

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: December 15, 2001

Proponent: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA); Utah Wilderness Coalition (UWC)

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Diamond Breaks Area**

Date(s) of Field Office Review: February 7, 2007

BLM Field Office(s) Affected: Vernal Field Office

EVALUATION

1. Was new information submitted by a member of the public for this area?

a. YES: _____ NO: X

2. If new information was submitted, describe the submission. For example, did the submission include a map that identifies the specific boundaries of the area(s) in question; a narrative that describes the wilderness characteristics of the area and documents how that information differs from the information previously gathered and reviewed in the BLM inventories; photographic documentation; etc?

a. No new information has been submitted by a member of the public.

In 1979, the BLM initially inventoried this area.

The *Diamond Breaks Wilderness Inventory Unit* was inventoried for wilderness characteristics and included in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponents submitted information for the *SUWA/UWC Diamond Breaks Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on December 15, 2001. The submitted information included more and additional detailed data than the BLM had considered concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The Diamond Breaks review area is encompassed in the SUWA/UWC submittal.

The BLM Vernal Field Office in November 2002 prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* that determined the parcels of the Diamond Breaks review area of the *SUWA/UWC Diamond Breaks Proposed Wilderness Unit* review area may contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1999 *Diamond Breaks Wilderness Inventory Unit*; the September 2001 SUWA/UWC submittal; and, the BLM Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information Report* of November 2002. In addition, the interdisciplinary team reviewed changes to the area since 2002 that could affect the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics

This maintenance review did not include State of Utah lands or private lands. The attached map shows the BLM Vernal Field Office's determination of which lands contain or do not contain wilderness characteristics for the review area.

3. As a result of interdisciplinary review of relevant information (which may include aerial photographs, state and county road information, road maintenance agreements, prior documentation from the BLM inventories, field observations, maps, master title plats, evidence presented as new information by a proponent, etc.), do you conclude:

a. _____ The decision previously reached in the BLM inventories that the area lacks wilderness is still valid.

(or)

b. X Some or all of the area has wilderness characteristics as shown on the attached map.

4. Describe your findings regarding specific wilderness characteristics and provide detailed rationale.

a. **WIA Area.**

(1). **Description:** The Diamond Breaks review area is in Daggett County about 35 air miles northeast of Vernal, Utah. There are 4,620 acres in the 4 parcels that comprise the review area.

Parcel #1 is located in Sections 26, 27, and 33-35, T1N, R25E. A vehicle way separates the parcel from the Diamond Breaks WSA to the north. The eastern boundary is the Utah-Colorado border and the WSA. Other boundaries of the parcel are formed by a State of Utah wildlife reserve management area. The parcel is less than 5,000 acres in size.

Parcel #2 is located in Section 35, T1N, R25E. On the east, the parcel is adjacent to the Utah-Colorado border and the Diamond Breaks WSA. Other boundaries of the parcel are formed by a State of Utah wildlife reserve management area. The parcel is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size.

Parcel #3 is located in Sections 1, 3, 4, and 9-15, T1S, R25E. On the east, the parcel is adjacent to the Utah-Colorado border and the Diamond Breaks WSA. Other boundaries of the parcel are primarily formed by State of Utah lands and a State of Utah wildlife reserve management area. The Allen Draw Road in Sections 12-14 forms the boundary of the WIA area. BLM administered lands southeast of the road were identified as part of the externally nominated area.

Parcel #4 is located in Section 17, T1S, R25E. It is segregated from other parcels by private lands and State of Utah lands. It is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size.

The terrain of the review area consists of southwest-trending ridges, with the south-facing slopes covered with piñon and juniper woodlands. The north-facing slopes are covered with a mixture of vegetation composed of Douglas fir, aspen, mountain mahogany, sagebrush, piñon, and juniper. The ridge tops are capped by rock outcrops offer scenic views. Elevations range from about 7,000 feet to 8,700 feet. The area is used primarily by hunters and ranchers.

There are no existing oil and gas leases within the area. No producing or plugged and abandoned wells are present in the area.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** Parcels #1 and #2 have retained their natural character due to the remote location and steep, rugged terrain of the parcels. Very few human-made disturbances are present. A vehicle way that is used primarily for hunting access separates the Diamond Breaks WSA from Parcel #1. ATV use has been occurring adjacent to existing roads and trails. Each parcel is less than 5,000 acres in size but is adjacent to the Diamond Breaks WSA

Parcel #3 also has rugged terrain with some of the higher elevations in the area. The parcel contains several minor vehicle ways and a short length of fence. These features are screened by topography and vegetation and do not affect the naturalness of the area. ATV use has been occurring adjacent to roads and trails. The Allen Draw Road along the southeast part of the parcel is the boundary for the 1999 wilderness inventory area. BLM administered lands southeast of the road were identified as part of the externally nominated area. On February 7, 2007, the Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the proponent submitted information; the office's 2002 *Evaluation of New Information*; and the 1999 *Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*. The team concurred with the BLM's prior inventories that the Allen Draw Road continues to be substantially noticeable and forms the southeastern boundary for those parcel lands that contain wilderness characteristics. The parcel is less than 5,000 acres in size but is adjacent to the Diamond Breaks WSA.

Parcel #4 does retain naturalness on the ridge top and side slopes. ATV use has been occurring adjacent to roads and trails. The parcel is substantially smaller than 5,000 acres in size and is isolated from any adjacent federal lands that are managed for wilderness values or characteristics. The limited size of the parcel precludes it from being considered to contain wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The numerous canyons and peaks found in Parcels #1 and #3 provide opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreational activities. The rugged terrain and vegetation screens the visitor thereby providing isolation and seclusion.

The opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation are limited in Parcel #2 due to its size. The solitude and primitive and unconfined recreational activities found in the adjacent Diamond Breaks WSA also extend into the parcel.

Opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreational activities are not present in Parcel #4 due to its size and isolation.

All parcels are used for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, and the viewing of natural resources.

- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The Diamond Breaks review area contains elk habitat and sensitive animal species. Also, Uinta Fremont cultural resource sites have been found within the area.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** Parcels #1, #2, and #3 were part of the Diamond Breaks inventory area of the 1999 *Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)* and do contain wilderness characteristics.

Parcel #4 is substantially smaller than 5,000 acres in size as well as, isolated from any adjacent federal lands that are being managed for wilderness values or characteristics. The limited size of the parcel precludes it from being considered to contain wilderness characteristics.

b. Externally Nominated Area.

- (1). **Description:** The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) proposal encompassed all lands reviewed above under Heading 4.a. The reader may refer to that information for all lands except for the lands located in the southeastern part of the parcel in Sections 12-14, T1S, R25E. These lands are bounded by the Allen Draw Road to the northwest, private lands to the south and the Utah-Colorado border to the east. Also, it is adjacent to the Diamond Breaks WSA to the east. This part of the parcel is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size. The nominated lands are not as rugged as other portions of Parcel #3. This part is located primarily in the lower lying lands associated with Allen Draw and the adjacent slopes away from the draw.
 - (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** On February 7, 2007, the Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the proponent submitted information; the office's 2002 *Evaluation of New Information*; and the 1999 *Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*. The team concurred with the BLM's prior inventories that the Allen Draw Road continues to be substantially noticeable. The team concurred with the determination that the road forms the boundary for those lands containing wilderness characteristics to the northwest of the road in Parcel #3. Even though the road is not maintained, there has been increased usage of the road as well as ATV usage adjacent to the road. The naturalness of the area has diminished. It was determined that due to the usage and existence of the road, increased ATV usage, and the small size of this part of Parcel #3 no wilderness characteristics are present.
 - (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreational activities are not present due to the size of this part of Parcel #3 and its diminished naturalness.
 - (4). **Supplemental Values:** The Diamond Breaks review area contains elk habitat and sensitive animal species. Also, Uinta Fremont cultural resource sites have been found in externally nominated portions of the review area.
 - (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed that portion of the review area in Parcel #3 that is southeast of Allen Draw Road. The team concurred with the BLM's prior inventories that the Allen Draw Road continues to be substantially noticeable. The team concurred with the determination that the road forms a boundary for those lands containing wilderness characteristics to the northwest of the road in Parcel #3. Even though the road is not maintained, there has been increased usage of the road as well as ATV usage adjacent to the road. The naturalness of the area has diminished. It was determined that due to the usage and existence of the road, increased ATV usage, and the small size of this part of Parcel #3 no wilderness characteristics are present.
- c. As protocol for all VFO wilderness characteristic reviews, the Interdisciplinary Team determined appropriate set-back distances for pipelines, roads, and other R-O-Ws.