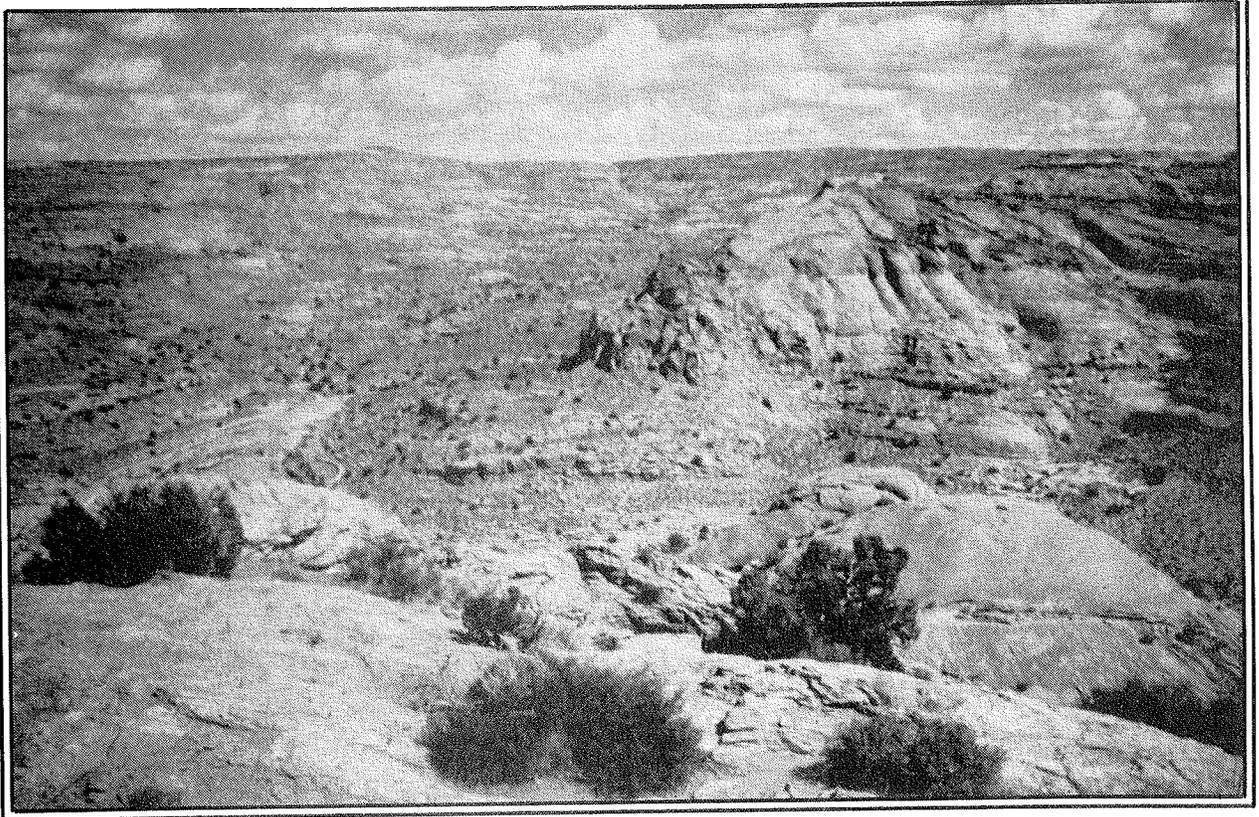


Mancos Mesa  
WSA



# MANCOS MESA WSA

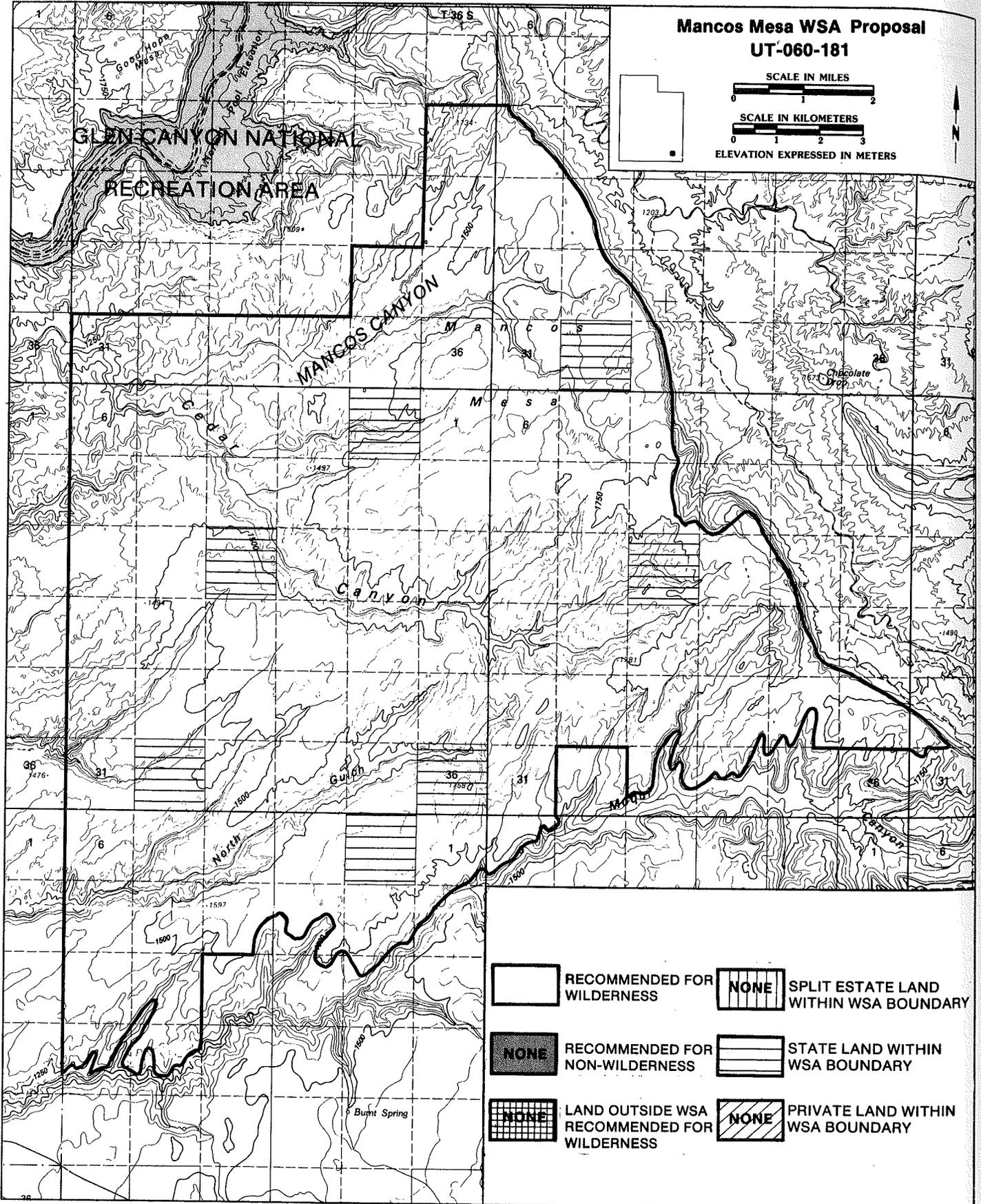
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T. 36 S.

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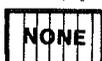
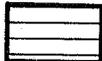
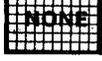
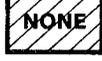


## Mancos Mesa WSA Proposal UT-060-181

SCALE IN MILES  
0 1 2

SCALE IN KILOMETERS  
0 1 2 3

ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                       |  | NONE SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY |
|  | NONE RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS              |  | STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY             |
|  | NONE LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | NONE PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY      |

## MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### 1. THE STUDY AREA: 51,440 acres

The Mancos Mesa Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-181) is in western San Juan County, about 50 miles west of Blanding, Utah (population 3,118). The unit is irregularly shaped: the western edge is along legal subdivisions and the eastern boundary nearly comes to a point on the southeast; the unit extends a maximum of 13 miles from north to south and 12 miles from east to west. The Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA) borders the WSA on the west and north. The eastern and southern boundaries are at the edges of Red Canyon and Moki Canyon, respectively (see Map). The WSA contains 51,440 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Seven State sections (4,481 acres) are inheld in the WSA (see Table 1).

The study area is in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. Mancos Mesa is a rugged, westward-sloping mesa bounded by canyons as much as 600 feet deep. Three winding canyons from 250 to 800 feet deep cut across the mesa. Wind-blown sand covers large parts of the mesa and has accumulated in large deposits in portions of the canyons. There are no perennial streams in the WSA. Elevations in the WSA range from 4,800 feet along the western boundary to more than 6,000 feet in the eastern part. Blackbrush is the most common vegetation. Climate is arid to semiarid, with hot summers and cold winters.

**TABLE 1**  
**LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA\***

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	51,440
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	4,481
Total	55,921
<b>WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY</b>	
BLM (within the WSA)	51,440
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	51,440
In-holdings (State, private)	4,481
<b>WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS</b>	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

\* The Appendix is a detailed table of in-holdings included within the portion of the WSA recommended for designation.

## MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report; a no wilderness (no action) alternative; and a partial wilderness alternative of 46,120 acres.

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP). The plan classified approximately 42,010 acres of the Mancos Mesa WSA as 'primitive' under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification system (ROS-P Class). ROS-P Class areas are managed to be essentially free of evidence of human use and to maintain an environment of isolation. Special management requirements now in effect within the ROS-P Class area in the Mancos Mesa WSA, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: closure to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; stipulations to prevent surface occupancy on new oil and gas leases (Category 3); requirement for an approved plan of operations with special conditions to limit surface use for mining related activity; exclusion from private and commercial use of woodland products, except for limited on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; closure to disposal of mineral materials; exclusion from surface disturbance by mechanized and motorized vehicles; limitation of recreation use to maintain primitive recreation opportunities; exclusion from new land treatments; management to meet Class I objectives for Visual Resource Management (VRM). The remaining 9,430 acres in the Mancos Mesa WSA is classified as a roaded natural area under the ROS criteria; however, this area is closed to OHV use to protect the adjacent primitive class area. In this area, an approved plan of operations is required for any mining-related activity other than casual use.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:  
51,440 acres  
(recommended for wilderness)  
0 acres  
(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate all of the study area, 51,440 acres, as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. This recommendation will further apply to any additional in-holding acreage acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. The Appendix lists all in-holdings and provides additional information on acquisition.

About 90 percent of the WSA is natural, and has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Abandoned dirt roads and mineral exploration pads that affect about 10 percent of the area are slowly becoming less noticeable through natural processes. BLM has approved and funded additional reclamation of the main roads in this area. As of February 1991, reclamation of these roads is under appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals. Special features include scenic, geologic, archaeological, historical, and wildlife values.

Approximately 42,010 acres of the area recommended for wilderness designation is in the ROS-P Class where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration and development, mineral material disposal, harvest of woodland products, and surface disturbance by mechanized and motorized equipment, would continue to be administratively applied if the area is released from wilderness consideration and protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective. The entire area recommended for wilderness designation would continue to be closed to OHV use.

Uranium, oil and gas deposits probably exist in the WSA, but exploration so far has not located deposits of commercial value. Consequently, BLM believes that wilderness values outweigh the mineral potential.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is

## MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Approximately 46,120 acres (90 percent of the WSA) are free of the imprints of human activity and meet the naturalness criteria under wilderness review. The rugged terrain and relative seclusion of the area characterize its naturalness.

The remaining 5,320 acres (10 percent of the WSA) have significant imprints. Construction of 25 miles of roads associated with mineral exploration in the WSA required significant rock cutting and earthmoving. About 20 drill pads were constructed adjacent to the roads. The disturbed areas affected a total of about 5 acres. Partial revegetation and drifting sand obscure short sections of the roads and some of the drill pads. These imprints occurred shortly after the passage of the FLPMA, but prior to the publication of wilderness inventory guidelines. Currently, the roads are not accessible by 4-wheel vehicles, but motorcycle tracks are evident on some abandoned roads. The roads and drill pads can be seen only from high points in the southeastern portion of the WSA.

Rangeland improvements in the WSA include Potato Hole Spring and stock trail, Jacob's Spring, and a 0.125 mile fence. The fence is adjacent to the eastern boundary, which is along a road.

The relics of an old wooden watering tank are visible at Jacob's Spring. The impacts of the spring improvements are negligible.

### B. Solitude

Approximately 90 percent (46,120 acres) of the WSA meets the criteria for outstanding solitude. The remaining 5,320 acres, in the southeastern portion of the WSA, do not meet the standards.

The very size of Mancos Mesa provides a sense of seclusion. The deeply entrenched meandering canyons and their irregular walls provide isolation. Scattered pockets of riparian vegetation provide some screening in the canyon bottoms. On the mesa top, sand dunes, steep sand slides, slickrock faces, bluffs and

buttes, and low desert shrubs afford screening necessary for solitude.

The roads in the southeastern portion of the WSA are occasionally used by motorcyclists. These sights and sounds diminish solitude in this portion of the WSA. Lake Powell is visible from high points in the northern and western portions of the WSA, and evidence of uranium mining activity east of Red Canyon can be seen from the rim of Red Canyon. No mining or exploration is currently taking place. These off-site influences have only a minimal effect on solitude because of the distances. Daily commercial airline flights are over the WSA but the disturbance is negligible.

### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for backpacking and horseback riding are outstanding in approximately 90 percent of the WSA (46,120 acres). The remaining 5,320 acres, all in the southeastern portion of the WSA, do not meet the criteria for outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Opportunities for dispersed, undeveloped recreation are essentially limited only by seasonal lack of water. The sandstone features within the extensive canyons and plateaus provide excellent opportunities for exploration, sightseeing, photography, and scientific and educational studies. The dissected mesa forces visitors to take circuitous routes between points.

### D. Special Features

The Mancos Mesa WSA contains archaeological, geological, wildlife, and scenic values.

The peregrine falcon, listed as endangered and eight animal species that are considered sensitive may occur in the WSA. Desert bighorn sheep, which is a wildlife species associated with wilderness is occasionally sighted in the WSA. The WSA may contain one special status plant species. Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

**MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS. PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area. The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely blackbrush (51,440 acres). The PNV in the WSA is not represented in the NWPS nationally or in Utah, nor is it represented in other BLM study areas outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Mancos Mesa WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January, 1987, the NWPS included 117 areas comprising 6,988,052 acres in Utah and in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, the adjacent states nearest the WSA.

A Mancos Mesa Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where

**TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION**

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
<b>NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)</b>				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	178,624
<b>UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)</b>				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	178,624

Source: BLM File Data.

there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are three designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. To the north is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service [FS]), to the east is the 8,100-acre Mesa Verde Wilderness (National Park Service [NPS]), to the southwest is the 112,400-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM) and to the northwest is the 25,751-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness, (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA could be managed as wilderness. There are 3 post-FLPMA oil and gas leases covering 1,565 acres in the WSA. A few exploratory wells which did have shows of oil and gas have been drilled in the vicinity of Mancos Mesa, but these wells were abandoned without production. Because of poor economic

## MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

conditions and wilderness protection requirements, oil and gas exploration is not anticipated following wilderness designation. There are 176 mining claims covering 3,520 acres in the WSA. Uranium exploration that would disturb approximately 13 acres is projected following wilderness designation. Uranium development is not projected following designation because the level of known resources and the probability of their development is too low to support a development assumption.

Uranium exploration would be under the unnecessary and undue degradation guidelines with consideration given to wilderness values.

An additional 10 acres of surface disturbance would result from road construction to State in-holdings to provide access for mineral exploration. The potential for additional disturbance on State sections in the WSA is low. Two wells were drilled on State lands within the WSA; however, they were abandoned without production.

It is likely that motorcycle use along abandoned roads will be administratively difficult to control within the WSA.

Domestic livestock grazing would continue as authorized and allotted in the WSA. The use and maintenance of two developed springs and 660 feet of fence would continue in the same manner as in the past based on practical necessity and reasonableness. Such use and maintenance would not significantly reduce wilderness values in the area.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Mancos Mesa WSA (USGS Bulletin 1755-A, Forrest G. Poole, et al., 1989). The report indicates that the WSA does not contain any identified mineral resources. The study area has moderate potential for oil and gas and for uranium resources. However, low mineral resource potential is projected for other metals, coal, and geothermal energy. No coal or thermal springs have been found within the WSA.

Surveys of the WSA and vicinity indicate that rocks which contain oil and gas elsewhere in the region occur beneath the surface of the WSA. A well drilled on a State section in the northern portion of the WSA was found to be dry and was plugged and abandoned in December 1987.

Uranium has been mined southeast of the WSA. The sandstone and rock structures that contain uranium outside the study area extend beneath the surface of the WSA. The workings of one mine that produced significant quantities of uranium ore also extend a short distance under the southeasternmost corner of the WSA.

Large inferred subeconomic sandstone resources in the WSA are suitable for decorative and building stone.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 94 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 901 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statement by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

## MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

In general, 80 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 816 commenters were opposed. Five commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on their belief that designation would not cause conflicts with minerals interests and that the WSA has significant wilderness values and special features. The majority of those commenting were from outside of Utah.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that the WSA is just one of many similar areas, wilderness designation is not necessary to protect the area, that the WSA lacks naturalness, and there would be conflicts with State and private lands and with land use plans. Most of the commenters opposed to wilderness were from rural Utah.

One Federal agency, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. The EPA took no position regarding designation of the WSA. The EPA commented that several WSAs near Canyonlands National Park, including Mancos Mesa WSA, should be under similar management or grouped together to form a larger geographical unit to improve integrated multiple resource planning.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are seven State sections (4,481 acres) in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding designation of the WSA. The State commented that Mancos Mesa WSA has moderate wilderness values but a high significance of conflicts compared to other WSAs in this region. The conflicts are primarily with potential uranium and oil and gas resources. A potential conflict also exists with groundwater development. The State reported that drilling in the area in the late 1970s disclosed some uranium mineralization and also identified errors in BLM's acreage figures for State in-holdings.

The Mancos Mesa WSA is in San Juan County. The San Juan County Master Plan emphasizes multiple use of public lands and zones the WSA as open range and forest land. The San Juan County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for the Mancos Mesa WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission noted that designation of the WSA as wilderness would be in conflict with the County Master Plan and that the BLM had underestimated the mineral potential of the WSA. The Commission also pointed out that State in-holdings would conflict with wilderness management and that the WSA is identical to other areas already protected in the GCNRA, National Parks, National Monuments, and FS wilderness within the Colorado Plateau and in San Juan County.

# MANCOS MESA WSA

Table 3  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternatives

Alternatives	
Issue Topic	No. Action/No. Wilderness
Recommendation All Wilderness (51,440 Acres)	Partial Wilderness (46,120 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>Wilderness designation would protect wilderness values overall in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 23 acres of the WSA and indirectly reduced in quality on up to 1,543 acres. The disturbance would be due to mineral exploration and development of access to State in-holdings. Special features would be preserved. This alternative would complement and enhance wilderness uses and values, and management of the contiguous portion of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area that is proposed for wilderness designation by the National Park Service.</p> <p>Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation, and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 94 acres of the WSA and indirectly reduced in quality on up to an additional 5,144 acres. The disturbance would be due to mineral exploration and from development of access to State in-holdings. Special features would not be significantly affected. The entire area would remain closed to OHV use. New mining roads would continue to occasionally detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. This alternative would not complement or enhance wilderness uses, values, and management of contiguous Glen Canyon NRA that is proposed for wilderness designation by the NPS.</p> <p>Wilderness values would be preserved overall in the designated portion which is approximately 90 percent of the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 32 acres of the WSA, and would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 2,572 acres of the WSA. The disturbance would be due to mineral exploration and from development of access to State in-holdings. Most of the impact would be in the designated area. Special features would be preserved overall. The entire WSA would remain closed to OHV use. This alternative would complement wilderness uses, values, and management of contiguous Glen Canyon NRA that is proposed for wilderness designation by the NPS.</p>

# MANCOS MESA WSA

Table 3 (Continued)  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Alternatives	
Issue Topic	No Action/No Wilderness (46,120 Acres)
<p>Recommendation All Wilderness (51,440 Acres)</p> <p>Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Production</p>	<p>Partial Wilderness (46,120 Acres)</p> <p>Opportunities for uranium and oil and gas exploration would be foregone because the area presently leased for oil and gas and with the highest potential for these resources would be in the designated area. Loss of development potential would not be significant. Potential for exploration for uranium would be foregone on 90 percent of the WSA.</p>
<p>Impacts on Wildlife and Populations</p>	<p>Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral exploration or production because access, mineral leasing and mining claim location would not be restricted for preservation of wilderness values. However, surface occupancy restrictions on oil and gas exploration and production and special conditions limiting surface use on locatable mineral exploration and production activities would continue to be applied on approximately 42,010 acres in the WSA. On approximately 9,430 acres of the WSA, mineral and energy exploration and production would be permitted with special conditions that would limit surface use.</p> <p>Populations levels would be the same as at present. Wildlife would be protected by reducing the potential for disturbance and activity within the WSA. Endangered, threatened, or sensitive species would be protected. Wildlife would benefit from preservation of solitude.</p>
<p>Impacts on Wildlife and Populations</p>	<p>No long-term adverse impacts on habitat and populations of bighorn sheep, threatened, endangered, or sensitive animal species would occur because only a small portion of the habitat (0.2 percent of the WSA) would be temporarily affected and mitigation would be required.</p> <p>Populations levels would be the same as at present. Wildlife would be protected by reducing the potential for disturbance and activity on 90 percent of the WSA. Impacts on endangered, threatened, or sensitive species would not be significant.</p>

## MANCOS MESA WSA

**Table 3 (Continued)  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative**

Alternatives	
Issue Topic	No Action/No Wilderness (46,120 Acres)
<p>Recommendation All Wilderness (51,440 Acres)</p>	<p>Partial Wilderness (46,120 Acres)</p>
<p>Impacts on Cultural Resources</p>	<p>Cultural resources on 90 percent of the WSA, including 16 of the 17 known sites, would benefit from reduction of potential surface disturbance. Continued closure to OHV use on the nondesignated portion would provide protection from indirect and direct impacts associated with vehicle access. Management of sites may be restricted in order to preserve other wilderness values. Sites in the nondesignated portion would continue to receive protection under existing laws.</p>
<p>Cultural Resources</p>	<p>Minor impacts to cultural resources would result from surface development. Continued closure to OHV use would provide protection from indirect and direct impacts associated with vehicle access. All archaeological sites would continue to be protected by existing laws. Cultural resource management would continue without regard for other wilderness values.</p>
<p>Cultural Resources</p>	<p>Cultural resources including 17 known sites would benefit from reduction of potential surface disturbance and elimination of vehicular use. Management of sites may be restricted in scope and execution in order to preserve other wilderness values.</p>

<sup>a</sup> The BLM San Juan RMP was approved following publication of the BLM Utah Statewide Wilderness EIS. The analysis of impacts summarized here has been modified to reflect the more restrictive management practices established by the RMP.

MANCOS MESA WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Appendix  
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Non-Federal Holdings Within Areas Recommended for Designation <sup>a</sup>

Legal Description (Prior to any Subdivision)	Total Acreage	Number of Owners (if Parcel has been subdivided)	Type of Ownership by Estate (Federal, State, Private, Other) (Surface Estate) (Subsurface Estate)	Presently Proposed for Acquisition (Yes, No)	Preferred Method of Acquisition (Purchase, Exchange, Other)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Land Costs)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Processing Costs)
T. 35 S., R. 14 E., Sec. 32	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 37 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 2	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 37 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 16	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2000
T. 37 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 32	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 37 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 36	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 17 S., R. 14 E., Sec. 16	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2000
T. 38 S., R. 13 E., Sec. 2	641.04		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000

<sup>a</sup> The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a Federal appraised value of the land or mineral estate, but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring non-Federal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.