

ADOBE TOWN WILDERNESS STUDY
 WY-030-401 and WY-040-408

I. INTRODUCTION

The Adobe Town area has long been recognized as having outstanding primitive and natural values. Previous BLM planning efforts, both in the Rock Springs and Rawlins districts have reflected this fact. A previous Rock Springs District Management Framework Plan (MFP) recommended that it be designated as a primitive area while the Rawlins District placed it in an "Interim Critical Management" category pending the outcome of the wilderness inventory.

While some roads and trails do exist in the Adobe Town area little effort has been made by BLM to maintain them. As a result many of the roads shown on standard maps are no longer passable. A similar situation exists with stock water reservoirs. None has been maintained and some are silted in or otherwise washed out. For the most part the man-made intrusions are very minor and only noticeable when they are directly underfoot.

The goal of the wilderness study process is to recommend for wilderness designation those areas for which it has been determined that wilderness is the most appropriate alternative use of the land and its resources. The wilderness study process is described in BLM's Wilderness Study Policy: Policies, Criteria, and Guidelines for Conducting Wilderness Studies on Public Lands, published in the Federal Register on February 3, 1982. The study policy consists of planning criteria which were developed for use in the BLM planning process to evaluate wilderness study areas for suitability as wilderness. Should the reader desire to review the Wilderness Study Policy copies are available in the Rawlins District office.

The Adobe Town Wilderness Study Area (WSA) was analyzed by an interdisciplinary team made up of the following individuals:

Tom Crawford.....	Socioeconomics
Bob Janssen.....	Minerals/Geology
Gary Long.....	Recreation/Wilderness
Vern Lovejoy.....	Recreation/Wilderness
Chris Yde.....	Wildlife
Chuck Ashton.....	Range/Livestock

Input to the study was provided by personnel from the Rock Springs District office.

II. THE WILDERNESS STUDY

The wilderness study is being done as part of the Divide Resource Area MFP update/revision. The MFP is what is referred to as a "Transition MFP," as it incorporates methods of approach found both in MFPs and Resource Management Plans (RMPs), the next generation of BLM land use planning.

Livestock grazing would continue in the area and other nonconforming uses may be allowed so long as they did not impair wilderness values. The existing livestock reservoirs in the area would continue to receive maintenance as needed.

Support needs: BLM would pursue land exchanges with the state of Wyoming so as to acquire the 10 tracts of non-BLM lands. This action would enhance wilderness management of the area.

IV. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

A. ALTERNATIVE 1

Under the no action alternative the administration would recommend to the Congress that the entire Adobe Town WSAs be released from the constraints on uses imposed by the Wilderness Interim Management Policy. Once released by Congress, the area would revert to management under BLM's normal multiple use management programs.

Under this form of management the bulk of the area would be managed much the same as under any of the remaining lands in the Rawlins District.

No special efforts would be made to protect the fragile or special values of the area. However, all BLM lands are managed to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and resources so this alternative would not be wide open to unrestricted damage.

However, without intensive management effort the Adobe Town area could suffer serious resource damage. Without great care in location of rights-of-way for roads and pipelines, excessive soil erosion and impacts to the visual resource could occur.

Due to the existence of unitized oil fields and a predominance of pre-FLPMA leases, oil and gas development will occur with or without wilderness designation. That development would be handled routinely by the resource area personnel.

Livestock operations would continue in the same manner as prior to the passage of FLPMA. The option would be open for additional range improvements or changes in the manner in which livestock grazing would be managed.

Recreation activities would include four-wheel drive vehicle and motorcycle access, as in the present. Should this activity increase, additional ORV damage is expected to become a serious problem. Under this alternative, there is great likelihood that unrestricted ORV use could change the character of the area. Through the proliferation of tracks and trails throughout Adobe Town.

The bulk of public opinion gathered during the wilderness inventory suggests that the public expects that careful or special management is appropriate for the area this alternative is not consistent with that public opinion.

northwestern part of the state. No lands in the Wyoming Basin are presently in either category, designated wilderness or areas endorsed for wilderness by the President.

There are over forty BLM WSAs in Wyoming, none of which has been designated as wilderness, assumed the administratively endorsed status, or been dropped from study.

2. Criterion 2 - Manageability

The area must be capable of being managed to preserve its wilderness character.

a. Land Status

The attached map shows land status in the Adobe Town WSAs. The map shows two sections of state surface and minerals and all or part of eight sections of state mineral ownership. The BLM Wilderness Management Policy provides for adequate access to nonfederal lands in a wilderness area. Due to the area's natural gas potential and the fact that mineral leases have been issued for those lands there is great likelihood that the right of access will be exercised and that natural gas exploration/development will occur sometime in the next five to ten years. That development will result in a number of new roads and rights-of-way and accompanying impairment of the area's wilderness quality. However, after these actions occur there will still be large blocks of land which are roadless and pristine.

b. Private Rights

The entire study area is leased for oil and gas development. Many of these leases were issued prior to the enactment of FLPMA on October 21, 1976. The attached mineral lease status map was prepared to show the situation for Adobe Town. If all or part of any section contained a pre-FLPMA lease it is shown in orange. If no pre-FLPMA leases are found, the section is shown in green. State lands are shown in blue. Pre-FLPMA leases convey to the lessee a private right, the right to develop the lease, even if that development would impair the area's wilderness quality.

The area shown in orange on the map is where such development could (and probably will) occur. Thus BLM cannot assure that any of those lands could be managed in the long run as wilderness. Everything shown in blue or orange is not manageable as wilderness but those lands shown in green would be.

There is one block of manageable land in excess of 5,000 acres in size that tract is located in the east-central part of the study area and consists of approximately 16,640 acres.

3. Quality Standards

a. Standard 1 - Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The BLM mineral analysis for the area concludes confidently that the entire WSA may contain between 1.1 and 1.9 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves. The dollar value of the gas may ultimately exceed ten billion dollars.

Using data supplied by the Denver Public Utilities Commission, 1.1 to 1.9 trillion cubic feet of natural gas would supply the residential customers in the Denver metropolitan area from between 23 to 40 years. Total natural gas needs for the Denver metropolitan area could be supplied at present levels of demand for a range of from 10.8 to 18.7 years. This includes supplying 286 industrial customers whose average annual consumption is 64,321.4 MCF. Refer to Table 1 for additional information.

It is not likely that any appreciable quantity of natural gas could be produced from the area and still retain wilderness character. In order to produce and market the gas, roads and pipelines are necessary, both of which would impair wilderness values. Directional drilling or continuing surface disturbance to the periphery of the area would not yield economically feasible quantities of natural gas.

The manageable block of land would contain approximately 19 percent of the total natural gas reserves of the area. That quantity would range from 209 to 360 billion cubic feet of natural gas. At 122,000 cubic feet per household per year that would be enough natural gas to supply the Denver metropolitan area residential demand at present levels from 4.4 to 7.5 years. That is still a very significant amount even though this is from only 19 percent of the total area.

With wilderness designation the above volumes of gas would be lost. It would not be possible to produce the gas and retain the wilderness character of the area. With or without wilderness designation, gas would be produced from the pre-FLPMA lease areas.