

Royal Gorge Filed Office Wilderness Characteristics Inventory 2013:

Process for Analysis

Introduction

The BLM assessed public lands within the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) 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 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 and existing wilderness study area (WSAs). The BLM reviewed original 1980 wilderness inventories, as well as lands identified through GIS analysis that had not been inventoried in the past, in order to identify lands with potential wilderness characteristics.

Eighty-nine (89) units were identified for inventory through the review; Forty (40) of those found to possess wilderness characteristics, totaling 77,756.5 acres. The inventoried areas included approximately 257,316.2 acres of public lands.

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.

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.

Scope of Assessment

The BLM considered and evaluated wilderness characteristics for all BLM lands within the Royal Gorge Field Office planning area, outside of existing WSAs. The assessment did not include national forest lands.

In performing this assessment, the RGFO:

- 1) Reviewed the 1980 BLM Intensive Wilderness Inventory and updated information when necessary to ensure that information was current and accurate.
- 2) Reviewed proposals to inventory and protect BLM lands with wilderness characteristics submitted by BLM staff and the public.
- 3) Intensively inventoried potential lands in the planning area identified through BLM staff and public wilderness proposals or acquired since the 1980 inventory.

Assessment Process

In November of 2012, the RGFO began the process of identifying and inventorying potential lands with wilderness characteristics within its administrative boundaries. BLM Manual 6310-Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Lands, provided guidance throughout the inventory process.

The first step in this process was to conduct a GIS analysis to identify roadless areas that were 5,000 acres or greater as well as identifying roadless parcels 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. The WSAs in the planning area were removed from this analysis as they were found to already possess wilderness characteristics and are managed for this resource. The identification of the 5,000 acre parcels was accomplished by running a GIS query using all roads within RGFO as polygon boundaries. All the polygons created by road boundaries were then queried to identify those that were a minimum of 5,000 acres or greater. Those polygons that met the size criteria were identified for intensive analysis.

The intensive analysis was accomplished by visually comparing the remaining individual polygons with aerial imagery, as well as oil and gas, pipeline, power line, transportation and roads layers to determine if they meet other minimum standards for lands with wilderness characteristics. This process was conducted by RGFO staff with extensive on-the-ground local knowledge of the resource area to aid in verifying the suitability of individual polygons to be considered as lands with wilderness characteristics.

The intensive analysis was also completed by field visits by BLM-RGFO staff as well as Mile Hi and Southwest Youth Corps interns. In the performance of the inventory, using the required forms, GPS data was collected for unit polygons, photo points, and route data. Inventory results, both forms and GIS meta-data, were submitted electronically to the RGFO interdisciplinary team for evaluation and approval upon completion of field analysis.