

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Environmental Assessment

Pre-Scoping Public Input

Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan

DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2021-0020 EA

April 2021

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction.....	2
1.1.	Identifying Information	2
1.2.	Introduction and Background.....	2
1.3.	BLM Purpose and Need	2

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Chaffee County Camping and Travel Management Plan

NEPA DOCUMENT NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2021-0020-EA

1.2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The BLM is preparing to develop a plan to manage camping and associated vehicle routes in Chaffee County, Colorado and is seeking early public input to help inform this plan. The need to develop a camping management plan is in direct response to increased demand for high quality camping experiences combined with documented increases in impacts to natural resources, increases in human waste due to lack of facilities, trash, as well as conflicts between visitors and other public lands users. The management plan's goal is to address issues and concerns associated with camping on public lands as well as meet the demand for a range of camping opportunities. There is also a need to establish a designated route network for areas with high camping demand and a travel management plan is not currently in place. This includes highly visited public lands such as Shavano. The plan also intends to put into place monitoring and adaptive management strategies to respond to changes in demand and visitor behavior.

The BLM is seeking comments on how best to manage camping on public lands in Chaffee County, Colorado. This includes consideration of specific management strategies that should be considered for high visitation areas as well as identifying routes or campsites that should be considered for inclusion in a designated route network to support camping management.

Please use the interactive map to provide site specific comments on either camp sites, routes, or areas. General comments can be submitted through the document comment function.

1.3. BLM PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need of the action stems from laws that direct the management of public lands including the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) outlining BLM's multiple use mandate. FLPMA also establishes the requirement to develop Land Use Plans specifying how resources will be managed for each Field Office. For the BLM Royal Gorge Field Office this is the 1996 Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan (RMP). While this plan is currently undergoing revision, the 1996 plan is the plan that is in effect until the new plan is signed and adopted. The plan identifies the need to address health and human safety when managing for recreation as well as maintaining land health standards for continuity in providing healthy and productive working landscapes.

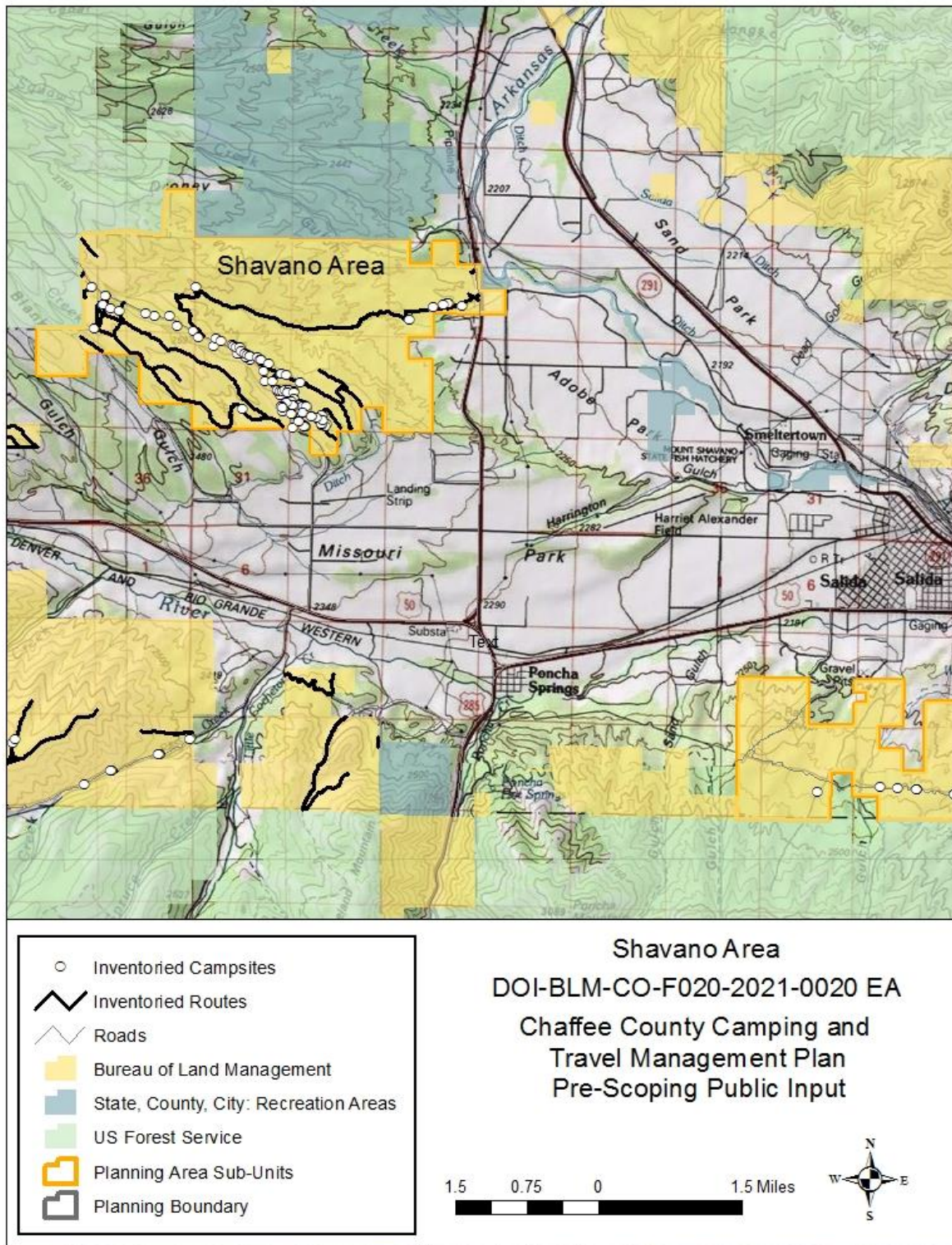
Observations by both staff and other public land users indicate the impacts associated with unmanaged vehicle based dispersed camping in high visitation areas is starting to impact these land health standards. Increased occurrence of barren soil adjacent to roads in areas of high recreation visitation is the primary indicator of this. Staff have also identified increased instances of human waste and trash surrounding preferred camping areas as well as conflicts between visitors or other land users. Anecdotally, staff is also beginning to notice a decrease in visitor satisfaction as vehicle based campsites become unsightly from trash and human waste or are experiencing stress in trying to locate camping opportunities. This all indicates a need to move forward in developing a management framework and strategy for vehicle based dispersed camping in the Shavano area.

1.4. AREA DESCRIPTIONS

Below are descriptions and maps of sub-units within the planning area that the BLM is seeking public input on.

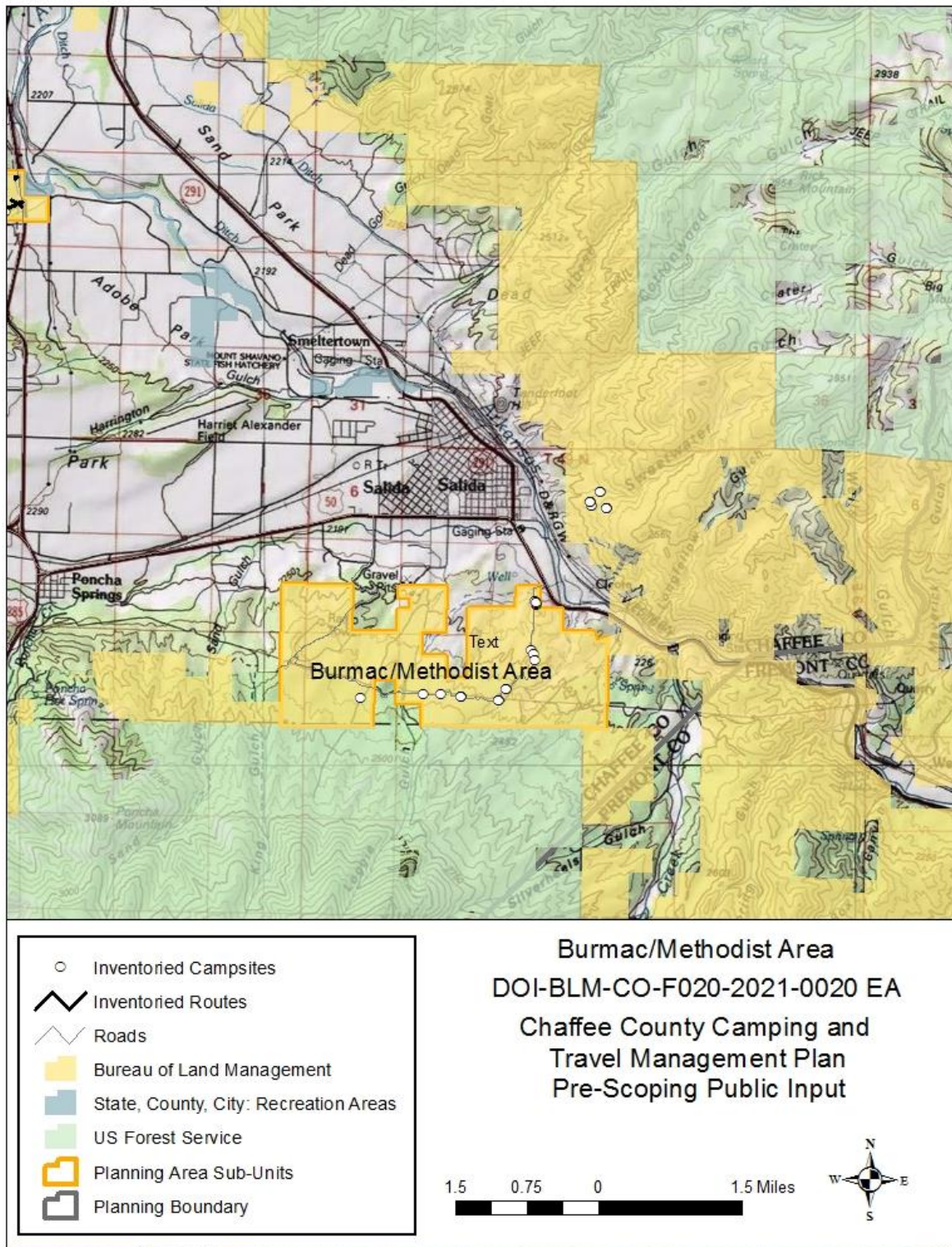
Shavano Area

- Located just 6 miles west of Salida and along a primary access road into US Forest Service lands, the relatively open and flat 4,720 acre Shavano area has seen dramatic increases in dispersed camping volume and impacts over the past 5 years.
- Increased use has led to impacts on grazing operations in the area, loss of forage, impacts to wildlife, and concerns from neighboring property owners.
- Dispersed campsites often have multiple fire rings, trash, and evidence of human waste that is degrading access to a quality recreation experience.
- Without a travel management network in place, campers have created an extensive network of user created routes impacting grazing forage.



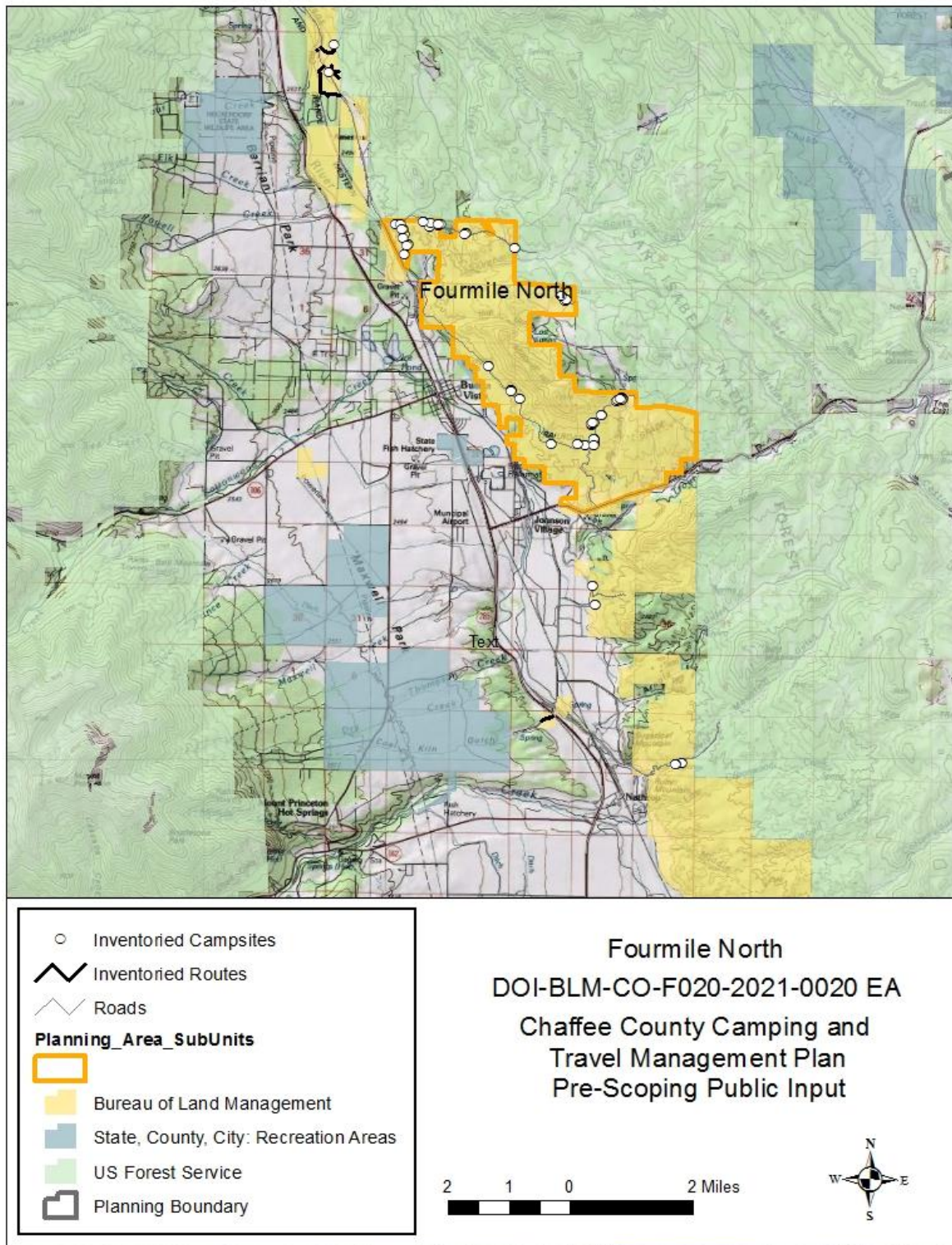
Burmac/Methodist Area

- The public lands directly adjacent to Salida sees high volumes of recreation use on an extensive trail network.
- The designated trail network was established through the 2006 Arkansas River Travel Management Plan, which has an allowance for visitors to travel up to 100' off designated route for camping and parking, and was later supplemented with additional planning efforts to add additional trails.
- Due to the proximity to Salida many areas within this sub-unit have become a popular destination for people wishing to reside on public land resulting in high volumes of trash, human waste and drug paraphernalia creating an unsafe environment for visitors.
- At the same time the trail network has created a demand for camping opportunities which are currently limited or are in an undesirable state.



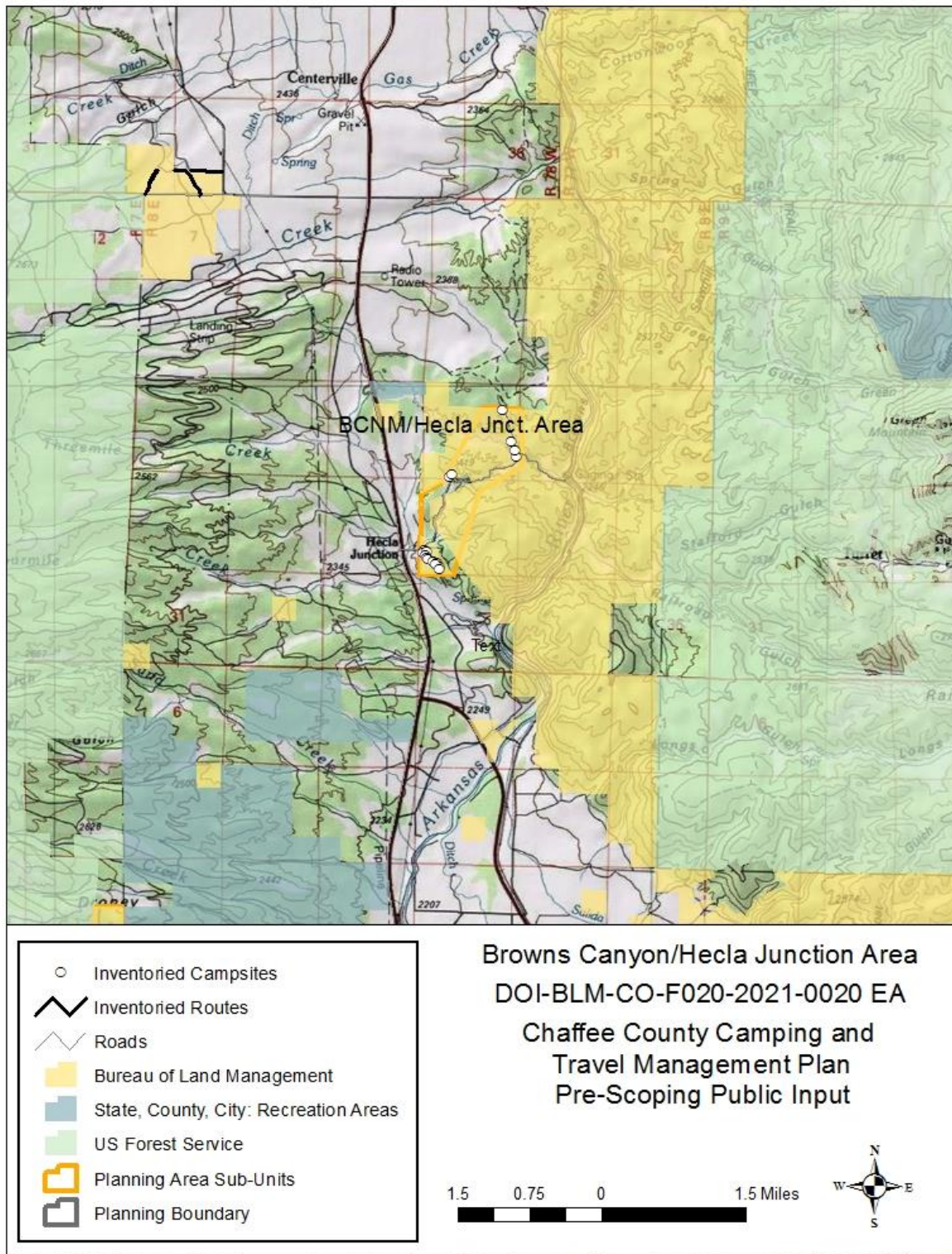
Fourmile North

- The Fourmile area is 9,000 acres of BLM land and offers numerous recreation opportunities outside of Buena Vista, Colorado.
- The routes in this area were designated through the Fourmile Travel Management Plan in 2002 with a number of modifications in recent years to add additional trails and recreation opportunities.
- Recent inventories show 60 user created dispersed campsites in this sub-unit and the area is also home to the Turtle Rock Campground, a concentrated camping area that has grown over the years to include a number of camping amenities including a vault toilet, a hardened access road, information kiosks, and contained campsites.
- Currently the campground does not have a fee, however management costs are continuing to increase with increased visitation.
- The current travel management plan provided an allowance for visitors to travel up to 100' off of a designated route for parking and camping which in recent years has led to an increase in impacts from dispersed camping.



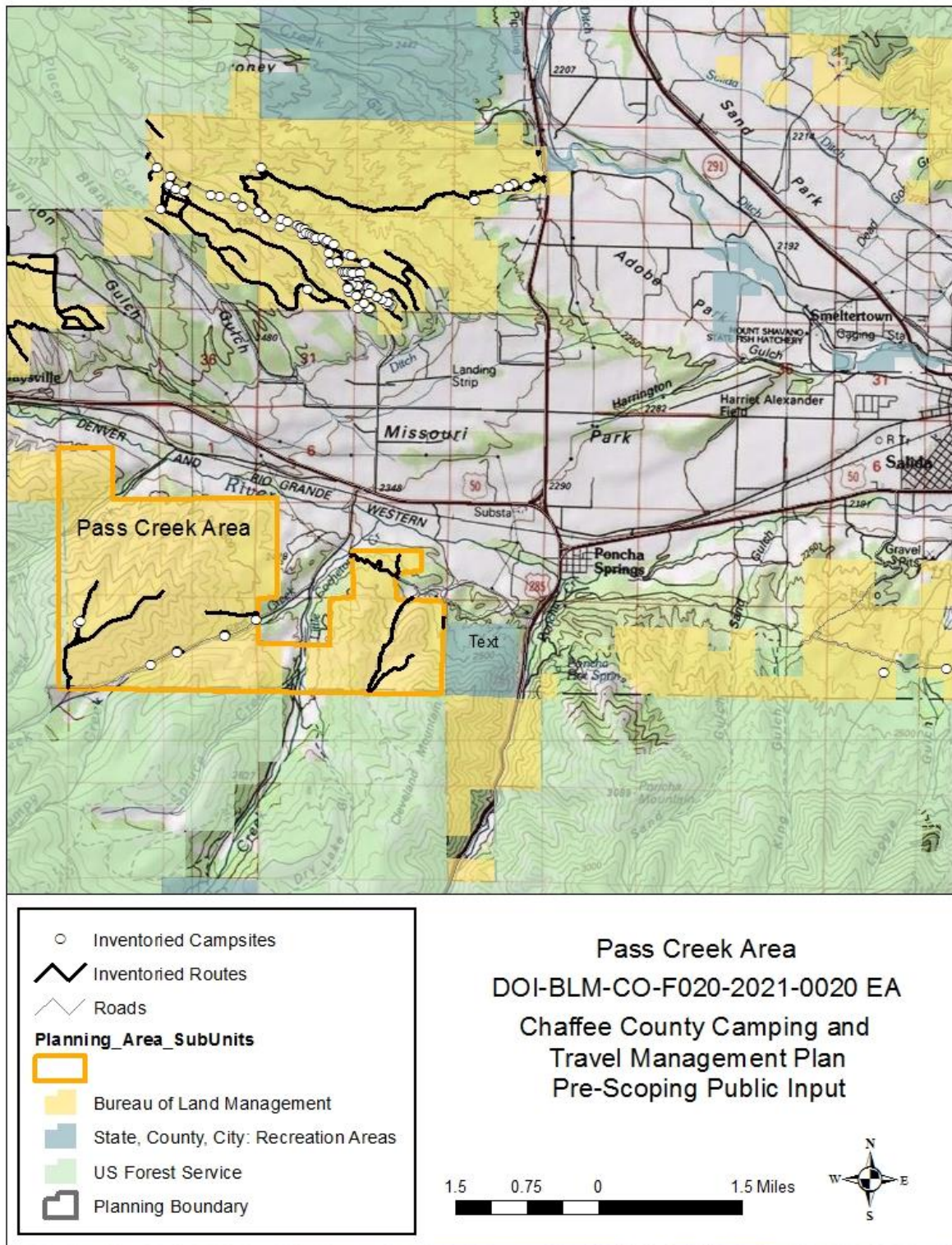
Browns Canyon National Monument Entrance/Hecla Junction

- The 900 acres of land located along County Road 194 which access Hecla Junction, the primary river take-out for Browns Canyon, is also the gateway to Browns Canyon National Monument.
- The route network in this area was established in the Arkansas River Travel Management Plan, signed in 2006, which has an allowance of 100' for parking and camping.
- In recent years these lands have been discovered by campers as an alternative for paying for camping at the Hecla Junction Campground. As a result the area is seeing an increase in camping impacts and conflicts with adjacent private property owners. 17 sites were recently inventoried.



Pass Creek

- These 5,200 acres of public land currently sees relatively low volumes of recreation use and camping has not been identified as an issue by staff to date.
- Given the proximity to Poncha Springs and other high valued recreation assets it is anticipated that use in this area will see increased visitation and camping demand.
- There is not a designated route network in this area, so motorized travel is limited to routes that existed at the time of the signing of the Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan in 1996.
- A thorough inventory was not completed at that time resulting in a challenging on the ground management situation for staff and public. Recent inventories documented 1.5 miles of BLM routes in these areas and 5 campsites.



Miscellaneous lands

- There are a number of small, isolated parcels totaling approximately 1,100 acres within Chaffee County that do not currently have any travel designations.
- Recreation use and camping impacts are relatively limited in these areas but are in close proximity to high valued recreation resources such as the Arkansas River and popular trail systems.

