

## Tres Piedras Ranger District

### Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul

**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 Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul evaluated area lacks apparent naturalness, because it has been heavily impacted by thinning and fuelwood harvesting treatments to counter an *lps* beetle outbreak that began in 2002. This outbreak is ongoing, increasing the potential to treat more acres in the evaluated area and further degrading its apparent naturalness.

As found throughout the Carson National Forest, there are also numerous range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and corrals scattered throughout this area. User created roads also detract for the natural character of this area especially, because road braiding is common where people have driven off the main road to avoid road damage from the highly erosive soils. Another infrastructure that impacts the apparent naturalness of the area is a microwave tower that can be viewed for miles.

#### Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Small portions of this evaluated area do offer opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation around Mesa Vibora and Cerro Azul. The rest of the area does not lend itself to this wilderness characteristic, because of flat terrain, lack of screening, and current uses such as fuelwood gathering, piñon gathering, and livestock grazing. This area does not tend to draw people in for recreation except for hunting and to hike up Cerro Azul and Mesa Vibora, where opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation can be found and are presently taking place.

#### Outstanding Values

Cerro Azul and Mesa Vibora are outstanding geological features (historic volcanoes) and are culturally significant to local Tribes. There are remnants of a historic trail that could possibly be the Chili Line in this area as well.

#### Manageability

It would be difficult to manage the Mesa Vibora and Cerro Azul evaluated area to preserve wilderness character, because the flat terrain lends itself to vehicle encroachment that is already an issue in this area. Additionally, motorized access and use of mechanized equipment have been established and are often times required for the maintenance of range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, a well with waterlines, and a corral found in this area. In addition, private land inholdings require motorized access, which 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 that consist of piñon picking and fuelwood gathering.