

# 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: **Bull Canyon 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 1999, the BLM reinventoried the Bull Canyon area and determined that the area did contain wilderness characteristics. This determination is described as the BLM Bull Canyon Wilderness Inventory Area in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponent submitted information on December 15, 2001, for the SUWA/UWC *Bull Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit*. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos during the evaluation of the BLM Bull Canyon Wilderness Inventory Area as described in *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The Vernal Field Office in November 2002 prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* that concurred with previous findings for the BLM Bull Canyon Wilderness Inventory Area.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the BLM Bull Canyon Wilderness Inventory Area in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*; and, the Vernal Field Office November 2002 *Evaluation of New Information Report*. 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 U.S. National Forest lands, U.S. National Park Service, State of Utah lands, or private lands. Only lands within the BLM Vernal Field Office planning boundaries were considered by the interdisciplinary team. 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 Bull Canyon Area is located in Uintah County along the Utah-Colorado border 25 air miles southeast of Vernal, Utah. The area is segregated into three parcels. Grassy flats in the southern parcel give way to rolling hills and drainages in the middle parcel of the area and steep, highly dissected, forested mountains in the northern parcel.

About 2,256 acres or 90% of the Bull Canyon review area is presently leased for oil and gas exploration and development.

Parcel #1 is the northern part of the review area. The parcel is located in Sections 25-27, 33-35 of T5S, R25E; and, Sections 1, 3, 4 of T6S, R25E. The terrain consists of steep forested mountains that are highly dissected. The easily accessed Miners Draw Road forms the northern boundary of the parcel.

Parcel #2 is the middle part of the review area. The parcel is located in Sections 1 and 11 of T6S, R25E. The terrain contains rolling hills and drainages. Access is limited due to private land and the presence of deep washes.

Parcel #3 is the southern part of the review area. The parcel is located in Sections 11, 12, and 14 of T6S, R25E. The terrain contains grassy flats dissected by drainages. Access is limited due to private land and the presence of deep washes.

(2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** All three parcels have retained an appearance of naturalness. Human-made disturbances are substantially unnoticeable. Massive white rock outcrops and colorful red soils contrast with the juniper woodland. Riparian vegetation in the canyons provides a diverse oasis. Although each of the three parcels is less than 5,000 in size, the parcels are contiguous with lands in the Bull Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The appearance of naturalness found in the WSA is continuous into the review area.

Livestock grazing is the primary use of the area. Parcel #1 is a popular area for hunting and other recreational activities.

Since 2002, there has been an increase in OHV routes. Most are along the northern boundary in sections 33 and 34. The naturalness has been diminished on 32 acres along the northwestern edge of Parcel #1 due to OHV and camping uses.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The steep, rugged terrain, isolated basins, deep drainages, and dense vegetation of the Bull Canyon review area promote feelings of solitude and isolation. The terrain described above also lends itself to hiking and other non-motorized recreational opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The review area parcels have scenic, archaeological, and wildlife values. The white cliffs, red soil, and green juniper woodland in Parcel #1 combine to provide a variety of form, line, color, and texture, creating an attractive landscape. Several archaeological surveys have revealed temporary camps and short-term habitation sites, including subsurface stone hearths and millstones. Antelope and elk are commonly found in all of the Parcels. Habitats for sensitive species such as the Mexican spotted owl, peregrine falcon, spotted and big free-tail bats, and the Utah milk snake exist within the review area.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The interdisciplinary team found that increased OHV travel routes and non-designated camping along the Northwest edge of Parcel #1 in Sections 33 and 34 of T5S, R25E, have diminished the appearance of naturalness in the immediate area. About 32 acres have been determined to not contain wilderness characteristics.

**b. Externally Nominated Area.**

- (1). **Description:** The SUWA/UWC *Bull Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit* encompasses the Bull Canyon Wilderness Inventory Area. The information stated above under the Heading 4.a., WIA Area, applies to this proposal.
- 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.
- d. The following table summarizes the Non-WSA lands in the review area that do or do not contain wilderness characteristics:

<b>BULL CANYON AREA</b>			
<b>Type of Lands</b>	<b>Non WSA Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (acres)</b>	<b>Non WSA Lands without Wilderness Characteristics (acres)</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
UWC, Externally Nominated	0	0	
WIA, BLM Identified	2,483	32	2,515
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	<b>2,483</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2,515</b>

5. Document all information considered during the interdisciplinary team review (e.g. 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.)

- August 2006 NAIP (National Agricultural Imagery Program) aerial photos.
- Master Title Plats.
- State of Utah DOGM (Division of Oil, Gas and Mining) approved, producing and plugged and abandoned oil and gas wells (current up to 1-25-07).
- R-O-W using LR 2000.
- Field Observations.
- GIS layers for various resources including: Range improvements, Recreation facilities, Wildlife, and Fire including both Rx and fuels projects.
- USGS digital topographic maps both 1:24,000 and 1:100,000.
- Land status of the BLM.
- The BLM road layer including roads on 1:24,000 scale and supplemented by both GPS and aerial photography.
- Uintah Co. Roads layer August 2006.
- UWC wilderness proposal data layer.

6. List the members of the interdisciplinary team and resource specialties represented.

<i>Chuck Patterson</i>	<i>Recreation</i>
<i>Kim Bartel</i>	<i>Recreation/wilderness</i>
<i>Tim Faircloth</i>	<i>Wildlife</i>
<i>Naomi Hatch</i>	<i>Realty</i>
<i>Jerry Kenczka</i>	<i>AFM Minerals</i>
<i>Howard Cleavinger</i>	<i>Associate Field Manager</i>
<i>Kyle Smith</i>	<i>GIS</i>
<i>Steve Knox</i>	<i>USO Planning Specialist</i>
<i>Kelly Buckner</i>	<i>NEPA</i>
<i>Mark Stavropoulos</i>	<i>Range</i>
<i>Blaine Phillips</i>	<i>Archeology</i>

## 7. Signature / Concurrence

This review by a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team was conducted in February 2007. The purpose of the review was to identify for planning purposes those areas that are not Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) but do contain wilderness characteristics. A supplement to the draft Vernal Land Use Plan will, in Alternative E, analyze the impact from and to the identified wilderness characteristics. Until the Land Use Plan is completed, it should be noted that as part of a project-specific or site-specific analysis within this area, these findings will be used to assess impacts, if any, to wilderness characteristics within the project area.

I concur with the findings of the interdisciplinary team as described in this review.

Name: William Hunsy Date: 4/25/07  
Field Office Manager

This determination is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision-making process and does not constitute a decision that can be appealed.