

## CHAPTER 5. WILDERNESS

### Background

After the passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964, Public Law 88-577, two areas totaling 85,734 acres were designated on the Gunnison National Forest as Wilderness, the La Garita (24,322 acres) and the West Elk (61,412).

Wilderness Name	Acres
La Garita	24,322
West Elk	61,412

The 1980 Colorado Wilderness Bill, Public Law 96-560, created six new wilderness areas on the GMUG and added acreage to the two existing wilderness for a total of 498,152 acres.

Wilderness Name	Acres
Collegiate Peaks	48,961
La Garita	77,122
Lizard Head	20,342
Maroon Bells/Snowmass	19,000
Mt Sneffels	16,200
Raggeds	42,200
Uncompahgre (Big Blue)	98,235
West Elk	176,092
	<b>498,152</b>

The 1993 Colorado Wilderness Bill, Public Law 103-77, created two new wilderness areas on the forest, Fossil Ridge (33,060 acres) and Powderhorn (13,935 acres), and a 5500 acre addition to the Raggeds Wilderness, bringing the total wilderness acres on the GMUG to 556,641. In addition, this legislation created two Areas to be managed for wilderness qualities, Tabeguache (9,065 acres) and Roubideau (19,600 acres), and the Fossil Ridge Recreation Management Area (43,900 acres).

Lands recommended for wilderness generally are reviewed against criteria for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System identified in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this chapter an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of

land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and us in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value

Forest Service directions for evaluating lands for potential wilderness character are identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 7. The GMUG process for evaluating potential lands is described in the 2005 Roadless Inventory and Evaluation of Potential Wilderness Areas.

## **Region of Comparison – Ecological Units**

The USDA Forest Service adopted a policy of ecosystem management on June 4, 1992, that applied to national forests, grasslands and research programs. By July, an Ecological Classification and Mapping Task Team (ECOMAP) was formed in the Washington Office to develop a consistent approach to ecosystem classification and mapping at multiple geographic scales. Soon afterwards a subgroup of ECOMAP was formed. The structure of the National Hierarchical Framework of Ecological Units (Table 1) was formulated at this meeting and was adopted by the Forest Service on November 5, 1993 (ECOMAP 1993).

Briefly, as described by ECOMAP (1993), the Framework "\dots is a regionalization, classification, and mapping system for stratifying the Earth into progressively smaller areas of increasingly uniform ecological potentials. Ecological types are classified and ecological units are mapped based on associations of those biotic and environmental factors that directly affect or indirectly express energy, moisture, and nutrient gradients which regulate the structure and function of ecosystems. These factors include climate, physiography, water, soils, air, hydrology, and potential natural communities."

The Ecological Sections that comprise the GMUG are briefly described below and are shown in Figure 1, Ecological Regions of the GMUG National Forest. Figure 2 displays the distribution of existing wilderness areas within the Ecological Regions.

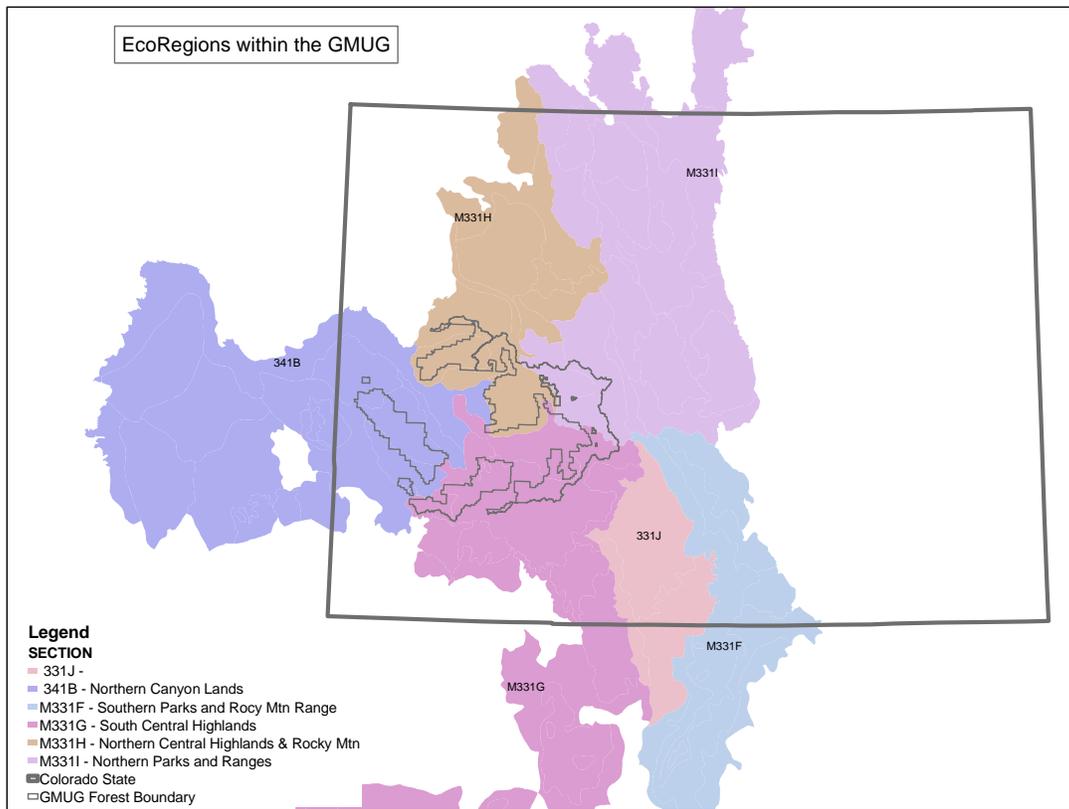


Figure 1. Ecological Regions of the GMUG National Forest.

## **Section 341B--Northern Canyon Lands**

**Geomorphology.** This area occurs within the Colorado Plateau physiographic province. Northern Canyon lands Section is located in the eastern portion of Utah and western Colorado. This area is eroded by the Colorado River and its tributaries. Deep sheer-walled canyons, canyonlands, lines of cliffs, low plateaus, mesas, buttes, and badlands dominate the landscape. Major landforms are the San Rafael Swell, Henry Mountains, Abajo Mountains, La Sal Mountains, and Circle Cliffs. Elevation ranges from 4,200 to 12,700 ft (1,300 to 3,900 m).

On the GMUG, this section represents the Uncompahgre Plateau Geographic Area.

## **Section M331G--South-Central Highlands**

**Geomorphology.** Steeply sloping to precipitous mountains are dissected by many narrow stream valleys with steep gradients. Upper mountain slopes and crests may be covered by snowfields and glaciers. High plateaus and steep walled canyons are common, especially in the west. Elevation ranges from 7,545 to 14,110 ft (2,300 to 4,300 m). This Section is within Fenneman and Johnson's Southern Rocky Mountains (eastern half of the Section) and Colorado Plateaus (western half of the Section) geomorphic physical divisions.

On the GMUG, this section represents the San Juans Geographic Area and the Gunnison Basin Geographic Area south of Pitkin.

### **Section M331H--North-Central Highlands and Rocky Mountain**

**Geomorphology.** This area includes steeply sloping to precipitous flat-topped mountains dissected by narrow stream valleys with steep gradients. High plateaus have steep walled canyons. There are gently rolling mountain parks, mountain ridges, and foothills. Elevation ranges from 5,600 to 12,000 ft (1,706 to 3,657 m). This Section is within three geomorphic physical divisions: Fenneman and Johnson's Wyoming Basin (northern part of the Section), Southern Rocky Mountains (central part of the Section), and the Colorado Plateaus (southern part of the Section).

On the GMUG, this section represents the Grand Mesa and North Fork Valley Geographic Areas, and the West Elks.

### **Section M331I--Northern Parks and Ranges**

**Geomorphology.** Steeply sloping to precipitous mountains are dissected by many narrow stream valleys with steep gradients. This area has gently rolling mountain parks and valleys, with some mountain ridges. Rugged hills and low mountains are found in narrow bands along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. These hills are strongly dissected and in many places are crossed by large streams flowing eastward from the mountains. Elevation ranges from 5,575 to 14,410 ft (1,700 to 4,400 m). This Section is within Fenneman and Johnson's Southern Rocky Mountains geomorphic physical division.

On the GMUG, this Section represents the Taylor River Basin north of Pitkin.

## **Summary of Existing Wilderness on GMUG**

Tables 1-6 display attributes and features of the existing wilderness areas on the GMUG. Table 7 displays the potential elevation ranges within the GMUG National Forest by Ecological Unit. Table 8 displays the elevation zones of existing wilderness areas.

**Table 1.** Wilderness acres progression of designation by year.

Wilderness Name	Acres designated		
	2004	1980	1964
Collegiate Peaks	48,996	48,961	-
Fossil Ridge	33,060	-	-
La Garita	79,822	77,122	24,322
Lizard Head	20,391	20,342	-
Maroon Bells/Snowmass	19,528	19,000	-
Mt Sneffels	16,566	16,200	-
Powderhorn	13,935	-	-
Raggeds	48,600	42,200	-
Uncompahgre (Big Blue)	99,331	98,235	-
West Elk	176,412	176,092	61,412
<b>Cumulative Total Ac:</b>	<b>556,641</b>	<b>498,152</b>	<b>85,734</b>
Tabeguache Area	9,065	-	-
Roubideau Area	19,650	-	-
	<b>28,715</b>		
<b>Recreation Mgmt Area</b>			
Fossil Ridge RMA	<b>43,900</b>	-	-

<sup>1</sup> Source – USDA Land Areas of the National Forest System, Sept 2004, Sept 1982, Sept 1979 (Acres are rounded)

**Table 2.** Elevation Ranges of Existing GMUG Wilderness lands

Wilderness Name	Acres	Eco Region	Elevation Range		Percent within Elevation Range				Dominate Vegetation
			Minimum Elevation	Maximum Elevation	<7000'	7-9000'	9-12000'	12-14000'	
Collegiate Peaks	48,996	M331I	9900	13,800			70	30	Spruce-fir
Fossil Ridge	33,060	M331I	8900	13,200		61	35	5	Spruce-fir
La Garita	79,822	M331G	9200	14,000			67	33	Spruce-fir
Lizard Head	20,391	M331G	9100	14,000			87	13	Spruce-fir
Maroon Bells/Snow.	19,528	M331I	9700	14,200			61	39	Bare/willow
Mt Sneffels	16,566	M331G	9500	14,000			67	33	Bare/Spruce-fir
Powderhorn	13,935	M331G	9200	12,400			88	12	Spruce-fir
Raggeds	48,600	M331G	6800	13,000		31	69	3	Spruce-fir
Uncompahgre	99,331	M331G	8200	14,300		2	68	30	Spruce-fir
West Elk	176,412	M331H	6800	13,000		18	79	3	Spruce-fir
Roubideau	19,650	341B	5800	9500	32	61	7		Pinyon-juniper
Tabeguache	9,065	341B	6000	8600	28	72			Ponderosa Pine

**Table 3.** Potential Natural Vegetation of Existing Wilderness Areas.

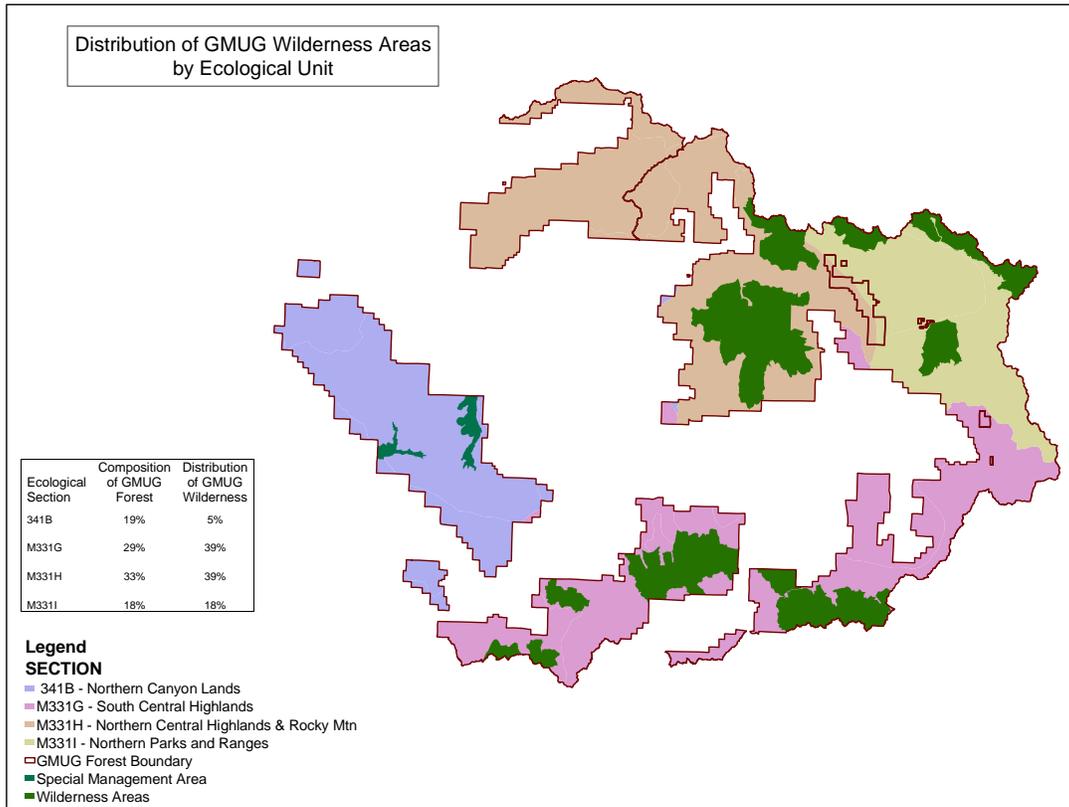
Wilderness Name	Potential Natural Vegetation (in Percent)														
	Tree							P-J	P-J Oak Srvceb erry	Oak Srvc berry	Shrub	Grass /forb	Alpine	Riparian (Alder Willow) *Cottonwd	Bare
	PP	LP	DF	SF	SFA	A	SFF								
Collegiate Peaks		9		36								8	18	27	
Fossil Ridge		5	20	36	9	2	2			7		3	5	11	
La Garita				24	25						4	13	16	16	
Lizard Head				41	17	4						7	4	25	
Maroon Bells/Snow.				16	3						2	10	24	44	
Mt Sneffels				16	22	5								54	
Powderhorn				21	31						5	12	20	6	
Raggeds				12	35	13	3					6	12	18	
Uncompahgre			2	31	10	2	4					7	19	23	
West Elk			6	21	33	9	10					2	3	13	
Roubideau	8			2	18	3		28	17	22					
Tabeguache	32		9		6		11		20	18					

**Specie Code:**

PP – Ponderosa Pine  
LP – Lodgepole Pine  
DF – Douglas fir

SF – Spruce fir  
SFA – Spruce fir – aspen  
SFF – Spruce fir - fir  
A – Aspen

P-J – Pinyon-juniper



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Existing GMUG Wilderness by Ecological Unit.

**Table 4.** Distribution of GMUG Wilderness by Ecological Unit

<b>Ecological Section</b>	<b>Composition of GMUG Forest</b>	<b>Distribution of GMUG Wilderness</b>
341B	19%	5%
M331G	29%	39%
M331H	33%	39%
M331I	18%	18%

**Table 5.** Elevation Range Summary of Existing GMUG Wilderness Areas

<b>Elevation Range (Feet)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
7000-9000	1%
9000-12,000	11%
12,000-14,000	70%
>14,000	17%

**Table 6.** Elevation Zones of existing GMUG Wilderness Areas by Ecological Unit.

<b>Section</b>	<b>Elevation Range</b>	<b>Percent</b>
341B	7000-9000	31%
	9000-12,000	64%
	12,000-14,000	5%
	>14,000	0%
M331G	7000-9000	0%
	9000-12,000	1%
	12,000-14,000	71%
	>14,000	28%
M331H	7000-9000	0%
	9000-12,000	21%
	12,000-14,000	77%
	>14,000	3%
M331I	7000-9000	0%
	9000-12,000	0%
	12,000-14,000	74%
	>14,000	26%

**Table 7.** Elevation Zones of GMUG by Ecological Unit.

Section	Elevation Range	Percent
341B	7000-9000	6%
	9000-12,000	78%
	12,000-14,000	16%
	>14,000	0%
M331G	7000-9000	<1%
	9000-12,000	7%
	12,000-14,000	87%
	>14,000	12%
M331H	7000-9000	1%
	9000-12,000	34%
	12,000-14,000	64%
	>14,000	1%
M331I	7000-9000	0%
	9000-12,000	4%
	12,000-14,000	88%
	>14,000	8%

**Table 8.** Elevation Zones of Existing GMUG Wilderness Areas.

NAME	%	Elevation Zone (feet)	Ecological Unit
Collegiate Peaks Wilderness	70%	12,000-14,000	M331I
Collegiate Peaks Wilderness	30%	> 14,000	
Fossil Ridge Wilderness	61%	7000-9000	M331I
Fossil Ridge Wilderness	35%	9000-12,000	
Fossil Ridge Wilderness	5%	12,000-14,000	
La Garita Wilderness	67%	12000-14,000	M331G
La Garita Wilderness	33%	> 14,000	
Lizard Head Wilderness	87%	12,000-14,000	M331G
Lizard Head Wilderness	13%	> 14,000	
Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness	61%	12,000-14,000	M331I
Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness	39%	> 14,000	
Mount Sneffels Wilderness	67%	12,000-14,000	M331G
Mount Sneffels Wilderness	33%	> 14,000	
Powderhorn Wilderness	88%	12,000-14,000	M441G

<b>NAME</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Elevation Zone (feet)</b>	<b>Ecological Unit</b>
Powderhorn Wilderness	12%	> 14,000	
Raggeds Wilderness	0%	7000-9000	M331H
Raggeds Wilderness	31%	9000-12,000	
Raggeds Wilderness	69%	12,000-14,000	
Raggeds Wilderness	3%	> 14,000	
Roubideau Special Area	32%	7000-9000	341B
Roubideau Special Area	61%	9000-12,000	
Roubideau Special Area	7%	12,000-14,000	
Tabeguache Special Area	28%	7000-9000	341B
Tabeguache Special Area	72%	9000-12,000	
Uncompahgre Wilderness	2%	9000-12,000	M331G
Uncompahgre Wilderness	68%	12,000-14,000	
Uncompahgre Wilderness	30%	> 14,000	
West Elk Wilderness	<1%	7000-9000	M331H
West Elk Wilderness	18%	9000-12,000	
West Elk Wilderness	79%	12,000-14,000	
West Elk Wilderness	3%	> 14,000	

## State of Colorado Wilderness Distribution

**Table 9.** Distribution of Wilderness within the State of Colorado by Ecological Unit and Elevation.

Ecological Unit SECTION	ELEVATION BY PERCENT				State Distribution
	7-9000'	9-12000'	12-14000'	14,000+	
331J		10%	0%		1%
<b>341B</b>	75%	17%	0%		8%
M331F		5%	7%	10%	7%
<b>M331G</b>	7%	21%	31%	44%	30%
<b>M331H</b>	1%	25%	17%	1%	14%
<b>M331I</b>	0%	22%	44%	45%	39%
(blank)	17%	1%			1%
Totals	9%	8%	70%	13%	100%

**Bold type** indicates representation on GMUG

**Table 10.** Distribution of Wilderness, State of Colorado, (all sources) by Ecological Unit and Elevation.

Ecological Unit SECTION	ELEVATION BY ACRES				Grand Total
	7-9000'	9-12,000'	12-14,000'	14,000'	
331J		31,598	707		32,305
<b>341B</b>	252,916	52,298	1,828		307,042
M331F		15,378	196,719	47,965	260,061
<b>M331G</b>	23,199	67,654	856,640	217,105	1,164,598
<b>M331H</b>	3,063	78,600	468,378	6,912	556,954
<b>M331I</b>	1,584	68,474	1,202,480	218,420	1,490,958
(blank)	55,629	1,814			57,443
Grand Total	336,391	315,816	2,726,752	490,401	3,869,361

**Bold type** indicates representation on GMUG