

Volunteers join forces to clean-up campground

BY MARISSA BRUNNER
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MONTROSE - What a difference a few paintbrushes, shovels, and 35 pairs of hands can make.

Volunteers from the Public Lands Partnership, The U.S. Forest Service, and several other organizations throughout surrounding counties proved this on Saturday by joining forces to improve the Iron Springs Campground in the Uncompahgre National Forest.

Fueled by motivation to keep the deteriorating campground open for use, and a free lunch, volunteers painted picnic tables, cleaned fire pits and bathrooms and built kiosks and fences.

Public Lands Partnership Coordinator, Pam Motley, along with other organization leaders, formed the campground clean-up project after learning about the possible closure of the area. The U.S. Forest Service, under a previous ranger, had planned to shut down 100 sites in Gunnison, Uncompahgre and Grand Mesa National Forests.

"We were going to close these campgrounds, because of financial concerns and the long-term maintenance," U.S. Forest Service Ranger Tammy Randall-Parker said. "So the Forest Service partnered up with the Public Lands Partnership and formed this campground working group."

Members of the Public Lands Forum recognized the important role that Iron Springs, as well as surrounding campgrounds plays on



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From left, Tammy Randall-Parker, Chuck Hughes, Charlie Richmond and Jack Casto straighten the fence at the Iron Springs Campground on the Uncompahgre Plateau Saturday. The joint effort by the Public Lands Partnership and the United States Forest Service is aimed at keeping the campground open after the USFS announced their plans to close the Iron Spring and Columbine Campgrounds last summer. The PLP will host a similar workday at the Columbine Campground next weekend. (Contact Barton Glasser via email at bartong@montrosepress.com)

the counties around the Uncompahgre Plateau.

"Our communities are dependent on these public lands for recreation and tourism, so that's why we got involved with this campground project," Motley

said.

Other volunteers expressed their personal fondness of the campground, and their compelling need to save a historical area of the Uncompahgre National Forest.

"The idea that things were just going to be shut down because of budget restraints was just shocking," Alan Staehle, a member of the executive committee of the Public Lands Partnership, said. "So we felt the need to intervene."

Even those who do not regularly use the campground facility still felt it necessary to help in the clean-up process, knowing that the area is important to so many people.

lend a helping hand because of childhood memories they hold of this popular campground.

"We used to come here when I was a little kid with the Elks," volunteer Jim Free said. "It's just been around a long time, and it's a neat old campground."

The Public Lands Partnership was established in 1992 by the cities of Montrose and Delta, and was later joined by Ouray County in 1995. It is an organization consisting of recreational groups, private citizens, and elected officials such as county commissioners and city officials. It is a non-profit group that presently represents four counties; Delta, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel.

"Our goal is to provide a public forum, and also to influence the management of our public lands in ways that are ecologically sound and also economically viable for local communities," Motley said.

The campground clean-up committee will be hard at work again next Saturday, this time at the Columbine campground. The committee will meet at the Public Lands office at 2465 S. Townsend Ave., at 8:30 a.m. Anyone who is interested in joining the volunteer group can contact Pam Motley at 970-209-9087.

Community members can learn more about the Public Lands Partnership by visiting their website at www.plp4co.org, or by attending the monthly meetings which are held on the first Thursday of every month.

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Ray Gotfredson, left, and Jim Free fix the Iron Springs Campground sign during the Public Lands Partnership campground workday Saturday.



"We don't camp here ourselves because we have a larger motor home," Cathy Gotfredson said, a volunteer

from Cedaredge. "But this is a great place for people camping in small tents, or for ATV-ers." Others were motivated to

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