WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY UPDATE – 2011

FORM 1

Documentation of BLM Wilderness Characteristics Inventory Findings from Previous Inventory on Record

1. Is there existing BLM wilderness inventory information on all or part of this area?
No _____Yes __X_ (If yes, and if more than one area is within the area, list the names of those areas.):

a) Inventory Source: Montana BLM's Initial Inventory (November 1978 – August 1979)
Montana BLM's Intensive Inventory (August 1979 - November 1980)

b) Inventory Area Name(s)/Number(s): Black Elk Coulee / MT-066-252

c) Map Name(s)/Number(s): BLM Montana Wilderness Inventory Maps:
Final Initial Inventory Map (August 1979)
Proposed Wilderness Study Decision Map Lewistown & Miles City Districts (March 1980)
Final Inventory Decision Map Lewistown & Miles City Districts (November 1980)

d) BLM District(s)/Field Office(s): Lewistown / Havre Resource Area

2. BLM Inventory Findings on Record:
Existing inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics (if more than one BLM inventory area is associated with the area, list each area and answer each question individually for each inventory area):

Inventory source: Montana BLM's Initial Inventory (November 1978 – August 1979)					
Area Unique Identifier	**Sufficient Size? (acres)**	**Naturalness?**	**Outstanding Solitude?**	**Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation?**	**Supplemental Values?**
MT-066-252	YES (9,702)	--	--	--	--
Comments	The unit possess at scattered locations, 4 reservoirs, 5-6 miles of fence, one loading corral, 7 dry gas holes, and numerous primitive vehicle trails. It may possibly have a few active gas sites. Although some development has occurred within the unit over the years, the area appears to have retained much of its primitive characteristics.				
Inventory source: Montana BLM's Intensive Inventory (August 1979 - November 1980)					
MT-066-252	YES (9,700)	YES	NO	NO	--
Comments	The few impacts that have occurred are well hidden by the topography and have allowed the unit to retain its natural appearance. The channeling effect of the single deep coulee, the narrow and cluttered boundary width of the area, and the presence of intensive farming activities on bluffs overlooking the coulee limits opportunities for solitude. Opportunities for a primitive and unconfined form of recreation are less than outstanding because of a lack of diversity. Recreational activities include hunting, camping, and hiking, but these activities are not outstanding.				

FORM 2

Current Conditions: Presence or Absence of Wilderness Characteristics

a. Area Unique Identifier__Black Elk Coulee – Area 4_____Acreage__8721_____
(If the inventory area consists of subunits, list the acreage of each and evaluate each separately).

(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_X_____ No _____
(Note: If "No" is checked the area does not have wilderness characteristics; check "NA" for the remaining questions below.)

Description *(describe the boundaries of the area – wilderness inventory roads, property lines, etc.):*

The unit is long and narrow, averaging 1-1.5 miles in width. The boundaries of this unit are generally defined by surrounding State and private lands with the following exceptions. Adjustments to the northern boundary of the unit were made to exclude active oil and gas leases MTM 1510 and MTM 1506 in sections 24, 25 & 26 (T25N R17E) and developed right-of-ways in sections 20 and 29 (T25N R18E). Approximately 450 acres of BLM in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument is contiguous to this inventory unit and has similar wilderness characteristics. An "Open BLM Road" with no public access separates this area from the Stafford Wilderness Study Area MT-068-250.

(2) Does the area appear to be natural? Yes __X___No _____ N/A_____
(Note: If "No" is checked the area does not have wilderness characteristics; check "NA" for the remaining questions below.)

Description *(include land ownership, location, topography, vegetation, and summary of major human uses/activities):*

The Black Elk Coulee Unit contains vegetation and topography typical of the Missouri River breaks region. The unit contains nearly level to rolling upland areas dissected by steep timbered coulees. The sagebrush/grassland type occurs on open ridges in timbered areas and cover large areas of the landscape that are nearly level to slightly sloping. This habitat type features a canopy of Wyoming big sagebrush with an herbaceous understory dominated by rhizomatous grasses and bunchgrasses. Timbered coulees are common and contain both ponderosa pine and Douglas fir habitat types. Douglas fir is more widespread on north-facing slopes while ponderosa pine tolerates drier sites such as south and west-facing slopes. There are examples of upland benches scattered throughout the unit with mid-grasses as the dominant plant community. Black Coulee is a large drainage that dissects the northern portion of the unit and is a prominent feature bordering the west side and southern end.

There are five plugged and abandoned gas/oil wells in this unit which is 78% leased (based on original inventory unit boundary). There is at least 2.3 miles of vehicle routes within the unit. There are portions of 7 grazing allotments within this unit. Most of the infrastructure supporting

the range program is located in the north half of the unit and consists of barb wire fences and stock water reservoirs and pits. All of these man-made features were deemed to be substantially unnoticeable and didn't detract from the apparent naturalness of the unit.

The southern end of the unit is bordered by the Sanford Ranch. Private cropland and CRP lands seeded to tame and native grasses are common along the southeast and west central portions 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__X____ No_____ N/A_____

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

Public access to the unit is limited to the very southern tip and would be reached traveling by foot from the Missouri River overland for about 2 miles. The remoteness of the unit combined with topographic and some vegetative screening creates outstanding opportunities for solitude. Most private lands directly adjacent to the unit are either native range or have been seeded back to grass and are no longer farmed. Vehicle use of routes on adjacent lands is infrequent and is controlled by private landowners.

(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_____
(Note: If "No" is checked for both 3 and 4 the areas does not have wilderness characteristics; check "NA" for question 5.)

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

It's possible to participate in a variety of primitive and unconfined recreation activities in the Black Elk Coulee unit including hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, snowshoeing, photography and sightseeing for botanical, zoological and geological features.

The area has excellent mule deer hunting opportunities, but there are access issues due to much of the surrounding private land becoming leased for outfitted big game hunting. The unit supports a world class bighorn sheep herd. There have been several rams harvested in the area that approach or surpass 200" B&C.

(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:

The ridge tops and benches (plateaus) on the southern end of the unit offer outstanding panoramic views of the badlands and breaks topography that is unique to the Missouri River Breaks. Cultural Resources, both known and unknown within the unit boundary are present and may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Sites types located within

the general area include prehistoric cultural resources such as subsistence gathering and processing areas, rock alignments, spiritual locales and numerous habitation sites. Historic cultural resources include the physical remains of sites associated with farming, ranching, railroad, mining and the homestead era. It is important to note that physical manifestations associated with prehistoric and historic cultural resources are rarely apparent or visually dominating to the overall landscape.

Based on the original size of 9,468.71 acres.

- 468 acres of Greater sage-grouse winter range
- 9,468 acres of mule deer winter range
- 1,183 acres of pronghorn winter range

Summary of Analysis*

Area Unique Identifier: _Black Elk Coulee – Area 4

Summary

Results of analysis: *(Note: explain the inventory findings for the entirety of the inventory unit. When wilderness characteristics have been identified in an area that is smaller than the size of the total inventory unit, explain why certain portions of the inventory unit are not included within the lands with wilderness characteristics (e.g. the inventory found that certain parts lacked naturalness).)*

1. Does the area meet any of the size requirements? Yes___X_____ No_____

2. Does the area appear to be natural? Yes___X_____ No_____N/A_____

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

4. Does the area have supplemental values? Yes___X_____ No_____N/A_____

Check one:

___X__ The area, or a portion of the area, has wilderness characteristics.

_____ The area does not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by (team members):

Name	Title	Date
Kathy Tribby	Outdoor Recreation Planner	12/20/2011
Kirsten Boyle	Natural Resource Specialist	3/24/2011
Abby Hall	Range Technician	3/29/2011
Mitch Forsyth	Range Specialist	3/29/2011
Craig Miller	Wildlife Biologist	6/29/2011
Brian Hockett	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	6/29/2011
Barney Whiteman	Petroleum Engineer	6/29/2011

Reviewed by (District or Field Manager):

Name: Stanley Jaynes **Title:** Field manager

Date: 6/26/12

**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.*

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