

# 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: **Rat Hole Ridge 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 *Rat Hole Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT 080-722)* and recommended that the area qualified for intensive wilderness. The *Rat Hole Ridge Wilderness Intensive Inventory Report* was completed in 1980 and the recommendation that the area did not qualify for wilderness study was approved on March 20, 1980.

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

The proponents submitted information for the UWC Rat Hole Ridge 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 and intense inventories concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The boundaries of the proposal are similar to original 1979 initial review for the area. Rat Hole Ridge is included in the SUWA/UWC Bitter Creek submittal of December 15, 2001.

The Vernal Field Office in May 2002 prepared an *Evaluation of New Information* report that concluded the Rat Hole Ridge review area may contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the *Rat Hole Ridge Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT 080-722)*; the 1980 *Rat Hole Ridge Wilderness Intensive Inventory Report*; The SUWA/UWC submittal; and, the BLM Vernal Field Office 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 State of Utah lands, private lands, or lands outside of the BLM Vernal Field Office planning boundary. 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:** No WIA review area is present.
  - b. **Externally Nominated Area:**
    - (1). **Description:** The Rat Hole Ridge review area is located in southeast Uintah County about 70 air miles southeast of Vernal, Utah. The area also extends into Garfield County, Colorado. On February 7, 2007, the interdisciplinary team reviewed only that portion of the Rat Hole Ridge area that is within the BLM Vernal Field Office planning boundary. The primary physiographic feature of the area is Rat Hole Ridge. The ridge trends southeast to northwest and has a topographic relief of about 1,400 feet. The terrain of the area is typical of the Book Cliffs. It consists of deep canyons and elongated ridges.

Vegetation in the review area includes: serviceberry, mountain mahogany, sagebrush, and scattered piñon-juniper trees. Some Douglas fir and isolated aspen groves may be found.

About 1,886 acres or 17% of the area is covered by existing oil and gas leases.

- (2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** The size of 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 activities. The route and well location on the unnamed portion of Rat Hole Ridge in Section 25, T14S, R25E, and Section 31, T14S, R26E has been cherry-stemmed out of the parcel.

The interdisciplinary team on February 7, 2007, determined that the review area as described above contained wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The terrain and vegetation provide a screening effect for visitors and the opportunity for solitude. 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 non-motorized 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 sensitive species.
- (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** As delineated, all of the review area was determined to contain 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:

<b>RAT HOLE RIDGE AREA</b>			
<b>Type of Lands</b>	<b>Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)</b>	<b>Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)</b>	<b>Total Acres</b>
UWC, Externally Nominated	11,367	0	0
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	11,367
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	11,367	0	11,367

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 Strayer  
Field Office Manager

Date: 6/7/07

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.