

# Master Leasing Plan (MLP) Assessment Book Cliffs Divide-Grand Valley-Cisco Desert

Utah State Office  
Moab Field Office  
November 2010

## **Name and Location of MLP Area:**

Book Cliffs Divide-Grand Valley-Cisco Desert in eastern Utah.

## **Internal or External Proposal?**

DESCRIPTION:

EXTERNAL – Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA), 8/17/2010

The 405,986 acre proposal is located in east-central Utah and includes the majority of the Grand Valley, Cisco Desert and other areas between the Bookcliffs on the north and the Colorado River on the south. The boundary of the proposed area follows the southern boundaries of the Coal Canyon WSA, and Flume Canyon WSA in a northeast to southwest direction then follows several dirt roads across Sagers Flat in a southern direction to Interstate 70. The southeastern boundary follows Interstate 70 to Cisco then the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad to the Colorado River. The eastern boundary of the area follows the Utah /Colorado state line north to the Divide road which forms the northern boundary of the area. The area is completely within the Moab Field Office.

INTERNAL – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) considered a similar but smaller area that is 239,993 acres in size. Like the external proposal, BLMs western boundary follows the Coal Canyon and Flume Canyon WSAs. The southern boundary utilizes land lines and Interstate 70 to White House then follows the Denver Rio Grande railroad to the Colorado River. The eastern boundary also uses the Utah/Colorado state line north. BLMs northern boundary excludes the Bar X gas field and the State Line gas field which occupy most of the northern part of the external proposal. BLM also removed some of the southwestern acreage with authorized leases. However, BLM's proposal is fully encompassed within the SUWA proposal.

Map A illustrates the boundaries of the MLP proposals (external and internal) including the authorized, pending and deferred leases within the proposal area. Map B shows existing oil and gas fields, shut in oil and gas wells, producing oil and gas wells and plugged/ abandoned wells. The Utah BLM recommendation is the internal Bookcliffs/Divide/Cisco MLP as delineated on the map Bookcliffs/Divide/Cisco A.

## **Does the area meet the criteria and qualify for MLP analysis?**

Both proposals encompass the same general area but the boundary was adjusted for the internal proposal to better fit the criteria. There does not appear to be any new information or changed circumstances in the proposed areas since the RMP was completed. However, the State Director proposes to exercise his discretion to take a closer look at the area and recommends that an MLP be prepared for the internally proposed area delineated on the attached maps.

## **Supporting Information:**

**1. What Resource Management Plan(s) are applicable to the MLP area?**

Moab Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP); dated October 31, 2008<sup>1</sup> (as maintained).

**2. Potential resource issues raised in the MLP proposal:**

Potential resource issues raised in the MLP proposal include impacts from leasing to wildlife, Citizen Wilderness Proposals (CWP) and areas that were considered and not designated as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). Issues also include potential effects on recreational opportunities such as river running, primitive hunting, and mountain biking. Wildlife issues raised in the external proposal include: burrowing mammals; big game and large mammal habitat (elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and black bear); habitat for state “wildlife species of concern” (white tailed prairie dog, ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl), and other raptors (golden eagle and Mexican spotted owl). The proponents also claim that the area contain seven CWP areas (Westwater Creek, Mexico Point, Hideout Canyon, Coal Canyon, Diamond Canyon, Flume Canyon, and Westwater Canyon) and two areas that were previously considered and not designated as an ACEC (Cisco White Tailed Prairie Dog Complex and Book Cliffs Wildlife Area) that the proponents feel the BLM should reconsider.

[NOTE: Of the areas described above, Coal Canyon and Flume Canyon are both included in Diamond Canyon area. Survey Point is not mentioned but it includes Westwater Creek.]

**3. How does the current Plan address these issues?**

The decisions within the Approved RMP were developed through an interdisciplinary process and extensive public participation including SUWA. The RMP also considered provisions of other state, county & federal plans, habitat management plans, endangered species recovery plans, and numerous activity plans and policies. The issues identified have been addressed in the current RMP.

The Moab RMP considered and analyzed wildlife and wildlife habitat, and made decisions which reflect this analysis. The BLM coordinated/consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR). For listed (threatened and endangered) species, the BLM completed a Biological Assessment, which made determinations of effect for each listed species (including Mexican Spotted Owl) based on conservation measures, stipulations and notices. These measures were affirmed by the USFWS in its Biological Opinion. Decisions involving other wildlife and wildlife habitat, including special status species and sensitive species, were developed in cooperation with the USFWS and the UDWR.

Additional special status species decisions cover implementation of recovery actions/recovery plans (including future plans), habitat protection/manipulation, survey, monitoring, translocations, specific species (Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, Gunnison sage-grouse, white tailed and Gunnison prairie dogs, Colorado river fishes, golden eagle,

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed online at: <http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/moab/planning.html>.

burrowing owl, kit fox, Ferruginous hawk, yellow-billed cuckoo, Jones cycladenia and California condor) (RMP, pages 117-125).

Likewise, additional wildlife and fisheries decisions for implementation/updates of habitat management plans and conservation plans, livestock grazing closures or season of use changes, camping restrictions, protection of migratory birds, predator management, important habitat (riparian areas, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, deer, elk, & raptors) and forage allocation are also detailed (RMP pages 136-143).

Management considerations in selecting the approved RMP included air quality, cultural resources, lands & realty, livestock grazing, minerals, non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics, recreation, soil & water, special designations (ACECs and Wild and Scenic Rivers), travel management, vegetation, visual resource management and wildlife.

Management protection was provided for potential ACECs not designated in the Approved RMP (Table 2, Page 30-33). The Cisco White Tailed Prairie Dog Complex [wildlife relevance and importance (R&I)], is managed as controlled surface use (CSU) (including no permanent above ground facilities) within 660 feet of active prairie dog colonies and off highway vehicle (OHV) activity is restricted to designated routes. More restrictive protections are not warranted to maintain the R&I value.

The Bookcliffs Wildlife Area (wildlife, natural systems and cultural resources R&I), is closed to leasing on those portions within wilderness study areas (WSA). The remaining acreage is managed with timing limitations (TL) to protect wildlife and travel is limited to designated routes. In addition, activities are precluded within riparian areas (natural systems) by policy. Cultural resources are protected by statute and policies. As such, more restrictive protections are also not warranted to maintain the R&I values.

Non-WSA areas with wilderness characteristics were considered throughout the planning process. As discussed in the RMP (pages 27-29), areas not selected for the management of wilderness characteristics were found to have other important values including leased acreage, vegetative treatments and range improvements or are protected by a controlled surface use (CSU) stipulation.

The MLP proposal contains part of the Extensive Recreation Management Area and did not warrant focus areas similar to what is south of Interstate 70. River running, primitive hunting, and mountain biking activities and oil and gas leasing and development were evaluated in the RMP and conflicts were addressed. As stated, (RMP, page 29), visitors to the Moab planning area come for non-motorized and motorized activities which inherently conflict with one another. Riverine systems that support recreation activities and municipalities are given priority when warranted. Recreation activity within the area of the MLP was acknowledged but did not warrant the intensive management as required within special recreation management areas (SRMAs) or focus areas. For example, the RMP designated the Klondike Bluffs Mountain Bike Focus Area (outside of this MLP) because of the high use by recreationists. BLM specialists found that public demand was lower within the MLP area.

A listing of RMP protesting parties and a summary of issues are contained in the Director's Protest Resolution Report prepared on October 28, 2008<sup>2</sup>. Challenges to the RMP were appropriately addressed during the planning process. RMP decisions were reviewed against the protest merits and specifically addressed non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics, ACECs and wild and scenic river designations. For example, Appendix K (RMP, pages K-1 to K-5) contains an overview of the wilderness characteristics interdisciplinary review process and it specifically discusses the seven units identified above. The SUWA protest claimed that BLM did not properly consider their wilderness characteristics nominations and found fault with the boundary delineations made by BLM and therefore maintained that BLM ignored vital information. In his report, the Director affirmed BLM's wilderness character review process and stands firmly on its subsequent decisions regarding the selection and management of the non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics.

**If MLP analysis is warranted, describe how and when MLP analysis will likely occur:**

The RMP for this area was completed in 2008. An MLP would be a "stand-alone" effort and not part on an ongoing or planned RMP revision. Upon receiving a decision from the Director on Utah's proposed MLP submissions, the MLPs would be prioritized and initiated as budgets allow.

**Describe the process used for review:**

For each of the proposals (the external and the internal) interdisciplinary teams looked at a range of GIS layers to determine if the proposal area fit the four criteria listed to require a MLP. The following GIS layers were reviewed as part of the interdisciplinary review process: existing leases, wells (active and plugged-and-abandoned), land ownership, deferred parcels, unissued leases with pending protests, leases which are under suspension due to court decisions, current plan oil and gas stipulations, and expressions of interest (EOI) - all overlaid with resource data. The resource data included WSA's, citizen proposed wilderness areas (Red Rocks), ACEC's, Wild and Scenic Rivers, BLM natural areas, and especially sensitive wildlife habitat data like sage grouse and white tailed prairie dog. Mineral potential for the area was also reviewed during this process.

**Describe how and why each of the following criteria are met or not met:**

**1. A substantial portion of the area to be analyzed in the MLP is not currently leased.**

MET = EXTERNAL – 40% unleased of BLM land.

MET = INTERNAL – 37% unleased of BLM land.

**2. There is a majority Federal mineral interest.**

MET = EXTERNAL – 84% Federal.

MET = INTERNAL – 86% Federal.

**3. The oil and gas industry has expressed a specific interest in leasing, and there is a moderate or high potential for oil and gas confirmed by the discovery of oil and gas in the general area.**

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<sup>2</sup> Accessed online at:

[http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/Planning\\_and\\_Renewable\\_Resources/utah.Par.34117.File.pdf/Moab\\_RMP\\_Directors\\_Protest\\_Resolution\\_Report.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/Planning_and_Renewable_Resources/utah.Par.34117.File.pdf/Moab_RMP_Directors_Protest_Resolution_Report.pdf).

This criterion is met since the area has existing leases and there has been industry interest (expressions of interest - EOIs) in the past several years. There are active leases and producing gas and oil wells concentrated in several portions of the area, along with accompanying infrastructure. Other portions of the area have fewer active leases and little production.

**4. Additional analysis or information is needed to address likely resource or cumulative impacts if oil and gas development were to occur where there are:**

This criterion is not met because there is no new information or changed circumstances including air quality from that analyzed in the 2008 RMP. Also, there are not any impending conflicts with any National Park System, national wildlife refuge, or National Forest wilderness area.

- **multiple-use or natural/cultural resource conflicts;**

The area contains protested (sold but not issued) leases and suspended leases with issues such as wildlife and citizen proposed wilderness. These could be addressed adequately in an environmental assessment tiered to the recently completed new RMP or as part of an MLP.

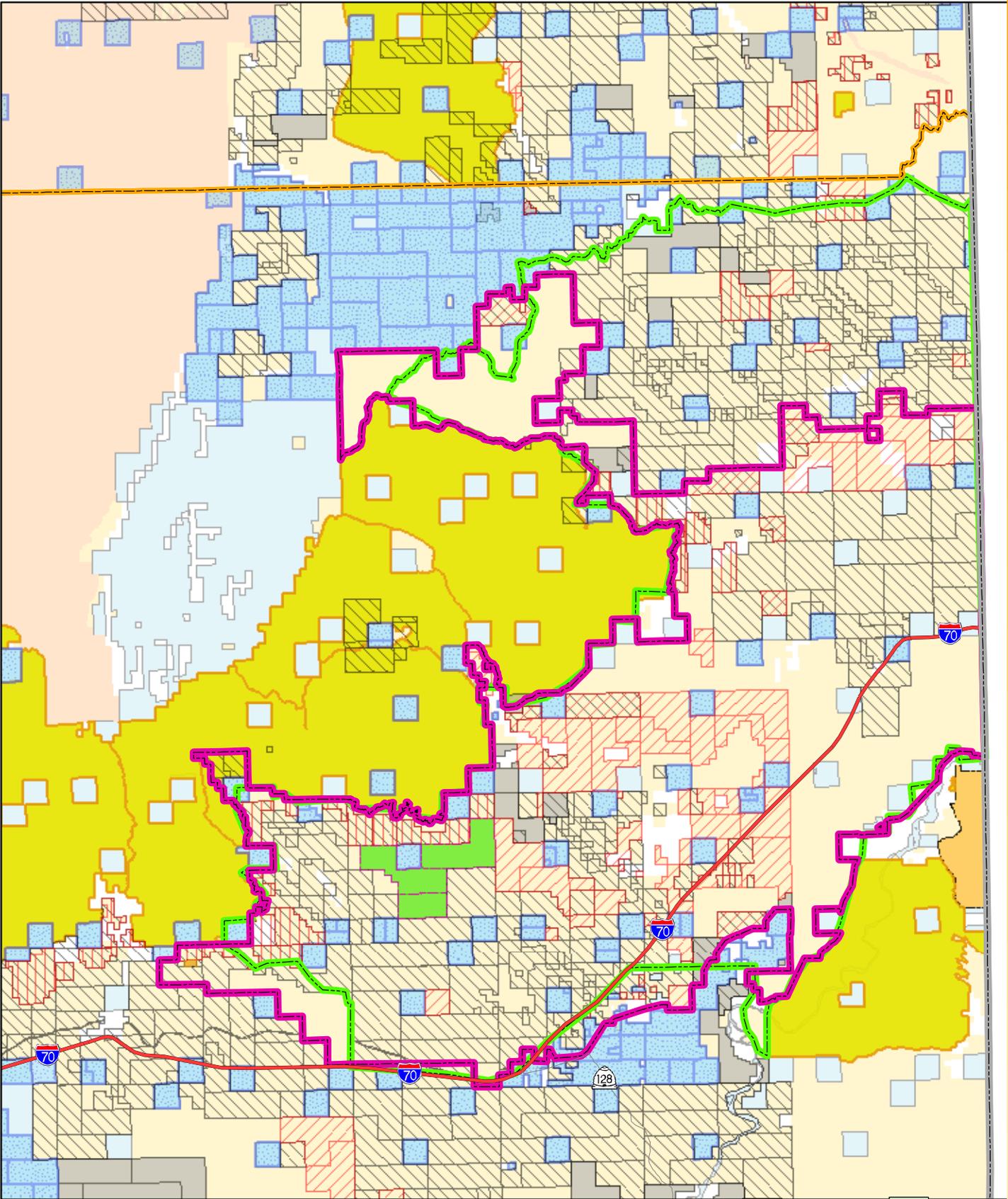
The proposals contain three “Stiles” parcels where conclusions/recommendations were to lease based on a similar process to the ID Team approach for MLPs. The area also contains one “Stiles” parcel where the conclusion/recommendation was to remove from leasing due to a crucial elk habitat corridor bounded by two WSAs, and a concern over no apparent well location due to steep slopes and floodplain issues. Stiles suggested NSO may be an option. This situation provides an example of disagreement among experts and specialists as to the adequacy of stipulations, since the RMP provides stipulations for steep slopes, floodplains, and elk crucial winter range. An independent assessment could reach a final conclusion on these issues and resolve outstanding concerns. A site-specific ID team review could provide this resolution, or it could be undertaken as an MLP.

- **impacts to air quality;**

Air quality is not a resource specifically at issue in the external proposal; however air quality will be analyzed for any proposed action that is completed before leasing is commenced in the area.

- **impacts on the resources or values of any unit of the National Park System, national wildlife refuge, or National Forest wilderness area, as determined after consultation or coordination with the NPS, the FWS, or the FS; or impacts.**

It is approximately nine miles from the shared southern boundary of these MLP proposals to the nearest National Park (Arches National Park), and the Utah BLM does not anticipate any impacts on the resources or values of Arches or other units of the National Park System. However, when conducting any analysis for this area, the BLM will conduct the appropriate level of coordination with the National Park Service. There are no national wildlife refuges or National Forest wilderness areas near the MLP proposal area. However, when analyzing this area the BLM will coordinate with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Forest Service, and the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration.



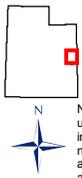
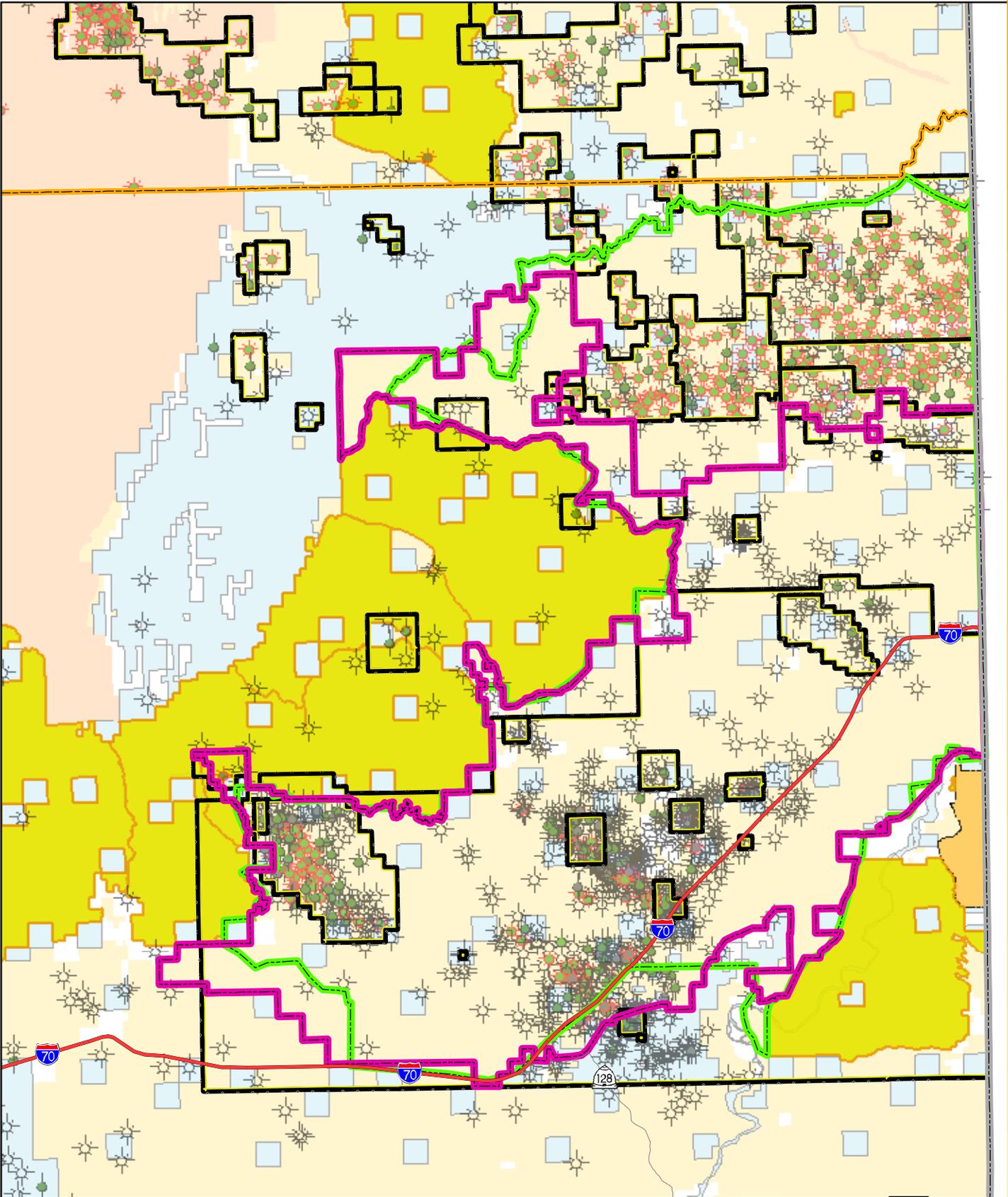
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- Leases At Issue**
- Issued\_Suspended
  - Sold\_Not Issued
- Stiles Report Recommendations**
- Closed
  - Defer
  - Lease
- Other Features**
- Internal Analysis Area
  - External Analysis Area
  - Authorized Parcels
  - Deferred Parcels
  - SITLA Parcels

- BLM
- BLM Wilderness
- WSA
- USFS
- NPS
- N. A. Res.
- State
- Private
- 





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|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|
| ☼ Abandoned          | <b>Wells</b>             | ● Shut In Gas Well | ■ BLM            | ■ USFS       |
| ★ Producing Gas Well |                          | ● Shut In Oil Well | ■ BLM Wilderness | ■ NPS        |
| ★ Producing Oil Well | ■ Oil and Gas Fields     |                    | ■ WSA            | ■ N. A. Res. |
|                      | ■ Internal Analysis Area |                    |                  | ■ State      |
|                      | ■ External Analysis Area |                    |                  | ■ Private    |

