

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: September 4, 2002

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

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Sunday School Canyon Area**

Date(s) of Field Office Review: February 6, 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 Vernal Field Office completed the BLM *Sunday School Canyon Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-719)*. The Sunday School Canyon review area is similar in size and extent to the area evaluated by this report. It was recommended that the area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved February 21, 1979.

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

The proponents submitted information for the *SUWA/UWC Sunday School Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on September 4, 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 *Sunday School Canyon Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-719)*. The Vernal Field Office prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* dated October 7, 2002, that found that the decision reached in the 1979 initial inventory remains valid and that the area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 6, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1979 *Sunday School Canyon Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-719)*; the September 2002 *SUWA/UWC Sunday School Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit*; 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 does 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. 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 Sunday School Canyon review area is located in southern Uintah County about 60 air miles south of Vernal, Utah. The area is bounded by Buck Canyon to the north; Seep Ridge to the east; Wood Canyon and the Winter Ridge WSA to the south; and, the Willow Creek drainage to the west. The entire Sunday School Canyon drainage is within the review area. The headwater regions of the drainages in the upper portion of the area away from the Willow Creek drainage are shallower and not deeply entrenched. The intervening ridge areas are broader and more rolling. Toward the Willow Creek drainage, the canyons are deeper with steeper walls. Higher elevations of about 6,700 feet are found in the southeastern part of the area. Lower elevations are found in the northwest portion at about 5,600 feet.

Piñon and juniper woodlands are prominent at higher elevations. Sagebrush, cactus, rabbitbrush, and native grasses are found throughout the area.

About 1,287 acres or 7% of the review area is covered by existing oil and gas leases.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** In 1979, the BLM concluded that the area does not have potential for wilderness because of the number of vehicle ways and the presence of other human developments, including two fences, a drill hole, and livestock reservoirs cumulatively impact the natural character of the area. The 2002 SUWA submittal stated that these developments were virtually unnoticeable after having naturally rehabilitated over the last 20 years. In the BLM Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information, 2002*, the office disagreed and determined that while the developments individually were less noticeable, it is hard to escape the presence of man in the review area. The review area is not a natural landscape where man-made disturbances are substantially unnoticeable. Even more vehicle routes were present and being used by an increasing number of visitors to the area in 2002.

In 1979, the BLM cited the presence of six livestock reservoirs, 7 miles of vehicle ways, 2.5 miles of road, 9 miles of fence, and a USGS monitoring well. A 1998 vehicle route inventory identified 31.5 miles of routes in the area. The vehicle routes are not fading away because they are being used by an increasing number of hunters, ATVs, and other visitors to the area. While individual developments may be less noticeable when considered by themselves, it is hard to escape the presence of man in the area. This is not a natural landscape where the presence of man's works is substantially unnoticeable.

Since 2002, there are additional OHV routes. Some of these routes have now connected with one another. It is also estimated that there are 5 more miles of OHV routes than the 31.5 miles of routes identified in 1998 vehicle inventory. A stone collection area is nearby. Four new archeology sites also have been inventoried since 2002.

In 2006, a 5.5 mile long, 8-inch surface pipeline was installed that bisects the northwest portion of the unit. About four miles of the pipeline crosses the BLM administered lands. The steel pipeline is used to transport natural gas from 17 newly drilled wells (2005-2006) located in the Agency Draw area, south and west of Buck Canyon, to the existing Canyon Pipeline which parallels the Seep Ridge Road.

The interdisciplinary team on February 6, 2007, concurred with the assessments of wilderness characteristics for this area during the BLM's 1979 wilderness inventory and the 2002 *Evaluation of New Information*. The Sunday School Canyon review area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Since the BLM has determined that the Sunday School Canyon area is still cumulatively unnatural, it does not have wilderness character. Thus, the BLM did not assess outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** Since the BLM has determined that the Sunday School Canyon area is still cumulatively unnatural, it does not have wilderness character. Thus, the BLM did not assess outstanding opportunities for supplemental wilderness values.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The area was reviewed by a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team on February 6, 2007. It was determined that the area did not contain wilderness characteristics based on the information provided above under Heading 4.b.(2)., Appearance of Naturalness.
- 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:

SUNDAY SCHOOL 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	18,069	18,069
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	0	18,069	18,069

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 Stump Date: 5/11/07
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.