

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: **Cripple Cowboy 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 gathered and reviewed previously 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 *McCook Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-723)* and recommended the area for intensive wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved on February 21, 1979.

The Cripple Cowboy review area was inventoried separately for inclusion in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponents submitted information for the *UWC Bitter Creek Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on December 15, 2001. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered during the 1979 initial inventories concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The UWC Bitter Creek area was divided into two separate proposals: 1) Bitter Creek – includes the BLM *McCook Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-723)* and the BLM *Atchee Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-720)*; and, 2) Bitter Creek/Rat Hole Ridge which includes the BLM *Rat Hole Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-722)*. The Cripple Cowboy review area is encompassed in the UWC Bitter Creek submittal.

The BLM Vernal Field Office in April and May 2002 prepared *Evaluation of New Information Reports* that concurred with the 1999 inventory that the Cripple Cowboy review area contains wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the *McCook Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-723)*; the SUWA/UWC Bitter Creek submittal; and, the two Vernal Field Office 2002 *Evaluation of New Information Reports*. 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 reached previously 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:** The Cripple Cowboy review area is located in southeastern Uintah and northern Grand Counties about 50 air miles south-southeast of Vernal, Utah. The area surrounds the Book Cliffs Mountain Browse Instant Study Area. All of the review area is within the planning boundaries of the Vernal Field Office. On February 7, 2007, the interdisciplinary team reviewed the Cripple Cowboy area. The terrain of the area is typical of the Book Cliffs. It consists of deep canyons and elongated ridges. Elevations range from 6,000 feet along canyon bottoms to 8,000 feet on the ridge lines. The dominant canyon providing the main access into the area and to the many side canyons is the Chipeta Canyon.

Canyon bottom vegetation consists of riparian species along the waterways. Canyon benches contain sagebrush, rabbit-brush, grasses, and greasewood. Above an elevation of 7,400 feet, the drainages are dominated by Douglas fir, piñon and juniper woodlands, and quaking aspen. The Douglas fir is mainly found on north-facing slopes. Ridge top vegetation consists primarily of sagebrush and piñon and juniper woodlands.

About 11,519 acres or 85% of the area is covered by existing oil and gas leases.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** The size of the area and the rugged terrain diminishes the impact from several human-made disturbances that exist in the area making the disturbances substantially unnoticeable. The disturbances include: cattle and wildlife exclosures, fences, motorized routes, and oil and gas seismic surveys.

Many of the accessible ridges or canyons have travel routes along them. The Chipeta Canyon route has been cherry-stemmed out of the parcel from Bitter Creek southward to the State of Utah lands in Section 16, T15S, R25E. Hunting, antler collecting and wood cutting are significant seasonal uses within the parcel.

The interdisciplinary team on February 7, determined that the review area as described above contained wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The rugged terrain of the steep-sided canyons and woodlands on the ridges provides a screening effect for visitors and the opportunity for solitude. Large portions of the parcel are not accessible by motorized vehicles thereby affording visitors with the opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation such as hunting, hiking, horseback riding and other nonmotorized recreational activities.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The review area with its deep canyons, high ridges, and sheer cliffs offers many scenic and wildlife viewing opportunities. The vegetation is diverse which adds to the area's scenic qualities. Deer and elk are common in the area. Bears have also been sighted. The streams and adjacent cliffs provide habitat for a variety of birds, including peregrine falcons and golden eagles.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** All of the review area was determined to contain wilderness characteristics.

b. Externally Nominated Area:

- (1). **Description:** The information provided under Heading 4.a., is valid for the externally nominated area that encompasses the Cripple Cowboy inventory area.
- 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:

CRIPPLE COWBOY AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	0	0	0
WIA, BLM Identified	13,603	0	13,603
TOTAL ACRES	13,603	0	13,603

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>
<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 Hump Date: 6/7/07
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.