



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

District 1 – Cody Davis 970-244-1605

District 2 – Bobbie Daniel 970-244-1604

District 3 – Janet Rowland 970-244-1606

September 24, 2024

Bureau of Land Management
Upper Colorado River District
Grand Junction Field Office - Recreation Program
2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506

To be submitted via email to: BLM_CO_GJ_Web_Mail@blm.gov

RE: Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Business Plan

Dear Planning Team:

The Mesa County Board of County Commissioners (“Mesa County”) thanks you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Business Plan (“Plan”) for the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (“D-E NCA”). We greatly value our collaborative relationship with the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) as outlined in our Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”), CO-076-97-00.

We acknowledge the vast importance of our public lands, not only to the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors, but also for the economic contribution to our state and local governments, private businesses, and non-profit organizations. We offer the following comments on the Plan.

Mesa County believes that fees should be set at a level that do not discourage individuals and families from experiencing our public lands. Striking a balance between affordability and sustainability is key to fostering a positive relationship between the public and the stewardship of our lands. Access should remain open and affordable so that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy these resources.

That being said, having had many discussions about the increase in public lands usage, we recognize the significant challenges facing many of our land management agencies. Mesa County understands the necessity of securing adequate funding to support maintenance and improvements, discourage and remove illegal dumping, as well as attract and retain staffing in light of a difficult housing market.

In review of the document and meeting minutes of the Joint Northwest-Southwest Resource Advisory Council (“RAC”) meeting on May 2, 2024, it appears that there is an inconsistency regarding the ability of the fees to be used in other locations, outside of the D-E NCA. As stated on page 22 of the Plan “The priorities for use of fee revenue are, first, to provide benefits at the site of collection; second, to establish new recreation sites as needed on lands within the D-E NCA; **and third, to offset existing and new BLM recreation site costs within the same state.**”ⁱ (bolded for emphasis).

However, the RAC meeting minutes reflect “Dan stated that Dominguez-Escalante fees must stay within the unit and cannot be used in other parts of the state.”ⁱⁱ As we appreciate that the fees will

be collected directly from end-users benefiting from these facilities, Mesa County requests that the BLM ensure the fees are also used in the D-E NCA, and not in other areas of the state.

According to the Plan, fees increases are dependent on the Western U.S. Consumer Price Index (“CPI”), whereby a 20% increase in the CPI would trigger an automatic, equal increase to fees in the D-E NCA. Mesa County strongly encourages the BLM to return to the Resource Advisory Council for review and approval before fees are increased. Stakeholders deserve an opportunity for review and input before the decision to increase fees is made.

We appreciate your continued efforts to care for our public lands while ensuring they are accessible to all. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Bobbie Daniel, Chair
Mesa County Board of Commissioners

Cody Davis
Commissioner

Janet Rowland
Commissioner

CC: Peter Baier, Mesa County Administrator
Todd Starr, Mesa County Attorney
Mesa County Administration

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. (2024). *Draft Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area business plan* (p. 30). https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-06/508_20240625%20D-E%20NCA%20Business%20Plan%20%281%29.pdf

² Joint Northwest-Southwest Colorado Resource Advisory Council. (2024, May 2). *Meeting minutes: May 2, 2024, at the Bill Heddles Recreation Center, 531 N Palmer St., Delta, Colorado* (p. 4). Bureau of Land Management. <https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2024-08/MAY%202024%20NW%20SW%20RAC%20%20MINUTES.pdf>