
Current Conditions: Presence or Absence of Wilderness Characteristics

Area Unique Identifier: CO-S05000-001 Camel Back WSA Adjacent

Acreage: 8,700 (includes BLM lands in the Colorado Wilderness Network proposal, exclusive of Camel Back WSA)

(1) Is the area of sufficient size? (If the area meets one of the exceptions to the size criterion, check "Yes" and describe the exception in the space provided below),

Yes No

Description:

This unit is contiguous with Camel Back WSA.

The Colorado Wilderness Network proposal includes all BLM lands of Monitor Canyon from rim to rim, most of the BLM lands on Monitor Mesa, except for an area on the south end of the mesa. Also included is Potter Canyon from the WSA boundary on the east, up to the west rim of the canyon formed by Monitor Mesa. The unit is bounded on the north by private land and on the south by US Forest Service land.

(2) Does the area appear to be natural?

Yes No N/A

Description:

Most of Monitor Mesa shows substantial evidence of human modification. In addition to constructed and maintained routes that run the length of the mesa top, nearly all of the mesa top has undergone mechanical vegetative treatments (e.g., chaining, roller-chopping) that are obvious to a casual observer. For this reason, 1,750 acres of Monitor Mesa has been excluded from the unit.

This leaves 6,950 acres, which include BLM lands in Monitor Canyon from rim to rim, and Potter Canyon from its west rim to the Camel Back WSA boundary in the bottom of Potter Canyon. The unit is bounded on the north by a road and private land and on the south by US Forest Service lands.

Both Monitor and Potter canyons (exclusive of the top of Monitor Mesa) possess a high degree of naturalness. The Camel Back WSA boundary in Potter canyon is defined by an old, impassable vehicle route that runs up the bottom of the canyon. The route was still in use when the WSA was established, but has long since fallen into disuse, and was closed by BLM's Dry Creek Transportation Plan (2009). It is no longer passable for any type of vehicle, and occasional flooding in Potter Creek together with growth of riparian vegetation is reclaiming the old route. While a person on the ground could still find evidence of the old road it is substantially unnoticeable

in the unit as a whole. From the WSA boundary in the bottom of Potter Creek up to the west rim of Potter Canyon the terrain is rugged and steep with rocky outcrops and ledges. Potter Creek has perennial flows. There are four small stock ponds on a bench about halfway up the slope, but they do not significantly detract from the overall naturalness.

The unit includes all BLM lands in Monitor Canyon from rim to rim. It is characterized by steep, broken cliffs and ledges with a perennial stream in the bottom. An old abandoned mineral exploration route exists in a side-drainage on the northwest side of the canyon. Though it was originally constructed, there has been no maintenance or vehicle use on the route for many years, and it is slowly weathering away. It is somewhat noticeable from certain vantage points, but does not dominate the setting. There is one small stock pond on the southwest bench of the canyon that is occasionally maintained via a short ATV access trail. The trail is open to administrative use, but closed to public use. The canyon as a whole is predominately natural appearing.

A stock trail runs from near the confluence of Monitor and Potter Creeks up the northern ridge of Monitor Mesa and onto the mesa. The portion of the trail ascending the steeper, rocky layers was originally built with mechanized equipment, likely a bulldozer. This trail is actively used by the grazing permittee, but only for driving cattle, which is accomplished on horseback. The trail is regularly maintained with hand tools to ensure its continued use. It's clearly visible from certain vantage points, but since it is a local, linear feature (as opposed to a broad area) it does not dominate the scene, and does not detract from the overall naturalness of the unit.

(3) Does the area (or the remainder of the area if a portion has been excluded due to unnaturalness and the remainder is of sufficient size) have outstanding opportunities for solitude?

Yes No N/A

Description (describe the area's outstanding opportunities for solitude):

With the high topographic relief, rugged terrain and lack of vehicular access outstanding opportunities for solitude exist in this unit. In the canyon bottoms, where most hiking and equestrian use occurs, the riparian vegetation provides excellent visual and aural screening.

Recreational use is mostly light in this unit, with an increase in use during the hunting season. With light use and ample size, one mostly feels alone on a large landscape. Contacts with other visitors are rare.

The closest major metropolitan area is Denver, CO, approximately 275 miles distant (by car). Grand Junction, CO (pop. 60,000) is 40 miles distant. Montrose, Delta, and Olathe are all within 20 miles of the unit and have a combined population of approximately 25,000.

The unit is approximately 10 miles from the Delta County airport, and 18 miles from the Montrose airport (measured to the nearest point). Montrose airport is the busiest airport in the area with several commercial jet flights arriving and departing each day during the busy season. The busy season is primarily the ski season in Telluride, which extends from November through April in a typical year. Typical flight paths in and out of local airports do not pass over this unit, so impacts from low-flying aircraft are not common.

(4) Does the area (or the remainder of the area if a portion has been excluded due to unnaturalness and the remainder is of sufficient size) have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation?

Yes X No _____ N/A _____

Description (describe the area's outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation):

All recreational use of the area is non-motorized and non-mechanized. Primary activities are backpacking, day hiking, equestrian use, and hunting. There are few trails, and no recreational facilities in the area. All use is self-directed and requires basic backcountry travel and map-reading or GPS skills.

(5) Does the area have supplemental values (ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value)?

Yes X No _____ N/A _____

Description:

Monitor Creek contains areas of Fremont cottonwood/skunkbush sumac riparian woodland (*Populus deltoides* spp. *Wislizeni/Rhus trilobata*) which is classified as globally imperiled by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP). It also contains a superior (A-ranked) occurrence of the common coyote willow riparian shrubland (*Salix exigua*/mesic graminoids).

It also provides habitat connectivity between the higher elevation forested lands on the Uncompahgre Plateau to the lower elevation desert scrub lands at the lower end of the unit. This is important especially for seasonal wildlife migrations.

Summary of Analysis*

Area Unique Identifier: CO-S05000-001 Camel Back WSA Adjacent

Summary

Results of analysis:

Of the 8,700 acres analyzed, 6,950 acres have wilderness characteristics.

Most of Monitor Mesa shows substantial evidence of human modification. In addition to constructed and maintained routes that run the length of the mesa top, nearly all of the mesa top has undergone mechanical vegetative treatments (e.g., chaining, roller-chopping) that are obvious to a casual observer. For this reason, most of Monitor Mesa has been excluded from the unit.

1. Does the area meet any of the size requirements? Yes No

2. Does the area appear to be natural?

Yes No N/A

3. Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?

Yes No N/A

4. Does the area have supplemental values? Yes No N/A

Check one:

The area, or a portion of the area, has wilderness characteristics and is identified as lands with wilderness characteristics.

The area does not have wilderness characteristics.

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4-3-15

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* This form documents information that constitutes an inventory finding on wilderness characteristics. It does not represent a formal land use allocation or a final agency decision subject to administrative remedies under either 43 CFR parts 4 or 1610.5-3.