

**GUNNISON FIELD OFFICE**  
**2013 WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Gunnison Field Office assessed and inventoried public lands to determine if any lands in the Field Office have wilderness characteristics. The assessment was conducted as part of BLM's responsibilities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), in accordance with BLM Manual 6310, Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Lands. It included an assessment of public lands outside of designated wilderness areas and wilderness study areas. The BLM reviewed original 1980 wilderness inventories, as well as lands identified through a GIS analysis that had not been inventoried in the past, in order to identify lands with potential wilderness characteristics.

Thirty-four (34) areas were identified for inventory through the review; 27 of those were found to possess wilderness characteristics. The inventoried areas included approximately 104,180 acres of public land.

**WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

The inventory evaluated wilderness characteristics as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and incorporated in FLPMA. In order for an area to qualify as lands with 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.

**Roadless Definitions**

The inventory area boundaries were generally based on the presence of wilderness inventory roads and on property lines between lands in Federal ownership and other ownerships or developed rights of way. Other inventory unit boundaries were occasionally identified.

For purposes of conducting wilderness characteristics inventories, the BLM uses definitions found on page 17 of House Report 94-1163 (May 15, 1976), on what became FLPMA. In the report, roadless refers to:

“... the absence of roads which have been improved and maintained by mechanical means to insure relatively regular and continuous use. A way maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a road.”

The BLM adopted the following sub-definitions of certain words and phrases related to roads.

- Improved and maintained: actions taken physically by people to keep the road open to vehicle traffic. “Improved” does not necessarily mean formal construction. “Maintained” does not necessarily mean annual maintenance.
- Mechanical means: use of hand or power machinery or tools.
- Relatively regular and continuous use: vehicular use that has occurred and will continue to occur on a relatively regular basis. Examples are: access roads for equipment to maintain a stock water tank

or other established water sources, access roads to maintained recreation sites or facilities, or access roads to mining claims.

A route that was established or has been maintained solely by the passage of vehicles would not be considered a road for the purposes of wilderness inventory, even if it is used on a relatively regular and continuous basis. Vehicle routes constructed by mechanical means but that are no longer being maintained by mechanical methods are not wilderness inventory roads. Sole use of hands and feet to move rocks or dirt without the use of tools or machinery does not meet the definition of “mechanical means”. Wilderness inventory roads need not be “maintained” on a regular basis but rather “maintained” when road conditions warrant actions to keep it in a usable condition. A dead-end (cherry-stem) road can form the boundary of an inventory area and does not by itself disqualify an area from being considered “roadless”.

A route, or a segment of a route, which was mechanically improved to permit the passage of vehicles, but which to date has not needed any further mechanical improvement or maintenance to facilitate the relatively regular and continuous passage of vehicles, can be a road in those circumstances where the road would be maintained if the need were to arise.

### **Sufficient Size**

The size criterion will be satisfied for roadless areas with over 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands, or of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Roadless areas of less than 5,000 acres of contiguous BLM lands that 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 may also satisfy the size criterion. State or private lands are not included in making this acreage determination.

### **Naturalness**

The naturalness criterion is met if the area is affected primarily by the forces of nature. For an area to appear to be in a natural condition, it must appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, and any work of human beings must be substantially unnoticeable.

Some human works are acceptable so long as they are substantially unnoticeable. Examples of human-made features that may be considered substantially unnoticeable in certain cases are: trails, trail signs, bridges, fire breaks, pit toilets, fisheries enhancement facilities, fire rings, historic properties, archaeological resources, hitching posts, snow gauges, water quantity and quality measuring devices, research monitoring markers and devices, minor radio repeater sites, air quality monitoring devices, fencing, spring developments, barely visible linear disturbances, and stock ponds.

The review of human impacts will assess the presence or absence of apparent naturalness. There is an important difference between an area’s natural integrity and its apparent naturalness. Natural integrity refers to the presence or absence of ecosystems that are relatively unaffected by modern human activities. Apparent naturalness refers to whether or not an area looks natural to the average visitor

who is not familiar with the biological composition of natural ecosystems versus human-affected ecosystems.

Human impacts outside the area will not normally be considered in assessing naturalness of an area. If, however, a major outside impact exists, it should be noted in the overall inventory area description and evaluated for its direct effects on the area.

### **Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation**

***Solitude.*** Visitors may have outstanding opportunities for solitude when they have the opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds, and evidence of other people in the area. Factors or elements influencing solitude may include size, configuration, topographic and vegetative screening, and ability of the visitor to find seclusion. It is the combination of these and similar elements upon which an overall solitude determination will be made.

***Primitive and Unconfined Recreation.*** Visitors may have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation when they have the opportunity to engage in dispersed, undeveloped recreation activities which do not require facilities, motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanized transport. Some examples of primitive and unconfined types of recreation include hiking; backpacking; fishing; hunting; spelunking; horseback riding; climbing; river running; cross-country skiing; snowshoeing; dog sledding; photography; bird watching; canoeing; kayaking; sailing; and sightseeing for botanical, zoological, or geological features. An area may possess outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation through either the diversity in primitive and unconfined recreational activities possible in the area or the outstanding quality of one opportunity.

### **Supplemental Values**

The area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values may be present in an area with wilderness characteristics, but they are not required.

### **LAND USE PLANNING**

Managing the wilderness resource is part of the BLM's multiple use mission. Consistent with FLPMA and other applicable authorities, the BLM will consider the wilderness characteristics of public lands when undertaking land use planning. The BLM will use the land use planning process to determine how to manage lands with wilderness characteristics as part of the BLM's multiple-use mandate. The BLM will consider a full range of alternatives for such lands when conducting land use planning. The BLM will analyze the effects of (1) plan alternatives on lands with wilderness characteristics and (2) management of lands with wilderness characteristics on other resources and resource uses. The Gunnison Field Office's Resource Management Plan (RMP) is scheduled to be revised beginning in 2015, dependent on funding availability and priorities.

### **MAINTAINING THE INVENTORY**

Section 201 of FLPMA requires the BLM to maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resources and other values, which includes wilderness characteristics. It also provides that the preparation and maintenance of the inventory shall not, of itself, change or prevent change of the management or use of public lands. Regardless of past inventory, the BLM must maintain and update as necessary, its inventory of wilderness resources on public lands. In some circumstances conditions relating to wilderness characteristics may have changed over time, and an area that was once determined to lack wilderness characteristics may now possess them.

**ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The BLM Colorado State Office conducted a preliminary GIS analysis to identify areas potentially requiring wilderness characteristics inventory. The Gunnison Field Office then conducted a more detailed GIS analysis, based on more site-specific information, including rights-of-way for roads and overhead utilities, and BLM routes open to public, motorized and/or mechanized vehicle use. Areas evaluated for potential inventory consisted primarily of roadless areas greater than 5,000 acres or roadless areas less than 5,000 acres if adjacent to a wilderness, WSA, or other area managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics.

Thirty-four (34) areas were identified for inventory through the review, which included approximately 104,180 acres of public land. BLM then conducted the field inventory of the identified areas, photographing and documenting the existing conditions on the ground. In conjunction with the field inventory, additional information from BLM resource specialists, and review of aerial photographs was included to help identify the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics. The results of the inventory are documented below

**ASSESSMENT AREAS AND DETERMINATIONS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total BLM Acreage Inventoried</b>	<b>Acreage with Wilderness Characteristics</b>	<b>Acreage without Wilderness Characteristics</b>
North Engineer Pass	COS-060-001	667	667	0
Upper Henson Creek	COS-060-002	11	11	0
Gravel Mountain	COS-060-003	5,767	5,767	0
East Cinnamon Pass	COS-060-004	387	387	0
Dolly Varden Mountain	COS-060-005	150	150	0
Boulder Gulch	COS-060-006	1,987	1,987	0
El Paso Creek	COS-060-007	2,084	2,084	0
Fanny Fern	COS-060-008	28	28	0
Wade Gulch	COS-060-009	284	0	284
Wade Gulch South	COS-060-010	31	31	0
Silver Coin Gulch	COS-060-011	1,250	1,250	0
Red Mountain Gulch South	COS-060-012	309	309	0
Red Mountain Gulch Road	COS-060-013	16	16	0
Snare Creek	COS-060-014	315	315	0

Eaton Creek	COS-060-015	62	62	0
Devils Creek	COS-060-016	1,301	1,301	0
Fourth of July Creek North	COS-060-017	119	119	0
Lower Big Buck Creek	COS-060-018	41	41	0
Hells Canyon North	COS-060-019	40	40	0
Skunk Creek	COS-060-020	1,034	0	1,034
Skunk Creek North	COS-060-021	162	0	162
Upper Trout Creek	COS-060-022	193	193	0
Indian Creek	COS-060-023	12,888	12,888	0
West Fork Powderhorn	COS-060-024	7,093	7,093	0
West Dempsey Gulch	COS-060-025	3,028	3,028	0
North Beaver Creek	COS-060-026	4,275	0	4,275
Rock Creek	COS-060-027	14,528	7,380	7,148
Cebolla Creek	COS-060-028	10,562	10,562	0
Sugar Creek	COS-060-029	11,868	11,654	214
South Beaver Creek	COS-060-030	7,369	7,369	0
Stubbs Gulch	COS-060-031	6,370	6,370	0
Sawmill Park	COS-060-032	3,045	0	3,045
Upper South Beaver	COS-060-033	3,187	0	3,187
Dillon Mesa	COS-060-034	3,733	0	3,733
<b>Total Acres</b>		<b>104,184</b>	<b>81,102</b>	<b>23,082</b>