

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Dominguez North

Home to desert big horn, deer, and rich, natural silence, the proposed Gunnison Wilderness Area is a wild gem close to Grand Junction. Its pinyon-juniper covered canyons and cliffs rise up from the river to create a quietly spectacular landscape just adjacent to the clutter of urban sprawl.

Kate Ellis and Eric Rechel, Grand Junction

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 12,449 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Grand Junction Field Office (Grand Junction)
Location: The Gunnison River area is located five miles south of Whitewater, on the west side of the Gunnison River, in Mesa County.

Wilderness Qualities

The desert has many voices: the moaning of the wind through narrow canyons, the trickle and rush of water over rock, the jubilant call of the canyon wren, the silence of open space. We hear these voices singly, sometimes in duos, but it is a rare place that presents to us the entire chorus. The Gunnison River area is such a place.

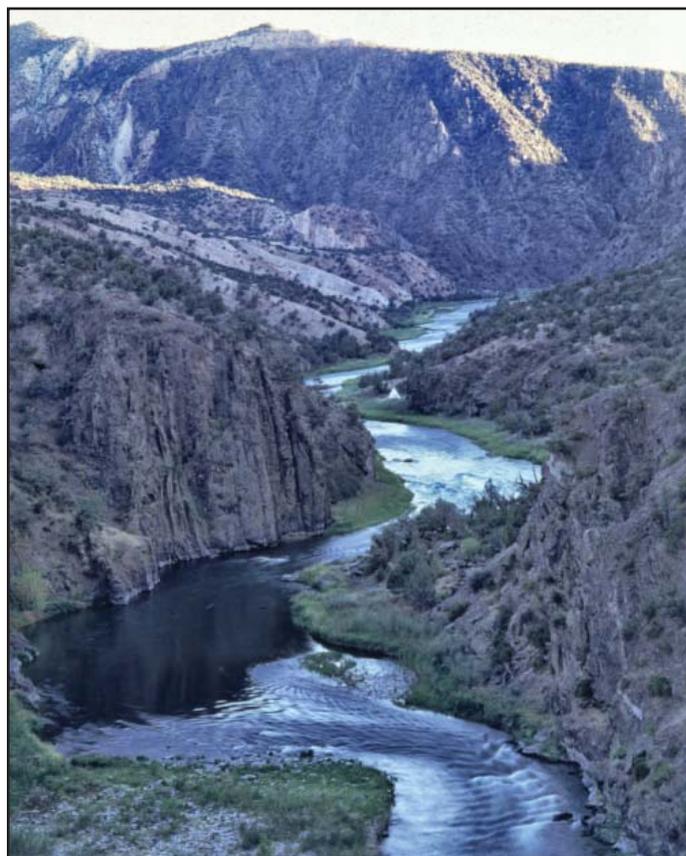
Located 12 miles southeast of Grand Junction, the Gunnison River unit encompasses an intricate system of mesas and canyons and hosts numerous species across three distinct ecosystems. Pinyon-juniper woodlands punctuate the rolling hills of the western portion of the unit, giving way to sagebrush and prickly pear as the terrain becomes rockier and more rugged.

In the eastern portion of the unit, many slopes hold no vegetation at all. Here, narrow canyons slice through red Entrada sandstone beneath a rugged escarpment of Morrison Formation sandstone. Ephemeral streams support insect and bird species and allow willows and other plants to thrive. At the eastern boundary, sheer cliffs plunge hundreds of feet down to the waters of the Gunnison River, providing a scenic backdrop for rafters and kayakers on the river and shelter for pallid bats and a variety of bird species.

The Dominguez North unit is a place of contrasts: hot, unrelenting sun on top of the mesas and cool shade beneath the cliffs; dry sand and rock and life-giving water; solitude and abundant life. Yet there is a harmony of elements here as well: day and night

flyers living within the rocks, feeding off the insects that proliferate in moisture rich pockets, and soaring on thermals that rise against the cliffs.

The forested mesa tops and exposed slickrock offer fine opportunities for hiking, backpacking, scenic viewing, and photography. Exploring the tight canyons, many encounter the very definition of solitude: themselves, alone with the lands.



Gunnison River canyon.

Resource Information

Dominguez North is within a livestock grazing allotment for cattle. Dominguez North has similar geology to the adjacent Dominguez Canyons unit, with low to non-existent potential for oil, gas, or coal. No mineral leases exist within the area.

Motorized vehicle use is permitted only on existing routes and trails.

There are no commercial timber stands, although some personal use firewood collecting has occurred in the area.

Dominguez North borders the Gunnison River but does not include it. The unit is essentially a headwaters area with only perennial streams arising within it.



Exposed mesas provide contrast from the cool, shaded canyons. (Kurt Kunkle)

Boundary Issues

The western boundary of the unit follows the Tabeguache Trail (which is not inside the unit). The communication towers visible from Highway 141 are excluded from the unit as well. As the boundary approaches Cactus Park, it begins to follow contour lines to exclude numerous stock ponds from the area.

The southern boundary follows BLM Road 7364. The eastern boundary follows the western bank of the Dominguez North and excludes private property. The river is excluded from the unit.



Hikers enjoy scenic slick-rock hiking. (Jeff Widen)

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Gunnison River Proposed Wilderness Area Grand Junction Field Office July 1, 2006

