

# Wildlife, Hunting and Fishing Fact Sheet

## North Fork Valley Big Game Units At Risk: 52, 521, 53, 411, 63

Clean air and clean water are the lifeblood of the North Fork Valley. **Clean, safe water is crucial whether you're an elk, fish or a human.** The BLM's preferred alternative in its Draft Resource Management Plan for the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) proposes to open close to 1 million acres to oil and gas leasing. The UFO Planning Area consists of Delta, Gunnison, Mesa, Montrose, Ouray, and San Miguel Counties in southwestern Colorado. The planning area does not include the Gunnison Gorge or Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Areas, which are managed under separate RMPs.

The BLM's preferred alternative is a roadmap to industrializing the North Fork Valley with large-scale oil and gas development: multi-well well pads, compressor stations, storage tanks, pipelines, roads, noise, air pollution and risks of contaminating surface waters.

Roads, and the activity from motorized vehicles, tend to move elk off and away. Hunter success is therefore reduced in an area filled with roads. Roads can also increase sedimentation into streams, potentially damaging fish habitat and reducing fish populations. Where you don't have fish, you won't have good fishing.

The North Fork Valley is home to gold medal fishing and our local BLM lands provide some of the best hunting experiences not just in Colorado but nationally. Prime hunting grounds potentially threatened by leasing and development, include areas above Paonia at the base of Mount Lamborn/Landsend and much of the country north of Hotchkiss. In terms of wildlife habitat, critical areas are the transitional zones of habitat, the middle ground between private land and national forests. In the North Fork, these are lands managed by the BLM that are above the valley floor (between Hotchkiss and Paonia) and below/adjacent to Gunnison National Forest and Grand Mesa National Forest. They are typified by sagebrush and juniper and are crucial winter ranges, migration corridors and year round habitat for not only big game, but many other species (numerous birds, reptiles, small mammals).

### BLM did not consider:

- The impact of industrial oil and gas operations, air pollution and water contamination on the health of wildlife animals, nor the impact on the hunting and fishing economy.
- Impacts on hunting due to changes in wildlife migration and reproduction habits.
- The decreased recreational value of public lands caused by industrial oil and gas activities.
- Impacts from noise pollution, negatively affecting wildlife, and bird migration patterns.
- Impacts on the hunting, fishing and camping experience from having to hike passed industrial activities.

In addition, rural gas pipelines are exempt from federal pipeline safety and integrity regulations. BLM did not consider the impact of a web of unregulated pipelines on forest fires, campsite safety, leaks and soil and water contamination.



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BLM's preferred alternative would open 94.5% of total oil and gas mineral acreage to leasing, which is .1% less than its current 30-year old RMP. BLM divides oil and gas leasing by potential for development. In its preferred alternative, BLM allocates 53% of the federal mineral estate to higher development potential<sup>1</sup> and the remaining 47% to lower development potential.<sup>2</sup> BLM has based its oil and gas drilling assumptions on a 2004 report, which assumes that 1271 wells will be drilled in the planning area. The RMP does not impose a cap on drilling. BLM's assumption on the number of foreseeable wells could be significantly understated given, new research, hydraulic fracturing and multi-stage drilling technologies, which were not considered at the time of the report.

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<b>Oil and Gas Mineral Leasing (acres)</b>	<b>Alt A</b>	<b>Alt B</b>	<b>Alt B.I (NFAP)</b>	<b>Alt C</b>	<b>Alt D (Preferred)</b>
<b>Total Oil and Gas leasing potential: 916,020 acres</b>					
<i>Open to Leasing: Higher Development Potential</i>	459,650	375,900	344,020	459,650	455,370
<i>Open to Leasing: Lower Development Potential</i>	407,270	353,420	287,570	412,150	410,600
<i>Closed to Leasing: Higher Development Potential</i>	23,140	106,890	138,770	23,140	27,420
<i>Closed to Leasing: Lower Development Potential</i>	21,080	79,810	145,660	21,080	22,630
<b>North Fork Area Total Oil and Gas leasing potential: 139,540 acres</b>					
<i>Open to Leasing: Higher Development Potential</i>			15,710		
<i>Open to Leasing: Lower Development Potential</i>			19,080		
<i>Closed to Leasing: Higher Development Potential</i>			36,010		
<i>Closed to Leasing: Lower Development Potential</i>			68,740		

Source: *Uncompahgre Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*, May 2016, pages 4-2, 4-255, 4-266, 4-272, 4-277, 4-280, 4-284; *Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario For Oil and Gas For The Uncompahgre Field Office, Colorado, Final Report*, February 16, 2012, page 61.

<sup>1</sup> Higher development potential refers to areas identified as having very high, high, or moderate conventional oil and gas development potential.

<sup>2</sup> Lower development potential refers to areas identified as having low, very low, or negligible conventional oil and gas development potential.