

Decision Notice / FONSI
Designation Order

Uinta Shale Creek, Lance Canyon, Ashley Gorge, Timber-Cow Ridge
Research Natural Areas

Ashley National Forest
Duchesne, Roosevelt, and Vernal Ranger Districts

Duchesne and Uintah Counties, Utah

By virtue of the authority delegated to me by the Chief of the Forest Service, it is my decision to establish the following Research Natural Areas (RNA's): Uinta Shale Creek, Lance Canyon, Ashley Gorge, Timber-Cow Ridge. These RNA's are located in the Ashley National Forest; Duchesne and Uintah Counties, Utah.

The establishment of these RNA's was recommended in the Record of Decision for the Ashley National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) in 1986. This recommendation followed an analysis of the factors listed in 36 CFR 219.25 and Forest Service Manual 4063.41, the results of which are documented in the Forest Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. Both documents are available to the public.

The RNA's have been re-examined to ensure the environmental effects of RNA designation have not changed since 1986. These later visits and studies are documented in establishment reports and monitoring reports, all of which were reviewed and considered in preparing an Environmental Assessment. Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment, it is my decision to adopt Alternative 1, to establish all of the above-mentioned RNA's. Alternative 1 is selected because it provides long-term protection and recognition of the unique natural resource environments found in these RNA's. The areas will be managed in compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and Forest Service Manual direction regarding RNA's, and in accordance with the management direction identified in the Ashley Forest Plan.

The other alternative considered was Alternative 2, the "No Action" alternative, which would continue management of the areas as candidate RNA's. Alternative 2 was not selected because it would provide only short-term protection of the areas.

The Ashley Forest Plan is hereby amended to change the allocation of the RNA's from "Candidate RNA's" to "Established RNA's." This is a non-significant amendment of the Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)).

The Environmental Assessment prepared for the designation of Uinta Shale Creek, Lance Canyon, Ashley Gorge, and Timber-Cow Ridge RNA's was released for a 30-day public review period on June 26, 1996. Approximately 45 copies of the Environmental Assessment were mailed to a list of groups and individuals who were known to have or thought to have an interest in this Environmental Assessment. In response, five comment letters were received. Four of the comment letters supported the proposal, and one (from the Utah State Historic Preservation Office) provided official follow-up on the need to certify the

lands regarding historic or heritage properties. These comments are addressed in the enclosed comment analysis.

It has been determined through the Environmental Assessment that the proposed action is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following factors:

A. Context

Although this is an addition to the national system of RNA's, both short-term and long-term physical and biological effects are limited to the local area.

B. Intensity

1. There are no known effects on public health and safety.
2. There are no known effects on historic or cultural resources, actual or eligible National Register or Historic Places sites, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers. Effects on ecologically critical areas are minimal.
3. Effects on the human environment are not uncertain, do not involve unique or unknown risks, and are not likely to be highly controversial.
4. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects.
5. There are no known cumulative effects.
6. The proposed action would not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.
7. The proposed action is consistent with Federal, State, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Two copies of the Notice of Appeal must be submitted in writing to:

The Chief of the Forest Service
14th and Independence Ave., S.W.
PO Box 96090
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090

The Notice of Appeal prepared pursuant to 36 CFR 217 must be submitted within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision.

fo Jack H. Bosworth
DALE N. BOSWORTH
Regional Forester

August 5, 1996
Date