

North Fork Alternative Plan—A Proposal to BLM for Managing Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

Colorado's North Fork Valley is a unique place. As the U.S. Bureau of Land Management revises its Resource Management Plan for the North Fork's public lands, special care must be given to the management of oil and gas leasing and development.

The North Fork is an area reinventing itself as a food and wine center, a creative and cultural hub. A nationally-renowned agritourism destination, the North Fork is a blend of old and new, producer of low-sulfur 'super-compliant' coal with hundred-year mining heritage, and home to the state's highest concentration of organic farms and orchards.

The North Fork Plan—An Alternative to the BLM Uncompahgre Resource Management Plan revision for Managing Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

Many in the area and beyond share the desire to preserve what's unique and special about the North Fork Valley. BLM should select as its final plan, management that protects this unique and special place. This outline offers the basis of just such a plan.

The BLM lands in particular are close-in and proximate to the towns, farms, and people of the valley. These public lands are already heavily utilized and are key components of the valley's fabric: they surround towns, schools, farms, orchards, and roads; these lands include our water sources—domestic and irrigation, nearby and popular recreation areas and hunting lands, key wildlife habitat and delicate soils and other resources. These BLM lands are also an important part of the scenic backdrop of the North Fork Valley.

Management Objectives: Support Community and Culture, Safeguard Existing and Emerging Economies, Protect Natural Resources and Wildlife

The *North Fork Alternative Plan* provides specific direction for oil and gas leasing and development to secure strong protections for the resources and uses by the public that the BLM-administered public lands support and affect.

The *North Fork Alternative Plan* provides a framework to support the culture and character of the North Fork including its agricultural and mining heritage and economies; to enhance nearby, river-based, and dispersed recreational opportunities; and to ensure protection for sensitive resources and wildlife lands.

It should be noted here that the agency can close the lands to leasing altogether, and Congress can withdraw all or some portion from future oil and gas leasing.



The Background of the North Fork Alternative Plan

The idea to provide BLM with more specific management direction as part of that public agency's revision of its decades old land use plan for this area came out of this community's response to an agency oil and gas leasing proposal last winter.

Led by co-chairs from Citizens for a Healthy Community and The Conservation Center, a set of individuals representing organic growers, wineries, ranching, businesses, and conservationists convened to consider management that could be proposed to BLM as part of its Resource Management Plan revision, to ensure adequate protections for important resources, activities and features of the North Fork.

The alternative plan sets out to adapt existing BLM management tools to the North Fork, and to craft a framework for oil and gas leasing and development that is highly protective of the North Fork's important features and resources.

Community Group

Co-Chairs: Jim Ramey, Citizens for a Healthy Community; Sarah Sauter, The Conservation Center.

Members: Brent Helleckson, Stone Cottage Cellars/West Elk AVA; Mark Waltermire, ThistleWhistle Farms/Valley Organic Growers Association; Tom Stevens; Bob Lario, Nancy Wood, RE/MAX Mountain West; John Moore, The Conservation Center; Daniel Feldman, Citizens for a Healthy Community; Pete Kolbensschlag, Mountain West Strategies.

Management Tools: Zones, Visual Resources, Special Designations

The general framework behind the *North Fork Alternative* is a combination of standard BLM management tools that work together to safeguard community and culture, support existing and emerging economies, and protect natural resources and wildlife. To help direct possible future oil and gas development on the area’s BLM lands, the *North Fork Alternative* would:

- Create ‘Management Zones’ to protect the North Fork Valley’s key features and economies.
- Maintain rural setting through protection of scenic corridors, key vistas, & view sheds.
- Enhance recreational opportunities and address sensitive resource issues.

Management Zones

- Maintain the historical, current, and emerging, economies of the area including agriculture, coal mining, wine-making, and agritourism; and, keep industrial oil and gas development away from schools and communities;
- Safeguard water supplies; and
- Protect key wildlife habitat, river corridors and riparian areas.

Management Zones would be developed to protect and maintain:

- Towns, Schools & Communities
- Coal Mining
- Agricultural Lands & Operations
- Domestic Water Supplies
- Dams, Irrigation Facilities & Water Conveyances
- Wildlife Habitat
- River & Riparian Areas

Visual Resource Management

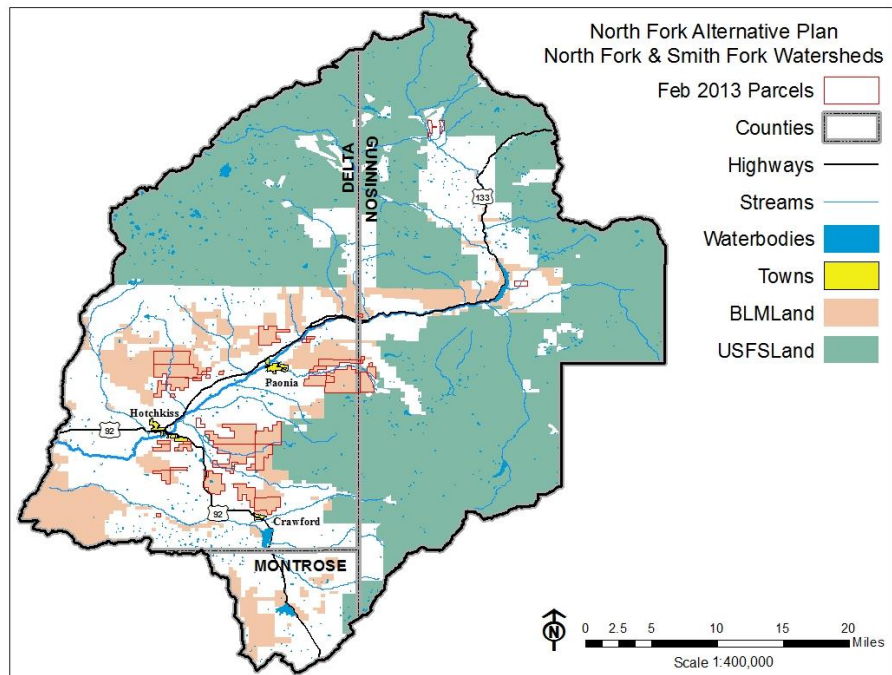
Manage BLM lands to preserve the rural look and character of the Valley.

- BLM lands within the North Fork would be managed with a mixture of ‘No Surface Occupancy’ and ‘Controlled Surface Use’ with stipulated Best Management Practices. Key areas in the valley and along road corridors would be protected by prohibiting surface disturbing activities from oil and gas development.

Special Management Designations

Protect the area’s unique recreational opportunities and sensitive resources through special management designations.

- **Recreation Management Areas**
 - Jumbo Mountain Special Recreation Management Area
 - North & Smith Fork Rivers Extensive Recreation Management Area
- **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern**
 - Mancos Soils (‘Dobies’) and areas with geologic hazards



The map depicts lands, towns and water bodies that are within the North Fork River and Smith Fork watersheds, in Delta, Gunnison and Montrose Counties, Colorado.

The North Fork Alternative Plan for Oil and Gas Leasing and Development applies to the tan-colored area on this map, which depicts the BLM-administered public lands. The green-colored area depicts National Forest Lands, which are subject to their own land use plans that manage surface use. The white-colored area depicts private lands and yellow-areas depict the town boundaries of Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford. Parcels included in the February 2013 BLM Lease Sale are highlighted in red.