

Questa Ranger District

Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments

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 entire Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from thinning projects, a powerline, and visually apparent logging roads from past timber activities in the area. Thinning and fuelwood treatments used to combat an *Ips* beetle outbreak, which began in 2002 and is still ongoing in 2016, have added to the impacts on apparent naturalness as well. These projects required motorized access and heavy machinery. Since the outbreak continues, there is potential for more treatments that would further degrade the evaluated area's apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

This area does offer opportunities for both solitude and unconfined recreation, since the area has few developments, improvements, or trails.

Size

This area would need to be managed in conjunction with the existing BLM's Rio Grande del Norte National Monument across the gorge, since it is less than 5,000 acres on its own.

Outstanding Values

The Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments evaluated area contains scenic vistas overlooking the Rio Grande, a designated Wild and Scenic River, and the geologic feature of the Rio Grande gorge itself. There are also cryptograms found throughout the area.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage this evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because of its shape and configuration. To address the issue of shape and configuration, this area could only be managed in conjunction with BLM's Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument, which is across the Rio Grande gorge. Also, this area has several existing open cherry stemmed roads that would pose encroachment concerns.

Other considerations that may affect the manageability of wilderness character in this area include long established traditional and cultural uses that consist of hunting, fishing, and fuelwood gathering from the communities of Taos, Arroyo Hondo, San Cristobal, and Questa.