

Final Identification and Inventory of Lands on the Ashley National Forest that may have Wilderness Characteristics

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The Ashley National Forest is revising its forest plan. The revision process requires identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determining whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. A description of this process can be found in the 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule and Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH) 1909.12. This process includes the following four steps – Inventory, Evaluation, Analysis, and Recommendation (if any). This document details Step 1, the Inventory.

Overview of Process

Step 1: Inventory

The inventory (Step) is intended to be broad and inclusive, including all areas across the Forest that meet certain size, roads, and improvements criteria (FSH 1909.12 Section 71.1). In August 2016 and February 2017 the Ashley National Forest released for public feedback draft inventories of areas suitable to continue to Step 2, Evaluation.

Step 2: Evaluation

The next step is to evaluate each area on the inventory map for wilderness characteristics. Evaluation of wilderness characteristics uses five criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and Forest Service Handbook final directives FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70, Section 72.1. A summary of these five criteria is as follows:

1. The degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable (**apparent naturalness**).
2. The degree to which the areas has outstanding **opportunities for solitude** or for a **primitive and unconfined type of recreation**. The work "or" means that an area only has to possess one or the other. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.
3. Evaluation how areas smaller than 5,000 acres are of **sufficient size** to make their preservation and use in unimpaired condition practicable.
4. Evaluate the degree to which they are contains ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, education scenic, or historical value (**unique features**). These values are not required for recommendation, but they should be identified and evaluated where they exist.

5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be **managed** to preserve its wilderness characteristics.

The Evaluation step is underway in the Winter of 2017/2018 and will the draft will be released in Winter 2017/2018.

Step 3: Determine which areas to further analyze in the National Environmental Policy Act process

Release of the Proposed Action initiates the National Environmental Policy Act process. The Draft Environmental Impact State (DEIS) will analyze the environmental effects and management tradeoffs associated with recommending areas for wilderness designation.

Step 4: Decide which areas, if any, to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System

As the deciding official, the Forest Supervisor makes a final decision on which areas to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System when he signs the forest plan. If any areas recommended in Step 4, these are preliminary administrative recommendations.

Once the forest plan is finalized, the Final Environmental Impact Statement is released, and a Record of Decision is signed, the Forest Supervisor may recommend suitable lands for National Wilderness Preservation System designation to the Chief of the U. S. Forest Service, if the Record of Decision contains suitable lands. Such recommendation may then be forwarded to the Secretary of Agriculture, and ultimately to Congress, for their consideration and possible designation. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

Developing the Inventory

The primary function of the identification and inventory step is to efficiently and effectively identify all lands within the plan area that may have wilderness characteristics as defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 *United States Code* 1131-1136, 78 Stat 890), using a transparent process. Lands included in the inventory are documented and identified on a map and carried forward for further evaluation.

To develop the inventory of lands on the Ashley National Forest that may be suitable for recommendation as wilderness, three categories of inventory criteria were used (size, forest roads improvements, and other improvements) and information obtained during our *Assessment Report of Ecological, Social, and Economic Conditions on the Ashley National Forest* (USDA Forest Service 2017), as directed by the Forest Service Handbook, and additional public input. The Ashley National Forest utilized existing databases and geospatial data as sources of information for the inventory process, which are dynamic and may change over time.

It is important to note that lands included in the inventory provide a starting point for further evaluation, and their inclusion is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management.

Size Criteria (FSH 1909.12, 71.21)

According to the Wilderness Act, a wilderness area “[h]as at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition” (16 U.S.C. 1131c). Areas to be included in the inventory must be federal lands and must meet one of the following size criteria:

1. The area contains 5,000 acres or more.
2. The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, including but not limited to areas contiguous to an existing wilderness, primitive areas, administratively recommended wilderness, or wilderness inventory of other Federal ownership.

The Ashley National Forest inventory includes lands over 5,000 acres that meet the remaining criteria, and areas less than 5,000 acres that are adjacent to the High Uintas Wilderness.

Improvements (FSH 1909.12, 71.22)

Lands to be considered for inventory may or may not have improvements. Improvements consist of things that show evidence of human activities such as roads, structures, or past management activities. The presence of such improvements does not necessarily exclude areas for consideration in the inventory.

Forest Road¹ Improvements

The following areas with road improvements were included in the inventory. Guidance on forest road improvements considered can be found in FSH 1909.12, chapter 70, section 71.22a.

1. Areas that contain operational maintenance level 1 (see Glossary for definition) forest roads.
2. Areas with routes that are decommissioned, unauthorized or temporary, or forest roads that are identified for decommissioning in a previous decision document or in travel management plan or travel analysis.
3. Areas with forest roads that are identified to be reclassified to maintenance level 1 in a previous decision document or in a travel management plan or travel analysis.
4. Areas with forest roads that were proposed for consideration as recommended wilderness in the 1986 Forest Plan or areas with forest roads that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public involvement during the assessment or other public or intergovernmental participation opportunity.
5. Areas with historic wagon routes, historic mining routes, or other settlement era transportation features considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.

The areas excluded from the inventory contained the following road improvements:

1. Permanently authorized roads validated by a Federal court or the Department of the Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded.
2. Forest road maintained to levels 3, 4, and 5 operational maintenance level.

¹ A forest road is defined as a road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the System and the use and development of its resources (36 CFR 2112.1).

3. Forest roads maintained to operational maintenance level 2. The 2009 Ashley National Forest Travel Management Record of Decision identified the level 2 roads for continued public access.

Other Improvements

Other improvements on the Ashley National Forest were reviewed to determine whether to include or exclude areas in the inventory (table 1, next page). Guidance on improvements considered can be found in FSH 1909.12, chapter 70, section 71.22b.

Improvement Type	Remarks
Airstrips	No airstrips exist on the Ashley National Forest.
Heliports	No heliports exist on the Ashley National Forest.
Vegetation treatments that are not substantially noticeable.	Vegetation treatments were included in the inventory. The definition for substantially noticeable, and how the team used the concept in the inventory, is presented in appendix A.
Timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable.	Timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable were included in the inventory. Areas where regeneration harvest had taken place within the last 40 years were excluded from the inventory, as well as a ½ buffer from the regeneration harvest. The definition for substantially noticeable, and how the concept was used in the inventory is presented in appendix A.
Permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations including cell towers, television, radio, and telephone repeaters, provided their maintenance and access needs is minimal.	It was determined that the vertical structures in step 2 of the inventory had a minimal impact, including their maintenance and access requirements; therefore areas with vertical structures were included in the inventory.
Areas of historic mining where impacts are not substantially noticeable.	Areas of historic mining activity on the Ashley National Forest primarily consist of small hand dug pits, therefore these areas were included in the inventory as they are not substantially noticeable.
Areas of mining activity where impacts are not substantially noticeable.	The areas of current mining activity on the Ashley National Forest were found to be substantially noticeable and were excluded from the inventory.
Range improvement areas, involving minor structural improvements (for example fences or water troughs) and non-structural improvements (chaining, burning, spraying, potholing, and so forth) that are not substantially noticeable.	Range improvements such as chainings were excluded from the inventory if they were substantially noticeable. Minor structural improvements such as troughs and fences were found to be not substantially noticeable and were included in the inventory.
Recreational improvements, such as occupancy spots, or minor hunting, or outfitting camps. As a general rule, do not include developed sites. Areas with minor, easily removable recreation developments may be included.	Areas with dispersed camping sites and outfitter camps were included in the inventory as they are temporary and easily removed. Areas with developed recreation sites were excluded from the inventory. Trails are not considered to be a recreational improvement and remained in the inventory.
Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and power lines if a right-of-way has not been cleared. Exclude power lines with cleared right-of-ways, pipelines, and other permanently installed linear right-of-way structures.	Whether powerlines or pipelines were included or excluded depended on what type they are. Most powerlines had a cleared corridor and were not included in the wilderness inventory. Oil and gas pipelines and large water transmission lines were not included in the inventory. Small buried water transmission lines were included in the wilderness inventory.
Watershed treatment areas (contouring, diking, channeling) that are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions. Areas may include minor watershed treatments that have been accomplished manually such as small hand-constructed gully plugs.	Areas of watershed treatment are very limited on the Ashley National Forest, one contoured area that was found to be substantially noticeable was excluded from the inventory.
Lands adjacent to develop or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. The fact that the non-wilderness activities or used can be seen or heard from within any portion of the area, shall not, or itself, preclude inclusion in the inventory.	Areas adjacent to development or activities were included in the inventory.
Structures, dwellings and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.	Areas with structures, dwellings and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area were included in the inventory.

Public Participation

The Ashley National Forest is actively engaging the public, tribes, other location governments and government agencies through this process to acquire feedback and input on the inventory, evaluation, and analysis of areas for wilderness recommendation.

In the middle of August 2016, the Ashley National Forest presented the wilderness evaluation process and the initial identification and inventory of lands that may have wilderness characteristics in five public meetings located at; Duchesne, Vernal, Manila, and Salt Lake City, Utah, and Green River, Wyoming. On September 7th, 2016 a website displaying the initial inventory was made available on the Ashley National Forest website for public review and to provide feedback on the inventory for a 17 day period. The Ashley National Forest received 72 comments through the public meetings, emails and letters, and the website application. Utilizing this information and internal feedback the interdisciplinary team refined the inventory. On February 8, 2017 the revised inventory was released on the wilderness process website, maps were also displayed at local government offices, and the Ashley National Forest Supervisors Office and Duchesne and Manila Ranger District offices. The Ashley National Forest received 40 comments through email, letters, and the website application over the 21 day comment period. The comments were used to further refine the inventory.

Public review and feedback on draft inventory

Results of Public Comments to the Initial Draft Inventory

- Powerline and pipeline corridors were identified and removed from the inventory
- Withdrawn lands were removed from the inventory
- Areas smaller than 5000 acres, and not adjacent to existing wilderness, that remained in the inventory due to GIS errors were removed from the inventory
- Ditch Bill Easements were removed from the inventory

Comments fit into several different categories of concerns and are addressed in the table below.

- Not supportive of inclusion of a specific location
- General statements in favor of or against Wilderness designations in general.
- Withdrawn lands for water storage and delivery infrastructure and potential future projects
- Water storage and delivery facility access and Ditch Bill easements
- Range improvements, including access to spring developments
- User created routes that remain in the inventory
- Regeneration timber harvests and the ½ mile buffer
- Motorized trails that remain in the inventory
- Feedback relevant to future Steps, such as whether to include or not include certain areas as Recommended Wilderness.

Concern	Response
<p>There is a concern that water storage and delivery facilities and access to the facilities should be removed from the inventory</p>	<p>Water storage and delivery facilities with a valid ditch bill easement were removed from the inventory. In the inventory step only authorized operational maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 roads and level 2 roads that have been authorized through a project level or travel management NEPA decision for continued public access or permanently authorized roads validated by a Federal court or the Department of Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded were excluded from the inventory. Other water storage and delivery facilities and access to water storage and delivery facilities will be included in the evaluation step and if necessary, the analysis step.</p>
<p>There is a concern that range improvements such as corals, fences, watering ponds, spring developments and access roads to these improvements should be excluded from the inventory.</p>	<p>Small range improvements were found to be not substantially noticeable and were included in the inventory.</p>
<p>There is a concern that activities adjacent to and within the inventory polygons would degrade the opportunity of solitude.</p>	<p>The Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 chapter 70 directives were followed for the inventory. The inventory is meant to be broad and inclusive, based on the inventory criteria. During the evaluation step, wilderness characteristics, including opportunities for solitude, will be evaluated for each polygon in the inventory.</p>
<p>There is a concern that motorized trails should be excluded from the inventory.</p>	<p>In the inventory criteria trails are not considered an improvement and were included in the inventory.</p>
<p>There is a concern that withdrawal lands were removed from the inventory.</p>	<p>Withdrawal lands are reserved for a particular public purpose or program.</p>
<p>There is a concern that user created routes remain in the inventory.</p>	<p>The Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 chapter 70 directives were followed for the inventory. In the inventory step only authorized operational maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 roads and level 2 roads that have been authorized through a project level or travel management NEPA decision for continued public access or permanently authorized roads validated by a Federal court or the Department of Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded were excluded.</p>
<p>There is a concern that the 1/2 mile buffer around regeneration timber harvests in the past 40 years should not be excluded from the inventory.</p>	<p>The high contrast between the timber harvest area that occurred within the past 40 years and the surrounding vegetation, as well as the remaining stumps and slash is substantially noticeable within the area as a whole when viewed from the foreground distance of zero to a half a mile.</p>

Final Inventory Results

The final inventory comprises 28 polygons over 5,000 acres and 4 polygons less than 5,000 acres that are adjacent to the High Uintas Wilderness, for a total of 590,788 acres (about 43% of the Ashley National Forest). The wilderness evaluation, the second step, will take a more detailed look at these inventoried areas to determine how well they meet wilderness characteristics using a set of criteria based on the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Area	Acres
Mill Hollow	6,301
Indian Springs	5,573
Alkali Canyon	20,306
Right Fork Indian Canyon	46,310
Nutters Canyon	6,642
Cottonwood	26,585
Wire Fence	22,239
Water Hollow	5,007
Timber Canyon East	10,479
Timber Canyon West	24,552
Wagon Road Ridge	5,063
Big Ridge	23,666
South Fork Rock Cr	8,925
Dry Ridge	23,509
Lake Fork Mtn	18,063
Flat Top Mtn	20,010
Pole Creek	13,207
Cow Hollow	18,028
Dyer Mtn	7,788
South Slope East Uintas	135,466
Grizzly Ridge	6,734
Lambson Draw	5,005
Mt Lena	34,114
Carter Creek	7,853
North Slope East Uintas	66,791
Sheep Creek East	7,579
Sheep Creek West	7,382
Goslin	7,066
Four areas less than 5000 acres and adjacent to existing wilderness	384
Total	590,270

Glossary

Road Maintenance Levels - The level of service provided by, and maintenance required for, a specific road

Level 1. These are roads that have been placed in storage between intermittent uses. The period of storage must exceed 1 year. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to prevent damage to adjacent resources and to perpetuate the road for future resource management needs. Emphasis is normally given to maintaining drainage facilities and runoff patterns. Planned road deterioration may occur at this level.

Level 2. Assigned to roads open for use by high clearance vehicles. Passenger car traffic, user comfort, and user convenience are not considerations. Warning signs and traffic control devices are not provided with the exception that some signing may be posted at intersections. Motorists should have no expectations of being alerted to potential hazards while driving these roads. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized use. Log hauling may occur at this level.

Level 3. Assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are not considered priorities. The manual on uniform traffic control devices is applicable. Warning signs and traffic signs are traffic control device are provided to alert motorists of situations that may violate expectations. Roads in this maintenance level are typically low speed with single lands and turnouts.

Level 4. Assigned to roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds. Most roads are double land and aggregate surfaced. However, some roads may be single land. Some roads may be paved and/or dust abated. The manual on uniform traffic control devices is applicable.

Level 5. Assigned to roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience. These roads are normally double land, paved facilities. Some may be aggregate surfaced and dust abated. The manual on uniform traffic control devise is applicable.

Appendix A

Defining “Substantially Noticeable”

Because the term “substantially noticeable” is not directly defined in the Forest Service handbook for wilderness planning (FSH 1909.12 chapter 70, 71.22b), the plan revision team vegetation and scenery specialist developed a definition. The definition developed for substantially noticeable is: what a viewer will likely see when viewing harvest areas and associated roads from the background, mid-ground, and foreground of an area to assist in determining whether or not vegetation treatments, timber harvest, and prior road construction were substantially noticeable and, consequently, whether or not they were included or excluded from the wilderness planning process inventory.

For the purpose of this wilderness planning process inventory vegetation treatments and timber harvest are considered different activities.

Vegetation Treatments

These include only prescribed fire use and non-commercial fuel reduction treatments that do not produce wood products. These types of treatments generally have not created substantially noticeable effects on the Ashley National Forest landscape. For these reasons, vegetation treatment areas were included in the wilderness planning process inventory.

Timber Harvest Activities

The region 4 wilderness planning inventory step sets 20 years as the timeframe for substantially noticeable regeneration timber harvests. Based on the following factors, it was determined that regeneration timber harvest (such as clearcuts and seed tree harvests) and associated road building activities that were conducted with the last 40 years (since 1976) were substantially noticeable on the Ashley National Forest. This determination was based on factors such as tree growth, stand productivity, stand densities, time of tree regeneration, and topographic features (such as elevation). There are obvious variability in stand conditions across the Ashley National Forest, but for the purposed of this inventory process and the need to consider all National Forest System lands outside of existing wilderness (1,107,957 acres), the timeframe of 40 years were determined to be substantially noticeable.

What a Viewer is Likely to See

Boundaries of past regeneration harvest units on the Ashley National Forest are typically geometric in shape with straight lines that contrast with unharvested areas. When viewed from the background (4 or more miles away), harvested areas are typically very distinct, with the line of delineation between harvested areas and unharvested areas substantially noticeable for the background view, but this is highly dependent on topography and surrounding vegetation. Roads within and surrounding the harvested area are particularly visible during the first few decades after harvest, until young trees have gained sufficient height to block views of the roads.

After four decades trees should generally be high enough (25 to 35 feet) to reduce the line of delineation between harvested and unharvested areas as well as intermittently break views of roads.

In the mid-ground view (0.5 to 4 miles from viewer), evidence of past regeneration harvested units are similar to background views except that the viewer may not have a continuous line of sight as when

viewing from the background view. The line of delineation between harvested and unharvested areas, as well as road cuts, may be interrupted due to terrain and vegetation.

In the foreground views (0 to 0.5 miles from view), decomposition is slower under the colder conditions of the Ashley National Forest. Therefore, stumps are generally still evident within 4 decades after harvest. After 4 decades, stumps have decomposed or ground cover (shrubs) sufficiently block the visibility of the stumps. Also, the difference between vegetation height and type is stark within the foreground views.

Conclusion

After considering tree height growth, stand productivity, stand densities, time of tree regeneration, topographic features, and abundance and type of ground vegetation at different viewing areas, areas of past harvest are generally found to be substantially noticeable, on average, for at least 40 years from time of harvest. The high contrast edges created by the harvest and evidence of mechanical harvest, such as visible stumps and slash, within these areas were the most prominent features affecting substantially noticeable determination. Additionally because of the high contrast between a regeneration timber harvest, within the past 40 years, and the surrounding vegetation and the visibility of stumps and slash in the foreground view, a one half mile buffer from the timber harvest was excluded from the inventory.