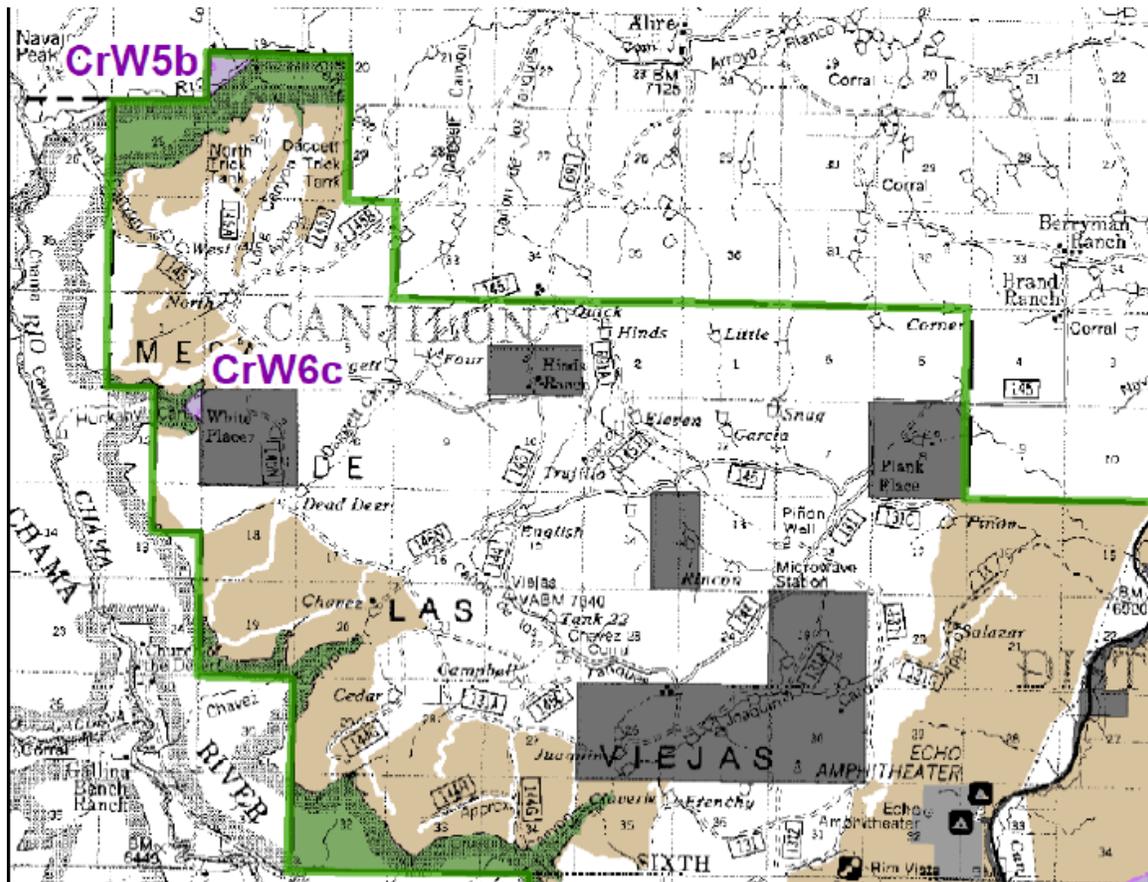


Canjilon and El Rito Ranger Districts

Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater

Suggested Evaluation Determination: Most of this area does not have wilderness character; however, one portion (labeled CrW5b and CrW6c see below) does have wilderness character.



If a wilderness characteristic is not addressed in the following rationale, that characteristic is not determined to be found in the evaluated area, except for size. If size is not addressed, the area is determined to be 5,000 acres or more per the [wilderness criteria](#). The five wilderness characteristics are: (1) apparent naturalness; (2) opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation; (3) size; (4) ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values; and (5) manageability of wilderness characteristics.

Apparent Naturalness

Most of the Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts left from past thinning projects, past and current large landscape scale brush hogging projects, past chaining projects, and closed roads that are still visually apparent across the landscape. Numerous range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, pit tank, and corrals, are scattered throughout this area, which also detract from the apparent naturalness

and offer visual impacts from developed infrastructure and evidence of human activity. Factoring into the apparent naturalness is also the high concentration of invasive weeds that detract from a natural landscape, given they are not naturally found within the landscape. Also found within the area is a religious shrine that people pilgrimage to from as far as Santa Fe. Large pilgrim events take place to the religious shrine, at least twice a year, in addition to regular visitation. Echo Amphitheater, a highly developed recreation site consisting of a concrete trail, parking areas, and a day use area, as well as the Rim Vista recreation site and trailhead access to the Rio Chama Wilderness, would not conform to offer apparent naturalness without the evidence of human activity.

Portions CrW5b and CrW6c are determined to have wilderness character, since they are adjacent to the existing Rio Chama Wilderness and are a part of the same canyon. As such, these areas offer many of the same features as the Rio Chama Wilderness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

The portions of this evaluated area determined not to have wilderness characteristics offer limited opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation, because it is already a high use recreation area for the communities of Canjilon, Abiquiu, Española, and Tierra Amarilla, in addition to non-local visitation. This is especially true around the heavily used and developed Echo Amphitheater and Rim Vista, as well as the religious shrine. Portions of these areas are also highly popular for driving for pleasure and scenic driving (including overlooking the Rio Chama River Wilderness).

CrW5b and CrW6c are within Rio Chama Canyon and adjacent to the Rio Chama Wilderness and offer similar opportunities for solitude as the designated wilderness area.

Size

CrW5b and CrW6c are both less than 5,000 acres, but are adjacent to a designated wilderness area. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the existing Rio Chama Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole, which would then meet the size requirement.

Outstanding Values

CrW5b and CrW6c both have outstanding features because of the geology found within the Rio Chama Canyon of the Rio Chama Wilderness.

The Echo Amphitheater also has outstanding geologic features of red and tan sandstone made famous by the artist, Georgia O'Keefe. Rare plant communities of Chacon milkvetch, Chama blazing star, and tufted sand verbena also exist in this evaluated area.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage most of the Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater areas to preserve wilderness character, because of current multi-year and multi-agency approved restoration projects and sagebrush treatments, and required motorized access and use of mechanized equipment for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements,

such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and corrals scattered throughout this area.

CrW5b and CrW6c are within Rio Chama Canyon and are adjacent to the Rio Chama Wilderness. Given their locations and adjacency to existing wilderness, these areas could be managed to preserve their wilderness characteristics, along with the Rio Chama Wilderness.