



Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan

A Message from the Superintendent

I invite you to join me in creating a long-term vision and plan for the wilderness and backcountry of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area.

As we begin this process, there are many opportunities to explore as well as issues to examine. What is a wilderness and backcountry experience at the units? Do you feel you are able to have that experience now? What uses are appropriate in the units? Do visitor conflicts exist? If so, where, how frequently, and what recreational uses are involved? Are there signs of resource impacts that affect your experience in the wilderness or backcountry?

These are some of the questions we would like to address in our planning process. Getting to the core of these issues will help us to better determine how to manage

wilderness and backcountry to ensure that visitor experiences, along with our legislative mandates, are being met.

I ask you to please look inside this scoping brochure and provide us with feedback on the questions outlined, or anything else about the wilderness and/or backcountry that you would like to comment on. If you are viewing this brochure online you will find an interactive map that will help guide you through some of the issues and opportunities we would like to address in this plan. You may also submit your comments electronically at this website.

Connie Rudd
Superintendent,
Black Canyon of the Gunnison
National Park

goals of the plan

- Restore, protect, and enhance wilderness character in wilderness.
- Provide and manage a range of visitor opportunities while protecting resource values and park purposes in wilderness and backcountry areas.
- Enhance public understanding of the relevance of wilderness values, understanding of opportunities and stewardship of the wilderness and backcountry.

objectives of the plan

- Evaluate existing conditions and management practices and define desired resource and social conditions in wilderness and non-wilderness backcountry areas, consistent with park purposes.
- Provide a framework and programmatic guidance for consistent direction in decision making in managing wilderness and backcountry.
- Define the role of commercial services/guiding in wilderness and backcountry areas.
- Provide guidance for implementing minimum requirements analyses.
- Base management decisions on sound scientific research and knowledgeable observation. Incorporate new data and information as available, into a dynamic backcountry and wilderness management program.
- Provide public information to promote backcountry skills and wilderness ethics.



Backcountry and Wilderness – How are they Different?

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park manages 15,505 acres of wilderness and 14,554 acres of backcountry areas. Curecanti National Recreation Area does not have any wilderness within its boundaries.

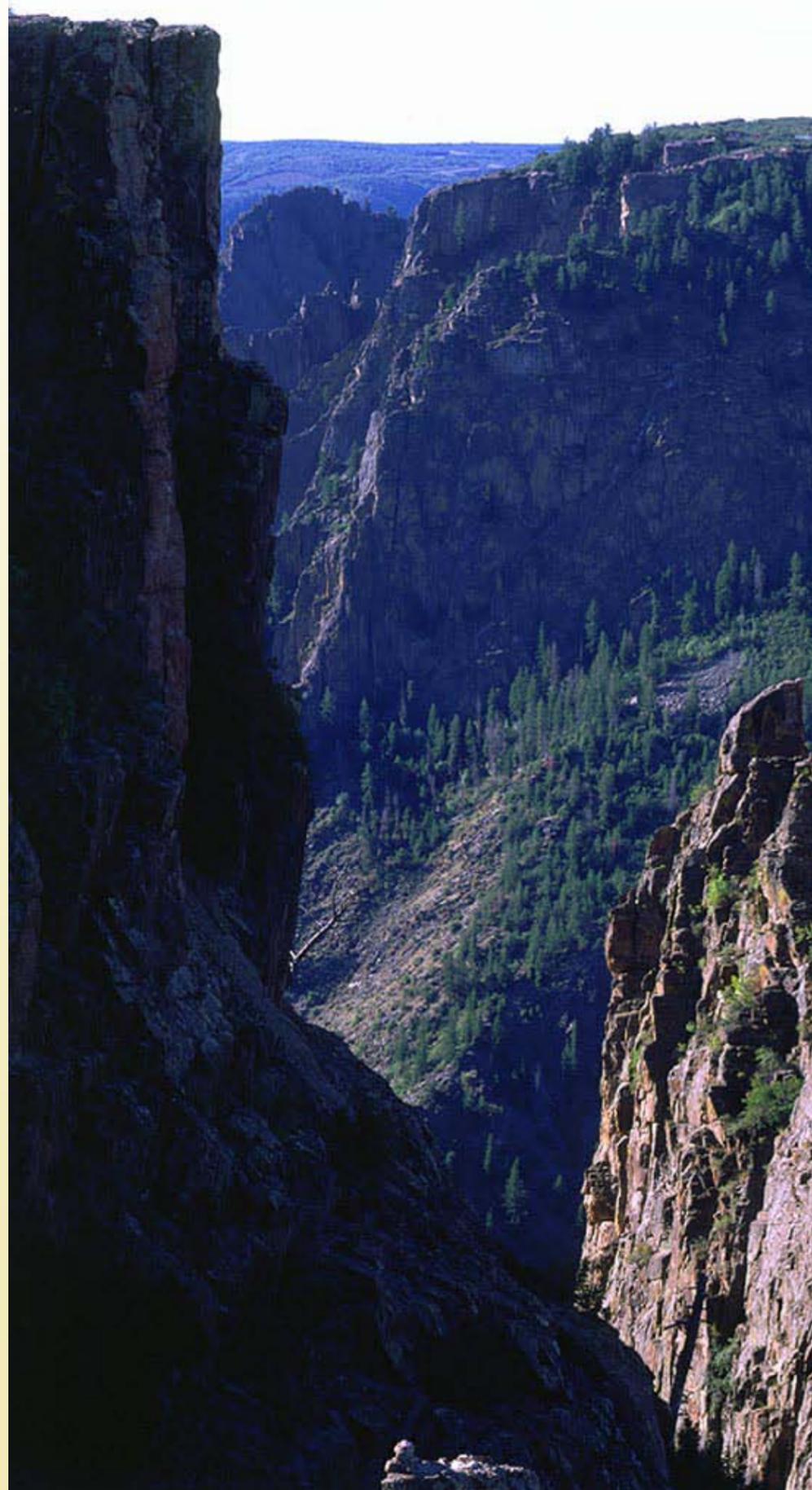
Although these classifications, located outside of the more developed/frontcountry areas of the park, may look similar, they are managed differently and may accommodate different types of recreational use.

Backcountry as defined by the NPS refers generically to "primitive and undeveloped portions of parks" (*Management Policies 8.2.2.4*). Developments that may occur within backcountry areas are generally limited to trails, unpaved roads, and administrative facilities associated with dispersed

recreational use. Dispersed recreational use is the most prevalent human use in backcountry areas, although research activities may also occur.

Wilderness is a federal designation and an added layer of protection that is given to those lands that are found eligible for inclusion in the federally designated wilderness system. In addition to the land management agencies' mandates, wilderness lands are managed under the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. By definition, wilderness is, "An area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or habitation, and which:

1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces



of nature, with man's imprint substantially unnoticeable;
 2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;
 3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation; and
 4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value.

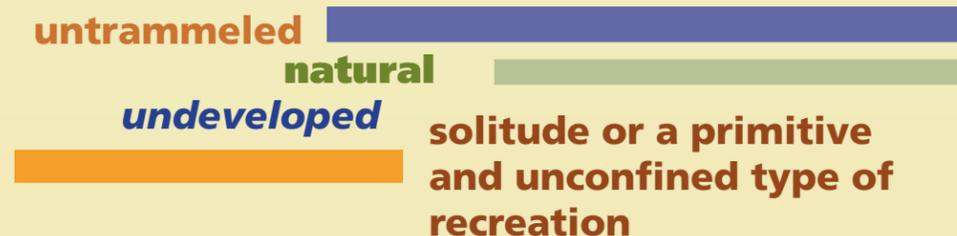
One main difference between backcountry and wilderness is that motorized equipment and mechanized transport is generally prohibited in wilderness. In contrast, motorized uses and mechanized transport may be present in the backcountry

if uses are deemed necessary and appropriate. Another difference is the presence of development. Shelters and other development such as cabins for purposes of public safety and resource protection may be allowed in backcountry areas, whereas structures and installations are only present in wilderness in circumstances necessary to administer the area. The Wilderness Act specifically prohibits commercial enterprises and permanent roads in wilderness.

Backcountry areas and federally designated wilderness areas are delineated on the park map found on pages 6-7.

What is Wilderness Character?

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness, in part, as, "...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence...". Although there is not a definition in the Act of exactly what primeval character is, land managers across different agencies have, through the intent of the Act, defined wilderness character through four tangible qualities that are practical to wilderness stewardship.



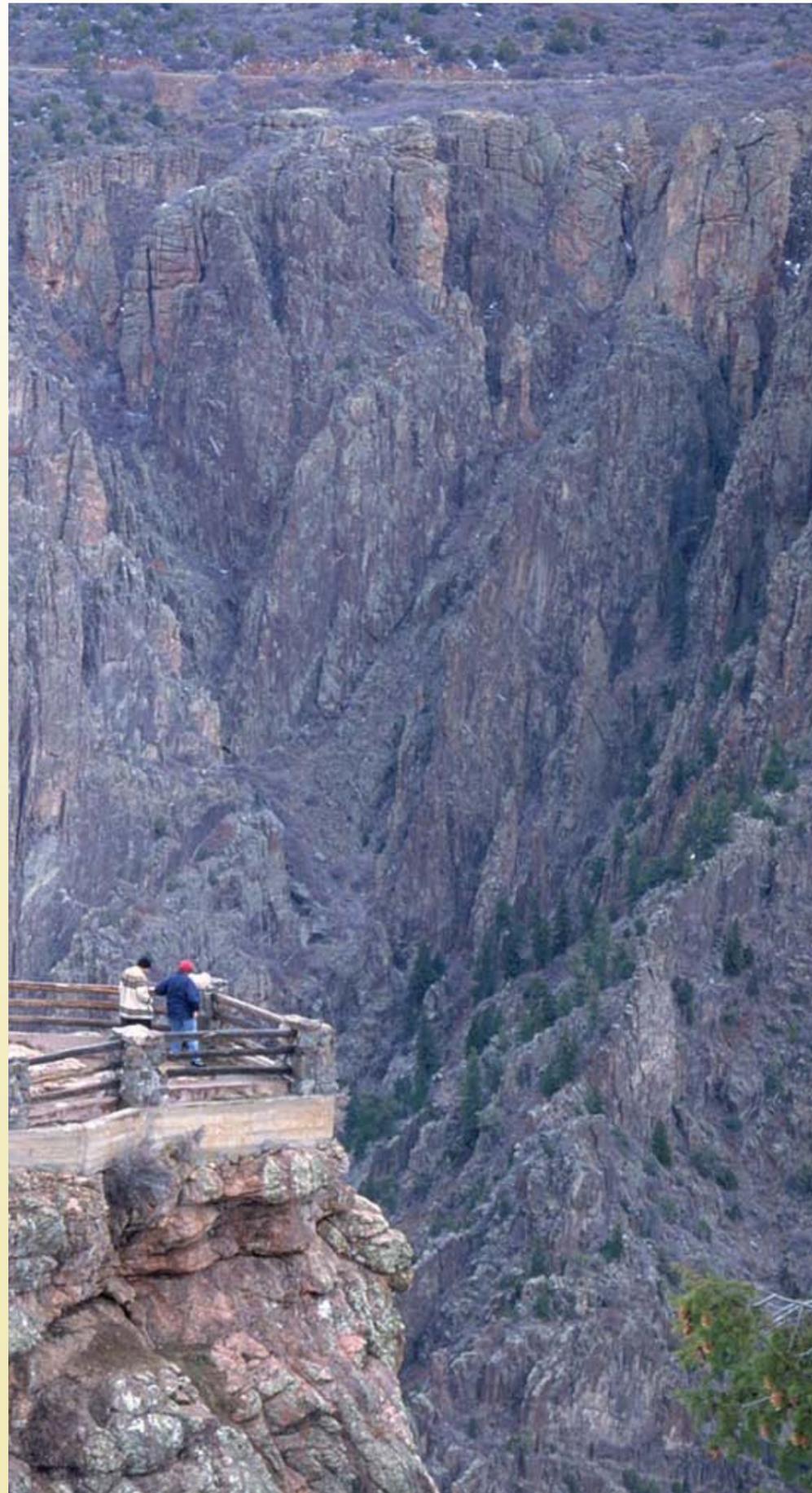
Untrammeled— “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man,” and “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature.” In short, wilderness is essentially unhindered and free from modern human control or manipulation. This quality is degraded by modern human activities or actions that control or manipulate the components or processes of ecological systems inside the wilderness.

Natural— “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” In short, wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. This quality is degraded by intended or unintended effects of modern people on the ecological systems inside the wilderness since the area was designated.

Undeveloped— “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,” “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” and “with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” This quality is degraded by the presence of structures, installations, habitations, and by the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport that increases people’s ability to occupy or modify the environment.

Solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation— “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” This quality is about the opportunity for people to experience wilderness; it is not directly about visitor experiences per se. This quality is degraded by settings that reduce these opportunities, such as visitor encounters, signs of modern civilization, recreation facilities, and management restrictions on visitor behavior.

These four qualities together comprise an approximation of wilderness character for wilderness planning, stewardship, and monitoring.



Gathering input

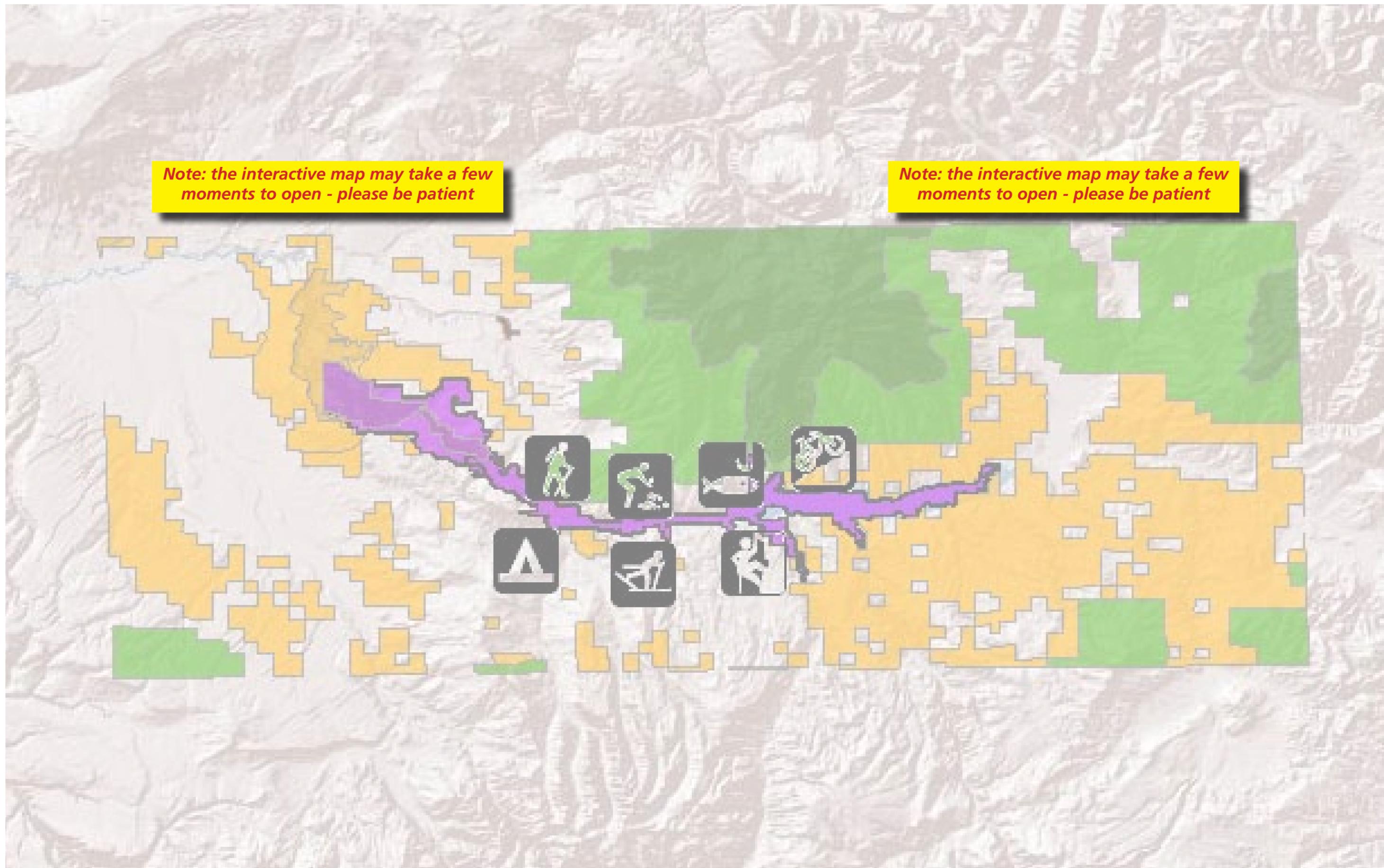
from park staff and the public on issues, opportunities, and the four qualities of wilderness will assist planners in defining what the current wilderness and backcountry character is at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Curecanti National Recreation Area, as well as what the desired wilderness character is. Once current wilderness character is defined, park managers can begin to identify issues or challenges to



achieving desired character, and look at strategies that will move the park towards the desired wilderness character. Note that certain management actions may improve some qualities of wilderness character while decreasing or impacting other qualities. For example, constructing fencing to exclude trespass cattle may

improve the “natural” quality of wilderness character, but may impact the “untrammeled” and “undeveloped” qualities.





Note: the interactive map may take a few moments to open - please be patient

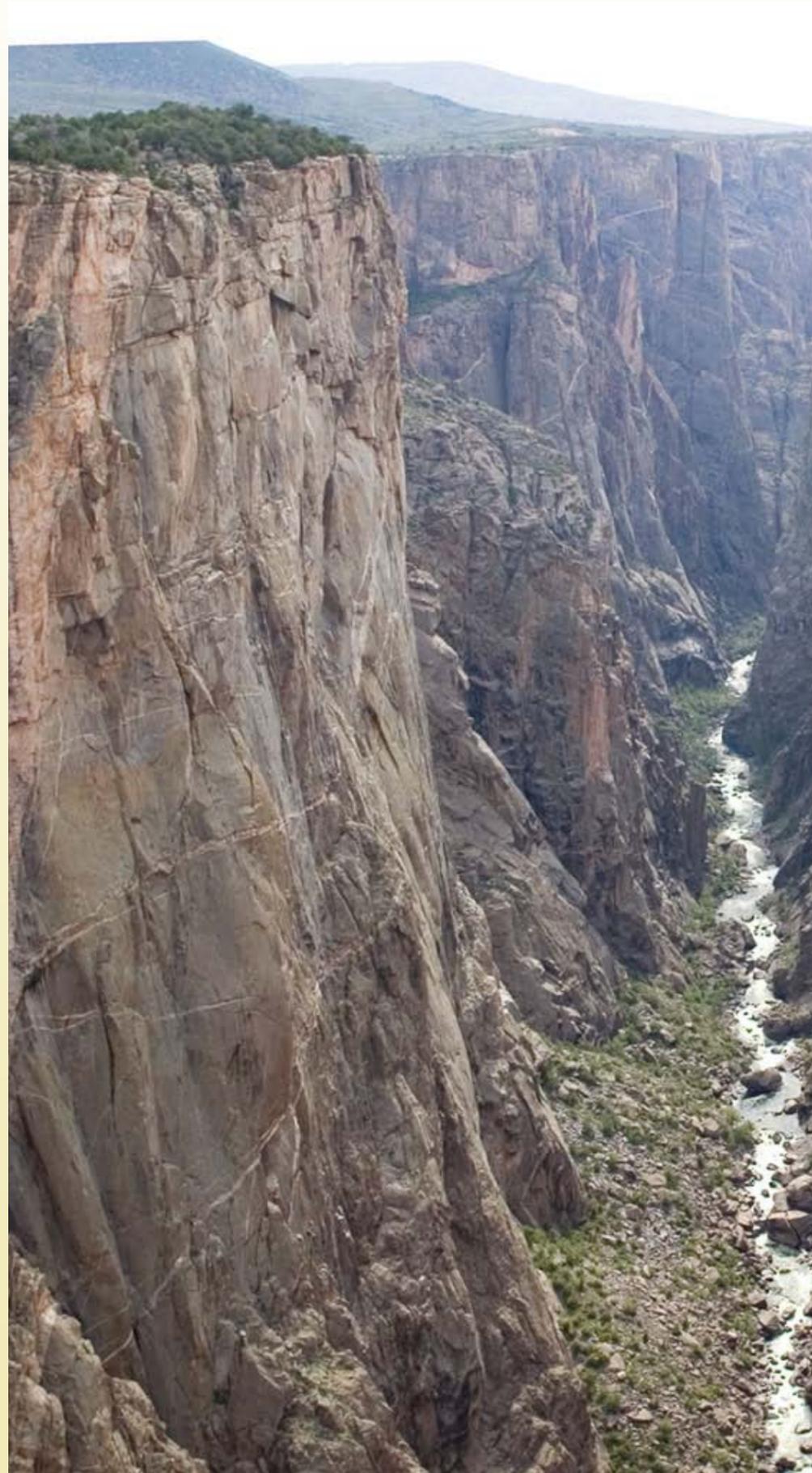
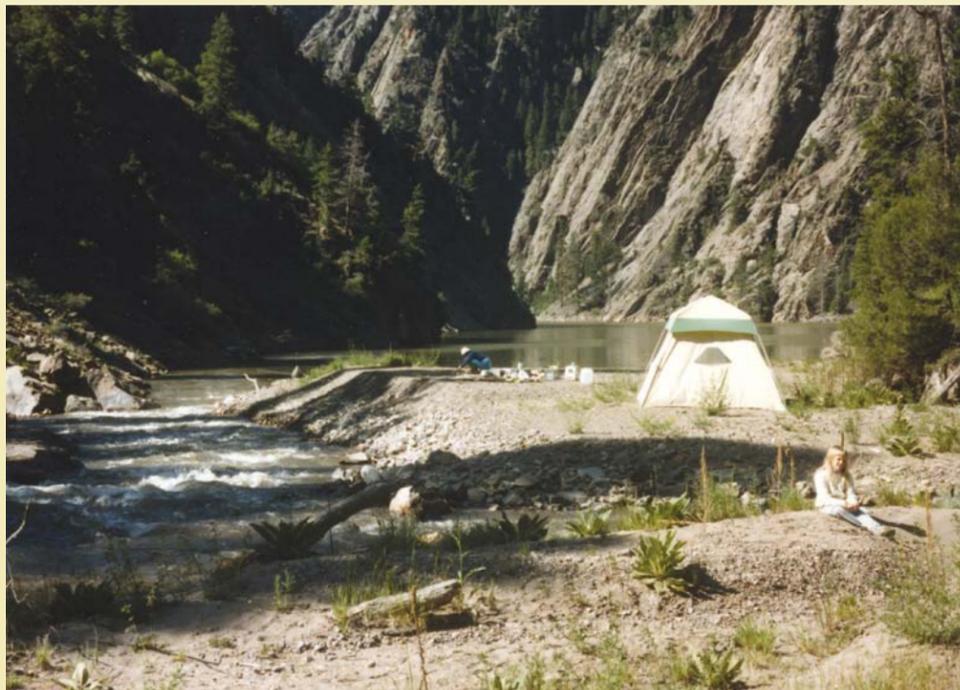
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Wilderness and Backcountry Issues and Opportunities

Park managers and planners held a meeting to discuss opportunities and issues regarding the wilderness and backcountry of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, and the backcountry of Curecanti National Recreation Area. In doing so, planning areas were divided into distinct units or "zones" based on resources, visitor uses and experiences and whether the area is federally designated wilderness or backcountry. The result was four distinct areas across the park units: the Inner Canyon and the uplands of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, East Portal to Morrow Point (EPMP), and Blue Mesa of Curecanti National Recreation Area.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park – Inner Canyon

The Inner Canyon of the park is characterized by steep, rugged, rock slopes and cliffs, as well as the river and surrounding river environs. This zone consists of designated wilderness lands and is home to most of the sensitive wildlife species found in the park. The terrain invites a variety of challenging visitor uses. Land-based uses include fishing, hiking, camping, and rock climbing. Along with those uses are opportunities and challenges in managing day and overnight use, climbing, and seasonal closures to protect peregrine falcon nesting. There are several issues/opportunities to address in order to maintain or improve wilderness character:



These are preliminary ideas. Please share your thoughts through this website.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park – Inner Canyon	
ISSUES/OPPORTUNITIES	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and overnight camping are allowed through a permit system. There are no designated campsites, but there is some competition for campsites, and unauthorized activities such as building fires, building natural "furniture", and caching gear is apparent. Human waste as well as soil and vegetation impacts are apparent in stretches along the river. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign campsites by permit • Require human waste bags • Provide more composting toilets • Increase ranger presence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day use in the inner canyon is now regulated by a permit system. Overall, hiking routes are essentially scrambles, and in some cases may be difficult to find. Permit demand varies by route and date (weekends and holidays having higher demand). Some routes show signs of soil compaction, erosion, vegetation disturbance, and congestion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review data and public comment to decide whether the number of day use/hiking/fishing permits released needs to be adjusted. • Build more trails in the inner canyon • Disperse use by building more trails in other areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interim climbing plan allows for hardware on new routes and replacement of unsafe hardware on existing routes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current plan and current climbing routes, hardware, permit numbers, and incorporate new climbing planning in the wilderness/backcountry planning effort.

"Furniture" arranged by visitors in designated wilderness



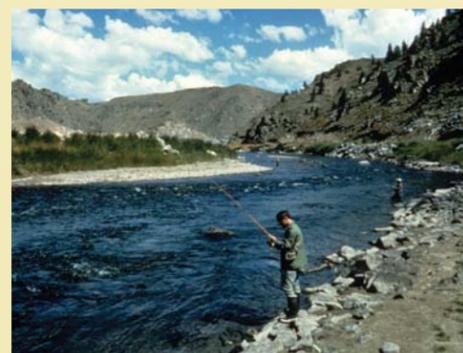
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park – Uplands

The uplands area of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park consists of those areas from the rim of the inner canyon to the park boundaries (excluding frontcountry areas such as roads and visitor facilities) and is a mixture of designated wilderness and backcountry. The terrain in this zone differs significantly from the inner canyon in terms of slope, amount and type of vegetative cover, and animal life, and it allows for a different variety of uses and visitor experiences. The relatively level terrain offers more level hiking opportunities and more easily accessible camping in the summer and cross country skiing in the winter. Most grazing that occurs in backcountry areas is authorized, however trespass livestock is known to occur. More fire starts and invasive plants occur in this zone. Habitat connectivity is threatened by urban development surrounding this landscape.

These are preliminary ideas. Please share your thoughts through this website.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park – Uplands

ISSUES/OPPORTUNITIES	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unauthorized/trespass grazing occurs in some areas of the park, and results in impacts on resources and the naturalness of the wilderness area. Other wilderness areas of the park were previously grazed and still contain many grazing-related structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct fencing to control unauthorized grazing in some areas, and remove unnecessary fencing and grazing related structures in other areas (i.e., stock ponds, abandoned roads, etc.).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of causes has resulted in the proliferation of non-native plants and degraded the naturalness of some areas of wilderness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to implement the park’s weed management program Allow natural fire starts, per the 2006 Fire Management Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The uplands wilderness has no permit system for hiking or camping. Both activities remain light. There are few trails and signs. The overall opportunity for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation is generally greater in the uplands than the inner canyon. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation in the uplands and whether a permit system is warranted at this time. Explore opportunities for hiking trails in varied terrain to enhance a range of experiences.



Curecanti National Recreation Area

Curecanti National Recreation Area contains 41,688 acres of which 30,818 are land and 10,870 are water. It does not contain any designated wilderness areas, therefore, all lands in the unit, exclusive of frontcountry facilities and water, are considered backcountry. For planning purposes, the backcountry has been divided into two different zones: East Portal to Morrow Point (EPMP) and Blue Mesa.

quality and recreational opportunities, but have been somewhat affected by grazing and surrounding development pressures. Authorized grazing is still allowed in this area, and hunting is allowed consistent with federal and state regulations. Blue Mesa has fewer sensitive species but more rare plant populations. It includes important sage-grouse and Gunnison's Prairie Dog habitat.

Many of the issues are similar to those found in the designated wilderness and backcountry areas of Black Canyon.

East Portal to Morrow Point (EPMP) –

This area is comprised of backcountry inner canyon and some uplands above the Crystal and Morrow Point Reservoirs. The main difference between this area and the Black Canyon wilderness area is that EPMP is not federally designated wilderness and the Gunnison River is impounded by dams. A majority of the sensitive plant species that occur in Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Curecanti are found in EPMP, and the steep terrain has limited the introduction of exotic or invasive plants to travel routes. Hiking in this area is limited to steep and/or rocky terrain; however, opportunities for more rim hiking could be explored. Hunting is allowed consistent with federal and state regulations.

Blue Mesa –

This area consists of uplands that are high in backcountry



The uplands of the EPMP and Blue Mesa have some roads and minor structures, making it less natural overall. Blue Mesa has more development, grazing, and external development pressures. There is a wide range of land based activities, including shoreline fishing, picnicking, camping, hiking, equestrian, and some motorized use (addressed through a motorized access plan). Although BLM has authorized hang gliding and parasailing in the Big Mesa area, occasional landings do occur within the national recreation area. Such landings are not currently authorized by NPS. Opportunity for this and other activities could be explored in this plan.

These are preliminary ideas. Please share your thoughts through this website.

East Portal to Morrow Point (EPMP) and Blue Mesa

ISSUES/OPPORTUNITIES	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A majority of rare plant species found in Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Curecanti are found in the uplands of the EPMP and Blue Mesa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor rare plant communities and pursue interagency consultation and cooperation Continue to identify and/or monitor cultural resource sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a general interest in developing a wider range of visitor activities and quality backcountry opportunities in these areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore opportunities for creating mountain biking trails in the Blue Mesa area, as appropriate Explore opportunities for hiking trails in varying terrain (i.e., EPMP inner canyon and rim hikes; Blue Mesa hikes) Evaluate camping opportunities Resolve access issues regarding ice climbing, and landing opportunities for hang-gliding and parasailing

Project Schedule	
Project Scoping	Winter/Spring 2010 (public involvement)
Analyze Public Comment	Spring 2010
Alternatives Development	Summer/Fall 2010
Data Collection Development	Spring 2011
Public Review of Plan/EA	Summer 2011 (public involvement)
Final Decision	Fall 2011

What Happens Next?

After the public scoping period has ended, park planners will analyze ideas and concerns submitted by the public and other affected public agencies. Those comments will be carefully considered as topics to be addressed in the wilderness/backcountry plan. If there are different ways or ideas on how to address some of the issues presented in this newsletter or other issues are presented in the scoping process, then the park will create alternative ways to address the issues and meet the goals and objectives of the plan. This is called the alternatives stage. The public will have an opportunity to comment at two different stages of the planning process: this scoping period and when the plan/EA is released for public review.

Please provide your comments on this process through this website!

