
File Code: 2820
Date: April 8, 2022

Dear Interested Party,

In response to increasing natural resource degradation issues and management challenges, the Ouray Ranger District of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) is seeking public comments on a proposed visitor use management plan for the Blue Lakes area, located approximately 12 miles south of Ridgway. The purpose of the plan is to provide comprehensive management of visitors in the Blues Lakes area and to reduce visitor impacts. The plan seeks to balance the preservation of natural conditions by addressing biophysical/social impacts resulting from visitor use, while continuing to provide quality opportunities for recreation. The plan proposes using an adaptive management strategy to achieve these goals.

The proposed planning area is divided into five zones (see Attachment A for map): Wilderness Zone, Mount Sneffels Peak Zone, Yankee Boy Zone, Lower East Dallas Zone, and Blaine Basin Zone. Desired conditions for each zone include:

Wilderness Zone is fully within the Mount Sneffels Wilderness. The zone will be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and Colorado Wilderness Act of 1980. Management emphasis is to provide for the protection of natural bio-physical conditions, high scenic integrity, and semi-primitive wilderness recreation opportunities. Settings would be managed for a relatively high degree of solitude, risk, challenge, and self-reliance. Recreational use is by primitive means and would be limited to non-motorized/non-mechanized activities. Proposed action in this zone would include, but not be limited to, a limited permit system for day and overnight use, designated campsites, trail maintenance, delineated pathways to designated campsites, requirement for removal of solid human waste, requirement for food storage, , no fire, campfire or wood burning stoves allowed, provide hardened ford on the outlet of the lower lake, install signs and/or markers (as needed), close and rehabilitate redundant or unsustainable user created social trails, and rehabilitate closed areas and delineate designated campsites.

Mount Sneffels Peak Zone lies adjacent to the Mount Sneffels Wilderness. Management emphasis is to provide for a self-reliant, challenging ascent to the summit of Mount Sneffels. Use will be managed to protect the quality and safety of the recreational opportunity. Management activities would not be visually evident or would remain unnoticeable. Recreational use would be limited to nonmotorized/nonmechanized activities. Proposed action in this zone would include, but not be limited to, a mandatory non-limited permit system, designated campsites, designated approach route, trail maintenance, requirement for food storage, requirement for burial or removal of solid human waste, and install signs and/or markers (as needed).

Yankee Boy Zone lies within the Yankee Boy Basin. Management emphasis is to provide for semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities. Use would be managed to provide



technical motorized opportunities and non-motorized/nonmechanized access to the Mount Sneffels peak and wilderness zones while protecting the historic, scenic, and biophysical resources to provide quality recreational opportunities. Settings would be managed for high social interaction and provide support facilities such as restrooms and parking areas. Proposed action in this zone would include, but not be limited to, trail maintenance, requirement for burial or removal of solid human waste, requirement for food storage, install signs and/or markers (as needed), close and rehabilitate redundant or unsustainable user created social trails/roads, rehabilitate closed areas, designate and delineate designated campsites and designate roads/trails to designated campsites, limited overnight permit system, restricted parking to designated parking areas only, and construct and/or improve existing parking/trailhead areas.

Lower East Dallas Zone is the main access to the Mount Sneffels Wilderness and Blaine Basin Zones. Management emphasizes is to provide for a variety of quality recreational opportunities while protecting the biophysical resources and the scenic integrity of the area. Setting would range from places where social interaction predominates to places where interaction with other people is less frequent and the area feels somewhat remote – particularly those coming from an urban environment and provide support facilities such as restrooms and parking areas. Recreational use would include motorized and non-motorized activities where appropriate. Proposed action in this zone would include, but not be limited to, trail maintenance, requirement for burial or removal of solid human waste, food storage restrictions, install signs and/or markers (as needed), close and rehabilitate redundant or unsustainable user created social trails/roads, rehabilitate closed areas, designate and delineate designated campsites and designate roads/trails to designated campsites, limited overnight permit system, restricted parking to designated parking areas only, and construct and/or improve existing parking/trailhead areas.

Blaine Basin Zone has been proposed in legislation as wilderness and lies within an upper tier roadless area. Management emphasis is to provide for the protection of natural biophysical conditions and scenic integrity and provide semi-primitive recreational opportunities. Social settings would be managed for a relatively high degree of solitude, risk, challenge, and self-reliance. Recreational use is by primitive means and would be limited to non-motorized/nonmechanized activities. Proposed action in this zone would include, but not be limited to, designated campsites, delineated pathways to designated campsites, food storage restrictions, trail maintenance, requirement for burial or removal of solid human waste, close and rehabilitate redundant or unsustainable user created social trails, rehabilitate closed areas, no fire, campfire or wood burning stoves allowed, and install signs and/or markers (as needed).

To review the details of the proposed action, please go to <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61979>.

Nature of Decision(s) to be Made

As Ouray District Ranger, I am the responsible official for the proposed Visitor Use Management Plan; however, if a permit system is issued for only a portion of the Mount Sneffels Wilderness Area, it will require an amendment under the current Forest Plan, which is a Forest

Supervisor decision. After considering the Proposed Action and any alternatives, the pending environmental analysis, and public comments, I will decide whether and how to authorize the management plan.

I anticipate the environmental analysis will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA). Following completion of the environmental analysis and issuance of a decision, a monitoring and implementation plan including a communication plan would be completed. Additional analysis or surveys may be required to implement parts of the plan.

Timeline

A draft EA is anticipated to be released in January 2023 for an additional comment period.

Submitting Comments

If you wish to provide feedback on this proposed plan, please submit your written comments via our website, by mail or hand delivery. This comment period serves as scoping under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and as a comment period to obtain objection standing to any future Forest Service decisions made under 36 CFR part 218 Subparts A & B implementing a land management plan not subject to Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) and on a plan amendment comment period under 36 CFR 219.16. Comments must be in writing and must be received or postmarked no later than 30 days after the publication of the legal notice in the Montrose Daily Press or Grand Junction Daily Sentinel, whichever publishes later. Commenters should include their name, address and organizations represented, if any. Please note, all names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record. Notice of the Decision will be mailed to those who file comments during official comment periods.

Please submit comments:

Mail or hand delivery:

Dana Gardunio, Ouray District Ranger
USDA Forest Service
2505 South Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401

Electronically: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=61979>

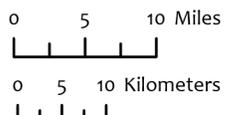
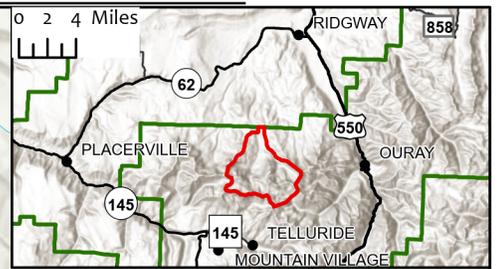
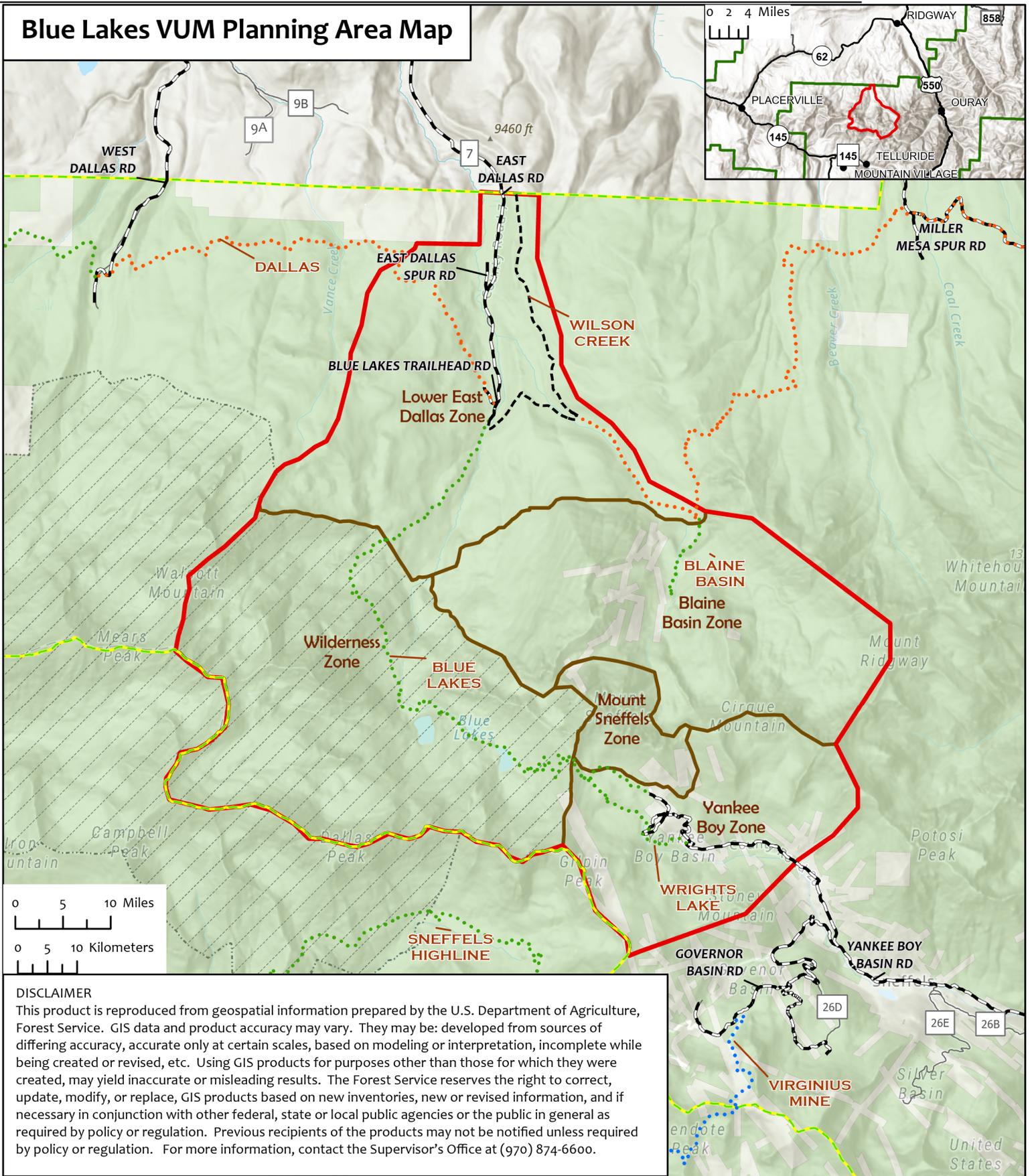
If you have any questions, or would like more information about this project or legal notice publication dates, please contact Julie Jackson at julie.jackson@usda.gov or 970-240-5429.

Sincerely,

DANA GARDUNIO
District Ranger

Enclosure: Attachment A, Blue Lakes VUM Planning Area Map

Blue Lakes VUM Planning Area Map



DISCLAIMER
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|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Blue Lakes Draft Planning Boundary | County Roads | Trails Open to Pack Animals | Trails Open to Vehicles <= 50 inches wide | Mount Sneffels Wilderness |
| Blue Lakes Planning Area Zones | Trails | Trails Open to Mountain Bikes | Non-FS Land | Ranger District Boundaries |
| Roads Open to All Vehicles | Trail Open to Foot Travel | | US Forest Service Land | Forest Boundary |

Modified on 4/8/2022