

## WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: October 24, 2002

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

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Mexico Point Area**

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

BLM Field Office(s) Affected: Vernal Field Office; Moab 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 Moab Field Office completed the *East Book Cliffs Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-060-108)* and recommended that the Mexico Point review area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved on March 11, 1979. The Mexico Point review area is located within this report.

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

The proponent submitted information on October 24, 2002, to the Vernal and Moab Field Offices concerning the SUWA/UWC *Mexico Point Proposed Wilderness Unit*. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM had considered for the *1979 East Book Cliffs Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-060-108)* concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The proponent also excluded impacts identified in the report.

The Moab Field Office in October 2002 prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* that determined wilderness characteristics may be present in the Mexico Point review area.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the *1979 Mexico Point Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-060-108)*; the *SUWA/UWC Mexico Point Proposed Wilderness Unit*; and the Moab Field Office October 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 review was conducted only on lands within the Vernal Field Office planning boundaries.

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)

a.  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:** No WIA Area present.

b. **Externally Nominated Area.**

(1). **Description:** The Mexico Point Area is located about 70 air miles southeast of Vernal, Utah, in Grand County. About 1,277 acres are of the *SUWA/UWC Mexico Point Proposed Wilderness Unit* is within the Vernal office planning boundaries. The majority of the area extends southward into the administrative area of the Moab Field Office. The interdisciplinary team review by the Vernal Field Office stopped at the planning area boundary. The Book Cliffs Divide Road is the northern boundary and Hay Canyon is the western boundary. Two buried, natural gas pipelines are the eastern boundary.

Elevation at the Book Cliff Divide Road is 8,200 feet. The area to the south is deeply incised by canyons. The canyons open toward the south. About half of the area consists of flat or gently rolling hills and draws.

Dense Juniper and piñon populate the dryer slopes. At higher elevation, stands of Douglas fir occur. Vegetation types found on the flatter terrain at the divide are aspen, sage, mahogany, oak, and perennial grasses.

About 635 acres or 46% of the area is covered by existing oil and gas leases. There are no producing or plugged and abandoned wells within the Vernal Field Office planning boundaries of the review area.

The area is divided into two parcels. Parcel #1 is located to the west of Parcel #2 in Section 21 of T16S, 23E. The parcel is separated from Parcel #2 and is not contiguous with any federally managed or administratively endorsed lands having wilderness characteristics. The parcel is substantially smaller than 5,000 acres.

Parcel #2 is located in Sections 14, 15, 22, and 27 of T16S, R23E. The parcel is smaller than 5,000 acres. However, it is adjacent to lands the Moab Field Office administratively endorsed as having wilderness characteristics.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** For both Parcels #1 and #2, the remoteness of the Mexico Point review area and the rugged, densely vegetated southern slopes has precluded substantial motorized use. The Book Cliffs Divide Road experiences seasonal recreational traffic for camping activities and during hunting seasons. Oil and gas operations 10 miles west of the review area have increased the usage of the road.

Several drive-in camp sites have been created over the years within 300 feet of the Divide Road. These campsites are generally visited during the big game hunts and some are used for a total of 15 nights annually. The sites are only accessed by seasonal two-tracks and contain no constructed facilities. Away from the road, the sites have not impacted the natural character of the lands.

Prescribed fire projects were conducted in 1999 to burn off brush and small trees. The appearance of naturalness was not diminished. No mechanical fuels treatments have occurred.

Weeds, including white-top, hen bane, and hounds tongue as well as small populations of Russian knapweed have been chemically treated by both back-pack and ATV boom. The average observer would not notice any change or impact to naturalness.

The interdisciplinary team found that Parcel #1 does have the appearance of naturalness and contains wilderness characteristics. However, the parcel is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size and is not contiguous to any federally managed and administratively endorsed area containing wilderness characteristics.

Parcel #2 does have the appearance of naturalness. The parcel is less than 5,000 acres in size. However, the parcel is contiguous to federally managed and administratively endorsed area containing wilderness characteristics in the Moab Field Office.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The remoteness of the area and the rugged, densely vegetated southern slopes and canyons described above provide the visitor with opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The high location and southern cliffs offer scenic views. The area provides habitat for deer, elk, black bear, and mountain lion. The following sensitive species can be found in the area: ferruginous hawks, long-billed curlew, southern spotted owl, and western yellow-billed cuckoo.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** Parcel #1 is of insufficient size (less than 5,000 acres) and is separated from other lands that contain wilderness characteristics. The interdisciplinary team found that Parcel #1 does not contain wilderness characteristics.

- b. As protocol for all VFO wilderness characteristic reviews, the Interdisciplinary Team determined appropriate set-back distances for pipelines, roads, and other R-O-Ws.
- c. The following table summarizes the Non-WSA lands in the review area that do or do not contain wilderness characteristics:

<b>MEXICO POINT 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	1,277	79	1,356
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	<b>1,277</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>1,356</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 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 Strange Date: 5/2/07  
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.