

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: **Wild Mountain Area**

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

BLM Field Office(s) Affected: Vernal Field Office, Utah;
Little Snake Field Office, Colorado

EVALUATION

1. Was new information submitted by a member of the public for this area?

a. YES X 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 gathered and reviewed in prior BLM inventories; photographic documentation; etc?

a. No new information has been submitted by a member of the public.

In 1980, the BLM issued a decision on Wilderness Study Areas based on the 1979 Wilderness Intensive Inventory Evaluation Reports. Much of the Wild Mountain review area is contained within the *Wild Mountain Wilderness Intensive Inventory Evaluation Report (UT-080-104)*. A recommendation was made that the area did not qualify for wilderness study. The recommendation was approved on March 20, 1980.

The *Wild Mountain Wilderness Inventory Unit* was inventoried for wilderness characteristics and included in the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory (revised 2003)*.

The proponent submitted information on December 15, 2001, for the SUWA/UWC *Wild Mountain Proposed Wilderness Unit*. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered during the *1979 Wild Mountain Wilderness Intensive Inventory Evaluation Report UT-080-104* concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The proponent also excluded impacts identified in the reports.

The Vernal Field Office in November 2002 prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* that determined wilderness characteristics may be present in the Wild Mountain review area.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the *Wild Mountain Wilderness Intensive Inventory Evaluation Report (UT-080-104)*; the *UWC Wild Mountain Proposed Wilderness Unit*; and, the November 2002 Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information Report*. In addition, the interdisciplinary team reviewed recent changes to the area 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, documentation from prior BLM inventories, field observations, maps, master title plats, evidence presented as new information by a proponent, etc.), do you conclude:

a. _____ The decision reached in previous BLM inventories that the area lacks wilderness is still valid.

(or)

b. 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:** The Wild Mountain review area is composed of three parcels located in Uintah County about 30 air miles northeast of Vernal, Utah. A larger part of the area evaluated in the *Wild Mountain Wilderness Intensive Inventory Evaluation Report* extends into Colorado. The interdisciplinary team did not review lands outside of the Vernal Field Office planning boundary.

No existing oil and gas leases are present in the area.

Parcel #1 is the northern part of the area in Section 24, T2S, R25E. The area is a grass and sagebrush covered knoll.

Parcel #2 is in Sections 24 and 25, T2S, R25E and adjacent to the Utah-Colorado border. The terrain ranges from a grass and sagebrush covered knoll to high limestone cliffs on the western flanks of Wild Mountain. Drainages in the area are steep-walled and lend to the ruggedness of the area. Most of the unit is heavily wooded with piñon and juniper.

Parcel #3 is in Section 1, T3S, R25E. The parcel is adjacent to the Utah-Colorado border. The topography found in this parcel is similar to that described in Parcel #2. The Jones Hole Fish Hatchery is adjacent to the parcel.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** A few intrusions exist in the more open, easily accessible Parcel #1. These include a vehicle way, two small reservoirs, and a fence. ATV usage has increased in the parcel. The human-intrusions in the parcel are noticeable and have diminished the appearance of naturalness in the parcel. The parcel lacks natural character.

Parcels #2 and #3 have retained their natural character. There are a few but largely unnoticeable human imprints in the parcel. The rugged terrain and dense piñon and juniper vegetation contribute to the appearance of naturalness. Weed populations, including White-Top and small areas of Russian Knapweed have been chemically treated by both back-pack and ATV boom. The existing treatment areas are substantially unnoticeable. There have been no new disturbances since the *1999 Utah Wilderness Inventory* nor has the passage of time reduced previously identified impacts to a level that additional wilderness characteristics now occur. The two parcels remain as previously assessed.

Parcel #2 is contiguous with the lands in Colorado that the BLM Little Snake Field Office, Craig, Colorado, determined likely to have wilderness character (phone interview with LSFO RMP coordinator, Jeremy Kasterson on 3-27-07). Parcel #2 is substantially less than 5,000 acres in size. While small, the parcel retained its natural character and is contiguous with lands in Colorado that have wilderness characteristics. The parcel has been determined to contain wilderness characteristics.

Parcel #3 is contiguous with lands in the Dinosaur National Monument that are being managed for their wilderness values (personal correspondence, Wayne Prokopetz, Chief of Research and Resource Management, Dinosaur National Monument). Parcel #3 while substantially less than 5,000 acres, retained the appearance of naturalness. The parcel has been determined to contain wilderness characteristics as it is contiguous with lands in the monument that are being managed for wilderness values.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The steep and rugged terrain with numerous box canyons offer areas for solitude. Primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities such as hiking may be found around the same topographic features.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The area provides scenic viewpoints. Sensitive wildlife species include peregrine falcons, big free-tailed bats, and spotted bats which inhabit nooks and crannies in the cliff faces in Parcel #3. Parcel #3 also contains cultural resources.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The interdisciplinary team found that naturalness in Parcel #1 has been diminished due to intrusions described above under Heading 4.a.(2)., Appearance of Naturalness. Parcel #1 lacks natural character and wilderness characteristics are not contained within the parcel..

b. Externally Nominated Area.

- (1). **Description:** The WIA referenced above under Heading 4.a., WIA Area, includes the area identified in the December 2001 SUWA/UWC *Wild Mountain Proposed Wilderness Unit*. The information provided under that heading is valid for the SUWA/UWC proposal.

- 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:

WILD MOUNTAIN 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	527	31	558
TOTAL ACRES	527	31	558

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 Strung
Field Office Manager

Date: 4/25/07

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.