & fishing	25,960	21,265				28,194

Rio (without season pass numbers)							
Pumphouse to State Bridge (with season pass numbers)	Floating & Fishing			30,323	32,674	30,751	

* Recreation User Permits sold with self-reported user numbers at Pumphouse, Radium, and State Bridge Recreation Sites. Season Pass numbers are incorporated after 2011.

In 2009, a Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report was conducted for the BLM Kremmling Resource Management Plan Revision. The primary outstandingly remarkable value for the Upper Colorado River from Byers Canyon to State Bridge is recreation (floatboating, fishing, and scenic driving). The proposed Record of Decision for the Kremmling Field Office Resource Management Plan would defer the Wild and Scenic determination and adopt the Wild and Scenic Stakeholder’s Plan. Under the Plan, the BLM and the W&S Stakeholders’ Group are prohibited from taking any actions that would diminish the free-flowing nature, outstandingly remarkable values, and water quality of the subject segment.

Lower Blue River

The Lower Blue River (Green Mountain Dam to the confluence of the Colorado River and Blue River) does not have any commercial permits (floatboting, fishing or shuttling) due to the following reasons:

- limited BLM managed public lands,
- a boat launch which is located on and managed by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands and is at the base of Green Mountain Dam and therefore subject to special security concerns, and
- US Forest Service (USFS) not issuing commercial permits on the Lower Blue River.

The BOR boat launch was reopened in May of 2002 after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, on a limited basis from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. Over the past five years, there has been an increase in use of the Lower Blue River for fishing and floatboating. Most kayakers take out of the river at Spring Creek, just downstream of Green Mountain Canyon on private property. Prior to 2011, most fishermen and floatboaters floated further downstream and would take out on private property at the beginning of the BLM’s Confluence Road. In 2011, the private boat launch was closed to boaters, forcing them to take-out at the Confluence Recreation Site at the end of the BLM Confluence Road. About half way down the Confluence Road, the BLM made

a temporary bridge and trail down to the river which helps avoid the hazard of using the boat slide at the Confluence Recreation Site as a take-out. However, this bridge and trail area does not have an appropriately sized parking lot and less than five vehicles can park at this location safely. When one vehicle is parked poorly, vehicles with trailers park along the narrow BLM Confluence Road, which can block access to the Confluence Recreation Site and the only toilets. This area has had extensive vegetation related resource damage due to poorly parked vehicles and vehicles being blocked in so they are forced to drive over vegetation to get out of the parking area.

Most Lower Blue River users shuttle their own vehicles, dropping their vehicle and trailer at the temporary bridge and trail and taking the other vehicle back to Green Mountain Dam. If vehicles are left past 7 p.m. they are locked inside the parking area and are towed. It is commonly known that some Lower Blue River boaters use non-permitted shuttles. It has been very difficult for land management agencies to catch the illegal shuttle operators.

Special Recreation Permits

In February of 2014, the Kremmling Field Office rescinded the river related special recreation permit moratorium. The rationale was to “preserve future management options being considered through the Resource Management Plan Revision/Environmental Impact Statement process. This planning process is near completion and the Proposed Plan/Final Environmental Impacts Statement is being prepared for publication. The moratorium has served its purpose and resource management direction has been established regarding Special Recreation Permits. Considering the timing and workload required to consider new Special Recreation Permits, it is appropriate to rescind the moratorium at this time.”

The Kremmling Field Office reviewed existing river outfitter’s business and operating plans to determine which niches were not being adequately met. Between June 1, 2014 and December 31, 2014, the Kremmling Field Office accepted river related SRPs through a prospectus. The identified niches were listed as: vehicle shuttles, accredited universities, fishing trips for special populations and/or people with disabilities, unique opportunities, equipment rental, and firewood vending.

The Kremmling Field Office received seven permit modifications applications from existing outfitters and thirteen applications for new permits. Using the outlined criteria in the prospectus, two permit modifications and three new permit applications were denied. A fifteen day scoping period for the proposed action of issuing new river related permits started on February 26, 2015. A request was made to extend the scoping period for an additional week. The scoping period ended on Saturday, March 21, 2015, and a total of twenty-two scoping comments were received (See Section 2.1 below for more information on public scoping).

1.3. Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose for the action is to evaluate the need for additional river related special recreation permits which fulfill unmet niches on BLM-administered public lands within the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area in a manner that protects the natural resources of public lands and prevents unnecessary or undue degradation. The need for the action is established by Title 43 CFR 8372 which requires authorization for commercial recreation activities on BLM-administered public lands. Authorization is granted through the issuance of Special Recreation Permits (SRPs).

1.4. Decision to be Made

Upon completion of this EA, the Authorized Officer (AO) will make a determination as to whether any “significant” impacts could result from the implementation of these actions. “Significance” is defined by NEPA and is found in regulation 40 CFR 1508.27. An EA provides evidence necessary to determine whether a significant impact exists. If the BLM determines that the proposal would result in a “significant” impact, then the BLM would prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project. If the AO determines that this project does not have “significant” impacts following the analysis, then the BLM would prepare and sign a “Finding of No Significant Impact” and Decision Record which implements the agency’s selected alternative.

Based on the analysis contained in this EA, the BLM will decide whether to approve or deny the proposed Special Recreation Permits, and if so, under what terms and conditions. The Field Manager is the AO who will decide one of the following:

- To approve all river related Special Recreation Permits that have been analyzed in detail.
- To approve selected river related Special Recreation Permits that have been analyzed in detail.
- To deny one or all Special Recreation Permits.

1.5. Conformance with the Land Use Plan

The Proposed Action is subject to and is in conformance (43 CFR 1610.5) with the following land use plan:

Land Use Plan: Kremmling Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: December 1984; Updated February 1999

Decision Language: a. Objective. “To ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreational opportunities which the public seeks and which are not readily available from other sources, to

reduce the impacts of recreational use on fragile and unique resource values, and to provide for visitor safety, and resource interpretation.”

2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

2.1. Scoping

NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis. Scoping is both an internal and external process.

Internal scoping was initiated when the project was presented to the Kremmling Field Office (KFO) interdisciplinary team on February 2, 2015.

External scoping was conducted by posting this project on the KFO website at <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/kfo.html> and via a press release on February 26, 2015. The news release was published in the Vail Daily Newspaper, the Grand Gazette, and on Mountain Buzz.

The proposed action for this EA was available for a 21-day scoping period beginning on February 26, 2015 until March 21, 2015. Below is a summary of all comments received for the proposed action of issuing 5 permit modifications and 10 new permits:

<u>Disagree with issuance of new permits:</u>	<u>In favor of selected new permits:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Niches are already being filled by current permit holders - Issues with overcrowding such as logistics, speeding on roads, duckies colliding, and conflicts with fishermen, lack of parking, too much trash, etc. - Need for a carrying capacity study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion of quality services for client base is positive. - Opportunity to offer unique services. <p>Shuttle companies should be held to the same standards as other permit holders.</p>

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted:

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Upper Colorado River Wild & Scenic Stakeholder Group
- All current river related special recreation permit holders on the Upper Colorado River (Confluence Recreation Site to State Bridge Boat Access)

2.2. Public Comment

A preliminary version of this environmental assessment was posted to the BLM NEPA register (https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/lup/lup_register.do) on May 29, 2015 and was available for comment for 30 days. The comments in their entirety have been posted on the

BLM NEPA register and are summarized in Appendix B. BLM responses to these comments are also noted.

3. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

This chapter describes the Proposed Action and alternatives, including any that were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. The BLM has developed three alternatives which will be considered in detail:

- Proposed Action - Issue Floatboating, and Shuttling SRPs
- Alternative A – Issue Shuttling SRPs
- No Action Alternative

3.1. Proposed Action – Issue Floatboating, Float Fishing and Shuttling SRPs

3.1.1. Project Components and General Schedule

Under the Proposed Action, the BLM would issue the following Special Recreation Permits:

Company	Activity	User Days
Arkansas Valley Adventure	Shuttle guests, rental equipment & vehicles	Unlimited
Gore Range Expeditions dba Stand Up Paddle	Shuttle guests, rental equipment	Unlimited
Adventures in Whitewater	Shuttle vehicles (Colorado River and Lower Blue)	Unlimited
East Grand School District	Floatboating	100 user days (not including guides)
Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides	Multi-day team building trips which include floatboating (they applied for hiking and mountain biking in Kremmling Field Office, which will be analyzed in separate NEPA document)	200 user days (not including guides)

The first two years, permittees are issued one year probationary permits. If the permittees meet all requirements on their annual authorizations, the authorized officer may issue multi-year permits (up to 10 years) with an annual renewal of the Annual Operating Authorization. All commercial operations would be from a half day to four days for a single trip.

FLOATBOATING would occur on approximately 15 miles of the Colorado River from the Pumphouse Recreation Site to State Bridge Boat Access. Floatboating includes rafts, kayaks, stand-up paddle boards, inflatable kayaks, etc.

SHUTTLING

-Colorado River shuttling would occur on Highway 9, Trough Road (Grand County Road 1 and Eagle County Road 11), Confluence Road, Pumphouse Road, Radium Road, and Highway 131.

-Blue River shuttling would occur on County Road 1812, County Road 30, Highway 9, Trough Road, and the Confluence Road.

Maps of these areas are shown in Appendix A.

3.1.2. Design Features of the Proposed Action

Permits would be reviewed in 2016, 2017, and every five years after that, to assess the resource conditions and observed impacts from recreation uses.

The BLM would inspect disturbed areas along the Colorado River for noxious weeds during the commercial river use timeframe. If noxious weeds are found, it is the responsibility of the BLM to treat the weed infestations.

-The permittees would practice the TREAD LIGHTLY and LEAVE NO TRACE land ethics and inform their clients about these practices and ensure that they follow them.

-All trash produced on commercial trips would be packed out. Trash cannot be deposited in BLM trash receptacles at the Confluence, Pumphouse, Radium Recreation Sites or State Bridge Boat Access.

Campsites-

- A. Camps may be set up for not longer than 14 days and must follow all BLM regulations. No year-round, permanent camps may be established on BLM lands; only temporary facilities are permitted.
- B. Camps would be located to avoid conflict with public road and trail traffic, and stream or lake access, and to the extent possible would be located out of sight of major trails.
- C. All campsites and temporary improvements would be as described in the approved operating plan.
- D. All campsite facilities including but not limited to tents and latrines, would be located at least 200 feet from the nearest spring, stream, lake, pond or reservoir unless specifically authorized otherwise.

- E. All campsites must be approved prior to use. Clearances may be required, such as inventories for cultural resources and/or for threatened or endangered species.
- F. All overnight trips would carry a portable toilet system, either a washable, reusable system or an EPA-approved bag system. All solid human waste would be packed out.

Campfires-

- A. All overnight trips would carry and use a firepan. All fire ash would be packed out.
- B. Campfires would be completely extinguished when left unattended. The permittee is responsible for all resource damages caused by a fire(s) started by him/herself, employees, or clients, and may be held responsible for fire suppression costs resulting from wildfire caused by his/her operations.
- C. An axe, shovel, water bucket or extinguisher for fire control would be available at each campfire.
- D. Wildfire caused by the permitted operation would be reported immediately to the nearest BLM office and or call 911. The permittee is responsible for informing employees, clients, and participants of the current fire danger and required restrictions or precautions that may be in effect.

Resource Protection-

- A. Aesthetics: Permittee would protect the scenic and aesthetic values of the public lands used in the operations, and maintain premises on permitted areas to acceptable standards of repair, orderliness, and cleanliness.
- B. Rehabilitation: After camps and other temporary facilities are dismantled, insofar as practical, the area would be left in a natural state.
- C. Trash Disposal: Camps and other permitted areas would be regularly cleaned and no trash or litter would be allowed to accumulate. Combustible trash may be burned when campfires are authorized. All non-combustible trash, including but not limited to tin cans, spent brass, glass bottles, foil, and wire would be packed out. Trash shall not be buried on public land.
- D. Waste or by-products of any kind would not be discharged into any stream, reservoir,

lake or pond.

- E. Soils/Vegetation: Permittee and their customers would be restricted to using established trails, stream crossings, or river access points where they are available.
- F. Vegetation Damage/Removal: All operations would be conducted in a manner which prevents damage to or loss of vegetation cover. Cutting, clearing or defacing of standing trees, alive or dead, or clearing and cutting of shrub/groundcover for any other reason would require specific advance authorization. When tree cutting is authorized, stumps would be left no higher than six inches above ground level and slash shall be lopped and scattered. A separate permit is required for removal and transportation of woodland/tree products from public land.
- G. Firewood Cutting: All firewood for commercial overnight trips must be brought to the river. No collection of dead, down, or drift wood is permitted.
- H. Protection of Public Property: Signs, equipment, markers, fences, livestock watering facilities, or any other property found on public land would not be damaged, destroyed, defaced, removed, or disturbed.
- I. Cultural Resources: All persons associated with operations under this permit must be informed that any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological, and scientific interest, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils, or artifacts shall not be damaged, destroyed, removed or disturbed. If in connection with operations under this permit any of the above resources are discovered, the permittee would immediately stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect such resources, and notify the BLM authorized officer of the discovery. The immediate area of the discovery must be protected until the operator is notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.
- J. Permittee is responsible for knowing where public land boundaries are located and the restrictions that may apply to an area of operation within these boundaries. Maps and information concerning restrictions are available at the local BLM field office.
- K. Permittee would inform guides and outfitters to float past identified bald eagle nesting/roosting areas and keep noise to a minimum. This may also hold true if an eagle is sighted perching or within 100 feet of the shoreline.
- L. At annual BLM/Outfitter meetings, and attached to the permit should be information regarding:
 - The use of established fish handling protocols designed to minimize stress

associated with the playing of fish, removal of hooks, and release of fish back into the water.

- Importance of foregoing fishing activities in the late afternoon or when water temperatures exceed 65 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce stress and post handling mortality.
- Aquatic invasive species and suggestions on how to minimize the spread of these species via proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Recommendations that equipment be cleaned and disinfected between uses particularly if moving to new water bodies.

3.1.3. BLM Required Conditions of Approval to Mitigate Impacts to Cultural and Paleontological Resources

The applicant is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with permit operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate or other scientifically-important fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the applicant must immediately contact the appropriate BLM representative.

3.2. Alternative A – Issue Shuttling SRPs

Under Alternative A, the BLM would issue the following Special Recreation Permits:

Company	Activity	User Days
Arkansas Valley Adventure	Shuttle guests, rental equipment & vehicles	Unlimited
Gore Range Expeditions dba Stand Up Paddle	Shuttle guests, rental equipment	Unlimited
Adventures in Whitewater	Shuttle vehicles (Colorado River and Lower Blue)	Unlimited

For each of the first two years, BLM would issue one year probationary permits to permittees. If the permittees are found to be acceptable on their annual authorizations, the authorized officer can issue multi-year permits (up to 10 years) with an annual renewal of the Annual Operating Authorization. All commercial operations would be from a half day to four days for a single trip.

SHUTTLING

-Colorado River shuttling would occur on Highway 9, Trough Road (Grand County Road 1 and Eagle County Road 11), Confluence Road, Pumphouse Road, Radium Road, and Highway 131.

-Blue River shuttling would occur on County Road 1812, County Road 30, Highway 9, Trough Road, and the Confluence Road.

Maps of these areas are shown in Appendix A.

3.2.1. Design Features of Alternative A

Permits would be reviewed in 2016, 2017, and every five years after that, to assess the resource conditions and observed impacts from recreation uses.

The BLM would inspect disturbed areas along the Colorado River for noxious weeds during the commercial river use timeframe. If noxious weeds are found, it is the responsibility of the BLM to treat the weed infestations.

-The permittees would practice the TREAD LIGHTLY and LEAVE NO TRACE land ethics and inform their clients about these practices and ensure that they follow them.

-All trash produced on commercial trips would be packed out. Trash cannot be deposited in BLM trash receptacles at the Confluence, Pumphouse, Radium Recreation Sites or State Bridge Boat Access.

Resource Protection-

- A. Aesthetics: The permittee would protect the scenic and aesthetic values of the public lands used in the operations, and maintain premises on permitted areas to acceptable standards of repair, orderliness, and cleanliness.
- B. Soils/Vegetation: The permittee and their customers would be restricted to using established roads and river access points where they are available.
- C. Protection of Public Property: Signs, equipment, markers, fences, livestock watering facilities, or any other property found on public land would not be damaged, destroyed, defaced, removed, or disturbed.
- D. The permittee is responsible for knowing where public land boundaries are located and the restrictions that may apply to an area of operation within these boundaries. Maps and information concerning restrictions are available at the local BLM field office.

3.3. No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative constitutes denial of all Special Recreation Permits. Under the No Action Alternative, none of the proposed project components described in the Proposed Action or Alternative A would be implemented.

3.3. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The BLM Kremmling Field Office received over twenty scoping comments on the proposed action to issue five permit modification and ten new river related special recreation permits (please see Public Comment section 2.2 of this document).

Many comments related to current outfitters already filling the specific niches identified in the 2014 River Related Commercial Outfitter/Guide Prospectus. Other comments addressed the capacity of the Upper Colorado River (Pumphouse to State Bridge) and that it was already overcrowded. In addition, questions were raised on how the Kremmling Field Office determined that there is a need for additional outfitters and clients on these stretches of river.

All floatboating, float and wade fishing permits (with the exception of the permits that are being considered and analyzed in detail under the Proposed Action) were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis.

Two floatboating permits are being analyzed in detail as part of the Proposed Action because there are currently no commercial outfitters conducting these services in the Kremmling Field Office. East Grand School District has teachers who are certified guides in the State of Colorado and own their own equipment which makes the price lower than any commercial company and also allows for team building between teachers and students. The other outfitter, Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides, is offering to meet the small niche of multi-day, multi-sport trips (mountain biking, hiking, and rafting) which is a unique service not being offered by other outfitters.

A capacity study should be conducted to gain a better understanding of what services current permittees are providing before new floatboating, float and wade fishing permits will be issued. The study would help determine how to protect the Outstanding Remarkable Values for Wild and Scenic Values and how to best manage to meet the needs of other resources. For these reasons, the issuance of these permits has been considered but eliminated from detailed analysis in this EA.

The BLM Permit Administration Handbook also notes the following:

“Issuance of an SRP is a discretionary action. Applications for an SRP may be denied based on many factors, including nonconformance with land use plans or designations; a moratorium on permits issued as part of a planning process; state licensing requirements; the results of an environmental analysis; other resource values, including the environment and endangered species or antiquities; an allocation system; public health and safety concerns; the applicant’s past performance, including previous convictions for violating federal or state laws or regulations concerning the conservation or protection of natural resources; or the inability of the managing office to issue, manage, and monitor the proposed use. If the field office is unable to fulfill or complete all the necessary steps of issuing and managing an SRP authorization, then an SRP must not be issued. Other factors that may determine whether or not the AO approves an SRP application include recreation conflicts in the proposed area of operations, diversity of services provided to the public, number of similar services already offered, and whether the public land area available is sufficient to accommodate the proposed use.”

4. ISSUES

The CEQ Regulations state that NEPA documents “must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail” (40 CFR 1500.1(b)). While many issues may arise during scoping, not all of the issues raised warrant analysis in an environmental assessment (EA). Issues will be analyzed if: 1) an analysis of the issue is necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives, or 2) if the issue is associated with a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact, or where analysis is necessary to determine the significance of the impacts. The following sections list the resources considered and the determination as to whether they require additional analysis.

4.1. Issues Analyzed

The following issues were identified during internal scoping as potential issues of concern for the Proposed Action. These issues will be addressed in this EA.

- **Aquatic Wildlife:**
 - Threats of introducing invasive aquatic organisms to native waters
- **Migratory Birds:**
 - Permitted actions would take place during the primary nesting season
 - Permitted shuttling activities pose a strike and take hazard to migratory birds
- **Terrestrial Wildlife:**
 - Shuttling vehicles have the potential to strike terrestrial wildlife causing injury or mortality. Vehicle shuttling can also disrupt behavior from increased ambient decibel levels and by stopping for prolonged periods to view or photograph wildlife.
- **Special Status Plant and Animal Species:**
 - Prolonged exposure by permittees and clients could cause avoidance behavior and potentially nest abandonment of bald eagles causing stress and reduced recruitment. Permittees would be briefed annually prior to issue of permits on bald eagle roosts, nests, and protocols to avoid disturbance of these birds.
- **Recreation:**
 - Niches are already being filled by current permit holders
 - Issues with overcrowding such as logistics, speeding on roads, duckies colliding, conflicts with fishermen, lack of parking, too much trash, etc.
 - Need for a carrying capacity study
 - Expansion of quality services for client base is positive.
 - Opportunity to offer unique services.
 - Shuttle companies should be held to the same standards as other permit holders.
- **Access and Transportation:**
 - Issuing of additional permits for new floatboating permits competing with other commercial outfitters and public visitors during periods of heavy use and limited camping opportunities.
- **Social and Economic Conditions:**
 - Additional services may generate new economic activity

4.2. Issues Considered but not Analyzed

- **Air Quality**: The SRMA is within an area that is considered to be meeting the National Ambient air quality standards. There are no known air quality concerns. The Proposed Action, Alternative A, and the No Action Alternative would not have measurable impacts to air quality or to climate change.
- **Geology and Minerals**: No impacts identified.
- **Surface and Ground Water Quality**: The proposed action occurs within the Upper Colorado River Basin on a segment of the Colorado River and the Blue River. The waters are all designated by the State of Colorado for water supply, agriculture, class 1 coldwater aquatic life, and primary contact recreation uses. The State has determined that the Colorado River mainstem is fully supporting recreational uses, but has not evaluated the other uses. Under the Proposed Action, the potential addition of up to 400 user days on the river would be unlikely to measurably effect ground or surface water quality. Alternative A and the No Action Alternative would not impact surface or ground water quality.
- **Soil Resources**: On a landscape scale, soils are considered to be meeting the Land Health Standard and only small site specific concerns exist. The proposed addition of up to 400 user days could increase soil impacts at rest stops and campsites. By monitoring and managing for riparian vegetation, the current soil conditions will be maintained until a capacity study helps determine sustainable recreational use in the area. Upland soils are basically unaffected by most of the river recreational uses. Under Alternative A and the No Action Alternative, there will be no measurable increase to soil impacts.
- **Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights**: No impacts identified.
- **Cultural Resources and Native American Religious Concerns**: The action is not an undertaking as defined by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, 54 U.S.C. § 306108. Therefore consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) is not necessary. Tribal consultation for traditional cultural use is not necessary under Section 106.
- **Paleontological Resources**: Geologic formations sensitive for fossil resources are present, but will not be impacted by the proposed project. BLM standard “discovery” stipulation is part of the environmental assessment and is to be attached to any authorization allowing project to proceed.
- **Invasive Species**: The proposed alternatives would have no significant effect on invasive species expansion, and or introduction. Further analysis is not needed for these actions.
- **Upland Vegetation**: The proposed alternatives would have no significant effect on vegetation within the project area. Further analysis is not needed for these actions.
- **Livestock Grazing**: The proposed alternatives would have no significant effect on livestock grazing within the project area. Further analysis is not needed for these actions.
- **Forestry**: No impacts identified.
- **Fire Management**: The Proposed actions and alternatives would have little to no impacts on Fire Management.
- **Realty Authorizations**: No impacts identified. There are no right-of-ways in the proposed area.

- **Hazardous or Solid Wastes:** No impacts identified.
- **Environmental Justice:** No impacts identified to low income or minority populations.
- **Prime and Unique Farmlands:** No impacts identified. There are no prime and unique farmlands within the project area.
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers:**
 - **Proposed Action:** An addition of 400 floatboating user days (not included guides) would be permitted. Currently, with no user day restrictions, use can fluctuate over 20 percent (up or down) from year to year depending on the economy, gas prices, and water levels. These extra user days would not impact the ORVs designated for the Upper Colorado River. Additional shuttle services will increase the social setting characteristics for the river corridor. People would be happier by having options of businesses to choose from and being able to contact the shuttle drives at any time. This will assist with maintaining the floatboating ORV for the Upper Colorado River.
 - **Alternative A:** Additional shuttle services will increase the social setting characteristics for the river corridor. People would be happier by having options of businesses to choose from and being able to contact the shuttle drives at any time. This will assist with maintaining the floatboating ORV for the Upper Colorado River.
- **Scenic Byways:** Additional shuttle services on the Colorado Headwaters National Scenic and Historic Byway would reduce the speed of some vehicles making the byway users enjoy it more. Permitted outfitters have stipulations attached to their permit, if an outfitter is going above the speed limit (whether an official speeding ticket, complaint from public, or monitored by a BLM employee), a permit can be put on probation or cancelled. With more vehicles being shuttled, fewer private users will be driving on the byway.
- **Wilderness, Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern:** There are no designated Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas in the proximity of the proposed project area. The areas do not possess Wilderness Characteristics due to it having permanent impacts to naturalness and its size being less than 5000 acres due to maintained roads in the area. Nor is it of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. There are no Areas of Critical Environmental Concern located near the Proposed Action.
- **Wetlands and Riparian Zones:** The recreational use in the SRMA impacts the vegetation along trails, in and around campsites, and along the streambanks in high use areas near parking lots and boat ramps, from both commercial and public users. These are more site specific concerns, and the use does not appear to be impacting the overall riparian community. Additional monitoring will help determine how to manage these site specific concerns and how to manage the overall riparian community. All three alternatives are not expected to measurably increase riparian impacts from commercial activities
- **Noise:** Special Recreation Permits (SRP) and the associated activities have little to no additional noise disturbance. Areas proposed for SPR's already have impacts from both public and permittees

for the same uses. There would be no impacts from the Proposed Action or from Alternative A or the No Action Alternative.

5. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

5.1. General Setting & Access to the Project Area

The Upper Colorado Special Recreation Management Area is generally located along US Highway 40 at its intersection with Colorado State Highway 9, and along Grand County Road 1, the Trough Road. The Lower Blue River is accessed from Grand County Road 1 (Trough Road), Highway 9, Summit County Road as shown in the maps in Appendix A.

5.2. Aquatic Wildlife

5.2.1. Affected Environment

The SRP area includes numerous miles of the Colorado River and a section of the Blue River. All of these waters provide habitat for a variety of coldwater fish, waterbirds, and several species of aquatic mammals and invertebrates. Some of the more common fish species inhabiting these waters include brook trout, German brown trout, rainbow trout, mottled sculpin, and several species of suckers and minnows. Some of the waterbirds common to the waters included in the within the SRP area include mallards, green-winged teal, Canada geese, common mergansers, water ouzels, kingfishers, and killdeers. Beavers, muskrats, mink and to a lesser extent river otters are common in the area of the SRP.

5.2.2. Environmental Consequences

Proposed: These SRPs, particularly with the outfitters that provide fishing opportunity would contribute to the mortality of numerous individuals of fish. Additionally, watercraft associated with floating activities can transport invasive aquatic species that can have detrimental effects to aquatic ecosystems. Design criteria and guide knowledge for fish handling and watercraft sanitation would mitigate these threats to the extent that individuals and aquatic systems would not contribute to measurable negative impacts.

Alternative A: Shuttling activities are not expected to have the ability of posing any impact to aquatic wildlife.

No Action: Aquatic wildlife would not be impacted by this alternative.

5.2.3. Mitigation Measures

None

5.3. Migratory Birds

5.3.1. Affected Environment

BLM guidance for migratory birds emphasizes management of habitat for species of conservation concern by avoiding or minimizing negative impacts and restoring and enhancing habitat quality. The proposed project area provides both foraging and nesting habitat for a variety of migratory bird species. Several species on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Birds of Conservation Concern (BCC) list occupy these habitats.

Native plant communities in targeted areas would be comprised of sagebrush and mountain shrub with varying stages of pinyon-juniper tree encroachment to woodland establishment. Sagebrush species occurring on the BCC list that may utilize sagebrush in the proposed SRP areas include sage sparrow, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike and Brewer's sparrow (also a BLM sensitive species). Two pinyon-juniper obligate species listed on the BCC list, the pinyon jay and juniper titmouse may also use this habitat type and can be found in old-growth pinyon-juniper woodlands that may be affected by the proposed treatments. Other perching birds in pinyon-juniper include Neotropical migrants such as the plumbeous vireo, mountain bluebird, black throated gray warbler, Virginia's warbler, and lark sparrow. Scattered pinyon-juniper trees may provide nesting and perching sites for a variety of raptor species.

5.3.2. Environmental Consequences

Proposed: Since project activities would be permitted during the nesting period (May 15 – July 15), there would be potential of impacts to breeding and nesting behavior. Individual birds would likely be displaced from the area during project implementation due to noise, and an increase in human presence. This disturbance would be minimal and short in duration. Actions involved in the proposed SRP would not remove vegetation and would occur mostly on designated areas along the river, minimizing the impact to nests and broods. These actions are unlikely to contribute to need for increased protection for migratory birds. These effects also include shuttling activities described below.

Alternative A: Shuttling activities pose a strike hazard to migratory birds which could cause “take” as defined by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. These occurrences would be incidental and are not expected affect population numbers or contribute to the need of increased protection of migratory bird species.

5.3.3. Environmental Consequences – No Action Alternative

There would be no impact to migratory birds as a result of this alternative.

5.3.4. Mitigation Measures-

None

5.4. Terrestrial Wildlife

5.4.1. Affected Environment

The wide variety of habitat types ranging from Douglas fir forest to irrigated hay meadow which occur in the SRP area provide habitat for numerous wildlife species. Large mammals inhabiting the area include

mule deer, rocky mountain elk, bighorn sheep, mountain lions, and black bears. Small mammals including coyotes, bobcats, foxes, cottontail rabbits, and white-tailed jackrabbit are also common. A variety of birds also inhabit the SRP area and some of the more common species include golden eagles, red-tailed hawks, prairie falcons, blue grouse, turkeys, and numerous songbirds, woodpeckers, and jays. Golden eagles and prairie falcons nest in the cliffs adjacent to the Colorado River in Gore Canyon and below Radium.

The upland habitat which lies adjacent to the Colorado River is especially important winter range for mule deer and rocky mountain elk. These animals migrate to these lands from adjacent high elevation forest habitats to the north and spend winter months on the ridges and slopes which lie north of the Colorado River. Typical winters in the area often involve extreme low temperatures and heavy snowfall. The period of time deer and elk utilize this area is heavily dependent upon these seasonal climatic conditions.

5.4.2. Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action

Proposed: The proposed SRP is not likely to impact terrestrial wildlife unless the associated action of these events increases recreational use of the upland areas associated with the permits. Increases in activities such as camping and increased occupancy of uplands adjacent to the Colorado River could have negative impacts on terrestrial wildlife. The majority of these activities occur when terrestrial wildlife are less dependent on the river for lower elevation feed and migration needs and is therefore not expected to disturb these life functions. Impacts would also include those found in Alternative A below.

Alternative A: Shuttling vehicles could strike terrestrial wildlife causing injury or mortality. Vehicle shuttling could also disrupt behavior from increasing noise. However, SRP holders generally provide high occupancy vehicles that would be able to accommodate large groups without excessive road travel and thereby minimizing many of the negative consequences associated with vehicles and terrestrial wildlife. These trips would also be infrequent in nature and are unlikely to pose measurable threats to this resource.

No Action: There would be no impacts to terrestrial wildlife under this alternative

5.4.3. Mitigation Measures-

None.

5.5. Special Status Plant and Animal Species

5.5.1. Affected Environment

The Colorado River analyzed in the proposed SRP provides important habitat for bald eagles and peregrine falcons. Both are BLM sensitive species. Bald eagles are common residents along the Colorado from October 1 through May 1 annually. Bald eagles perch and roost in large cottonwood and ponderosa pine trees along the river with various nest locations. Road and rail-killed deer, elk, and rabbits provide food for bald eagles during the time they inhabit the Colorado River corridor. Fish are also an important food source. Peregrine falcons consistently nest in Gore Canyon. The Colorado River corridor from Little Gore Canyon south the KFO boundary is within the State Bridge Linkage Area for

Canada Lynx. This has been identified as an important area for movement of Canada lynx between their more permanent home ranges.

5.5.2. Environmental Consequences

Proposed:

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*): These birds are sensitive to human activity near nesting, roosting and foraging habitats. Consecutive nights of camping in proximity to bald eagles could alter eagle behavior and nest success (Steidl and Anthony 2000). Permits provide for camping 5 days both before and after launches take place. This activity may have negative impacts in the earlier stages of nesting when adults are under pressure to feed eaglets and raise them to fledglings. This timeframe usually coincides with high flows along the Colorado when recreational floats are highly sought after. Fishing floats may also coincide with this sensitive time frame which can stress eagles trying to stay on eggs or protect eaglets in nest trees.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*): These raptors are less likely to be impacted by the proposed SRP due their eyries (nests) being high up on canyon walls of the area which they typically defend a territory of 100 yards. These raptors typically prey on waterfowl in this area which could be disrupted by the proposed SRP, but these indirect impacts are expected to be minimal and immeasurable.

Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*): Landscape linkages are put in place to ensure the movement of lynx between home ranges. Actions included in the proposed SRP would not limit movement of lynx between their home ranges and therefore the proposed SRP is not expected to impact this species.

Alternative A: There would be no expected impact to special status species as a result of infrequent shuttling of clients on maintained roads.

5.5.3. Environmental Consequences – No Action Alternative

There would be no impact to special status species under this alternative.

5.5.4. Mitigation Measures

None.

5.6. Recreation

5.6.1. Affected Environment

The proposed action is within the Upper Colorado Special Recreation Management Area (UCR SRMA) and the Blue River (shuttle permit only). These areas are managed to provide and maintain floatboating, fishing opportunities, and associated activities in a roaded-natural setting. Within the UCR SRMA, an estimated 80,000 visitors participate in river-related activities annually. Recreation visitors from Eagle and Routt counties use the Trough Road as a primary access to the Colorado River. Recreation use within these areas peaks from mid-July through Labor Day. The areas proposed for the SRPs are used for dispersed camping or day use by boaters and anglers during the summer months, by big game hunters in

the fall, and by antler shed hunters in the spring. The Upper Colorado River (Pumphouse to State Bridge) commercial river use economic impact in 2014 was \$10,857,787 (CROA, 2014).

Increasing the number of permitted shuttle companies would allow commercial and private floatboaters and float fishermen a diverse option for shuttling services. Currently, only one shuttle company (for commercial outfitters and visitors who own their own equipment) is permitted from Kremmling to State Bridge. Likewise, there is only one rental company that is permitted to shuttle equipment from the business location (Rancho del Rio) to any spot or pick up rental equipment after the guest has floated the river. By adding additional shuttle services, there would be more adequate market competition.

As part of the BLM Kremmling FO RMP revision in progress, the Arizona State University conducted a visitor preference survey within the SRMA. Respondents to the survey identified their most satisfying activities as rafting, kayaking, and fishing. Visiting natural places and participating in recreational activities were the most important factors in visitor satisfaction. Overall, visitors had a very high level of satisfaction; indicated by 4.3 on a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 being extremely satisfied.

The BLM has also updated the recreation setting inventory as part of the RMP revision. The area's remoteness is classified as rural due to the proximity of the Trough Road, CO State Hwy 131 and the railroad. The area's social setting is classified as front country (30 or more encounters and 15 – 25 people per group) due to the proximity of the river to the Trough Road.

The Lower Blue River is managed in the current Kremmling Field Office Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). This area emphasizes traditional dispersed recreation use and is limited to protecting resources rather than managing for recreation with an implementation-level plan. Use levels have not been recorded due to many factors including the boat launch is located off of BLM managed lands and is not monitored, very limited BLM managed lands along the river, multiple boat take-outs, BLM take-out not in a developed recreation site with staff. There is a traffic counter but it is difficult to know who is taking out, who is putting-in, who is walking their dog or viewing information for the scenic byway, or who is just using the road because they know there is a toilet at the end. The Lower Blue River is very dependent on water releases from Green Mountain Dam. When the river is running at a level where boats can float, often on week days there could be between 3-15 vehicles and during the weekends there could be between 10-25 or more vehicles. Typically there are between 2-3 people per boat. During a low water year, the river may never have acceptable water flows for boats and during a high water year, the river may be runnable for 5 or more months.

5.6.2. Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action

The BLM manages public lands for a full range of recreation activities, including rafting, fishing, camping, hunting, etc. About 80,000 visitors use the Upper Colorado River SRMA every year and additional visitors use the Lower Blue River. Currently, about one half of the UCR users use their own equipment and have skills to participate on their own. Others who wish to experience the outdoors in natural settings rely on the services of commercial outfitters who lead trips onto public lands for a fee, rent equipment, and/or require shuttle services. Commercial outfitters, especially fishing outfitters use vehicle shuttle services. River related special recreation permits have been issued since the 1980's and visitors to the area are used to commercial activities.

The two floatboating permits would provide opportunities and knowledge to visitors who would not normally have access to river related activities. Many current outfitters do take schools on the river for a reduced cost but cannot operate as cheaply as East Grand School District (EGSD). The EGSD can provide overnight trips for their students for just the cost of food because all their guides are school teachers, their insurance is covered through the school; use the school buses for transportation, etc. The teachers do not get paid any extra from their base salary thus allowing more students to experience overnight river trips. The EGHS Adventure Education Program incorporates both experiential and academic education through camping, hiking, and rafting trips that weave in hands-on academic treatment ranging from geology to history of the area. EGSD would be allowed to take 200 users (not including guides) per year until a carrying capacity is completed.

Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides (CWR&G) would provide a service that customers cannot currently pay for on the Upper Colorado River. They have a permit application in for the Kremmling Field Office for mountain biking, hiking, and camping as well as the floatboating. They plan on offering 4-5 day multi-sport team building, guided tours for leisure travel guests, corporate entities, government organizations and non-profits. They currently offer shorter multi-sport adventures in other parts of the county but cannot offer floatboating because they do not currently have a floatboating permit. Their ability to have all series in-house allows them to customize and cater to diverse and different populations, individuals, and organizations. Outsourcing a service (floatboating) is not effective for meeting their needs. CWR&G would be allowed to take 200 users (not including guides) per year until a carrying capacity is completed.

These two proposed floatboating outfitters would add 400 user days (not including guides) to the Upper Colorado River. Currently, user days are not restricted for existing commercial or private users. The five year average of user days for commercial outfitters is 34,386. The addition of 400 user days would increase the commercial use by just over one percent. If the private user days are included in the five year average the user days rise to 62,580 and 400 users days would increase the total number by just over 0.5 percent. Commercial outfitter's user days can fluctuate over 20 percent up or down from one year to the next because of the economy, gas prices, and water levels.

EGSD would focus most of their trips in the late spring and early fall when the UCR SRMA is not as busy. CWR&G would have the option of offering their floatboating trips during the week since their customers would be enjoying multiple adventures, over 4-5 days and can easily switch the floatboating to slower times of the week. Overall, most visitors (both commercial and private) would not notice the increase of 400 user days (not including guides). If CWR&G is launching or taking-out on a busy day, it could increase crowding at the launches and through the two rapids.

The two companies applying for new shuttle rental permits are unique because one offers rentals of Stand Up Paddle Boards (SUP) (located at Rancho del Rio) and the other company offers rafts, duckies, personal floatation devises, etc. out of Kremmling. There is a need for these rental companies to offer shuttling for their equipment as most of this equipment is oversized and cannot fit in many vehicles. Users often rent equipment from Gore Range Expedition at Rancho del Rio, get in the river float down to State Bridge, and then have to hitch-hike back to Rancho. This is a health and safety issue for those

customers who have to hitch-hike. Many people like the idea of renting equipment because they already know how to SUP/raft/kayak but cannot afford or do not want to go on a guided trip. If these customers do not have a vehicle that can hold a SUP, this option is not possible.

There is currently one company that rents and shuttles equipment that is based out of Rancho del Rio. If visitors do not want to drive all the way down to Rancho (19 miles from Kremmling on a dirt road) they can rent equipment in Kremmling from Arkansas Valley Adventures (AVA). AVA is applying for rental equipment shuttling from their Kremmling Office as is analyzed in this EA.

The third shuttling company, Adventures in Whitewater (AW), would be shuttling in the UCR SRMA and on the Lower Blue River. Boaters in the UCR SRMA would have two shuttling companies to choose from. Parking at Pumphouse Recreation Site would improve because vehicles would be able to be moved out of the site and downriver quicker. Shuttling prices would stay competitive with the market economy. AW plans on purchasing cell phone boosters so boaters can call the office at any time to have vehicles shuttled and the office can communicate with the shuttle drivers.

Adventures in Whitewater would also provide shuttling services on the Lower Blue River. Currently, there are no permitted shuttle companies on the Lower Blue River. By adding a shuttle company, vehicles will be moved out of the BOR parking area in a more timely matter which will assist BOR reduce safety concerns. A shuttle company will know where and how to most efficiently park vehicles and trailers at the BLM Confluence Road which would reduce resource damage to vegetation. Having a permitted outfitter may also reduce the likelihood of illegal shuttle companies by providing an unmet service and by having the shuttle company looking for suspicious behavior. Shuttle service would improve social setting characteristics and natural resource conditions.

5.6.3. Environmental Consequences – Alternative A

Alternative A would permit the two shuttle rental companies (Gore Range Expeditions and Arkansas Valley Adventures) and the one vehicle shuttling company (Adventures in Whitewater).

The two companies applying for new shuttle rental permits are unique because one offers rentals of Stand Up Paddle Boards (SUP) (located at Rancho del Rio) and the other company offers rafts, duckies, personal floatation devises, etc. out of Kremmling. There is a need for these rental companies to offer shuttling for their equipment as most of this equipment is oversized and cannot fit in many vehicles. Please often rent equipment from Gore Range Expedition at Rancho del Rio, get in the river float down to State Bridge, and then have to hitch-hike back to Rancho. This is a health and safety issue for those customers who have to hitch-hike. Many people like the idea of renting equipment because they already know how to SUP/raft/kayak but cannot afford or do not want to go on a guided trip. If these customers do not have a vehicle that can hold a SUP, this option is not possible.

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The third shuttling company, Adventures in Whitewater (AW), would be shuttling in the UCR SRMA and on the Lower Blue River. Boaters in the UCR SRMA would have two shuttling companies to choose from. Parking at Pumphouse Recreation Site would improve because vehicles would be able to be moved out of the site and downriver quicker. Shuttling prices would stay competitive with the market economy. AW plans on purchasing cell phone boosters so boaters can call the office at any time to have vehicles shuttled and the office can communicate with the shuttle drivers.

Adventures in Whitewater would also provide shuttling services on the Lower Blue River. Currently, there are no permitted shuttle companies on the Lower Blue River. By adding a shuttle company, vehicles will be moved out of the BOR parking area in a more timely matter which will assist BOR reduce safety concerns. A shuttle company will know where and how to most efficiently park vehicles and trailers at the BLM Confluence Road which would reduce resource damage to vegetation. Having a permitted outfitter may also reduce the likelihood of illegal shuttle companies by providing an unmet service and by having the shuttle company looking for suspicious behavior. Shuttle service would improve social setting characteristics and natural resource conditions.

5.6.4. Environmental Consequences – No Action Alternative

No additional shuttle services within the UCR SRMA would keep the shuttle market locked with one outfitter. Since this outfitter does not have competition, prices and quality of services could decline. If the existing outfitter goes out of business or has their permit revoked, there would be no shuttle service for the approximately 80,000 commercial and private users.

No shuttle services on the Lower Blue River would allow for continued resource damage to the vegetation on the BLM managed area near the take-out. Illegal shuttling would continue along with health and safety concerns with unregulated outfitters.

5.6.5. Mitigation Measures

None.

5.7. Social and Economic Conditions

5.7.1. Affected Environment

The proposed action is within the Upper Colorado Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and the Blue River. The economic activity directly related to the issuance of the five SRPs are for businesses or organizations located in Grand County Colorado. As such, the socioeconomic study area for this project is Grand County Colorado as the majority of economic activity generated from permitted activities described in this EA will occur within Grand County. However, not all economic activity related to issuance of special recreation permits will occur within Grand County as some purchases of equipment, services, travel, lodging, and food and beverage is expect to occur in neighboring counties including Eagle and Summit Counties and in other areas outside the study area.

In both Grand County, and neighboring counties including Eagle, Routt, and Summit, recreation is a large component of the economic base. Specifically, food service and recreation industries are the two largest

sectors in Grand County. These sectors employed over 1,800 workers and contributed approximately \$120,000,000.00 to the county's economy in 2012 (IMPLAN, 2012).

5.7.2. Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action

The proposal to approve all or selected river related Special Recreation Permits would allow businesses and organizations to engage in activities that provide services to recreationists. These services may generate new economic activity within the study area. These activities may include creation of jobs, development businesses, procurement of services, and generation taxes.

To examine the economic impacts of the issuance of permits on the Grand County economy the BLM modeled \$100 of new recreational spending using an input-output model. For every \$100 of new recreation spending in the study area an additional \$38 is generated by indirect and induced or multiplier effects in the retail, food and lodging, and professional services sectors (IMPLAN, 2012). This additional \$38 is generated by the “initial change in economic activity” the \$100 of new recreation spending that “results in diminishing rounds of new spending as leakages occur through saving or spending outside the local economy.” (BEA, 2011). More specifically, this additional \$38 is generated as employees purchase food, housing, and other goods and services, and as the businesses purchase equip, facilities, and services required by their operations. Purchases made within Grand County continue the multiplier effect and purchases made outside the county result in leakages.

5.7.3. Environmental Consequences – No Action Alternative

The no action alternative would have no changes from the current social and economic conditions.

5.7.4. Mitigation Measures

None.

5.8. Access and Transportation

5.8.1. Affected Environment

The Upper Colorado Special Recreation Management Area (UCRSRMA) is a highly visited destination utilized for recreational activities including but not limited to floatboating, fishing, hiking, camping, wildlife viewing and hunting. The area receives approximately 80,000 visitors annually with activities occurring along the entire Colorado River corridor in western Grand County and eastern Eagle County. Access to the area is primarily from US Highway 40, Highway 131, Trough Road and access roads to the Pumphouse, Radium and State Bridge Recreation Sites. Other primitive roads and trails provide access to the river for those not utilizing the river channel as a travel way. Once on the river the main mode of transportation is by floatboat whether by commercial or private entity.

5.8.2. Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, three new Special Recreation Permits (SRP) would be issued for shuttling vehicles. Two new SRP's for guided floatboating and related activities would also be issued. One commercial floatboating SRP would be issued to a school that does annual student river trips. The second

commercial floatboating SRP would be issued to an outfitter who provides multi-day team building trips in conjunction with proposed non-river related recreational activities.

Currently, there is only one authorized shuttle provider on the UCR SRMA who provides services to all main access points and recreation sites. The issuance of additional shuttle SRPs would provide beneficial impacts to the public and commercial outfitters that seek shuttle services by providing additional opportunities and choices. The main access roads, access points and recreation sites already are busy during the summer months and there would be limited to no additional impacts from increased traffic or crowding under the Proposed Action.

The issuance of two new commercial SRP's would have limited impacts due to user day constraints identified within the Proposed Action. The East Grand School District would be limited to 200 user days and is already counted in approximate annual visitors on the UCR SRMA due to conducting an overnight student river trip annually. They have contracted other authorized outfitters to provide support and the State of Colorado required River Outfitters License. This trip occurs at the end of September when visitation is lower, with camping located at developed recreation site group campsites which are reserved ahead of time. Busses and vans are utilized by the school district which limits additional vehicle use within the UCR SRMA. Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides would also be limited to 200 user days for floatboating, fishing and camping associated with other proposed uses outside of the UCR SRMA. If use was to occur sporadically throughout the summer there would be limited adverse impacts to visitor access and transportation associated with existing recreational activities along the river corridor. Additional use during high use weekends including holidays or when events or festivals occur along the river corridor would have the greatest adverse impact to other commercial outfitters or public visitors. There are limited camp locations, whether at developed recreation sites, undeveloped areas of BLM-administered lands and at campsites along the river itself that visitors floatboat or hike to. Increasing pressure to already limited resources during high use periods may have adverse impacts to other users to the area or to area resources if displacement resulted in new camp locations being developed.

5.8.3. Environmental Consequences – Alternative A

Under Alternative A, only the shuttle SRP's would be issued and there would be no additional commercial SRP's issued for floatboating related activities. Impacts for adding new shuttle services would be the same as identified in the Proposed Action analysis above.

By not issuing new commercial SRP's for floatboating related activities, the East Grand School District would be unable to provide an annual student overnight trip under their own ability. They would continue to be required to contract with an existing outfitter to provide the State of Colorado required River Outfitters License and authorized SRP. This would not reduce existing use on the river and there would be no to limited change in existing conditions. Colorado Wilderness Rides and Guides would also not be issues a SRP and their ability to provide multi-day team building activities would be limited to those that are authorized elsewhere or would be required to contract an outside entity already under permit. Under this alternative there would be no increase in commercial user days from this service provider and no additional impacts to limited camp resources.

5.8.4. Environmental Consequences – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative no new SRP's would be issued for shuttle services or commercial floatboating related activities. The public would not be provided with new shuttle service alternatives and the associated beneficial impacts while be limited to the existing permittee. Impacts for not issuing new commercial floatboating SRP's would be similar or the same as identified in the Alternative A analysis above.

5.8.5. Mitigation Measures

None.

6. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSIS

6.1. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider the cumulative effects of proposals under their review. Cumulative effects are defined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations 40 CFR §1508.7 as "...the impact on the environment that results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency...or person undertakes such other actions." The CEQ states that the "cumulative effects analyses should be conducted on the scale of human communities, landscapes, watersheds, or airsheds" using the concept of "project impact zone" or more simply put, the area that might be affected by the proposed action. The area that may be affected by this project are the 5th order watersheds which include the Colorado River above State Bridge and the Lower Blue River. The following list includes all past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions known to the BLM that may occur within the affected area:

6.1.1. Past Actions

Colorado Big Thompson Project & Denver Water Board reservoirs (Green Mtn., Granby, Williams Fork) provide for mid-July to August flows sufficient for rafting

6.1.2. Present Actions

Transbasin water diversions increase low summer flows, possibly contributing to stream temperature concerns, reduce dilution flows, increasing sediment load concerns.

6.1.3. Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

There would continue to be upgrades along the river corridor if recreation continues to increase. The improvements will accommodate more people. The Pumphouse road has been designated for Federal Highway money to be realigned and paved increasing the quality and safety of the access to the river.

The BLM is currently working on a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Kremmling Field Office, which includes the Upper Colorado River SRMA. This RMP is anticipated to be completed in 2015, and would include additional management prescription for these areas.

6.2. Cumulative Impacts by Resource

6.2.1. Soil Resources

Within the SRMA, there are also impacts to soils from upland recreational uses such as hunting, hiking, vegetation treatments, and ORV use. It is felt that the commercial river recreationists are a small, more site specific, impact to the riparian area and the immediate vicinity, and that in the cumulative analysis, do not measurably impact overall soil health. Commercial users tend to use developed sites, which help reduce user created paths and sites. Permit fees help provide the revenue needed to mitigate all recreationists' impacts. At the present time, however, there has not been specific soil monitoring occurring in these recreation sites. Soil monitoring as part of the carrying capacity study could help determine soil health in the recreation sites. There would be no measurable difference to soil health from the selection of any of the three alternatives.

6.2.2. Floodplains, Hydrology, Water Quality, and Water Rights

Water quality concerns for the stream segments involved are all affected by upstream land owners and water diversions. The Colorado Rivers' water quality would be more reflective of land uses upstream of the SRMA than the public land segments. Besides some possible site specific impacts, BLM's uses would not likely add to the cumulative impacts of private land uses, transbasin diversions, water treatment, road and highway drainage, sub-developments, and railroad disturbances that occur upstream and within the public segments. Monitoring of water quality, however, will continue to help insure that public lands are not affecting water quality and water resources. There is no substantive difference between any of the alternatives to water quality.

6.2.3. Wetlands and Riparian Zones

The riparian zones along these segments of the Blue and Colorado River are generally considered to be in properly functioning condition. There are concerns about invasive species in the riparian communities, along with streambank damage due to recreational uses. In addition to recreation, the communities are impacted by roads, the railroad, and streamflows. Monitoring will help direct the management of the riparian areas to help lessen overall impacts to these areas. There is no substantial difference between the three alternatives to the overall cumulative impact to riparian areas.

6.2.4. Aquatic Wildlife:

These SRPs, particularly with the outfitters that provide fishing opportunity would contribute to the mortality of numerous individuals of fish. Additionally, watercraft associated with floating activities can transport invasive aquatic species that can have detrimental effects to aquatic ecosystems. This action combined with increased use of increased public use may increase to the extent of negative population trends and altered aquatic species composition.

6.2.5. Migratory Birds:

Increased recreation use is expected in these areas in the reasonably foreseeable future. This action combined with future human use of the SRP area are expected to cause negative impacts to migratory birds including reproductive disruption and decreased recruitment. BLM has an obligation to conserve

these species while maintaining a multiple use mission that would require a user day and activity cap to conserve the wildlife resources of this popular stretch of the Colorado River in the near future.

6.2.6. Terrestrial Wildlife-

Increased recreation use is expected in these areas in the reasonably foreseeable future. This action combined with future human use of the SRP area are expected to cause negative impacts to terrestrial wildlife including avoidance behavior and decreased recruitment. BLM has an obligation to conserve these species while maintaining a multiple use mission that would require a user day and activity cap to conserve the wildlife resources of this popular stretch of the Colorado River in the near future.

6.2.7. Special Status Plant and Animal Species-

Increased recreation use is expected in these areas in the reasonably foreseeable future. This action combined with future human use of the SRP area are expected to cause negative impacts to special status species including avoidance behavior and decreased recruitment. BLM has an obligation to conserve these species while maintaining a multiple use mission that would require a user day and activity cap to conserve the wildlife resources of this popular stretch of the Colorado River in the near future.

6.2.8. Recreation

Recreation use fluctuates in these areas given many uncontrollable factors such as economy, gas prices, water levels, etc. With unregulated user days with existing SRPs, an addition of 400 user days would not be noticed by many people. A carrying capacity study must be completed to understand social setting characteristics. Health and safety and resource protection would benefit from additional shuttle services.

6.2.9. Access and Transportation

The addition of new shuttle service SRP's and would likely not create cumulative impacts when considered with other resources and resource uses. Access roads and facilities are typically maintained and use fluctuates depending on the time of year. As visitation and use fluctuates adding additional commercial SRP's during high use periods with other public resource uses may have a limited cumulative adverse impact. However, use by the East Grand School District already occurs and is likely to continue through the foreseeable future and issuing this SRP would have limited to no cumulative impacts. Issuing an SRP that would increase visitation and competition for limited resources may have cumulative impacts when taken into account with other resource use such as commercial and public recreational use.

7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

7.1. Interdisciplinary Review

Table 1. List of Preparers

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility	Date Signed
Paula Belcher	Hydrologist	Air Quality; Surface and Ground Water Quality; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Rights; Soils; Wetland and Riparian Zones	5/1/2015
Bill Wyatt	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources; Native American Religious Concerns; Paleontological Resources	5/7/2015
Darren Long	Biologist	Special Status Plant and Animal Species, Migratory Birds, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife	5/1/2015
Zach Hughes	NRS	Vegetation; Invasive, Non-Native Species; Rangeland Management	04/16/2015
Kelly Elliott	NRS	Geology and Minerals; Hazardous or Solid Wastes	05/08/15
Kevin Thompson	Fire Management Specialist	Fire Management	04/16/2015
John Monkouski	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Lands with Wilderness Characteristics; Wilderness Study Areas; Recreation; Access and Transportation; Noise	05/11/2015
Hannah Schechter	Outdoor Recreation Planner, Project Lead	Recreation; Visual Resources; Scenic Byways; Wild and Scenic Rivers	05/21/2015
Annie Sperandio	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations	5/12/2015
Martin Hensley	Economist	Social and Economic Conditions and Environmental Justice	5/5/2015
Susan Valente	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Compliance	5/21/2015

7.2. References

BEA, 2011 https://www.bea.gov/papers/pdf/WP_IOMIA_RIMSII_020612.pdf
IMPLAN, 2012 Implan Version 3 and 2012 Implan State Package for Colorado

Colorado River Outfitters Association, 2014. Commercial River use in the State of Colorado 1988-2014.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
KREMMLING FIELD OFFICE



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Upper Colorado River SRPs
DOI-BLM-LLCONO2000-2015-011-EA

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, and considering the significance criteria in 40 CFR 1508.27, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not required.

BACKGROUND

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to analyze public demand for services provided by commercial outfitters and guides related to river operations including: floatboating, fishing, and shuttle services within the Kremmling Field Office. Currently, 61 permittees are authorized for commercial river related operations on the Upper Colorado River. The 61 permittees hold a total of 71 permits- 40 floatboating permits, 30 fishing permits, and one shuttle permit- as some companies hold both a floatboating and fishing permit.

Outfitting activities are an essential tourism support service that assists visitors on public lands. Commercial outfitters play an important role in facilitating safe public use and enjoyment of recreational activities. Visitors who engage the services of river related outfitters include first time visitors to the area as well as repeat customers. Many are from out of state and are not familiar with river conditions, access, and/or climate. Most visitors do not have the equipment needed to participate in the outdoor recreation activities which they seek. In turn, the use of public land is vital to river permittees' operations and their clients' enjoyment.

Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) are issued to applicants who fulfill application requirements under current BLM policy and guidelines set by the BLM's Colorado Northwest District Office.

In 2009, a Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report was conducted for the BLM Kremmling Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision. The Upper Colorado River, from Gore Canyon to State Bridge, was determined to be eligible, with the primary outstandingly remarkable value (ORV) of recreational (floatboating, fishing, and scenic driving). The segment may be determined suitable in the final Record of Decision for the BLM Kremmling Field Office RMP, which is expected to be completed in 2015. As an eligible stream segment, the BLM is prevented from taking any actions that would diminish the free-flowing nature, outstandingly remarkable values, and water quality of the subject segment.

The Bureau of Land Management prepared an Environmental Assessment which analyzed the effects of river related SRPs within the Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area and the Lower Blue River. The EA considered a range of alternatives from zero commercial users to 400 commercial floatboaters and an unlimited number of shuttles. The EA was made available for a 30-day public review on May 21, 2015.

INTENSITY

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Commercial River Special Recreation Permits decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. Commercial outfitters provide a high quality service that many people cannot provide for themselves. The majority of the commercial users are from outside of Grand County and even tourists from outside of the State. Most visitors who use commercial services do not have access to equipment or knowledge for floatboating or shuttling. Commercial outfitters are natural resource educators for the general public. They are trained in Leave No Trace ethics and River Etiquette and teach their customers about these philosophies as well as public land use ethics. Not permitting these outfitters would have an adverse impact on the visitors, rafting companies, and shuttle companies. After the capacity study is completed, permit applications for specific activities may be a submitted depending on the outcome of the study.

There would be some adverse impacts to resources just from the additional use of commercial visitors. Stipulations would assist in minimizing these impacts and if a company is not adhering to the stipulations, their permit would be put on probation. If the issue is not corrected within a year, the permit would be revoked.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety. The proposed action has stipulations that protect public health and safety on public lands.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. The Upper Colorado River Special Recreation Management Area has two segments within the Wild and Scenic Suitability Report completed in 2011. Cultural and historic resources of the Upper Colorado River are identified ORVs.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment are not considered highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Floatboating and shuttling have taken place in the area for over 20 years. The commercial day use has fluctuated between 30,000 and 40,000 people since 1991. The effects on the human environment from the proposed action are known and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for the future, nor does it represent a decision in principle about future considerations. This EA includes stipulations which allow for the BLM to cancel the Special Recreation Permits if BLM policies are not being met.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. There are no significant cumulative effects on the environment, either when combined with the effects created by past and concurrent projects, or when combined with the effects from natural changes taking place in the environment or from reasonably foreseeable future projects.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The proposed action would not adversely affect any districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The project would not adversely affect any sensitive, threatened, endangered or proposed for listing species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed action does not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the "Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan," (1984/1999); (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Resource Management Plan; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR '1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA.

/s/ Stephanie Odell

Stephanie Odell
Field Manager, BLM Kremmling Field Office

July 7, 2015

Date

Decision Record

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Kremmling Field Office
2103 E. Park Ave, Kremmling, CO 80459

Upper Colorado River SRPs
DOI-BLM-LLCONO2000-2015-011

Decision

It is my decision to authorize the Proposed Action as described in the attached EA. This decision is contingent on meeting all compliance and monitoring items listed below.

For each of the first two years, BLM would issue one year probationary permits to permittees. If the permittees are found to be acceptable on their annual authorizations, the authorized officer may issue multi-year permits (up to 10 years) with an annual renewal of the Annual Operating Authorization. All commercial operations would be from a half day to four days for a single trip.

Compliance and Monitoring

1. Permits would be reviewed in 2016, 2017, and every five years after that, to assess the resource conditions and observed impacts from recreation uses.
2. The BLM would inspect disturbed areas along the Colorado River for noxious weeds during the commercial river use timeframe. If noxious weeds are found, it is the responsibility of the BLM to treat the weed infestations.
3. The permittees would practice the TREAD LIGHTLY and LEAVE NO TRACE land ethics and inform their clients about these practices and ensure that they follow them.
4. All trash produced on commercial trips would be packed out. Trash cannot be deposited in BLM trash receptacles at the Confluence, Pumphouse, Radium Recreation Sites or State Bridge Boat Access.
5. Campsites-
 - a) Camps may be set up for no longer than necessary. No year-round, permanent camps may be established on BLM lands; only temporary facilities are permitted.
 - b) Camps would be located to avoid conflict with public road and trail traffic, and stream or lake access, and to the extent possible would be located out of sight of major trails.
 - c) All campsites and temporary improvements would be as described in the approved operating plan.
 - d) All campsite facilities including but not limited to tents and latrines, would be located at least 200 feet from the nearest spring, stream, lake, pond or reservoir unless specifically authorized otherwise.
 - e) All campsites must be approved prior to use. Clearances may be required, such as inventories for cultural resources and/or for threatened or endangered species.
 - f) All overnight trips would carry a portable toilet system, either a washable, reusable system or an EPA-approved bag system. All solid human waste would be packed out.
6. Campfires-
 - a) All overnight trips would carry and use a firepan. All fire ash would be packed out.
 - b) Campfires would be completely extinguished when left unattended. The permittee is

responsible for all resource damages caused by a fire(s) started by him/herself, employees, or clients, and may be held responsible for fire suppression costs resulting from wildfire caused by his/her operations.

- c) An axe, shovel, water bucket or extinguisher for fire control would be available at each campfire.
- d) Wildfire caused by the permitted operation would be reported immediately to the nearest BLM office and or call 911. The permittee is responsible for informing employees, clients, and participants of the current fire danger and required restrictions or precautions that may be in effect.

7. Resource Protection-

- a) Aesthetics: Permittee would protect the scenic and aesthetic values of the public lands used in the operations, and maintain premises on permitted areas to acceptable standards of repair, orderliness, and cleanliness.
- b) Rehabilitation: After camps and other temporary facilities are dismantled, insofar as practical, the area would be left in a natural state.
- c) Trash Disposal: Camps and other permitted areas would be regularly cleaned and no trash or litter would be allowed to accumulate. Combustible trash may be burned when campfires are authorized. All non-combustible trash, including but not limited to tin cans, spent brass, glass bottles, foil, and wire would be packed out. Trash shall not be buried on public land.
- d) Waste or by-products of any kind would not be discharged into any stream, reservoir, lake or pond.
- e) Soils/Vegetation: Permittee and their customers would be restricted to using established trails, stream crossings, or river access points where they are available.
- f) Vegetation Damage/Removal: All operations would be conducted in a manner which prevents damage to or loss of vegetation cover. Cutting, clearing or defacing of standing trees, alive or dead, or clearing and cutting of shrub/groundcover for any other reason would require specific advance authorization. When tree cutting is authorized, stumps would be left no higher than six inches above ground level and slash shall be lopped and scattered. A separate permit is required for removal and transportation of woodland/tree products from public land.
- g) Firewood Cutting: All firewood for commercial overnight trips must be brought to the river. No collection of dead, down, or drift wood is permitted.
- h) Protection of Public Property: Signs, equipment, markers, fences, livestock watering facilities, or any other property found on public land would not be damaged, destroyed, defaced, removed, or disturbed.
- i) Cultural Resources: All persons associated with operations under this permit must be informed that any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological, and scientific interest, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils, or artifacts shall not be damaged, destroyed, removed or disturbed. If in connection with operations under this permit any of the above resources

are discovered, the permittee would immediately stop operations in the immediate area of the discovery, protect such resources, and notify the BLM authorized officer of the discovery. The immediate area of the discovery must be protected until the operator is notified in writing to proceed by the authorized officer.

- j) Permittee is responsible for knowing where public land boundaries are located and the restrictions that may apply to an area of operation within these boundaries. Maps and information concerning restrictions are available at the local BLM field office.
 - k) Permittee would inform guides and outfitters to float past identified bald eagle nesting/roosting areas and keep noise to a minimum. This may also hold true if an eagle is sighted perching or within 100 feet of the shoreline.
8. At annual BLM/Outfitter meetings, and attached to the permit should be information regarding:
- a) The use of established fish handling protocols designed to minimize stress associated with the playing of fish, removal of hooks, and release of fish back into the water.
 - b) Importance of foregoing fishing activities in the late afternoon or when water temperatures exceed 65 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce stress and post handling mortality.
 - c) Aquatic invasive species and suggestions on how to minimize the spread of these species via proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures. Recommendations that equipment be cleaned and disinfected between uses particularly if moving to new water bodies.

Compliance with Laws & Conformance with the Land Use Plan

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the Kremmling Resource Management Plan (RMP), and Record of Decision (ROD) approved December 19, 1984 and updated February 1999

Environmental Analysis and Finding of No Significant Impact

The Proposed Action was analyzed in DOI-BLM-N02-2015-011-EA and it was found to have no significant impacts, thus an EIS is not required.

Public Involvement

Scoping was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. Internal was initiated on February 2, 2105 and external scoping was initiated on February 26, 2015 (see EA Chapter 2). Press releases and articles were also printed the local newspapers in Ski Hi Daily, Vail Daily, and the Grand Gazette. More than twenty comments were received.

After internal and external scoping was conducted, a preliminary EA was posted on the BLM online NEPA register on May 21, 2015 and the public was allowed to submit comments. Details of this process can be found in the attached Appendix B.

The signed Decision Record was then posted on the BLMs on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on the date of its signing.

Rationale

Analysis of the Proposed Action has concluded that there are no significant negative impacts and that it meets Colorado Standards for Public Land Health.

Administrative Remedies

Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a Notice of Appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at Kremmling Field Office, 2103 E. Park Ave, Kremmling CO 80459 with copies sent to the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood, CO 80215, and to the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA, 22203. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the above address within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

Signature of Authorized Official

/s/ Stephanie Odell

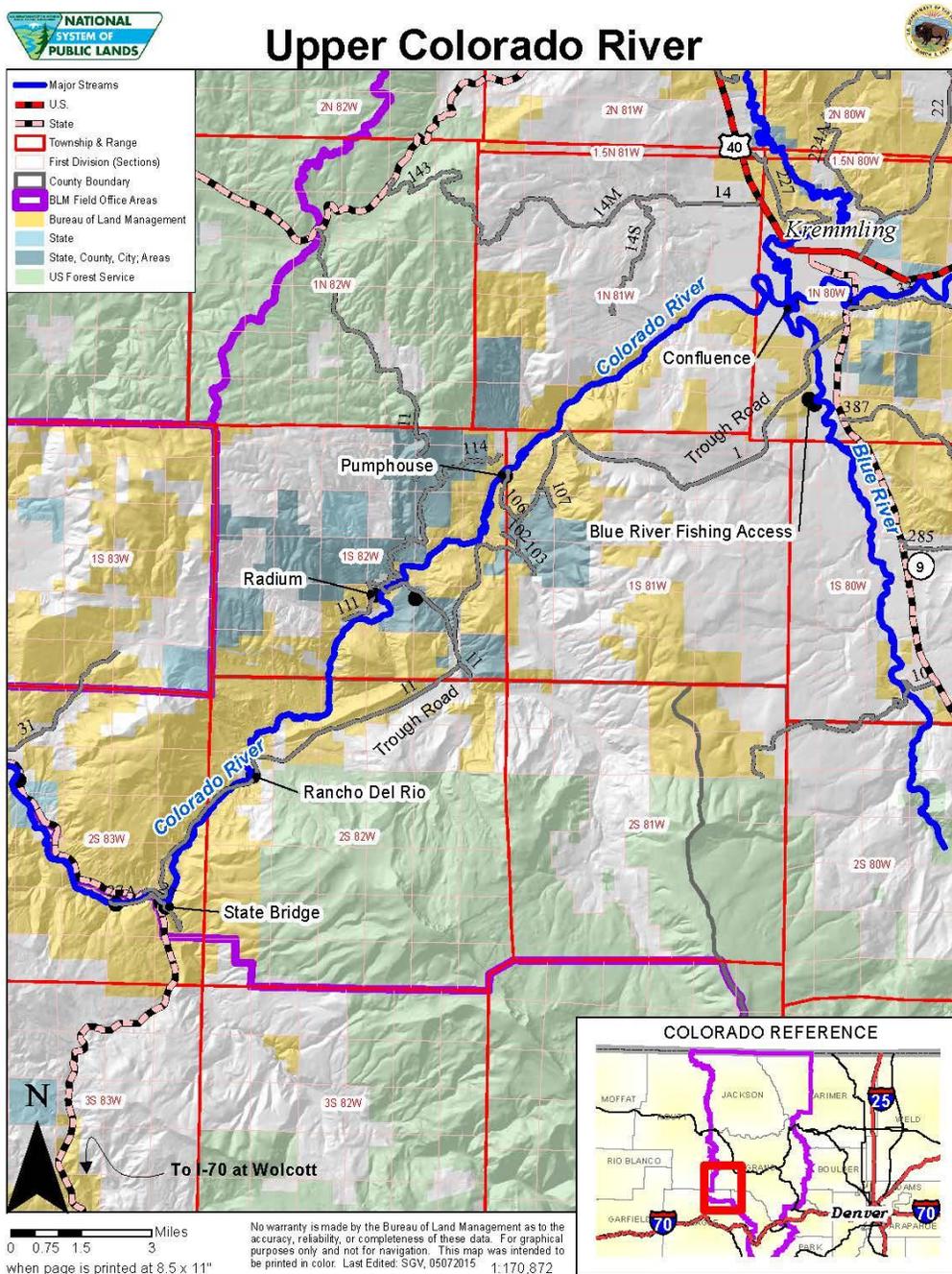
Field Manager

July 7, 2015

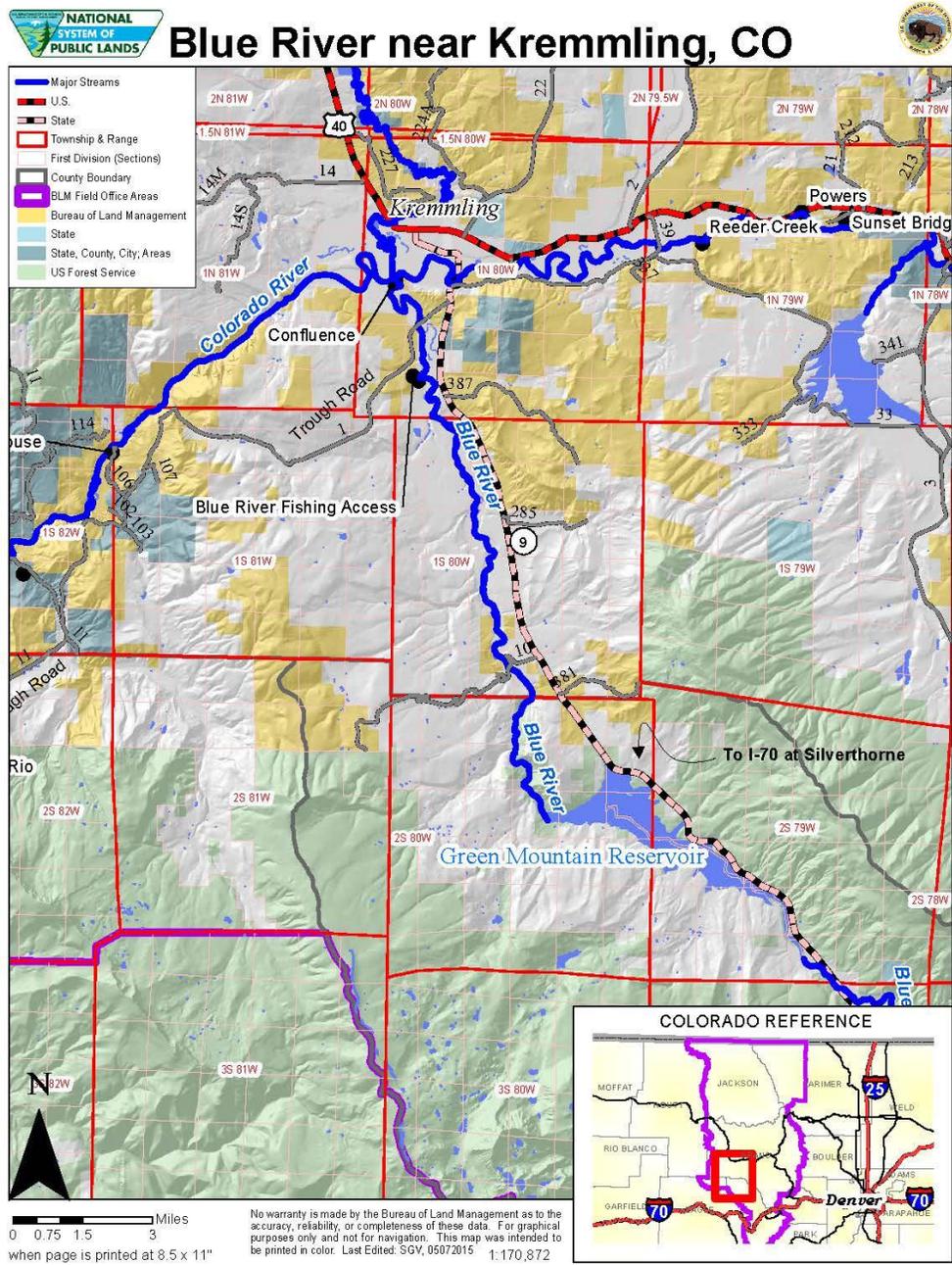
Date

APPENDIX A. FIGURES

Map 1: Upper Colorado River from Kremmling to State Bridge



Map 2: Blue River Shuttle Area



APPENDIX B. RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

A preliminary version of this environmental assessment was posted to the BLM NEPA register (https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/lup/lup_register.do) on May 29, 2015. Several comments were received over the 30-day comment period. The comments in their entirety have been posted on the BLM NEPA register and the substantive pieces are summarized below.

Many of the comments received were in relationship to the permitting process and not this Environmental Assessment and so therefore were not considered substantive. They have however, been filed with the permitting analysis process itself.

Comment 1: There are limited fishing outfitters and guides within Grand County and the area is therefore underserved.

Comment 2: There would be no significant impact from the issuance of additional fishing outfitter and guide permits and so it should be allowed.

Comment 3: More affordable, qualified, and experienced outfitters should be permitted between Pumphouse and State Bridge on the Colorado River.

Comment 4: More reputable companies are needed on this portion of the river to maintain competitive pricing and improve service and quality.

Comment 5: Professional fishing guides do not interfere with rafting companies and only add a couple of boats which is in contrast to many rafting companies have no limit to the number of boats they can put on the water. Fishing outfitters also have fewer people per boat than do rafting companies in general.

Comment 6: Additional fly fishing outfitters would benefit the local economy.

Response to comments 1 through 6: Thank you for your comments. The BLM needs to complete a capacity study and gain a better understanding of what services current permittees are conducting before new floatboating, float and wade fishing permits can be issued. The study would help determine how to protect the Outstanding Remarkable Values for Wild and Scenic Values in addition to helping to guide management for other resource values. For these reasons, the issuance of these permits has been considered but eliminated from detailed analysis in this EA. In the 2012 Environmental Assessment for the Commercial River Special Recreation Permits and in the 2015 Kremmling Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment, concerns were raised regarding the need for a carrying capacity for the Upper Colorado River. The carrying capacity would help determine how the BLM could manage recreational uses while maintaining environmental and cultural values. In the RMP amendment, the BLM adopted the Wild and Scenic Stakeholders' Group Management Plan

Comment 7: Professional guided services provide the vital role of taking care of the river and clean up after many general public users.

Response to comment 7: Thank you for your comment. It is true that commercial services can help reduce recreational impacts to the river corridor.