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**EVALUATION OF NEW INFORMATION SUGGESTING THAT AN AREA OF  
PUBLIC LANDS HAS WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**Date of Submission:** June 12, 2013

**Proponent:** Montana Wilderness Association (MWA)

**Name of Area(s) Identified By the Proponent:** Montana Wilderness Association's Long  
Coulee (#338)

**BLM Field Office(s) Affected:** Glasgow Field Office

This evaluation covers BLM's Long Coulee (MTM-2012-61) wilderness characteristics  
inventory unit, minus the Burnett Flats Area for a total of 44,305 acres.

**Evaluation**

1. Does the submission include the required:

a) map which identifies the specific boundaries of the area(s) in question?

Yes   X   No

b) detailed narrative that describes the wilderness characteristics of the area and  
documents how that information significantly differs from the information in prior  
inventories conducted by BLM regarding the wilderness values of the area?

Yes   X   No

c) photographic documentation?

Yes   X   No

2. From the evidence presented by the proponent, as well as other relevant information (which  
may include documentation from prior BLM inventories, aerial photographs, field observations,  
maps, etc.), do you conclude that the information is significantly different from the information  
in prior inventories conducted by BLM regarding the wilderness values of the area or a portion  
of the area?

Yes   X   No

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**Explanation and Rationale:**

The initial BLM inventory for these lands was conducted in 1979 and was identified as MT-064-335 Long Coulee. Long Coulee was not recommended for further wilderness consideration in BLM's November 1980 *Wilderness Final Intensive Inventory Decisions* in part because of flat topography, lack of vegetative screening and the lack of opportunities for solitude or recreation. Hunting was mentioned as the best recreational activity but it was not considered outstanding. The original inventory for these units was revisited and updated in March 2011 in preparation for the HiLine Draft Resource Management Plan. The BLM concluded in 2012 that Long Coulee did not meet the naturalness criteria for wilderness characteristics.

The MWA split the original inventory unit for Long Coulee to remove the man-made dike system located on Burnett Flats area. This change decreased the size of the area from 46,048 to 44,305 acres. The MWA contends the "new" Long Coulee Unit, with the removal of the dike system, qualifies as LWC and supports their position with a detailed narrative and geo-referenced digital images. MWA also asserts that BLM erred in their finding that Long Coulee does not meet the naturalness threshold and provides solitude and primitive recreation. MWA supports their position with additional narrative and geo-referenced digital images.

MWA also presents information on a variety of primitive recreational activities that considered together suggest outstanding opportunities for primitive forms of recreation. They include information on recreation activities the BLM did not document in their previous inventory. Further, MWA provides information on supplemental wilderness values that BLM did not document in their previous inventories.

Because MWA proposes a different unit boundary than the BLM considered in their previous inventories and provides additional information on apparent naturalness of the areas, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and supplement wilderness values, the BLM concludes that the information MWA provides is new and significantly different from that considered in the BLM's previous inventories.

See the explanation to question #3 below for further discussion on the differences between the information MWA provides and the information the BLM considered in their previous inventory.

3. From the evidence presented by the proponent, as well as other relevant information (which may include documentation from prior BLM inventories, aerial photographs, field observations, maps, etc.), do you conclude: *(Check a or b below.)*

a) that the decision reached in previous BLM inventories remains valid.

(or)

b) that there is a reasonable probability that the area(s) in question (or a significant portion(s) thereof) may have wilderness characteristics.

**Explanation and Rationale:**

MWA proposes an LWC (lands with wilderness characteristics) unit of 44,305 acres, which exceeds the minimum requirement of 5,000 acres. The boundaries they use follow well-maintained roads and trails. The MWA proposal narrative is complete and has all the required

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information, including geo-referenced digital images. MWA's report provides new information on all 3 wilderness characteristics, (size, naturalness & outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation), and includes additional information on supplemental values.

BLM staff conducted a field inspection of the Long Coulee proposed LWC in early-August 2013. BLM staff also reviewed the previous BLM wilderness characteristics inventories, aerial photographs and maps in preparing this evaluation.

### **Boundary Delineation**

BLM staff toured the area on August 7, 2013 to visually evaluate Long Coulee for determination of lands with wilderness characteristics. BLM staff reviewed MWA's proposed unit boundaries, as well as the original boundaries. The MWA proposed boundaries were based on removing an area that is highly developed with a man-made dike system.

As stated in the original assessment, the boundary roads are maintained and well-traveled throughout the year. The boundary change proposal by MWF would change the northwestern boundary to a lesser traveled trail that wouldn't be used as frequently.

Both units qualify by being well over the 5,000 acre minimum.

### **Naturalness and Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation**

As stated by MWA in their submission to the BLM on Long Coulee, this unit was eliminated in past assessments due to lacking topographic and vegetative screening and lacking outstanding opportunities for solitude and recreation. It was also stated that this area has limited remoteness and solitude, and the recreational opportunities were not spectacular.

In addition, the 2012 inventory described the area as no longer having naturalness. This was due to many reservoirs throughout the area and a water spreading system on the north end. The area was described as relatively flat and numerous man-made reservoirs are visible from nearly every vantage point.

The MWA contends that the area has become more natural with time and that stock water ponds appear more natural than at earlier times. It also contends that some routes have become degraded and are no longer used.

BLM continues to view both the original area and the MWA proposed area without the man-made spreader dike system as having an abundance of man-made structure that are visible from nearly every vantage point. Excluding the dike system, nearly 50 constructed dams are located in this unit. Many of these structures continue to be on the BLM asset list as hazard class dams that will be provided a range of investment from no maintenance to fully rebuilding the existing dams. Jim Dam was recently rebuilt and is located inside the unit, while Triple Crossing Dam on the boundary will be rebuilt in the summer of 2014. Additional dams will be rebuilt and maintained in the next ten years.

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The MWA also discusses additional uses and recreational opportunities than what was discussed in the BLM inventories. The MWA's list does include additional opportunities that an individual can experience on nearly all BLM lands in the District.

**Summary**

The BLM concludes that the information the Montana Wilderness Association presents on the Long Coulee proposed LWC unit does not warrant further consideration. Based on a review of the information submitted by MWA and a review of other pertinent information, as well as a site visit, BLM staff determined that the conclusion reached in previous BLM inventories remains valid. A copy of the Montana Wilderness Association's Long Coulee proposed LWC (#338) "citizen submitted information" will be maintained in the permanent documentation file for the Long Coulee (MTM-2012-61) wilderness characteristics inventory unit. BLM staff concluded that the original boundaries for the Long Coulee MTM-2012-61 wilderness characteristics inventory unit are accurate.

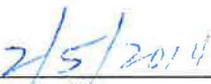
The following staff and information sources were used in arriving at this determination.

- Kathy Tribby – Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Abel Guevara – Wildlife Biologist
- Vinita Shea – Malta Field Office Manager
- Ray Neumiller – Rangeland Management Specialist
- Steve Klessens – Rangeland Management Specialist (retired)
- Pat Gunderson – Glasgow Field Office Manager

Reference Material:

- Draft HiLine Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement
- BLM Manual 6310 – Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Lands
- BLM Manual 6320 – Considering Lands With Wilderness Characteristics in the BLM Land Use Planning Process
- Montana Fort Peck West Surface Management Status 1:100,000-Scale Topographic Map
- Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Guide Map and Information
- GIS-generated Orthophoto Maps

  
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Field Manager, Glasgow Field Office

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*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.*