

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: September 3, 2002

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

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Seep 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:

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.

The Seep Canyon review area is similar to the Monument Ridge West wilderness inventory unit (UT-080-728). In 1979, the BLM Vernal Field Office completed an initial wilderness inventory for the Monument Ridge West wilderness inventory unit. It was determined that the unit did not qualify for further wilderness inventory.

The Seep Canyon review area was not reinventoried for inclusion in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponents submitted information to the BLM Vernal Field Office on September 3, 2002. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered during the 1979 initial inventory concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The boundaries of the proposal are similar to the 1979 Monument Ridge West wilderness inventory unit. The Vernal Field Office prepared an *Evaluation of New Information* report dated October 7, 2002, that indicated the decision reached in the 1979 initial inventory remains valid and that the area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1979 Monument Ridge West initial inventory report; the September 2002 SUWA/UWC submittal; and, the Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information* Report of October 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. 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:** No WIA area is present.

b. **Externally Nominated Area:**

(1). **Description:** The Seep Canyon review area is located in Uintah County about 60 air miles south-southeast of Vernal, Utah. Boundaries of the review area are formed by existing roads, State of Utah owned lands, private lands, and noticeable intrusions. The primary boundary roads include Seep Ridge Road, Monument Ridge Road, and Indian Ridge Road.

The terrain is typical of the Book Cliffs. The landscape within the area is dissected and rugged with the ridges separated by deep canyons. The canyons walls may slope gently to broad valley floors or are defined by steep, sandstone cliffs with topographic relief up to 800 feet. Elevations range from 6,000 to 8,000 feet. Prominent features of the area include Monument Ridge, Seep Canyon, and Sweet Water Canyon. Numerous other canyons and associated ridges are present.

Riparian habitat is present in some canyon bottoms. In Sweet Water Canyon some wet meadows are present. The bench areas contain sagebrush, rabbitbrush, grasses, and greasewood. Above an elevation of 7,400 feet, the drainages contain small pockets of Douglas fir and piñon pine. Ridgetop vegetation is dominated by sagebrush and piñon and juniper woodlands.

Present uses of the area include oil and gas exploration, cattle grazing, hunting, firewood cutting, antler collecting, and mule deer and elk habitat. Stock ponds, fences, and undesignated camping sites are present.

About 14,625 acres or 70% of the review area is covered by existing oil and gas leases. Considerable oil and gas activity has occurred adjacent to the area. Several wells have been drilled within the review area and have been cherry-stemmed.

Cattle and big game grazing, at present, is the dominant surface use. Stock ponds, fences, and cattle are present. Hunting, antler collecting and wood cutting are significant seasonal uses; hunting impacts include camps and vehicle traffic on and off the unit's many vehicle ways.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** The 2007 interdisciplinary team determined that the natural character of the dissected, rugged, and varied terrain in the review area has been substantially diminished by human-made disturbances. The team concurs with the findings of the 1979 initial inventory of the area and the 2002 *Evaluation of New Information Report*.

In 2002, the BLM determined that the cumulative impacts of vegetative chainings, vehicle routes, fences, reservoirs, oil and gas wells, pipelines, firewood gathering and commercial timber sales were substantially noticeable causing this area to not have wilderness character. The interdisciplinary team determined that the determination is still valid. In addition, the team recognized that increased usage of the area is further diminishing the remaining appearance of naturalness. More ATV usage, undesignated camping, and oil and gas related travel is occurring on the ridges and canyon floors.

The interdisciplinary team reviewed changes. In addition, several other human disturbances exist in the unit including stock ponds, BLM constructed cattle and wildlife exclosures, fences, increased motorized routes, and oil and gas seismic surveys. Collectively again, their cumulative impact on natural character is considered enough so as to preclude the area from containing wilderness characteristics.

The interdisciplinary team on February 7, 2007, determined that this area in fact still did not contain wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Limited opportunities may exist in the Seep Canyon review area due to screening by vegetation and the deep canyons. These areas would be small and separated.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The area's geologic and topographic features provide scenic views for the visitor. Habitats for mule deer, elk, black bear, and mountain lion are present in the area. Habitats for sensitive plant and animal species are present. Visitors to the area may take advantage of hiking, camping, and photography.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The interdisciplinary team determined that the human-made disturbances identified under Heading 4.b.(2)., are substantially noticeable and the area does not contain wilderness characteristics. This determination is the same as that reached in previous decisions by the BLM.

- 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:

SEEP CANYON AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands With Wilderness Characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands Without Wilderness Characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	0	20,802	20,802
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	0	20,802	20,802

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 Division of Oil, Gas and Mining (UDOGM) 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 County 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>
<i>Steve Strong</i>	<i>Fire</i>
<i>Stephanie Howard</i>	<i>NEPA</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 Strung
Field Office Manager

Date: 6/6/07

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.