

Year: 2011

Inventory Unit Number/Name: Pryor Mountains Unit (8 separate Tracts)

**FORM 1**

**DOCUMENTATION OF BLM WILDERNESS INVENTORY FINDINGS ON RECORD:**

**1. Is there existing BLM wilderness inventory information on all or part of this area?**

No \_\_\_\_\_ (Go to Form 2) Yes  X  (if more than one unit is within the area, list the names/numbers of those units.):

Much of the lands were initially inventoried as portions of what became two separate WSAs, the Pryor Mountains and the Big Horn Tack-On WSAs. At the time human impacts were recorded which eliminated them from consideration. Other lands were acquired after the initial inventory was concluded:

A portion of Tract 1 was previously inventoried and found to possess wilderness values, but another portion of this Tract (T. 8 S., R., 28 E., Section 16 – 640 acres) was acquired after the inventory and has not been previously evaluated. Some lands (154 acres) in Section 1 have also never been inventoried since they were previously isolated by the acquired lands.

Tracts 2 and 3 (T., 9 S., R 28 E., Section 16 - 640 acres) were not previously inventoried for wilderness character since they were acquired after the inventory effort. They were subsequently recommended for potential wilderness designation in the Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report (1991) and were noted as being outside the WSA.

Tracts 4, 5 and 7 were recommended for wilderness designation in the Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report (1991) and were noted as being outside the WSAs. However, they were not inventoried for wilderness character.

Tracts 6 and 8 were previously inventoried by BLM and found to lack wilderness character. It was noted in the Final Decision, Montana Wilderness Inventory, (1980), that the lands now in Tract 6 had a power line, a portion of a stock trail, a vehicle routes used to view wild horses, and some small uranium mining scars. The lands now in Tract 8 were noted as having extensive uranium mining scars and other development impacts.

a) Inventory Source:  Bureau of Land Management

b) Inventory Unit Name(s)/Number(s):  Pryor Mountains (MT-067-206) and Big Horn Tack-On (MT 067-027)

c) Map Name(s)/Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

d) BLM District(s)/Field Office(s):  Lewiston District, Billings Field Office

**2. BLM Inventory Findings on Record:**

Existing inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics (if more than one BLM inventory unit is associated with the area, list each unit and answer each question individually for each inventory unit):

Existing inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Inventory Source: _ Bureau of Land Management Unit#/Name</b>	<b>Size (historic acres)</b>	<b>Natural Condition? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Solitude? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Primitive &amp; Unconfined Recreation? Y/N</b>	<b>Supplemental Values? Y/N</b>
<b>Pryor Mountains MT -067-206</b>	18,067	Y - 16,927 N- 1,120 (portions or all of Tracts 6, 7 and 8)	Y	Y	Y
<b>Big Horn Tack-On MT-067-207</b>	4,450 acres	Y - 2,470 acres brought forward, other 2,000 acres dropped but recommended for wilderness designation (tracts 3, 4, 5)	Y	Y	Y

## FORM 2

### DOCUMENTATION OF CURRENT WILDERNESS INVENTORY CONDITIONS

a. Unit Number/Name: Pryor Mountains Unit (8 Tracts) MT-0100-206 and 207

(1) Is the unit of sufficient size?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  X

None of the Tracts identified below are over 5,000 acres in size, but the review team analyzed all the Tracts since it was known that most if not all were adjacent to existing WSAs and this met the exemption criteria. There are no private lands or State lands inholdings present.

The public lands in the inventory unit are as follows:

Tract 1: This parcel is approximately 2,873 acres in size. This parcel is separated from The Pryor Mountains WSA by an established road (Sykes Ridge Road) but is adjacent to the Big Horn Tack-On WSA to the south and lands administratively endorsed for wilderness designation by the NPS in the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area to the southeast. Private lands form the northern boundary and the west boundary is a combination of a vehicle road, private lands and Custer National Forest lands.

Tract 2: This parcel is approximately 497 acres in size. It is adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA to the west, south and north, while the Sykes Ridge road forms the boundary to the east.

Tract 3: This parcel is approximately 142 acres in size. It is adjacent to the Big Horn Tack-On WSA on the north, east and south sides. The west side is the Sykes Ridge road.

Tract 4: This parcel is approximately 445 acres in size. The parcel boundary is formed by vehicle routes on all sides. It was initially unclear whether the two boundary routes were roads, trails or a combination of both. If either vehicle route were found not to be a road, then the tract would be adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA or the Big Horn Tack-On WSA.

Tract 5: This tract parcel is an irregular shape and the boundary is formed by a combination of vehicle routes and a ROW. It is approximately 536 acres in size with 353 acres in Wyoming and 183 acres in Montana. The Pryor Mountains WSA is located to the west and the Big Horn Tack-on WSA is located to the east. It was initially unclear whether the two routes were roads or trails or a combination of both. If either one of the two boundary vehicle routes were determined to be a way, then the tract would be adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA or the Big Horn Tack-On WSA. BLM has determined that the vehicle route to the east is not a road and that the Tract is adjacent to the Big Horn Tack-On WSA. The tract will not meet the size criteria by itself but as an extension of the WSA it will and so this Tract will be evaluated further. See the Road Analysis Forms for details.

Tract 6: This parcel is located adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA to its north. It is approximately 1074 acres in size and is completely within Wyoming. The boundary is either a county maintained road or a Power Line ROW to the south, east, and west.

Tract 7: This tract parcel is located adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA on the north, east and south. The west side boundary is a county road (Burnt Timber Road). It is approximately 326 acres in size.

Tract 8: This parcel is located adjacent to the Pryor Mountains WSA on the north, east and south. The western boundary is a county road (Burnt Timber Road). The Tract is approximately 283 acres in size.

**Total acreage:           6,176 acres**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT CONDITIONS:**

The Pryor Mountains range in elevation from around 8,480 feet in the north end down to around 3,780 feet in the southeastern end of the range.

The upper elevations of the Pryor Mountains are characterized by patches of Douglas fir, particularly on the north slopes, with occasional open parks. Understory is generally sparse in the dense Douglas fir stands. Shrub species include snowberry, ninebark, spirea, and juniper. Limber pine is also present, along with bluewbu8inch wheat grass, needle-and-thread grass, bluegrasses, forbs, and sedges. In the open, unforested areas, vegetation is composed primarily of shrubs and grasses. Big sagebrush and shrubby cinquefoil are the dominate shrubs. Grasses include mountain brome, Kentucky bluegrass, and bluebunch wheatgrass. Common forbs are balsam root, geranium, and Eriogonum.

The mid elevations of the Pryor Mountains consist mostly of mountain shrubs. Utah juniper occupies the upper elevations gradually blending into mountain mahogany and eventually into big sagebrush Black sage, rabbit brush, and skunkbrush sumac may also be present along with bluebunch wheatgrass, needle-and-thread grass, three-awn, and sandberg bluegrass.

The red Desert/saltshrub occurs on the lower slopes of the Pryor Mountains. Vegetation is generally spares and scattered. Saltbushes of the Atriplex genus compose the majority of the vegetation.

There is no commercial timber harvest allowed on the lands.

There is no licensed livestock use allowed on the lands.

There are no active oil and gas leases allowed on the lands.

There is evidence of extensive mining exploration, which is most apparent in Tract 8. None are being conducted at this time.

ROW WYW 79503, a county maintained road with a 50 foot width, lies along the southern end of Tract 6. This forms a portion of the boundary.

ROW WYWO 262374, a Bureau of Reclamation power line, lies along the southern boundary of Tract 5. This forms a portion of the boundary

MTM 75373, and 8 foot wide ROW exists in Tract

Much of the lands are within the Pryor Mountains Wild Horse Range (PMWHR): however, since the management plan for the PMWHR was written with possible wilderness designation in mind, very little wilderness conflict exists with management of the wild horse range. The PMWHR was established by Act of Congress. Management actions conducted by the BLM include the construction and operation of a number of water developments and the occasional temporary installation of corrals for wild horse gathers.

The East Pryor Mountains ACEC is located over all of the lands. It was established for the protection of resource values in the 1984 Billings RMP.

The Crooked Creek National Natural Area covers a portion of Tract 6. This area provides significant fossil evidence of Early Cretaceous terrestrial fossil vertebrates and is one of only two known areas representing this period of life on the North American continent. It has produced eight new species and three new genera of dinosaurs. It was established in 1966. There is ongoing scientific research being done by Accredited Colleges under permit by BLM.

There are two communication sites located at T. 8 S., R. 28 E., Section 6 and T. 8 S., R. 28 E., Section 21.

**(2) Is the unit in a natural condition?**

Yes   X              No   X      N/A       

**Description:**

The lands are primarily in a natural condition, with a few, mostly well screened intrusions. Topography and vegetation screen these intrusions, which are mostly located adjacent to the designated road network and not in the interior of the Tracts.

Tract 1: A historical site, Pen's Cabin, is located in T. 8 S., R. 28 E., section 7. Pen's cabin was built about 1925. This site is a popular recreation attraction and the localized area is not in a natural condition due to human impacts from dispersed camping. There are two communication sites located on T. 8 S., R. 28 E., Section 6 and T. 8 S., R. 28 E., Section 21. These localized sites are not in a natural condition, but the rest of the Tract is. The total impact area is approximately 10 acres.

Tract 2: The lands are in a natural condition. The terrain and vegetation along Sykes Ridge road does not lend itself to cross-country OHV use or dispersed camping. There is a user-created foot trail leading to Frog's Fault Cave, which is only a short distance from the road. It attracts recreational use of an unknown level.

Tract 3: The lands are in a natural condition. The terrain and vegetation along Sykes Ridge road does not lend itself to cross-country OHV use. There are several wide spots along the road where vehicles park for scenic views or use as pull outs for opposing traffic but these are not major intrusions into the Tract and some are rehabbing naturally. None of these routes were evaluated by the BLM.

Tract 4: BLM has determined that both vehicle routes used as boundaries meet the classification of a road, and that the parcel is isolated from either WSA. Accordingly, these lands do not meet the size criteria for evaluation and lack wilderness character. See the Road Analysis Forms for details. This Tract will not be evaluated further since it does not meet the stand-alone size criteria.

Tract 5: BLM has determined that a portion of Tract 5 is isolated from the rest of the Tract by a vehicle route which is classified as a Road. This portion of the Tract is approximately 46 acres in size and is located in portions of T. 58 N., R. 95 W., Sections 22, 23, and 26. Although it has been recommended for wilderness designation (BLM Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report, 1991), this portion of Tract will not be evaluated further since it does not meet the stand-alone size criteria.

Tract 6: The BLM closed the sole vehicle route identified during the initial inventory when the 1984 Billings RMP was signed. It has since naturally rehabbed and is not substantially noticeable. The electrical power line noted as an intrusion was used as a portion of the boundary in this effort and was not included in the area under consideration. The evidence of uranium exploration was determined to be minor in scale and size and is not substantially noticeable due to its location in the remote and generally untraveled interior of the Tract. Cattle are no longer grazed in the area. The natural condition of the landscape has improved from what was earlier observed since human use trends have changed through time and the lands are now in a natural condition.

Tract 7: The initial inventory identified several human improvements which were substantially noticeable, including vehicle routes and a fence line along the boundary. These impacts have been reduced or removed. The vehicle routes have naturally rehabbed after closure in the RMP of 1984. The land condition has improved and the lands are now in a natural condition.

Tract 8: There is extensive evidence of uranium exploration located throughout the Tract. This includes tailings piles, access roads, etc. The presence of these impacts was noted in the initial WSA inventory and the lands were found to not possess wilderness character. Although time has passed, these impacts have not significantly reduced naturally or have not been rehabbed manually. The east boundary was set along Aliquot parts, an artificial boundary, but an attempt at using natural features and human impact boundaries was determined to be too difficult to

manage. This Tract is not in a natural condition and the initial conclusions are still appropriate. The Tract will not be evaluated further.

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

Yes   X                        No                                 N/A           

**Description:**

The mountain topography in the unit is characterized by steep cliffs and dense timber in places. There are excellent opportunities for solitude and these are typical and complementary of the adjacent WSAs and the NPS lands. While some areas are located along vehicle routes there is also broken topography and vegetation screening present.

In Tract 6, the expansiveness of the unit compensates for the lack of vegetative screening. Patches of juniper and eroded hills provide more screening. Big Coulee is the major north-south drainage along the northeastern boundary of the unit. This channel with its array of side drainages would tend to spread users and increase the opportunity for solitude.

**(4) Does the unit (or the remainder of the unit 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:**

The entire area attracts a high level of both casual and commercial recreational use from local, regional, and national sources. The Pryor Mountains are marketed as a destination area by a wide range of local, state, and federal agencies as well as commercial concerns and special interests. The main recreational activities are semi-primitive motorized touring on the designated vehicle route network and primitive recreation throughout the landscape.

The Tracts are essentially extensions of the WSAs and taken together with the WSAs and the NPS lands provide extensive and expansive areas for primitive recreation opportunities and experiences. All of the Tracts are located within the Pryor Mountains Wild Horse Range. This is a significant attraction and there are several commercial operators providing tours. There are a number of caves and Karsts and human features, including Mystery Cave and Pen's Cabin, which are popular destination points. A small year round pond located in the northern region of Tract 1 provides excellent wild horse observation from the surrounding area. For experienced climbers there are there are sheer limestone cliff faces and pinnacles.

**(5) Does the unit have supplemental values?**

Yes  No  N/A

**Description:**

Tract 1: Pen's Cabin is a historical site dating to the 1920's, although the site itself has been rebuilt and is excluded from the unit. It is a popular destination and serves as a staging site for further recreational activities in the area.

Tracts 1, 2, 3, 5, most of Tract 6, and Tract 7 are within the PMWHR and provide critical habitat for the wild horse population, which is a unique and distinct population.

All lands are within the East Pryor ACEC, established for its significant resource values.

Tract 6 has the Crooked Creek National Natural Area.

All tracts have cave and karsts formations, which provide critical habitat for Bat Species, and have significant geological features within them.

The lands have been designated as Visual Resource Management Class II in the 1984 Billings RMP, in recognition of their scenic values. These are outstanding. There are colorful marine rock formations with hues ranging from blues, greys, and greens to the red formations of the Chugwater. Conifers in the higher elevations create a predominantly deep green contrast to the more arid lowlands.

A small herd of Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep in this area is noted as an important feature.

**Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

**Unit Name and Number:** MT-0010-01

**Summary**

**Results of Analysis:**

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

The lands, with the exception of Tract 4, taken together with the adjacent and contiguous BLM WSA lands and NPS lands recommended for wilderness designation, meet the size exception criteria.

**2. Does the area appear to be natural?**  Yes  No

The lands have minimal intrusions, as noted above, and are substantially in a natural condition, with the exception of small portions of Tracts 1 and 5, which have been excluded from the Inventory Unit.

All of Tract 8 has extensive mineral development and exploration impacts and lacks naturalness.

**3. Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?**       Yes     No     NA

There is abundant vegetation screening and topographical aspects which taken together with minimal vehicle use, which is also restricted to designated routes outside of the inventory Tracts, and general low use numbers offers challenging recreational opportunities for hiking, climbing, wildlife viewing, and hunting. There are numerous natural limestone caves and karsts which offer a range of caving opportunities and which are advertised. The Tracts, especially when considered with the adjacent WSAs and NPS lands, offer expansiveness and sequestration of an outstanding level.

**4. Does the area have supplemental values?**       Yes     No     NA

The lands possess the following significant resources documented in the Billings RMP and the Montana State wide Wilderness Report (1991): wildlife, plant, geology, scenery and cultural. The wild horse herd is a significant attractant and is known internationally.

All Wild Horse management operations conducted on the PMWHMR have been analyzed for potential impacts to wilderness values through the development of NEPA documents. None have caused detrimental effects. The occasional removal of the wild horses occurs when the population exceeds its carrying capacity and begins to damage the natural condition so the operation is considered to have beneficial aspects for the wilderness values. Similarly, the construction of the localized water developments spreads the wild horse population throughout the area and reduces potential adverse impacts throughout the range.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Check One:**

The area—or a portion of the area—has wilderness character.

**Lands with Wilderness Character:      5,685 acres**

**Lands without Wilderness Character:      491 acres**

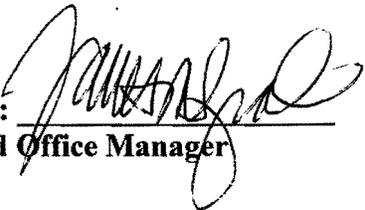
The area does not have wilderness character.

**Prepared by:**

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**Approved by (District or Field Manager):**

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**Title: Billings Field Office Manager**

**Date:** 12/12/12

\* This form documents information that constitutes and 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.