

## **Carson National Forest Wilderness Evaluation Phase 1**

Evaluation Phase 1 takes a broad look and offers a first cut of the inventoried lands in Evaluation. First cuts are based on: (1) existing designated areas that would conflict with managing that specific designation for wilderness character; (2) legally established rights; (3) fire management; (4) motorized trails; (5) shape and configuration; and (6) private land located in Valle Vidal. The rationale for removing areas in Evaluation Phase 1 is described below.

### **Existing Designated Areas**

Two existing designated areas were identified in Evaluation Phase 1. These include the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit and two of the four designated Wild Horse Territories found on the Carson National Forest. The rationale for removing these specific areas from further wilderness character Evaluation is described below:

#### **Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit**

Portions of Alamosa, Rio Tusas Watershed, El Rito-Lobato, and Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed Areas were removed from evaluation based on their locations within the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit.

The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” Given that the management for a federal sustained yield unit requires timber harvesting projects and large scale motorized and mechanized equipment use, the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was removed from further wilderness character Evaluation.

Removing portions of the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit resulted in contiguous land blocks that were less than 5,000 acres in size. Based on the wilderness characteristic pertaining to size being greater than 5,000 acres, these remaining smaller blocks were also removed from further Evaluation.

#### **Wild Horse Territories**

Portions of the Rio Tusas Watershed and Jicarilla Areas were removed, because they were within the Jarita Mesa and Jicarilla Wild Horse Territories.

The Carson National Forest has four federally designated Wild Horse Territories; however, only the Jarita Mesa and Jicarilla Wild Horse Territories are occupied and managed. The Forest Service is required to manage these wild horse herds to protect the herd and maintain ecological integrity of the land. Management practices frequently include managing population numbers by capturing and transporting members of the herd. This generally requires the use of all-terrain vehicles and motor vehicles with trailers. Given the management requirements necessitated by this existing federal designation, the management of any potential wilderness characteristics in these two Wild Horse Territories are precluded by the previous existing designated use of the area. For these reasons, these two Wild Horse Territories were removed from wilderness character Evaluation.

## **Established Rights**

Areas with established rights were removed in the first cut from the inventoried lands. For the purpose of wilderness evaluation, this primarily consisted of the known acequias scattered throughout the forest.

## **Acequias**

Portions of Embudo Watershed, Latir Wilderness Accompaniments, Valle Vidal, Canjilon Mountain-Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed, Cruces Basin-San Antonio Watershed, East-West Lobato, and Columbine Hondo-Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Areas were split based on known acequias that have legally existing water rights and the right-of-way to maintain structures (i.e., headgates, flumes), which may require motorized or mechanized equipment.

Acequias are the historic ditches that bring water from rivers and streams to communities for irrigation purposes. They are generally community run through associations headed by a majordomo (ditch master) and date back to the time of Spanish settlement in the 1500s. These waterways are still in use today for the original purposes for which they were established. Acequias that predate the National Forest Reservation are afforded special rights and status under National Forest System management. Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required.

If a portion of an area was split by an acequia and that split portion was less than 5,000 acres in size, that area was also removed from further evaluation based on the size criteria.

## **Fire Management**

Portion of Taos Canyon, Embudo Watershed, Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed, Columbine Hondo-Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments, Midnight-Mallette, Rio Grande Del Norte Accompaniments, Chama River Wilderness Accompaniments-Echo Amphitheater, Petaca, Alamosa, East-West Lobato, Arroyo Seco Watershed, Canjilon Mountain-Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed, and Jicarilla Areas were removed from Evaluation because these areas are within Fire Management Unit 1 (FMU1).

FMU1 units on the Carson National Forest are found near towns or villages. These units are under current fire management direction through the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, which states that fire is not desired and is to be suppressed. Given the management for a FMU1 unit requires fire suppression by any means necessary to protect life and property, these units were removed from further wilderness character Evaluation.

## **Motorized Trails**

Portions of Taos Canyon, Embudo Watershed, Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed, Columbine Hondo-Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments, and Midnight-Mallette Areas were split, based on open designated motorized trails that transect them.

The Carson National Forest's travel management decisions include designated trails open to motorized use throughout the forest. The Wilderness Inventory removed the open motorized roads, in Evaluation motorized trails are removed, as they do not offer wilderness character. If an area had a designated motorized trail going through it, the trail was removed and the rest of the

area was evaluated for wilderness character. If however, the split resulted in two dissected areas that were less than 5,000 acres in size, these areas were removed based on size criteria.

### **Shape and Configuration**

Portions of Latir Peak Wilderness Accompaniments, Embudo Watershed, Luna-Coyote, Taos Canyon, Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed, Columbine Hondo-Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments, Midnight-Mallette, Valle Vidal Area, Arroyo Seco Watershed Area, Rio Tusas Watershed, Chama River Wilderness Accompaniments-Echo Amphitheater, Comanche East, Cruces Basin-San Antonio Watershed, Alamosa, East-West Lobato, Canjilon Mountain-Upper Canjilon, and Upper El Rito Watershed Areas were removed due to shape and configuration of the area.

The basis of removal under the shape and configuration consideration was contingent upon pinch points. A pinch point is a strip of land within an inventoried area that is less than a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile wide. It was determined during Evaluation that a strip of land less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile wide would not be manageable for wilderness character. Once a pinch point was removed and the resulting area was less than 5,000 acres in size, it was also removed based on size criteria.

### **Valle Vidal Private Property**

During the Wilderness Inventory step, portions of land within Valle Vidal were misidentified as National Forest System lands. Further inspection during Evaluation found they were private lands belonging to Vermejo Park. This correction resulted in the removal of the Valle Vidal La Belle Area from further evaluation, since it is actually private land. Removing the Valle Vidal La Belle Area also split the remaining National Forest System lands, because of a road (not open to public) needed to access this block of private land. The resulting bisected areas from the road were also removed from evaluation.