

WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS REVIEW

Date of Submission: September 3, 2002

Proponent: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA); Utah Wilderness Coalition (UWC)

Name of Area to be Reviewed: **Cliff Dweller Canyon 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 BLM *Monument Ridge East Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-727)*. It was recommended that the area did not qualify for further wilderness inventory. The recommendation was approved February 21, 1979.

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

The proponents submitted information concerning the *SUWA/UWC Cliff Dweller Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit* to the BLM Vernal Field Office on September 3, 2002. The submitted information included more detailed data than the BLM considered during the 1979 initial inventory concerning opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, supplemental wilderness values, natural character, and photos. The boundaries of the proposal are similar to the 1979 Monument Ridge East wilderness inventory unit.

In October 2002, the Vernal Field Office prepared an *Evaluation of New Information Report* that concurred with the decision reached in the 1979 initial inventory. The Cliff Dweller Canyon review area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

On February 7, 2007, a Vernal Field Office interdisciplinary team reviewed the 1979 *Monument Ridge East Wilderness Inventory Situation Evaluation Report (UT-080-727)*; the September 2002 *SUWA/UWC Cliff Dweller Canyon Proposed Wilderness Unit*; and, the Vernal Field Office *Evaluation of New Information Report* of October 2002. 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. 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 Cliff Dweller review area is located about 60 air miles south of Vernal, Utah. The majority of the area is within Uintah County; however, a small portion extends into Grand County. All of the area is within the Vernal office planning boundaries and was reviewed by the interdisciplinary team. The area is bounded by Monument Ridge on the west, Seep Ridge on the south, Sweet Water Canyon on the north, and both PR Canyon and Willow Canyon on the east.

The landscape within the Cliff Dweller Area is dissected and rugged. The existing ridges are separated by canyons. The canyons walls may slope gently to broad valley floors or are defined by steep sandstone cliffs.

Dense piñon and juniper woodlands cover much of the review area. Stands of aspen and Douglas fir occur at higher elevations.

About 7,699 acres or 53% of the review area is covered by existing oil and gas leases.

(2). **Appearance of Naturalness:** In 1979, the BLM concluded that the area did not contain wilderness characteristics. It was identified that the area contains numerous ways. Other human-made disturbances included fence lines and firewood gathering areas. A large part of the review area had been chained or prescribed burns conducted to remove the woody vegetation.

In 2002, the BLM vehicle route inventory identified the presence of approximately 16.4 miles or routes on public lands located within the area. An increase in firewood cutting had occurred and was considered even more evident than in 1979. Christmas tree cutting permits have been issued in the Trap Canyon area, and the stumps are considered unnatural in character. Also, there had been an increase of vehicle trails related to firewood and Christmas tree cutting.

Specialists of the BLM determined that burned, chained, and reseeded area continued to exhibit the same character as found in 1979.

In 2002, the BLM identified 9 oil and gas wells had been drilled after 1979.

In 2002, it was determined that the area did not have an appearance of naturalness due to the ongoing identified human activities described above.

At present, the interdisciplinary team determined that the previous inventory review remain valid. Changes that have occurred since the 2002 review include:

- Fire treatments were completed in the Sweetwater Creek area in 2000.
- Increased hunting and visitation have occurred due to 20 more limited entry elk tags.
- Two designated campsites were established in the area.
- In particular hen bane and hounds tongue noxious weed infestations were sprayed by motorized equipment along existing roads and ways.

The interdisciplinary team review of February 7, 2007, concluded that the prior review findings remain valid and the Cliff Dweller Canyon review area does not have an appearance of naturalness. Therefore, the area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

- (3). **Solitude, and Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The area does not have solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities based on the information provided above and the determination that the area does not have wilderness characteristics.
 - (4). **Supplemental Values:** See the narrative under Section 4.b.(2)., Appearance of Naturalness.
 - (5). **Areas without wilderness characteristics:** All of the Cliff Dweller Area was determined by the interdisciplinary team to not contain wilderness characteristics. See the narrative under Section 4.b.(2)., Appearance of Naturalness.
- 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:

CLIFF DWELLER AREA			
Type of Lands	Non WSA Lands with wilderness characteristics (acres)	Non WSA Lands without wilderness characteristics (acres)	Total Acres
UWC, Externally Nominated	0	14,604	14,604
WIA, BLM Identified	0	0	0
TOTAL ACRES	0	14,604	14,604

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 Co. 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 Houser
Field Office Manager

Date: 4/30/07

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.