

## San Juan Public Lands Desired Future Exercise Study Group Meeting 6

At the National level, the Forest Service and BLM have similar missions:

- Forest Service: to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.
- BLM: to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

As part of the Plan revisions, we need to describe in specific terms how the San Juan Public Lands can help contribute to achieving those Agency missions. We will be using what we learn from the community study group meetings, other public involvement, and conversations with our employees to do that.

Forest Plans and Resource Management Plans set the overall direction for the National Forest and BLM lands and resources. The Plans should articulate a vision for the future, identify important niches that the public lands fill, and describe desired future conditions. Plan direction should help guide managers in making decisions on projects and in their day-to-day activities.

### VISION

One message that the plan revision team has heard many times, from many people is a desire that the San Juan Public Lands continue to function as "working lands", meaning that historic uses such as livestock grazing and timber production continue at sustainable levels. An equally strong message is that it is important to maintain some areas in a wild, or relatively pristine, condition and to maintain a high quality for scenery, historic and cultural resources, water, and wildlife and fisheries habitat. Providing a balance of different types of recreation settings and opportunities is important to the people that live in southwestern Colorado, people that come here to visit, and businesses that support those activities.

### NICHE

BLM and National Forest System lands total over 450 million acres, scattered across the United States. While having some things in common, they also vary greatly. The San Juan Public Lands differ from many other BLM and National Forest units in a variety of ways. Some of the things that people have identified as standing out on the San Juan compared to most places include:

### **Diversity of Uses/Working Lands**

A wide variety of activities and uses occur on the San Juan Public Lands. These include both commodity uses that shaped the early history of the area such as mining, grazing, and timber harvest, and growing use of the area for recreation and as a scenic backdrop to amenity settlement in the surrounding towns. Activities aimed at forest restoration and fire hazard mitigation have had increased emphasis in recent years.

### **Diverse Landscapes**

The San Juan Public Lands range from just under 5,000 feet in elevation in the canyon country near the Utah border to over 14,000 in the highest peaks of the San Juan Mountains. Parts of the San Juan Public Lands are in the Colorado Plateau, other parts in the Rocky Mountains. Few places match this range of semi-desert and canyon lands to alpine. This results in a diverse range of habitats for plants and animals, as well as diversity in scenery and recreation opportunities.

### **Recreation**

The San Juan provides access to large areas of unconfined recreation experiences in an area with diverse natural settings. This combined with the package of amenities offered by the local communities and the recreational opportunities found on the public lands makes southwestern Colorado a place where people want to live and visit.

### **Large Expanses of Undeveloped Country**

The San Juan has large areas of Wilderness and other roadless, undeveloped areas that provide large, inter-connected areas of wildlife habitat and that are of high value for biological diversity. Just over four hundred fifteen thousand acres have been designated as Wilderness. The San Juan manages a portion of the Weminuche Wilderness, the largest in Colorado. More than six hundred thousand additional acres are currently roadless

### **Scenery**

The public lands are becoming increasingly important as a scenic and recreational backdrop to the local communities. These attractions are an important component of population growth and also bring many visitors to the area.

The San Juan Skyway is one of only 26 All-American Roads in the United States. The Skyway's diverse natural and cultural resources, combined with unique and spectacular scenery, gives it a claim as truly one of the crown jewels of scenic byways in the entire nation. Even more spectacular views can be found by getting off the pavement. Very diverse settings and opportunities for recreation are available. The combined package of the amenities offered by the local communities and the recreational opportunities found on the public lands makes southwestern Colorado a place where people want to visit and live.

### **Clean Air and Water**

The San Juan Public Lands contain a Class I airshed, the Weminuche Wilderness, and relatively clean air and high visibility. A large portion of the water in southwestern Colorado originates on National Forest lands which are located in mountainous, headwaters areas. Maintaining supplies of clean water and protecting watersheds were major reasons National Forests were created. The BLM lands in San Juan County play a similar role. This is one of the few areas in the United States where BLM has high-elevation, headwaters lands.

### **Heritage Resources**

The San Juan has a greater range and richness of cultural resources than most areas. Some of the highest densities of archeological sites in the United States, mostly pre-Puebloan, are found here. The area is rich in historical evidence of early European settlement also. Diversity is also found in the people currently connected to the National Forest and BLM lands. Twenty-five Native American tribes claim a cultural affiliation with the San Juan. Portions of the San Juan Public Lands are adjacent to Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute lands.

### **Citizen Stewardship**

The San Juan Public Lands have a National reputation as a place where people are willing to actively engage in caring for the land and resources. A variety of organizations and individuals volunteer to work in stewardship roles and are an integral part of the management of National Forest and BLM lands. Some user groups are willing to assume stewardship responsibilities in order to help maintain opportunities for their interests. Local communities, subdivisions, and individuals have contributed to collaborative wildfire mitigation efforts. This cooperative spirit may provide more opportunities for creative solutions to land management issues than are available most places