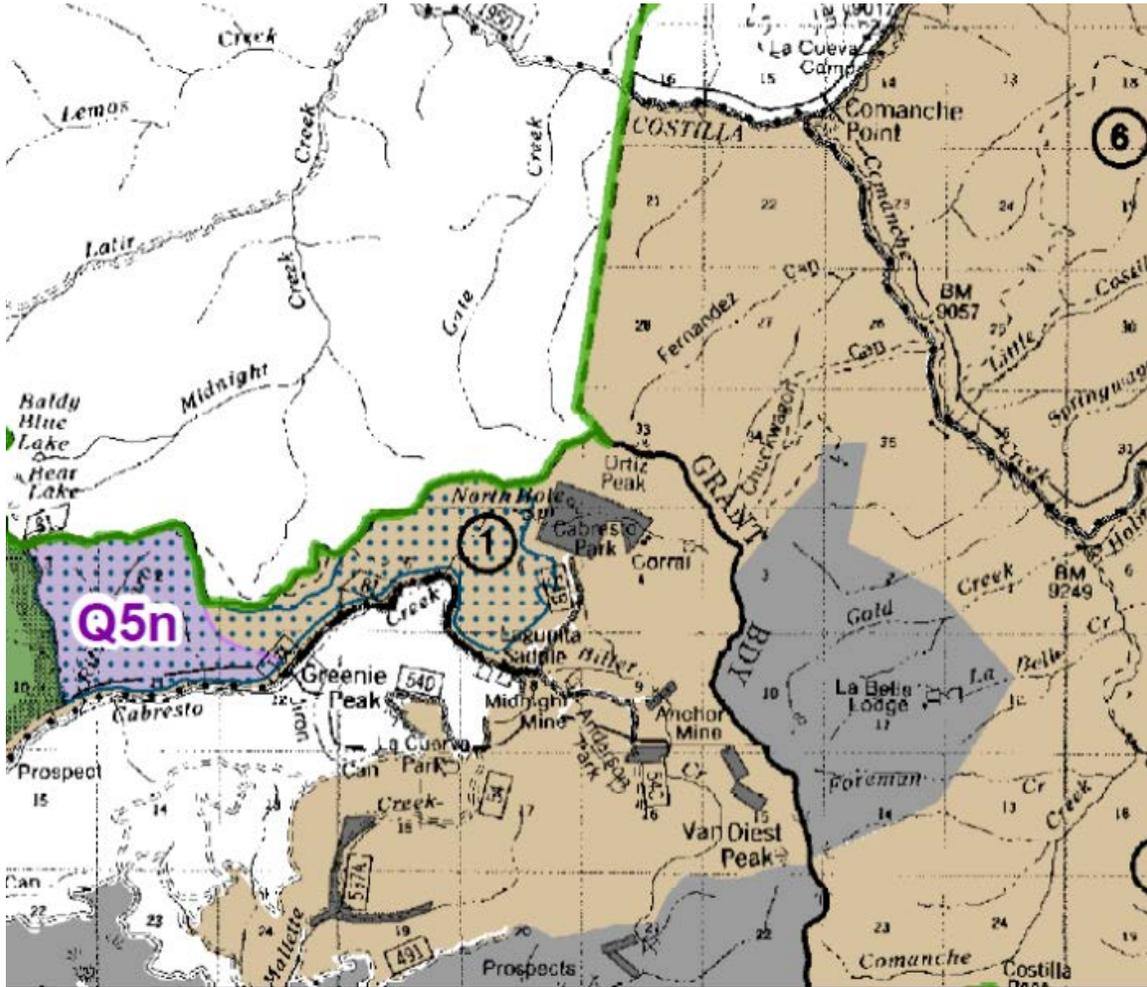


Questa Ranger District

Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon

Suggested Evaluation Determination: The majority of this area does not have wilderness character; however, one portion (labeled Q5n see below) does 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 Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because of the visible impacts from past thinning projects, historic mining activities, and closed roads that are still evident on the landscape throughout this area. This area contains a historic

mining district with two associated towns. Tailings piles, mine adits and shafts, as well as historic buildings are evident on the landscape. Mining reclamation work took place in this area in 2010.

Installed to protect Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams, wetlands, and Arizona willow populations, numerous wildlife exclosures are also scattered throughout the area. Motorized access routes are used to maintain them. Two electronic sites with associated motorized access routes for maintenance are within the evaluated area, as well.

Q5n is determined to have apparent naturalness, because it is within an inventoried roadless area¹ and is adjacent to the existing Latir Wilderness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

This area offers limited opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation, since it receives high recreation use by the communities of Questa, Cerro, and Red River, in addition to serving as a tourist destination. For example, this area attracts tourists to Red River in the summer for various types of motorized recreation experiences and in the winter for snowmobiling. The breathtaking view from Greenie Peak and the historic structure of Midnight Town and Anchor Town is also a tourist draw. Given the high levels of motorized use, the sounds from these activities can be pervasive throughout the area. Other uses that have high participation rates include fuelwood gathering, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping (including car camping), hunting, fishing, and autumn aspen viewing.

The inventoried roadless area within this evaluated area offers solitude, as there are few improvements, no roads, and only one trail. However, the others portions of this area do not offer solitude, since the sound of motorized road and trail use in the spring, summer, and fall, and snowmobile use in the winter impact solitude. Activities from private land inholdings also limit the opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation. The only portion of the inventoried roadless area that offers solitude is Q5n, which is adjacent to the existing Latir Wilderness.

Size

Q5n is less than 5,000 acres, but is adjacent to a designated wilderness area. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the Latir Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole, which would then meet the size requirement.

Outstanding Values

The Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon evaluated area contains outstanding values, consisting of scenic vistas from Greenie Peak, Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams, possible ptarmigan, Arizona willow, and bighorn sheep. The area also has historic values related to Midnight Town, Anchor Town, the old timber mills, mining claims, and telegraph line.

Manageability

It would be difficult to manage the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because of the motorized access and the use of mechanized equipment needed to maintain wildlife exclosures that are scattered throughout this area.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the [2001 Roadless Rule](#) included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.

Established motorized uses, such as four-wheeling, driving for pleasure, and snowmobiling, are very popular in this area and a draw for both tourists and local residents. The area's popularity and high levels of motorized use make vehicle encroachment a concern when managing to protect wilderness character. Additionally, the Lagunitas Saddle portion of the inventoried roadless area was designated for snowmobiling through the 1986 Carson Forest Plan. Vehicle encroachment is already an existing concern, since much of this area is comprised of open meadows that are receiving motorized impacts from people illegally driving off of open roads.

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 Cerro, Red River, and Questa.

A portion of the inventoried roadless area's shape and configuration would also make it difficult to manage to preserve its wilderness character. Part of this inventoried roadless area narrows to between 0.5 and 0.6 mile wide. These narrow areas have visual and sound impacts from an existing forest road to the south, and from the adjacent private land and associated access roads to the north. The eastern part of this inventoried roadless area is also highly used by snowmobiles, since it is an area that was designated for snowmobiling through 1986 Carson Forest Plan.