



Uncompahgre Plateau Project FY2007 Executive Summary



The ecosystem functions as a whole irrespective of administrative or land ownership boundaries. We must, therefore, also work in this broad and dynamic manner. Based on this, the UP Partners have committed to a systems-based approach for developing coordinated watershed restoration and rehabilitation projects across jurisdictional boundaries.

The UP Project centers around communication and community involvement. By using a collaborative approach, the UP Partnership hopes to balance economic, cultural, social and ecological values in the restoration of the Uncompahgre Plateau – an area located

Partnership (PLP), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to move beyond conflict to effective and efficient management of the landscape. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and Tri-State Generation joined the partnership in 2004.

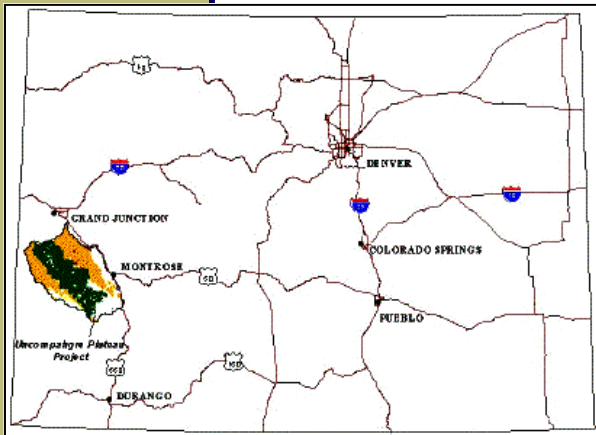
com·mu·ni·ty ~ a group sharing common ownership

Invasive Species Management, a Native Plant Program, On-The-Ground Treatments, and Education and Technology Transfer. The UP Native Plant Program, our largest and most exciting endeavor, has expanded the upper Colorado Plateau Region - increasing efficiency and reducing costs.

A broader vision provides an opportunity for programs that work with natural systems and meet vital management objectives in spite of limited budgets and personnel. Collaboration leads to communication, trust, credibility, adaptive management, and a better understanding of the environment and the effect we have on it. The results are healthier landscapes.

col·lab·o·ra·tion ~ a source of innovation and joint problem-solving whereby people with different perspectives, experiences, and information formulate new resource management alternatives. ~ ERI, NAU 2003

Our goal ~ to improve the ecosystem health and natural functions of the landscape through active restoration projects backed by best science, community input and adaptive management.



A map of the Uncompahgre Plateau in southwest CO

in southwest Colorado, comprising over 1.5 million acres of private, state and federal lands. The UP Project strives to use the best science available to develop and implement a plan for sustainable natural resource management on the Plateau.

The primary role of UP is to help coordinate and facilitate restoration and rehabilitation activities on the Plateau. Over the past 6 years however, we have leveraged the strength and effectiveness of this collaboration to help obtain funding for an array of programs - expanding to a comprehensive and multi-faceted organization.

The main UP programs now include: Landscape Scale Project Planning,



The purpose of this Executive Summary is to briefly outline several of our 2007 accomplishments. For a more comprehensive look at the UP Project, visit our website at: www.UPProject.org.

co·op·er·a·tion ~ the act of working together for a common purpose.

We began in 2001 with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a commitment by the UP partners: the Public Lands



Big Dominguez Vegetation Management Analysis



Map of the 'Big D' Area

The Big Dominguez Vegetation Management Analysis Area is a 195,000-acre landscape located on the northeastern portion of the Uncompahgre Plateau. The 'Big D' area encompasses both US Forest Service and BLM lands and includes a portion of the Dominguez-Escalante Management Area currently proposed for National Conservation Area (NCA) designation. The area lies within the Grand Valley Ranger District of the GMUG National Forest and the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre Field Offices of the BLM. By working on a landscape- or watershed-scale, the focus is broadened from single-issue management to overall land health.

The BLM completed a Land Health Assessment for the area in the summer of 2007. This assessment pro-

vided up-to-date information on the current conditions and general health of the BLM lands. The USFS has also compiled all the current GIS data on the area (vegetation, roads, past treatments efforts, etc). The data from both the BLM and USFS is now being integrated. Once this sizable task is complete, we will begin to seek public input on the area. We will look to our local community for valuable information on the current conditions and we will work together to develop desired conditions for the area. We hope that you become involved in this exciting and substantial planning effort.



Invasive Species Management

The UP Project, Montrose County, USFS, The Nature Conservancy and the BLM have almost 500,000 acres of public and private land designated as Weed Management Areas (WMA). The purpose of a WMA is to facilitate cooperation among all land managers and private landowners for the mapping, monitoring, control, and prevention of weeds. The formation of a WMA replaces jurisdictional boundaries that can be barriers to proper weed management with natural and more logical boundaries. Once a WMA is designated a Coordinated Plan can be developed, increasing the effectiveness of our weed management efforts.



Spraying weeds in Roubideau Canyon

This project has been made possible by a 2005 Uravan Mill Natural Resources Damage Fund Grant that was awarded to the partners for natural conservation and reclamation through weed management. The UP Project also received grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Forest Foundation and Center for Invasive Plant Management. An exciting aspect of the current grants awarded is the opportunity to provide a Cost Share Program for private landowners in the West End of Montrose County.

The Horsefly CWMA Plan, completed in 2006, encompasses 143,000 acres. In 2007, the adjacent 213,816-acre Tabeguache CWMA Plan was completed. The WMA was inventoried and treatment was initiated by the partners.

Within the Horsefly WMA, coordinated treatment of noxious weeds is on-going. One particular project is to control an outbreak of spotted knapweed that covers about 4,800 acres. The UP Project has been working cooperatively with private landowners, NRCS, Montrose County, utility companies and the USFS to

treat this aggressive invader. The UP Project was successful in receiving a Environmental Quality Incentives Program grant to treat noxious weeds on the private lands. The local Habitat Partnership Program (HPP) has also awarded funds for herbicide costs for this project. In addition, the UP Project has coordinated treatment efforts in adjacent areas, including the right-of-ways of the Trans Co. and Tri-State power lines. Through this cooperative project, we can increase the effectiveness of our treatment efforts.

The 116,000-acre Paradox WMA is the third focus area that our partners have initiated an integrated weed strategy for. The UP Project received a grant from Encana to help with the drafting of this CWMA Plan and for public outreach efforts. An inventory of this area was completed in Summer 2007 and the first public meeting held in December. Treatments will begin in Spring 2008.

At a series of public meetings hosted by the UP Project, several landowners expressed an interest in learning more about the effectiveness of various herbicides on the noxious weed, Russian knapweed. Last fall, with the help of CSU Cooperative Extension, 4 treatment plots were set up to test five different herbicide. In July, the UP Project, BLM, San Miguel County Weed Department and CSU Extension Office hosted a public tour of weed treatment plots.

This summer, in coordination with the BLM, the UP Project also hired a contractor to treat weeds in an 18-mile stretch of Roubideau and Potter Canyons via horseback over 11 days. This is the second year that this rugged and hard-to-reach section of canyons has been treated.



Field tour of treatment plots



A Need for Natives

The goal of our Native Plant Program is the development of regionally-adapted native plant materials for the Colorado Plateau region. A reliable source of native plant seed is needed to facilitate the restoration and rehabilitation of diverse plant communities in wildland burned areas, fuels reduction treatment areas, depleted rangeland, wildlife habitat, energy development areas and for noxious weed mitigation.

The primary elements of the program include: the production of native plant materials; basic and applied research on native species; and training and dissemination of information on restoration activities and native plant communities.

Study plots at Fountain Green

Beginning in 2003, we have made wildland collections of over 50 key native species to establish Seed Increase fields and for comprehensive studies. Since many of the species have not yet been researched, considerable information is needed. As we learn more about the different species within our program, we are able to

focus our efforts on those that are most promising and demonstrate valuable characteristics such as drought tolerance, high germination rates, and ease of cultivation.

This year we are actively working with 44 native species, of which 25 species are in Seed Increase fields and 36 are in Cultural and/or Life History studies.

This fall, our crew also planted two different suites of our native species in two wildland settings in UT - one natural setting and one area that experienced a wildfire in the summer of 2007. These plantings will provide excellent public demonstration sites as well as provide useful data on the survivability of these local ecotypes when planted in a seed mix.

The ultimate aim of our Native Plant Program is to provide source-identified seed and data on cultivation practices to growers for commercial production. We currently have 15 species (1 shrub, 4 grasses and 10 forbs) available for interested growers.



Oregon fleabane in a seed increase field



Powerline Treatments

Work has begun on the Western Area Power Administration powerline fuels treatment project. The project area extends approximately 3.5 miles along the WAPA 345kv transmission line located on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The US Forest Service and WAPA are working in coordination to: mitigate wildfire hazards; improve forest diversity and increase wildlife habitat by releasing

grasses, forbs and mountain shrub vegetation communities; and create a demonstration site for natural resource collaboration among various project participants.

Treatments along the right-of-way will leave an undulating corridor of vegetation to reduce visual impacts and create cover areas for wildlife.

Lower height vegetation will be left within the right-of-way when possible. Merchantable timber will be removed and all other products will be treated on-site.

This project will be partially funded by a 3-year National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant.



The Forest Through the Trees



A meeting of the minds

The UP Project, US Forest Service, and representatives from the timber industry and conservation groups are working with the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute – Colorado State University (CFRI) to discuss the potential of creating demonstration plots on the Uncompahgre Plateau.

Portions of the forests on the Uncompahgre Plateau are outside the historic range of fire frequency and forest structure. Fire suppression, among other factors, have

lead to multi-storied canopies and high fuels that support uncharacteristically severe wildfires. Other areas have seen successional changes in vegetation types –leading to an imbalance of the natural diversity of the ecosystem. Forest restoration and rehabilitation treatments can reduce fire risks and improve forest health. The GMUG National Forest is also concerned about Sudden Aspen Decline (SAD) and Spruce Budworm infestations on the Uncompahgre Plateau.

Our collaborative group is focusing on the “Ouray Mesas” area on the southern portion of the Uncompahgre Plateau. Planning efforts will initially concentrate on about 5,000 acres of ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and aspen forests. With the help of the CFRI,

treatments will be designed to examine several resource management alternatives. Demonstration areas will be imbedded within projects, allowing the public to see the range of forest conditions that follow various treatments, and provide a place for people with diverse views to come together and talk about forest health and fire risks. The group is also interested in investigating the economic aspect of forest health treatments. We look forward to working with our partners on this exciting endeavor.

The UP Project was successful in receiving a National Forest Foundation—Collaborative Support Program Grant to assist in its role of outreach and facilitation for this project



For more information,
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Program Funding

The UP Project has received direct and in-kind funding from the Bureau of Land Management – Colorado and Utah State Offices; U.S. Forest Service Regions 2 and 4; Colorado Division of Wildlife; Utah Division of Wildlife Resources; Natural Resources Conservation Service; National Fish and Wildlife Fund; National Forest Foundation; Environmental Quality Incentives Program; Western SARE; Habitat Partnership Program; Encana; BASF; Cornerstone; Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation; and the Colorado Mule Deer Foundation.

Since its inception in 2002 through December 2007, the program has received \$3.8 million. In 2007, the UP Project expended \$573,000 on its many program areas. Funds are administered by Uncompahgre/Com., Inc., a 501c-3 nonprofit formed by the Public Lands Partnership. The UP Project has also received substantial in-kind donations from several sources. For a more detailed report of current program funding, please contact us at: UPProject@UPProject.org.

Ironhorse Analysis Area

The UP Project is assisting the US Forest Service in drafting an Environmental Assessment (EA) for areas within the Ironhorse Analysis Area (IAA) – a 65,000 acre landscape of ponderosa pine, pine-oak, aspen, pinyon-juniper woodland, and sagebrush rangeland located at the southern tip of the Uncompahgre Plateau approximately six miles east of Norwood, Colorado. In 2006, the UP Project completed a Comprehensive Vegetation Management Analysis for the area. The report found that the IAA was in need of vegetation treatments, especially in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) areas. The current EA will focus on WUI areas around the community of Sanborn Park and the powerlines.

The IAA was extensively modified during the settlement and homesteading era of the late 19th century and received heavy commercial use well into the middle of the 20th century before being acquired by the U.S. Forest Service. In addition to the legacy of past land use, the previous landowners and the USFS implemented a fire suppression program that has resulted in fire exclusion in a landscape that was adapted to relatively frequent, low intensity fires. The cumulative vegetative and fuel conditions resulting from this collective history are the underlying challenge for current and future management of the IAA.

There are also over 3,600 acres of ponderosa pine plantations within the IAA. The current condition of the pine plantations represents a significant



risk of loss to potential wildfire and continuing decline in growth potential.

Findings from the Vegetation Management Analysis show a need to intervene to move the landscape in the direction of pre-settlement (1870) structural and restoration in the pine ecosystem. The application of a combination of active and passive restoration approaches are recommended to restore ecosystem function and resiliency, reduce the potential for unnaturally severe wildfires, and reduce susceptibility to abnormal levels of insect and disease mortality to this unique area.

Funding from a 3-year National Fish and Wildlife Foundation General Matching Grant will be used for planning and implementation of this landscape-scale project.



Pine Plantations in the IAA



Plant Community Restoration Workshop

In September, the UP Project hosted a Plant Community Restoration Workshop in Grand Junction, CO. Co-sponsors of the event included: the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Colorado Division of Wildlife, BLM, US Forest Service, Society for Range Management, and Colorado State University Extension. Over 100 participants joined us for this 3-day workshop to learn more about contemporary restoration and post-disturbance landscape treatments. The workshop had both classroom presentations and field inspection of practices and procedures used to control plant competition, complete seedbed preparation, seeding operations to es-

tablish a diverse number of species, and measures to interseed and encourage natural recovery. We also spent a day on-site on the Uncompahgre Plateau for an exciting equipment demonstration day to view large machinery in action. Participants were able to assess the effectiveness of various mechanical treatment methods including: modern anchor chains, cables, roller choppers, hydro ax, Lawson aerator, rangeland drills, the new Truax drills, seed dribblers, and pipe harrows. Presentations from the workshop are available for download on our website.



Workshop participants view a rollerchopper up-close at the demo day