

**WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS ASSESSMENT
For The BLM Portions of the
San Juan Public Lands**

Project Summary

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A. Land Use Planning Process

Through the San Juan Public Lands (SJPL) land use planning process, SJPL will consider all available information to determine the mix of resource use and protection that best serves the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) multiple use mandate. BLM is required by FLPMA Section 202 to maintain inventories of all public lands and their resources, including wilderness characteristics, and to consider such information during land use planning process.

Through this assessment, the BLM will meet its obligations for updating and maintaining its inventory of wilderness resources under sections 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, 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). Additionally, IM-2011-154 provided the most recent agency guidance and a specific methodology for conducting the inventory of Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs).

Based on this assessment and other resource analyses, the RMP will make land use allocation decisions as to which BLM public lands found to have wilderness characteristics would be: 1) Managed to protect wilderness character, or 2) Not managed to maintain wilderness character.

B. Scope of Assessment

This assessment is intended to provide an evaluation of wilderness characteristics on BLM lands within the SJPL, outside of existing WSAs. This process has been designed to look at all SJPL BLM lands (USFS lands are analyzed in Appendix H, Roadless Area Inventory and Wilderness Evaluation, specifically to: 1) Update data to ensure environmental impacts of alternatives on BLM lands with wilderness characteristics are adequately analyzed, and 2) Address proposals from the public to inventory and protect BLM lands with wilderness characteristics.

For the purpose of this assessment, all lands underwent a review regarding whether or not the areas 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 in the SJPL are roadless. The findings of this review were used to frame a GIS analysis to identify areas to include in this wilderness characteristic assessment. The resulting five analysis maps are titled Weber/Menefee Mountains, McKenna Peak, Lower Dolores Canyon, Silverton, and Snaggletooth

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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 Canyons of the Ancients Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The existing eight designated WSA's will continue to be managed to protect their wilderness characteristics under BLM's interim Management Policy For Lands Under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1) until Congress designates them as wilderness or releases them for other uses.

B-1: Areas Not Considered

The SJPL will not reconsider any portions of three Wilderness Areas all on National Forest Lands, eight Wilderness Study Areas on BLM lands, and the Piedra Area which is a Congressionally designated area managed to protect its wilderness characteristics. Wilderness Areas are managed by policy FSM 2320, BLM 8560. Specifically the Wilderness areas and the Piedra Area are managed through a 1998 forest plan amendment. BLM WSAs were designated in the 1980's and a final recommendation was forwarded to the president in 1991. BLM WSAs are managed through the BLM 8550-1 Handbook.

Wilderness Area	Acres
Weminuche	492,418
South San Juan	158,790
Lizard Head	41,496
Piedra Area	60,400
Wilderness Study Area	
Weber Mountain	6,303
Dolores River Canyon	28,668
Menefee Mountain	7,129
McKenna Peak	19,398
West Needles Contiguous	1,240
Whitehead Gulch	1,669
Weminuche Contiguous	1,533
Handies Peak	1,175 on Tres Rios
Total	820,219

During the scoping process for this plan on November 7, 2005 a letter with the subject line: "Submission of Information on Citizen-Proposed Wilderness Areas for the San Juan Resource Area Planning Process" was forwarded to the planning team for consideration. This Citizens Wilderness Proposal (CWP) included a wilderness characteristic report for the Dolores River, McKenna Peak, and Weber-Menefee WSAs and recommended additional acreage be added to those WSAs. In addition the report proposed a new wilderness area called Snaggletooth. The BLM cannot designate new WSAs through the planning process. (IM2003-275)

B-2: Areas Considered But Eliminated From Detailed Evaluation

A Weber-Menefee addition as proposed by the CWP was not evaluated in detail because the additional 1,205 acres proposed are either a private in holding or Colorado State lands.

Other lands identified in the GIS roadless analysis were eliminated upon closer examination as they indeed had significant roads not found in the GIS data used in the analysis. Other areas were eliminated as they would be unmanageable due to their physical shape, surrounding land uses, private/state inholdings, or existing rights and leases that would adversely affect or preclude managing them for wilderness characteristics.

C. Wilderness Character Assessment

This assessment addresses the following criteria for determining the presence of wilderness characteristics: 1) Area size, 2) Does the area appear to be natural? 3) Does the area have outstanding opportunities for solitude? 4) Does the area have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation? 5) Does the area have supplemental values such as ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value?

C.1. Area Size Criteria

Is the roadless area greater than 5,000 acres in size, or adjacent to an existing WSA or Wilderness Area?

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 is substantially unnoticeable?

An area'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

Do visitors have outstanding opportunities for solitude? Are the sights, sounds, and evidence of human developments other people rare or infrequent? Can visitors feel isolated, alone or secluded from others?

C.4. Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Types of Recreation

Is the use of the area primarily through non-motorized or non-mechanical means with no or minimal recreation facilities? Are there opportunities for a variety of primitive recreation types?

C.5. Supplemental Values

Does the area 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. This Wilderness Characteristic Assessment will enabled SJPL to determine if there is any new information that was not considered as part of the original inventories or new information that has emerged. 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.

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. During the scoping process for this plan a letter (dated November 7, 2005) with the subject line: Submission of Information on Citizen-Proposed Wilderness Areas for the San Juan Resource Area Planning Process was forwarded to the planning team for consideration. This Citizens Wilderness Proposal (CWP) included a wilderness characteristic report for the Dolores River, McKenna Peak, and Weber-Menefee WSAs and included additions acreage to those WSAs. The letter included a citizen proposed wilderness that had not been previously analyses by the SJPL called Snaggletooth. The letter was signed by the San Juan Citizens Alliance, Colorado Environmental Coalition (CEC), the Wilderness Society, Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project, Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative, Colorado Wild, Sinapu, Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition, Rocky Mountain Chapter, Sierra Club, Western Resource Advocates, Upper Arkansas South Plate Project, Colorado Mountain Club, Center for Native Ecosystems, and San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council. The proposal contains wilderness inventories completed by these groups on an area by area basis, wilderness designation justifications and a statewide wilderness proposal. The letter contained updated Citizens’ Wilderness Proposals completed by these groups on an area by area basis, wilderness designation justifications and a statewide wilderness proposal. Earlier submissions had been received by BLM in 1994 and 2001.

F. Specific Documents and Data Utilized for the Assessment

Conclusions reached in this assessment were based on:

- Public written proposals and San Juan Citizen Alliance letter and inventory CD with boundary shape files (11/7/05)
- Range improvements (SJPL GIS)
- SJPL Travel and Transportation (SJPL GIS)
- Digital Aerial photos (GIS)
- Digital Ortho Quads (GIS)

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- SJPL road maintenance records
- SJPL range allotment management files
- Oil and Gas leases (SJPL GIS)
- SJPL'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.
- Field Investigations

The following documents contain additional inventory and resource information as well as agency guidance regarding LWCs:

BLM, 1990. *San Juan/San Miguel Planning Area – Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement*.

BLM, 1991. *Wilderness Study Report, Vol. II*. Montrose District Study Areas. Pgs. 169-352.

Pearson, Mark. 1992. *Colorado's Canyon Country – a Guide to Hiking & Floating in BLM Wildlands*. Westcliffe Publishers. Englewood, Colorado.

San Juan Citizen's Alliance, 2008. *Colorado's Canyon Country – Wilderness Proposal*. Digital format, CD.

Bureau of Land Management, 2011. Instruction Memorandum IM-2011-154. *Requirement to Conduct and Maintain Inventory Information for Wilderness Characteristics and to Consider Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in Land Use Plan*. Memorandum from Director to Field Officials.

G. Areas Considered for Assessment (Summary)

The following table shows all the areas within the *SJPL* that were considered as part of this assessment.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Public Wilderness Proposal Acreage*</i>	<i>Acres in Existing WSA's</i>	<i>Acres Analyzed</i>
Dolores River	41,133	28,668	40,103
Weber-Menefee	14,597	13,432	6674
McKenna Peak	33,467	19,398	6,603
Snaggletooth	31,971	0	29,660
Silverton	0	4,693	4,926

* Reflects total BLM acreage that was submitted by San Juan Citizens Alliance, 11/7/2005 and reflects the public wilderness proposal and includes acreage within existing BLM WSA's. Acreage figures within GIS mapping can vary due to rounding errors and different mapping techniques

H. Inventory Report Format

Five area report files were created during this inventory process, and each includes all inventory units assessed within that geographic area. The five areas are: Weber and Menefee Mountains, McKenna Peak, Lower Dolores River Canyon, Silverton, and Snaggletooth. These five geographic areas were selected to group the inventory units by their general location within the planning area.

Each of the five area report files follows the specific inventory and assessment methodology established by IM-2011-154, Attachment 1. The most recent guidance, IM-2011-154, also provided standardized forms for the wilderness characteristic inventory and assessment.

Each subunit that was inventoried and assessed within the five geographic areas listed above was assigned a unique identifier, generally based on the nearest existing WSA (e.g. CO-030-286-a). A "Permanent Documentation File" has been completed for each subunit which determined whether that particular subunit contains wilderness characteristics.

Approval:

Field Manager: Conni Cuntz **Date:** 11.15.12

