

Tres Piedras Ranger District

Rio Tusas Watershed

Suggested Evaluation Determination: This area does not 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

The Rio Tusas Watershed evaluated area does not offer much in the way of apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from past thinning projects (Red Mesa, Maquinita, and Gulch), evidence of historic mining activities for mica and gold, and closed roads that impact the landscape throughout the entire area. Infrastructure found throughout this area includes numerous range and wildlife improvements, such as spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and corrals that detract from the natural setting and are evidence of human activity. Additionally, there is a lookout tower and electronic site on Kiowa Mountain that is visually apparent from all areas within the Rio Tusas Watershed evaluated area. There are also impacts from ungulate (wildlife and livestock) grazing that have altered the natural landscape.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

This evaluated area offers limited opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation, because it is a high use area for the communities of Antonio, Taos, Petaca, and Las Tablas. Some of this high use consists of fuelwood gathering, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping (including car camping), and hunting. There are some opportunities for solitude on the east side of Kiowa Mountain; however, because of limited access and lower levels of use, compared to the rest of the area.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values that can be found in the area include the rare plant small-head goldenweed, in addition to the Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The historic mining town of Good Hope is also located in this area.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage the Rio Tusas Watershed evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because of current multi-year and multi-agency approved restoration projects that are being planned and funded with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. Other governmental and non-governmental organizations are also partners in these upcoming projects. Motorized access and use of mechanized equipment for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements are also established and required. This evaluated area is also within the wildland urban interface (WUI) for the communities of Las Tablas and Tusas Box, where all fire suppression efforts would be the priority to protect life and property.

Additionally, there are open roads that cherry-stem into this area that would create a high potential for vehicle encroachment, which is already occurring. Furthermore, there are private land inholdings requiring access that would impact the manageability of the area for wilderness character.

Other considerations that may affect the manageability of wilderness character in this area include long established traditional and cultural uses, such as fuelwood gathering, piñon picking, and hunting from the local communities of Petaca, Antonio, Taos, and Las Tablas.