

HERITAGE AREAS: Why Are They Being Proposed?

Heritage is defined as an inheritance, a legacy, or a tradition.

Designating these areas in the Grand Junction Field Office will recognize their resource values and manage them for future generations. These areas, with few exceptions, have a landscape setting that was experienced by the Ute Indians when they were forced to leave in 1881 and by the first settlers in the area that came immediately after to establish homesteads and ranches. They all have roads, either through them or surrounding them. They are not Wilderness. Each has a unique combination of resource values, not just significant Cultural Resources, and different management prescriptions will protect those values. Most of these areas have stipulations to protect resources from the 1987 Resource Management Plan. No Surface Occupancy will be a common stipulation carried forward or established for all areas. Travel management will be for existing roads and some roads may close to prevent resource damage. Below is more information on each of the proposed Heritage Areas. If you know of special values that should redefine these areas or have a proposal of your own please let us know in writing as a comment to this Public Scoping by January 9, 2009.

- ② **Blue Creek/ 800 acres-** Existing oil and gas stipulation #7 for perennial streams and water quality in Blue Creek. This creek canyon is a known transportation corridor with game trails used by Ute Tribes, later used as a pack trail to the Uranium mines, and also as an early stock driveway that is still in use today. The ruins of an historic ranch at the south of the area have irrigated fields that are important to grazing and wildlife. Maintaining these fields prevents invasive weeds and provides wildlife with habitat.
- ② **Sinbad Valley/ 6,383 acres** Existing oil and gas stipulations: #12 Deer and Elk Seasonal Winter Range, #2 Visual Resource Management for Natural and Scenic Values, borders #14 seasonal restriction for Peregrine Falcon Habitat, #1 No Surface Occupancy for Sinbad Cliffs and for an edge of Sewemup Wilderness Study Area, #7 for perennial streams and water quality of Salt Creek. Recorded sites include Ute trails and Historic Homesteads associated with Black Spring and the rest of the valley has a rich history. Large stands of plants for Ute basket material are easily accessible to Ute elders and known population of a plant species of concern occurs in this area.
- ② **Mud Springs/ 2,630 acres** - Existing oil and gas stipulation #7 for perennial streams and water quality-headwaters of North East Creek, #2 Visual Resource Management for Natural and Scenic Values, #1 No Surface Occupancy surrounding the BLM Recreation Site of Mud Springs Campground. This area provides a unique opportunity for facilities to host local and Ute school groups to experience the Aspen and Ponderosa Pine vegetation in a setting very close to Grand Junction. The area features plants of Ute traditional use. BLM lands leading to and surrounding the campground should be protected to maintain this landscape setting.

- ② **Pyramid Rock- Adds 725 acres** to an existing 515 acre Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) described as a Research Natural Area for Threatened and Endangered Plant Species. It is also under existing oil and gas stipulations: #12 Deer and Elk Seasonal Winter Range and #1 No Surface Occupancy. More recent inventories have identified important paleontology resources as well as cultural resource values. Threatened and Endangered Plant Species as well as species of concern exist outside of the original designated ACEC and new boundaries are proposed to better manage the area by using natural barriers or existing roads. Better identification of the boundary will make it easier for the public to avoid resource damage by vehicle encroachment.

- ② **Atwell Gulch/ 2,795 acres** - Existing oil and gas stipulation #12 Deer and Elk Seasonal Winter Range and the south end is covered by #2 Visual Resource Management for Natural and Scenic Values. The area is being proposed as an ACEC for the Colorado Hookless cactus and the DeBeque milkvetch with known populations of federally listed plant species as well as animal and plants that are recognized by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Working with the Fish and Wildlife Service and with help from EnCana Oil and Gas Company grazing has been removed from the area. The area is also important to the Ute Tribes who traditionally occupied the area as well as having much older cultural resources with scientific research potential. It is accessed from the west by the DeBeque Cut-Off Road.

- ② **High Park/ 260 acres** – This area has been requested by the Northern Ute Tribe who have participated in the Ute Ethnobotany program. There is a remnant population of ponderosa pine, important vascular plant species that are recognized by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. Existing roads would be used as boundaries and no road access would be changed. Because of proximity to an area where there is heavy cattle concentration it is proposed to fence off this area as a grazing enclosure which will allow for botanical research studies as well as student and Ute elder field trips to be held in a setting that is not impacted by more modern non-Native uses.

- ② **The Hunting Grounds/ 9,400 acres** - Existing oil and gas stipulation #7 for perennial streams and water quality along the Gunnison River on the south boundary, #1 No Surface Occupancy at both the north and south ends for Visual Resource Management along the Gunnison River Corridor. The area has known populations of federally listed plant species as well as animal and plants that are recognized by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. This area is within the boundaries of the proposed Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Area and was an important transportation corridor starting thousands of years ago with major Indian trails as well as explorer and trade routes up to more modern times with routes such as the Old Spanish Trail. The BLM anticipates increasing pressure on this area with the population explosion anticipated for the Whitewater/ Kannah Creek area. As a Heritage Area travel management would remain as it exists today without new recreation trails or facilities development.