

Camino Real Ranger District

Rio Grande del Rancho 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 Grande del Rancho evaluated area does not offer apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from past thinning projects (e.g., old decks, stumps, and partnership blocks), evidence of exploration activities for decorative rock, visually apparent logging roads, and large infestations of invasive weeds. Infrastructure associated with range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, fish barriers, trick tanks, stock tanks, and corrals are also scattered throughout this area. An electronic site is visually noticeable from most of the area. Detracting even further from its apparent naturalness are the dumpsites scattered throughout the area. On the east side of this evaluated area is an old sanitation clearcut called, “Little Korea”, which degrades the apparent naturalness of the area as well.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

The evaluated area offers limited opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation, because this area is already highly used by the communities of Taos, Ranchos, Talpa, and Llano Quemado. A contributing factor to the high levels of use is the town of Taos, the largest population center in the area. Taos’ close proximity to the evaluated area offers easy year-round access by various types of users and an urban feel. Some of the uses within this evaluated area include various motorized and non-motorized recreational activities, fuelwood harvesting, clay gathering, latilla cutting, and snowmobiling.

Outstanding Values

The outstanding values found within this evaluated area include a proposed Research Natural Area, Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations in the streams, and the Pot Creek Cultural Interpretative Site, which includes Pot Creek Pueblo, the largest prehistoric adobe pueblo north of Santa Fe.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage the Rio Grande del Rancho evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because it is within the wildland urban interface (WUI) of Talpa, Pot Creek, and Valle Escondido, where all fire suppression efforts would be the priority to protect life and property. Motorized access and the use of mechanized equipment are also needed for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements. This area is also extremely popular for pleasure driving, fuelwood gathering, hunting, and autumn aspen viewing. Authorized through the 1986 Carson Forest Plan, snowmobiling is a popular activity throughout this area. Mountain biking is also

extremely popular, especially on the South Boundary Trail, internationally known for its challenging experience.

Other considerations that may affect the manageability of wilderness character include long established traditional and cultural uses that consist of hunting, fishing, piñon picking, latilla cutting, and fuelwood gathering from the communities of Taos, Ranchos, Talpa, and Llano Quemado. Given these established uses, especially those that are motorized, it would be difficult to manage this evaluated area for wilderness character.