

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: December 14, 2001

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

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Red Creek Badlands 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.

The Red Creek Badlands review area is contained within the 1979 *Teepee Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-106; WY-040-410)*. In January 1979, the Utah portion was recommended to be dropped from any further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved in January 1979.

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

The proponents submitted information for the *SUWA/UWC Red Creek Badlands Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on December 15, 2001. Their submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered for the 1979 *Teepee Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report* concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The Red Creek Badlands review area is encompassed in the SUWA/UWC submittal.

The BLM Vernal Field Office in 2002 reviewed the SUWA/UWC submittal but no evaluation report was finalized.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1979 *Teepee Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-106)*; the September 2001 SUWA/UWC submittal; and, the BLM Vernal Field Office 2002 draft *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, 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. X 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 Red Creek Badlands review area is located in Daggett County along the Utah-Wyoming border about 42 air miles northeast of Vernal, Utah. There are 4,656 acres in the review area. Additional lands were nominated in Wyoming. The northern boundary of the area reviewed is the Utah-Wyoming border. The eastern and southern boundaries are formed by private land, Clay Basin Creek, and the exclusion of the substantially noticeable Clay Basin natural gas storage unit.

The southern boundary of the 1979 Teepee Mountain Wilderness Inventory Unit was the Scott Canyon Road. The externally nominated submission proposed that the boundary be moved southward to the Clay Basin Road. The opinion of the proponents is that the road is not maintained, only occasionally used, and is not substantially noticeable. The Scott Canyon Road bisects the review area considered by the BLM Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team.

The rugged terrain of the south slope of the Tepee Mountains rises in elevation from over 6,800 feet at Clay Basin Creek to over 8,600 feet near the Utah border. Numerous canyons and washes and associated ridges have their headwaters in the higher portions of the Tepee Mountains.

Vegetation consists of small stands of Douglas fir and limber pine and scattered juniper. Sagebrush and native grasses are present throughout the review area.

There are about 1,886 acres or 40% of the area covered by existing oil and gas leases. Most of the leases occur in the western part of the review area. No new wells have been constructed since the late 1970s.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** The Scott Canyon Road divides the review area into two distinct parcels. The linear scar of this road is readily visible from most viewpoints and portions of the area south of the road. The rugged terrain of incised canyons, intervening ridges, and open areas provides minimal screening of the impact by the road to diminishing the naturalness of the review area. ATV use of this road and the adjacent areas south of the road has grown substantially in the last 5 years.

Surface disturbance from oil and gas activities in the 1970's in this southern portion is reclaiming naturally and are not obvious to the casual observer.

That part of the review area north of Scott Canyon Road to the Utah-Wyoming border is higher in elevation and contains more rugged terrain. This portion has retained the appearance of naturalness. The rugged topography limits motorized access. This portion is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size. Lands adjacent to the review area in Wyoming are not being managed for wilderness characteristics.

A Bull-Hog hazardous fuels removal project is planned and budgeted for in 2007. The mechanized equipment grinds up individual trees. Only a stump, chunks, and strips of vegetative material are left. The remaining pile rarely exceeds one foot in height. About four to ten trees per acre would be removed. The casual observer would not notice any alteration in vegetation or color composition beyond 200 feet thereby retaining a sense of naturalness.

- (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** In particular, that portion of the review area north of Scott Canyon Road offers opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The steep, rugged terrain and existing vegetation provides screening for the visitor. These opportunities are enhanced by the limited motorized access. The area is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size.

Solitude is limited in that portion of the review area south of the Scott Canyon Road. The diminished naturalness of the area is described under Heading 4.b.(2). The increase in ATV use year-round also limits primitive and unconfined recreation.

- (4). **Supplemental Values:** Hiking or horse-back riding into the area provides scenic views of the topography. A herd of approximately 500 elk frequent the area during the spring, summer and fall months. Golden eagle, red tailed hawks, a variety of song birds, the northern great owl as well as prairie and kestrel falcons are also present.

- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the Red Creek Badlands area on February 7, 2007. The team determined that the portion of the review area south of Scott Canyon Road does not contain wilderness characteristics. Scott Canyon Road is substantially noticeable throughout that portion of the review area south of road and forms a boundary within the review area. The southern portion of the area is also less than 5,000 acres in size. This part of the review area does not have an appearance of naturalness.

The interdisciplinary team determined that the portion of the review area north of Scott Canyon Road does not contain wilderness characteristics. The area north of the road has retained the appearance of naturalness. However, this part of the area is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size and the lands adjacent to the review area in Wyoming are not being managed for 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:

RED CREEK BADLANDS AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	0	4,656	4,656
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	0	4,656	4,656

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 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>

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 H. Hume
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.