

111-18 POLE CREEK

The April 1980 proposed decision included the following evaluation of wilderness characteristics.

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 31,756 acres of BLM land, in an area 13 miles long and 2½ to 7 miles wide. It contains six small inholdings in the northern half. A 7,000-acre thumb extends out of the southern portion. The unit is located 35 miles west of Grasmere. The unit lies on a flat rolling plateau. The northern half is lightly to moderately eroded into a broad, shallow basin defined by steep, meandering slopes. The basin is further dissected by the sheer-walled meandering canyons of Camas Creek and Pole Creek. The vegetation of the unit is predominately northern high desert shrubs with scattered, sparse stands of juniper in the basin region.

NATURALNESS:

The southern portion of the unit contains few imprints of man other than three small reservoirs adjacent to roads that form the boundaries of the unit and two reservoirs in the southeast periphery of the unit. The road-side reservoirs, and the reservoir east of state Sec. 16, should be excluded from the unit. A small area impacted by mining in the extreme southern edge of the unit should also be excluded. The northern portion of the unit contains four stock ponds and four miles of ways: one way penetrating to the confluence of Camas and Pole Creek from the western boundary and one penetrating to a spring in the northeast portion of the unit from a dead-end road intruding from the eastern boundary. Three of the stock ponds lie adjacent to intruding dead-end roads and should be trimmed from the unit. The ways and stock ponds not excluded from the unit are substantially unnoticeable due to their wide distribution and the flat ground on which they are located. The imprints are effectively screened by the very low profile sagebrush vegetation and scattered juniper even at close distances.

SOLITUDE:

Size and configuration of the main body of the unit are good. The constriction of the unit by a dead-end road and excluded state land to a width of one-quarter mile isolates a 7,247-acre area in the extreme south. The northern portion contains good screening due to the sparse juniper cover, topographic relief provided by the canyons and rolling topography of the plateau and basins. The remainder of the unit is dominated by desert shrub vegetation and contains little topographic relief. The portion of the unit north of the constriction caused by the dead-end road and state land offers outstanding opportunities for solitude due to its size and good screening. The southern thumb of the unit, 7,247 acres, lacks outstanding opportunities for solitude due to its small size and minimal screening.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

Primitive recreation opportunities in the unit are primarily associated with the northern basin region and include camping, hiking, backpacking, nature photography, sightseeing, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing. The recreational opportunities are generally considered outstanding because of the unit's large size, and exceptional and unusual natural features and recreational attractions of the basin region and canyons of Pole Creek and Camas Creek. The recreational opportunities are generally considered moderately challenging. Recreation opportunities in the southern plateau region are considered less than outstanding.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

The unit contains significant cultural resource values and ecological values, including antelope range and fawning habitat.

REHABILITATION:

The unit is sufficiently natural in character to qualify as a Wilderness Study Area. However, it may be possible to remove the imprints of man from portions of the unit by hand labor or natural regeneration. Rehabilitation potential will be considered in detail during the study phase of the wilderness review process.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments opposed to identifying a study area specifically mentioned the following reasons:

- The area is not natural because of rock monuments scattered throughout the area;
- also, mining activity in the southern periphery.

- There are no outstanding opportunities for solitude or for primitive recreation in the canyon areas because of the confining affect of the canyons.
- There are no outstanding primitive recreation opportunities in the unit because the area is dangerous.

Those supporting a study area specifically mentioned the following reasons:

- The unit is natural because it has few impacts of man.
- The unit has outstanding opportunities for solitude because of its size and shape, the presence of unobstructed open space, and the diversity of geography between canyon and plateau areas.
- The unit has outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation because of its size, shape, and topographic diversity.
- One individual felt that the study area should be expanded to the south to include the acreage excluded in the proposed decision.
- The unit has outstanding supplemental values including outstanding scenery, cultural values, and wildlife values (antelope, deer and raptor habitat).

COMMENT EVALUATION:

Naturalness:

No rock monuments were located within this unit, however, rock monuments are widely scattered throughout this region on the top of low hills. They cannot be considered substantial imprints of man on the overall naturalness. As stated in the proposed decision, the imprints of man are few and widely scattered and are therefore substantially unnoticeable.

The reference to rehabilitation in the proposed decision was to areas that already met the naturalness criteria, not to areas that did not.

Solitude:

Opportunities for solitude were considered outstanding in the study area because of topographic screening from the canyons of Camas and Pole Creek as well as the diverse land forms in the area as a whole. There are 16 miles of meandering shallow canyons within the area which one can easily leave in numerous places to explore interesting juniper or sagebrush basins. Because the area offers a diversity of interesting land forms and with easy entry or exit to the main shallow canyons, the canyons do not create a significant corridor effect. Furthermore, any corridor effect in the canyon is minimized by the number of miles of canyon available for use.

Though outstanding opportunities exist in the northern basin/canyon areas, they do not exist in the southern portion of the unit because of a lack of screening on this small area. It is generally recognized that low vegetation on flat terrain can provide excellent screening if the area involved is large. Low vegetation over sufficient distances can provide a blending affect where other visitors or external influences can disappear into the landscape. In this area, vegetation is typified as being extremely short and extremely sparse. This vegetative cover requires significantly more distance than is available in the 7,247-acre southern portion of the unit to provide adequate blending of other visitors or external influences into the landscape. Therefore, the opportunities for solitude cannot be considered outstanding in the southern portion.

Primitive Recreation:

As stated in the proposed decision, primitive recreation opportunities are considered outstanding because of the unit's large size and exceptional and unusual natural features and recreation attractions found in a diversity of geological formations. Recreation activities are not considered dangerous in this area. The physical challenge of recreation experiences are considered only moderate because of the lack of severity in topography. Any sense of physical challenge or danger is an important factor in the achievement of a wilderness experience.

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DECISION:

No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. A unit of 24,509 acres is identified as a wilderness study area, as it meets the naturalness and the solitude-recreation criteria.

111-36a SHEEP CREEK WEST

The April 1980 proposed decision included the following evaluation of wilderness characteristics.

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 15,376 acres of BLM land. The unit is six miles long and 2-5 miles wide and is located six miles north of the Idaho border, 12 miles southeast of Riddle. The unit is a rolling plateau, dissected by moderately deep draws and cut by the canyon of Sheep Creek, over seven miles of which are contained in the unit. The creek flows through a deep, narrow gorge in most of the unit, and occupies a wider valley between large rolling hills at each end of the unit. Riparian trees and shrubs dominate the canyon, and northern desert grasses and shrubs dominate the remainder of the unit. Pockets of aspen and shrubs are found on north and east slopes and along the canyon. The lower two miles of Bull Creek are also contained in the unit.

NATURALNESS:

The northern plateau contains a system of eight miles of ways and one stock pond. A way leading from the southeast boundary to a stock pond one mile inside the unit, and a constructed cow trail from the pond to Sheep Creek are the only imprints of man in the southern half of the unit. On the north side of Sheep Creek, there are two miles each of a constructed stock driveway and a fence that defines a stock holding area. These developments cannot be considered imprints of man since they are post-FLPMA authorized developments or trespass violations. They must be ignored when making a judgement about naturalness. The imprints of man are not considered substantially noticeable in the unit except where they are concentrated. Such is the case in an area of 1,506 acres in the northwest portion of the unit. Tindall Water Hole, its access routes and the substantial portion of a way extending south toward the canyon rim are contained in this area. The 3½ miles of ways that remain south of this portion of the unit are very light, widely scattered imprints, and are substantially unnoticeable. 13,870 acres of the unit appear substantially natural in character.

SOLITUDE:

Vegetative screening within the Sheep Creek Canyon is considered fair to good due to riparian vegetation and aspen-ninebark thickets. Outside the canyon, the predominately desert shrub vegetation provides little screening. Topographic screening is fair within the canyon. Relief is good but the linear nature of the canyon provides little topographic screening within Sheep Creek. Visitor concentration may be expected to occur in the canyon. Relief outside the canyon is minimal. Despite the relief and vegetative screening associated with Sheep Creek, the unit's moderate size, lack of screening outside the canyon and the corridor effect of visitor travel within the linear canyon limit opportunities for solitude. Opportunities are considered moderately good but not outstanding.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

Recreation opportunities include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, photography, and wildlife observation. The scenic qualities of the narrow gorge of Sheep Creek and the pockets of aspen, ninebark and associated species contribute to outstanding hiking and sightseeing opportunities. The unit is considered to be of adequate size, given its scenic qualities, to provide outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. Six small land fingers around the edges of the unit do not provide opportunities for solitude or recreation. These fingers, totalling 800 acres, should not be retained for study.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

The unit contains important sage grouse habitat.

REHABILITATION:

While imprints of man might be partially removed by hand labor or natural regeneration, the unit is sufficiently natural in character to qualify as a Wilderness Study Area. Rehabilitation potential will be considered in detail in the study process.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments expressing opposition to study area identification gave the following specific reasons:

- The area is roaded because of a road from Bull Creek Bridge south to Tindall Water Hole #2 and the base of Rough Mountain; you can see Rowland Road from most of the area.
- The unit is not natural because of a major livestock trail crossing north-south through the center of the unit (should be considered an imprint even though a post-FLPMA trespass), and some imprints scattered throughout the unit including tin cans, abandoned fences, water developments and rock monuments.
- The unit does not have outstanding opportunities for solitude because of frequent low-flying military aircraft, the lack of sufficient vegetative screening and the confinement or corridor affect of the narrow canyon of Sheep Creek.
- The unit does not have outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation because of the confining affect of the Sheep Creek canyon.

Those who were in support of the proposed Study Area gave the following specific reasons:

- A visitor can feel a sense of untouched stillness in the unit.
- The unit offers outstanding opportunities for solitude; one comment stated the area was marginally outstanding because of the canyons short length and straightness.
- The unit offers outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation; the opportunity most frequently listed being outstanding hiking or backpacking. One individual thought the opportunities were only marginally outstanding because of the canyon's short length and straightness.
- The unit has supplemental values including outstanding scenery and wildlife, geological and cultural values.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

Roadless/Naturalness:

The portion of the vehicle route defined by public comment as a road running from Bull Creek Bridge to Tindall Water Hole #2 lies outside the northern boundary of the Study Area. A spur route originating at Bull Creek Road extends south into the area to the southeast base of Rough Mountain. This vehicle route consists of a light 2-wheel track (with sagebrush between the tracks) and shows no sign of construction nor maintenance; therefore, this route is a way maintained solely by the passage of vehicles. Because of the flat terrain on which this way is located, it is not possible to see it except when standing almost on top of it or when looking down from limited areas on top of Rough Mountain. Contact with this way would be extremely brief and peripheral while walking across the plateau unless used as a trail to the canyon.

The Rowland Road is located more than two miles southeast of the unit and generally cannot be seen from within the unit. The presence of significant topographic relief between the unit and Rowland Road precludes the possibility that the road could be seen from anywhere inside the unit except at small isolated higher elevations. If it can be seen, its presence could not be considered a significant external influence due to its distance from the unit.

There is a major road cut along the northeast boundary which is readily visible. This road cut represents a significant inescapable scar in this region and is therefore considered a significant external influence. This northeast portion of the unit, 1,390 acres, is trimmed from further consideration.

The livestock trail crossing the center of the unit in a north-south direction is an unauthorized post-FLPMA development that cannot be considered during the evaluation of naturalness. This livestock trail does not represent a major unacceptable imprint upon the naturalness of the unit.

The widely scattered presence of tin cans, abandoned fences, water developments and rock monuments has extremely minimal impact upon the naturalness of the unit as a whole. Tin cans or other garbage can be readily removed. Rock monuments appear as natural rock outcrops on the horizon.

As stated in the proposed decision, man's imprints within the unit are so few and so widely scattered that they cannot be considered substantially noticeable in the unit as a whole.

The reference to rehabilitation in the proposed decision was to areas that already met the naturalness criteria, not to areas that did not.

In the proposed decision, the unit was not considered to offer outstanding opportunities for solitude because of the corridor effect of the canyon (the canyon length and linear character does not mitigate the corridor effect) in combination with the lack of sufficient topographic and vegetative screening on the plateaus (the plateau areas are not large enough to achieve an adequate blending of visitors or external influences into the landscape).

It is recognized that the opportunity for solitude is impacted by low-flying aircraft. However, these low-level flights are considered temporary external influences. If the area should be recommended for wilderness, the BLM could initiate negotiations with the Air Force to alter the flight paths of low-level aircraft to lessen their impact.

Primitive Recreation:

The opportunity to achieve a quality primitive recreation experience is dependent upon the interrelationship of a unit's size, configuration and availability of exceptional or unusual natural features or recreation attractions. Exceptional natural features are those which provide exceptional scenery, diversity of land form and/or reasonable mobility for a visitor, and would result in a strong recreation attraction to an area for one or more types of activities. It is recognized that the canyon of Sheep Creek is narrow and would give a visitor a sense of confinement (loss of mobility). However, it is also recognized that the length of the canyon (5½ miles) is sufficient to minimize the sense of confinement when considered with the rest of the unit. The length of the canyon in combination with the unit's size and diversity of land forms on the surrounding plateaus affords outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. The opportunity to achieve outstanding recreation experiences in narrow river canyons is widely recognized, particularly if the canyons are lengthy and of exceptional scenic beauty.

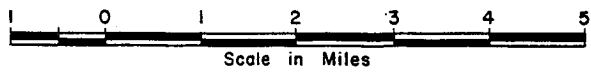
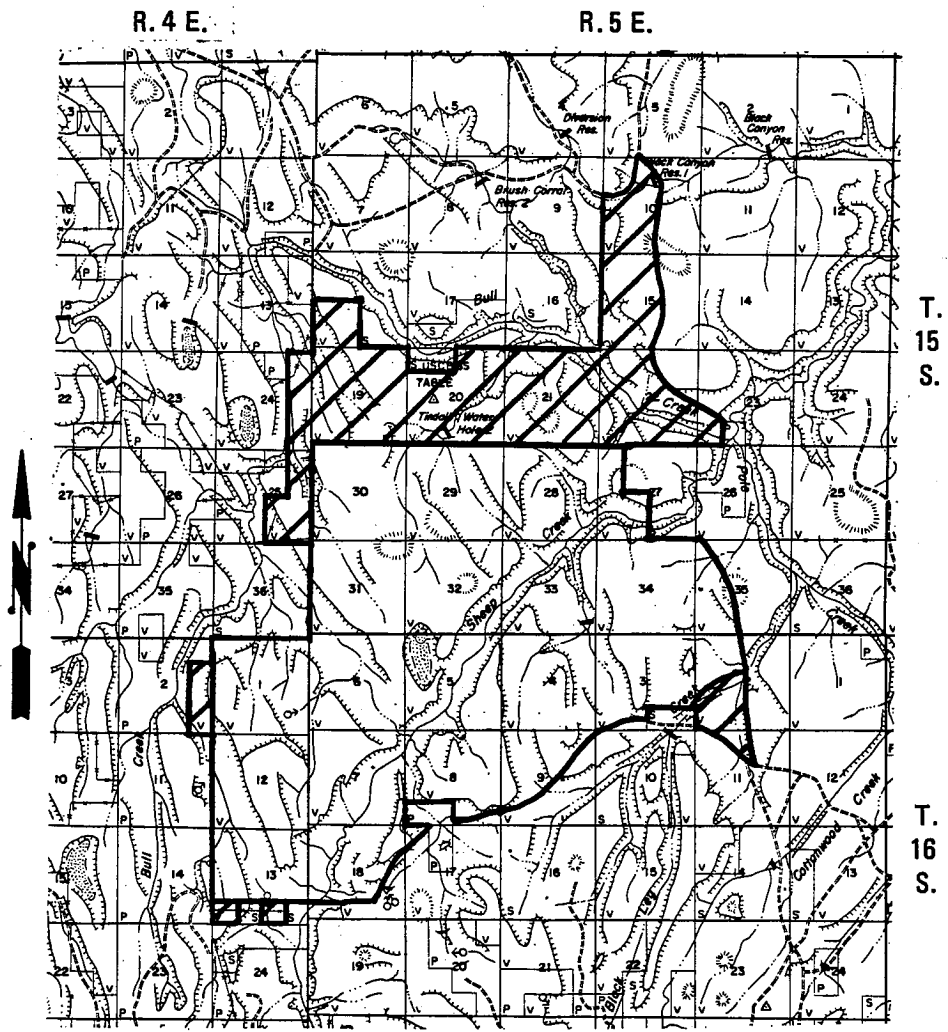
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DECISION:



Due to public comment and evaluations, an additional 1,390 acres are now considered not to have wilderness characteristics. A unit of 11,680 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the recreation criteria.

111-36a

SHEEP CREEK WEST



LEGEND

-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
-  AREA WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS