



Uncompahgre Field Office Plan Resource Management Plan Amendment

US Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

January 2024

Background and How to Comment

Project Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision in April 2020 and received three lawsuits challenging the decision. In spring 2022, the BLM entered into a settlement agreement in which the agency agreed to initiate two plan amendment efforts in response to issues identified in the lawsuits: a statewide RMP amendment for big game and a rangewide RMP amendment for Gunnison sage-grouse. Both planning efforts are currently underway. In summer 2022, the BLM entered into settlement agreements on the remaining two lawsuits stipulating that the BLM would initiate an RMP amendment within 60 days of the Notice of Availability for whichever of the two initial planning efforts occurs later. In response to the terms, the BLM published the Notice of Intent for the Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment in the Federal Register on January 5, 2024.

The BLM UFO is considering amending the RMP for public lands it administers in southwest Colorado. The RMP amendment will be supported by a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis in an environmental impact statement (EIS), hereinafter referred to as the Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment / EIS. The BLM needs to undertake this planning process to fulfill its responsibilities under the settlement agreements that resolved litigation challenging the 2020 Uncompahgre Field Office approved RMP. The purpose of this effort is to consider different management of oil and gas, lands with wilderness characteristics, and previously proposed and analyzed areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) within the specific scope described in the settlement agreements. To ensure consistency across the planning areas for the Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment, statewide big game RMP Amendment, and rangewide Gunnison sage-grouse RMP Amendment, the BLM could formulate additional alternatives to the settlement agreements that closely align with the BLM preferred

alternatives for the other two RMP amendments. Additional alternatives identified through the Uncompahgre RMP amendment process must fall within the scope of the alternative outlined in settlement agreements.

Planning Process

The resource management planning process is a key tool that the BLM uses, in collaboration with interested public parties, to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to managing BLM-administered lands. An RMP is a set of comprehensive long-range decisions concerning the use and management of resources administered by the BLM. In general, the purpose of an RMP is twofold:

- It provides an overview of goals, objectives, and needs associated with public lands management.
- It provides management guidance with the intent of resolving multiple-use conflicts or issues associated with those requirements that drive the preparation of the RMP.

When a modification of one or more parts of an existing RMP are required, an RMP amendment is undertaken. The process of amending an RMP is similar to an RMP revision in that it involves public input and environmental analyses. An RMP revision addresses all components of an RMP, whereas an RMP amendment may focus on a limited number of resource and resource use issues.



The overall project schedule is provided below:

Target Timeline	Key Milestone
January - March 2024	Notice of Intent to prepare an RMP Amendment / EIS and 45-day scoping period
March - October 2024	Develop Draft RMP Amendment / Draft EIS
November 2024 - February 2025	Notice of Availability for the Draft RMP Amendment / Draft EIS and 90-day public comment period
March - July 2025	Develop Proposed RMP Amendment / Final EIS
August 2025	Notice of Availability for the Proposed RMP Amendment / Final EIS
September - November 2025	Public Protest Period (30 days) and Governor’s Consistency Review (60 days) for the Proposed RMP Amendment / Final EIS
December 2025	Approved RMP Amendment and Record of Decision

Planning and Decision Areas

The **planning area** is the geographic area for which resource management plans are developed and maintained. The UFO planning area (planning area) boundary defines the area assessed in this RMP amendment, regardless of surface ownership or jurisdiction. It encompasses 3.1 million acres in Delta, Gunnison, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel counties and includes BLM; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service; State of Colorado lands; and private property.

Proposed decisions in this RMP amendment apply only to BLM-administered lands and federal mineral estate under BLM jurisdiction. This is known as the **decision area**. The decision area consists of 678,400 acres of BLM-administered lands, including withdrawn lands (see Figure 1, Decision Area).

There are over 2.2 million acres of federal mineral estate in the planning area, 963,300 acres of which are in the decision area. Federal mineral estate subject to oil and gas leasing decisions (including helium and methane) in the decision area includes mineral estate underlying BLM-administered lands. It also includes the federal mineral estate underlying privately owned lands, city lands, and state-owned lands, which is known as *split estate* (see Figure 2, Federal Mineral Estate in the Decision Area). Management directions and actions outlined in an RMP only apply to BLM-administered lands and to the federal mineral estate under BLM jurisdiction within the decision area.



Alternatives Description

Consistent with the settlement agreements, the BLM will consider in an alternative the following:

- Increasing the total number of acres closed to new oil and gas leasing compared to Alternative B/B.I in the 2019 UFO Proposed RMP/Final EIS;
- Changing acres open to oil and gas leasing subject to no surface occupancy or controlled surface use constraints;
- Designating all ACECs proposed under Alternative B of the UFO Proposed RMP/Final EIS;
- Management of lands with wilderness characteristics proposed under Alternative B of the UFO Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

In addition to the settlement agreement alternative, the BLM could formulate alternatives within the scope of the RMP amendment for oil and gas leasing, ACEC designations, and lands with wilderness characteristics.

Public Involvement Opportunities

The NEPA requires that federal agencies engage the public during preparation of an EIS. Scoping is the process that continues throughout the planning and early stages of EIS preparation. Agencies use scoping to engage various stakeholders including state, local, and Tribal governments and the public in the early identification of affected resources and issues to be considered (known as *planning criteria*), and potential alternatives. As part of the public scoping process, the BLM is hosting two live virtual public outreach meetings and one in-person open house. In addition to these meetings, the BLM invites you to access additional information specific to this planning effort on the project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>

Virtual*:

January 23, 2024 (1:00 PM- 2:00 PM MT)
January 24, 2024 (4:30 PM– 5:30 PM MT)

*Attendees must register for the virtual meetings in advance. To register, visit https://empsi.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_H_Va6dbgRH-YfbGEoNygVQ

In-Person:

February 1, 2024, (4:00 PM - 6:30 PM)
Ute Indian Museum, Chipeta Meeting Room
17253 Chipeta Rd, Montrose, CO 81403

BLM values your input!

We thank you for your participation. The public has the opportunity to provide input on issues and planning criteria related to the UFO RMP Amendment via the following methods:



Website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2026528/510>



Mail: Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment/EIS, BLM Uncompahgre Field Office, 2465 South Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401

How to Comment

The scoping period provides an opportunity for people who could be affected by the proposed action to submit comments concerning the scope of the analysis, planning criteria, potential alternatives, and identification of relevant information and studies. At this stage of the RMP amendment

process, the most effective comments include specific details regarding issues or concerns and provide rationale for the concern or suggestion. Ideas for effective comments include:

- What issues or resources warrant detailed analysis in the RMP Amendment / EIS?
- What are your specific concerns about oil and gas, ACECs, or lands with wilderness characteristics, and why?
- Do you know of any geographic areas of concern for oil and gas, ACECs, or lands with wilderness characteristics, and why?
- Are there reasonable alternatives that should be considered within the scope of the planning effort?
- Are there new technologies BLM should consider?
- Let us know about important data or other information to inform the development of the alternatives.

Participating in the BLM's public comment process provides individuals and organizations with a valuable opportunity to participate in and contribute to the management of public lands and to have their voices heard in the decision-making process.

All comments will be carefully considered in our review and development of the RMP amendment to meet the BLM's NEPA responsibilities and other applicable laws.



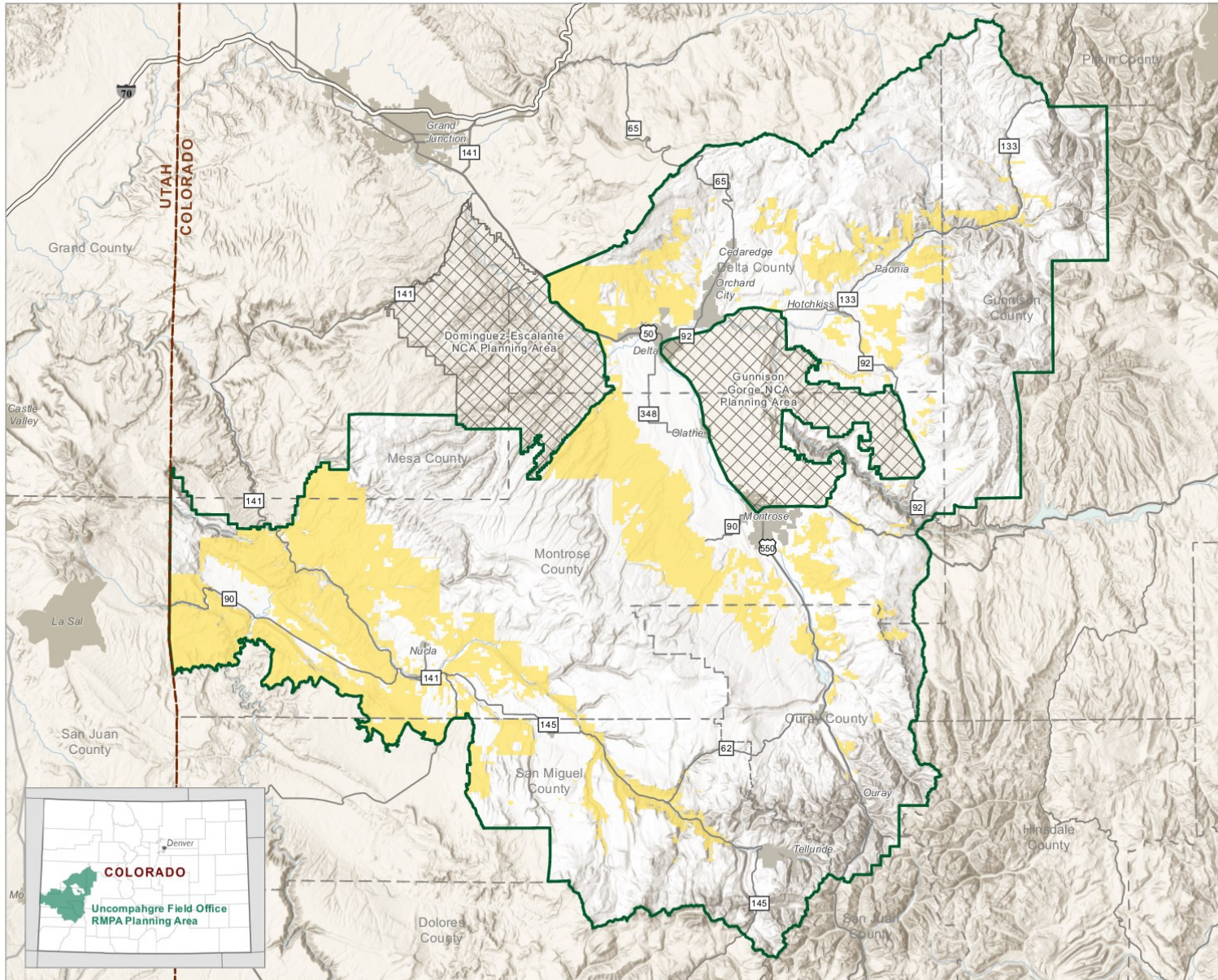
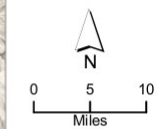
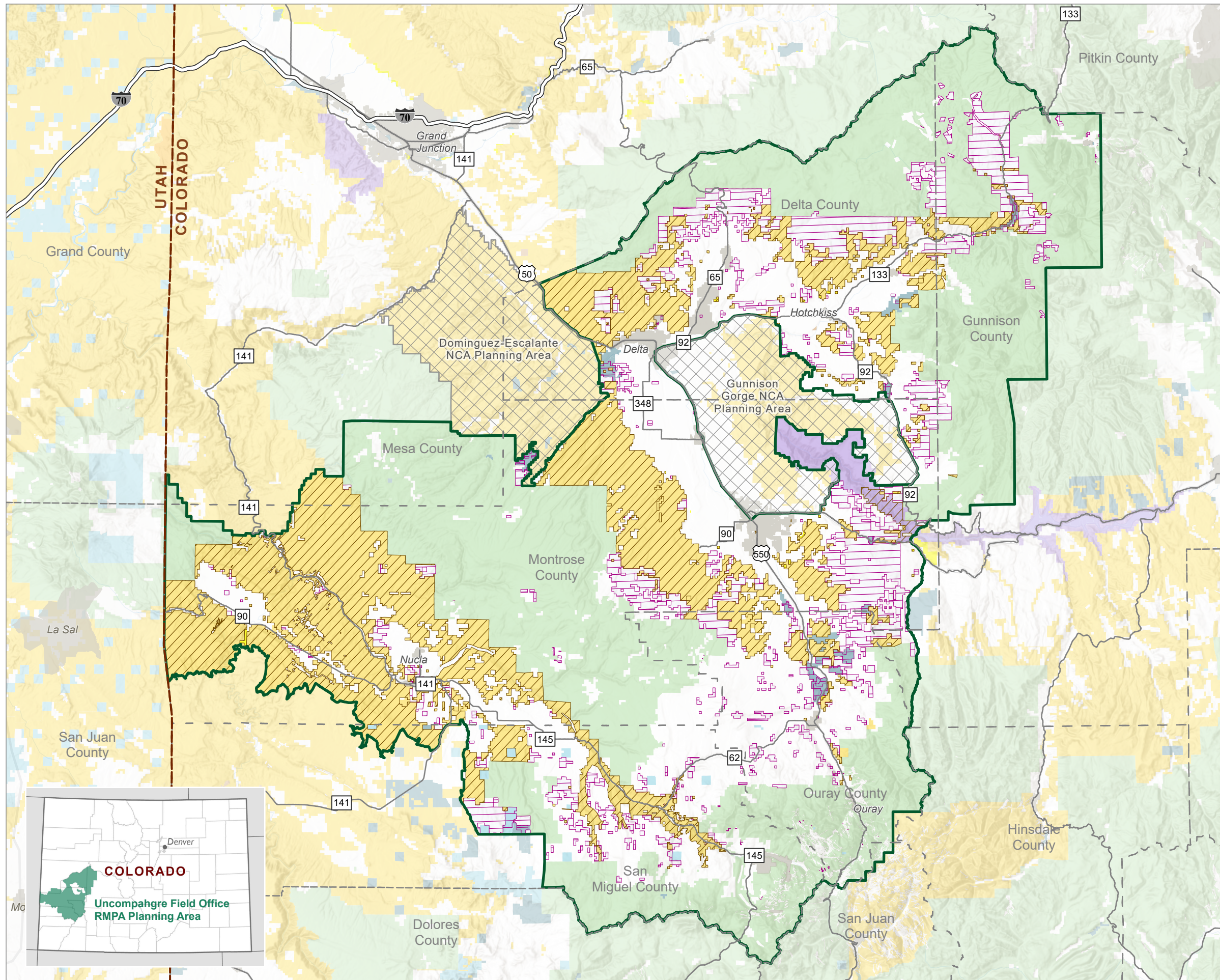


Figure 1
Uncompahgre Field Office RMP
Amendment Decision Area





- Decision area
- Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment planning area
- BLM-administered lands outside the planning area









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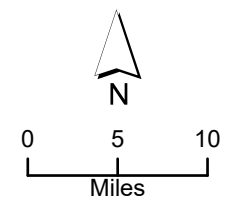
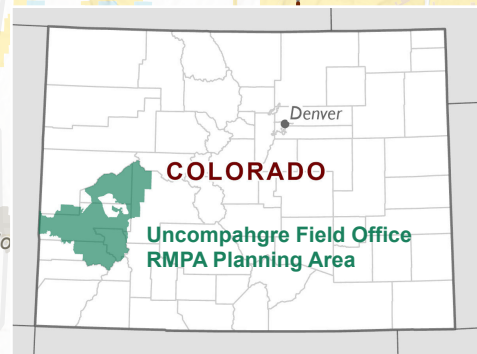


**Figure 2
Federal Mineral Estate in the Decision
Area**

-  BLM surface/Federal mineral estate
-  Split-estate
-  Uncompahgre Field Office RMP Amendment planning area
-  BLM-administered lands outside the planning area

Surface Management

-  Bureau of Land Management
-  US Forest Service
-  National Park Service
-  Bureau of Reclamation
-  Other Federal
-  State
-  County and local areas
-  Private
-  Private, Incorporated place



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