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Forest may lose 6 sites Camping facilities in jeopardy; \$140M in cuts nationally

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By Joe Hanel | *Herald Denver Bureau*

DENVER - Six facilities in the San Juan National Forest might close as part of a national review of campgrounds by the U.S. Forest Service.

"There's going to be somebody attached in some way to every one of these sites."

-Greg Griffith, deputy regional forester

San Juan forest officials say nothing will be closed without public involvement, but they are not ready to name the sites because they are still in the planning stages.

The number was disclosed in a memo from the Forest Service to congressional staff.

White River National Forest is looking at closing 15 sites, and half of the 140 sites in the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison National Forest are being considered for closure or service changes, according to the memo. Colorado's other national forests did not

report specific numbers in the memo.

"The next step is public involvement. We will do a lot of public involvement in this," said Greg Griffith, the deputy regional forester.

People often have emotional ties to specific campgrounds, he said.

"There's going to be somebody attached in some way to every one of these sites," Griffith said.

Colorado is home to 383 Forest Service campgrounds and 153 other developed sites, such as trailheads, fishing holes and overlooks.

The Recreation Sites Facility Master Planning process is trying to identify how heavily sites are used, the costs to maintain them, safety and environmental concerns and public opinion, according to the memo.

The last 30 years have seen a spike in the number of people visiting the forests, and snowmobiles and off-road vehicles are taking people to different areas of the forests. Many USFS sites are 70 years old and weren't built for such use. Other remote sites are costly to maintain and seldom used. Some have old water systems that don't meet clean water rules, according to the memo.

"Our niche is dispersed, backcountry recreation, rather than the kind of things that take infrastructure, like pull-through campgrounds (for RVs) with showers," Griffith said.

The local foresters in each forest identified sites that could be closed. Final decisions on which sites to close will be made at the local level, said Forest Service spokeswoman Janelle Smith.

The president's budget for the Forest Service calls for \$140 million in budget cuts from last year's funding.

The Forest Service hasn't given the individual forests a goal or quota of sites that must be closed, Griffith said.

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