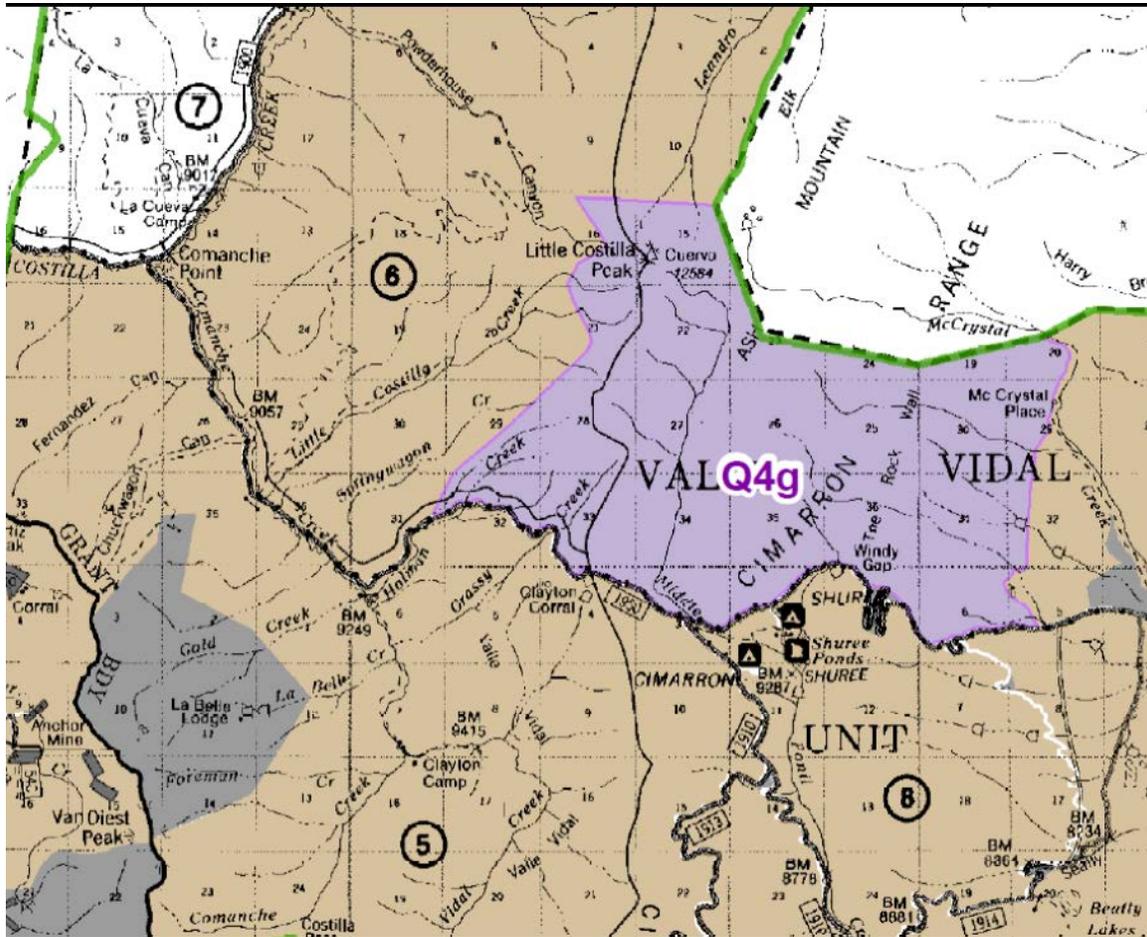


Questa Ranger District

Valle Vidal

Suggested Evaluation Determination: Most of this area does not have wilderness character; however, one portion (labeled Q4g see below) does have wilderness character. For the purpose of this discussion, Valle Vidal will be discussed as East-side Valle Vidal and West-side Valle Vidal, these portions are split by the geological Rock Wall feature.



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

The East-side Valle Vidal evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because of the visible impact from firefighting efforts during the 2002 Ponil Complex Wildfire. Some of these visual

impacts include dozer lines, erosion control structures, invasive weeds, and plantings. There are also noticeable routes left on the landscape from closed roads throughout this area.

Infrastructure is peppered throughout this area, mostly pertaining to range and wildlife improvements. These include range rider camps, spring developments, streambank stability structures, a rock dam, erosion control structures, 14 windmills, trick tanks, exclosures, stock tanks, a fish barrier, and a corral. Most of these improvements have motorized access (administrative) routes for maintenance. There are also constructed recreation sites in the area consisting of McCrystal Campground and the historical Ring Ranch site that is used for education and parking. Philmont Scout Ranch has three permitted camps with access routes and a mountain bike trail that are highly used and noticeable in the evaluated area. These camps house a permanent crew of 10 people throughout the summer, and over 4,000 scouts visit these camps each year (over 13,000 days and nights camping). Once a week, a vehicle supply run is made to each camp by the permitted motorized access routes. An electronic site and the administrative route to access it for maintenance purposes is visually apparent from within this evaluated area.

The West-side Valle Vidal evaluated area also lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from past thinning projects and old logging roads from past timber activities. Similar to East-side Valle Vidal, there are numerous range and wildlife improvements and infrastructure, such as range rider camps, spring developments, streambank stability structures, one rock dam, exclosures, stock tanks, a fish barrier, and a corral. Most of these improvements have motorized access routes for maintenance. In addition to range and wildlife structures, there are constructed recreation sites consisting of hardened campsites, fishing piers, parking areas, and day use areas at Cimarron Campground and Shuree Ponds. There is also an electronic site and associated motor vehicle access route that is visually apparent from within this evaluated area.

Q4g is determined to have apparent naturalness based on the Middle Ponil headwaters, Little Costilla Peak (Alpine Peak), Ash Mountain, rare pure bristlecone pine stands, beautiful meadows, wetlands, clear streams, and scenic and diverse landscapes. Due to the steepness and remoteness of this area, there are few improvements or other evidence of human activity.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

The entire Valle Vidal offers unconfined recreation, because there are no establish trails on the Valle Vidal, only four roads that are open to the public, and all vehicle camping must occur in an established campground. However, Valle Vidal is a destination area for people outside the Carson National Forest, who come to see the breathtaking large meadows, aspen stands, and abundant wildlife.

Most of East-side Valle Vidal offers limited opportunities for solitude, because this evaluated area is already a high use recreation destination point, in addition to the use brought in by Philmont Scout Ranch through special use permit. Philmont Scout Ranch alone has three permitted camps with motorized access routes and a 10 person permanent crew throughout the summer. Over 4,000 scouts visit these camps each year (over 13,000 days and nights camping).

West-side Valle Vidal offers solitude, as there are no establish trails and hikers and horseback riders are spread out over a vast landscape. However, the southern part of West-side Valle Vidal is frequently used during the winter by snowmobiles.

Q4g is determined to offer solitude and unconfined recreation, because of its steepness and remoteness, few improvements, no roads, and no developed trails.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values in the Valle Vidal evaluated area include the Outstanding National Resource Waters, Little Costilla Peak (alpine ecosystem), Ash Mountain (shale rock peak, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and possible ptarmigan), the Rock Wall geologic feature, large open valleys, Beatty Lake salt playas, and pure bristlecone pine stands. This area also contains historic outstanding values such as Ring Ranch, Ring Town with cemetery, Ponil Town with cemetery, McCrystal Place, railway beds, smelters, timber mills, Clayton Camp, La Belle Town, La Cueva Camp, Old Shuree, Shuree Lodge, and telegraph line.

The outstanding values found within Q4g include the Outstanding National Resource Waters, Little Costilla Peak (alpine ecosystem), Ash Mountain (shale rock peak, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, and possible ptarmigan), the Rock Wall, large open valleys, and pure bristle cone pine stands. The bristlecone pine stand in Q4g of the Valle Vidal has the state's largest bristlecone pine tree.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage most of the Valle Vidal evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because of the existing Vermejo Ranch easement rights. The Vermejo Ranch has the right to use all open and closed roads on Valle Vidal at any time to access private property, which is within and surrounds Valle Vidal.

The East-side Valle Vidal would be difficult to manage to preserve wilderness character, because of needed motorized access and use of mechanized equipment for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements, such range rider camps, spring developments, streambank stability structures, a rock dam, erosion control structures, widespread windmills, trick tanks, exclosures, stock tanks, fish barrier, and corral. Philmont Scout Ranch also has permitted motorized vehicle access to service a camp and permitted uses.

The West-side Valle Vidal would be difficult to manage to preserve wilderness character, because of multi-year and multi-agency approved restoration projects that are planned and funded with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Environment Department, Quivira Coalition, Trout Unlimited, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations. These projects will require mechanized and motorized equipment for the development of stream and wetland improvements. Also, a high level of snowmobiling is taking place in the southern part of this area, which was designated for snowmobiling through the 1983 Valle Vidal Multiple Use Guide and 1986 Carson Forest Plan. Kaiser Steel has legally established mining rights for coal in Valle Vidal, as well.

Taking into account the permitted motor vehicle access, legal existing rights, currently approved restoration projects, developed recreation sites, and established uses in these areas, the ability of managing to preserve wilderness character is greatly diminished in most of the Valle Vidal evaluated area, both East-side and West-side.

