

North Fork Alternative Plan

A Proposal to BLM for Managing Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

Western 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, a producer of low-sulfur 'super-compliant' coal with a hundred-year mining heritage, and home to the state's highest concentration of organic farms and orchards.

The North Fork Alternative Plan—A Community-based Proposal for Managing BLM Oil and Gas Development in the North Fork and Smith Fork watersheds



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 management plan an approach that protects this unique and special place.

The North Fork Alternative Plan offers just such a management approach to be presented to the Bureau of Land Management as a recommendation and comment on its draft Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan revision, expected sometime in 2013. With strong community support behind it, it is hoped that the BLM will adopt these recommendations into its final plan.

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

The North Fork's BLM lands are nearby to the towns, farms, and people of the valley. These public lands are already heavily utilized, multiple-use lands that 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 lands are an important part of the scenic qualities of the North Fork.

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 recreational opportunities; and to ensure protection for sensitive resources and wildlife lands.

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 in December 2011.

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 over the year 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 Elks 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.

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

The North Fork Alternative Plan for Oil and Gas Leasing and Development

The general framework behind the North Fork Alternative Plan is to recommend a combination of existing and familiar BLM and other agency management tools that work together to protect the important resources, uses and values of the BLM lands and resources in the North Fork. The North Fork Alternative Plan sets out to support existing and emerging economies, safeguard community and culture, and protect natural resources and wildlife.

To help direct possible future oil and gas development on BLM lands/minerals, the North Fork Alternative Plan 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 coal mining, agriculture, wine-making, and agritourism.
- Keep industrial oil and gas development away from schools and communities.
- Safeguard water supplies.
- Protect key wildlife habitat, river corridors and riparian areas, and sensitive landscapes.

Management Zones would be developed to protect and maintain:

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

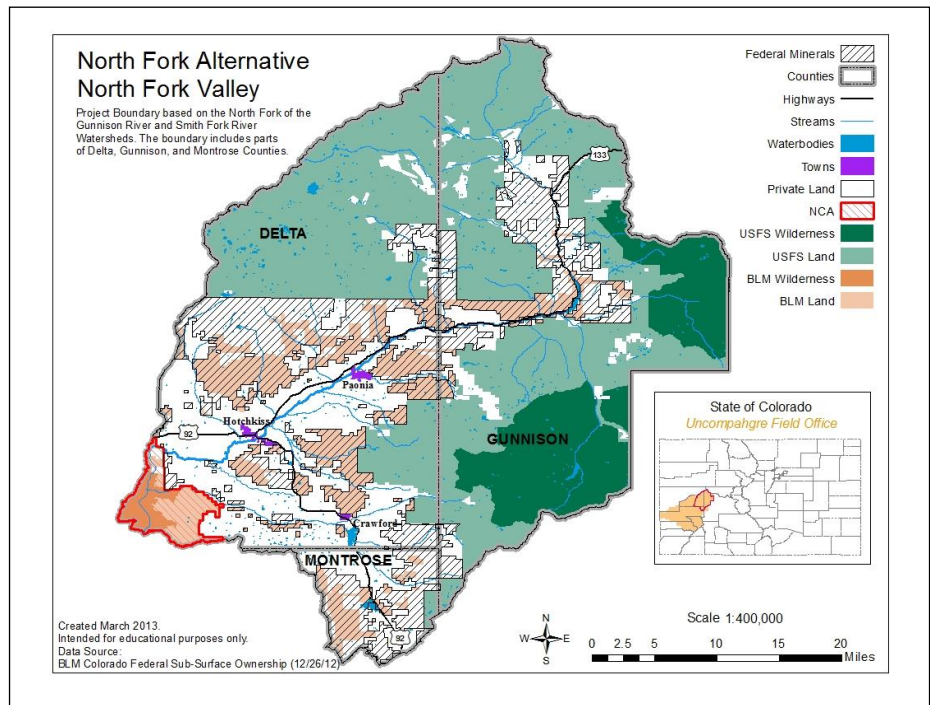
Special Management Designations

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

- Scenic areas and views from important corridors and locations would be protected by a mixture of No Leasing, and ‘No Surface Occupancy’ and ‘Controlled Surface Use’ protections, with stipulated Best Management Practices.

Protect the area’s unique recreational opportunities.

- Designate the Jumbo Mountain Special Recreation Management Area, and work with area stakeholders and the Town of Paonia to manage it specifically for its recreational opportunities.



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 primarily to the tan-colored lands on this map, which depict the BLM-administered public lands; and also to the ‘fluid minerals’ or potential BLM-administered federal oil and gas reserves, indicated by the cross-hatching.

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 purple-areas depict the town boundaries of Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Crawford. Private lands with cross-hatching indicate ‘spilt estate’ situation, where the federal government controls the minerals beneath non-federal, generally private, land.