

**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):**  Cummings Bench MT-066-251

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-066-254	YES (6,280)	--	--	--	--
<b>Comments</b>	The area possess 3-4 miles of vehicle ways, 6-7 dispersed reservoirs, 3 miles of fence, 3 dry gas exploration wells exposing only 4' marker pipes, and possible active gas drilling sites although their locations are not known at this time.				
Inventory source: Montana BLM's Intensive Inventory (August 1979 - November 1980)					
MT-066-254	NO	YES	YES	NO	--
<b>Comments</b>	Two roads were found during the intensive inventory that separate the unit into three parcels that are all less than 5000 acres. The terrain and vegetation visually screen the area's few impacts thereby preserving the unit's natural appearance and allowing opportunities for solitude. Opportunities are less than outstanding for a primitive and unconfined recreation due to the unit's lack of diversity and uniqueness.				

FORM 2

Current Conditions: Presence or Absence of Wilderness Characteristics

a. Area Unique Identifier Cummings Bench – Area 3B Acreage 6244  
(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.)

Neither of the two "roads" mentioned in the intensive inventory meet the definition of a wilderness inventory road at this time. The first vehicle route that "crosses the unit's center" shows evidence of originally being constructed, but it hasn't been improved and there isn't any evidence of maintenance. The second vehicle route that "cuts through a small section of the unit's eastern boundary" also shows evidence of being constructed by mechanical means, but hasn't been improved or maintained. Both routes are nearly impassible by pick-up and there's no indication that either of the routes receives regular and continuing use.

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

The boundaries of this unit are defined by the Greens Bench road to the north and surrounding private lands.

(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 Cummings Bench Unit contains vegetation and topography typical of the Missouri River breaks region. Areas of barren clay and sandstone outcrops (badlands) and gumbo soils (shale) with little or no plant cover are common features over a large part of the unit. 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 areas of the landscape that are nearly level to slightly sloping. Timbered areas 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. Upland benches are scattered throughout the unit with mid-grasses as the dominant plant community. Birch Creek is a large intermittent drainage, nearly all of which is in private ownership, bordering the southern boundary of the unit. Areas of Birch Creek, mostly the southwest corner of the unit, have been cultivated and are currently in hay production. Private cropland and CRP lands seeded to tame and native grasses are common along the east side of the unit.

The unit contains three stock water reservoirs, 1.8 miles of interior barb wire fence and five miles of interior vehicle routes used by recreationists and the grazing permittees to access range improvement projects. All of the man-made features observed during the field inspection were deemed to be substantially unnoticeable and didn't detract from the apparent naturalness of the unit. There are no right-of-ways in this 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):

Vehicle use of routes on BLM lands within the unit is infrequent and is controlled by the adjacent private landowners. Public access to the unit is non-motorized only from the Cow Island Trail (county road) across state lands in section 35 and 36 (T26N, R16E) and then across the Sand Creek inventory unit (Area 3A). The remoteness of the unit combined with topographic and some vegetative screening creates outstanding opportunities for solitude.

(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  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 Cummings Bench 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  No  N/A

Description:

Cummings Bench provides seasonal habitat for Greater sage-grouse, mule deer, pronghorn, elk, and bighorn sheep. Other supplemental values associated with these areas include numerous paleontological sites and prehistoric cultural resources, such as subsistence gathering and processing areas, rock alignments, spiritual locales and numerous habitation sites. Historic cultural resources such as the physical remains of sites associated with farming, ranching, and the homestead era are also present. 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.

### Summary of Analysis\*

Area Unique Identifier: Cummings Bench - Area 3B

#### 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  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.

The area does not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by (team members):

Name	Title	Date
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	4/1/2011
Brian Hockett	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	4/6/2011
Kathy Tribby	Outdoor Recreation Planner	6/21/2011
Josh Chase	Archaeologist	7/6/2011
Barney Whiteman	Petroleum Engineer	6/21/2011

Reviewed by (District or Field Manager):

Name: Stanley James 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.