

Ashley National Forest Assessment

Recreation Opportunities, Designated Areas, Settings, and Access Report

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Introduction

This assessment provides information on many aspects of recreation and focuses on those specifically referenced in the 2012 Planning Rule:

- Recreation Setting - The social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities. The Forest Service uses the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to define recreation settings and categorize them into classes.
- Recreation Opportunity - A specific recreation activity in a particular recreation setting pursued to enjoy the desired recreation experiences and other benefits that accrue. Recreation opportunities include nonmotorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air.
- Recreation Niches – Forest wide guidance for recreation settings and opportunities.
- Recreation Access - The systems of roads and trails on which people travel to access certain recreation settings and opportunities.
- Recreation Special Uses and Outfitter/Guides - Recreation opportunities that are provided via permit by private individuals and businesses.
- Sustainable Recreation - The set of recreation settings and opportunities on National Forest System lands that is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

Information Sources and Gaps

Primary Sources

National Visitor Use Monitoring Reports: We use national visit monitoring data throughout this document. National visitor use monitoring provides the most relevant, reliable and accurate information on Ashley National Forest visitation. We collect national visitor use monitoring data using a random sampling method that yields statistically valid results at the Ashley National Forest level, depending on an accurate sample design.

INFRA: We use a database application called “INFRA” to house information on developed facilities and natural resources, such as buildings, campgrounds, day use sites, interpretive sites, trails, roads, and wilderness areas.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: We use the Forest Service recreation opportunity spectrum classification system to describe the different recreation settings that are available on a given landscape and the differing levels of development of constructed recreation facilities.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps and Travel Management Plans: The Forest Service Travel Management Rule, published in 2005, requires each national forest or ranger district to designate roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles. The rule requires we publish a motor vehicle use map (36 CFR 212.56), which identifies motorized route/area designations. It also provides us with the authority to regulate use of over-snow vehicles on forest system roads and trails and in designated areas on the National Forest (36 CFR 212.81). The Ashley National Forest completed its Travel Management Plan in 2009.

Recreation Facility Analysis: Recreation facility analysis is a Forest Service analysis process we use to help us design a sustainable recreation program for our developed recreation sites and facilities. Our last recreation facility analysis was conducted in 2006.

Naturewatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education Database (NICE): The NICE database is used to document and advertise interpretation and education programs for the Forest Service.

Secondary Sources

- State Travel and Tourism Reports
- State comprehensive outdoor recreation plans, the latest published for both Wyoming and Utah is 2014.
- Trailhead registry data
- Campground use logs and fee envelopes
- Recreation pass sales
- Outfitter and Guide actual use data
- Relevant analysis or information offered for consideration by the public about recreation or scenic character

Gaps

- We have limited documentation of the Ashley National Forest regarding the location, type, and frequency of recreation use conflicts.
- We have limited data on actual recreation use outside of the NVUM surveys.
- We have limited winter use data, and no winter recreation opportunity spectrum inventory specific to seasonal variations between summer and winter settings and the Ashley National Forest's capacity to support winter opportunities.
- There are no wilderness recreation opportunity spectrum classifications for the High Uintas Wilderness to describe the variations in the degree of isolation from the sounds and influences of people, and the amount of recreation visitor use.
- There are limitations to the national visitor use monitoring as a tool to gather accurate recreation data.
- Wilderness trailhead registration is voluntary and there are varying rates of registration, depending on the user type. Hikers and backpackers are more likely to register than stock groups. It is estimated that approximately 40 – 50 percent of all wilderness users register at the trailheads.
- There is not a registration system for the public to float the Green River, or to record outfitters and guides launched. Nor is there a registration system for visitors using the Little Hole National Recreation Trail, adjacent to the Green River.

Scale of Analysis

The plan area for this assessment includes all lands within the Ashley National Forest, regardless of ownership or jurisdiction. When we discuss larger population trends driving demand for recreation on the Ashley National Forest from surrounding areas outside of the Uintah Basin,

southwestern Wyoming, and northeastern Colorado; the scale of our analysis includes the Wasatch front, which includes Salt Lake, Utah, Davis, and Weber counties. The Ashley National Forest is located on the primary corridor between Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks in northeastern Wyoming, Arches and Canyonlands National Parks in southeastern Utah, and Rocky Mountain National Park in north central Colorado. Tourists that travel these corridors are considered in this assessment as well.

Existing Management Direction

1986 Forest Plan and other Forest Direction

The 1986 Forest Plan Desired Future Condition provides for a special emphasis on recreation because of "unique characteristics, public demand, and management direction". The plan focuses on meeting demand for recreation opportunities through maintaining, upgrading, and adding developed recreation sites and trails while maintaining the mix of opportunities present in 1986. The desired future condition also emphasizes management of the High Uintas Wilderness and other special designations or areas.

Forest-wide direction is also provided for recreation developments. This direction generally repeats direction found in Forest Service Manual 2300 and associated handbooks.

Management Area Direction includes general prescriptions about what types of recreational opportunities or activities fit within the area emphasis, and in some cases describe tools to help achieve the direction. Goals, objectives, and standards/guidelines direct managing dispersed uses, trails, and developed sites. Variations for each of these tie to the management area emphasis. Much of the management area direction repeats national and regional direction.

1986 Forest Plan Objectives Regarding Recreation

Objective 1: Allow public access, and manage all travel to protect other resources, provide for public safety, and minimize conflicts with other users.

Objective 2: Operate and maintain developed recreation sites to Standard Service Levels.

Objective 3: Construct new developed recreation facilities within Ashley National Forest capabilities to meet public demand. Give special emphasis to completion of planning, design, and construction of Central Utah Project sites in a timely manner.

Objective 4: Dispersed recreation will be managed to the standard service level, except in those management areas that specify reduced maintenance.

Objective 5: Manage dispersed recreation use to avoid resource deterioration. Improve economic efficiency and provide for public safety.

Objective 6: Provide areas and opportunities for all types of recreation user experience

Objective 7: Inventory, operate, maintain, construct, and reconstruct, trails based on a Forest-wide coordinated program that is updated annually.

Objective 8: Manage Research Natural Areas to prevent site deterioration.

Twenty amendments have been made to the plan since 1986. Only those affecting recreation direction in the plan are mentioned here.

Amendment 7: Identified the rivers and streams found to be eligible in a Wild and Scenic River Eligibility study.

Amendment 8: High Uintas Wilderness use restrictions were set July 1991. The direction was superseded by Amendment 12.

Amendment 9: The Flaming Gorge direction was amended in September 1991, and allowed for the Dutch John land exchange.

Amendment 12: The High Uintas Wilderness Plan, September 1997, provides for managing the entire Wilderness, including Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forest Lands. The plan has three management areas. Limits of Acceptable Change methods are used to monitor effects to wilderness characteristics, and adjust recreation uses as needed.

Amendment 21: Supersedes Amendment 7, identifies 13 miles of the Green River and 40 miles of the Uinta River and its tributaries within the High Uintas Wilderness as suitable to be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. This identification is effective with the decision for the Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for National Forest Lands in Utah, 2008.

Amendment 23: The prohibition on developed recreation sites in Dry Fork Canyon was amended in 2011 to allow for the construction of the Dry Fork Flume Trailhead.

The Forest Niche was approved in 2005, and is summarized below with an overview of the Ashley National Forest's four distinct recreation areas and special places, and three main visitor groups. The niche did not amend or otherwise change the Forest Plan, but does include priority program objectives. The objectives are not included here, however, the niche and niche map layer are available in the project file.

Existing Recreation Information

Existing Recreation Settings

Recreation Niche

The Ashley National Forest recreation niche was developed by forest and district personnel, with the help of partners from other agencies. It was formally approved in 2005. The niche provides a broad overview of the Ashley National Forest's recreation resources, programs priorities by area, and unique opportunities. The niche description focuses on who visits the Ashley National Forest, what draws the majority of visitors to the Ashley, what makes the Ashley National Forest a recreation destination. Big Fish and Ancient Rocks were identified as the two defining features that attract visitors to the Ashley National Forest. Below is a summary of the four characteristic settings or special places, and three primary visitor groups identified in the recreation niche.

The Ashley National Forest is characterized by rounded mountain ranges, incised plateaus, isolated lakes, and the water-filled gorge. All of these features provide healthy habitat for a diverse array of wildlife and fish species. The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, the Green River, and the High Uintas Wilderness are national attractions. Scenic Byways and

Backways interpret local geology, paleontology, and wildlife, and connect local communities with the Ashley National Forest.

Flaming Gorge: Congress established this National Recreation Area to provide for public outdoor recreation, and to conserve scenic, scientific, and historic resources. The primary features include 91-mile-long Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River. Red canyon walls provide a scenic backdrop for water-based recreation. Development is concentrated in a few areas, leaving the rest in a predominantly natural state (16 percent of the Ashley National Forest).

Vast Backyard: This roaded area is easily accessed, yet offers both motorized and nonmotorized remote experiences. The feeling of expansiveness is enhanced by the proximity of Wilderness and rugged mountain settings. (48 percent of the Ashley National Forest).

Rugged Backcountry: Remote areas of intact natural vegetation and healthy ecosystems epitomize this setting. These areas, because of difficult access, often provide greater solitude than Wilderness (17 percent of the Ashley National Forest).

High Uintas Wilderness: Opportunities include hiking to destination lakes, mountain climbing, multi-day backpack trips, horse packing, fishing, hunting, and outfitter-guide supported trips (20 percent of the Ashley National Forest, plus Wasatch-Cache-Uinta National Forest lands).

Table 1. Recreation niche by ranger district and niche type

Administrative Unit	Flaming Gorge	High Uintas Wilderness	Vast Backyard	Rugged Backcountry
Flaming Gorge Ranger District	61%	0%	23%	16%
Vernal Ranger District	0%	0%	61%	39%
Duchesne-Roosevelt Ranger District	0%	39%	50%	11%
Ashley National Forest	16%	16%	48%	20%

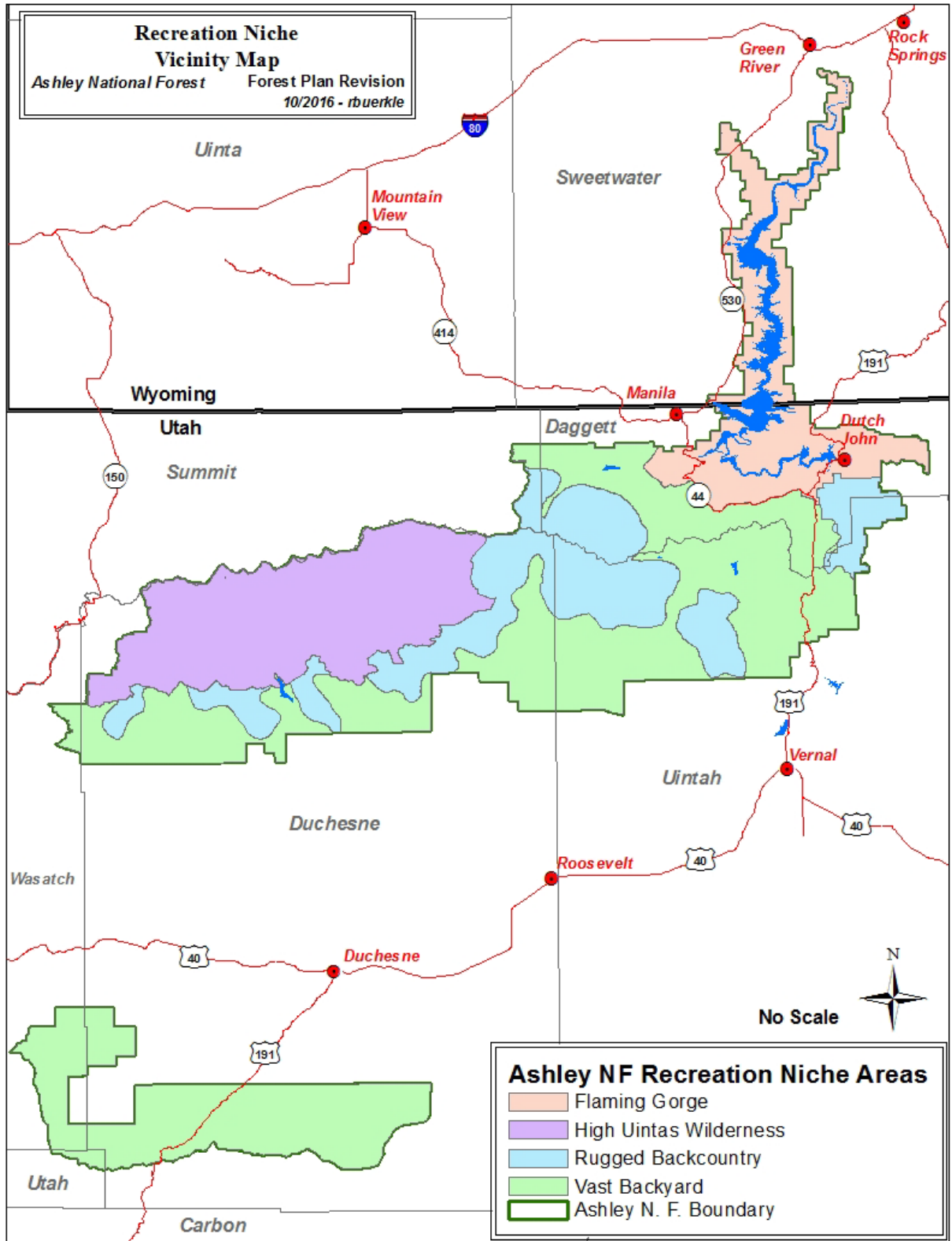


Figure 1. Recreation niche vicinity map

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The recreation opportunity spectrum is a method used by the Forest Service and other agencies to inventory and display a range of recreation settings. Recreation opportunity spectrum inventories are maps of current conditions. The recreation opportunity spectrum inventory provides baseline information, and informs the planning process for the future settings. The classification system is contained in the USDA Forest Service, 1979 The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: A Framework for Planning, Management, and Research and USDA Forest Service, 1986, ROS Users Guide.

Figure 2 is a graphic generalization of the five recreation opportunity spectrum classes found on the Ashley National Forest. These classes represent the typical range of settings provided on National Forest lands (Urban class is not included) lands. Site-specific inconsistencies are present on the landscape, but most Ashley National Forest lands fit the classification system.

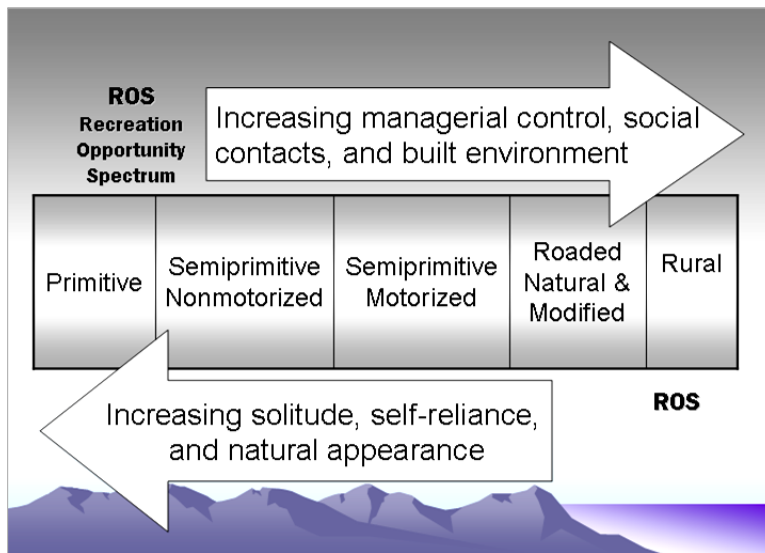


Figure 2. Recreation opportunity spectrum classes

Three setting components of recreation opportunity spectrum classes are mapped during the inventory. The area's biological and physical setting includes natural features and cultural (man-made) features, such as infrastructure or other developments. The social setting is generally assessed based on the average number of encounters a visitor could expect, or the density of people generally using the area. The managerial setting is based on managerial controls such as signing, presence of agency personnel, and other immediate management influences.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes

The Ashley National Forest offers opportunities in the five recreation opportunity spectrum classes common on National Forest System lands: primitive, semi-primitive nonmotorized, semi-primitive motorized, roded natural, and rural. The existing classifications were updated in 2005 using the recreation opportunity spectrum mapping protocol (December 2003). The 2005 recreation opportunity spectrum classifications are still valid in 2016 because the 2005 classifications were used for the 2009 Ashley National Forest Travel Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision. There have been no new facilities, roads, or trails constructed on the Ashley National Forest that were not identified in the 2009 travel management plan record of decision. These classes are described below, and the current

distribution (inventory) is shown in table 2 and figure 4. Figure 3 shows the activities that are compatible with each recreation opportunity spectrum class.

Primitive (P): Areas mapped as primitive have minimal modification to the natural environment. They are greater than 5,000 acres in size, either alone or in combination with semi-primitive nonmotorized areas. Motorized activities and access are rarely allowed, and mechanized activities are limited to certain areas and uses outside the High Uintas Wilderness. Interactions with other people are very limited. Facilities are limited to bridges and other structures necessary to protect the natural environment from erosion or other damage that may result from recreation use. In the High Uintas Wilderness, there are some inconsistencies within this class based on higher concentrations of visitors in lake basins.

Semi-primitive nonmotorized (SPNM): The area is characterized by a natural-appearing environment, usually greater than 2,500 acres in size (alone or in combination with primitive and semi-primitive motorized) and ½ mile from motorized routes. Interaction between visitors is low, and there may be minor evidence of human activities. These areas also include motorized routes that are used on rare occasions for administrative access to water developments, fences, or for other infrequent management needs.

Semi-primitive motorized (SPM): These areas are characterized by a predominantly natural appearing environment. The areas are usually greater the 2,500 acres in size, alone or in combination with semi-primitive nonmotorized. The concentration of users is low, but there is some evidence of other visitors. The area is managed with minimal on-site controls.

Roaded natural (RN): Areas have moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidence usually harmonize with the natural environment, though areas of timber harvest and other resources are included in this class. Interaction between users may be frequent, and evidence of other users is common. Conventional motorized travel is allowed, and is planned in design and construction of facilities.

Rural (R): Areas are characterized by a natural environment that has been modified by structure and vegetative manipulation, or pastoral agricultural development. Resource use practices may be used to enhance specific recreation activities or maintain vegetation and soils. Sights and sounds of humans are readily evident, and interaction between people is moderate to high. There are many facilities and/or facilities designed for use by a large number of people. Facilities for intensified motorized use and parking are available. Marinas are examples of rural settings on Ashley National Forest areas.

Table 2. Summer recreation opportunity spectrum by class and ranger district

Administrative Unit	Primitive	Semi-primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural
Flaming Gorge Ranger District	3%	27%	7%	59%	4%
Vernal Ranger District	4%	32%	25%	39%	0%
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District	36%	24%	25%	15%	0%
Ashely National Forest	20%	27%	20%	32%	1%

Primitive	Semi-Primitive Non-motorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural & Modified	Rural
<i>Not consistent with the setting</i>				Ski and other Recreation Resorts
				Camping in campgrounds
				Motorized watercraft activities
				Scenic driving on asphalt or gravel roads
				Four-wheeling (full-size) on low standard roads
				ATV & motorcycle riding on trails
				Mountain Biking
Horseback riding, hiking, backpacking, spelunking, non-mechanized water travel				
Dispersed Camping				
Hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing				
Mineral Collection				

Figure 3. Recreation infrastructure and activities generally consistent with recreation opportunity spectrum classes

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Information Needs

The Ashley National Forest recreation opportunity spectrum map is based on seasons when over-snow travel is not allowed, mostly summer and fall. Snowmobile use is occurring in the semi-primitive summer recreation opportunity spectrum classifications. Winter classifications have not been completed, however, winter travel is represented on Ashley National Forest winter travel maps. Water-based recreation opportunity spectrum classifications have not been completed for the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam. Portions of the High Uintas Wilderness are classified as semi-primitive nonmotorized. These areas are higher use lake basins. A better recreation opportunity spectrum classification for wilderness areas is the wilderness recreation opportunity spectrum system. This classification has not been completed for the High Uintas Wilderness.

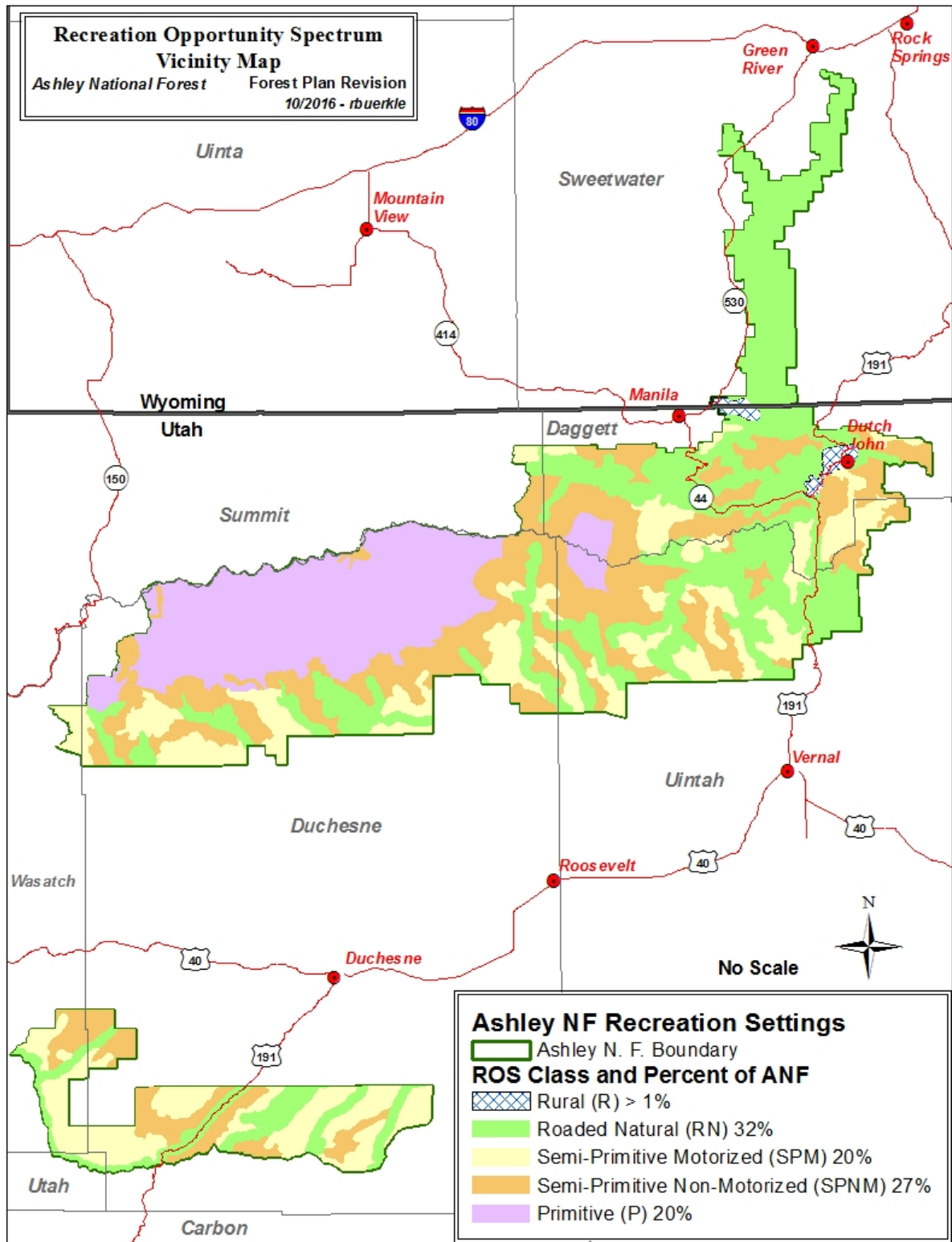


Figure 4. Recreation opportunity spectrum map

Important Designated Areas, Recreational Sites, and Other Areas

Designated Areas

Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area – The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area is located in northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming. The area was designated by Congress in 1968 to provide for the public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and surrounding lands. The intent was also for the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment. The 207,363-acre national recreation area is most known for its scenery, geology, and recreation opportunities. The recreation opportunities include fishing on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River, which attracts visitors from across the Nation. The area overall has the greatest development supporting water- and road-based recreational opportunities on the Ashley National Forest.

The Flaming Gorge Reservoir is the centerpiece of the national recreation area. The reservoir stretches 91 miles north from the Flaming Gorge Dam north into southwestern Wyoming and has a surface area of 42,020 acres. The national recreation area also includes the Green River corridor below the Flaming Gorge Dam, Red Canyon, Firehole Canyon, Antelope Flat, Sheep Creek Bay, Hideout Canyon, Kingfisher Island, and many other unique areas and opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation. Multiple developed and dispersed camping settings and opportunities are available as well. These opportunities include lake and river fishing, boating, sailing, water skiing, mountain biking, hiking, ice fishing, rafting, hunting, and scenic byways and backways.



Figure 5. Antelope Flat boat ramp, Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area

The Wyoming side of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area offers developed camping at Firehole and Buckboard. Buckboard also has a full service marina and RV park. The gently sloping landscape towards the reservoir is crossed by gravel and dirt roads accessing the water's edge. There are also scattered remote boat ramps and many dispersed camping locations adjacent

to the reservoir. Peninsulas, coves, and small islands create private getaways for boaters and fishermen. The Utah side is characterized by steep and colorful cliff faces that reach down to the water surface and forested plateaus and ridges adjacent to the reservoir. There are boat-in only campgrounds and first-come-first-serve camping docks hidden throughout canyons that offer either amenities.

The Utah side of the national recreation area has the highest level of the developed recreation facilities on the Ashley National Forest. There are numerous campgrounds, group campgrounds, swim beaches, interpretive sites, overlooks, and two full service marinas - Lucerne and Cedar Springs - adjacent to the reservoir. The Red Canyon corridor is a popular tourist destination, both for local and nonlocal visitors. Within the corridor is the Red Canyon Visitor Center, which is perched on the cliff edge overlooking Red Canyon and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. A nature trail next to the visitor center leads to developed overlooks and has interpretive information regarding local wildlife, wildfire, and animals. The Red Canyon Lodge operates under a special use permit and has a restaurant, lodging, small general store, fishing lake, mountain bike, canoe, row boat, and paddle boat rentals, and trail rides. The Red Canyon Lodge is also open during the winter when snow covers the landscape and visitors glide across the groomed cross-country ski trails in the stunning silence of winter. Other developed recreation sites in the corridor include campgrounds, day-use sites, and the Canyon Rim Trail. The trail is popular for hiking and mountain biking in the summer, and snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter.

Fishing on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam are two of the primary reasons visitors come to the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. Catches in the Flaming Gorge Reservoir include record lake trout and other fish species in Utah and Wyoming. The Green River below Flaming Gorge Dam is a blue river fly-fishing area. Visitors travel from around the Nation to test their fly-fishing skills and enjoy the stunning contrast between the red canyon walls and the clear, cold water of the Green River.

High Uintas Wilderness - The High Uintas Wilderness, located in northeastern Utah, comprises the wild core of the massive Uinta Mountains and provides a nearly pristine natural setting (primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized ROS). The High Uintas Wilderness is 453,900 acres in size and is the largest wilderness area in the state of Utah, more than three and half times larger than the second largest wilderness area in the state. The Ashley National Forest manages 60 percent of the wilderness, 274,154 acres. The remainder is managed by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. Management of the wilderness is coordinated between the two national forests, but the Ashley is the lead forest for the management of the High Uintas Wilderness.

The Uinta Mountains were carved by glaciers from an immense uplift of Precambrian rock. The main crest of the Uinta Mountains runs west to east for more than 60 miles.



Figure 6. High Uintas Wilderness, looking west from Porcupine Pass down the crest of the Uinta Mountains on the right

The crest rises more than 6,000 feet above the Wyoming and Uinta Basins to the north and south. Massive secondary ridges extend north and south from the crest of the range, framing glacial basins and canyons far below. This rugged expanse of peaks and flat-topped mountains is the largest alpine area in the Intermountain West and is the setting for Kings Peak, the highest peak in Utah. Hundreds of picturesque lakes, streams, and meadows are nestled in beautiful basins. Cold, clear rivers plunge from the basins to deep canyons that form the headwaters of Utah's major rivers.



Figure 7. Glacial-formed alpine area in the High Uintas Wilderness

The Uinta Mountains rise from 7,500 to 13,528 feet at the summit of Kings Peak, offering diverse habitat for plants and animals. Above tree line, tundra plant communities thrive in the harsh climate of the highest altitudes. Thick forests of Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and lodgepole pine trees blanket the land below tree line. These forests are interrupted by park-like meadows and lush wetlands. In the lower elevations, aspen groves and countless mixed species offer contrast to the scene. The Uinta Mountains are home to elk, mule deer, moose, mountain goats, coyotes, black bears, bighorn sheep, ptarmigan, river otter, several species of raptor, pine marten, and cougar to name a few.

The High Uintas Wilderness was designated by Congress under the Utah Wilderness Act of 1984, pursuant to the Wilderness Act of 1964. In 1997, the High Uintas Wilderness Management Plan was completed and amended the Ashley National Forest Plan (amendment 12).

The High Uintas Wilderness draws visitors from across the Nation. The recreational opportunities available are horse and foot trails to lakes and other natural features, fishing, hunting, viewing natural features and wildlife, mountain and rock climbing. The size of the High Uintas Wilderness allows for extended backpacking or horse packing trips not possible in other Utah wilderness areas.

Sheep Creek Canyon Geologic Area - Named after the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep that inhabit the area, the Sheep Creek Canyon Geological Area is dominated by steep scenic cliffs and

sections of folded and twisted rock that reveal millions of years of geological history. A portion of the Sheep Creek-Spirit Lake Scenic Backway bisects the 3,590-acre area. The Sheep Canyon Geologic Area location is displayed on figure 8.

Research Natural Areas - The Ashley National Forest contains seven research natural areas with a total area of 6,230 acres. The research natural areas have been designated for the purposes of maintaining biological diversity, conducting nonmanipulative research and monitoring, and fostering education. The research natural areas on the Ashley National Forest are identified in table 3 and figure 8.

Table 3. Research natural areas, Ashley National Forest

Research Natural Area	Year Established	Acres	Features
Ashley Gorge	1996	874	Blue spruce, lodgepole pine, and aspen woodlands; shrub lands with mountain mahogany and snowberry; moderate-gradient perennial stream; rare plant
Gates of Birch Creek	1988	269	Steep slope forests of Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine; hogback and water gap landforms
Lance Canyon	1996	234	Douglas-fir and pinyon pine woodlands; outstanding occurrence of Salina wildrye grassland community; big sagebrush shrub land with bluebunch wheatgrass
Pollen Lake	1987	1090	Subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce forest and krummholz; alpine turf communities on shallow rocky soil; lake and wetlands in cirque basin; rare plants
Sims Peak Potholes	1991	1006	Seral lodgepole pine with subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce understory; sedge dominated pothole wetlands; rare plant
Timber-Cow Ridge	1996	571	Open Douglas fir and ponderosa pine woodlands with abundant curleaf mountain mahogany; juniper pinyon pine woodlands
Uinta Shale Creek	1996	2186	Subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce forest and krummholz; alpine turf communities; cirque basins draining into moist forest-meadow complexes

Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway – The Ashley National Forest includes the segment of U.S. Highway 191 between Duchesne and Helper, Utah. The segment is the same as the Indian Canyon Scenic Byway, and crosses the South Unit of the Ashley National Forest. As with the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway, it is managed to promote tourism along its route through Colorado and Utah.

Indian Canyon Scenic Byway includes the segment of U.S. Highway 191 between Duchesne and Helper, Utah where it crosses the Ashley National Forest. The segment is the same as the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway, and follows Indian Creek through the Ashley National Forest to the 9,100-foot summit on the Ashley National Forest's southern boundary.

Flaming Gorge - Uintas National Scenic Byway is also known as The Drive through the Ages. The byway includes U.S. Highway 191 from Vernal to Dutch John, Utah, and Utah Highway 44 from U.S. Highway 191 to Manila. This drive along the eastern edge of the Uinta Mountains and the southern rim of Flaming Gorge Reservoir affords outstanding views of the river gorge and the High Uintas. Interpretive pullouts provide roadside geology, ecology, and history information. The scenic byway is also along one of the primary routes from the national parks in Montana and Wyoming to the national parks in southern Utah.

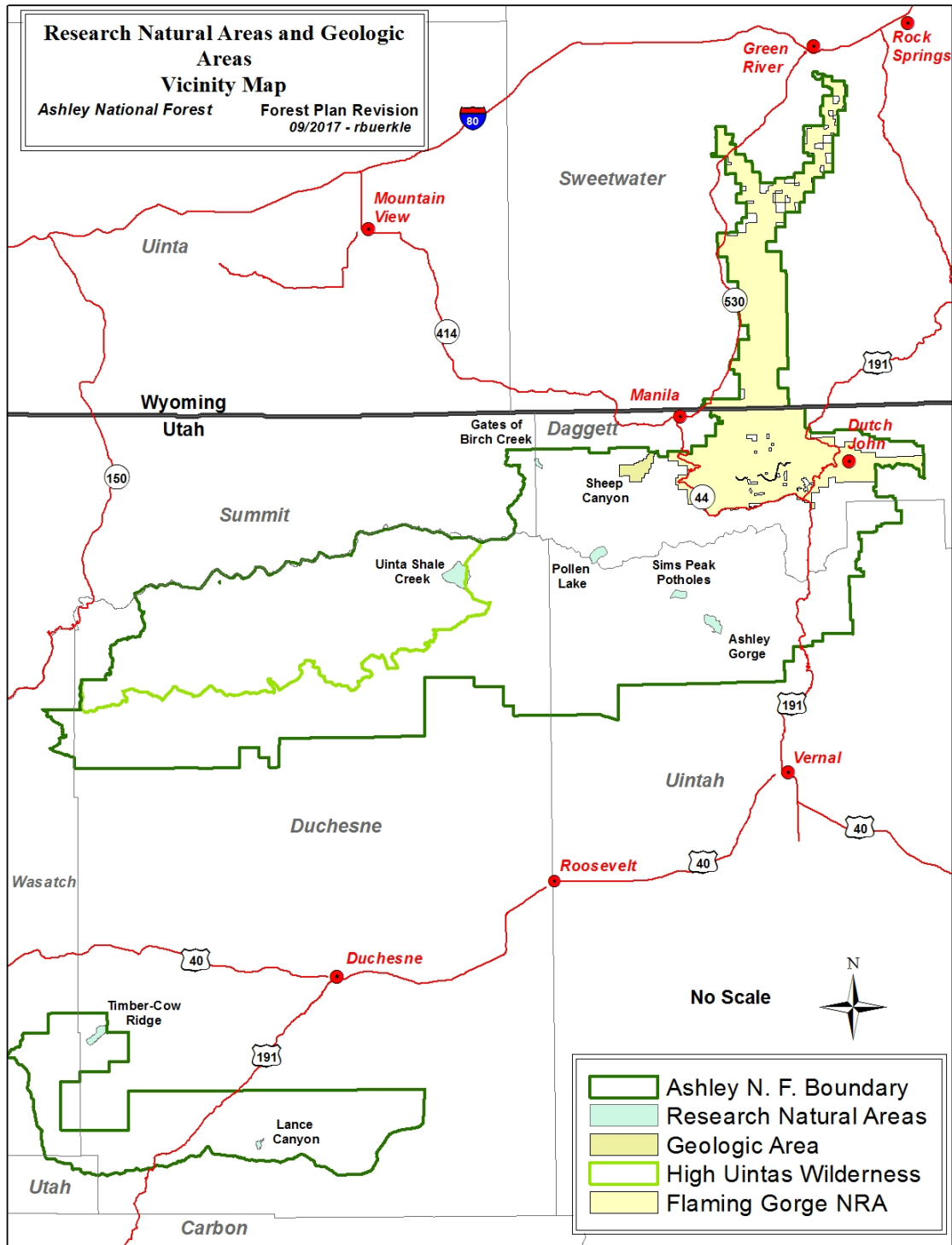


Figure 8. Research natural areas and geologic area, Ashley National Forest

Little Hole National Recreation Trail (National Forest System Trail 006) follows the Green River through the Ashley National Forest, from the Flaming Gorge Dam to the Little Hole day-use area. The 7-mile trail is open to hiking and open seasonally to mountain biking. It also provides access to the Green River for fly fishing.



Figure 9. Little Hole National Recreation Trail

Fish Creek National Recreation Trail follows a ridgeline above Fish Creek, between Moon Lake and Center Park Trailhead on the south slope of the Uinta Mountains. The 6-mile trail is managed for horse and foot travel under a minimal maintenance schedule.

Jedediah Smith Trappers Route 1824, Utah – the Ashley National Forest part of this route follows the Green River and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir (Public Lands.org). The route is managed by the National Park Service.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

Inventoried roadless areas were established under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR Part 294). Approximately 57 percent of the Ashley National Forest land mass (790,485 acres) is located within 36 individual inventoried roadless areas (table 4) and are displayed in figure 10.

The Roadless Area Conservation Final Rule prohibits road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest, except under certain circumstances, in inventoried roadless areas because they have the greatest likelihood of altering and fragmenting landscapes, resulting in loss of Roadless Area values. The roadless area values listed in the Roadless Area Conservation Final Rule are:

- High quality of undisturbed soil, water, and air
- Sources of public drinking water
- Diversity of plant and animal communities
- Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species and for those species dependent of large, undisturbed areas of land

- Primitive, semi-primitive nonmotorized, and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation
- Reference landscapes
- Natural appearing landscape with high scenic quality
- Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites
- Other locally identified unique characteristics

Table 4. Inventoried Roadless Areas, Ashley National Forest

Inventoried Roadless Area	Acres	Inventoried Roadless Area	Acres
0401001	11,705	0401021	5,152
0401002	36,150	0401023	8,393
0401003	5,111	0401024	12,882
0401004	10,509	0401025	1,471
0401005	38,929	0401026	398
0401006	7,645	0401027	7,312
0401007	16,483	0401028	446
0401008	15,615	0401029	6,718
0401009	30,378	0401030	531
0401010	21,886	0401031	7,110
0401011	30,134	0401032	6,471
0401012	46,414	0401034	967
0401013	11,910	0401035	5,465
0401014	26,904	0401036	6,309
0401015	14,423	0401037	1,166
0401016	5,695	0418033	24,909
0401018	6,157	0419020	355,768
0401019	6,202	0419022	2,232
		Total	795,950

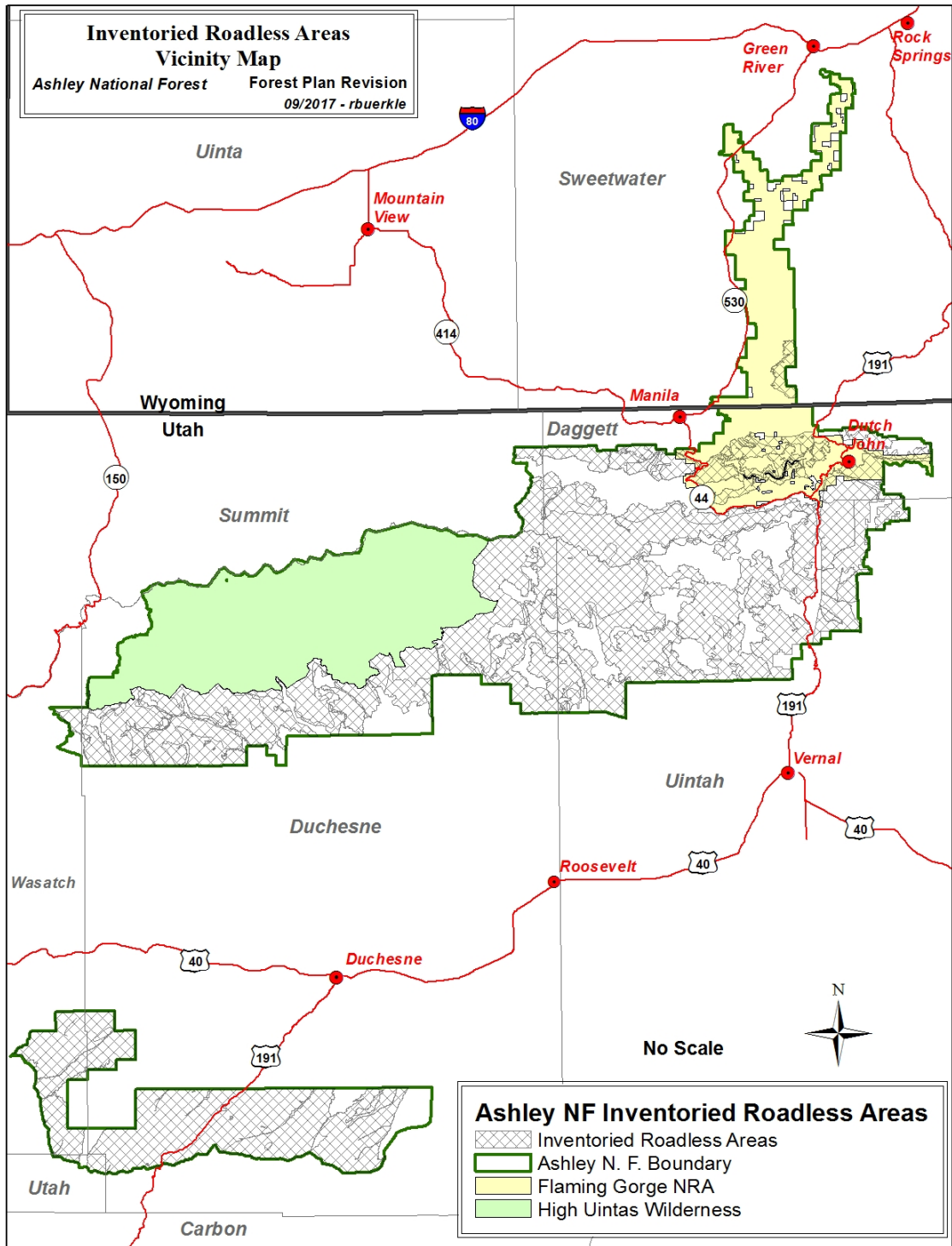


Figure 10. Inventoried roadless areas, Ashley National Forest

Other Important Recreational Sites and Other Areas

Green River – The Green River from the Flaming Gorge Dam to the Ashley National Forest boundary was found to be suitable as a scenic river in the decision for the Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for National Forest Lands in Utah, 2008. This segment of the Green River is a nationally recognized blue-ribbon trout stream and is popular for both fly fishing and floating.



Figure 11. Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam

Upper Uinta River – The Upper Uinta River was found to be suitable as a wild river. The river includes Gilbert Creek, Center Fork, and Painter Draw in the High Uintas Wilderness. This section of the Uinta River and its tributaries begins above tree line in a scoured cirque basin. The section then enters a broad glacial valley and passes through or by lakes, ponds, wet depressions, and forested knolls. The middle portion consists of a V-shaped valley, with moderately steep to very steep canyon walls. The main drainage is characterized by a relatively broad glacial canyon. The Upper Uinta River and the selected tributaries are a good representation of High Uintas Wilderness river systems and the diversity of landforms adjacent to the rivers and streams.



Figure 12. Uinta River, High Uintas Wilderness

Sheep Creek – Spirit Lake Scenic Backway - The backway includes a 13-mile loop of National Forest System Road 218, around the Sheep Creek Geologic Area from Utah Highway 44. There is also a 17-mile spur from National Forest System Road 218, along National Forest System Road 221, to Spirit Lake. The road provides access to and a drive through the unique geological features of Sheep Creek and the visually dramatic North Flank Fault. The backway is also managed as a recreation access road to dispersed camping areas, trails, lakes, including Spirit Lake and the High Uintas Wilderness, and as access for other resource management activities.

Red Cloud-Dry Fork Loop Scenic Backway extends 45 miles in a loop with U.S. Highway 191 north of Vernal Utah, to the Ashley National Forest boundary in Dry Fork, northwest of Vernal. The road provides access to and a route through the eastern Uinta Mountains for full-size vehicles. Interpretive sites, overlooks, dispersed-use areas, lakes, all-terrain vehicle trails, and hiking and mountain biking trails are additional opportunities off the backway.

Reservation Ridge Scenic Backway connects U.S. Highways 191 and 6, along Reservation Ridge and Right Fork White River, on the Ashley National Forests and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forests. National Forest System Road 147, along the ridge, offers uncrowded driving with views in all directions. National Forest System Road 181 follows the river through the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The Reservation Ridge Scenic Backway provides access to Timber Canyon and the Strawberry River in Duchesne County.

Swett Ranch Historic Site – The historic ranch is managed as an interpretive site on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. The ranch was home to the large Swett family, who ran the ranch in the early and mid-1900s.



Figure 13. Swett Ranch historic site

Ute Tower Historic Site is a fire lookout tower constructed between 1933 and 1935. Though no longer serving as a lookout tower, the structure remains. The site gives people the opportunity to see what living and working in the tower was like for early lookouts.



Figure 14. Ute Fire Lookout Tower

Kings Peak – Located within the High Uintas Wilderness at 13,528 feet, it is the highest point in Utah. Kings Peak is a popular backpacking and trail-running destination.



Figure 15. Kings Peak, High Uintas Wilderness

Historic Guard Stations and Yurt Recreation Rentals – The Ashley National Forest has 11 former guard stations and yurts¹ available for public rental in both the summer and winter seasons. The facilities are used for Boy Scout outings, family reunions, and by the general public.



Figure 16. Paradise Guard Station

Carter Military Road led to developments and growth of communities in the Uinta Basin and Mountains. Completed in 1881, the road was built, without surveys, by Fort Bridger's Judge Carter as a supply route between military forts. The road is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

¹ A yurt is a large circular tent with a wooden frame.

Whiterocks Cave – the cave contains impressive formations of water deposited minerals. Guided tours are offered in September to a few visitors. Access is difficult. The area is otherwise closed to public access due to safety and vandalism concerns.

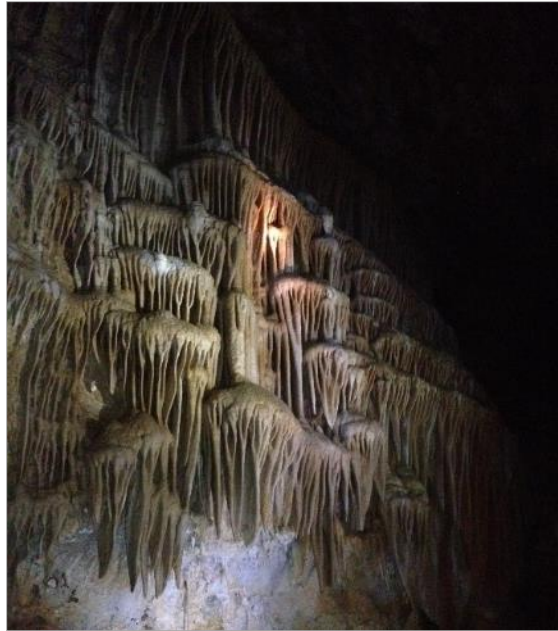


Figure 17. Rock formations in Whiterocks Cave

Recreation Opportunities

The Forest Service organizes its recreation management into programs, with each program covering multiple activities and settings. Some programs overlap with each other or other resources. Managing by programs and within recreation niche areas helps ensure that a range of recreation opportunities are provided. It also gives managers a way to track where recreation budgets are spent and what has been accomplished in each program area.

Developed Recreation

Developed recreation takes place at facilities constructed for specific activities or groups of activities. Developed sites offer visitors a sense of security and structure, as well as facilities such as toilets, parking, tables, and cooking areas. The main developed recreation activities that occur on the Ashley National Forest are:

- overnight stays in developed campgrounds;
- scenery viewing from developed overlooks and interpretive sites;
- launching watercraft from developed boat ramps;
- entering the High Uintas Wilderness from developed trailheads;
- overnight stays at cabins and yurts; and
- visiting interpretive and historic developed sites.

The developed sites, with the exception of boat-in campgrounds, are all accessed by roads. There are minimally to highly developed facilities available, depending on the setting and use. Many

developed recreation sites are access points for dispersed recreation activities, such as trailheads and boat ramps.

Table 5. Ashley National Forest developed recreation sites

Facility Type	Sites
Campgrounds	55
Group campgrounds	11
Resorts and lodges	4
Marinas	3
RV park	1
Rental yurts, cabins, and buildings	11
Boat ramps	16
Day-use areas	8
Trailheads	11
Documentary sites	1
Swim beaches	3
Target ranges	1
Interpretive sites	27
Picnic areas	7
Fishing access sites	5
Ashely National Forest visitor centers	2

The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area developed recreation program is also one of the most highly developed in the National Forest System. The unique nature of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation area, which contains the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, requires additional developed recreation facilities besides campgrounds and day use sites. Boat ramps that are necessary to access the Flaming Gorge Reservoir include restrooms, docks, fish cleaning stations, and may also have floating restrooms and sewage pump-out stations. There are developed campgrounds ringing the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and a majority of these has potable water available. Numerous water systems, including three full-treatment water treatment plants, are necessary to provide this potable water. Sewer lagoons are sewer lift stations are also present. The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District is also complex due to the number of sites, distances between sites, and water systems. The majority of the developed sites are located in the rural and roaded natural recreation opportunity spectrum classes.



Figure 18. Fish cleaning station at the Lucerne boat ramp



Figure 19. Buckboard water tower

The winter developed recreation program is primarily the operation of the recreation rental cabins and yurts, which are accessible by snowmobile, or snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. The Carter Military Yurt is not available for rental during the winter because it is left open as a warming hut for snowmobiles and cross-country skiers. The other two yurts on the Vernal Ranger District, Limber Flag, and Grizzly Ridge Yurts, are popular as cross-country skiing or snowshoe destinations. Of the three historic guard stations on the Vernal District - Trout Creek, Colton, and Paradise - only Colton is close enough to a regularly plowed road to be used by cross-country

skiers or visitors on snowshoes. Trout Creek and Paradise are primarily used by visitors with snow machines.



Figure 20. Trout Creek Guard Station in winter

The Ashley National Forest has 165 developed sites (table 6).

Table 6. Developed recreation facilities on the Ashley National Forest

Flaming Gorge Ranger District	Vernal Ranger District	Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District
35 developed campgrounds	5 developed campgrounds	15 developed campgrounds
6 group campgrounds	1 group campground	4 group campgrounds
2 resorts/lodges	6 recreation rental facilities	2 resorts/lodges
3 marinas	1 boat ramp	3 recreation rental facilities
1 RV park	6 day use areas	2 boat ramps
2 recreation rental facilities	4 trailheads	7 trailheads
13 boat ramps	1 documentary site	2 interpretive sites
2 day use areas	2 interpretive sites	4 fishing sites
3 swim beaches		1 small visitor center
1 target range		
23 interpretive sites		
7 picnic areas		
1 fishing site		
1 visitor center		



Figure 21. West Greens Lake fishing site

The developed campgrounds and group campgrounds on the Flaming Gorge Ranger District and two campgrounds on the Vernal Ranger District are operated by a concessionaire. Three of these campgrounds are boat-in access only. The concessionaire also operates one rental historic guard station and one rental four-plex apartment. The remaining three campgrounds on the Vernal Ranger District, and all of the campgrounds on the Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District, are operated by the Ashley National Forest. All of the boat ramps and other sites across the Ashley National Forest are operated by the Ashley, and nine of the 11 rental cabins, yurts, and buildings are operated by the Ashley. Developed campgrounds are usually on a seasonal basis, generally from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but a number of campgrounds are kept open into the fall hunting seasons for public convenience, and one, Dripping Springs, is open all year. The Ashley has found that during the peak-use times, most of the popular developed recreation sites are nearly all full. This indicates that use demand is successfully being met for most developed recreation facilities. The four resorts and lodges, one RV Park, and three marinas are managed through the recreation special use program.

Dispersed Recreation

The Ashley National Forest is fairly unique throughout the Forest Service Intermountain Region in that there are locations and settings for a diverse range of dispersed recreation opportunities. Dispersed recreation is any recreation activity outside of a developed recreation site and includes travel on trails and roads and water. Dispersed recreation activities include camping outside a developed campground, known as dispersed camping, backpacking, off-highway vehicle use, driving for pleasure on roads and trails, fishing and boating, mountain biking, trail running, and horseback riding. Some of the popular locations and activities are:

- Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area water-based recreation, which includes boating for pleasure, water skiing, rafting, sailing, kayaking, and fishing on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River;

- dispersed camping and off-highway vehicle riding on the shoreline adjacent to the Flaming Gorge Reservoir;
- backpacking and horseback riding in High Uintas Wilderness;
- hiking, fishing, hunting, and dispersed camping in the rugged backcountry areas of the western Vernal Ranger District;
- dispersed camping, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and off-highway vehicle travel in the more accessible eastern Uinta Mountains and southwestern corner of the Flaming Gorge Ranger District;
- dispersed camping, hunting, and off-highway vehicle travel in the primarily undeveloped Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South Unit; and
- dispersed camping, hunting, fishing, and off-highway vehicle travel in the Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District outside the High Uintas Wilderness on the south slope of the Uinta Mountains.

This is displayed in the recreation niche divisions of the Ashley National Forest.

The Ashley's unique situation leads to it being a popular destination for both motorized and nonmotorized recreationists seeking frontcountry, backcountry, and water-based dispersed recreation. Camping, fishing, and travel on trails, roads and by watercraft are among the most popular summer dispersed recreation activities. Snowmobiling, ice fishing, and cross-country skiing are the most popular winter dispersed recreation activities. Outfitted opportunities include boating, rafting, fishing, hunting, and wilderness trips with horse and mules, or on foot.

Dispersed recreation occurs across the Ashley National Forest in undeveloped areas. The level of dispersed use depends on visitor experience desired, setting, ease of access, and nearby facilities. The shoreline surrounding the Flaming Gorge reservoir has high dispersed camping use by visitors who desire water-based activities. The visitors often use both RVs and boats in areas such as Stateline Cove and South Buckboard. The majority of these visitors are from the Wasatch Front. The eastern portion of the Vernal Ranger District and western portion of the Flaming Gorge Ranger District have high dispersed camping and off-highway vehicle use. The area is most used by residents of northeastern Utah or southern Wyoming, who have a long tradition of using certain areas for annual gatherings of families and friends.

Dry Fork Canyon on the Vernal Ranger District is the most easily accessed portion of the Ashley National Forest from Vernal, Utah. The area has high equestrian, hiking, and mountain biking dispersed use, primarily by residents from the eastern Uintah Basin area. The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District has high dispersed camping use, concentrated in river and road corridors on the south slope of the Uinta Mountains. The Green River corridor, below the Flaming Gorge Dam, receives very high dispersed recreation in fishing and rafting. Visitors come from across the Nation to fish the blue-ribbon trout fishery. The Flaming Gorge Reservoir also has a very high level of dispersed recreation on the reservoir and on the shoreline immediately adjacent. Other areas of high, moderate, and low dispersed recreation occur across the remainder of the Ashley National Forest.



Figure 22. Stateline Cove, Flaming Gorge Reservoir



Figure 23. Visitors kayaking the Green River

Dispersed recreation in the High Uintas Wilderness is very popular. This use is primarily concentrated around the multiple lake basins scattered across the south slope of the Uinta Mountains. There are 291 miles of wilderness trails within the Ashley National Forest's portion of the High Uintas Wilderness, and there are no established campsites. Visitors may camp wherever they wish, while following the regulations:

- No camping within 200 feet of a National Forest System trail
- No camping within 200 feet of live water
- No camping within 200 feet of an occupied campsite

These regulations were put into place to preserve the feeling of solitude and to prevent natural resource impacts in the High Uintas Wilderness.

Winter dispersed recreation consists of nonmotorized activities; snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, backcountry skiing, and motorized over-snow activities; primarily snowmobiling. There are a number of designated cross-country ski trails which are closed to snowmobiles and other over-snow motorized travel. The Ashley National Forest has a cooperative agreement with Uintah and Daggett counties to groom snowmobile trails on the Vernal and Flaming Gorge Ranger Districts. The most popular snowmobile groomed trail is the Red Cloud Loop on the Vernal Ranger District. From this trail, snowmobilers can access many other areas.



Figure 24. Cross-country skiers viewing Red Canyon

Recreation Access

Roads and trails provide opportunities for dispersed recreational travel activities, such as scenic driving, off-highway vehicle travel, horseback riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and hiking. They also provide access to developed sites and areas for other dispersed activities. Trails are managed as a recreation program. Roads are commonly used to access other types of resource

uses and management, and are usually managed by the engineering program. Travel management on both types of routes is generally coordinated among resource specialties.

Table 7. Miles of Ashley National Forest travel routes

Type of Route	Miles
National Forest System roads	1,471.8
Motorized trails (all-terrain vehicle)	168
Nonmotorized trails (outside wilderness)	649
Nonmotorized trails (in wilderness)	291
Over-snow vehicle (groomed trails)	110
Cross-country ski	45

The travel routes separated by district are:

- **Flaming Gorge Ranger District:** 461.6 miles of system roads, and 213 miles of system trails (40 motorized and 173 nonmotorized)
- **Vernal Ranger District:** 445.4 miles of system roads, and 358 miles of system trails (95 motorized and 264 nonmotorized)
- **Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District:** 565 miles of system roads, and 537 miles of system trails (33 motorized and 504 nonmotorized)

Motorized Recreation

The Ashley National Forest offers abundant motorized recreation opportunities across approximately 54 percent of the Ashley, in the rural, roaded natural, and semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunity spectrum settings. Motorized travel is restricted to designated routes that include paved roads, gravel or dirt roads, and trails designated for motor vehicle travel. Some trails and roads have a seasonal limitations to protect resources and wildlife. Motorized water-based use is a significant use of the Ashley National Forest, with the majority of use occurring on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Popular summer motorized use areas are:

- Flaming Gorge Reservoir waters;
- adjacent land from the Flaming Gorge Reservoir waters;
- Outlaw all-terrain vehicle trail;
- Yellowstone all-terrain vehicle trail;
- Sheep Creek Lake all-terrain vehicle trail;
- eastern half of the Vernal Ranger District;
- southwestern portion of the Flaming Gorge Ranger District; and
- Dry Gulch area of the Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District.

Many forest roads also serve as designated groomed snowmobile trails in the winter. Some of the most popular winter motorized recreation areas are Blind Stream, Grizzly Ridge, Oaks Parks, Deep Creek, Hickerson Park, Paradise, and Red Cloud Loop. Motorized equipment is often used for ice fishing on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir when ice conditions allow it.



Figure 25. Sheep Creek all-terrain vehicle trail

Nonmotorized Recreation

The Ashley National Forest offers abundant nonmotorized opportunities such as:

- hiking;
- backpacking;
- climbing;
- horseback riding and packing;
- fishing;
- mountain biking;
- road biking;
- antler collecting (shed hunting);
- trail running;
- primitive camping;
- nonmotorized boating (kayaking, rafting, canoeing);
- backcountry downhill skiing;
- cross-country skiing; and
- snowshoeing.

Approximately 47 percent of the Ashley is classified as primitive or semi-primitive nonmotorized, where motorized travel is either prohibited or discouraged. There are approximately 940 miles of nonmotorized trails, which include 291 miles of trails in the High Uintas Wilderness.

Popular summer areas for nonmotorized recreation are:

- Dry Fork Canyon;
- High Uintas Wilderness;
- Chepeta Lake to Leidy Peak Area;
- Highline Trail on the Vernal Ranger District;
- the mountain lakes between Browne Lake and Spirit Lake;
- Little Hole Trail;
- Red Canyon area; and
- Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam.



Figure 26. Mountain bikers in Dry Fork Canyon

Winter nonmotorized use is concentrated around areas with sufficient snow for backcountry and cross-country skiing, skiing or snowshoeing into cabins and yurts, and ice fishing. On the Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam, fishing from shore or by boat occurs throughout the winter, as the Green River does not freeze. Popular winter areas for nonmotorized recreation are Dry Fork Canyon, Grizzly Ridge area, Limber Flag yurt area, Buckboard Marina, Red Canyon, Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam, and Little Hole Trail.

Recreation Special Uses

The Ashley National Forest facilitates some of its recreation program through the recreation special use program. The program helps the Ashley provide recreation opportunities that would be otherwise unavailable on National Forest System lands. The campground concession, resorts, and marinas contribute to the developed recreation program, while outfitter-guide permits mostly contribute to the dispersed recreation program. Outfitter and guides offer services and equipment to visitors that the visitors otherwise may not be able to perform on their own, such as a guided hunting trips, overnight rafting trips, and rental of a house boat or other equipment.

The special use permit marinas include:

- full hookup boat slips;
- restaurants;
- general stores;
- RV parks;
- boat storage;
- boat mechanic facilities;
- boat rentals; and
- permanent housing for the marina employees and special permit holder.



Figure 27. Lucerne Marina, with rental house boats in the foreground

Table 8. Ashley National Forest recreation special use permits

FY 2016 Recreation Special Uses	Number of Permits
Campground Concessions	1
Marinas	3
Resorts	4
Outfitter-Guides	31
Recreation Residences	57

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District has 1 campground concession, 2 resorts, 3 marinas, and 1 recreation residence area. The Vernal Ranger District has 2 recreation residence areas, and the Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District has 2 resorts and 2 recreation residence areas

Outfitters and guides often operate across district boundaries and have not been separated according to district. There are currently outfitter and guide permits for:

- river and reservoir fishing;
- vehicle shuttles;
- hunting;
- trail rides;
- drop camps;
- environmental education courses;
- rafting; and
- outdoor therapy.

The largest recreation special uses program is on the Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam and on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The program consists of fishing guiding on the Green River and Flaming Gorge Reservoir, and rafting trips on the Green River. The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District has a wide range of recreational special use permits and includes outfitters and guides in the High Uintas Wilderness. The 1986 Ashley National Forest Plan contains no direction pertaining to Recreation Special Uses and Outfitters and Guides.

Interpretation and Conservation Education

Visitor information is provided at ranger district offices in Manila, Duchesne, and Vernal, Utah and in the Green River, Wyoming Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center. Seasonal visitor services are offered at Red Canyon and Rock Creek Visitor Centers. Additional interpretive facilities include signs at roadside pullouts, trailheads, historic sites, a fire lookout tower, and other features. The Red Canyon Visitor Center is the primary visitor center on the Ashley National Forest. The center is located within the Red Canyon corridor and is perched on the cliff edge, overlooking Red Canyon and the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Adjacent to the visitor center is a nature trail leading to developed overlooks where visitors have a view of the canyon rim and water below.



Figure 28. Red Canyon Visitor Center perched above Red Canyon

There are three other developed nature trails besides Red Canyon, on the Ashley National Forest that provide educational information: Dry Fork Nature Trail, Sheep Creek Canyon Nature Trail, and Yellowpine Nature Trail. Swett Ranch on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area is a historical ranch managed as an interpretive site. Walking tours are available and living history events are conducted each summer. The Flaming Gorge – Uintas National Scenic Byway and Wyoming Scenic Byways have multiple pullouts that include overlooks and interpretive information on the history, geology, wildlife, wildfire, and plant life of the local area. Ashley National Forest employees conduct education and interpretation events throughout the year at many locations both on and off the Ashley National Forest.

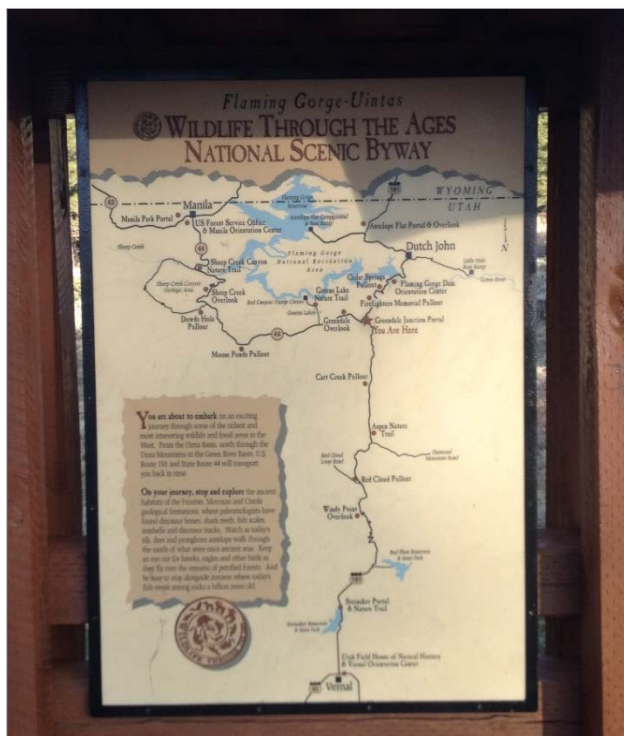


Figure 29. Flaming Gorge - Uintas Scenic Byway information panel at Greendale pullout

Interpretive programs are conducted during the summer and throughout the year at:

- Red Canyon Visitor Center;
- Swett Ranch;
- Ute Tower;
- amphitheatres on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area;
- other day use areas and campgrounds on the Ashley;
- lodges and resorts both on and off the Ashley;
- local schools;
- private lands off the Ashley;
- other federal agency facilities;
- County facilities;
- County fairs;
- parades;
- rodeos;
- historical society meetings; and
- State park presentations.

The 1986 Ashley National Forest Plan contains no direction pertaining to interpretation and conservation education.

Recreation Current Activity, Trends, and Conditions

Developed Recreation

The current developed recreation activities, trends, and conditions on the Ashley National Forest varies by area and use type. The highly developed sites show increasing visitation. These sites include Cedar Springs and Lucerne Marinas and the adjacent campgrounds and the Mustang and Firehole campgrounds on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. Visitation numbers at the less-developed sites are similar to past numbers. Visitation is increasing during the early spring and late fall seasons (before Memorial Day and after Labor Day) as more of the Baby Boomer generation retire and travel. The western half of Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District is

experiencing increased visitation in the North Fork Duchesne, Rock Creek, and Lake Fork Canyon Campgrounds. This increase is primarily from visitors from the Wasatch Front, who are looking for less crowded areas and available developed campsites.

The facilities at the campgrounds and day-use sites on Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area were constructed in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Many were constructed by the National Park Service to “Mission 66” standards, prior to the designation of the national recreation area in 1968. Mission 66 was a federally sponsored program to improve deteriorated and dangerous conditions in the national parks, the result of a massive visitor boom after World War II. These facilities were not designed for the size of current recreation vehicles, and modifications are necessary to accommodate these vehicles. Also, these facilities are now reaching, or have reached, 50 years of age, and the maintenance needs are increasing considerably. Because of the age of these facilities, replacement parts are not readily available, so repairs become more costly and time consuming.

The Ashley National Forest operates three full-treatment water systems and numerous smaller water systems for developed recreation sites in the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, including 750,000 gallons of treated water storage in aboveground and belowground tanks. These systems, and the associated water storage and waterlines, were constructed in the 1960s and early 1970s and have greater deferred maintenance needs each year. The seasonal opening of these systems and operation of these systems is becoming more time consuming and costly as new pipeline leaks appear. Because of the locations of these developed facilities, it was necessary to construct sewer lagoons with sewage lift stations to service the sites. These facilities are also deteriorating, resulting in high maintenance and operation costs. Across the Ashley, some campground water systems have been temporarily or permanently closed because of deteriorating infrastructure and where meeting new water quality regulations would not be possible or cost effective.

The deferred maintenance on campgrounds and other developed sites is also an issue on the Ashley National Forest. As funding has decreased, facilities have aged and upkeep is becoming more difficult. Campground facilities deteriorate with use and age, and many facilities in these campgrounds have become inaccessible. These types of facilities include fire rings, picnic tables, access routes, toilets, and other amenities.

As the American public ages, yet remains active, there is an increased need to provide adequate accommodations for many forms of recreation activities and infrastructure. Developed campgrounds that have been designed for universal accessibility will become increasingly important as the population ages. These campgrounds will influence the recreation activities in which visitors choose to participate. Also important will be improved and new innovations for assistive technology for the aging public (Sperazza 2010).

The Ashley National Forest conducted a recreation facilities review in 2013. The review looked at all of the developed recreation sites on the Ashley and ranked the sites according needs of each site, including:

- landscape;
- safety;
- site condition;
- impacts affecting the site;
- connectivity;
- site design and operation;
- visitation;
- visitor satisfaction; and
- effect if not found to be sustainable.

The result was a proposal to close or reduce amenities at 9 campgrounds, 1 boat ramp, and 1 picnic site. The Ashley is currently in the National Environmental Policy Act stage to analyze the effects of reducing amenities or closing some developed recreation sites.

Dispersed Recreation

Dispersed recreation uses on the Ashley National Forest has increased and changed since the 1986 forest plan. The changes in off-highway vehicle performance and even vehicle types have significantly affected the amount, location, and duration of off-highway vehicle use. Off-highway vehicles are more powerful, safer, and more comfortable than 30 years ago. The vehicles are able to travel terrain and topography that was not feasible in the mid-1980s era of three wheel all-terrain vehicles. Also, the eastern Uinta Mountains' relatively mild terrain is easily accessed by off-highway vehicles. These developments have led to a vast increase in off-highway vehicle use on the Ashley National Forest. In 2005, the Forest Service published *36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295, Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule*. This travel rule governs motor vehicle use, including off-highway vehicles, on national forests and grasslands. The rule requires each national forest to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use.

The Ashley National Forest conducted the travel management process, and the record of decision was signed in 2009. The record of decision identified approximately 1,645 miles of open designated roads and motorized trails. This is an increase in 106 miles compared to the previous travel plan. Many user-designated routes, primarily accessing dispersed camping areas, were adopted in the record of decision. The Ashley National Forest is still working on implementing this decision, and unauthorized routes are still a significant issue. This significance is displayed in figure 30. The Taylor Mountain area is only one example of the number of unauthorized routes that exist on the Ashley. Other areas with a high density of unauthorized routes are Dry Gulch, Range Study, Stringham Cabin, McKee Draw, Iron Springs, the Flaming Gorge Reservoir adjacent lands from Lucerne north to Firehole, Hickerson Park Road, and Colton area.

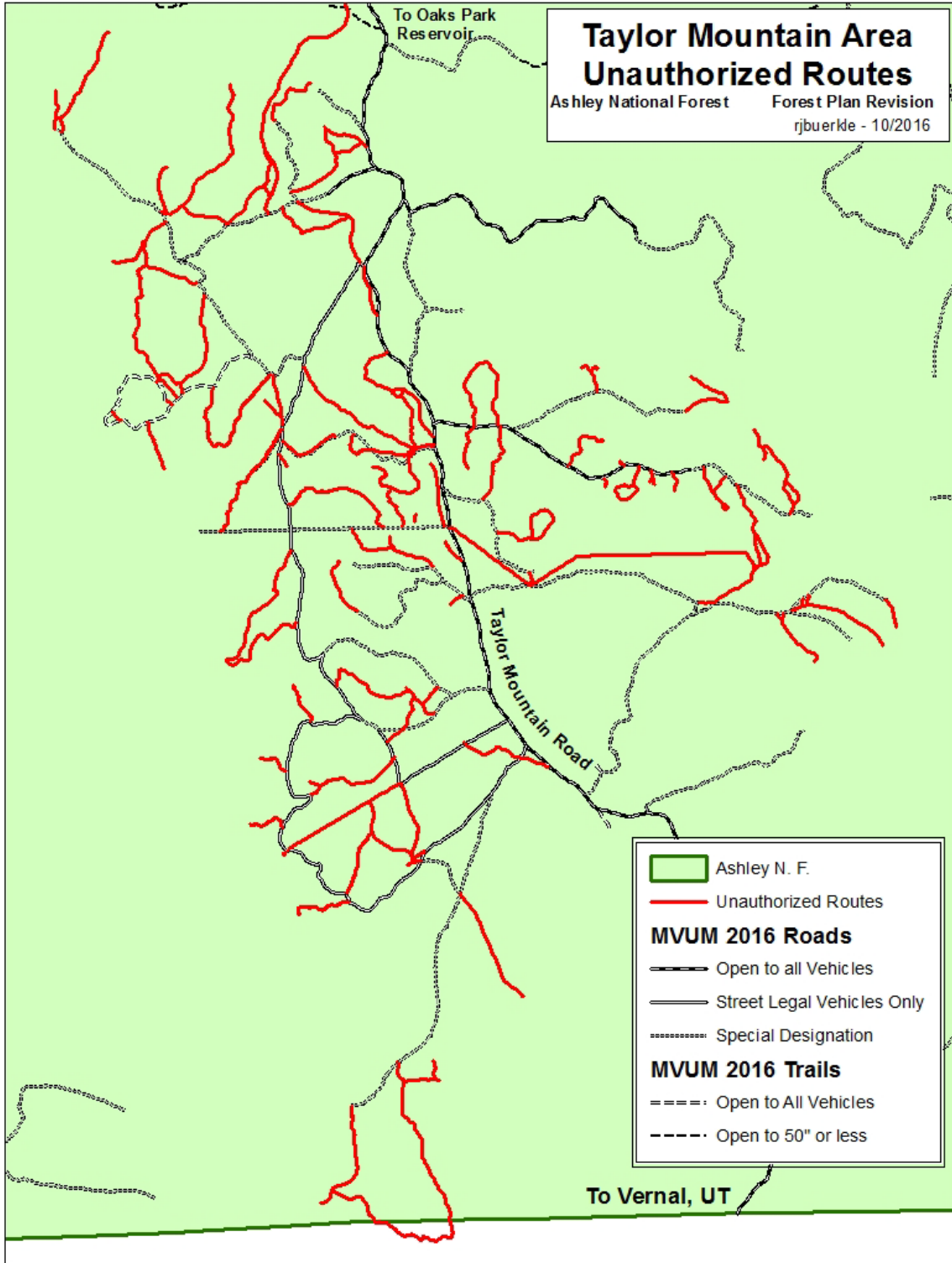


Figure 30. Taylor Mountain unauthorized routes

The popularity of side-by-side off-highway vehicles was underestimated during the 2009 travel management record of decision. Many visitors are moving away from single-rider all-terrain vehicles to side-by-sides, which are safer and more comfortable. A number of the popular motorized trails on the Ashley National Forest are designated as 50-inch width or less and preclude the side-by-side off-highway vehicles, which are often 60 inches wide or wider.



Figure 31. Side by side off-highway vehicle on Cliff Lake Road

Dispersed camping is heaviest during the summer holidays (Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Pioneer Day, and Labor Day weekends) and during the general rifle and archery hunting seasons. During these times, seclusion is often not the objective of the visitors and the dispersed campers set up camps very close together. This more intense dispersed camping has resulted in large site footprints and impacts to the natural resources. In some of the more heavily used dispersed camping areas on the Ashley National Forest, vault toilets have been installed to protect the natural resources of the areas. A vault toilet is one with no running water where waste is held in an underground vault.

Dispersed camping has increased significantly with the evolution of recreational camping vehicles. Recreational vehicles have become larger and contain more comforts of home, and campers remain in place for longer periods, often exceeding the 16-day stay limit. This has led to user conflicts throughout the summer and includes health and safety and water quality concerns (littering and human waste), and visible resource impacts (vegetation removal, damage, and trampling, soil erosion and compaction, and wildlife disturbance).



Figure 32. Dispersed camping at North Iron Springs

Nonmotorized dispersed recreation is any recreational activity outside a developed recreation site that does not include the use a motorized vehicle. This type of use has increased significantly. Backpacking in the High Uintas Wilderness has become more popular, while horse and mule use has declined. The numerous high lake basins are popular destinations for wilderness visitors, due to the basins' availability for fishing, scenery, and opportunities for solitude. The Grandview Trailhead is the second most popular trailhead for the entire High Uintas Wilderness. Henry Fork Trailhead, on the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, is the most used, and it has the easiest access to Kings Peak. Visitors who use the Henry's Fork Trailhead to climb Kings Peak cross into the Ashley National Forest at Gunsight Pass before Kings Peak.



Figure 33. Granddaddy Basin, High Uintas Wilderness

The Grandview Trailhead sits at more than 9,700 feet elevation, and from there it is a 4-mile hike over Hades Pass to Granddaddy Basin. Because of the relatively easy and quick access to the Granddaddy Basin, Grandview Trailhead receives a large amount of visitation, often from youth groups and novice backpackers. The Grandview Trailhead has a voluntary trailhead register kiosk and the actual percentage of visitors that register vary by use group. It is estimated that only 40 to 50 percent of people use the trailhead registers. The number of people registered at the Grandview Trailhead in 2012 was 2,060, 2013 was 2,247, 2014 was 1,891, and 2015 was 1,907. The primary use periods depend on snow levels, but approximately 95 percent of visitation occurs in June, July, and August. The high use numbers and failure to follow regulations are having an impact on soil and vegetation resources and the opportunity for solitude. The area is a primary focus for public education and enforcement by seasonal wilderness rangers. Additionally other lake basins in the High Uintas Wilderness receive moderate to high use, and soil and vegetation resources and wilderness characteristics are being degraded as well.



Figure 34. Full parking lot at the Grandview Trailhead

There has been an increase in the amount and interest in mountain biking across the Ashley National Forest, particularly on the south rim of the Red Canyon area between Manila and Dutch John, Utah and the Wilkins Peak area south of Green River, Wyoming. Both areas are in the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and also in the Dry Fork area on the Vernal Ranger District. Visitors and local governments are interested in adding trails, particularly on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area in Daggett County (Daggett County Recreation Audit 2013). Increases in mountain bike use could lead to user conflicts with other users of nonmotorized trails, hikers, and horseback riders, but currently, it is not a problem.



Figure 35. Mountain biker on Dowd Mountain Trail, Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area

Roads and trails need regular maintenance to provide safe and desirable dispersed recreational opportunities and to prevent negative effects to other resources. Many of the both motorized and nonmotorized trails on the Ashley have poorly located sections which travel directly down the slope, the fall line. These trails are easily erodible. Because of the underlying geology of the Uinta Mountains, eroded trails develop into rock gardens that are unsafe or difficult for both motorized and nonmotorized uses. The 1986 Ashley National Forest plan revision called for “constructing/reconstructing approximately 80 miles of trail per decade.” Because of decreases in trails funding for the Ashley National Forest, this action has not been possible. Currently, there is a large amount of deferred maintenance on the Ashley’s trails. State trail grants have been utilized in past years to repair or reroute poorly located and deteriorating trail sections, but much more is required to bring both motorized and nonmotorized trails to Forest Service standards.

Water-based dispersed recreation has changed significantly from the 1986 forest plan era on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam. The Flaming Gorge Reservoir is a nationally significant recreation destination. Dispersed recreation occurs on and adjacent to the reservoir, and includes Boating for pleasure, sightseeing, fishing, dispersed camping, waterskiing and tubing, and jet skiing. The dispersed recreation activities are serviced by:

- boat ramps surrounding the reservoir;
- floating toilets and sewer pump out facilities at major boat ramps;
- eleven first-come-first-serve dispersed camping docks scattered throughout the reservoir;

- floating fuel stations;
- boat rentals;
- boat mechanic shops; and
- general stores at the three special use permit marinas.

The Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam to the Ashley National Forest today is a nationally recognized blue-ribbon trout fishery. Anglers travel from all over the world to fish the tailwater fishery for rainbow and brown trout.

The 1984 Green River scenic corridor management plan states:

“Approximately 1 percent of the use on the Green River is from commercial float trips, the majority of which are guided fishing trips”... “63 percent of the floaters on the river are there to enjoy the floating experience ... The remaining 37 percent of the floaters are on the river to fish.”

During the early to mid-1980s, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources utilized techniques to improve the fishery on the river below the Flaming Gorge Dam. Habitat management, combined with changes in fishing regulation (limited harvest, bait ban), helped elevate the status of the Green River below the dam to a class I fishery. This changed the public use patterns to more fisherman. The type of angler changed from novice to more expert, and commercially guided fishing trips have increased.

The Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam is heavily used for both shore fishing and boat fishing by both the public and commercially guided trips. The section is also heavily used for recreational and commercial floating. Commercially guided trips have been steadily increasing over the past five years. The number of commercial fishing trips between the Flaming Gorge Dam and Little Hole day use area are shown in table 9. The numbers ranged from a low of 2,650 in 2012 to a high of 3,775 in 2015.

Table 9. Commercial fishing trips between Flaming Gorge Dam and Little Hole day-use area from 2011 to 2015

Year	Number of trips
2011	3,025
2012	2,650
2013	2,897
2014	3,351
2015	3,775

The number of vehicle shuttles between the Spillway boat launch site and the Little Hole take-out have also steadily increased over the past five years. The number of shuttles reflect both the amount of commercial and private use of the Green River “A section” between the Flaming Gorge Dam and the Little Hole Day use area. The number of shuttles ranged from a low of 1,731 in 2011 to a high of 3,345 in 2015. The increase in use and the pressure on the resources are beginning to create user conflicts, create resource damage, and negatively affect visitor experiences.

Table 10. The number of vehicle shuttles between the Spillway boat launch site and the Little Hole take-out from 2011 to 2015

Year	Number of shuttle trips
2011	1,731
2012	2,314
2013	1,862
2014	3,142
2015	3,345

The releases from the Flaming Gorge Dam usually allow for flows between 800 and 1,000 cubic feet per second. During spring runoff, flows can increase to 8,600 cubic feet per second. These increased flows can create public safety concerns, especially for inexperienced boaters. Search-and-rescue activities put responders in potential dangerous situations.

The Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam to the Ashley National Forest boundary was found to be suitable as a wild and scenic river in Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for National Forest Lands in Utah, 2008. This designation requires the Ashley National Forest to manage the river to preserve its free-flow, water quality, scenic classification, and all the outstandingly remarkable values for which it was recommended; scenic, recreation, fish, historic, cultural, and wildlife.

Recreation Special Uses

The 1986 forest plan includes no direction regarding outfitters and guides. The last Green River capacity analysis was completed in 1996. Current outfitting and guiding activities and public use are pushing the limits of the desired recreational experiences. The 1997 High Uintas Management Plan set the number of outfitter and guiding service days according the watershed drainage. Changes in recreational and educational activity uses from 1997 to 2017 have increased the demand for educational wilderness trips and decreased the demand for guided hunting trips.

There are numerous outfitter and guide fishing permits on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and other recreation special use permits across the Ashley. The current Ashley National Forest outfitter and guide policy for the Ashley outside of the High Uintas Wilderness and the Green River corridor was completed in 1991 and revised in 1999. An updated needs assessment and capacity analysis is needed to reflect changes in demand for outfitting and guiding activities and to address new potential outfitting and guiding activities that have developed over the past 20 years.

Interpretation and Conservation Education

The Ashley National Forest does not have a formal forest wide interpretation and education plan or an education plan for the High Uintas Wilderness. Interpretation and education plans assess the needs, inventory existing offerings, and provide recommendations for interpretive, education, and information services for an area. Although the Ashley does not have a formal interpretation and education plan, there are many programs and facilities provided to visitors, and Ashley staff present education programs on the Ashley National Forest and at other locations.

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District has the most active interpretive program on the Ashley. The interpretation focal point of the district is the Red Canyon visitor Center. The Red Canyon Visitor Center was remodeled in 2015 and 2016; new displays and interpretation information were developed and built to improve opportunities for Ashley visitors to learn about the area. Between

2011 and 2016, visitation to the Red Canyon Visitor Center has been increasing steadily. In 2016, 23,446 people visited the visitor center during May to September, which is the highest number since visitation began being recorded in 2000. There are multiple other education and interpretation opportunities, including Swett Ranch and Ute Tower.

The Ute Tower Fire Lookout was reopened to the public in 2015 after extensive structural repairs were completed. The fire tower is the only one of its kind in Utah and demonstrates what living in a fire lookout was like. Along with the Ute Tower structure, the Ashley has begun a homing pigeon program. Homing pigeons were historically used by wildland firefighters to communicate before radios or telephones were available. The pigeons are released from the Red Canyon Visitor Center carrying messages from Ashley National Forest visitors and fly to Ute Tower where the visitors can retrieve their messages. The Ute Tower pigeon program also performs pigeon releases and education about wildland fire at local elementary schools, county fairs, and rodeos.



Figure 36. Pigeon release at local elementary school

Swett Ranch is a historic homestead and ranch acquired by the Ashley National Forest in 1972. The historic ranch buildings and farming equipment are maintained as an interpretive site, with walking tours and visitor information. Each spring, the grazing permittee holds an open cattle branding for visitors to experience historic ranching activities. The grazing permittee also holds living history events for local schools.

Interpretive and education events are also conducted by Ashley employees at the Lucerne, Bootleg, and Mustang Amphitheaters. These events include presentations on area history, wildlife, plants, and astronomy. Other events on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area are:

- kids fishing derbies;
- summer camp tours;
- junior ranger programs;
- auto tours;
- nature walks; and
- scavenger hunts.

The Ashley National Forest is currently developing the Discovery Agents mobile device application for the Red Canyon and Ute Tower areas. The application will allow visitors, particularly children, to use their mobile devices to discover the area while completing missions and learning natural history.

Ashley National Forest employees participate in career fairs at location schools to describe natural resource management careers to area students. They also participate in local county travel and tourism events, such as float trips, all-terrain vehicle rides, and nature walks. The Ashley heritage program holds presentations and demonstrations and at local schools, permitted lodges and resorts on the Ashley, private lodges and resorts off of the Ashley, the McConkie Ranch petroglyphs, local and regional historical societies, the Utah State Parks Field House in Vernal, Utah, and other locations. The heritage program also sponsors Passport in Time volunteer projects. Passport in Time volunteers work with professional archaeologists and historians in archaeological survey and excavations, historic structure restoration, analysis and curation of artifacts, and other projects. Some past projects on the Ashley include restoration of the historic Summit Springs Guard Station, restoration of Swett Ranch, and mapping the Carter Military Road. Multi-media interpretation is becoming more user friendly.

In 2016, the Ashley National Forest set up a webcam on a raptor nest. The webcam is shown on television at the Red Canyon Visitor Center and the Ashley National Forest supervisor's office. The webcam is also available to view on the Internet. In 2016 there were over 200,000 webcam views.

Recreation Conflicts, Compatibility, and Incompatibilities

Conflicts occur when a person's expectations for a recreational experiences are not met. This can be the result of contact with, or sounds made by, another user. The potential for conflict exists among user groups and even among members of the same group. Whether the activity is motorized or nonmotorized, conflict often occurs over competition for space. Conflict situations may also occur from management trying to provide too many activities in one setting. This can result in marginal quality for all users. Overall, there are few major user conflicts on the Ashley National Forest, but there are numerous minor conflicts that, over time, could become major.

Dispersed Camping

Dispersed camping with an RV is a popular activity across the Ashley National Forest. Visitors often have traditional or favorite spots they frequent year after year, and often there is competition for the same spot. There is a 16-day stay limit for dispersed camping on the Ashley, but with limited law enforcement, visitors stay over the limit. This creates conflicts between the visitor that currently has the desired location and the visitor that is waiting for the spot to vacate so they can camp.

Green River Corridor

The Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam is a nationally recognized blue-ribbon trout fishery and is heavily used by fishermen. The river is also a popular for one day or overnight floats with outfitter-and-guide groups and the public. In some cases, members of the public will float the section between Spillway and Little Hole two to three times a day. Throughout the summer, both fisherman and floaters are using the river corridor simultaneously, leading to conflicts both unloading and gearing up at the Spillway boat ramp and on the river itself. Because of the easy access, the river section is popular for inexperienced rafters who may be ill-prepared and do not know river etiquette. This leads to conflicts between the inexperienced public and fisherman, more experienced rafters, and raft guiding operations. These conflicts reduce the recreational experience for all those involved.



Figure 37. Multiple parties launching from the Spillway boat ramp

Recreation Visitors, Activities, and Trends

National Visitor Use Monitoring

The Ashley National Forest conducted national visitor use monitoring in fiscal years 2002, 2007, and 2012. The surveys are conducted every five years for each national forest. The survey is being conducted for the Ashley in fiscal year 2017 from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017. Some information from the 2002, 2007, and 2012 reports is presented below.

A national forest visit is defined by national visitor use monitoring as the entry of one person upon a national forest to participate in recreation activities for an unspecified period of time. A national forest visit can be composed of multiple site visits. A site visit is defined as the entry of one person onto a national forest site or area, such as a day-use fishing access site or a developed campground, to participate in recreation activities for an unspecified period.

The FY 2007 and FY 2012 reports summarize the visits as follows.

Recreation use on the Ashley National Forest for fiscal year 2007, at the 90 percent confidence level, was 535,000 estimated national forest visits plus or minus 48 percent. This means, given the 2007 national visitor use monitoring data, the best estimate is that there were 535,000 visitors to the Ashley National Forest, and we are 90 percent certain the true number is between 791,800 and 278,200 visitors. Recreation use on the Ashley National Forest for fiscal year 2012 at the 90 percent confidence level was 295,000 estimated national forest visits plus or minus 21 percent. The numerical difference in Ashley National Forest visitors was not observed by field staff and may have actually increased between 2007 and 2012. The variation may result in changes in the survey design between 2007 and 2012, and the difficulty of accurately capturing exiting Ashley National Forest visitors because of the multiple exit points. The Ashley is currently conducting the fourth round of surveys. The 2017 survey should help validate the accuracy of the past surveys.

A profile of Ashley National Forest visitors was developed, based upon those visitors interviewed during the 2012 surveys. According to the surveys, 61.2 percent of visitors to the Ashley are male and 38.8 percent are female. Figure 38 and figure 39 further describe the visitors to the Ashley National Forest, including the percentage in age group, and by race and ethnicity based on the 2012 national visitor use monitoring information.

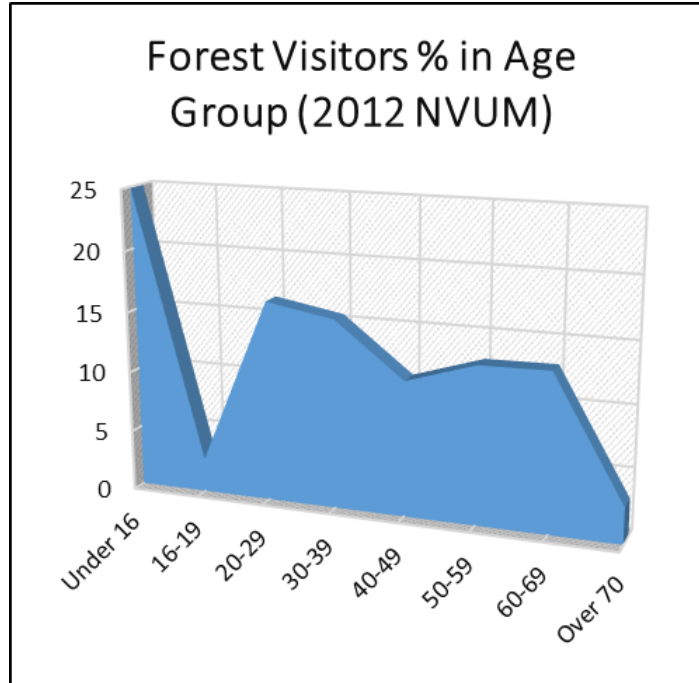


Figure 38. Ashley National Forest visitors by age group (2012 survey)

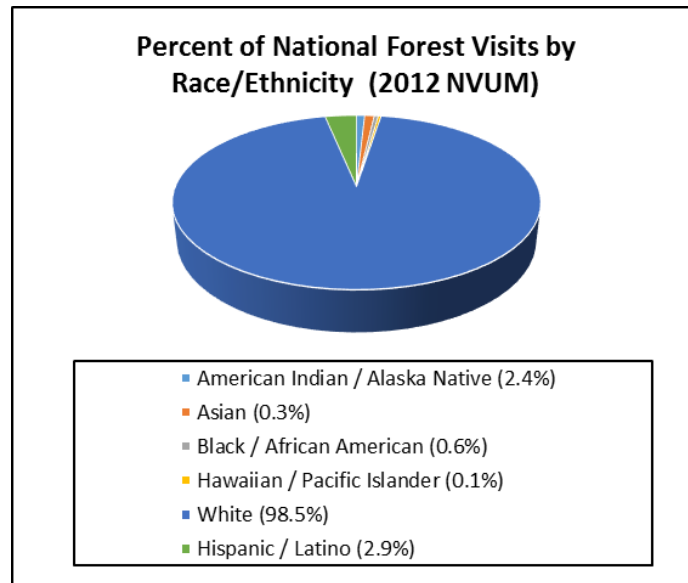


Figure 39. Ashley National Forest visitors by race and ethnicity (2012 survey)

Visitor travel distance to the Ashley National Forest was also recorded during 2012 survey interviews. Seventy five percent of visitors interviewed came from counties in Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado, which are within 200 miles of the Ashley National Forest. The data did not lend itself to an exact percentage split between counties with Ashley National Forest lands and those slightly more distant. Fourteen percent of the visitors traveled between 201 and 500 miles to get to the Ashley National Forest, and 9 percent traveled more than 500 miles. The interviewed visitors reported living in 36 different states, and a few visitors came from other countries. This data is consistent with the summary of the Ashley National Forest recreation niche visitor groups (see niche discussion on page 4).

Table 11. Distances from the Ashley National Forest where visitors live

Area	Distance from national forest and trip details	Percent of visitors
Local	Live 1 hour from the Ashley, Visits may be spontaneous.	75
Regional	Live approximately 3 hours from the Ashley. Visits require little planning.	75
National	Live more than 3 hours away. Plan visits in advance, stay multiple days, often use outfitter and guide services. Attracted to the area by the national recreation area, the Green River, High Uintas Wilderness, and nearby national parks and monuments	25

Recreation Activities of Ashley National Forest Visitors

The most common recreation activities reported in national visitor use monitoring surveys include viewing natural features and wildlife, relaxing, and driving for pleasure. Almost one-third of visitors stayed overnight on the Ashley National Forest, whether at developed campgrounds, in cabins and resorts, or at dispersed sites along the road and in the backcountry. The overnight stays, one-day gatherings with family and friends, and general relaxing emphasize the popularity of developed areas and travel routes on the Ashley National Forest. Many of these activities also take place in dispersed areas, most commonly along roads. Fishing, hiking, and walking are among the most popular activities on the Ashley National Forest.

Those visitors who were interviewed on the Ashley National Forest during survey were asked to identify, from a predetermined list, the activities they participated in while visiting the Ashley National Forest (see figure 40). The results from the survey show activities from the list, and are charted below. Most respondents said they participated in multiple activities, so the results total greater than 100 percent.

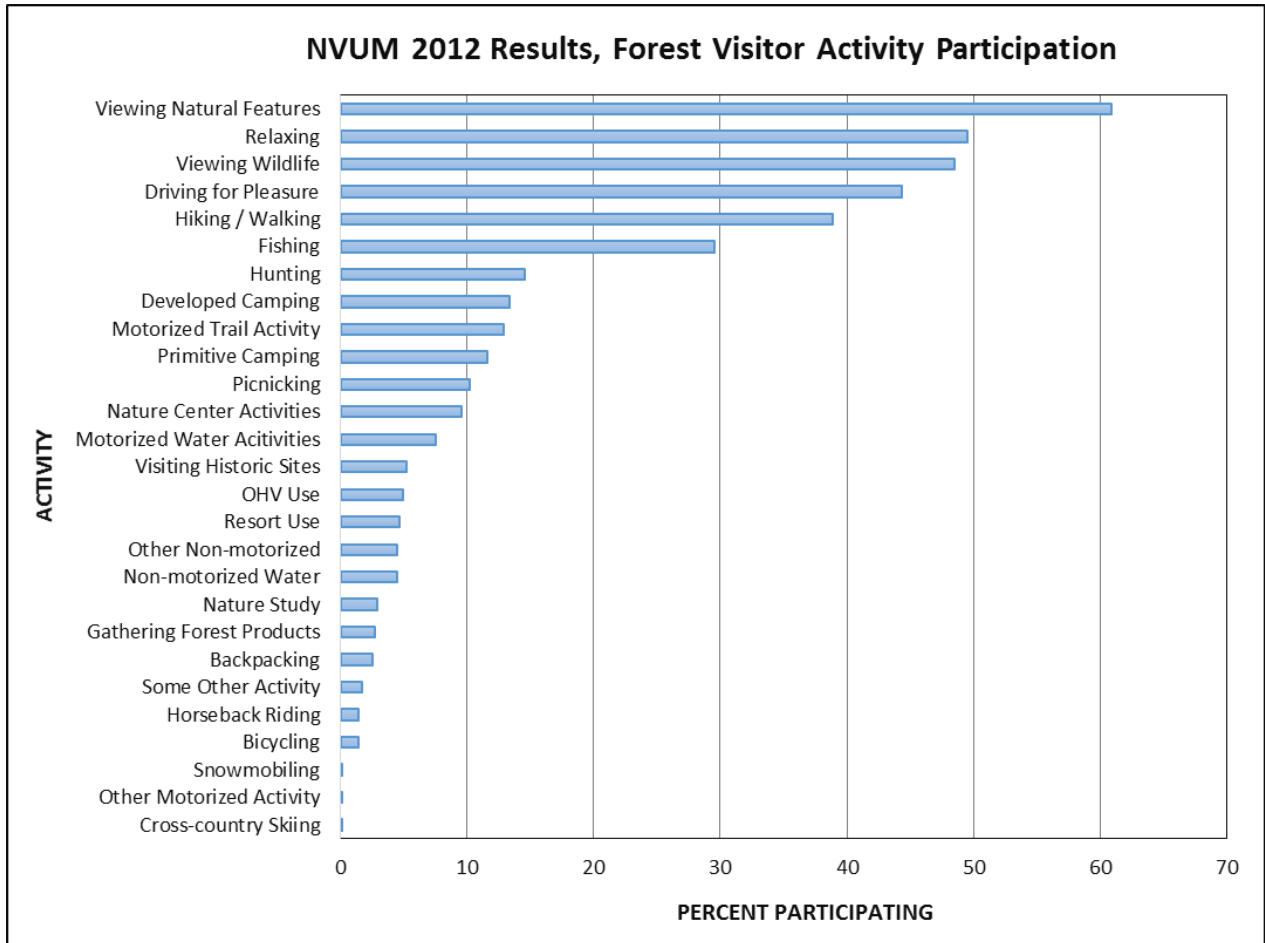


Figure 40. Ashley National Forest visitor activity participation (2012 survey results)

Recreation Activities on Public Lands in Utah

In 2008, Utah State University completed a survey called Public Lands and Utah Communities (Krannich 2008). The survey responses include participation in specific recreational activities on public lands from 2007 to 2008. The results shown in figure 41 are the grouped responses for the three Uintah Basin Counties with the majority of Ashley National Forest lands in Utah. The results show similar most common activities to those reported from national visitor use monitoring surveys. The survey addressed all general types of land use on all public lands. Though the data is not identical to the national visitor use monitoring, the survey responses are useful for addressing participation in outdoor recreation and preferred activities of nearby residents.

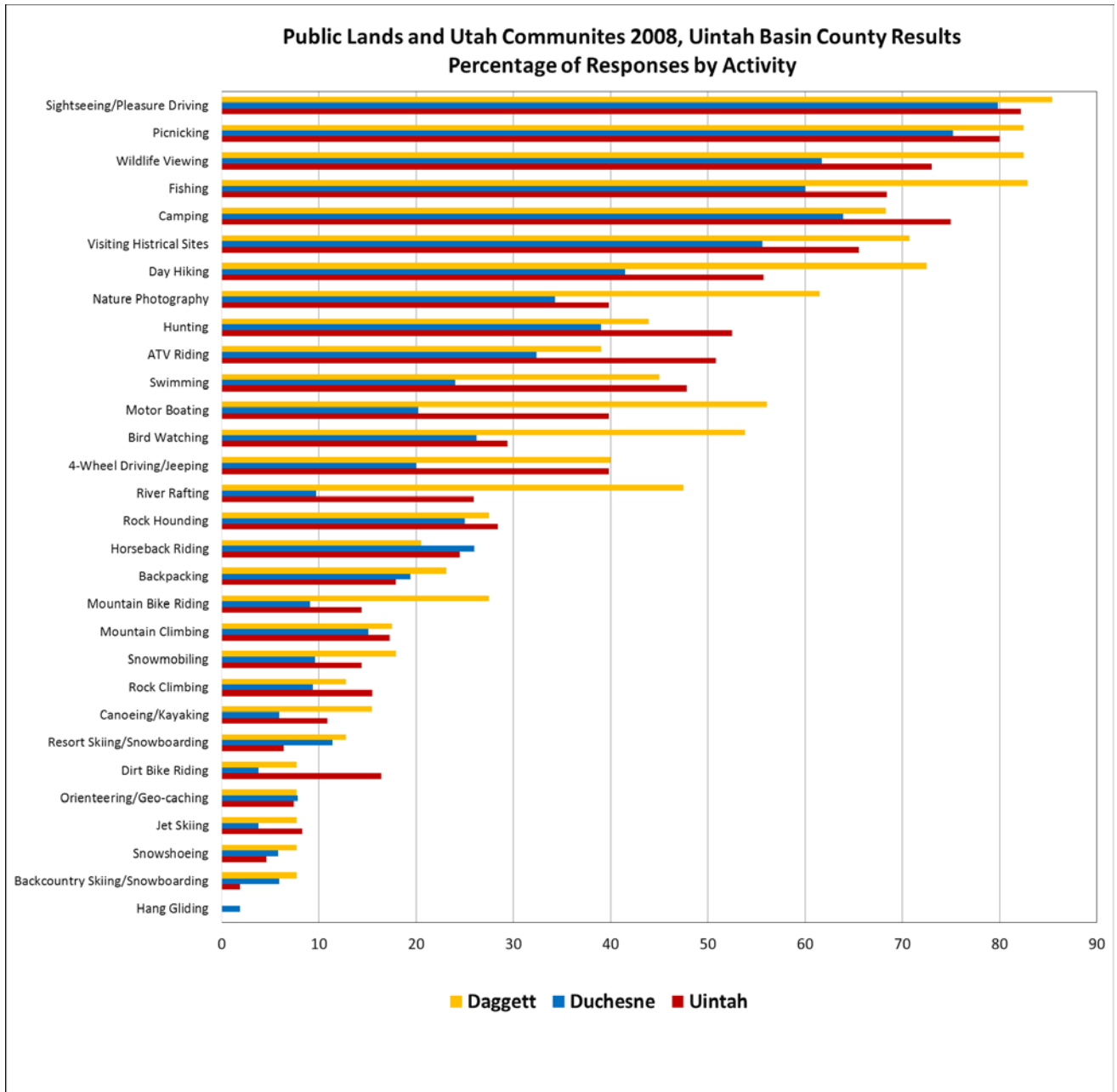


Figure 41. Public lands and Utah communities 2008, Uintah Basin results

Activity Preference Findings from National Visitor Use Monitoring and Public Lands and Utah Communities

These two surveys were conducted with a different purpose, audience, and even survey questions. Even so, they validate each other on several points (data similar to the Utah data was not available for Wyoming).

People participate in a broad range of activities on the Ashley National Forest and on other public lands in Utah. Nearby residents are dependent upon the Ashley National Forest for at least some of their leisure time individual and group activities. The majority of the respondents say pleasure driving, viewing

scenery, wildlife, and other natural and historic features were a part of their activities. Camping, fishing, and gathering with family or friends for picnics or to escape their normal routine, were also among the top reported activities.

The Utah recreation data shows participation in off-highway vehicle and motorcycle use in the Uintah Basin at a much higher rate than national visitor use monitoring data. This finding is consistent with observations from Ashley National Forest recreation specialists. The variables of the two surveys are compared in the table below. It shows the frameworks that account for differences in survey outcomes.

Table 12. National visitor use monitoring versus Utah Public lands survey variables

Survey	Purpose	Area	Sample Population	Period Sampled	Method
National visitor use monitoring	Monitor recreation use and visitor satisfaction on the Ashley	Ashley	Ashley National Forest visitors	October 2011 through September 2012	Exit interviews
Public lands and Utah communities	Collect information on all public land uses and public perceptions of those uses in Utah	Utah public lands	Utah resident sample by county	2007 activities in the last year	Questionnaires

Population Trends and Likely Effects on Recreation

Known and predictable trends at local, regional, and national scales are likely to affect Ashley National Forest visitation and visitor choices in nature-based recreation activities in the future. These trends are summarized in figure 42 and figure 43 below. The source for both figures is the Utah Governor’s Office of Management and Budget, subcounty population projections.

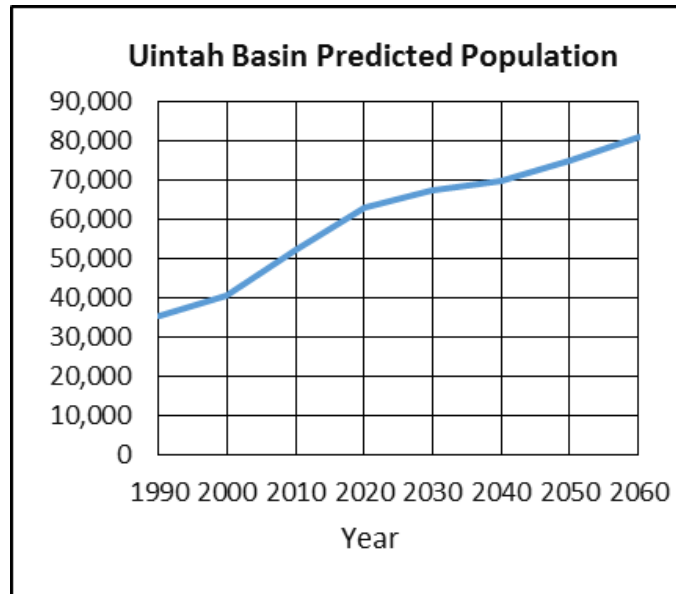


Figure 42. Uintah Basin predicted population growth

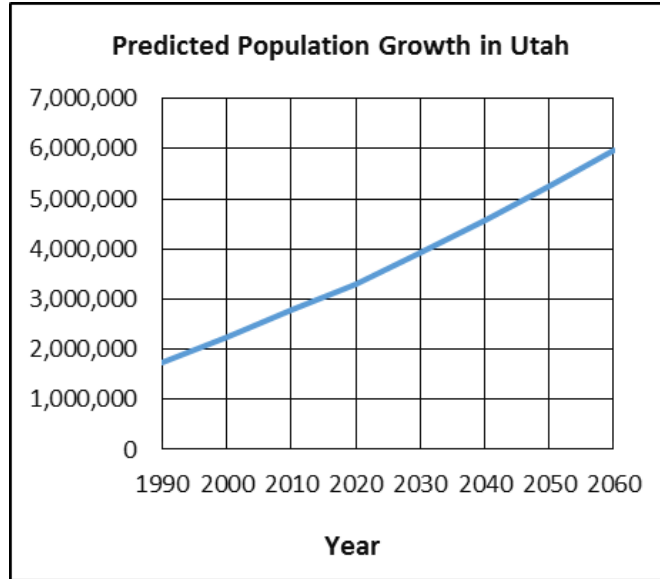


Figure 43. Utah predicted population growth

About 75 percent of Utah's estimated three million people live within four counties along the Wasatch Front. The population in Utah and the Uintah Basin is expected to almost double by 2060 (Utah Governor's Office of Management and Budget, sub-county population projections). This information is important because national visitor use monitoring reports indicate 75 percent of visitors to the Ashley National Forest come from within 200 miles of the Ashley. This distance zone includes the Uinta Basin and most of the land in the Wasatch Front counties.

Uintah Basin predictions are of people residing in Daggett, Duchesne, and Uintah Counties, Utah, where substantial growth is predicted. Smaller population increases are predicted for Uinta and Sweetwater Counties in Wyoming and for the State of Wyoming for the same period.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov), the total US population will increase by less than one percent each year. The trend toward an "older" population on the average is expected to continue.

National Recreation Trends

Trends in recreation visits nationally include shorter trips of one to five days, and an increasing percentage of one-day visits. Most visitors indicate at least some time spent in nature appreciation (viewing scenery, wildlife, or other features; nature study; and similar activities) and walking. In fact, bird watching was the most rapidly growing activity nationwide between 1981 and 2001 (Cordell, Betz, and Green 2002). Rapid increases in motorized activities on roads and trails over the last 15 years are locally evident in Utah surveys (Krannich 2008). These increases were also noticed in observation of activities in Wyoming and Utah parts of the Ashley National Forest by Ashley personnel.

The number of people camping has continued to increase since the 1960s. The percentage of people who camp with self-contained recreational vehicles has increased, while tent and open-air camping has decreased. The trailers and motorized vehicles used, including boats, have more amenities. The average size of RVs being purchased appears to be increasing. This suggests a general trend away from more primitive recreation activities. (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE): 2000-2002)

Results of the public lands and Utah communities survey (Krannich 2008) show residents of Daggett, Duchesne, and Uintah Counties value recreation opportunities on public lands. Most of these people would like to see the present mix of opportunities retained. Many survey participants would like to see trail opportunities for motorized vehicle travel increase. Others would like to see more areas and trails available for mountain biking and other nonmotorized activities.

The national assessment report, *Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures* (Cordell 2012), is one of several Forest Service reports done for the 2010 Renewable Resources Planning Act assessment. The objectives of the trends and futures assessment report include a review of past trends in outdoor recreation participation, and projections of outdoor recreation participation to the year 2060. The assessment points out that what people now choose to do for outdoor recreation is different from previous generations of Americans. It also points out that outdoor recreation, including nature-based recreation, is growing and is likely to continue to grow. The five activities projected to have the highest growth percentage nationally are developed skiing, undeveloped skiing, challenge activities, equestrian activities; and motorized water activities. The activities with the lowest rates of participant growth are visiting primitive areas, motorized off-road activities, motorized snow activities, hunting, fishing, and floating water activities. :

The 2014 Utah Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan identified the top recreational facility needs in the Uintah Basin planning district, based on public surveys. The facility needs relating to the Ashley National Forest were:

- camping areas #2;
- all-terrain vehicle and off-highway vehicle trails and areas #3;
- hiking trails #7;
- trails (general) #9; and
- biking trails #10.

The most common mountain activities in which Uintah Basin residents participated were:

1. off-highway vehicle riding;
2. camping;
3. hiking or backpacking;
4. hunting;
5. horseback riding;
6. mountain biking; and
7. rock climbing and rappelling.

An outdoor recreation participation study for 2015 from The Outdoor Foundation shows a growth in outdoor activities in ages 6 to 12 and 25 to 44, a decline in ages 18 to 24 and 45 plus, and no change in ages 13 to 17. Overall the participation rate (percentage of population) in outdoor activities nationwide has declined slightly from 2006 to 2014. But the number of participants has increased with the national population increase.

National parks are experiencing a large increase in visitation. More than 305 million people visited national parks in 2015, which surpassed the previous all-time visitation record from 2014. Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Arches, Canyonlands, and Rocky Mountain National Parks all set visitation records in 2015. The Ashley National Forest is located on one of the primary travel routes between these national parks.

As national parks experience record visitation, the visitor experience is changed. This change may lead to fewer local or regional visits to the national parks and an increase in visits to national forests as a substitute for outdoor activities.

Demand and Recreation Resources

The preceding sections show data used to predict future visitation and what settings will likely be in demand. This section describes predictions and assumptions developed from the data. The section also describes implications of the assumptions to recreation settings and programs, and therefore, to visitor opportunities. The relationship between the data and the predictions below is graphically represented in figure 44.

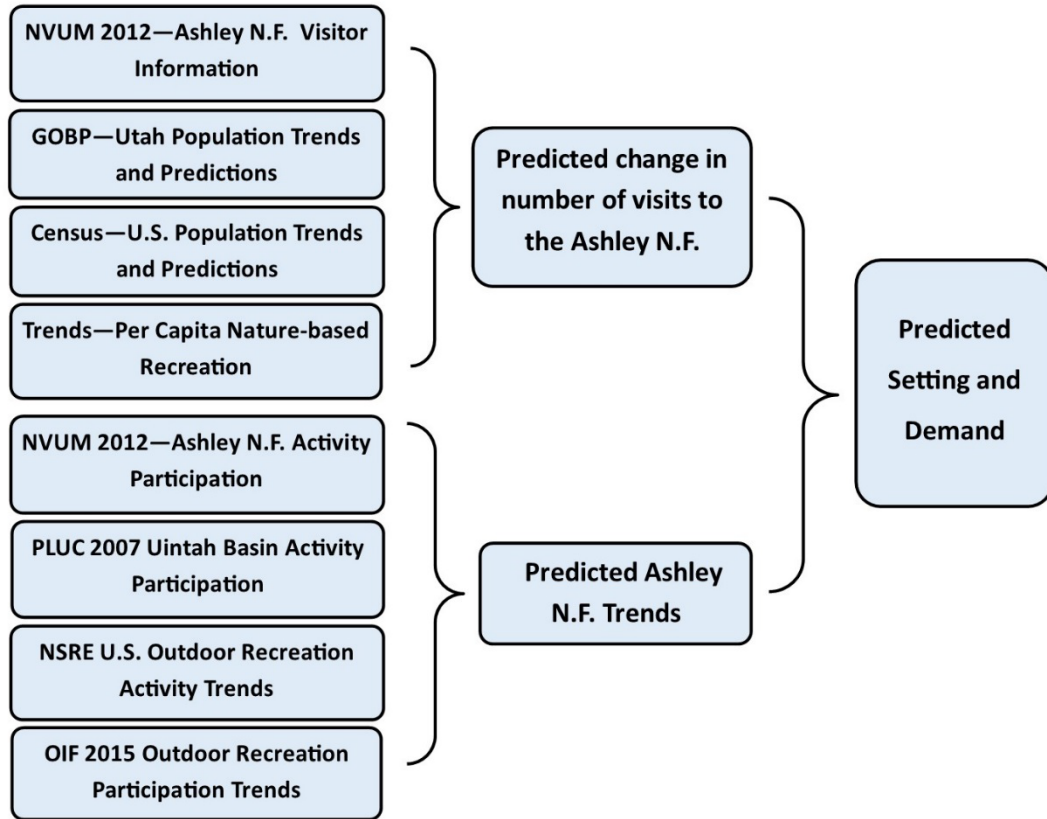


Figure 44. Relationship between recreation demand trend and projections

Recreation Visits to the Ashley National Forest

Over the next 15 years, the population along the Wasatch Front and in the Uintah Basin is estimated to increase 25 percent. Smaller population increases are predicted for Uinta and Sweetwater Counties, Wyoming, and for the State of Wyoming for the same period. These are the areas where 75 percent of the Ashley National Forest visitors reside. The U.S. population trend shows slower growth and contributes most of the other 25 percent of visitors. Nature-based recreation is expected to increase across the Nation, but the nature and type of preferred recreation is difficult to predict. If national park visitation continues to increase, a greater number of people could choose to forgo national park visits and instead recreate on National Forest System lands.

An estimate of 15 to 30 percent growth in visitation is predicted over the next 15 years on the Ashley National Forest, based on the predicted population increases and increases in nature based recreation.

Activities likely to show increases in overall rate of participation (as a percentage of visitation) are motorized trail activities, bicycle trail travel, undeveloped skiing, and visits to developed areas for motorized and nonmotorized day-use activities (water-based, trail-based, interpretive, and viewing). Activities likely to show little or no change in the rate of participation are visits to primitive areas, Developed and dispersed camping, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and visitor use of private providers, including resorts and outfitter-guide services

Since 1986, recreation activities and equipment have evolved. Industries have been created around the new technologies that have arisen. Visitors can now GPS their locations from their smart phones, reach their home computer through the cloud network, find an off-highway vehicle that is as comfortable to ride in as a car, and set up camp in recreational vehicles that are self-contained and include microwaves and big-screen televisions. Paying active attention to these emerging trends in technology and how they will affect recreational activities will be important to ensure that recreation user continue to have ample opportunity to enjoy their national forests.

Recreational activities that are now occurring on the Ashley National Forest compared to 1986 are side-by-side off-highway vehicles, geocaching, mountain biking, fat-tire mountain biking, drone operation, and stand-up paddle boarding. There are unique and emerging recreational activities that could occur on the Ashley in the future, such as timber sled snow machines, kite skiing, and electronic bicycles.

Recreation Setting and Opportunities

Recreation Niche - As previously described, the recreation niche can likely be maintained under existing management direction. There is some risk that increases in visitation will displace local recreationists from their preferred areas of use. Displaced local recreationists may then seek out less utilized areas, which in turn changes the areas setting and opportunity and could displace the users seeking more solitary areas. This, in turn, could affect the areas defined in the niche. Recreation opportunity spectrum setting creep, as described below, would only affect the niche if the setting creep occurred over large areas.

Recreation Settings - Given recreation trends, providing adequate recreation opportunity spectrum settings will become increasingly difficult over time, particularly where forest plan direction does not limit changes to the recreation opportunity spectrum. These challenges are tied to demand predictions and described as risks to the existing settings. The settings, in turn, affect visitor experiences and satisfaction.

Setting creep is possible, particularly in areas of existing heavy dispersed use. This is unplanned change in recreation opportunity spectrum class results from incremental increases in use, activities, and supporting developments in an area. The increases occur to the point the area is in a more developed recreation opportunity spectrum class. For example, heavy use in a semi-primitive motorized dispersed area along a road accessible by high-clearance vehicles could lead to gravel surfacing of the road, hardening of dispersed sites, addition of toilets, and other amenities. The area would then meet the definition of roaded natural setting. Setting creep often displaces traditional recreation users to another area.

Increased visitation is expected in all recreation opportunity spectrum classes. The increased visitation and changes that favor the increase are among the most likely triggers of setting creep. Existing recreation opportunity spectrum classes that are likely to see the greatest increases in recreation visitation are the three classes offering motorized opportunities and a mix of day use: rural, roaded natural, and semi-primitive motorized.

Semi-primitive motorized settings are the most vulnerable to creep. Contributing to this vulnerability are more visitors participating in motorized trail activities, predicted increases in visitation, and the low user density that defines these areas as semi-primitive settings.

Sustainable Recreation

Sustainable recreation is defined as the set of recreation settings and opportunities on National Forest System land that is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations (36 Code of Federal Regulations 219.19). To be sustainable means the recreational settings and opportunities provided are compatible with other plan components that provide ecological sustainability, foster healthy social relationships among recreationist and with the broader community, and are within the fiscal capability of the planning unit (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, chapter 20).

The context for evaluating sustainable recreation is the Ashley National Forest's recreation niche, developed through the recreation facilities analysis process. In doing so, sustainability is focused on those things the Ashley is uniquely poised to provide and framed within the broader regional area. Current conditions and trends are discussed in each of the three areas (ecological, economic, and social) of sustainable recreation.

Ecological Consideration and Conditions

The health and resiliency of the Ashley's natural resources are critical to the sustained delivery of natural recreational settings and opportunities. The Ashley is divided into three very different ranger districts. Each ranger district has ecologically diverse landscapes with different vegetation cover types and landforms:

- **Flaming Gorge Reservoir:** Sagebrush flats, steep canyons, and scarp and dip ridges
- **Eastern Uintas:** Dense conifer forests and large meadows covering the gentle hills
- **Western Uintas :** Glacier carved mountains and valleys
- **Tavaputs Plateau:** Steep timbered canyons and grass-covered ridgetops

There are populations of wildlife and fish species including thriving elk herds, big game animals such as deer and moose; black bears, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, goshawks, osprey, and habitats for cutthroat trout, rainbow, and brown trout. Without healthy resilient landscape and habitats, many recreation opportunities that have historically been enjoyed would not be sustainable.

The top 10 recreational activities (USDA Forest Service 2012) people participate in on the Ashley National Forest are:

1. viewing natural features;
2. relaxing;
3. viewing wildlife;
4. driving for pleasure;
5. hiking;
6. fishing;
7. hunting;
8. developed camping;
9. motorized trail activity; and
10. primitive camping.

Obvious linkages exist between the types of activities being pursued and the presence and condition of natural resources. The history of exploration, settlement, and development of the Ashley created a network of roads and trails which made recreational access to the remote and rugged country possible. Some of the needs for the network included water development, range allotments, mining, and timber harvesting activity. The historic pattern of access had a notable effect on when and how people use the Ashley National Forest. Although areas of concentrated use are found in the eastern Uintas, much of area's settings are relatively intact. These settings include main stream and river drainages on the Uintas south slope and around the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Abundant and clean water, lush riparian areas, clean air, pristine alpine areas, and diverse wildlife populations all contribute to sustaining the Ashley's recreation settings and opportunities.

Ecological unsustainable recreation can include:

- Introduction of invasive plants by recreational activities
- Disruption of wildlife during stressful periods
- Motorized trails that deliver sediments to streams and rivers
- Decreases in water quality from human waste

Economic Considerations and Conditions

Two aspects of economic sustainability are important. The first is how the Ashley's recreation program contributes to local economies and the other is the fiscal sustainability of the Ashley recreation program. Although related and interdependent, the scales concerning the economic viability of each are assessed and found to be different.

The Ashley National Forest recreation programs contribute to the economic sustainability of northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming. Hiking, fishing, and hunting are the top nonpassive activities visitors come to the Ashley National Forest to enjoy (USDA Forest Service 2012). Both jobs and revenue directly and indirectly result from visitors traveling to the Ashley National Forest (see the Social and Economic Report). The remoteness of many of Ashley's recreation settings encourages visitors to stop and buy supplies such as groceries and gas to before entering the Ashley. Visitors can also buy items to support their visit and their activities on the Ashley. On the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, there are the three special use permit marinas, one lodge, and businesses adjacent to, or on, private land that cater to visitors in the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. These enterprises fill needs such as boat storage, restaurants, an RV park, rental cabins, boat mechanics, fishing gear shops, raft and boat rentals, restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations and convenience stores. There are also overnight facilities such as bed and breakfasts, cabins, inns, privately owned campgrounds, and motels. More direct jobs and revenue are associated with the Ashley's outfitter and guide operations, the majority of which are on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam. Hunting and fishing outfitters and guides on other areas of the Ashley contribute to the local economy as well.

The Ashley National Forest also hosts a number of events that draw visitors from outside the local area. Some of these events include an all-terrain vehicle jamboree, road running events, family reunions, fishing derbies, and a Boy Scout camp.

The fiscal sustainability of the Ashley's recreation programs is partially dependent on congressionally appropriated budgets and regional allocations. Over the past decades, the Ashley's budget for recreation-related programs has declined. These programs include trails; recreation facilities including campgrounds, toilets, water and sewer systems; day-use sites; wilderness management; recreations special uses; and all other recreation program management. The budget decreases have led managers to more closely examine

expenditures by program area, so some programs have decreased funding. For instance, less money is now available for maintaining trails across the Ashley National Forest, translating into fewer trails receiving maintenance each year.

Reduced budgets have also led to changes in the way some programs are managed. Cost savings have been achieved through workforce adjustments by eliminating, combining, and zoning positions. Many campgrounds once maintained by Forest Service employees are now administered through a concessionaire permit. Other tasks traditionally completed by local Ashley personnel are now done through volunteer programs, employees from other locations, or contractors. While these solutions have helped the Ashley National Forest continue its recreation programs, the options remaining for adapting recreation infrastructure and services to smaller budgets are becoming quite limited. Facilities maintenance, visitor services, and addressing enforcement issues become increasingly difficult in light of declining budgets and increasing demand.

In 2013, the Ashley National Forest conducted a review on all developed recreation facilities. The review's purpose was to assess the sustainability of the sites and identify a sustainable level of recreation infrastructure on the Ashley National Forest for foreseeable funding amounts. Nine campgrounds, one boat ramp, and one picnic site were identified for either reducing current amenities and infrastructure or decommissioning.

Social Considerations and Conditions

The Ashley National Forest serves as a backdrop, workplace, and playground of the communities in northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming. Ashley National Forest visitation is primarily local and regional, 75 percent of visitors live within 200 miles. More than 80 percent (82.7) of Ashley visitors are very satisfied with their recreation experience (USDA Forest Service 2012). Important components of a satisfying recreation experience are:

- visitor safety;
- minimizing conflicts between uses;
- responding to the needs of existing and future visitors;
- creating connections between people and nature;
- promoting long-term physical and mental health; and
- instilling a culture of stewardship and appreciation.

Two management tools are employed to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Ashley: interpretation and education programs and law enforcement. Both management techniques influence visitor behavior; however, law enforcement is typically a reactive approach. Interpretation and education programs are designed to create an appreciation and understanding as a way to encourage voluntary compliance and deter behavior that would result in negative resource impacts. The Ashley is making progress in reaching a broader audience and delivering information before, during, and after visitation through web site updates, social media, and public outreach events.

Climate Change effects on Recreation

Climate change could affect all facets of recreation on the Ashley National Forest. Climate change could increase the summer recreation season by lengthening the shoulder seasons in the spring and fall, which may lead to an increased public pressure for earlier access. Warmer weather could also shift recreational activities from lower elevations to higher more fragile environments with limited capability, as visitors try to escape the summer heat. Warmer weather and longer summer seasons could increase demand for water-based recreation. But increasing temperatures could change precipitation patterns, which could

change water levels on the Ashley. Increased variability in precipitation and decreased precipitation in the form of snow could reduce reservoir and lake levels, reduce river and stream flows, and reduce water releases from the Flaming Gorge Dam into the Green River.

Recreation infrastructure could also be affected by climate change by warming temperatures. These warming temperatures could cause earlier melting of the mountain snowpack, resulting in changes in the timing and magnitude of stream flows. Increases in streamflow magnitude, and the greater potential for flood peaks from rain-on-snow events, could damage developed recreation sites (campgrounds and day use) located near streams and rivers. These effects could damage roads, motorized and nonmotorized trails, and trail bridges.

Future projections for winter snowpack show the Wasatch Front will become unreliable for winter snow sports if it gets reduced winter seasons and snow pack. Projections also show the higher elevations of the Uinta Mountains would be one of the few areas adjacent to the Wasatch Front with persistent snowpack. This could drive an increased demand in snow-based winter recreation on the Ashley National Forest.



Figure 45. Backcountry skier on the Ashley National Forest

State and Local Planning

The 2013 State of Utah outdoor recreation vision identified 10 guiding principles for recreation in Utah.

- Quality of life
- Heritage
- Healthy landscapes
- Strong and diversified economy
- Long-term perspective and timely action
- Diverse opportunities
- Innovation
- Good information
- Balanced solutions
- Education

The 2014 to 2019 Wyoming statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan identified five major concerns for outdoor recreation from user surveys:

- Public land access
- Concern about off road recreation vehicles and snowmobile use
- Development of more parks and facilities
- Cost
- Maintenance

In 2017, each Utah County is required to have a resource management plan. These plans will include existing condition, desired future condition, and methods from monitoring progress towards desired condition (including on Federal lands within the counties).

The Public Lands Initiative is current legislation that would affect the future management of the Ashley National Forest. This management includes designations of:

- national geologic and recreation area;
- wilderness areas;
- special management areas; and
- watershed management areas.

Recreation Opportunities on the Broader Landscape

The availability of recreation opportunities on lands in the Ashley National Forest broader landscape is extensive. The Ashley National Forest is bordered by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest to the northwest and west. The northwestern border splits the High Uintas Wilderness along the spine of the Uinta Mountains between the two national forests. The western border abuts the popular Mirror Lake Highway area.

There are multiple recreation opportunities in the broader landscape on neighboring Federal lands, including Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. These lands offer a variety of nonmotorized and motorized recreation opportunities, as well as various settings for dispersed and developed recreation. The Bureau of Land Management's Vernal, Price, Rock Springs, and Little Snake Field Offices have several recreation opportunities including motorized and nonmotorized trails, historic and interpretative sites, rafting, fishing, and hunting.

Vernal Field Office popular locations include the Pariette Wetlands, Fantasy Canyon, Pelican Lake, Browns Park, Jarvie Ranch, McCoy Flats mountain bike trail complex, and the Red Fleet mountain bike trail complex. Price Field Office popular locations and activities include Nine Mile Canyon and its pictographs and petroglyphs, and rafting Desolation and Gray Canyons. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ouray National Wildlife Refuge and the Jones Hole National Fish Hatchery offer wildlife viewing, sightseeing, fishing, and hiking.

Utah State parks have a significant presence in the area. Steinaker, Red Fleet, and Starvation State Parks are located in the Uintah Basin and primarily provide water-based recreation and developed camping. Dinosaur National Monument has the Quarry Exhibit Hall and other recreational opportunities including hiking, sightseeing, white-water rafting, camping, and viewing petroglyphs and historic sites. Dinosaur National Monument is on the primary travel route between Yellowstone National Park in Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana; Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado; and Arches and Canyonlands National Parks in southeastern Utah. Visitors travelling between these areas often stop at Dinosaur National Monument before continuing to their next destination. Other popular areas for recreation opportunities in the broader landscape are:

- Wilkins Peak Mountain Bike Trails – popular mountain biking area outside Green River, Wyoming
- Stewart Lake Waterfowl Management Area – birdwatching and wildlife viewing
- Big Sand Wash Reservoir and Bottle Hollow Reservoir – fishing

Regional, National, or International Significance

National visitor monitoring use data indicates little international visitation to the Ashley National Forest, 1.6 percent of surveyed visitors in 2012. This number is expected to increase because of an increase in international travelers between Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, and the national parks in southern Utah. More coordination is expected with tour companies and local government tourism boards. The Ashley National Forest is located on the primary route between these parks and tourists often visit the Red Canyon Visitor's Center and scenic byway pullouts while travelling these routes.

The Flaming Gorge Reservoir draws visitors from across the regional area for water sports and flat water fishing. The Ashley National Forest nationally significant areas are the Green River fishery and the High Uintas Wilderness. The Green River tailrace below the Flaming Gorge Dam is a nationally recognized blue-ribbon trout fishery. Visitors come from across the Nation to specifically fish the "A" section, between the Flaming Gorge Dam and Little Hole. The High Uintas Wilderness is a regionally significant destination. The Uintas is trending towards national significance with the destination of Kings Peak, the highest point in Utah, and the Highline Trail. The trail is a 70-mile hiking and horse-packing route going across the spine of the Uinta Mountains.

Opportunities for Greater Connection between People and Nature

The 2012 Planning Rule asks to describe the opportunities in the plan area to foster greater connections between people and nature through education, experience, recreation, and stewards. These opportunities tie into sustainable recreation, as it would not be possible without the collaboration and coordination with local user groups and communities. The Ashley currently partners with a number of recreation user groups for adopt-a-trail programs, volunteer work days, and to discuss issues. The Ashley utilizes both local and national summer-season volunteers for activities such as trail crews, wilderness rangers, campground hosts, trailhead hosts, interpretation programs, and other needed duties. On a majority of the Ashley, the recreation use of volunteers is at its capacity. This is primarily because of the amount of housing or RV pads available, fleet availability, and management capability. Although volunteer use is near capacity, the Ashley National Forest recreation and trails programs are always looking for additional volunteer opportunities and ways to increase volunteer capacity.

There is a current effort to expand the collaboration and partnership between the Utah State University – Uintah Basin campus to connect local students with Federal agencies and public lands by offering internships and opportunities to work on projects. Also, there are current opportunities to connect people with nature through smart phone applications specifically for the Ashley National Forest. These applications could connect kids with nature through the integration of technology and the Ashley National Forest landscape. Web cameras, which broadcast live video feeds from specific Ashley National Forest sites, are also an opportunity to connect people with nature. The Ashley National Forest setup a webcam on a raptor nest in 2016. The webcam was broadcasted into the Red Canyon Visitors center, was available online, and had more than 200,000 visits.

The personnel in the recreation and fire programs on the Ashley collaborated on interpretation during the recent expansion of the Ute Fire Lookout, and they identified additional interpretation opportunities. Some include promoting the use of homing pigeons at the Ute Fire Lookout

through partnerships with the Intermountain Natural History Association, bird aviaries in the state, national homing pigeon societies, national fire lookout preservation groups, and other related partnerships. The current Ute Tower Fire Lookout program is actively involved in area elementary schools. An expansion of the program could also include local middle and high schools.

The Ashley National Forest does not have a forestwide interpretative and education plan for the High Uintas Wilderness or for the Ashley National Forest as a whole. An interpretive and education plan assesses the needs, inventories existing offerings, and provides recommendations for interpretive, education, and information services for an area. The plan would assist the Ashley in identifying the issues or dynamics in the social, cultural, or economic conditions that may prevent groups without access from seeking or participating in recreational activities typically demanded by others on the Ashley National Forest.

Other Resource Values

Environmental factors and other resource concerns or commitments may also affect opportunities provided in recreation program areas. For instance, resource concerns may lead to area or route closures. These concerns could be issues such as viability of species or soil movement, and could affect visitors or visitor satisfaction.

Summary

The recreational opportunities on the Ashley National Forest are diverse. Many opportunities are specialized to certain settings and recreation facilities, from water skiing on the Flaming Gorge, to horse packing in the High Uintas Wilderness. The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area has the highest level of developed recreation facilities on the Ashley National Forest. Some of these facilities were overbuilt and built to the level of visitor expectations and desires in the 1970s and 1980s. However, expectation for amenities and services have changed over time. The financial constraints and deferred maintenance costs of aging facilities make achievement of the 1986 Ashley forest plan desired conditions (through the 1986 objectives and strategies) impossible. This is especially true for water systems and water treatment plants, because of the need for certified full-time water treatment plant operators and the required maintenance. Although dispersed recreation takes place outside developed sites, many users depend on developed sites such as boat ramps and trailheads to access dispersed recreation opportunities.

Dispersed recreation opportunities vary across the Ashley National Forest and competition for use of available land is increasing between motorized, nonmotorized, and bicycle recreational users. The Flaming Gorge Reservoir and Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam offer extensive water-based dispersed recreation opportunities. Dispersed camping has increased significantly in the past 30 years on the Ashley National Forest. The 1986 forest plan objectives, standards, and guidelines for dispersed recreation are very general and do not reflect the current level of demand for dispersed camping. Motorized dispersed recreation is popular across the Ashley National Forest. Poorly located and maintained trails and unauthorized trails are leading to resource damage and user conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized users and other resources such as grazing. The 1986 forest plan objectives, standards, and guidelines for trails are not possible to achieve with current funding and staffing levels. Partnerships will be an important ingredient in maintaining Ashley National Forest recreation facilities and trails.

The Ashley National Forest does not have a forest wide interpretation and education plan or an education plan for the High Uintas Wilderness. Passive activities, such as driving for pleasure, viewing wildlife, and viewing natural features, are some of the top activities that visitors participate in on the Ashley National Forest. These visitors are looking for good, professional information to help them in their journey and to learn about the area. An Ashley National Forest interpretation and education plan can also assist in identifying the issues or dynamics in the social, cultural, or economic conditions that may prevent groups without access from seeking or participating in recreational activities typically demanded by others on the Ashley National Forest.

The 1986 Ashley forest plan does not include any direction for recreation special uses, including outfitters and guides. The Ashley currently does not have an updated outfitting and guiding needs assessment or capacity analysis. The assessment could help in identifying changes in the demand for outfitting and guiding activities and to address new potential outfitting and guiding activities that have developed over the past 20 years.

Recreational visitation and use is expected to increase by 15 to 30 percent over the next 15 years. Accessible developed sites, increased amenities, and local area interpretation will be in demand as the population grows older yet remains active. It will be necessary for the Ashley National Forest to identify a level of sustainable recreation settings and opportunities to meet these demands with decreasing funding and staffing levels.

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