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**APPENDIX D**  
**LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**  
**ASSESSMENT FOR THE**  
**COLORADO RIVER VALLEY FIELD OFFICE**



**Lands with Wilderness Characteristics  
Assessment for the  
Colorado River Valley Field Office**

**Prepared by:**

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Colorado River Valley Field Office**

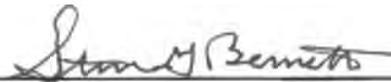
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Colorado River Valley Field Manager


Date 3/18/13

*\* This assessment will be used as information for alternative development, affected environment, environmental consequences sections of the proposed RMP/ EIS for the CRVFO.*

*\*\* This assessment will be signed as final upon approval of the Final Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision.*

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### **A. Land Use Planning Process**

Through the land use planning process, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will consider all available information to determine the mix of resource use and protection that best serves the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) multiple use mandate. BLM has authority under FLPMA to maintain inventories of all public lands and their resources, including wilderness characteristics, and to consider such information during land use planning process. Section 201 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) identifies policy that the BLM will conduct wilderness characteristics inventories as part of managing the wilderness resource under the BLM's multiple use mission. H-1601-1, Land Use Planning (LUP) Handbook, identifies that wilderness characteristics must be analyzed in the LUP. Lands managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics will not be designated in the Proposed RMP, as the BLM does not have any designation authority. However, these lands may be identified as having wilderness characteristics and decisions may be made to manage to protect wilderness characteristics. The proposed decision will include goals and objectives to protect the resource and management actions necessary to achieve these goals and objectives.

Through this assessment, the Colorado River Valley Field Office (CRVFO) is meeting its obligations for the updating and maintaining of its inventory of wilderness resources under section 102, 201, 202 of FLPMA. BLM's 1601-1-Land Use Planning Handbook, identifies broad scale decisions that guide future land management actions and subsequent site specific implementation decisions. Specifically, BLM Handbook 1610-1 - Appendix C - Part K - Wilderness Characteristics and BLM Manual 6300-1-Wilderness Inventory directs Field Offices to identify decisions to protect or preserve wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude, and outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation).

In addition, guidance was updated for the BLM through Manuals 6310 – Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Public Lands (BLM 2012) and 6320 – Considering Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in the BLM Land Use Planning Process in March 2012 (BLM 2012), after the CRVFO draft RMP was released for public comment. Since this guidance emphasized documentation of findings per old inventory area/unit, the CRVFO had worked to comply with this guidance since the draft. Completed documentation of the CRVFO planning area inventory (outside of the Roan Plateau planning area) in accordance with the updated Manuals 6310 and 6320 will be available through contacting the CRVFO.

Through this Resource Management Plan (RMP) planning revision, the CRVFO will determine which portions of BLM lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics would be protected or preserved through management prescriptions, stipulations, and allowable uses (see *Appendix F – Management and Setting Prescriptions for Lands Managed for the Protection of Wilderness Characteristics*).

### **B. Scope of Assessment**

This assessment is intended to provide an evaluation of wilderness characteristics on BLM lands within the CRVFO, outside of existing wilderness study areas (WSAs). This process has been designed to look at all CRVFO lands, specifically: (1) to update data to ensure environmental impacts of alternatives on BLM land with wilderness characteristics are adequately analyzed;

and (2) to address proposals from the public to inventory and protect BLM lands containing wilderness characteristics.

For the purpose of this assessment, all lands underwent a review regarding whether or not the areas/units are roadless. “Roadless” definition refers to the absence of roads which have been improved and maintained by mechanical means to insure relatively regular and continuous use. BLM reviewed externally submitted wilderness proposals, BLM records, and other information on area routes to determine which areas/units in the CRVFO are roadless. The findings of this review are documented under the “Findings” section for those individual units in the completed and updated documentation of the CRVFO planning area inventory.

Proposals involving lands entirely within existing WSA’s were not assessed. Lands outside or adjacent to WSAs were within the scope of this assessment. This assessment does not include National Forest Lands or BLM lands assessed in the Roan Plateau Planning Area Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement. The existing four (4) designated WSA’s will continue to be managed to protect their wilderness characteristics under BLM Manual 6330 – Management of Wilderness Study Areas [BLM 2012] until Congress designates them as wilderness or releases them for other uses (see WSA section in the RMP revision/Environmental Impact Statement [EIS]).

### **C. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

The inventory evaluated wilderness characteristics as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and incorporated in FLPMA. In order for an area/unit to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics, it must possess sufficient size, naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. In addition, it may also possess supplemental values.

#### **C.1. Size.**

*Do the area/units meet the size criteria?*

- 1) *Roadless area/unitss with over 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands. State or private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.*
- 2) *Roadless areas/units of less than 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands where any one of the following apply:*
  - a. *They are contiguous with lands which have been formally determined to have wilderness or potential wilderness values, or any Federal lands managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics. Such lands include: designated wilderness, BLM wilderness study areas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service areas proposed for wilderness designation, U.S. Forest Service wilderness study areas or areas of recommended wilderness, and National Park Service (NPS) areas recommended or proposed for designation. They do not include NPS areas merely considered —eligible for wilderness study, nor do they include FS Roadless Areas unless they are also designated as — recommended wilderness through a forest plan revision.*

- b. *It is demonstrated that the area/unit is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.*
- c. *Any roadless island of the public lands.*

### **C.2. Naturalness.**

*Do the lands and resources exhibit a high degree of naturalness? Are the lands affected primarily by the forces of nature? Is the imprint of human activity substantially unnoticeable?*

*An area's/unit's naturalness may be influenced by the presence or absence of roads and trails, fences or other developments; the nature and extent of landscape modifications; the presence of native vegetation communities; and the connectivity of habitats. Wildlife species are recognized as an indicator of naturalness.*

### **C.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude and/or Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

*Do visitors have outstanding opportunities for solitude, or primitive and unconfined types of recreation? Are the sights, sounds, and evidence of other people rare or infrequent? Can visitors feel isolated, alone or secluded from others? Is the use of the area/unit primarily through non-motorized or non-mechanical means with no or minimal recreation facilities?*

### **C.4. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the area/unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

## **D. Review of Past Wilderness Inventories**

BLM reviewed the original BLM wilderness inventory reports and maps from 1979 and 1980. The review was done through GIS analysis and field investigations. This review enabled BLM to determine if there is any new information that was not considered as part of the original inventories or new information that has emerged since that timeframe. Opinions as to what constitute solitude and outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation change as the larger landscape experiences more development and more people. There also has been an increase in interest in looking at natural systems and features found in more arid and low elevation environments and expanding the diversity of the wilderness preservation system. Therefore, some information submitted by the public was considered "new information" based on changed physical conditions, diversity within the wilderness preservation system, and changed social perceptions of wilderness characteristics that have occurred over time.

Between draft and final RMP, the CRVFO completed documentation for the updated wilderness inventory throughout the field office. This documentation found that a polygon between the CRVFO and Grand Junction Field Office was not evaluated in the draft because it was clipped at the field office boundary and did not meet the size criteria. Once the polygon was looked at across field office boundaries, it did meet the size criteria, but did not meet outstanding opportunities for solitude or unconfined, primitive recreation based on steep slopes to the north and existence of sights of development and sounds in much of the lower locations to the south and therefore did not have wilderness characteristics. In addition, naturalness would be impacted

due to current oil and gas leases that are held in production in the area. Therefore, the updated documentation did not reveal any different findings of lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics between draft and final RMP. Completed documentation of the CRVFO planning area inventory (outside of the Roan Plateau planning area) in accordance with the updated Manuals 6310 and 6320 will be available through contacting the CRVFO.

### **E. Review of Public Wilderness Proposals**

Numerous external groups have varying interests and have advocated wilderness designations through legislation and through participation in the land use planning processes. Proposal areas and acreage figures have changed over time. This assessment and inventory included consideration of the most recent proposal submitted to the BLM for consideration of protection of wilderness characteristics. The most recent proposal was submitted to the BLM in May of 2007, by the Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC), the Wilderness Society, American Rivers, Inc., Center for Native Ecosystems, Colorado Mountain Club, and the Wilderness Workshop. The proposal contains wilderness inventories completed by these groups on an area by area basis, wilderness designation justifications and a statewide wilderness proposal. Earlier submissions were received from CEC in 1994, 2000, and 2001.

In November 2012, the BLM reviewed current proposed wilderness legislation (the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2009 by Congress Member DeGette, the Eagle and Summit County Wilderness Preservation Act by Congressman Polis, and the Central Mountain Outdoor Heritage Proposal by Senator Udall) and the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign proposal. The review confirmed that all of the proposed wilderness is included in this assessment and inventory. The two exceptions that did not match the draft assessment and inventory have been reviewed. In December 2010, the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign proposal expanded the Assignment Ridge (Thompson Creek) boundary in T8S R88W, sections 16, 20 and 21 to include an additional 425 acres. In addition, the Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign proposal, Congressman Polis' proposed Eagle and Summit County Wilderness Preservation Act, and Senator Udall's Central Mountain Outdoor Heritage Wilderness Preservation Act created a Special Management Area and expanded the Castle Peak Addition boundary to the northeast to include 2261 acres and expanded the northeast corner to include another 1229 acres. These expansions are in T3S R84W, sections 1, 11, 12, 13, and 24; T2S R84W, sections 35 and 36; and T3S R83W, sections 6 and 7. These expansions are not currently proposed in the legislation as wilderness because of on-going Army National Guard helicopter training, but the wilderness characteristic would be more fully evident should the Army National Guard no longer use this area. External proposals for wilderness can be brought to Congress that are different from BLM assessments and inventories. Opportunities for reviews during the legislative process typically occur with the affected land management agencies. Congress can designate wilderness through legislation.

These additional expansions of the Thompson Creek and Castle Peak Addition Units were not found to contain wilderness characteristics in the review that occurred between draft and CRVFO Final Resource Management Plan Revision. Thompson Creek's addition includes an aerial powerline that would detract from the naturalness of the area, and the current boundary is an improved road maintained for continuous use by the current grazing permittee. The Castle Peak Addition expansion was not found to include wilderness characteristics because of the Recreation Setting Characteristics analysis that showed that area in middle and front country classifications, which means that there are four-wheel drive vehicle, ATV and motorcycle routes

within ½ mile (for middle country) and low clearance or passenger vehicle routes which include unpaved County roads and private land routes within ¼ mile (for front country). In addition to the obvious impact those nearby routes will have on sights and sounds for solitude, in order to include that expansion, many man-made unnatural developments (developed roads, heavily developed reservoir, etc.) would need to be cherry-stemmed to make a difficult to define boundary in order to justify that the area contained within is natural. Therefore, the BLM found those expansions proposed in legislation outside of the boundaries that are shown in this assessment to not contain wilderness characteristics.

## **F. Specific Documents and Data Used for the Assessment**

Conclusions reached in this assessment were based on:

- Field investigations of BLM lands throughout the CRVFO
- CRVFO-Recreation Setting Characteristics Maps
- CRVFO Travel and Transportation (CRVFO GIS)
- CRVFO road maintenance records
- Range improvements (CRVFO GIS)
- CRVFO range allotment management files
- Oil and Gas leases (CRVFO GIS)
- Digital Ortho Quads
- Aerial photos (GIS)
- CRVFO's cultural data base
- Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP) data base for potential conservation areas, rare plants, natural plant communities, raptors, bats, etc.
- BLM's LR2000 data base for ROW's, Mineral Claims, Oil and Gas leasing etc.
- Castle Peak Travel Management Plan, 1997
- Glenwood Springs Oil and Gas FSEIS, 1997
- Updated documentation of the CRVFO planning area inventory (outside of the Roan Plateau planning area) in accordance with the updated Manuals 6310 and 6320

The staff also reviewed the following wilderness proposals:

- Colorado Environmental Coalition proposed wilderness GIS data layer (2007)
- Public written proposals and CEC's boundary shape files (5/2/07)
- Hidden Gems Wilderness Campaign website information (Jan. 2008 and Feb. 2011. [http://www.whiteriverwild.org/.](http://www.whiteriverwild.org/))
- Diana DeGette Colorado Wilderness Act of 2009 website information (Feb. 2011. [http://degette.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=906:degette-introduces-colorado-wilderness-act-of-2009&catid=76:press-releases-&Itemid=227.](http://degette.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=906:degette-introduces-colorado-wilderness-act-of-2009&catid=76:press-releases-&Itemid=227.))
- Diana DeGette Colorado Wilderness Act of 2011 website information (Nov. 2012. <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr2420/text.>)
- Jared Polis Eagle and Summit County Preservation Act website information (Feb. 2011. [http://polis.house.gov/wilderness/.](http://polis.house.gov/wilderness/))
- Mark Udall Central Mountain Outdoor Heritage Proposal website information (Nov. 2012. <http://www.markudall.senate.gov/?p=form&id=52.>)

This assessment documents all known valid existing rights, grandfathered uses, and public land investments. However, due to timing and resource constraints; a full field examination of each area for human disturbances did not take place. This assessment builds on the draft RMP (amendment) and draft EIS, and draft Wilderness Characteristics Assessment and Inventory to include appropriate responses to public comments received on the draft documents. GIS information has been updated and acreages are rounded to provide for on the ground accuracy and making sure boundaries match existing BLM public lands or special designation boundaries. Acreages may adjust in the future with more accurate GIS data. Pisgah Mountain boundaries were updated to erase the state land acres (200 acres) from BLM analysis. Also, the boundary adjustments made in the Wilderness Characteristic Assessment Appendix for both Pisgah Mountain (to exclude roads #8530 and #8535 which had been maintained previously) and Castle Peak Addition (to exclude road #8512 which had been maintained previously) were reflected in the acreage information listed below and in the GIS data used for analysis. Additionally, WSA acres have been reviewed through GIS and the actual GIS acreage may be different from previous reports, although this acreage may change in the future to provide for on the ground accuracy and making sure boundaries match existing BLM public lands, USFS boundaries or special designation boundaries. The BLM currently does not have the ability to change WSA boundaries, but must use its most current technology and information to determine what those boundaries are.

## G. Areas/Units Considered for Assessment

The following table shows the units brought forth from the CRVFO-wide inventory that met the lands managed to protect wilderness character criteria.

**Table 1. CRVFO Assessment Units**

| <i>Unit</i>                                      | <i>Acres Analyzed</i> | <i>Acres in existing WSA's</i> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Bull Gulch</b>                                | 0                     | 15,210                         |
| <b>Castle Peak</b>                               | 4,020                 | 12,230                         |
| <b>Deep Creek</b>                                | 4,420                 | 0                              |
| <b>Flat Tops Addition-Hack Lake</b>              | 3,550                 | 4                              |
| <b>Grand Hogback</b>                             | 11,360                | 0                              |
| <b>Maroon Bells-Snowmass Addition- Eagle Mt.</b> | 0                     | 320                            |
| <b>Pisgah Mountain</b>                           | 15,480                | 0                              |
| <b>Thompson Creek</b>                            | 8,220                 | 0                              |
| <b>Storm King</b>                                | 0                     | 0                              |

<sup>1</sup> Acreages are rounded based on the most current GIS information and lining up boundaries to existing BLM or WSA boundaries. All lands outside of BLM public lands were eliminated from consideration, as in the case of Pisgah Mountain (state lands of 200 acres).

## H. Areas/Units Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Evaluation

The Storm King area/unit is the only unit that was dropped from detailed evaluation. Inventory findings within the Storm King unit documented in 1980 are still relevant today. While the unit may contain some wilderness characteristics within small portions of the unit, the unit has undergone numerous additional man-made modifications within the landscape that create serious impairment to the unit's naturalness. While some modifications are not as visible and dominating within the unit as others, they still take away from the unit's naturalness as a whole. In addition to the features identified in the 1980 report, new man made features (interpretive panels, benches, crosses, etc.) were constructed in the southern portion of the unit for the Storm King Memorial Trail in 1995. This popular memorial trail serves as an important memorial to those who lost their lives fighting the Storm King Fire. It also serves as an important training tool for visiting firefighters across the country.



## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 1 - Castle Peak Addition

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#### 1.1. Area Description.

The unit is located approximately 6 miles north of Eagle in Eagle County, Colorado. The Castle Peak “Addition” is an area approximately 4,020 acres in size that is directly adjacent to the Castle Peak WSA. The adjacent Castle Peak WSA consists of 12,230 acres. This assessment will be for 4,020 acres outside of the WSA.

#### 1.2. Background.

This unit was part of the BLM’s “Initial” wilderness inventory process in 1979 under section 603 of FLPMA, and was later part of the “Intensive” wilderness inventory process in 1980. The unit contained 17,500 acres of federal land that underwent the intensive inventory. During the intensive inventory approximately 6,500 acres were eliminated due to the existence of numerous roads, ways, fences, irrigation ditches and ponds that detracted for the naturalness. The Castle Peak Addition was part of the original unit that was eliminated.

In the 1980’s, 11,940 acres were proposed for WSA designation. However after the completion of the study process, 0 acres were “recommended” for wilderness as documented in the Final Wilderness Study Report in 1991. The Castle Peak WSA was recommended as “non-suitable” for wilderness designation because it would “add little to the diversity of the National Preservation System.” It was stated that the unit was very similar ecologically to existing wildernesses both locally and state-wide. No manageability concerns were raised. Today, 12,230 acres in the Castle Peak WSA continues to be managed under the BLM’s Interim Management Policy until Congress designates the unit or releases it for other uses.

In August of 1997, the BLM conducted a citizen’s wilderness “roadless” review process on the adjacent 4,026 acres within the Castle Peak Addition that was identified in the 1994 Colorado Conservationists’ Wilderness Proposal for BLM lands. The citizen’s inventory group looked at routes to determine if the unit contained “roads” or “ways”. The review unit was found to meet the wilderness criteria as being roadless with the exception of the “Poison Trail” BLM road #8511. Two additional routes determined to be ways were left open for continued motorized travel (Picture Ridge #8512 & Alkali Creek #8500).

The Castle Peak Travel Management Plan (TMP) partially addressed the roadless character; however a full intensive wilderness inventory was not completed. The Castle Peak TMP and the 1999 Glenwood Springs Oil and Gas EIS, provided a high degree of protections to a variety of natural values and non-motorized recreation opportunities within this unit and risks to wilderness characteristics are low. The TMP closed all routes within this unit except the Poison Trail and Picture Ridge. The Alkali Creek road, north end of # 8500 was closed and rehabilitated outside of the units’ boundary less than ¼ mile west of Welsh Reservoir.

### **1.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues.**

#### **1.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.**

The Castle Peak public wilderness proposal involves a total of 16,250 acres; this assessment is for the 4,020 acres outside of the Castle Peak WSA known as the “Addition”. All lands within this proposal are on BLM lands.

#### **1.3.2. Topography.**

The Castle Peak Addition contains gently rolling slopes that lead to the uplands within the WSA and towards Domantle Mountain. The elevation ranges from 8,000 feet within the drainages to 10,000 feet along the slopes of Domantle Mountain.

#### **1.3.3. Vegetation.**

The unit contains a variety of vegetation types, from mixed sage and grasslands to aspen and subalpine douglas fir and spruce- fir forest.

#### **1.3.4. Existing Issues.**

Most of the acres within the Castle Peak Addition have been managed to protect the units semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation settings and to minimize impacts of all land uses since the 1997 Castle Peak TMP. Current information shows no long-term threats to the units wilderness characteristics from current or projected proposed land uses.

While some motorized use occurs in the northern part of the Addition, the motorized use occurs under administrative access agreement only. The administrative use is limited and authorized travel is specific for the purpose of managing grandfathered uses relating to associated grazing permits and water rights. This unit is not open to public motorized or mechanized use. No long-term irreversible impacts are occurring.

One route (Picture Ridge) was determined to be a “way” in 1997 and continues to be managed as a designated motorized route open to the public. Three local commercial jeep tour operators and two commercial ATV/UTV operators have special recreation permits to use this route known as Picture Ridge (route # 8512). The commercial jeeping use has been permitted since the early 1990’s and serves as the name indicates, as the main destination point due to Castle Peak high scenic values. No other routes within the vicinity offer this kind of scenic viewpoint. In 2011, the commercial ATV/UTV use was permitted. In 2006, a culvert was installed on this route to eliminate the increasing resource damage occurring in a boggy area. This is not an irreversible or irretrievable action and was done to mitigate resource damage and the proliferation of routes occurring around the mud holes. No other maintenance has occurred on the route since 1997, and the route continues to be used for passage by four wheel drive vehicles and ATV/UTV use.

Both the Poison Trail and Picture Ridge roads were cherry-stemmed to reflect current travel management, continuous public use, its affect on naturalness, and maintenance records. If the unit were to be designated as wilderness, the drainage structure could be considered reversible and temporary; however, the current motorized commercial and public use on this route would be eliminated.

## **1.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions**

### **1.4.1. Travel.**

Motorized and mechanized travel within the 4,020 acre Castle Peak Addition was “Limited” to Designated Routes. The only routes designated as open for motorized and mechanized travel within this unit are Poison Trail (#8511) and Picture Ridge (#8512). The adjacent 12,230 acres within the Castle Peak WSA is “closed” to all motorized and mechanized uses.

All other historic routes within this unit have been closed to motorized uses. There are administrative agreements in place with two permittees that allows for motorized access specific to the purpose of managing; livestock grazing permit and water rights. The authorizations allow travel on all routes shown as trails in the northwest portion of the “Addition”.

### **1.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

The Castle Peak Addition unit is located in an unit classified as VRM Class II in the GSRA 1984 Resource Management Plan. The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing characteristic landscape. The level of change in any of the basic landscape elements (line, form, color, texture) due to management activities should be low and not evident.

### **1.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

There are no streams or rivers that were found to be eligible within the Castle Peak Addition under the Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study conducted in 2007 in preparation for the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision.

### **1.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

Currently this unit offers excellent opportunities for activities such as hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, camping, wildlife viewing, sightseeing, and photography. The most popular recreation use is related to big game hunting.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 51% classified as primitive, 34% classified as middle country, and the remaining 15% classified as front country due to roads on adjacent private property (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

### **1.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing occurs on two allotments with three (3) permittees. Currently, there are 12 fencelines, 13 ponds and reservoirs, and 7 existing spring developments that exist within the unit.

### **1.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWs).**

The entire unit has been mapped as a retention zone. No rights-of-ways (ROW) exist within the Addition.

### **1.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

The unit contains no existing leases. A No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation is currently in place for the Castle Peak Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) for the protection of

non-motorized recreation opportunities. The Castle Peak Addition has been mapped as having “Medium Occurrence Potential”. Areas of “Occurrence Potential” are listed in the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision and their economic importance is analyzed. Development of any leases will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

#### **1.4.8. Minerals.**

The proposed Castle Peak Addition is not currently identified as having mineral potential.

#### **1.4.9. Water and Water Rights.**

The proposed Castle Peak Addition contains several springs and major perennial streams and their tributaries that include Norman Creek, Catamount Creek, Big Alkali Creek, and Alkali Creek. In addition, this unit contains the ephemeral Milk Creek and its tributaries. There are currently eight water rights associated with ditches, ponds, and springs on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

#### **1.4.10. Road Maintenance.**

There are two BLM maintained roads, #8500 (East Castle Peak aka Milk Creek Road) and #8511 (Poison Trail) that serve as the boundaries for the Castle Peak Addition and receive maintenance. There is one route #8512 (Picture Ridge) inside the wilderness proposal boundary that has had maintenance actions on the lower end of the route to address boggy conditions and avoid the creation of parallel routes.

Routes 8511 (for 1.0 miles) and 8512 (for 1.1 miles) have been prescribed as maintenance level 2. Level II objectives are to make the road passable by high clearance vehicles.

Maintenance level III management has been prescribed for the route # 8500 for 6.5 miles. Level III objectives are for roads that improvements (culverts, ditches, aggregate, etc.) have been made and the road is to be passable by passenger cars.

#### **1.5. Topographic Maps.**

Castle Peak 7.5 minute series topographic map.

### **Findings for the Castle Peak Addition**

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#### **1.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

The Castle Peak Addition contains wilderness characteristics on 3,900 acres. A boundary adjustment to omit Road #8512 - Picture Ridge Road, resulted in 120 acres not meeting the naturalness criteria. Due to implementation of Castle Peak Travel Management Plan in 1997, roads have been reclaimed or have re-vegetated naturally since the original inventories in the late 70's. Subsequently the unit has been found to contain wilderness characteristics.

**1.6.1. Size.**

The BLM lands are not 5,000 acres in size however they possess sufficient size to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics because they are contiguous with the BLM Castle Peak WSA managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics

**1.6.2. Naturalness.**

The Castle Peak Addition has retained a natural landscape. The naturalness of the “Addition” was enhanced when the Castle Peak TMP closed routes. Through implementation of the Castle Peak TMP many of the old roads naturally re-vegetated, which returned the unit to a more natural appearing condition. While there are authorized and permitted motorized uses occurring in the northwest portion of the unit related to valid existing rights and grandfather uses, those uses are limited, not permanent, and do not detract from the unit’s overall naturalness. Outside of the livestock developments (reservoirs, ditches, and fencelines), the unit has experienced little additional evidence of significant human activity that is substantially noticeable.

One road (#8512) was omitted from the eastern boundary due to the ongoing maintenance and management and its effect on naturalness. While the map shows an isolated polygon created from the road entering into the unit, the route ends at the WSA boundary that also contains wilderness characteristics. Therefore acreage has not been eliminated between these two roads. No changes to WSA boundaries are being analyzed or proposed as part of this assessment. While these roads are surrounded by units considered to be natural, they do not detract from the overall naturalness of the unit due to the topography and vegetative screening.

**1.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

The “Additions” opportunities for solitude can be considered outstanding within the unit alone and in combination with the adjacent WSA lands. Due to the units varied terrain, vegetation, and non-motorized and non-mechanized access, visitors are not likely to encounter many others once inside the unit. The unit’s pockets of dense vegetation and isolated drainages provide excellent opportunities for visitors to find isolation and seclusion. Outside of hunting season, encounters with other groups are low and generally fall into a primitive or backcountry classification (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

**1.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. The diverse topography and vegetation consisting of rolling meadows, aspen stands, and dense forests have helped to maintain remoteness and offer the visitor challenging and primitive recreation experiences such as but limited to; hiking, horseback riding, and hunting. The unit has no recreational infrastructure or developments within the unit and signs and/or visitor controls are infrequent. RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote units more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation, exists. Considering the mapped physical RSC and the activity opportunities in both the Addition and within the adjacent Castle Peak WSA, those opportunities are exceptional.

**1.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Castle Peak Addition contains supplemental values that are described below.

**1.7.1. Cultural.**

There is a high potential for significant concentration of cultural sites associated with historic and prehistoric human use and occupation.

**1.7.2. Wildlife.**

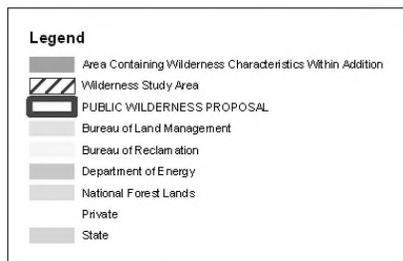
The Castle Peak “Addition” offers wildlife habitat for populations of elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, raptors, coyote, porcupine, squirrels, chipmunks and a variety of small birds and other small animals.

The Castle Peak “Addition” also encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall.

The unit is part of CRVFO’s largest intact sage grouse habitats. The relatively open sagebrush flats and rolling sagebrush hills are included within Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) mapped greater sage grouse overall range and greater sage grouse production areas.

Most of the Castle Peak “Addition” is within CPW mapped lynx potential habitat defined as those areas having the highest potential of lynx occurrences.

# Castle Peak Addition



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This project was developed through digital means and may be updated without notice.

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## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 2 - Deep Creek

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#### 2.1. Area Description.

Deep Creek drains from the Flat Tops to the Colorado River and is approximately 15 miles northeast of Glenwood Springs with its confluence at the Colorado River 3 miles north of Dotsero. Deep Creek starts at Deep Lake on the White River National Forest, where it drops into an extremely rugged and remote limestone canyon. The Deep Creek unit (20,850 acres) contains 16,430 acres on the White River National Forest and 4,420 acres of BLM lands. Elevation changes from 10,500 ft. at Deep Lake to 6,100 ft at the Colorado River. This assessment is for 4,420 acres on BLM public land only.

#### 2.2. Background.

Deep Creek has long been recognized for its rugged and remote scenic limestone canyon, unique geologic features and its biological diversity. Deep Creek's rugged limestone canyon has made this one of the most scenic places in Colorado. Both the BLM and the White River National Forest have managed the area for protection of its numerous unique and outstanding values. Deep Creek has been proposed to be designated for wilderness under numerous legislative proposals. Deep Creek is currently managed as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). The unit was found to be eligible under a joint interagency National Wild and Scenic River Study in 1996 and is currently under a suitability review for inclusion into the Wild and Scenic River system. The unit has a high concentration of caves, many of which are the state's most outstanding. The unit's remoteness and rugged terrain has resulted in limited and difficult access which has maintained its primitive and natural landscape.

In March of 1979, 4,800 acres of BLM lands in the Deep Creek unit was studied under the "initial inventory" process and was originally recommended for "intensive inventory". However, information obtained during the public comment period and verified by BLM stated that unit did not meet the minimum size criteria of 5,000. The unit was released from further Wilderness Review study and the second part (intensive inventory) of the Phase I- Inventory process. The "BLM Initial Wilderness Inventory Final, August 1979" stated the unit was released "due to the topographic setting within the unit, it appears not to be "clearly and obviously of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition and of a size suitable for wilderness management."

Concerns in the 1979 inventory were also raised regarding the unit's mineral potential and planned development of a limestone quarry just south of the unit. The BLM did not inventory or consider lands across administrative boundaries at that time. Adjacent lands on the White River National Forest were inventoried under their roadless process.

In 2002, the White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision prescribed the Deep Creek unit (defined by the canyon rims) for management under “1.5 Wild Rivers- Designated and Eligible.” This management prescription objective is for those identified lands and related waters “to protect and perpetuate eligible and designated wild river segments under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.”

## **2.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues.**

### **2.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.**

This assessment identified 4,420 acres of BLM lands in the Deep Creek unit.

### **2.3.2. Topography.**

Deep Creek plunges more than 4,400 feet in the 15 mile span from Deep Lake on the Flat Tops to its confluence with the Colorado River. The limestone canyon contains significant cave and karst systems resulting in one of the largest concentrations of caves in Colorado. The canyon’s rugged terrain and distinct geologic formations result in one of Colorado’s most scenic gorges.

### **2.3.3. Vegetation.**

Vegetation types within the unit are diverse from the uplands which include forests of aspen, spruce, subalpine fir and grassy meadows to the lower elevation benches containing pinyon-juniper woodland, sagebrush and scrub oak. Vegetation changes along the riparian corridor which contains cottonwood, douglas-fir and red osier dogwood communities.

### **2.3.4. Existing Issues.**

CRWCD held a conditional water right in the headwaters of Deep Creek, but this right was abandoned in 2011. While there are no active limestone claims, BLM has not formally withdrawn the unit from mineral entry. Increased recreation visitation and subsequent impacts are occurring along the creek on BLM lands adjacent to Coffee Pot Road. OHV encroachment has continued to occur into Jack Creek and in the northern portions of the uplands off of the Onion Ridge road accessed from an old trail at Lyons Gulch. Proposed future development and associated improvements along with an existing dozed route into Deep Creek Canyon, on adjacent private lands to the south have created disturbance into an otherwise intact and undisturbed canyon. The BLM, the White River National Forest, and the Colorado Army National Guard (COARNG) have agreements in place that allow the COARNG to train helicopter pilots under high altitude conditions on FS and BLM lands. The Deep Creek unit is within a COARNG training area and has some frequently used landing areas within the canyon corridor. This use is historic (occurred since 1985) and its impacts have been determined to be minimal, temporary, reversible, and would not preclude the unit from legislative designation.

## **2.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions.**

### **2.4.1. Travel.**

The Deep Creek ACEC (2,380 acres) is “Closed” to motorized travel. The remaining lands were designated as “Open” in the 1984 RMP. Most routes entering into the unit are from adjacent private lands and have no public access. Cross country travel has not been a problem in the unit as a whole due to its inaccessibility and steep terrain. However, some limited motorized travel has occurred into the Jack Creek area from the Onion Ridge Road that is accessed by the general

public from a route at Lyons Gulch. The Onion Ridge road is administratively open to the adjacent private land owner for access to their private property to the north of the unit.

The trail along Deep Creek has been managed as an extremely primitive trail in order to maintain the social and physical setting within the canyon. The trail is not maintained and ends approximately 2 miles up the canyon.

#### **2.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

The ACEC portion of the proposal unit was one of 4 areas in the Colorado River Valley Resource Area that was recognized for its outstanding scenic quality and was subsequently designated as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I in the 1984 RMP. The objective of VRM Class I is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. VRM Class I provides for natural ecological changes; and may allow very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

The remainder of the unit was designated as VRM Class II. The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing characteristic landscape. The level of change in any of the basic landscape elements (line, form, color, texture) due to management activities should be low and not evident.

#### **2.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

A joint Forest Service and BLM eligibility study was done for Deep Creek in 1995. Deep Creek was found to meet the necessary free flowing criteria and was found eligible for its numerous Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs). The ORVs identified in the study unit were scenic, recreational, geologic, wildlife, cultural and several supplemental values. In accordance with study procedures, the creek was divided into four (4) segments and given potential classifications. Segment 1 from Deep Lake outlet to ¼ mile downstream on the National Forest land was classified as “recreational”. Segment 2 from segment 1 (approx. 6,130 acres of National Forest land, and 2,480 acres of BLM land and 40 acres of private) to the Deep Creek diversion, approximately 13 ¼ miles was classified as “wild”. Segment 3 from segment 2 to the BLM private land boundary, approximately 1 mile, (450 acres of BLM land) was classified as recreational. Segment 4 from segment 3 to the Colorado River confluence, approximately one (1) mile (approximately 30 acres of BLM land and 110 acres of private land) was classified as “recreational”.

As part of this RMP revision, a suitability study will be conducted for all eligible streams within the Glenwood Springs Field Office. The White River National Forest 2002 Land and Resource Management Plan Revision prescribed the Deep Creek unit (defined by the canyon rims) for management under “1.5 Wild Rivers- Designated and Eligible.” This management prescription is managed to protect and perpetuate eligible and designated wild river segments under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

#### **2.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

Currently this unit offers excellent opportunities for non-motorized and non-mechanized activities such as hiking, fishing, hunting, caving, wildlife viewing, photography, and educational values relating to ecosystem and geology.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the

physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 17% classified as primitive, 37% classified as middle country, and the remaining 46% classified as front country due to roads on adjacent private properties to the north and south of the Canyon (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

#### **2.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing occurs on three allotments with two (2) permittees. Two (2) fence lines and seven (7) reservoirs exist within the unit. While portions of the canyon are mapped within the allotment boundaries, no livestock grazing occurs within the canyon itself due to the steep topography.

#### **2.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWs).**

The entire unit has been mapped as a retention zone. A record search through LR2000 shows no ROWs within the boundaries.

#### **2.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

Open to oil and gas leasing, not currently leased, the ACEC portion has an NSO stipulation from the 1991 SEIS to protect surface and cave resources. The remaining portion of the unit has no special stipulations in place. The Deep Creek Unit has been mapped as having a “Low Occurrence Potential”.

#### **2.4.8. Minerals.**

The unit was recommended to be withdrawn to mineral entry in 1984 RMP. A withdrawal has not occurred to date. According to the United States Geological Survey and the Colorado Geological Survey, there is a location south of Deep Creek within Section 22 that has been identified as a past producer of Gypsum. In addition, limestone claims were forfeited as late as June of 2002. ” Mineral actions are listed in the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision and their economic importance is analyzed. Development of any minerals will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

#### **2.4.9. Water and Water Rights.**

Flowing through the Deep Creek unit is the perennial Deep Creek and its many ephemeral tributaries including Jack Creek along with several springs. There are three existing water rights on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources in the Deep Creek unit that include the South Fork Spring in Section 14, the Deep Creek Ditch in Section 25, and the Hayes Ditch in Section 26.

#### **2.4.10. Road Maintenance.**

There are no roads within the unit receiving ongoing maintenance. However, two (2) routes within the northern portion of the unit have received authorized intermittent maintenance and continuous use in order to maintain associated water developments for grazing.

### **2.5. Topographic Maps.**

Dotsero and Broken Rib Creek 7.5 minute series topographic maps.

## Findings for Deep Creek

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### **2.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

The entire 4,420 acres within Deep Creek contains wilderness characteristics. Findings differ from the original inventories done in 1979 as the original inventories dropped this unit because the study process did not consider adjacent Forest Service lands therefore it did not meet the minimum size criteria of 5,000 acres.”

#### **2.6.1. Size.**

The Deep Creek unit is a roadless island of public lands. Due to topography and the management of the adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands it is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.

#### **2.6.2. Naturalness.**

The Deep Creek unit has retained a natural landscape within the unit as a whole. Deep Creek’s steep and rugged topography and difficult access have prevented significant human activity from occurring within the unit. While several man-made intrusions exist in the uplands within the northern portion of the unit, these disturbances do not dominate the unit or detract from the unit’s overall natural appearance. Specifically, two routes coming off the private property creating a loop in the northern portion of the unit are authorized for use to maintain associate permitted grazing activities and developments. These routes have received intermittent maintenance in order to get equipment down to maintain four (4) water developments (small reservoirs). Additional three (3) small scale reservoirs exist along the southern boundary adjacent to the Coffee Pot Road. While these manmade intrusions exist, they are reversible and do not detract from the naturalness of the unit.

#### **2.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

The Deep Creek unit offers outstanding opportunities for solitude within the unit. Due to the units steep terrain, huge vertical relief, and difficult access, visitors traveling up into the canyon are not likely to encounter many others beyond ½ + mile of entry. In addition to the rugged canyon, the unit offers numerous side drainages, adjacent Forest Service Lands managed for primitive types of recreation, and remote uplands where one could find isolation and be secluded.

#### **2.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape and the activities allowed are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. With the steep topography and difficult and limited access into the canyon and available adjacent Forest Service lands, visitors are offered many challenging and outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation such as hiking, fishing, caving, and sightseeing. Once in the unit, there is no supporting recreational infrastructure or developments and signs and/or visitor controls are minimal.

RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote units more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined

types of recreation exist. While portions of the unit were mapped as middle and front country, the physical qualities remoteness mapping does not take into consideration the topographic vertical relief of the canyon. While portions of the canyon are within ½ mile of roads, the canyon itself is physically separated from those roads and the landscape reflects truly a more primitive classification (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix in Appendix AA*).

## **2.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Deep Creek unit contains supplemental values that are listed below.

### **2.7.1. Cultural.**

There is a high potential for significant concentration of cultural sites associated with historic and prehistoric human use and occupation.

### **2.7.2. Wildlife.**

The unit has diverse wildlife habitat in excellent condition including riparian, gambel oak/mountain brush, spruce fir forest, juniper-pinyon woodland, sagebrush, and cliff and cave habitat types. The difficult access provides seclusion for animals. Populations of elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, raptors, beaver, weasel, coyote, porcupine, squirrels, chipmunks, grouse and a variety of small birds and other small animals are found in the unit.

The Deep Creek unit encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall.

The unit takes in CPW mapped mule deer critical winter range created by combining deer data analysis units (DAUs), mule deer winter concentration areas, and "high density" mule deer severe winter range. CPW mapped elk winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range can be found in the Deep Creek unit. The rocky, rugged canyon terrain is ideal for bighorn sheep. The lower canyon's rocky slopes are part of CPW mapped bighorn sheep winter range and winter concentration areas.

The south side of the unit is within CPW mapped lynx potential habitat defined as those areas having the highest potential of lynx occurrences.

There has been documentation of cave use by bats in Deep Creek canyon. During the summer, the caves are likely used as day roosts, night roosts, and maternity roosts. In the winter, the caves are likely used as hibernacula. More monitoring is occurring in cooperation with CPW to validate these assumptions.

The cliffs and rock outcrops are part of CPW mapped Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) nesting areas that are defined as areas of good nesting sites with one or more active or inactive nest locations.

**2.7.3. Scenery.**

Deep Creek contains outstanding landforms, vegetation, and water features that give this unit its high scenic quality. A portion of this unit (ACEC portion) was designated as Visual Resource Management Class I in the 1984 RMP. This is one of only four areas within the Glenwood Springs Resource Area that were determined to contain Scenic Quality A and managed as VRM Class I. The canyon's vertical relief and dramatic displays of prominent cliffs, rocky outcrops, prominent geologic features contrasting with the diverse vegetation and the stream makes this one of the most scenic places in Colorado.

**2.7.4. Geological.**

The unit is within a significant karst area, and the canyon is carved through several sedimentary formations of Cambrian to Pennsylvanian age. The unit contains several monoclines, faults and glacial, volcanic, erosional and karst features which exhibit the geologic processes which formed the unit's landscape. Speleogenesis is largely controlled by faults and fractures, and water found in some of the caves indicates that formation process is active. Many caves are candidates for listing as significant caves under the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988. The unit provides outstanding opportunities for educational and scientific study related to its geologic values.

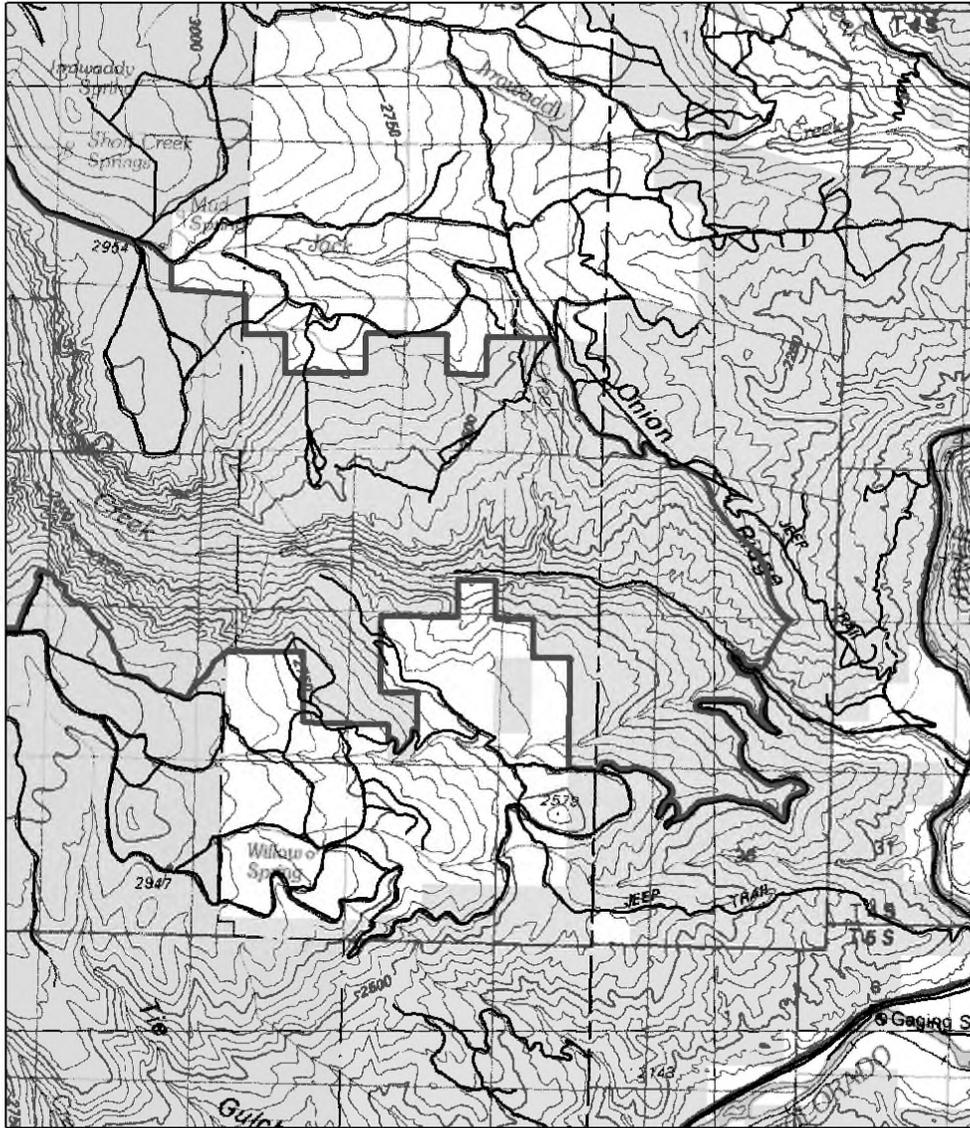
**2.7.5. Ecological.**

This unit contains a large portion of the Deep Creek Potential Conservation Area (PCA), proposed by the CNHP for its significant biodiversity. CNHP has identified Deep Creek as containing one of the most pristine, high quality, exemplary occurrences of significant riparian communities in the State of Colorado. Within the boundaries are also several small occurrences of the BLM sensitive plant, Harrington's penstemon.

**2.7.6. Education and Scientific Study.**

The unit's intact ecosystem condition and biodiversity and geologic values offer excellent opportunities for outdoor education and scientific study.

# Deep Creek



**Legend**

- PUBLIC WILDERNESS PROPOSAL
- Area Containing Wilderness Characteristics
- Oil and Gas Leases
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Department of Energy
- National Forest Lands
- Private
- State



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This project was developed through digital means and may be updated without notice.

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## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 3 - Flat Tops Addition/Hack Lake

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#### 3.1. Area Description.

The Flat Tops Addition is located in Garfield County and is approximately 22 miles northeast of Glenwood Springs, Colorado. This public wilderness proposal contains 12,925 acres of White River National Forest and 3,550 acres of BLM lands. This assessment is for BLM lands only (3,545 acres outside of the WSA). The unit is bordered on the north and west by the White River National Forest, which includes the Flat Tops Wilderness, and includes BLM lands in the Flat Tops Wilderness Addition/Hack Lake WSA (4 acres) and the Hack Lake SRMA (3,100 acres). For the purposes of this assessment and inventory, the public wilderness proposal area will be referred to as the Hack Lake unit.

#### 3.2. Background.

Hack Lake has been used as an access to the Flat Tops Wilderness area. The historic “Ute and W. Mountain” trail were originally used by the Ute Indians until the late 1800’s for access to Meeker over the Flat Tops, which later became a National Forest system trail. The Ute and W. Mountain trail leaves Sweetwater Lake and accesses the base of W. Mountain thru diverse vegetation zones as it climbs in elevation to Hack Lake. The unit has long been recognized for its semi-primitive recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, panoramic views of distant mountain ranges and high scenic quality of the steep, rugged cliffs and rocky outcrops of the adjacent Flat Tops Wilderness Area.

The Hack Lake Unit was studied under section 202 of FLPMA and documented under BLM’s Initial Wilderness Inventory Final report in August of 1979. The unit consisted of 5,300 acres and was determined to meet the initial inventory criteria and was then analyzed under the second part of the inventory phase “Intensive Inventory”. In the intensive inventory phase, it was determined that 3,360 acres would be proposed for inclusion in the Wilderness Study Area. However, later in the “study process” (Glenwood Springs Resource Management Plan (RMP), Final EIS, June 15, 1983), 3,350 acres were found not suitable because it was “physically isolated from the existing wilderness.” The report stated that managing the remainder of the unit could conflict with future management on adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands and would “create an island of non-wilderness national forest lands between the WSA and existing wilderness.” Subsequently, ten (10) acres were recommended for wilderness as an addition to the existing Flat Tops Wilderness. The ten (10) acres are located above the rim, are a logical extension of the Flat Tops Wilderness and were recommended as suitable. Upon designation, administration of the Hack Lake WSA was recommended for transfer to the U.S. Forest Service. These ten acres have been reviewed through GIS and the actual acreage found through GIS accuracy is four acres, although this acreage may change to provide for on the ground accuracy and making sure boundaries match existing BLM public lands or special designation boundaries. The BLM

currently does not have the ability to change WSA boundaries, but must use its most current technology and information to determine what those boundaries are.

In 2002, the ‘White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision’, prescribed management direction on adjacent lands as “1.2 Recommended Wilderness” and “5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range”. There are no longer management conflicts with adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands, nor would there be “islands” of non-wilderness lands.

### **3.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues**

#### **3.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.**

This assessment identified 3,550 acres of BLM public lands.

#### **3.3.2. Topography.**

The Hack Lake unit varies in elevation from 7,500’ to over 10,000’ at the top of W. Mountain. The unit is accessed through two main routes, the “Ute / W. Mountain Trail” and the upper “Hack Lake/Horse Lake” trail via Sheep Creek Road. Both of these routes leave the Sweetwater valley and gain elevation through rough and rocky, steep, west facing slopes. The unit’s topography is diverse with terraced slopes, open parks, stream drainages, rolling hills, and steep terrain. The topography changes at the bench at Hack Lake, where cliffs of “W. Mountain” within the Flat Tops Wilderness tower overhead at 11,000 ft.

#### **3.3.3. Vegetation.**

The Hack Lake unit contains diverse vegetation which includes sagebrush, juniper-pinyon pine in the lower elevations and oakbrush, mountain brush, aspen, dense spruce-fir and lodgepole pine in the upper elevations.

#### **3.3.4. Existing Issues.**

Since 1984, the unit has been managed to protect the unit’s semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation values and to minimize impacts of all land uses. Current information shows no threats to the unit’s wilderness characteristics from current or projected proposed land uses. While the unit is experiencing some beetle infestations in spruce fir forests, there is no known potential for commercial logging in the unit. A fuels treatment project occurred by the Upper Colorado River Interagency Fire Center in the 2008/2009 seasons. No impacts occurred from the fuels treatment to wilderness characteristics.

### **3.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions**

#### **3.4.1. Travel.**

The Hack Lake SRMA portion (3,100 acres) currently is “Closed” to all motorized travel. The additional 450 acres of lands within the wilderness proposal area was left as “Open” in the 1984 RMP to motorized and mechanized uses. While these lands were designated as open in 1984, cross country travel has not been an issue to date as these polygons of public lands are in effect inaccessible due to steep terrain or dense vegetation.

#### **3.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

The entire Hack Lake unit was designated as VRM Class II in the 1984 RMP.

### **3.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

Hack Creek was studied for eligibility in 2007 as part of this land use planning process for its potential “Historic” Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV) relating to the Ute Trail. A suitability determination will be done as part of this planning process.

### **3.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

The unit has long been managed for public land users seeking to find solitude within primitive settings while participating in the following unconfined types of non-motorized activities: hunting, horseback riding, fishing, photography, backpacking, hiking, and camping.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 41% classified as primitive, 34% classified as middle country, and the remaining 25% classified as front country (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

### **3.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing occurs within two allotments with three permittees. Four (4) fence lines and two (2) ponds/reservoirs exist within the unit.

### **3.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWS).**

The entire unit has been mapped as a retention zone. A record search through LR2000 shows one ROW for a water facility for an adjacent private ranch.

### **3.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

Open to oil and gas leasing, but not currently leased, the SRMA portion has an NSO stipulated on it from the 1999 SEIS to protect its recreation values (3,100 acres). The remaining portion of the unit has no special stipulations in place. The Hack Lake unit has been mapped as having “Low Occurrence Potential”.

### **3.4.8. Minerals.**

The proposed Flat Tops Addition is not currently identified as having mineral potential.

### **3.4.9. Water and Water Rights.**

The Flat Tops Addition contains several springs and major perennial streams and their tributaries that include Hack Creek, Horse Creek, and the West Fork of Sheep Creek. In addition, this unit contains Hack Lake and Horse Lake along with a few unnamed lakes. There are three existing water rights on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources within the Flat Tops Addition that include the Lower White One Spring in Section 2, the Kinser Spring in Section 11, and the Sawmill Spring Number 1 in Section 6 (R86W).

### **3.4.10. Road Maintenance.**

There are no numbered system roads within the unit receiving ongoing maintenance.

## **3.5. Topographic Maps.**

Sweetwater Lake and Sugarloaf Mountain 7.5 minute series topographic maps.

## **Findings for the Flat Tops Addition/Hack Lake**

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### **3.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

The Flat Tops Addition/Hack Lake contains wilderness characteristics within the 3,550 acres. Findings are the same as the original inventories. BLM has been actively managing the unit to retain the primitive physical qualities of the unit since the 1980's. There are no longer management conflicts with adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands, nor would there be "islands" of non-wilderness lands on the USFS. In 2002, the "White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision", prescribed management direction on adjacent lands as "1.2 Recommended Wilderness" and "5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range".

#### **3.6.1. Size.**

The BLM lands are not 5,000 acres in size however they possess sufficient size to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics because they are contiguous with the Flat Tops Wilderness Area managed by the U.S. Forest Service for the protection of wilderness characteristics.

#### **3.6.2. Naturalness.**

The entire Hack Lake public wilderness proposal unit has retained a natural appearing landscape. Hack Lake has long been managed to retain its primitive physical and backcountry operational, non-motorized values. Subsequently, the unit has experienced limited evidence of significant human activity and related impacts are substantially unnoticeable. The unit contains two (2) trails, three (3) fencelines, one (1) reservoir, and one (1) historic cabin adjacent to Hack Lake. While these manmade features exist within the unit, they do not detract from the overall naturalness of the unit due to the topography and vegetative screening. There is occasionally limited evidence of hunting camps at Hack Lake and on lands adjacent to the upper Hack Lake trailhead. However, these disturbances are temporary and do not dominate the unit.

#### **3.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

The Hack Lake unit offers outstanding opportunities for solitude within the unit. Visitors' opportunities to find isolation and seclusion are outstanding due to the unit's size, terraced landscapes and varied vegetation. While there is one permitted commercial outfitter offering horseback riding tours and hunting services within the unit, this permittee is also permitted on adjacent national forest lands so that use is dispersed, user days are few, and group sizes are relatively small. The unit makes a great addition to the solitude visitors can find on adjacent White River National Forest lands and within the Flat Tops Wilderness.

#### **3.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape and the activities allowed are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. The diverse wildlife and vegetation, abundance of water, access to system trails within the unit, remoteness, and the large size of public lands available managed for primitive uses on both BLM and adjacent USFS lands

contribute to the outstanding opportunities for visitors to participate in numerous unconfined types of recreation activities such as hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, camping, fishing and hunting. Within the unit, there are no supporting recreational developments and signs and/or visitor controls are infrequent, mostly occurring at trail intersections and at Hack Lake.

RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote areas more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation exists (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix in Appendix AA*).

### **3.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

#### **The Flat Tops Addition/Hack Lake unit contains supplemental values.**

##### **3.7.1. Cultural.**

The historic Ute trail was originally used by the Ute Indians until the late 1800's for access to Meeker over the Flat Tops. The historic Hack Lake cabin still stands today, in a meadow above the lake. The BLM has three (3) cultural resources documented within this unit. Two of the sites are eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

##### **3.7.2. Wildlife.**

The Flats Tops Addition/Hack Lake unit has diverse wildlife habitat in excellent condition including riparian, gambel oak/mountain brush, spruce fir forest, juniper-pinyon woodland, sagebrush, and cliff and cave habitat types.

The Flats Tops Addition/Hack Lake unit encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall. The unit takes in CPW mapped mule deer winter range. CPW mapped elk winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range can also be found in the Flats Tops Addition /Hack Lake unit.

The secluded, rugged terrain is ideal for bighorn sheep. The unit is part of CPW mapped bighorn sheep overall range.

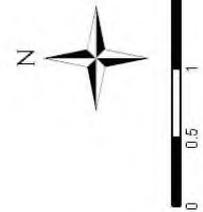
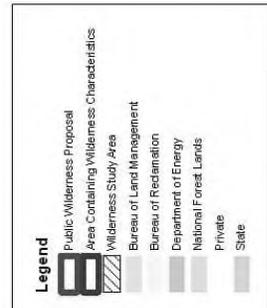
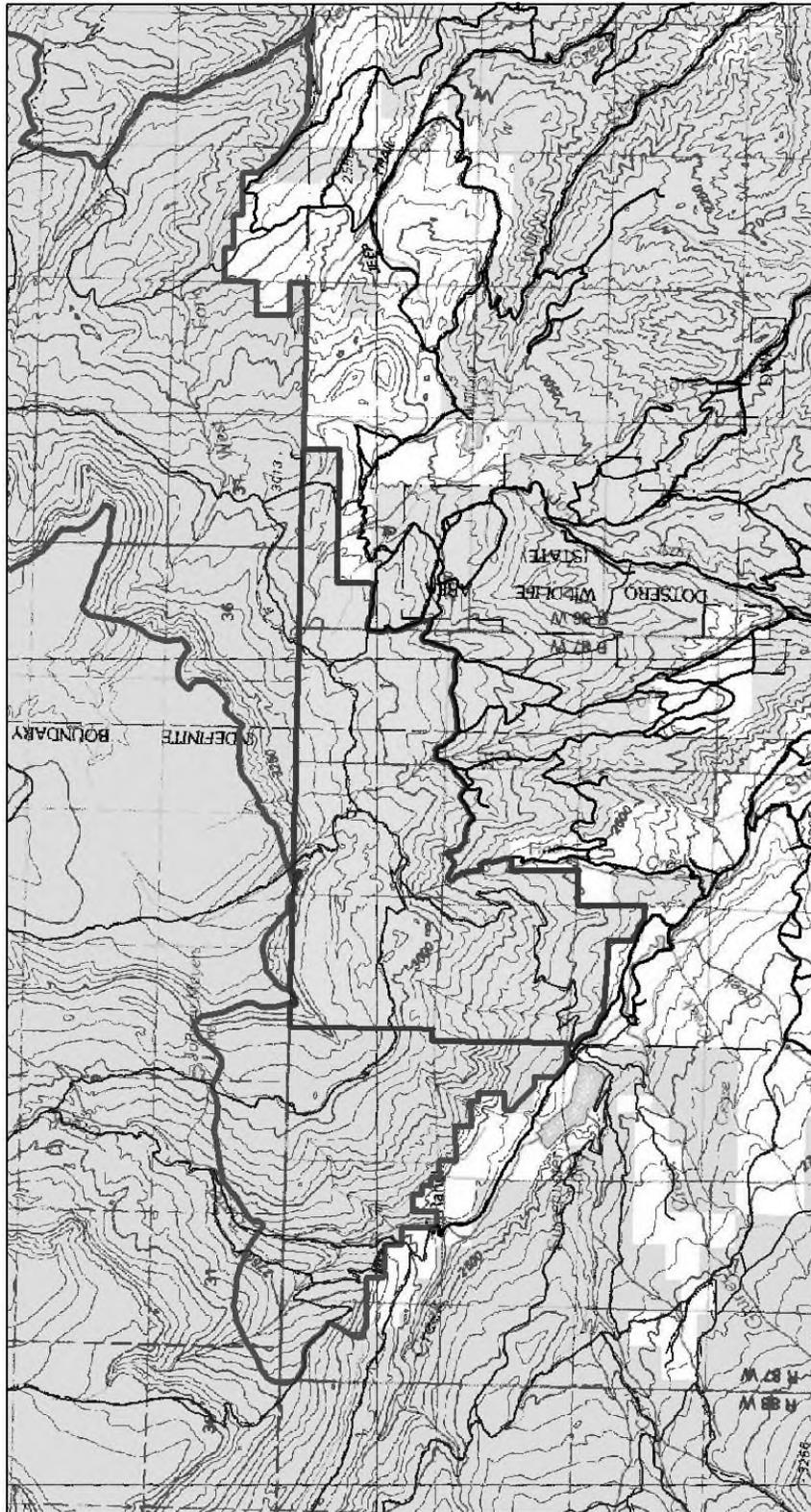
The northside of the unit is within CPW mapped lynx potential habitat defined as those areas having the highest potential of lynx occurrences.

The southwestern corner of the unit is within bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) winter range as defined by an area where bald eagles have been observed between November 15 and April 1.

##### **3.7.3. Scenery.**

The unit possesses excellent panoramic scenic views of surrounding mountain ranges including the adjacent Flat Tops, the Gore Range, the Sawatch Range and the Elk Range.

Flat Tops Addition/Hack Lake



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## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 4 – Grand Hogback

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#### 4.1. Area Description.

The Grand Hogback is located 5 miles north of Rifle, Colorado and is within Garfield County. The Grand Hogback public wilderness proposal encompasses 11,700 acres. This assessment will be for 11,360 acres of BLM public lands and will not include the 180 acres of CPW lands or 170 of Bureau of Reclamation lands. The unit is bounded by Colorado State Highway 13 on the west and County Road 252 to the east. The boundary of the unit is a combination of roads, private property and landscape features. This unit contains the Rifle Arch, which is visited by Rifle residents and regional visitors alike. The Rifle Arch trail is heavily used as the unit's southwest aspect is free of snow early and late which offers residents a close to home recreational opportunity.

Much of the unit is inaccessible to the public due to private lands surrounding most of the unit. Current "managed" public access is limited to a few areas such as Estes Gulch, the Rifle Arch trailhead on the western side, and the State Wildlife Area on the southeastern corner.

#### 4. 2. Background.

This unit was part of the BLM's Initial Wilderness Inventory process in 1979 and was later part of the intensive wilderness inventory process in 1980. The original unit contained 11,700 acres after boundary adjustments were made during the intensive inventory process. Then 9,000 acres were intensively inventoried of which 8,550 acres of roadless and primarily natural acres were identified. Following the intensive inventory field work, the unit was not proposed as a WSA and was released from any additional wilderness review and management constraints (*BLM, Intensive Wilderness Inventory, Final Wilderness Study Areas, November 1980*). The unit's release from further study was based on a determination that "Outstanding opportunities for solitude and or primitive types and unconfined recreation are not offered in this unit." The recommendation was based on "a combination of small size, narrow configuration and rugged terrain limiting recreational opportunities."

#### 4.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues

##### 4.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.

The Grand Hogback unit contains 11,360 of BLM public lands, 180 acres of Colorado Parks and Wildlife Lands and 170 acres of Bureau of Reclamation lands. This assessment will only addresses the 11,360 acres on BLM lands.

##### 4.3.2. Topography.

The Grand Hogback is an extensive single, jagged ridgeline running approximately eight (8) to nine (9) miles long and approximately two (2) miles wide. The Grand Hogback unit's highest

elevation is 9,196 feet. The unit has striking displays of flatirons, dipping fins, and ridges coming off the dominate monocline. The Grand Hogback contains steep cliffs, sandstone outcroppings and deep, incised ravines that fall off the dominate ridgeline to the southwest and northeast.

#### **4.3.3. Vegetation.**

Vegetation types include scrub oak, pinyon-juniper woodland and a small amount of aspen in the northern part of the unit.

#### **4.3.4. Existing Issues.**

The Grand Hogback lies along the eastern boundary of the Piceance Basin and has been essentially split in half and mapped as medium and high potential for oil and gas resources. There are currently 6 active gas leases within the unit which totals approximately 2,240 acres. None of these leases have shown any active drilling, and there are no wells that have previously been drilled within the unit. No applications for permit to drill (APD) have been filed on these leases and the leases have expiration dates ranging from 2012 to 2018. While no impacts to the units wilderness characteristics have occurred to date, wilderness characteristics would likely be lost in the leased portions of the unit if they were developed. This assessment was researched in November, 2012.

While much of the unit has NSO stipulations in place for steep slopes and visual resources, lease holders have valid existing rights to develop their lease and obtain their minerals. If the leases expire, additional lease stipulations could be attached to a new or renewed lease that may protect some characteristics while still allowing for the lease holder to recover their gas. However, it can be expected that if the unit continues to be leased and experiences any development, protecting the unit's wilderness characteristics would not be feasible on large portions of the unit. The only way wilderness characteristics could be preserved in this unit is if all or most of the leases are not developed under current leasing stipulations and when the existing leases expire, those leases would be made unavailable for renewal or sale or covered in whole by NSO stipulations.

Under the 1984 RMP Record of Decision (ROD) revised in 1988, decisions were made for this unit and it was included and mapped as part of a larger area known as the Hogback Coal Field (28,529 acres) that was designated as "acceptable for further consideration for coal leasing." Old, historic coal mine features still exist today in the Estes Gulch area in the very southern part of the unit.

### **4.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions.**

#### **4.4.1. Travel.**

Travel in this unit was designated "Open" in the 1984 RMP. However, motorized travel is extremely limited in the unit due to very limited public access and the steep and rugged terrain. Currently the only motorized travel occurring is related to permitted uses or where Rights of Ways have been obtained to access adjacent private lands or in holdings. While some old roads show on the map within the unit and are noticeable in the landscape, they have not been maintained, are not accessible to the general public, are not routinely used, and have, for the most part, naturally reclaimed themselves.

#### **4.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

Most of the Grand Hogback unit is VRM Class II with some isolated pockets of VRM Class IV along the southern boundary. The unit's VRM Classes were designated in the 1984 Glenwood Springs RMP. The objective of VRM Class II is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. Class II provides for natural ecological changes and may allow very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

The objective of Class IV is to provide for management activities which require major modifications of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements as described in BLM's Best Management Practices (BMP's).

#### **4.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

There are no designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in or adjacent to the unit nor are there any eligible or suitable streams or rivers.

#### **4.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

Currently, this unit offers excellent opportunities for activities such as hiking, climbing, hunting, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and photography.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 29% classified as primitive, 27% classified as middle country, 23% classified as front country, and 21% classified as rural due to roads on adjacent private property (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

#### **4.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing occurs on ten allotments with ten permittees. Currently there are five livestock reservoirs within the boundary.

#### **4.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWs).**

The Grand Hogback Unit has been mapped as a retention zone with a small portion adjacent to state lands as a Cooperative Management zone. Record search through LR2000 shows there are currently 14 ROW's that are either directly adjacent to or within the boundaries. There are 12 ROW's on record that would need additional verification on the ground to ensure any necessary boundary adjustments would occur if the unit was designated. There are two (2) ROW's within the boundaries. Small boundary adjustments need to be made for these incursions. One (1) adjustment would occur in T4S, R94W, Sec.11, where the boundary was mapped directly adjacent to the road and communication tower sites currently exist within the mapped unit. The other adjustments would occur in T4S, R94W, Sec. 36 where a spring and pipeline exist. Current ROW's include uses that involve; several Qwest Tel, Rifle Gap, Colorado Dept. of Transportation, DOE, several communication sites, and a private spring and pipeline.

#### **4.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

The Grand Hogback lies along the eastern boundary of the Piceance Basin and has been essentially split in half and mapped as medium and high occurrence potential areas. There are currently 6 active oil and gas leases within the boundaries which totals approximately 2,240 acres. None of these leases show any active drilling or wells that have been previously drilled. No APD's have been filed on these leases and have expiration dates ranging from 2012 to 2018. This assessment and inventory was researched in November, 2012.

Several stipulations are attached to most of the leases within the unit for steep slopes, erosive soils and soils greater than 30%, and for VRM Class II values. While these stipulations were designed to protect these values, development may still occur if the operator can avoid these values or "demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts" (*GSRA, Oil and Gas Leasing and Development, ROD, RMP Amendment, March 1999, pg.8*), through site specific assessment and mitigation or special design measures and demonstrated successes under similar conditions. The only way wilderness characteristics could be preserved in this unit is if all or most of the leases are not developed under current leasing stipulations and when the existing leases expire, those leases would be made unavailable for renewal or sale or covered in whole by NSO stipulations.

#### **4.4.8. Minerals.**

According to the United States Geological Survey and the Colorado Geological Survey, two (2) locations within the Grand Hogback unit are identified as past producers of coal. One is named Ted Estes and is within Section 3 and the other is named North Canon and is within Section 12 (both are within T5S R93W).

#### **4.4.9. Water Rights.**

Within the Grand Hogback unit are numerous springs and unnamed ephemeral drainages. There are approximately 30 existing water rights for wells, springs, and ditches within the Grand Hogback unit on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

#### **4.4.10. Road Maintenance.**

There are no BLM records showing maintenance of any routes within this unit.

#### **4.5. Topographic Maps.**

Horse Mountain, Rio Blanco and Rifle minute series topographic map.

### **Findings for the Grand Hogback**

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#### **4.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

The Grand Hogback contains wilderness characteristics on the entire 11,360 acres. The findings today have not changed much from the findings in 1979 on 9,000 acres that were intensively inventoried of which 8,550 acres were identified as being roadless and primarily natural. The unit's steep and rugged topography and limited public access has maintained wilderness

characteristics throughout most of this unit. The conclusion of the 1980 report however, is not the same today in that this unit includes additional contiguous acreage to the north and the south. In addition, the unit has been determined to provide for outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities within some portions of the unit.

#### **4.6.1. Size.**

The Grand Hogback is a roadless area with over 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands resulting in sufficient size to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics.

#### **4.6.2. Naturalness.**

The Grand Hogback proposal unit has retained a natural appearing landscape within the unit. The unit's steep and rugged topography and limited access points has preserved this unit's naturalness.

While this assessment acknowledges the 6 existing leases and associated valid existing rights that occur within the proposal unit, those leases have not yet been developed and therefore this assessment is reflecting the naturalness present at the time of the research done in November, 2012. While a couple of old non-maintained routes exist within the unit and a few imprints of man, those imprints are negligible and the overall landscape has retained its physical undisturbed natural setting.

#### **4.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

Some areas within the Grand Hogback offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. The unit's steep topography giving way to numerous ridgelines and drainages offers visitors a place to find isolation and seclusion away from sights and sounds and obtain solitude. Due to its proximity to the town of Rifle and to its accessibility year round, the highest amount of visitation occurs from hikers on public lands adjacent to and on the Rifle Arch trail in the southwestern part of the unit. However, visitors are still able to obtain seclusion in this unit away from the trail, and can expect to see fewer than 3 groups per day, with little evidence of use observed and sounds of people rare, due to the diverse topography and vegetation. While no visitor survey has been completed professional observations have indicated that visitation in the unit is infrequent, and social qualities within the unit would be considered as being classified as primitive. Most visitations taking place in the unit occurs during the big game hunting seasons.

#### **4.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape and the activities allowed are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. The unit has been managed over the years predominately for non-motorized types of recreation due to its limited public access and rugged topography. The diverse topography, geologic formations along with the wildlife, vegetation, and remoteness is within an arid and lower elevation environment. Therefore, the unit receives less snow allowing for longer periods of accessibility, which provides outstanding opportunities for visitors who wish to participate in numerous primitive and unconfined types of recreation activities such as, climbing, hiking, wildlife viewing, and hunting within localized portions of the unit. Within the unit, there are no supporting recreational developments outside of the Rifle Arch area, and signs and/or visitor controls are absent.

RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote areas more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined

types of recreation exist (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

#### **4.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Grand Hogback contains supplemental values that are listed below.

##### **4.7.1. Cultural.**

BLM cultural data base shows 12 cultural resources, 8 sites that are eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

##### **4.7.2. Wildlife.**

The Grand Hogback unit works in conjunction with Colorado Parks and Wildlife lands to provide year round habitat for a variety of wildlife species. The Grand Hogback unit has diverse wildlife habitat in good condition including riparian, gambel oak/mountain brush, spruce fir forest, juniper-pinyon woodland, and sagebrush.

The Grand Hogback unit also encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall.

The eastern part of the unit takes in CPW mapped mule deer critical winter range created by combining deer DAUs, mule deer winter concentration areas, and "high density" mule deer severe winter range. CPW mapped elk winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range can be found as well in the Grand Hogback unit. At one time, the CPW had proposed reintroduction of bighorn sheep in the unit.

The West Rifle Creek side and the northern portion of the unit is within bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*): a) winter range as defined by an area where bald eagles have been observed between November 15 and April 1, and b) bald eagle foraging areas as defined as areas frequented by wintering bald eagles between November 15 and March 15.

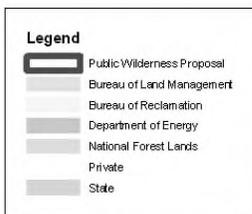
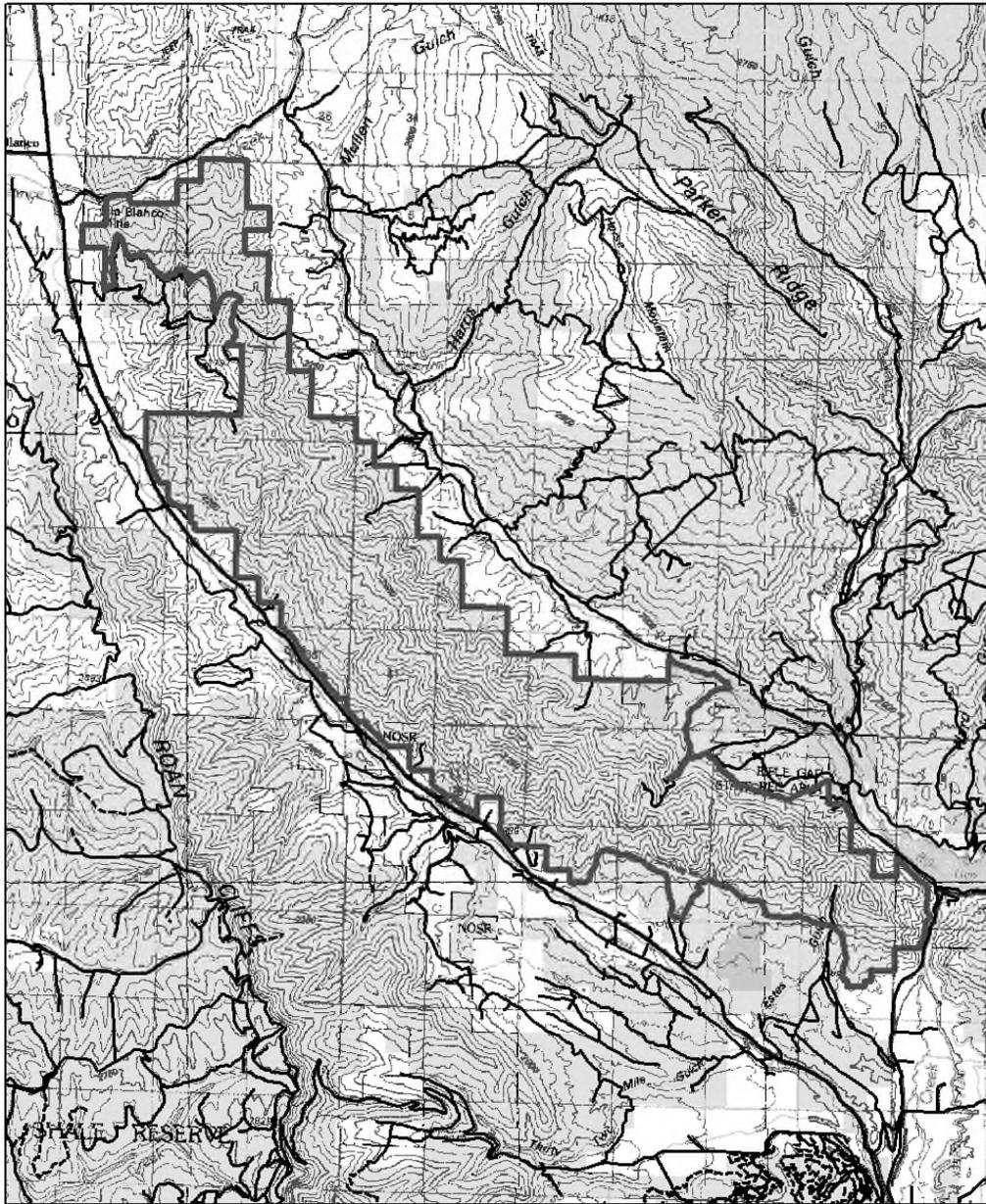
##### **4.7.3. Scenery.**

Most of the unit was classified as VRM Class II. The unique and colorful landforms were characteristics identified as deserving protection. The unit is also within foreground viewing distance to travelers on State Highway 13 and the sensitivity to changes within the landscape is high.

##### **4.7.4. Geological.**

This unit represents the largest uninterrupted portions of BLM land on the "Grand Hogback". The Grand Hogback represents one of the longest geologic structures in Colorado that spans approximately 80 miles from the town of Meeker in the north to the town of Redstone in the south.

# Grand Hogback



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## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 5 - Pisgah Mountain

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#### 5.1. Area Description.

The Pisgah Mountain unit is located in Eagle County, approximately 14 miles northeast of Eagle, Colorado, 3 miles southwest of McCoy and four miles west of Bond. The Pisgah Mountain public wilderness proposal encompasses 15,480 acres of BLM public lands and 200 acres on State lands. The unit's northern boundary is the Colorado River. Pisgah Mountain unit lies within the northeastern part of a larger travel management area known as Castle Peak. The unit's vegetation and rolling topography are diverse and offer the visitor wide unobstructed views from unique desert canyon country to upland environments. The red rock cliffs adjacent to the Colorado River accentuate the diverse landscape character. The unit is dominated by pinyon-juniper and some of the largest intact sagebrush communities left on public lands within the Colorado River Valley resource area. The unit is currently managed as critical wildlife habitat for numerous species.

#### 5.2. Background.

This unit was part of the BLM's Initial Wilderness Inventory process in 1979 and was later part of the intensive wilderness inventory process in 1980. The original unit contained 15,520 acres of federal land which is dominated by Pisgah Mountain adjacent to the Colorado River. Following the intensive inventory field work the unit was not proposed as a WSA and was released from any additional wilderness review and management constraints (*BLM, Intensive Wilderness Inventory, Final Wilderness Study Areas, November 1980*). The unit's release from further study was based on a determination that outstanding opportunities for solitude were severely restricted and not attainable in the Pisgah Mountain unit due to combination of the steep topography, sparse vegetation and narrow configuration.

In 1997, the Castle Peak TMP and RMP amendment was finalized. Pisgah Mountain travel decisions were made to enhance big game hunting opportunities by implementing travel designations with the overall objective of keeping big game habitat and cover areas more intact and to reduce motorized vehicle pressures that pushed big game onto adjacent private lands. A seasonal closure on one route (# 8535 "Stagecoach Route") was implemented to provide and enhance the physical and social settings that provide for a more primitive hunting experience.

#### 5.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues

##### 5.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.

The Pisgah Mountain unit is on both BLM public lands containing 15,480 acres and on State lands containing 200 acres. This assessment is only for the 15,480 acres on BLM public lands.

### **5.3.2. Topography.**

Pisgah Mountain rises approximately 2,000 feet from the Colorado River and is diverse topographically. The unit consists of scenic rugged canyons along its northern and eastern borders giving way to the Colorado River. The northwestern portion of the unit is dominated by red rock canyon country leading up to the peak itself at 8,600 feet. The southern portion of the unit is best characterized by more gentle, rolling, open sage hillsides.

### **5.3.3. Vegetation.**

Pinyon-juniper, scrub oak, sagebrush and grasslands dominate most of the unit. However, some Ponderosa pines, along with other riparian vegetation, can be found along the river. Aspen and Douglas-fir stands are present in pockets on some of the higher elevations.

### **5.3.4. Existing Issues.**

Current management issues within the unit include maintaining existing active sage grouse leks to ensure the integrity of the sagebrush communities and reducing pinyon-juniper encroachment. While the unit was designated as “Limited” where motorized and mechanized travel is limited to designated routes established in the 1997 Castle Peak TMP, continued off road travel occurs (mostly during hunting season) in some portions of the unit due to the open nature of the vegetation and gentle topography.

## **5.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions.**

### **5.4.1. Travel.**

All travel by motorized or mechanized vehicles, except snowmobiles operating over snow, is limited to designated routes year round on all public lands not otherwise closed. The entire unit is closed from December 1 to April 30 to all motorized vehicles including snowmobiles to limit impacts to wintering big game and erosive soils. The seasonal closure on the Stagecoach Route # 8535 was done to enhance non-motorized recreation opportunities particularly during the big game hunting seasons. The northern part of the unit was closed not only to provide for non-motorized recreation opportunities, but to reduce stress to big game and keep the big game on public lands longer, and to enhance harvest success to correlate with CPW’s management objectives. The unit has become popular for those seeking to hunt in a non-motorized setting. Access in that portion of the unit is by foot from the southern closure point or by boat from the Colorado River along the northern boundary.

### **5.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

The unit was classified as VRM Class II and VRM Class IV in the 1984 Glenwood Springs RMP. Most of the unit is VRM Class II with some isolated pockets of VRM Class IV along the southern boundary.

### **5.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

The Colorado River adjacent to the Pisgah Mountain Unit was found to meet the eligibility criteria for its fish, wildlife, and recreation values under a Wild and Scenic Rivers Study, March 2007, that was done as part of the CRVFO RMP land use planning process.

### **5.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

Currently, this unit offers excellent opportunities for primitive activities such as hunting, hiking, camping, photography, and horseback riding which occur predominately during the fall months.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 20% classified as primitive, 11% classified as backcountry, 32% classified as middle country. The remaining portion of the unit showed 12% classified as front country, and 25% classified as rural due to its proximity to Colorado River Road 301 and Eagle County Road 41 (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

#### **5.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing occurs on four allotments with three (3) permittees. There are 24 spring/ponds/reservoir developments and two (2) fencelines.

#### **5.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWs).**

The entire Pisgah Mountain Unit has been mapped as a retention zone. A record search through LR2000 shows no ROW's within the boundaries. However, there are numerous ROW's on record that show on the plats as being directly on or adjacent to the boundaries. There are seven (7) ROW's on record that would need additional verification on the ground to ensure any necessary boundary adjustments would occur if the unit was designated. Current ROW's include uses that involve Century Tel, Yampa Valley Electric, Fiber Optics, and the Railroad.

#### **5.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

Currently, no leasing has occurred; eastern portions of the unit have been mapped as having "Low Occurrence Potential" with the remaining area as having "Medium Occurrence Potential". "Occurrence Potential" is listed in the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision and their economic importance is analyzed. Development of any leases will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

#### **5.4.8. Minerals.**

All or portions of T02S R84W Sections 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 24 and all or portions of T02S R83W Sections 7, 8, 16, 17, and 18 have been designated as favorable for hosting uranium and/or vanadium deposits by National Uranium Resource Evaluation reports. The term favorable refers to areas that can be demonstrated as having favorable geologic characteristics or significant uranium mineralization using U.S. Department of Energy recognition criteria. Mineral favorability is listed in the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision and their economic importance is analyzed. Development of any minerals will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

#### **5.4.9. Water Rights.**

The Pisgah Mountain unit contains numerous springs and ephemeral drainages, many of which are direct tributaries to the Colorado River to the north. Currently, there are approximately 16 water rights for springs, ditches, wells, and reservoirs on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

**5.4.10. Road Maintenance.**

The Pisgah Mountain Unit contains four (4) routes within the boundary proposed by public groups. Those routes are 8535, 8536, 8537, and portions of 8530. The remaining routes serve as the boundary of the unit (8520 & 8532).

The following shows the current maintenance level II that been prescribed for the following routes. Level II objectives are to make the road passable by high clearance vehicles.

| <u>Route #</u> | <u>Miles</u> |
|----------------|--------------|
| 8520           | 2.0 miles    |
| 8532           | 2.3 miles    |
| 8535           | 4.5 miles    |
| 8536           | 0.8 miles    |
| 8537           | 0.5 miles    |

Route # 8530 has been prescribed for maintenance level III management for 5.8 miles. Level III objectives are for roads that improvements (culverts, ditches, aggregate, etc.) have been made and the road is to be passable by passenger cars.

**5.5. Topographic Maps.**

Castle Peak, McCoy, Blue Hill, And State Bridge 7.5 minute series topographic maps.

## **Findings for Pisgah Mountain**

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**5.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

Due to implementation of Castle Peak Travel Management Plan in 1997, roads have been reclaimed or have re-vegetated naturally since the original inventories in the late 70's. Subsequently the unit has been found to contain wilderness characteristics. A total of 14,540 acres were found to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics.

**5.6.1. Size**

Pisgah Mountain is a roadless area with over 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands resulting in sufficient size to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics.

**5.6.2. Naturalness.**

The Pisgah Mountain unit has retained a natural appearing landscape within the unit as a whole. While some boundary adjustments were done within the unit to eliminate areas that are not natural, the rest of the area has an unmodified landscape that has maintained its natural qualities.

Signs of man resulting mostly from livestock developments such as fences, ponds, and troughs are largely unnoticeable in the landscape and do not detract from the overall naturalness of the unit. Most of these developments are small scale stock ponds directly adjacent to maintained roads serving as boundaries or are off old two track routes that have mostly rehabilitated. Many

developments are off of routes that were closed to public motorized and mechanized travel in the Castle Peak TMP in 1997.

Boundary adjustments were done as part of this assessment in two (2) areas to exclude road #8530 that serves as the main access into the area and have been routinely maintained. The road's continuous use and ongoing maintenance resulted in impacts to naturalness. The public wilderness proposal boundary appears to be a mapping error. The road proposed along the western boundary comes through private land, has no public access and was closed in the Castle Peak TMP in 1997.

In addition, route # 8535 also known as the Pisgah Mountain or the Stagecoach route is listed in BLM's system as a route that is maintained and was mechanically constructed. It serves as the only access to the northern part of the unit and is used for livestock grazing activities and maintenance of related developments. This route was cherry-stemmed to eliminate its disturbance and its unnatural character and does not detract from the unit's overall naturalness.

These boundary adjustments were done to eliminate areas or linear features found not to be natural resulting in a reduction of 940 acres.

### **5.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

The Pisgah Mountain unit offers outstanding opportunities for solitude within the northern portions of the unit. Visitors within the Pisgah Mountain unit as a whole are infrequent during most of the year, with most visitations occurring during hunting season. While the southern portions of the unit offer vast vistas in open sage country, the northern portion contains a diversity of landscapes and vegetation where one could find isolation and be secluded especially in areas adjacent to the banks of the Colorado River. The northern portion of the unit contains some heavy vegetative screening, rugged drainages, and winding canyon features where visitors can find seclusion. In conclusion, the unit's size in conjunction with opportunities for topographic screening and varied vegetation provide visitors outstanding opportunities for solitude.

### **5.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape and the activities allowed are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. The unit has been managed for predominately non-motorized types of recreation while allowing for limited four wheel drive motorized access to key points within the unit. Much of the unit is remote and rugged and offers the visitor opportunities to experience primitive types of recreation with unobstructed views. However, "outstanding" opportunities are considered to be mostly within the northern portion of the unit due to the vegetation, topography, and distance from boundary roads. Those outstanding opportunities for primitive activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, and photography. Within the unit, there are no recreation developments or marked trails, and signs and/or visitor controls are very minimal.

RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote areas more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation exist (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

**5.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Pisgah Mountain unit contains supplemental values that are listed below.

**5.7.1. Cultural.**

BLM cultural data shows 13 cultural resources within the unit, six (6) sites that are eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

**5.7.2. Wildlife.**

The Pisgah Mountain unit offers wildlife habitat for populations of elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, raptors, coyote, porcupine, squirrels, chipmunks, sage grouse, and a variety of small birds and other small animals.

The Pisgah Mountain unit encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall.

The unit takes in CPW mapped mule deer critical winter range created by combining deer DAUs, mule deer winter concentration areas, and "high density" mule deer severe winter range. CPW mapped elk winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range can be found in the Pisgah Mountain unit.

The unit is part of CRVFO's largest intact sage grouse habitats. The relatively open sagebrush flats and rolling sagebrush hills are included within CPW mapped greater sage grouse: a) overall range defined as seasonal activity areas within the observed range of a population of sage grouse, b) sage grouse observed winter range, and c) greater sage grouse production areas defined as the majority of important sage grouse nesting habitat and mapped as a buffer zone of 4 miles around active leks.

The portion of the unit along the Colorado River is within Bald Eagle: a) winter range as defined by an area where bald eagles have been observed between November 15 and April 1, and b) Bald Eagle foraging areas as defined as areas frequented by wintering bald eagles between November 15 and March 15.

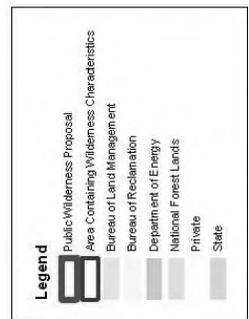
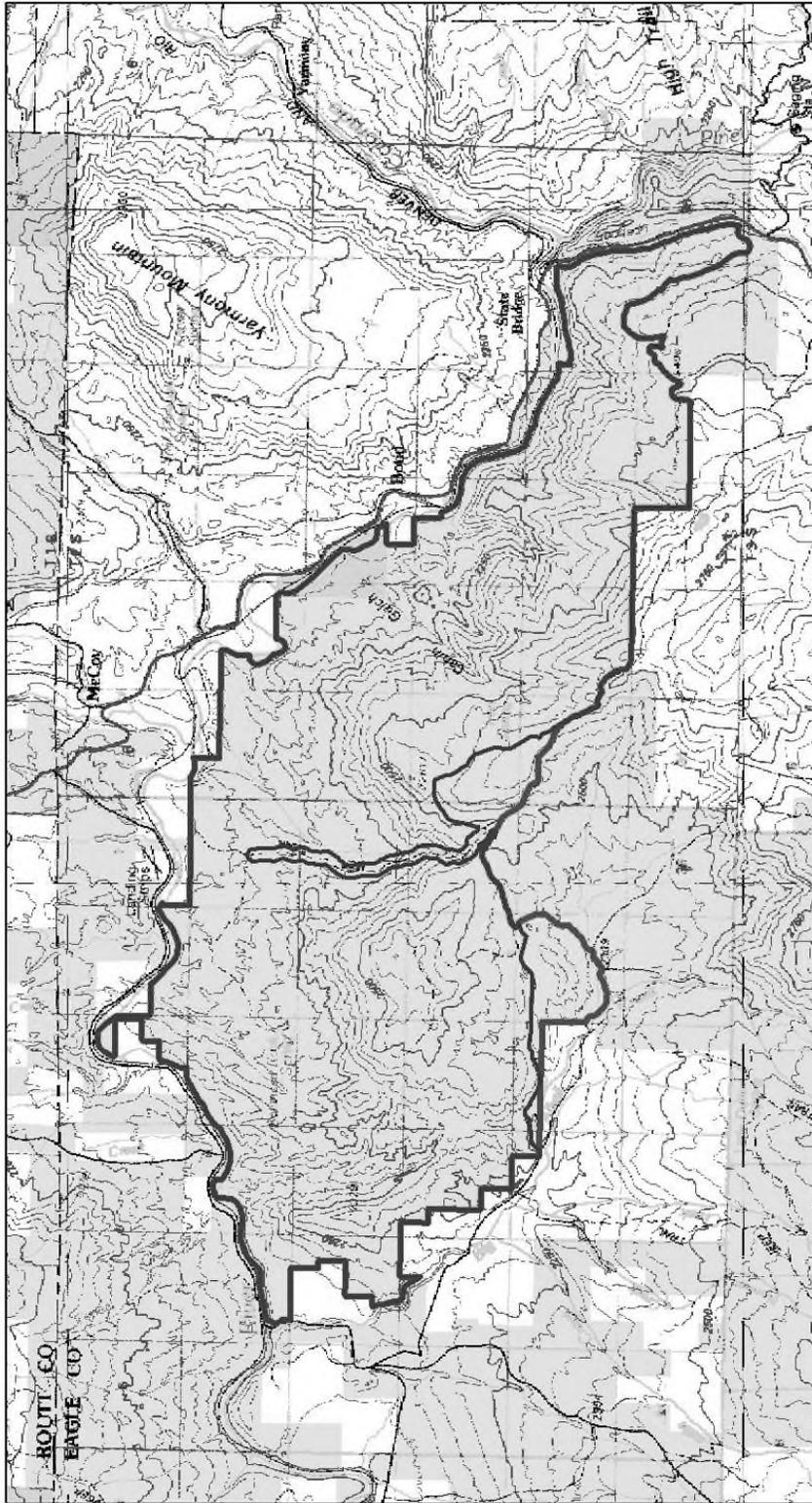
**5.7.3. Scenery.**

The unit has been recognized and managed for its VRM Class II scenery along the Colorado River.

**5.7.4. Ecological.**

BLM rare plant data indicates the unit supports several small, but good condition occurrences of the BLM sensitive plant, Harrington's penstemon. Although not a core population of this species, the Pisgah Mountain unit does contribute to the overall biodiversity and viability of the species.

# Pisgah Mountain



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 completeness of the information shown on this  
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## Wilderness Character Assessment

### Chapter 6 - Thompson Creek

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#### 6.1. Area Description.

The Thompson Creek Unit is located approximately eight (8) miles southwest of Carbondale, Colorado and is within both Garfield and Pitkin Counties. The Thompson Creek public wilderness proposal includes a total of 25,285 acres that occur on both the White River National Forest and on BLM lands. This assessment will only address the 8,170 acres on BLM lands.

#### 6.2. Background.

Thompson Creek has long been recognized as a special place deserving special management. In 1974, Thompson Creek was determined to be a Natural Environment Area (NEA). In 1975, a management plan was written for the Thompson Creek NEA. In 1976, an Antiquities Report was prepared. In 1985, portions of the current wilderness proposal area (4,286 acres) was designated as an ACEC to preserve its geological, cultural, scenic values, its natural ecological state, and to provide for educational and primitive types of recreational use.

This unit was part of the BLM's Initial Wilderness Inventory process in 1979 and was later part of the intensive wilderness inventory process in 1980. The original unit contained 8,800 acres during the initial inventory where boundary adjustments and subsequent deletions occurred. During the intensive inventory an additional 4,330 acres in the northern half of the unit were deleted because of the impacts of several routes in that portion of the unit. The remaining 4,200 acres were not recommended as a WSA based on a determination that the unit did not meet the size criteria and while outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation existed, these opportunities were determined not to be unconfined due to the small size. For this same reason, opportunities for solitude were determined not to be outstanding and the unit was subsequently determined not to meet the criteria for a WSA and was released from any additional wilderness review and management constraints. (*BLM, Intensive Wilderness Inventory, Proposed Wilderness Study Areas, February 1980, pages 231*).

In 2002, the Revised Forest Plan for the White River National Forest found adjacent forest lands known as "Assignment Ridge Roadless Area" (11,800 acres) to be roadless, contain opportunities for solitude, and would provide biological diversity to the designated wilderness system with additional acres of under-represented low elevation cover types. The Forest Plan's ROD recommended this unit for wilderness designation (1.2) and prescribed management to not impair its wilderness qualities.

#### 6.3. Landscape Characteristics and Issues

##### 6.3.1. Land Ownership and Acreage.

This assessment addresses 8,170 acres on BLM lands.

### **6.3.2. Topography.**

Thompson Creek's topography is diverse and contains unique and outstanding geologic values. Elevation ranges from 6,600 to 10,700 feet and is the southernmost terminus of the Grand Hogback. Generally along the Hogback, canyons and drainages parallel the strike of the uplift. However, in the Thompson Creek unit, the canyons traverse the Hogback. Erosion processes left unique thin vertical fins and outcrops of sandstones and siltstones. This erosion has displayed 12 formations and exhibits the tilted beds caused by the uplift. Thompson Creek canyon is said to be reminiscent of the "Garden of the Gods" in Colorado Springs. The Thompson Creek drainage itself contains an undisturbed riparian zone.

### **6.3.3. Vegetation.**

The unit contains a wide diversity of vegetation including pinyon-juniper, scrub oak and sagebrush, with douglas fir and aspen stands present in pockets in some of the higher elevation. Within Thompson Creek drainage, a healthy riparian community contains cottonwood-alder-willow communities along with ponderosa pine.

### **6.3.4. Existing Issues.**

Although there are no active leases currently on BLM lands within the Thompson Creek unit, parts of the region have been leased. Some seismic activity has occurred just to the west of the unit. The unit has been mapped as "medium potential" for oil and gas. No interest in other minerals has arisen. Portions of this unit (ACEC and SRMA 4,286 acres) have a No Surface Occupancy stipulation prescribed (1999 Glenwood Springs Oil and Gas SEIS). Development of any leases will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

Recreation related impacts in the unit continue due to increased visitation from both the local and regional public. Subsequently, areas adjacent to the north and western boundaries are experiencing impacts and bringing up human health and safety issues, and related needs for more active management and potential recreational infrastructure (i.e. bathrooms, signs developed trailheads, parking lots, etc.). Maintaining a primitive recreation setting and related social experiences (1+ mile from the western and northern boundaries) has become increasingly more difficult. The values for which the ACEC was designated are vulnerable and at risk.

Thompson Creek canyon has seen a large increase in visitation over the last 2 seasons relating to sport rock climbing. In 2006, approximately 45 routes were bolted onto one of the unique geologic fins and the unit became very popular for nearby Roaring Fork residents and other sport climbers in the state. The Roaring Fork Climbers Coalition was formed to try to mitigate the social and physical impacts until this plan is completed and further direction is provided.

Unmanaged travel and trail building activities continues to occur mostly within the northern half of the unit.

## **6.4. Current Management Allocations/Prescriptions.**

### **6.4.1. Travel.**

The 1984 RMP prescribed 4,286 acres (the ACEC portion) closed to motorized travel and 3,234 acres as open to motorized travel year round.

#### **6.4.2. Visual Resource Management.**

The unit was classified as VRM Class I, II, and III in the 1984 Glenwood Springs RMP. Approximately half of the unit in the southern portion of the area that falls within the Thompson Creek ACEC was designated VRM Class I for its High Scenic Quality. Thompson Creek is one of only four VRM Class I areas within the CRVFO. The northeastern boundary is VRM Class II, which the objective is to protect the existing landscape character. The northwestern part of the unit is currently VRM Class III which will allow for moderate changes within the landscape but should not dominate the viewshed.

#### **6.4.3. Wild and Scenic Rivers.**

Thompson Creek was found to be eligible under a Wild and Scenic River's Study, March 2007, for its Outstandingly Remarkable Values related to its Geologic and Scenic values. A suitability determination will be done as part of this planning process.

#### **6.4.4. Recreation Activities and Recreation Setting Characteristics (RSCs).**

Currently this unit offers excellent opportunities for primitive activities such as hiking, fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, sightseeing, nature study, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and photography on both BLM and adjacent Forest lands.

The physical qualities of the landscape can be classified and mapped looking at a spectrum of RSC classes based on distance from motorized and mechanized routes. Based on mapping the physical RSC attribute of remoteness, there are lands that fall within the primitive class (lands more than ½ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes). Using the existing CRVFO GIS transportation data, the RSC mapping shows 21% classified as primitive, 40% classified as middle country, 34% classified as front country, and 5% classified as rural (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

#### **6.4.5. Grazing.**

Livestock grazing, 11 permittees on four (4) allotments. Existing range developments consist of seven (7) reservoirs, one (1) spring development, and two (2) fences.

#### **6.4.6. Realty and Rights of Ways (ROWs).**

The entire Thompson Creek Unit has been mapped as a retention zone. A record search through LR2000 shows no ROWs within the boundaries. However, there is one ROW (N. Thompson 4 mile water facility) on record shown on plates directly on or adjacent to the boundaries. In addition there is an old mining claim on record. This ROW and claim would need additional research to ensure if needed any necessary boundary adjustments if the unit was designated.

#### **6.4.7. Oil and Gas Leasing.**

Area outside of the ACEC is open to oil and gas leasing, but not currently leased. A NSO stipulation was applied in the 1999 Glenwood Springs Oil and Gas SEIS to any future leases within the ACEC. Most of the unit has been mapped as "Medium Potential". "Occurrence Potential" is listed in the CRVFO Resource Management Plan Revision and their economic importance is analyzed. Development of any leases will likely impact the wilderness characteristics.

#### **6.4.8. Minerals.**

The Thompson Creek unit is not currently identified as having mineral potential.

**6.4.9. Water and Water Rights.**

Several ephemeral drainages and springs are within the Thompson Creek unit including the ephemerals Barbers Gulch and Smith Creek in the northern portions of the unit. Thompson Creek in the southern portion of the unit is perennial and has ephemeral tributaries. There are currently approximately four water rights associated with ditches, reservoirs, and springs on record with the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

**6.4.10. Road Maintenance**

The Thompson Creek unit does not have numbered “system roads” that are assigned maintenance levels and receive regular and routine maintenance within the unit. However, the unit does have some routes that may be maintained in order to perform maintenance on livestock developments, such as stockponds, reservoirs, or fences.

**6.4.11. Area of Critical Environmental Concern.**

In 1985, portions of the current wilderness proposal area (4,286 acres) was designated as an ACEC to preserve its geological, natural ecological state, cultural, and scenic values and to provide for educational and primitive types of recreational use. The 1984 RMP prescribed the following management prescriptions to protect the identified values: unsuitable for utility and communication facilities, closed to Off Road Vehicles (ORV’s), and manage under VRM Class I. The 1999 Glenwood Springs Oil and Gas ROD prescribed a No Surface Occupancy (NSO#16) stipulation for the Thompson Creek ACEC.

**6.4.12. Special Recreation Management Area.**

Thompson Creek was designated as an SRMA (4,286 acres) in the 1984 RMP. The area was designated to provide scarce recreation opportunities not available elsewhere. The 1999 Oil and Gas ROD prescribed a No Surface Occupancy (NSO# 16) stipulation for the Thompson Creek SRMA.

**6.5. Topographic Maps.**

Cattle Creek, Carbondale, Mount Sopris, and Stony Ridge 7.5 minute series topographic maps.

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**Findings for Thompson Creek**

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**6.6. Wilderness Characteristics Assessment.**

*Does the unit contain wilderness characteristics (naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation)?*

The entire Thompson Creek unit, consisting of 8,170 acres, was found to contain wilderness characteristics. The findings differ today from the original inventories in 1980 based on the current condition of routes in the northern portion of the unit that have not received regular and/or routine maintenance or continuous use due to the difficult limited public access. Many of these routes have naturally reclaimed or become partially or totally covered with vegetation and do not detract from the units overall naturalness and offer unconfined recreation opportunities. The southern portion of the unit has maintained its naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation due to administrative

designations (ACEC, SRMA) and subsequent management prescriptions that have been in place since 1984 to preserve its primitive physical and social characteristics.

#### **6.6.1. Size**

The Thompson Creek unit is a roadless area with over 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands resulting in sufficient size to qualify as lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics. In addition, lands directly adjacent to this unit on the White River National Forest were found to be roadless, contain opportunities for solitude, and would provide biological diversity to the designated wilderness system with additional acres of under-represented low elevation cover types. The 2002 ROD for the White River National Forest recommended this unit for wilderness designation (1.2) and prescribed management to not impair its wilderness qualities.

#### **6.6.2. Naturalness.**

The Thompson Creek proposed wilderness unit has retained a natural landscape within the unit as a whole. Thompson Creek's diverse topography and somewhat limited and difficult access has prevented significant evidence of human activities throughout the unit. While a few livestock developments exist within the northern portion of the unit, and some historic features can be found adjacent to the creek, these do not dominate the landscape, are well screened due to vegetation or topography, and subsequently do not detract from the unit's overall naturalness.

#### **6.6.3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude.**

The Thompson Creek unit offers outstanding opportunities for solitude. Visitors within the northern portions of the unit are infrequent and the size, diversity of land forms, and vegetation offers excellent screening opportunities and solitude opportunities. In addition, visitors can find excellent opportunities for solitude on adjacent Forest Service Lands that were recommended for wilderness designation and are managed to not impair its wilderness qualities.

While the Thompson Creek drainage itself is used more heavily, there are numerous side drainages, canyons, steep rock outcrops, and isolated pockets that visitors can find opportunities for isolation. While a trail exists along the creek, the trail does disappear approximately 1½ miles down the creek where hikers then must travel in the creek itself to get further downstream. This in effect reduces visitors and keeps the physical and social settings primitive. The trail once again starts up on the historic railroad grade, but it is not maintained.

#### **6.6.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation.**

Physical qualities of the landscape and the activities allowed are important to producing opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation. The northern portion of the unit has been managed predominately for non-motorized types of recreation. However, years ago, one (1) road was managed for motorized use under an agreement with the Colorado Division of Wildlife in order to provide big game hunting opportunities within the northern half of the unit. While this one unmaintained access road has been left open for 20 years, very limited motorized activity has occurred within the unit due to the access road's steep, out sloped, rugged condition. The southern half (ACEC portion) has been managed for non-motorized and non-mechanized recreation activities since 1984. Outstanding opportunities exist for primitive and unconfined types of recreation including hiking, hunting, and wildlife viewing throughout most of the unit.

RSC mapping shows that this unit contains physically remote areas more than ½ mile from motorized or mechanized routes, which indicates opportunities for primitive and unconfined

types of recreation exist (see *Recreation Setting Characteristics Matrix and Map in Appendix AA*).

### **6.7. Supplemental Values.**

*Does the unit contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?*

The Thompson Creek unit contains supplemental values that are listed below.

#### **6.7.1. Cultural.**

Within the Thompson Creek unit there are historic values from the remains of the abandoned Aspen and Western Railway, which operated between 1887 and 1889. This site is considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A (associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history).

#### **6.7.2. Wildlife.**

The Thompson Creek unit offers wildlife habitat for populations of elk, deer, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, raptors, coyote, porcupine, squirrels, chipmunks, sage grouse, and a variety of small birds and other small animals. This unit contains a small portion of the Middle Thompson Creek PCA, proposed by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program because of its significant biodiversity.

The Thompson Creek unit encompasses mapped mule deer and elk summer range defined by that part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located between spring green-up and the first heavy snowfall. The unit takes in CPW mapped mule deer critical winter range created by combining deer DAUs, mule deer winter concentration areas, and "high density" mule deer severe winter range. CPW mapped elk winter concentration areas and elk severe winter range can be found in the Thompson Creek unit.

The unit is completely within Bald Eagle: a) winter range as defined by an area where bald eagles have been observed between November 15 and April 1, and b) Bald Eagle foraging areas as defined as areas frequented by wintering bald eagles between November 15 and March 15.

The Thompson Creek unit contains a Core Conservation population of Colorado River cutthroat trout located in Middle Thompson Creek. Core Conservation populations are important in the management of this sub species of cutthroat and receive the highest management attention/consideration. North Thompson Creek also contains cutthroat trout, but this population does not have conservation value due to reduced genetic purity.

#### **6.7.3. Scenery.**

Portions (the ACEC portion) of the Thompson Creek public wilderness proposal area contain one of only four (4) areas within CRVFO that was designated to be managed as VRM Class I. This scenic area was rated as Class A due to its outstanding scenic qualities tied to the unique topography and geologic forms (fins), and their sharp contrasting colors adjacent to the creek.

#### **6.7.4. Geological.**

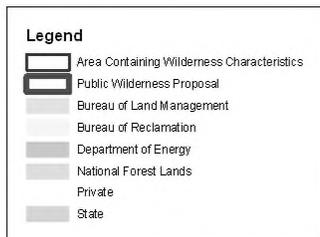
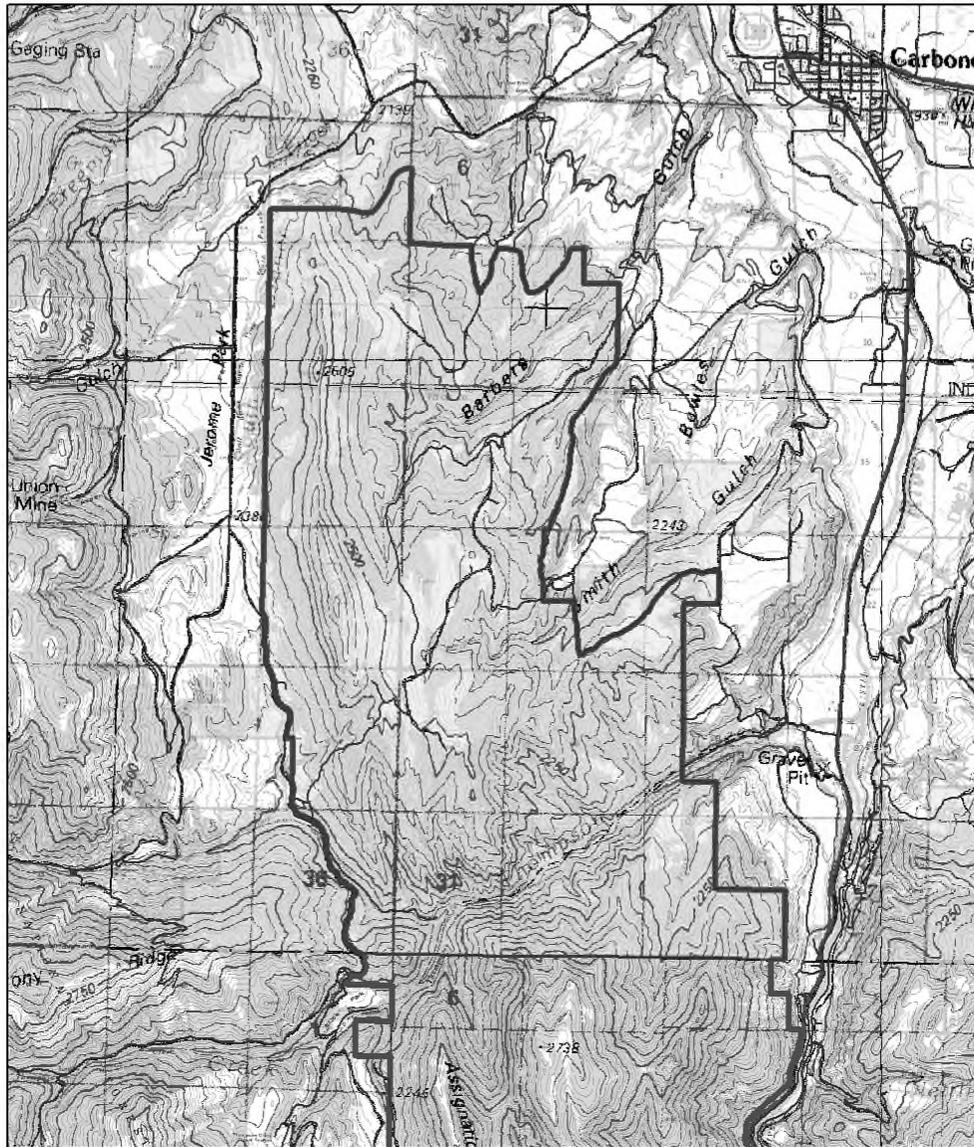
The Thompson Creek unit contains unique geologic features that were identified as meeting the relevance and importance criteria for ACEC. These features were deemed to be significant

geologic features that has more than local worth, have qualities that make it rare, irreplaceable, unique and vulnerable to adverse change, and have been recognized as warranting protection. Approximately 12 unique formations from the Paleozoic Era are exposed and represent depositional events that occurred in the past.

**6.7.5. Ecological.**

This unit contains most of the Smith Gulch PCA and a small portion of the Middle Thompson Creek PCA. The Smith gulch PCA contains B and C-ranked occurrence of a BLM sensitive plant, Harrington's penstemon. Although not a core conservation population of this species, the Thompson Creek unit does contribute to the overall biodiversity and viability of the species.

# Thompson Creek



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# Appendix AA

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## RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS MATRIX

RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS –Alternative A (Current Condition) Remoteness Map  
Based on Existing Road and Trail Inventory

**RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS MATRIX**

**PHYSICAL COMPONENT – Qualities of the Landscape**

|   | <i>Primitive Classification</i>                              | <i>Back Country Classification</i>  | <i>Middle Country Classification</i>  | <i>Front Country Classification</i>   | <i>Rural Classification</i>  | <i>Urban Classification</i>  |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Remoteness</b><br>(approx. distance from routes)         | More than ¼ mile from either mechanized or motorized routes. | Within ¼ mile of mechanized routes.   | Within ¼ mile of four-wheel drive vehicle, ATV and motorcycles routes.  | Within ¼ mile of low-clearance or passenger vehicle routes (includes unpaved County roads and private land routes).             | Within ¼ mile of paved/primary roads and highways.   | Within ¼ mile of streets and roads within municipalities and along highways.     |
| <b>Naturalness</b><br>(landscape texture form, line, color) | Undisturbed natural landscape.                               | Natural landscape with any modifications in harmony with surroundings and not visually obvious or evident (e.g. stock ponds, trails). | Character of the natural landscape retained. A few modifications contrast with character of the landscape (e.g. fences, primitive roads). | Character of the natural landscape partially modified but none overpower natural landscape (e.g. roads, structures, utilities). | Character of the natural landscape considerably modified (agriculture, residential or industrial). | Urbanized developments dominate landscape.                                       |
| <b>Facilities</b>   | No structures. Foot/horse and water trails only.             | Developed trails made mostly of native materials such as log bridges. Structures are rare and isolated.                               | Maintained and marked trails, simple trailhead developments and basic toilets.  | Rustic facilities such as campsites, restrooms, trailheads, and interpretive displays.  | Modern facilities such as campgrounds, group shelters, boat launches, and occasional exhibits.     | Elaborate full-service facilities such as laundries, restaurants, and groceries. |

**SOCIAL COMPONENT – Qualities Associated with Use**

|   | <i>Primitive Classification</i>   | <i>Back Country Classification</i>  | <i>Middle Country Classification</i>  | <i>Front Country Classification</i>   | <i>Rural Classification</i>  | <i>Urban Classification</i>  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Contacts</b><br>(avg. with any other group)      | Fewer than 3 encounters/day at camp sites and fewer than 6 encounters/day on travel routes. | 3-6 encounters/day off travel routes (e.g., campsites) and 7-15 encounters/day on travel routes.    | 7-14 encounters/day off travel routes (e.g., staging areas) and 15-29 encounters/day on travel routes.                | 15-29 encounters/day off travel routes (e.g., campgrounds) and 30 or more encounters/day on travel routes.                    | People seem to be generally everywhere.  | Busy place with other people constantly in view.                           |
| <b>Group Size</b><br>(average - other than you own) | Fewer than or equal to 3 people per group.  | 4-6 people per group.   | 7-12 people per group.  | 13-25 people per group.   | 26-50 people per group.  | Greater than 50 people per group.  |
| <b>Evidence of Use</b>                              | No alteration of the natural terrain. Footprints only observed. Sounds of people rare.      | Areas of alteration uncommon. Little surface vegetation wear observed. Sounds of people infrequent. | Small areas of alteration. Surface vegetation showing wear with some bare soils. Sounds of people occasionally heard. | Small areas of alteration prevalent. Surface vegetation gone with compacted soils observed. Sounds of people regularly heard. | A few large areas of alteration. Surface vegetation absent with hardened soils. Sounds of people frequently heard. | Large areas of alteration prevalent. Some erosion. Constantly hear people. |

**OPERATIONAL COMPONENT – Conditions Created by Management and Controls over Recreation Use**

|  | <i>Primitive Classification</i>  | <i>Back Country Classification</i>  | <i>Middle Country Classification</i>  | <i>Front Country Classification</i>  | <i>Rural Classification</i>   | <i>Urban Classification</i>   |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Access</b><br>(types of travel allowed)   | Foot, horse, and non-motorized float boat travel.  | Mountain bikes and perhaps other mechanized use, but all is non-motorized.                                | Four-wheel drives, all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, or snowmobiles in addition to non-motorized, mechanized use. | Two-wheel drive vehicles predominant, but also four wheel drives and non-motorized, mechanized use.                  | Ordinary highway auto and truck traffic is characteristic.  | Wide variety of street vehicles and highway traffic is ever-present.                                    |
| <b>Visitor Services</b><br>(and information) | No maps or brochures available on-site. Staff rarely present to provide on site assistance.                  | Basic maps, staff infrequently present (e.g. seasonally, high use periods) to provide on-site assistance. | Area brochures and maps, staff occasionally (e.g. most weekends) present to provide on-site assistance.           | Information materials describe recreation areas & activities, staff periodically present (e.g. weekdays & weekends). | Information described to the left, plus experience and benefit descriptions, staff regularly present (e.g. almost daily). | Information described to the left, plus regularly scheduled on-site outdoor demonstrations and clinics. |
| <b>Management Controls</b>                   | No on-site posting/signing of visitor regulations, interpretive information or ethics. Few use restrictions. | Basic user regulations at key access points. Minimum use restrictions.                                    | Some regulatory and ethics signing. Moderate use restrictions. (e.g. camping, human waste).                       | Rules, regulations and ethics clearly posted. Use restrictions, limitations and/or closures.                         | Regulations strict and ethics prominent. Use may be limited by permit, reservation, etc.                                  | Enforcement in addition to rules to reduce conflicts, hazards, and resource damage.                     |

NOTE: This matrix can be customized to meet particular planning needs: 1) classes can be added, split, or merged; 2) characteristics can be added or deleted; 3) class names can be changed; and 4) the text can be modified. However, the concept of a spectrum must remain intact.



