

**Colorado River
Ruby-Horsethief Recreation Area
Draft Business Plan Update**



Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction Field Office
McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area

December 2017

Executive Summary

This business plan outlines the Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River fee program and the need for an update to the current fee schedule. The BLM is proposing to extend the fee season by two months. Currently fees are charged from May 1 to September 30. BLM is proposing to charge fees from April 1 to October 31. This proposal would not change the amount of the current fees. It only proposes changing when the fees are charged.

The proposed fee change is for sites along the Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River, which flows through the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area (NCA) within the Grand Junction Field Office. The primary activities BLM manages the area for are overnight rafting, canoeing and kayaking as well as associated camping and wilderness hiking.

Fee Site Description

This river corridor contains approximately 2,600 acres and encompasses 20 miles of the Colorado River through Ruby and Horsethief Canyons. BLM manages 34 campsites within Ruby Horsethief Recreation Area (RHRA). The 2004 NCA Resource Management Plan (RMP) established the management objective for this zone; to “manage this zone to provide opportunities for visitors to engage in “Overnight flat-water boating for social group and family affiliation in a naturally-appearing red-walled river canyon.”

Background of Current Fee Program

The fee program is associated with overnight camping permits. Visitors are required to obtain overnight camping permits along the Colorado River within Ruby-Horsethief Canyon. The current fee program was initiated in 2012. The first year of the fee program, boaters were required to call the Grand Junction Field Office and reserve a permit for overnight camping Friday and Saturday nights May 1 through September 30. Self-issued permits were available at the Loma Boat Launch for trips not on Friday or Saturday or from October 1 through April 30. No fees were charged the first year of the program.

After the first season, it became clear; permits were needed 7 days a week. In 2013, the BLM began taking reservations, by phone for all campsites, 7 days a week during the high use season (May 1 through September 30). 2013 also was the first season fees were charged for overnight camping. Fees were charged from May 1 through September 30.

Fees were charged by group size:

Group Size	Fee
1-5	\$20 Per night
6-14	\$50 Per night
15-25	\$100 Per night

Group size for private groups is limited to no more than 25. Group size for commercial groups is limited to 25 plus guides. Each trip can have no more than two dogs.

To determine fees, kids under 17 are not counted, but dogs are. For example, a group with three adults 18 years

and older, two dogs, and 20 kids 17 and under would pay \$20 per campsite. The policy of “kids camp for free” is to encourage more youth participation in outdoor recreation.

For private groups, permit reservations were taken over the phone, on a first come first served basis 60 days in advance of the launch date. The phone line was open Monday 8am-2:30pm and Tuesday-Friday 8am-12 noon. Permits were emailed to permittees to be printed and taken on the river to show a ranger. Refunds were not given for trip cancellations; however, the fee could be used for a trip later in that boating season.

For commercial groups, permit reservations were taken beginning in August for the following season. This provided business certainty for the outfitters to be able to book trips. Commercial reservations for the Westwater section of the Colorado River (downstream of Ruby-Horsethief) have historically been set in August for the following season. Many of the outfitters that operate in Westwater Canyon also operate in Ruby-Horsethief. It made sense to coordinate commercial reservations for both sections.

This system was used during the 2013, 2014 and 2015 seasons.

In 2016, the fee program was rolled over to recreation.gov, an on-line reservation system for federally-managed outdoor recreation amenities. Permits are now available 24 hours a day. This saves boaters the hassle of having to call at a certain time. There is also an option for a refund if the permit is cancelled eight or more days in advance of a trip. Permittees (private and commercial) are able to access the permit electronically and print the permit at their own convenience. A \$10 non-refundable reservation fee is charged to cover the cost of using recreation.gov. This fee is in addition to the nightly camping fee. Commercial outfitters do not make their own reservations. The BLM makes the outfitter reservations.

In 2012 when the program began, there were 10,000 visitors. That number has more than doubled, to over 21,000 visitors.



The BLM has received good feedback from both private boaters and commercial outfitters about the permit program. Both user groups recognize the need for the permit system and appreciate knowing their camp is reserved. Boaters can now enjoy their trip more knowing they don't have to race down the river to get a campsite for the night. There are also less conflicts at the campsites. With the assigned campsites, all someone has to do is to show their permit to prove they have the campsite reserved. Commercial outfitters have certainty in knowing

their group of paying customers will have a place to stay and do not have to worry about whether someone else is in their campsite.

The BLM has also received good feedback regarding the improvements to the area because of the fee system. Tamarisk has been cleared, cottonwood trees have been planted, campsites have been improved, and more law enforcement and river ranger patrols have all been possible because of the fee program. People are following the rules because their name is on a permit.

The original determination for the camping fee was based on fees for the surrounding areas. In 2013, the surrounding areas charged:

- BLM-Moab Field Office charged boaters \$7 per person for a shorter but more technically challenging float on the Colorado River through Westwater Canyon (just downstream of the Ruby-Horsethief segment)
- BLM-Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area charged boaters \$10 per person for one night and \$15 for two nights on the Gunnison River
- BLM-Monticello Field Office charged boaters either \$6, \$12, or \$18 to float the San Juan River (depending on the length of their float)

Fees for Ruby-Horsethief will stay the same. \$20 for a small group (1-5) \$50 for a medium group (6-14) and \$100 for a large group (16-25), an average of \$5.27 per person per night. Looking at the surrounding areas, again, the BLM believes this is still a fair fee for camping. Fees for the surrounding areas as of 2017 are:

- BLM-Moab Field Office charges boaters \$10 per person for a shorter but more technically challenging float on the Colorado River through Westwater Canyon (just downstream of the Ruby-Horsethief segment) and \$15 per night/per site to camp at the Westwater Ranger Station.
- BLM-Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area charges boaters \$10 per person for one night and \$15 for two nights on the Gunnison River
- BLM-Monticello Field Office charges boaters either \$10, \$20, or \$30 to float the San Juan River (depending on the length of their float)

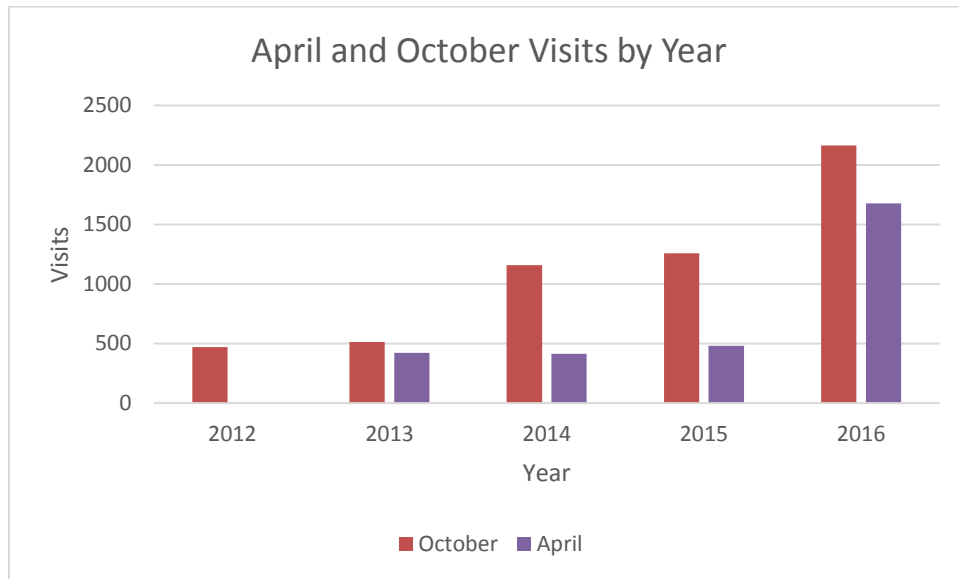
October and April Use

As boating and camping experiences have improved with the implementation of the permit system, and with the growth of visitation, a growing number of boaters are using Ruby-Horsethief during the shoulder seasons (October-November and March-April). 2016 visitor use numbers:

Month	Number of Campers
April	1,678
May	2,948
June	3,324
July	5,019
August	3,734
September	3,196

October	2,164
Total	20,385

The use in October has nearly quadrupled since 2012 when the permit system was established and now is just as busy as May, June and September.



Currently, it is still required to have a permit for camping year-round, there are no camping fees charged for the low use season (October-April)

Because no camping fees are charged, there is no incentive to cancel a reservation. As a result, campsites, especially the popular campsites, are often reserved, not used, and not available to other users. In one instance, a visitor reserved three campsites for one night because he was not sure where he wanted to camp. Two of the three sites were not available to other users. The BLM has received many complaints from private boaters and commercial outfitters about this problem. Since use in October has grown dramatically, the need and cost for patrols has also increased.

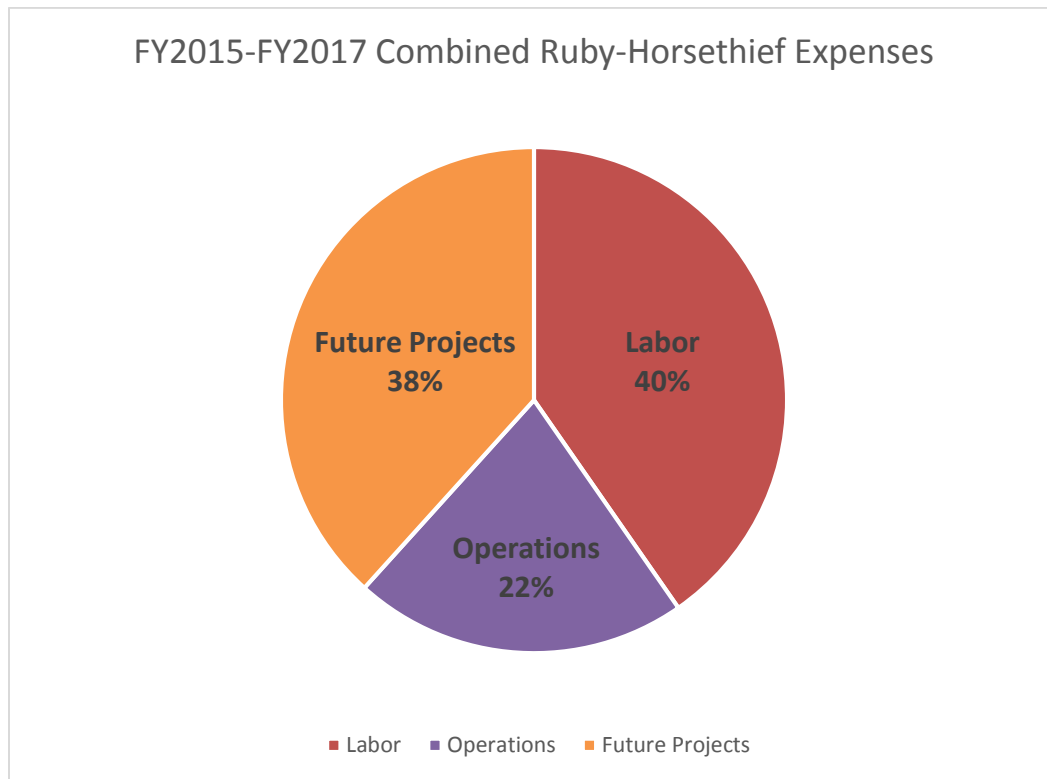
Proposal

The BLM is proposing extension of the fee season to include April and October. Extending the fee season would provide more funds for a longer river ranger season to patrol April through October when use is still high. The extended fee season would also address the problem of reservations not being cancelled and campsites not being available to other visitors. With a camping fee charged April through October, there would be an incentive to cancel a permit and receive a refund, thus limiting the no-shows we now have. Camping fees in October and April would be the same as the current high use season.

Group Size	Fee
1-5	\$20 Per night
6-14	\$50 Per night
15-25	\$100 Per night

Where Fees Go Now

All of the fees collected are used for staffing and improvements in Ruby-Horsethief Canyon. The following is a breakdown of how fees were spent the past three years:



Objectives for Use of Fee Receipts

The objectives for the use of fee receipts would be similar to the objectives in the original fee program listed below. The BLM would use the fee revenue to support additional river ranger patrols during April and October.

Original objectives for fee receipts:

1. Recreation and visitor services, safety, and security through increased patrols by BLM river rangers and law enforcement officers
2. Invasive species treatments and natives species restoration
3. Westwater take out improvements: new parking, restroom, and boat ramp in collaboration with Moab, Utah BLM.
4. Cleaning and maintenance of toilets
5. Cleaning and maintenance of campsites
6. Replacement and maintenance of existing signs and visitor information
7. Development of new educational and interpretive materials when requested by boaters

How Public Will be Informed About Fee Expenditures

The BLM will post annual income and expenditures at the Loma Boat Ramp. Typically, pie charts showing expenditure categories (labor, operations, equipment, etc.) will be used.

How will public comment on the fee change be solicited

Comments from private boaters will be solicited with a notice on the Mountain Buzz website and through the Press Release. Outfitters will be notified directly through an email.

Attachments

- A. List of campsites within the Ruby-Horsethief Recreation Area
- B. Map of the Ruby-Horsethief Recreation Area
- C. RRAC Fee and Non-Fee Revenue and Expenditure Worksheet
- D. Photos of the main features
- E. Letter from Centennial Canoe Company
- F. Draft Press Release

Attachment A – list of campsites in the Ruby-Horsethief Recreation Area

Rattlesnake Canyon

Beaver Tail 1

Beaver Tail 2

Bull Draw

Banjo

Cottonwood 1

Cottonwood 2

Cottonwood 3

Cottonwood 4

Cottonwood 5

Salt Creek 1

Salt Creek 2

Fault Line 1

Fault Line 2

Mee Corner

Mee 1

Mee 2

Mee 3

Mee 4

Mee Canyon

Dog Island

Split Rock

Black Rocks 1

Black Rocks 2

Black Rocks 3

Black Rocks 4

Black Rocks 5

Black Rocks 6

Black Rocks 7

Black Rocks 8

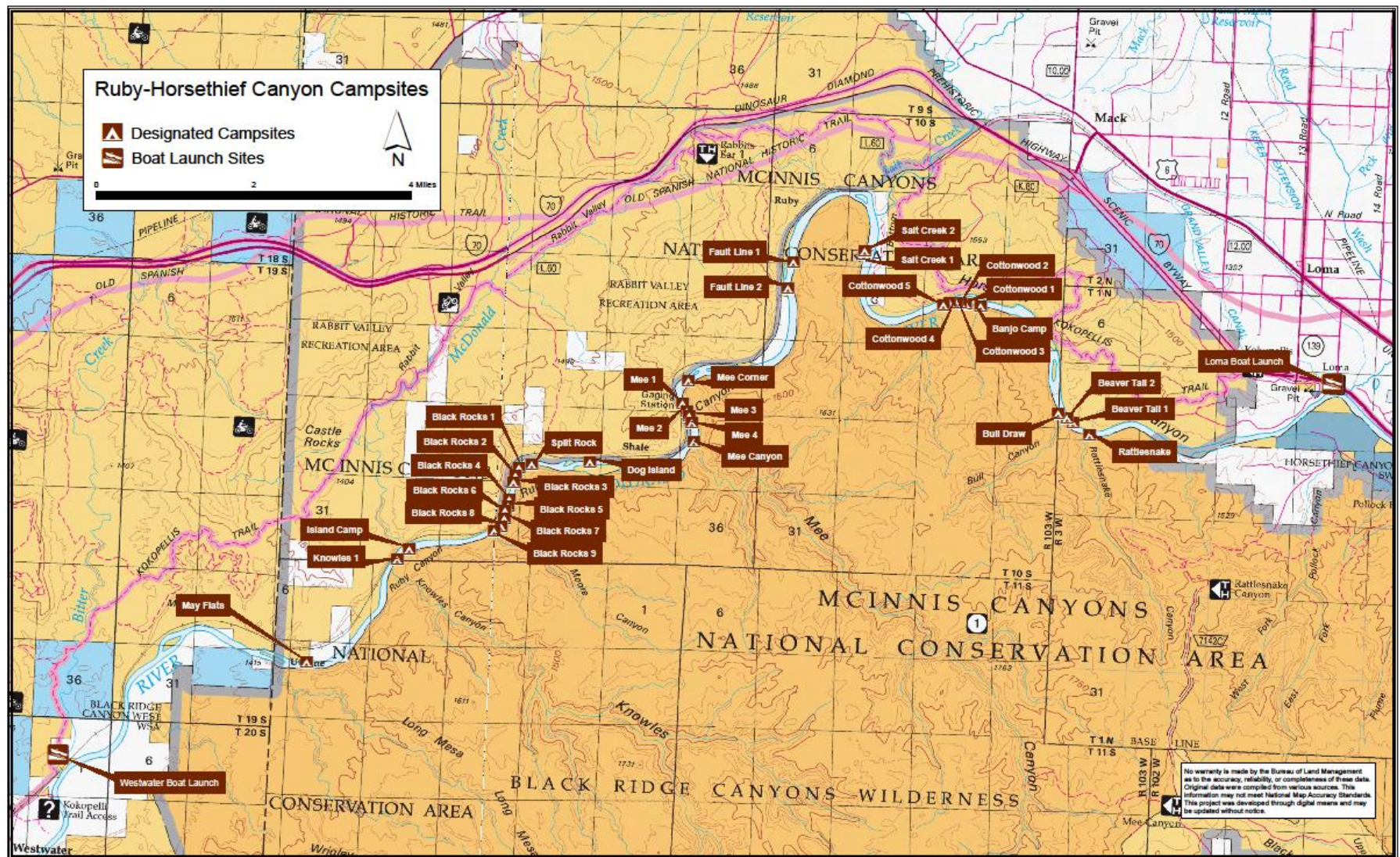
Black Rocks 9

Island Camp

Knowles 1

May Flats

Attachment B – Map:



Appendix C – RRAC Fee and Non-Fee Revenue and Expenditure Worksheets**Revenue/Expenditure Worksheet**

Ruby-Horsethief Camping			
Annual Fee Revenue	FY 2015 Final Total	FY 2016 Final Total	FY 2018 Projected
Site or Pass Type			
Special Area SRP (camping)	\$96,080	\$101,835.00	\$116,000
Total Annual Revenues	\$96,080	\$101,835.00	\$116,000

Ruby-Horsethief Camping			
Annual Fee Expenditures	FY 2015 Final Total	FY 2016 Final Total	FY 2018 Projected
All Expenditures (Visitor Services, Reservation Support, Maintenance, Operations, Law Enforcement)			
Personnel	\$ 42,586.35	\$61,775	\$52,870.00
Vehicles	\$ 1,919.31	\$2,387	\$ 2,579.00
Equipment	\$ 314.77	\$4,286	\$ 4,835.00
Materials & Supplies	\$0	\$8,236	\$ 3,868.00
Other	\$4,247	\$12,270	\$ -
Total Expenditures	\$49,067	\$88,955	\$64,152

Future One-Time Fee Expenditures	Projected		
Parking and boat ramp development at Westwater			
Parking Area	\$ 50,000.00		
Vault Toilet	\$ 30,000.00		
Boat Ramp	\$150,000.00		
Total	\$230,000.00		

Attachment D- Photos



Loma Boat Launch



Black Rocks 5



Black Rocks 9



Rattlesnake



Cottonwood 5



Colorado River near Knowles Canyon

Attachment E – Letter from outfitter:

RECEIVED
BUREAU OF LAND MGMT.
GRAND JCT. CO

2016 OCT 17 PM 3:19



October 13, 2016

Katie Stevens, Field Manager, Grand Junction, BLM
2815 H. Road
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Dear Katie,

The reason for this letter to you is twofold. The first topic is the relatively new reserved camping program on the Colorado River. I continue to believe it's been a huge improvement and has gone very well. The Wild West days of finding a campsite on the Colorado River seem to be over.


The second topic is the performance of [REDACTED] who administrates the Ruby program. I can't imagine the stress she's under dealing with a sometimes angry public and ornery outfitters like me. I can't count the times she's come to my rescue either by my mistakes or when Murphy's Law occurs. My worst nightmare is launching a high profile trip with nowhere to camp. When these problems arise I immediately call Alex, who is responsive and professional. Not to mention an amazing problem solver.

Please give [REDACTED] a pat on the back the next time you see her. She deserves it and I really appreciate all she's done for me.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Marty Genereux".

Marty Genereux
CCO, Inc



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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

BLM Seeks Comment on Ruby-Horsethief Permit Program Updates

The BLM Grand Junction Field Office needs your comments on extending the Ruby-Horsethief fee season. The BLM is proposing extending the fee season to include April and October. Do you have comments on this?

Visit [XXXXXXX](#) for more information and how to submit you comment.



Bureau of Land Management
Grand Junction, Colorado



NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS

**McInnis Canyons
National Conservation Area**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management



News Release

McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, Colorado

XXX XX, 2017

Contact: Christopher B. Joyner, Public Affairs Specialist, (970) 244-3097

BLM Seeks Public Comment on Proposed Permit Changes

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. –The Bureau of Land Management seeks public comment regarding a proposed extension to fee camping in the popular Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River.

Permits are always required for camping in this popular section of the river but paid permits are only required seasonally May 1 – Sept. 30. The BLM wants feedback on a plan to expand fee camping by two months to account for growing user impacts on limited camping sites. The Proposed change would add fee collection for camping in April and October.

In 201X the Ruby-Horsethief section of the river received XXXXX man days of visitor use. The \$XXXXX.00 in camping fees collected were used to fund a seasonal River Ranger, improve campsites, and XXXXXXX.

The proposed plan can be found online at: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX or by visiting the BLM Grand Junction Field Office at 2815 H Road. Please submit comments by XXXX. XX. Written comments and questions should be directed to the Bureau of Land Management, Attn: XXXXXX, 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506 or submitted electronically to xxxxxxxxxxxx@blm.gov.

Before including your address, phone number, email address or other personal identifying information in your comment, be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

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Social Media – BLM seeks public input on a proposed camping fee expansion for the popular Ruby-Horsethief section of the Colorado River.