Uncompahgre Mesas Forest Restoration and Demonstration Project

A collaborative forest health workgroup in western Colorado

Mission Statement:

To enhance the resiliency, diversity and productivity of the native ecosystem in the Uncompahgre Mesas area of the Uncompaghre Plateau, CO using best available science and collaboration.

Project Area:

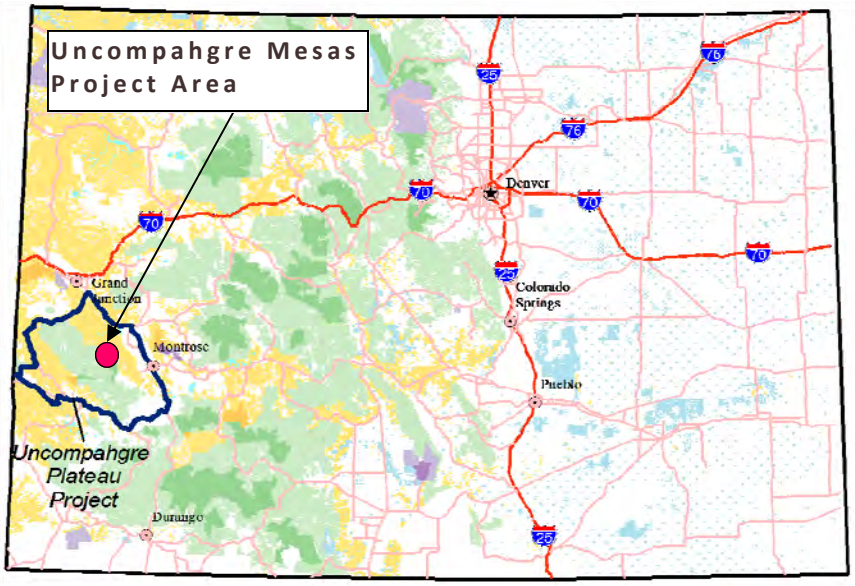
Uncompahgre Mesas is a 74,000-acre landscape located on the Uncompahgre Plateau in western Colorado. The area is comprised of U.S. Forest Service lands with a number of private in-holdings. The first phase of this demonstration effort will focus on a 17,000-acre portion of this larger landscape. The major forest types are ponderosa pine, aspen, mixed conifer and spruce-fir.

Workgroup Members:

Numerous individuals and organizations have participated in the workgroup. The Uncompahgre Plateau (UP) Project, a non-profit landscape collaborative, provides coordination for the project.

The main workgroup members include:

- Colorado Forest Restoration Institute – Colorado State University
- U.S. Forest Service – Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Colorado State Forest Service
- Colorado Wild
- Western Colorado Congress
- Audubon Society
- Interested Community Members
- Uncompahgre Plateau (UP) Project



Project Goals:

- **Collaborate**. The project seeks to bring together individuals with different perspectives, experiences, and expertise to develop innovative resource management alternatives.
- **Restore ecosystem structure, composition and function.** The protection and restoration of ecosystem structure, composition and function encourages viable populations of all native species in natural patterns of abundance and distribution.
- **Develop and establish research demonstration sites.** Research demonstration sites aid in the development of environmentally sound, economically sustainable and socially acceptable approaches to forest ecosystem restoration.

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A Need for Action:

Many forest community types in Colorado have been altered during the last 120 years by fire exclusion, the proliferation of roads and vehicular traffic, past logging and grazing practices, and other activities. The changes to these forests have, in some cases, increased the potential for catastrophic fire and adversely affected many biological processes. Therefore, this collaborative group seeks to restore the ecosystem to a more natural condition, consistent with the historical ranges of variability, and to reduce the risk of unnatural crown fires both within stands and across the landscape.

Restoring Resiliency:

With the help of the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute –Colorado State University, historical forest composition and structure data (pre 1880) were collected by workgroup members in areas representative of the major vegetation types within the project area. This data provided a starting point for designing forest management and restoration treatments that encourage healthy forested landscapes that are resilient to change while contributing to the human communities that benefit from the forests' production of water, timber, forage, wildlife, recreation, and beauty. A long term 'citizen scientist' multi-party ecological monitoring program has been initiated that encourages participation from members of the community. A study of the economics of the project will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatments and the lessons learned from this first phase will be applied to future phases of the project.

On-the-Ground Treatments:

Commercial timber harvest and mechanical treatments will take place on about 6,000—8,000 acres within ponderosa pine, aspen, mixed conifer and spruce-fir forest types, producing an estimated 17,000-24,000 hundred cubic feet of commercial timber and generating $0.6 million. Timber from higher elevation forest types, with greater commercial value, will be extracted to offset the costs of restoration treatments in lower elevation stands through Stewardship Contracting. Approximately $0.7 million will need to be sought in grant funding or additional appropriated funding to complete the planned project.

Contributions:

This project would not be possible without significant contributions of time and energy given by the numerous organizations and individuals involved in the workgroup. To date, formal funding has been provided by the U.S. Forest Service, UP Project and Colorado Forest Restoration Institute –Colorado State University. The UP Project has also received additional funding for the project from the National Forest Foundation through their Collaboration Support Program Grant and Matching Grant Programs.

For more information on this project, please contact the UP Project at:
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Updated: 08/2009