

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

Date of Submission: September 24, 2002

Proponent: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

Name of Area(s) Identified By the Proponent: Utah Wilderness Coalitions Sweetwater
Reef Wilderness Proposal Unit

BLM Field Office(s) Affected: Richfield Field Office

This evaluation deals with only that portion of the unit within Wayne County and those public lands managed by the Richfield Field Office. These lands total approximately 4,000 acres of the 70,000 acres total.

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

Explanation -

The BLM Inventory for these lands was conducted in 1979 and was identified as UT-060-044/Jacks Knob/North Spring Wash. Because SUWA proposes a different unit boundary than the BLM considered in their previous inventory, excludes impacts the BLM found to disqualify the area in their previous inventory, provides additional information on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and provides additional information on supplement wilderness values, the BLM concludes that the information SUWA provides is new and significantly different from that considered in the BLM=s previous inventory.

SUWA also provides information about opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. They present information that suggests the combination of a large unit size coupled with varied topography types provides an outstanding opportunity to find solitude in their proposed wilderness unit. They also present 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 that the BLM did not document in their previous inventory. Further, SUWA provides information on supplemental wilderness values that BLM did not document in their previous inventory.

Because SUWA proposes a different unit boundary than the BLM considered in their previous inventory, excludes impacts the BLM found to disqualify the area in their previous inventory, provides additional information on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and provides additional information on supplement wilderness values, the BLM concludes that the information SUWA provides is new and significantly different from that considered in the BLM=s previous inventory.

See the explanation to question #3 below for further discussion on the differences between the information SUWA 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 -

The SUWA proposal narrative is complete and has all the required information. The SUWA proposal boundary does differ from the earlier BLM inventory in that a number of intrusions have been removed. SUWAs main emphasis is on the naturalness values and the difference in that condition since BLMs initial inventory. The staff review notes include the following:

- For the lands in Wayne County, there are a few additional vehicle route sections not identified by SUWA; BLM staff knowledge does indicate while some were rehabilitating, some may be still used, at least occasionally, but essentially the area is increasing in natural condition from what it was earlier. BLM does not have a current road/way analysis on the condition of the vehicles routes.

- The SUWA proposal has excluded the main impacts. A number of the earlier noted range facilities have actually been relocated outside of the proposed boundary or are no longer in use. However, the lands in Wayne County actually have a higher concentration of facilities and impacts than found throughout the entire unit.

- based on the amount of use, the topography, remote nature, and the lack of facilities, there is opportunity for solitude, as well as some level of primitive recreation. The earlier BLM effort did not substantially address these.

- In terms of the supplemental values, this area, at least in the Wayne county portion, does not have any unique features which distinguish it. There does not appear to be any species of critical concern present described in either the SUWA proposal, the earlier BLM effort, or in the current BLM information. The habitat type can be found extensively throughout the entire region. At this time, it does not appear that there would be significant archeological sites present simply because of its proximity to Horseshoe Canyon, where there are extensive sites, but the conditions are different (the Horseshoe Canyon drainage leads into the larger Labyrinth Canyon watershed, while the Sweetwater Reef unit does not have this extensive riparian condition.)

SUWA proposes a wilderness unit of approximately 70,000 acres, well in excess of the minimum requirement of 5,000 acres. The boundaries they use follow roads and ways. They contend their boundaries are drawn to exclude significant human impacts in the western part of their unit (wells, a corral, roads). In the northeastern part of their unit in Wayne County, they have included a seismic line which they assert is naturally rehabilitating. These are the main developments the BLM cited in their 1979 inventory as the reason they found the area unnatural. Further, SUWA cherrystems other routes and stock ponds along the southern boundary. Within their proposed wilderness unit, SUWA includes other ways they feel are not maintained, fading with time, and substantially unnoticeable in the unit. Further, other stock ponds left in their proposed unit have silted-in and are re-vegetating. SUWA contends they have removed the developments that have a significant impact on the natural character of the unit, and those developments that remain in their unit are substantially unnoticeable.

In 1979 the BLM concluded opportunities for solitude were present in the inventory area, but they were typical of the area, not outstanding. Topographic and vegetative screening was present in some areas, but only provided small, localized places to be alone. SUWA cites the

large size of their proposed unit (70,000 acres) and a variety of landscapes (expansive grasslands, open and rolling terrain, washes, canyon breaks, extensive side canyons, and other features) as places where visitor can find an outstanding opportunity for solitude.

The BLM concluded in their previous inventory that opportunities for primitive recreation were not outstanding. Limited water sources, less than outstanding vistas, typical scenery and geology, and limited wildlife population did not lead to outstanding opportunities for primitive recreational activities. SUWA, however, contends that the size and topography of their proposed unit provides unlimited opportunities for hiking, photography, birding, horseback riding, and sightseeing for a variety of natural features.

Finally, the BLM did not identify any supplemental wilderness values in their 1979 inventory. SUWA cites the potential for cultural resource values of the area due to its proximity to known high value sites, the potential of scenic vistas from the interior of the unit, and the geological value of the Sweetwater Reef itself as supplemental wilderness values in their proposed unit.

Based on the information SUWA provides, the BLM concludes there is a reasonable probability the Sweetwater Reef proposed wilderness unit may have wilderness character. First, SUWA proposes a wilderness unit with a different boundary than the BLM considered in their 1979 inventory, a boundary that excludes many intrusive developments that the BLM cited as the reason they found the area unnatural in their 1979 inventory. Second, SUWA argues that the large size of their proposed unit and its varied landform do provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. The BLM concurs that the unit is sufficiently large and varied to potentially provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. Third, SUWA cites a number of primitive recreation activities that can be enjoyed in the area, more than those the BLM identified in their 1979 inventory. And finally, SUWA provides information on supplemental cultural and scenic wilderness values, where the BLM found none in 1979. While BLM does not agree with the SUWA assertion of significant cultural sites, this does not necessarily reject the claim, since more information may be required to address the claim.

Thus, the BLM concludes that the information SUWA presents on the Sweetwater Reef proposed wilderness unit warrants further consideration.

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

Buzz Rakow - Minerals	Dave Gibbons - Law Enforcement
Tim Finger - Wilderness, Recreation, Visual Resources	Lauren Mermejo - Wilderness
Craig Harmon - Archaeology	Sue Fivecoat - Recreation, Visual Resources
Leroy Smalley - Range	Sam Brown - Range
Steve Knox - Wilderness	Suzanne Grayson - Wildlife, T&E Species
Gene McEwen - Range	LaRell Chappel - Soils
Gary Hall - Assistant Field Manager	Stan Adams - Environmental Protection
Kay Erickson - Realty	Justin Seastrand - GIS

Rod Lee - Resource Advisor
Vearl Christiansen - Natural Resources
Tom Gnojek - Wilderness

Chris Colton - Range
Brant Hallows - Natural Resources

Reference Material:

Master Title Plats
Little Rockies Range Allotment Management Plan
Henry Mountains Management Framework Plan
Oil, gas, and coal lease maps
Lake Powell NRA Management Plan, NPS.

Field Manager, Richfield Field Office

Date

This determination is part of an interim step in the BLM=s internal decision making process and does not constitute an appealable decision.