

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: **Lower Flaming Gorge 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.

In 1979, the BLM Vernal Field Office completed the *Diamond Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-109)* and recommended that the area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved on February 21, 1979. The Lower Flaming Gorge review area is encompassed by this report.

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

The proponent submitted information on December 15, 2001, for the SUWA/UWC *Lower Flaming Gorge Proposed Wilderness Unit*. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered for the *1979 Diamond Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-109)* 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 Lower Flaming Gorge review area.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the *1979 Diamond Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-109)*; the *SUWA/UWC Lower Flaming Gorge Proposed Wilderness Unit*; and the Vernal Field Office November 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 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)

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:** No WIA Area is present.

b. **Externally Nominated Area.**

(1). **Description:** The Lower Flaming Gorge Area is located about 30 air miles northeast of Vernal, Utah, in Daggett and Uintah Counties. All of the review area is within the planning boundaries of the Vernal Field Office. On February 7, 2007, the interdisciplinary team reviewed the area. The terrain is rugged with steep-walled canyons and high topographic features which reduce in topographic relief rapidly toward the Green River in the northern portion of the area. Jackson Creek, Sears, and Tolivers Canyons are found within this portion. The southern portion of the area is not as steep and contains rounded hills that are forested. Elevations range from 5,450 feet at the Green River to 8,700 feet in the central portion of the area.

Vegetation within the review area will range from sagebrush and grasses to areas that are heavily forested with piñon and juniper.

There are no existing oil and gas leases within the Lower Flaming Gorge Area.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** Most of the review area contains an appearance of naturalness. The few intrusions in the area are effectively screened by the sheer cliffs and vegetation and are substantially unnoticeable.

The lands administered by the Ashley National Forest that are contiguous to the northwestern part of the review area and form part of the northern boundary. The Forest Service lands are being managed as roadless and are not being managed for wilderness characteristics.

In 2005, a wildfire occurred in Mail Draw that burned some of the passes, ridgelines and side slopes in the southern portion of the area.

Two portions of the area in Sections 17 and 31 of T2N, R24E, are segregated from the main portion of the area and are substantially smaller than 5,000 acres in size.

That portion of the review area north of the Green River in Sections 20-22, T2N, R24E, is segregated by the river from the main body of the area and is less than 5,000 acres in size. OHV trails and designated and undesignated camping areas have impacted the naturalness of this portion of the area.

The appearance of naturalness in that portion of the area south of the Green River in Sections 22 and 23, T2N, R24E, has been impacted and diminished by OHV trails and undesignated camping areas.

Along the northeast boundary of the review area in Sections 1 and 12, T1N, R24E; and, Sections 1, 7, 18, 19, and 30, T1N, R25E, the appearance of naturalness has been impacted and diminished by mechanical vegetative treatments.

The interdisciplinary team on February 7, 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*, for wilderness characteristics by the BLM Vernal Field Office.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The steep-walled canyons and rugged mountainous terrain of that portion of the review area containing naturalness promotes feelings of solitude and isolation. The terrain also lends itself to hiking, horseback riding, and other non-motorized recreational opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** The review area contains scenic, archaeological, and historical values. Wildlife in this area include mule deer, elk, bear, cougar, sage grouse, blue grouse, duck, geese, golden eagle, prairie falcon, coyote, and ground squirrel.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** The two portions of the area in Sections 17 and 31 of T2N, R24E, as described under Heading 4.b.(2)., have been determined to not have wilderness characteristics due to their segregation and size.

That portion of the review area north of the Green River in Sections 20-22, T2N, R24E, as described under Heading 4.b.(2)., has been determined to not have wilderness characteristics due to its segregation and size and the OHV trails and designated and undesignated camping areas have impacted the naturalness of this portion of the area.

That portion of the area south of the Green River in Sections 22 and 23, T2N, R24E, has been determined to not have wilderness characteristics due to the presence of OHV trails and undesignated camping areas that have impacted the naturalness of this portion.

The appearance of naturalness has been impacted and diminished by mechanical vegetative treatments in the portion of the area along the northeastern boundary of the review area in Sections 1 and 12, T1N, R24E; and, in portions of the review area along the eastern boundary in Sections 1, 7, 18, 19, and 30, T1N, R25E. The interdisciplinary team found that these areas do not have wilderness characteristics.

- 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:

LOWER FLAMING GORGE AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	17,810	3,360	21,170
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	17,810	3,360	21,170

- 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 (UDGOM) 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 Sturges*
Field Office Manager

Date: 5/11/07

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.