

# MANTI-LA SAL NATIONAL FOREST

Roc Creek, (7,700 acres)..... 2

# **Roc Creek, (7,700 acres)**

## **1. Description**

Roc Creek CRA is located in Montrose and Mesa Counties, Colorado and Grand and San Juan Counties, Utah. It is within the Moab Ranger District, approximately 27 air miles southeast of Moab, Utah. The area is accessed from Paradox, Co by National Forest System Roads (NFSR) 371 or 378 and 755. This area is within the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province with elevation ranges from 5,300' to 8,200'. Roc Creek cuts through sedimentary rock layers forming a narrow steep-walled canyon. The channel has moderate gradients which are uniform for most of its length. The lower half of the canyon is comprised mostly of sandstone and the upper half of the canyon consists of a mixture of sandstone and shale. The massive sandstone cliffs vary from 1,500 to 1,800 feet in height. Faulting and erosion have created patterns of ledges, benches, and slick rock aprons along Sinbad Ridge. It is located between two collapsed salt domes (Sinbad Valley and Paradox Valley), and terminates in the Dolores River Canyon area. Existing vegetation at the lower elevations of the canyon are tree dominated riparian with ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and manzanita on the canyon walls. Pinyon, juniper, and mountain brush occur on the rim. Sinbad Ridge forms the north wall of the 1,500-foot gorge of Roc Creek. Green forests of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine frame the brilliant red walls of the canyon. Sinbad Ridge contains relatively pristine areas of large ponderosa pines. Tree mortality from Douglas-fir beetle is present within the northern half of the unit. Stream flows in Roc Creek are gentle with some cascading water. One waterfall exists within the canyon. Alluvial deposition has produced bench land areas along the canyon bottom, especially in the middle section.

## **2. Roadless Characteristics**

The free-flowing perennial stream descends through diverse riparian vegetation. The relatively undisturbed riparian communities support a diversity of native reptile and amphibian species, and habitat for native Colorado River cutthroat trout. The canyon area and benches are critical winter range for elk. It is an important migration route for deer and elk as they move between summer range in Utah and winter range in Colorado. The canyon is a summer concentration area for wild turkeys and provides year-round habitat for black bears. The area contains habitat for the midget faded rattlesnake, longnose leopard lizard and northern leopard frog, Colorado state species of special concern. Kit foxes, a Colorado state endangered species, may occur in the area. There is nesting habitat for peregrine falcons and golden eagles. Other sensitive species that occur in the area are northern goshawk, and spotted and western big-eared bats. The undisturbed, mature woodland communities in the area support several bird species of concern from Colorado's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, including pinyon/juniper obligate species such as pinyon jay, gray vireo, juniper titmouse and black-throated gray warbler.

Roc Creek is classified as an eligible wild and scenic river based on its scenic and geologic/hydrologic values. However, Roc Creek was not found suitable for wild and scenic river status and was released from protective management for wild and scenic river purposes and is no longer afforded agency protection as a potential wild and scenic river and will continue to be managed by other underlying direction in the Land and Resource Management Plan (Record of Decision, Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for National Forest System Lands in Utah, November 2008). Other special features of this CRA include the waterfall and diversity of vegetation found in the canyon. The pristine nature of the area makes it suitable as a reference landscape for several

habitat types especially the riparian complex along Roc Creek. Vistas within several areas of the gorge are expansive and varied, ranging from high mountain peaks to canyons and mesas, and eventually to wide valley areas. Faulting and erosion have created ledges, benches and spire-like sandstone columns along the cliff areas of the gorge and along Sinbad Ridge. From the rim, sections of Sinbad Valley are visible. Opportunities for primitive recreation include off-trail hiking and exploring, big game and upland bird hunting, and possibly fishing. Opportunities for technical rock climbing are also available. Approximately one mile of NFST 310 (Roc Creek Trail) descends into the middle section of the canyon from a trailhead on Carpenter Ridge. This steep trail crosses the channel and connects to NFST 001 (Sinbad Trail) on Sinbad Ridge..

The rugged terrain and limited access provide opportunities for solitude and a sense of remoteness. There is evidence of some historic and possibly prehistoric human uses within the canyon. A few non-intensive cultural resource inventories have been conducted on the rim areas of Roc Creek, but none have been conducted in the canyon itself. The surveys have only identified and documented two archaeological sites within two miles of Roc Creek. One is a historic sawmill and one is an undated prehistoric resource processing site. Although few sites are documented, it is likely that the area was used seasonally by Native Americans for hunting and gathering purposes. The general area was also used historically for mining and cattle grazing, though no sites have been documented to date. Overall, the canyon remains free of visible human uses. Roc Creek does have a water supply designation use associated with it. This CRA is within a state defined source water assessment area (municipal water supply).

### **3. Current Conditions and Uses**

Incidental grazing occurs within the canyon bottom. On the ridge tops there are some range improvements such as ponds and fences present but not in the canyon. Geyser ditch upstream of the canyon removes some of the natural flow for agricultural use. Approximately 15 years ago, timber harvest occurred around Carpenter Ridge. There is no current timber harvest planned or proposed due to the limited access in the Sinbad Ridge area. No easement/right-of-way exists across private land onto the National Forest; therefore public motorized access is limited. There is the potential for unauthorized motorized use on the CRA from private lands. Although the CRA is adjacent to private land boundaries; there are no National Fire Plan Communities in close proximity to Roc Creek. Most ignitions in the area are caused by lightning.

Uranium host rocks are present in the canyon bottom and lower slopes. Historic mining and exploration has occurred within the canyon, mostly on adjacent slopes and ridges. A few mining scars are visible. Occurrence potential for uranium/vanadium is high but development potential is probably moderate considering the remoteness of the area. Other than the potential for uranium/vanadium, there are no known valuable deposits of locatable minerals. Very low concentrations of placer gold deposits have been found in other drainages in the area. The potential for deposits exists in the CRA although there are no known placer gold deposits. Some recreational prospecting/panning probably occurs in this area. The potentials for occurrence of oil and gas are considered moderate. There are three current oil and gas leases at least partially within the Roc Creek CRA, all issued after January 12, 2001 encompassing 2,760 acres. These leases have the following stipulations: no surface occupancy on slopes > 35% or unstable areas, riparian areas, arterial and collector roads and semi-primitive recreation (SPR) management units; timing limitation in calving and fawning areas (May 1- July 5); and, lease notices for baseline water data/monitoring and noise/visibility. Sandstone and stream alluvium could be

collected and used as landscaping rock/building stone and riprap (mineral materials/saleable minerals).

#### **4. Alternative Designations**

<b>2001 Inventory Acres</b>	<b>Colorado Roadless Area Acres</b>	<b>Reasons for the Change</b>
11,100	7,700	Some acres were removed due to an authorized road (NFSR 671) and other acres were removed due to previous mining activities.