

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: January 30, 2007

Proponent: Utah Wilderness Coalition (UWC) – (America's Red Rock Wilderness Proposal)

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Mountain Home 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: 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 previously in the BLM inventories; photographic documentation; etc?

a. The proponent submitted a map identifying the specific boundaries of the UWC *Mountain Home Proposed Wilderness Unit* as proposed in the bill, *America's Red Rock Wilderness Act*. This bill was first introduced in 1989. The *America's Red Rock Wilderness Act* bill was reintroduced into the 110th Congress as H.R.1919 in the U.S. House of Representatives, and S. 1170 in the U.S. Senate.

In 1979, the BLM Vernal Field Office completed the BLM *Home Mountain Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-101)*. The Mountain Home review area is encompassed by this report. This review will use the name, Mountain Home. It was recommended that the area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved February 21, 1979.

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

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed UWC *Mountain Home Proposed Wilderness Unit* as proposed in the bill, *America's Red Rock Wilderness Act*. 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 reached previously 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 present.

b. **Externally Nominated Area.**

(1). **Description:** The Mountain Home Area is located about 40 air miles northeast of Vernal, Utah, in Daggett County. The area encompasses the east-west trending Mountain Home. Clay Basin Creek is the northern boundary of the review area and Jarvie Ranch Road forms the southern boundary. Jesse Ewing Canyon Road is the eastern boundary and Red Creek is the western boundary. As stated in Section 4.b., the interdisciplinary team determined and used appropriate set-back distances for existing corridors, pipelines, roads, and other R-O-Ws.

The top of Mountain Home peak is relatively flat with an elevation of nearly 8,000 feet. Incised drainages are present on the steep sides of the mountain. The mountain appears relatively natural. Particularly, the mountain top and the canyons that lead to the summit which are not accessible by motorized equipment.

The general vegetation in the review area is big sagebrush, scattered piñon-juniper trees. Greasewood is present along the creek and river bottoms, particularly in the southeastern part of the area.

About 4,705 acres or 49% of the Mountain Home Area has been leased for oil and gas exploration and development. The only oil and gas activity has occurred on State of Utah lands with one well drilled, plugged, and abandoned.

(2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** In the northern part of the review area, human-made disturbances in the lower-lying lands are substantially unnoticeable. The more gentle sloping lands from Clay Basin Creek southward to the base of Mountain Home have the appearance of naturalness. A hazardous fuels reduction project is approved to be conducted during 2007 in Sections 26 and 27, T3N, R24E. The project will consist of the cutting of invasive juniper trees. The "Lop and Scatter" method will cut 10 to 12 trees per acre resulting in random piles of material that do not exceed three feet in height. After one to three years the cut trees will be substantially unnoticeable.

The portion of the review area from Clay Basin Creek to Clay Basin Road is located in Sections 26-29, T3N, R24E. This portion of the area lacks naturalness due to the density of well locations, roads and ways.

In the southern part of the review area, the more gentle-lying lands from the base of Mountain Home to the southern boundary lack the appearance of naturalness. A chaining of juniper and piñon trees occurred on the southwest part of this area during the late 1960's. The disturbance caused by the chaining is still noticeable. An average observer would notice the upended trees and root clumps and the hundreds of acres of dead trees. Additionally in the area, there has been an increase in OVH roads and trails extending up the drainages from the Jarvie Ranch Road to non-designated camping sites. Other ongoing or potential activities in the area includes the Jesse Ewing Canyon is being rebuilt in the lower half of Section 12. This road will be a two-lane paved road.

The boundaries of this area were adjusted to accommodate for the R-O-W construction width in Jesse Ewing Canyon and the Kanda Lateral pipeline route which is to be constructed up Red Creek Canyon. The Kanda Lateral pipeline forms the southern boundary as the pipeline route crosses the Green River to the mouth of Red Creek.

- (3). **Solitude, Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The remoteness of the top of the mountain, incised drainages, and areas of heavy vegetation allow for solitude. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are available for hiking, riding, and other non-motorized activities. See Section 4.b.(2). for more description of the area.
- (4). **Supplemental Values:** Several historic mining operations are present along Red Creek which forms the west boundary of the area. The operations are from the early 1900's and include some smelting hearths and tailings. The topographic relief in the review area provides scenic views.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** That portion of the review area from Clay Basin Creek to Clay Basin Road on the northern boundary was determined in Section 4.b.(2). to lack an appearance of naturalness due to the density of well locations, roads and ways. The interdisciplinary team determined on February 7, 2007 that this part of the Mountain Home Area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

The southern part of the review area, the more gentle-lying lands from the base of Mountain Home to the southern boundary was determined in Section 4.b.(2). to lack the appearance of naturalness. Reasons for this determination are presented in the section referenced in the preceding sentence. The interdisciplinary team determined on February 7, 2007 that this part of the Mountain Home Area does not contain 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:

MOUNTAIN HOME AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	7,083	2,564	9,647
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	7,083	2,564	9,647

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 (UDOGM) 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 H. Hays
Field Office Manager

Date: 5/2/07

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.