

Ashley National Forest Assessment

Scenery Report

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for:
Ashley National Forest

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Introduction

The scenery of the Ashley National Forest is among the amenities contributing to lifestyles and tourism in southwestern Wyoming and Northeastern Utah. Ashley National Forest lands provide a scenic backdrop for the travel, work, and play of daily life for area residents. The Ashley's scenery contributes to casual and inexpensive recreation experiences near home and contributes to a general sense of well-being, security, and constancy. This scenery stretches from the rugged mountains and valleys in the High Uintas Wilderness to the stunning red canyons of the Flaming Gorge. Many people point to their tie to the landscape, regardless of administration or ownership, as a positive part of living in the area. Beyond the local level, the scenery has been a deciding factor in creating several of the Ashley National Forest's national designations and is a draw for tourists. Moreover, the general scenic condition influences many people's opinions about ecosystem health and Ashley National Forest's management.

People view the Ashley National Forest from places within the Ashley and from roads, homes, and other areas off the Ashley. The Ashley National Forest is the backdrop for the Uinta Basin and areas of southwestern Wyoming. The assessment area includes all lands of the Ashley National Forest, as well as places with views of the Ashley. For analysis, views are limited to those within 15 miles of the area viewed.

Scenic Resource Management Direction

National Direction

Forest Service Manual 2380.3 requires the agency to "inventory, evaluate, manage, and where necessary, restore scenery as a fully integrated part of the ecosystems of National Forest System lands through the land and resource management and planning process. Scenery must be treated equally with other resources." Forest Service Manual 2380.31 specifies the use of the basic concepts, elements, principles, and variables defined in Agriculture Handbook 701, Landscape Aesthetics, a Handbook for Scenery Management (USDA Forest Service 1995).

Forest Plan Direction

1986 Forest Plan Direction

Objective 9: Implement and manage to adopted visual quality objectives

- Manage according to the following visual quality objectives: preservation, retention, partial retention, modification, maximum modification, and as inventoried

Objective 10: Rehabilitation or mitigate (high priority) visually unacceptable condition of the Ashley National Forest

- Areas meeting "unacceptable modification" visual quality objectives standards will be inventoried and rehabilitated or mitigated.
- Protect and enhance the visual qualities within the scenic corridor along Highway 191

The Visual Management System was used in the 1986 forest plan to identify visual quality objectives for the Ashley National Forest. The 1986 forest plan visual quality objectives represent Ashley National Forest management direction to assure visitors are afforded views of natural-looking landscapes when seen from popular travelways, developed recreation sites, and where other visitor use is concentrated. The

visual quality objectives represent a combination of three visual components: 1) landscape variety classes; 2) distance zone; and 3) viewer sensitivity. These ratings describe the particular level of visual variety or diversity of a landscape, areas of landscapes denoted by specified distances from an observer, and the observer's particular degree of interest in the visual qualities of the landscape.

In some management areas, the direction to meet visual quality objectives is included as standards. In other areas, it is stated as a value to be considered but should be reduced as needed to meet wildlife or other management area priorities and emphases. Areas with an objective of visual rehabilitation were not mapped and are not shown.

Landscape Variety Classes

Landscape variety is a classification of the variety or diversity of a landscape. The classification is based on the premise that all landscapes have some value, but those with the most variety or diversity have the greatest potential for high scenic value. The three variety classes are:

- class A – distinctive: Areas where landforms, vegetative patterns, water forms, and rock formations are of unusual or outstanding visual quality. The landforms, vegetation patterns, water forms, and rock formations are usually not common in the area.
- class B – common: Areas where landscape features contain variety in form, line, color, texture, or combinations thereof. However, the areas tend to be common throughout the landforms, vegetation patterns, water forms, and rock formations.
- class C – minimal: Areas where landforms, vegetation patterns, water forms, and rock formations have little change in form, line, color, or texture.

Distance Zones

Distance zones reflect the typical distance from which the landscape is viewed. The distance zone mostly viewed determines the distance used in a visual quality objective designation. There are three distance zones. Foreground is defined as the landscape within 0.5 miles of the observer. Middleground is defined as the distance between 0.5 miles and 3 miles. Background is defined as the distance beyond the middleground.

Sensitivity Levels

Sensitivity levels reflect the particular degree or measure of view interest in the scenic qualities of a landscape.

- Level 1 – high sensitivity: Primary travel routes, water bodies, and recreation use areas where large numbers of visitors are anticipated to have a high concern for visual quality.
- Level 2 – moderate sensitivity: Primary travel routes, water bodies, and recreation use areas where fewer numbers of visitors are anticipated to have a high concern for visual quality.
- Level 3 – low sensitivity: All travel routes not in level 1 and 2, dispersed use areas. Level 3 also includes areas considered not seen from travel routes, use areas, and water bodies.

1986 Forest Plan Visual Quality Objectives

The 1986 forest plan standards specify visual quality objectives by management area. In many management areas, the objectives refer to inventory and other resource priorities. The direction is flexible yet clearly discusses the need to consider effects to the scenery in project design. The existing inventoried

visual quality objectives in the 1986 forest plan are preservation, retention, partial retention, modification, and maximum modification.

The preservation visual quality objectives designation allows for ecological changes only. Management activities, except for very low visual impact recreation facilities, are prohibited. The objective applies to wilderness areas, primitive areas, other special classified areas awaiting classification, and some unique management units that do not justify special classification. (USDA Forest Service 1974).

The retention visual quality objectives provides for management activities that are not visually evident. Under retention, activities may only repeat form, line, color, and texture frequently found in the characteristic landscape. Changes in qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc. should not be evident (USDA Forest Service 1974).

Under the partial retention visual quality objectives, management activities are to remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape. However, changes in qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc. remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Activities may also introduce form, line, color, or texture. These qualities are found infrequently or not at all in the characteristic landscape, but they should remain visually subordinate to the visual strength of the characteristic landscape (USDA Forest Service 1974)

Under the modification visual quality objectives, management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. However, activities of vegetative and landform alterations must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so completely and at such a scale that their visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences in the surrounding area or character type. Additional parts of these activities, such as structures, roads, slash, and root wads (debris from logging activity including cut limbs and stumps pulled from the ground), must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition. Activities which are predominantly introduction of facilities, such as buildings, signs, roads, etc., should borrow naturally established form, line, color, and texture so completely and at such a scale that their visual characteristics are compatible with the natural surroundings (USDA Forest Service 1974).

Under the maximum modification visual quality objectives, management activities of vegetative and landform alterations may dominate the characteristic landscape. However, when viewed as background, the visual characteristics must be those of natural occurrences in the surrounding area or character type. When viewed as foreground or middleground, they may not appear to completely borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture. Alterations may also be out of scale or contain detail, which is incongruent with natural occurrences, as seen in foreground or middleground. Introduction of additional parts of these activities such as structures, roads, slash, and root wads must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition as viewed in background (USDA Forest Service 1974).

Figure 1 displays the 1986 forest plan visual quality objectives.

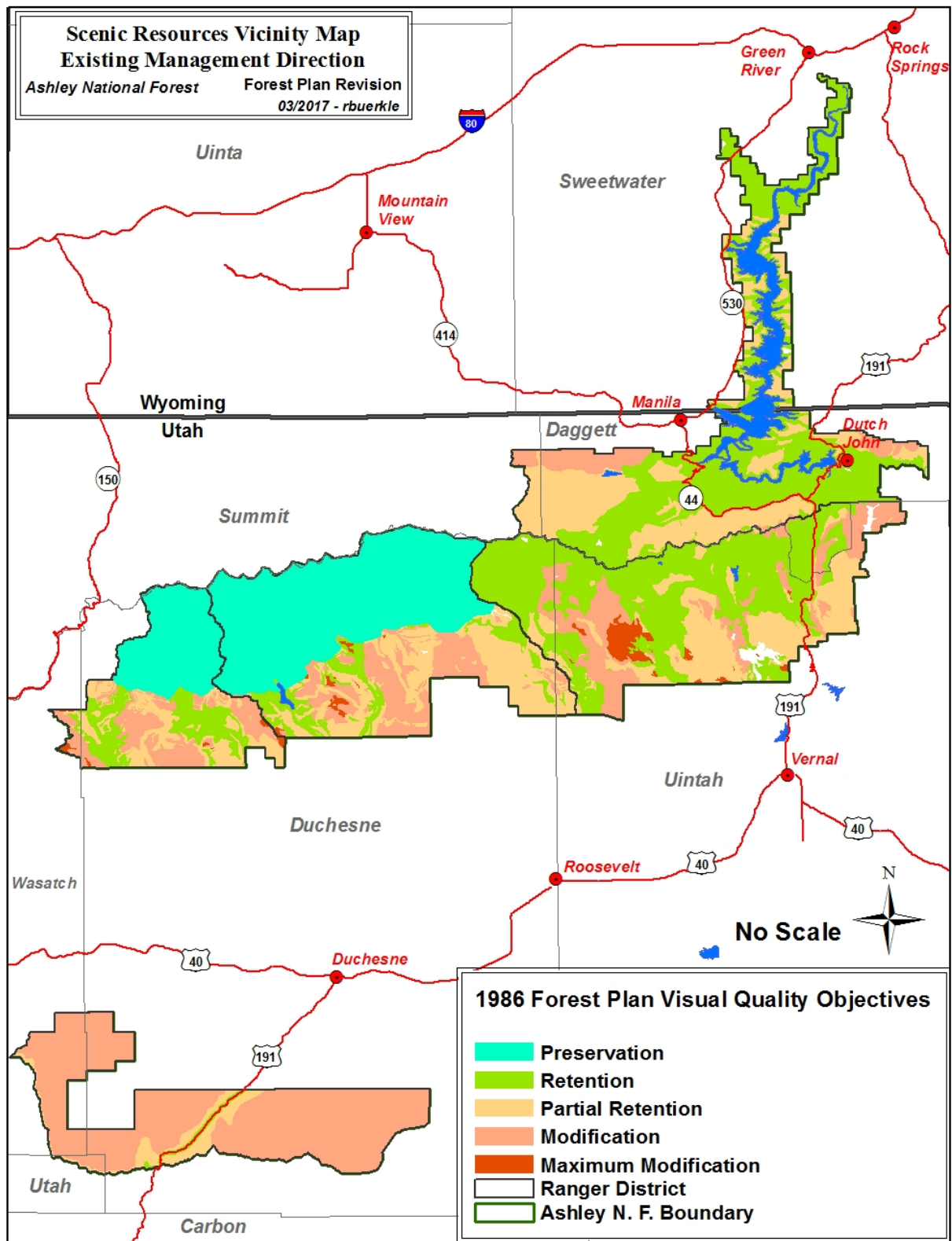


Figure 1. 1986 forest plan visual quality objectives

Scenic Character of the Ashley National Forest

Scenic character is defined as a combination of the physical, biological, and cultural images that give an area its scenic identity and contribute to its sense of place. Scenic character provides a frame of reference from which to determine the scenic attractiveness of a landscape and to measure scenic integrity (36 CFR 219.19, USDA Forest Service 2013). Scenic character for the plan area was assessed by ranger districts and includes the encompassing viewsheds on forested and nonforested National Forest System lands. Land type association descriptions describe the biophysical aspects of the scenic character of the Ashley National Forest landscape; refer to the “Ashley National Forest Ecosystem Diversity Evaluation Report” (USDA Forest Service 2009) for more information. These land type association descriptions served as the frame of reference for assessing scenic character and the scenery attributes in these landscapes.

The Ashley National Forest is comprised of about 1.4 million acres located in northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming. A majority of the Ashley is located within the Uinta Mountain Range. However, the Ashley National Forest’s diverse landscapes span three different landform types that include the Uinta Mountains, Green River Basin, and Tavaputs Plateau. Elevations on the Ashley range from about 5,500 feet on the Green River below the Little Hole day-use area to 13,528 feet at the summit of King’s Peak, the highest point in Utah.



Figure 2. Kings Peak, High Uintas Wilderness

Geology and geomorphology are diverse and dramatic. These features include glacial deposits and sculpted mountain peaks in the higher elevations, steep red canyon walls above Flaming Gorge Reservoir, and the highly dissected plateau lands in the south unit. About 70 percent of the Ashley is in the Uinta Mountains. This is the largest east-west mountain range in the lower 48 states. Together with the Tavaputs Plateau, the Uinta Mountains provide a transition zone connecting the northern and southern Rocky Mountains. A single day’s drive takes visitors through life zones ranging from high desert vegetation, to shrub-steppe and aspen zones, to extensive coniferous forest, to high alpine ecosystems. Because of the diversity in landscapes and scenery on the Ashley, the scenic character and scenic integrity will be described by ranger district. The Flaming Gorge and Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger Districts will be divided into two subareas, as displayed in figure 3 below.

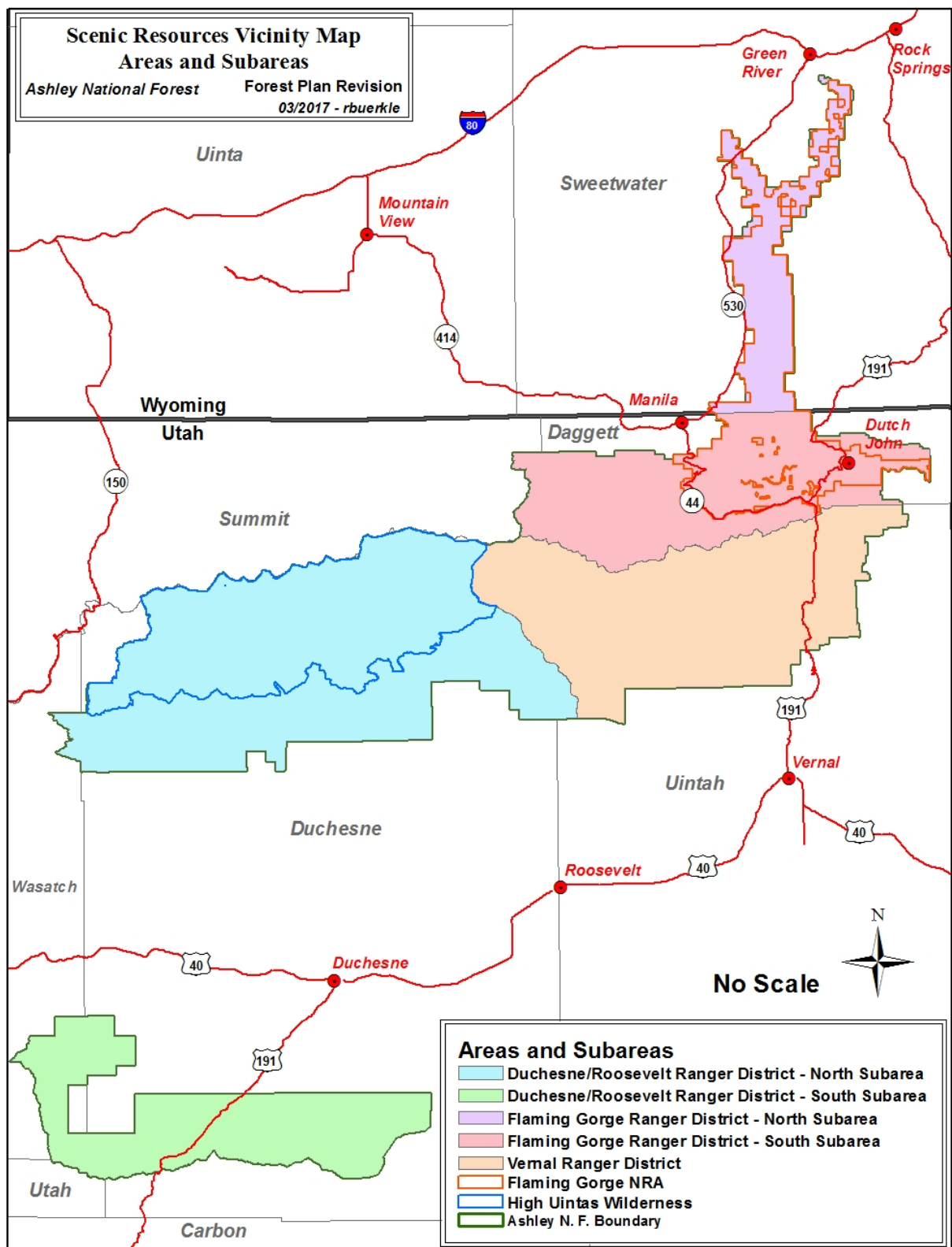


Figure 3. Scenic resources vicinity map

Flaming Gorge Ranger District

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District spans lands in northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming. The district contains the:

- Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area;
- Sheep Creek Geologic Area;
- Wyoming Flaming Gorge/Green River Scenic Byway;
- Flaming Gorge-Uintas National Scenic Byway; and
- other general forest areas.



Figure 4. Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area

The district is the scenic backdrop for the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. The Flaming Gorge was established in 1968 for the public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and surrounding lands in Utah and Wyoming. Developed recreation and water-based recreation are the main activities in the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area. Throughout the recreation area, there are 3 marinas; 2 resorts; 1 recreational vehicle (RV) park; 1 visitor center; and multiple campgrounds, picnic areas, interpretive sites, swim beaches, and boat ramps where visitors are concentrated.

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District has been separated into two subareas to describe the scenic character: Flaming Gorge Ranger District North and Flaming Gorge Ranger District South.

Flaming Gorge Ranger District North Subarea

Location

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District North subarea surrounds the Flaming Gorge Reservoir in Wyoming. The district extends from the Utah and Wyoming state line north for 45 miles, almost to Green River, Wyoming. Most of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir is in the subarea and is the primary feature. Public use is primarily concentrated on the water and includes a marina, developed campgrounds, and dispersed camping next to the reservoir. The nearest population centers are Green River and Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Scenic Character

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District North subarea is high desert surrounding the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The subarea splits in the north end, following the Green River drainage to the northeast and the Blacks Fork drainage to the northwest. The Green River drainage contains the Firehole recreation complex: a developed campground, swim beach, boat ramp, and picnic site. The area is popular for residents of Rock Springs and Green River, Wyoming. The Buckboard Marina and recreation complex is approximately in the middle of the subarea on the western shore of the reservoir. The area is a popular fishing destination in both summer and winter. To the south of the Buckboard complex is the South Buckboard peninsula. The peninsula has a long flat shoreline with easy access to the reservoir and is a popular dispersed camping area. The broad, gentle shoreline of Stateline Cove, at the far southern border of the subarea, is a popular camping area adjacent to the reservoir. Visitors will often have their boats anchored on the beach. The Flaming Gorge/Green River Scenic Byway is located on both the east and west sides of the subarea. The location spans from U.S. Interstate 80 to the Wyoming and Utah border; the scenic byway is the main access route to the subarea.

The subarea has been occupied by humans for thousands of years. Rock art and other clues of their settlement can still be found on the landscape. But many of prehistoric sites and historic sites were submerged with the construction of the Flaming Gorge Dam and the filling of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Before the dam construction, the uplands adjacent to the Green River were utilized less than the river bottoms. These areas are now National Forest System lands surrounding the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. In 1825, General William Ashley and a small party became the first known people to run the Green River. After running the Green River to the mouth of Ashley Creek in the Uinta Basin, General Ashley returned over the Uinta Mountains. General Ashley held the first mountain man rendezvous near the confluence of the Henrys Fork and Burnt Fork of the Green River, near present day town of Burnt Fork, Wyoming, to the west of the subarea. John Wesley Powell and his Colorado River expeditions descended the Green River in 1869 and 1872, and named many of the landmarks.

The subarea contrasts sharply with the adjacent National Forest System lands to the south, being considerably more arid than the nearby Uinta Mountains. The area is primarily treeless, except for a few trees along the floodplain of the Green River in the northern part of the area. The landforms include:

- benches and plateaus;
- alkaline flats, which occur where there is clay soils with high salt content and low infiltration capacity;
- moderately to highly dissected slopes;
- slope wash debris; and
- broad sloping sediment fields of old streams.

The slopes are highly dissected by seasonal-flowing stream channels and gullies, with few perennial streams. The majority of the subarea is gently sloping towards the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and dissected by gullies and channels. The area has cliffs, steep-sloped buttes¹ with rock ledges, and beaches, depending on the reservoir water level. The buttes and spires, adjacent to the Flaming Gorge Reservoir in the Firehole area, are unique in the subarea and are a popular visual attraction.

¹ A butte is a hill with nearly vertical sides and a flat-top cliffs.

The shoreline of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir has many large and small coves, inlets, and peninsulas. There are a number of small islands dispersed throughout the reservoir. At the head of the coves and inlets are seasonal-flowing stream drainages with low-growing brush and vegetation.

The geology of the area consists of flats, hills, and canyons underlain by the Green River Formation. The geology consists primarily of the Lanes Shale Member, with the Wilkins Peak and Tipton Shale members, north of the Blacks Fork confluence. All the members consist of shale, organic mudstone and marlstone, sandstone, limestone, and oil shale. The shale component transmits water slowly, if at all. It tends to become waterlogged and, in some areas, alkaline flats develop. It is plastic when wet and tends to erode rapidly, which has resulted in the dissected and eroded slopes and landforms.

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District North subarea vegetation reflects the availability of moisture and low rainfall. Vegetation is generally dominated by cold desert shrub species of sagebrush, saltbrush, and grasses.

The sense of place for the subarea is very distinct. The Firehole area, in the northeast part of the subarea, is unique with the chimneys, tall narrow rock formations, and caprock buttes. Sweeping panoramas of sagebrush flats and hills with rock outcrops dominate the northern and mid part of the subarea. In the southern and middle part of the subarea, the Uinta Mountains and scarp ridges provide the background to the south.



Figure 5. Anvil Draw looking south towards Uinta Mountains



Figure 6. Anvil Draw area looking north



Figure 7. Looking east down Buckboard Wash



Figure 8. Looking south from Buckboard Area



Figure 9. Looking east over Buckboard Recreation Complex



Figure 10. North and South Chimney Rocks from Firehole

Flaming Gorge Ranger District South Subarea

Location

The Flaming Gorge Ranger District South subarea is a combination of landscapes and characteristics. The area runs from the border with the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache to the west to the Ashley National Forest boundary on the east, the Utah and Wyoming state line on the north, to the summit of the Uinta Mountains to the south. The town of Manila is located approximately four miles from the subarea, and the town of Dutch John is on the eastern side of the subarea.

Scenic Character

The subarea is part of the north slope of the Uinta Mountains. The dramatically eroded faulted scarp and dip ridges² provide the scenic background for the area. The subarea contains a variety of differing landforms and scenic qualities. These qualities include:

- open meadows;
- dense timber stands;
- precipitous canyon walls;
- rugged drainages;
- sculpted ridge lines; and
- mountain peaks.

² Scarp and dip ridges have a steep slope or cliff on one side and a gentler slope on the other.

The steep, colorful cliff walls on both sides of Red Canyon create a unique experience while boating on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir and viewing the reservoir and canyon from overlooks along the canyon rim. The scarp and dip ridges that surround and form Sheep Creek Bay, Kingfisher Island, Horseshoe Canyon, and Hideout Canyon create a unique visual and recreational experience for boaters on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Important scenic areas on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area include:

- The Sheep Creek geologic area;
- Swett Ranch;
- Green River;
- Horseshoe Canyon;
- Sheep Creek Canyon and Bay; and
- Hideout Canyon.

The Flaming Gorge-Untas National Scenic Byway affords outstanding views of the national recreation area and multiple developed overlooks and interpretive areas. The Sheep Creek-Spirit Lake Scenic Backway passes through the Sheep Creek Geological Area. The unique geological features of Sheep Creek and the visually dramatic Uinta Fault are popular visual attractions. The backway also accesses the southwestern part of the subarea. The backway travels through dense conifer, an evergreen with needle or scale like leaves, forests, aspen stands, and large open meadows. The Ute Tower Fire Lookout and Spirit Lake are a popular attractions on the backway.

This area has a rich history of occupation, beginning with prehistoric peoples. In 1825, General William Ashley and a small party became the first known people to run the Green River. He left the inscription “Ashley 1825” at Ashley Falls, which is now submerged by the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. John Wesley Powell and his Colorado River expeditions descended the Green River through the area in 1869 and 1872 and named many of the landmarks including the Flaming Gorge. Butch Cassidy and other outlaws frequented the area throughout the late 1800s. In the early 1900s, homesteaders settled on the Greendale Plateau. The historic Swett Ranch is now a Forest Service interpretive site. Other homesteads have become subdivisions, a lodge, and other private lands surrounded by the Ashley National Forest. In the 1920s, a road was constructed for automobiles between Vernal and Daggett Counties. The route followed close to the same route that would become U.S. Highway 191 and Utah Highway 44. Construction of the town of Dutch John began in 1957. Dutch John was built to house the workers constructing the Flaming Gorge Dam, which was completed in 1964. Upon completion of the dam, the Bureau of Reclamation began to downsize and transferred many permanent buildings in Dutch John to the Ashley National Forest and the National Park Service. The National Park Service constructed and managed the recreation facilities around the reservoir in Wyoming. When Congress assigned management of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area to the Ashley National Forest, the National Park Service transferred their buildings on the national recreation area (and in Dutch John) to the Forest Service. Over the past 20 years, the Ashley National Forest has significantly reduced its building inventory in Dutch John by sale or conveyance.

The geology of the area is a combination of shales, limestone, sandstones, and quartzite. The fault and folds of the Uinta Mountain uplift and the Uinta Mountain Group beds weather differently. This results in ridges with steep southern faces and more gently sloping northern slopes, with intervening valleys in the northern part of the subarea, such as Sheep Creek Bay. The Green River’s erosion of the Uinta Mountain quartzite³ resulted in the steep, high, red-colored canyon walls rising from the reservoir and the Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam. On the plateaus south and west of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir,

³ Quartzite is a hard metamorphic rock which was originally sandstone.

rock outcrops and large boulders are common at, and near, the surface for most of the area. Streams drainages dissecting the plateaus have a low to moderate gradient, and wide wet and dry meadows exist throughout the area. The southern border of the subarea is a gently rolling upland with broken rock fragment fields scattered throughout the slopes. In the far south western corner of the subarea between Leidy Peak and Tamarack Lake, glaciation has formed cirques,⁴ basins, lakes, ground moraines, exposed bedrock, and deep gorges. The summits and slopes of these glaciated mountains are gently rolling rounded bolliies. A bollie is a local term for a treeless, alpine ridge top with grasses and forbs.

The variation of terrain, landforms, aspect, and precipitation throughout the Flaming Gorge Ranger District South subarea has resulted in vegetation communities ranging from sagebrush flats, to dense conifer forests, to alpine forbs and grasses. On the Lucerne Peninsula, Bare Top Mountain, and Antelope Flat area, sagebrush dominates. Pinyon and juniper dominate on the Dutch John Mountain and Goslin Mountain in the northeastern part of the subarea. Aspect drives the type of vegetation along the Flaming Gorge Reservoir through Red Canyon. Red Canyon mostly runs east and west, thus the aspects of the deep canyon are orientated to the north and south. In places, large blocks of sheet bedrock limit vegetation to a single plant. Northern aspects are dominated by Douglas-fir, aspen, and mountain brush communities. Warmer southern aspects are dominated by pinyon and juniper. The plateaus south and west of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir contain the largest, most continuous stands of ponderosa pine on the Ashley National Forest. Ponderosa pine forms a more or less continuous belt from the Ute Lookout Tower to the eastern end of the Ashley. These ponderosa pine parks contain large, tall, large-crowned, widely spaced trees with grasses or low-growing shrubs along the ground. The hills forming the southeastern boundary of the subarea, and the divide between the north and south slope of the Uinta Mountains, are covered in dense stands of lodgepole pine at lower elevations and mixed stands of lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir at higher elevations. The plateaus interspersing the glacial moraine areas, from Leidy Peak to the Ashley's boundary with the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest, are forested by lodgepole pine stands and mixed stands of lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir. There are also numerous wet meadows, seeps and springs, and raised bogs throughout the plateaus. The glacial moraine areas are dominated by coniferous forests at lower elevations, with numerous meadows and willow fields interspersed and at higher elevations. Above treeline, alpine grass and forbs are dominant, with some low-growing shrubs. Alpine grass and forb communities are also present on the mountain top bolliies, from Leidy Peak to the Ashley National Forest's boundary with the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest.

⁴ A cirque is an amphitheater-like valley formed by a glacier.



Figure 11. Looking east down Lucerne Peninsula



Figure 12. Lucerne Marina looking east



Figure 13. Red Canyon looking northeast from south rim



Figure 14. Green River below the Flaming Gorge Dam



Figure 15. Sheep Creek Geological Area



Figure 16. Wildflowers in meadow northeast of Swett Ranch



Figure 17. Flaming Gorge Reservoir from Hideout Campground, looking southeast



Figure 18. Ponderosa pine stand in Red Canyon area



Figure 19. Southwest view from Ute Tower



Figure 20. Sheep Creek Bay from the Sheep Creek Overlook

Vernal Ranger District

The Vernal Ranger District is the background for the Uinta Basin and covers the south slope of the eastern Uinta Mountains. There is an extensive network of roads and trails. Winter recreation use is high, in part because U.S. Highway 191 provides year-round access to the higher elevations. The Flaming Gorge-Uintas National Scenic Byway and the Red Cloud-Dry Fork Loop Scenic Backway are located on, or pass through, the district.

Location

The Vernal Ranger District is located in the eastern Uinta Mountains. A majority of the northern boundary is the summit of the Uinta Mountains. The eastern and southern boundaries are the Ashley National Forest boundary. The western edge is the boundary between the Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District and the Vernal Ranger District. Vernal, Utah is the closest population center.

Scenic Character

In contrast to the glacial features found in the western and central part of the Uinta Mountains, the eastern Uintas were formed by uplift and subsequent downcutting by streams. The resulting topography is characterized by large plateaus separated by steep canyons. The area has a long history of human use and habitation. In 1825, General William Ashley passed through the area and throughout the mid-1800s, fur trappers harvested furs from the area. In 1869 and 1871, John Wesley Powell passed south of the area on his Green River expeditions. In 1881, the Carter Military Trail was constructed through the Vernal Ranger District to connect Fort Thornburgh northwest of Vernal, Utah to Fort Bridger in southwestern Wyoming. During the late 1800s, Europeans started settling the Ashley Valley south of the Vernal Ranger District. The Vernal Ranger District was utilized for water storage by the Ashley Valley residents to further irrigation water throughout the summer growing season. Settlers in Dry Fork sought to capture water that disappeared into limestone sinkholes by diverting the water into flumes, ditches, and canals. Remnants of the flume structure are still evident in Dry Fork Canyon. The construction of multiple water management facilities, including East Park Reservoir, Paradise Reservoir, Chepeta Lake, Ashley Twins, and Goose lakes, began in 1910. Area residents also utilized the Vernal Ranger District for grazing and timber production. In 1880, the first sawmill was transported to the area. Through the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s, logging increased significantly on the Vernal District. Copper ore was discovered on Dyer Peak in the 1880s, and a copper smelter was built in 1899 on Anderson Creek. The Civilian Conservation Corp was active on the district in the 1930s (figure 21). The Corp crews constructed the following on the Vernal Ranger District:

- several ranger station buildings
- roads
- telephone lines
- drift fences
- campgrounds
- stock ponds
- spring developments
- campground water developments

The foundations of the Civilian Conservation Corp camps are still evident in places.



Figure 21. Kaler Hollow Civilian Conservation Corp camp, circa 1935

The higher elevations in the eastern half of the area, Leidy Peak to the eastern Ashley National Forest boundary, are comprised of shales and quartzite of the Uinta Mountain Group. This area is an uplifted residual plateau and the landforms are predominantly a gently rolling uplands, with rock outcrops and talus fields. Riparian areas are a small portion of this area, but are large in the areas where they occur. In the higher elevations of the western half of the area (Leidy Peak to the western boundary of the area), glaciation has formed cirques, basins, lakes, ground moraines, exposed bedrock, and deep gorges. The summits and slopes of these glaciated mountains are gently rolling rounded bolliers. The sediment from both of these higher-elevation landforms formed the plateaus that occupy the mid elevations of the Vernal Ranger District. These plateaus are flat to gently sloped. Adjacent to the mid-elevation plateaus are scarp and dip slopes of Mississippian Limestone. Some of these slopes are located in the Grizzly Hollow, Iron Springs, East Draw, and Limestone Mountain areas. Karst topography, including depressions with internal drainage, is present in the scarp and dip slopes. Between the mid-elevation plateaus and scarp and dip slopes are stream canyons with steep to extremely steep slopes and occasional vertical cliffs. Examples of these stream canyons are Dry Fork Canyon, Big Brush Creek Canyon, Ashley Creek Canyon, and Little Brush Creek Canyon. Karst systems are present in this area. The most notable examples of these systems are Big Brush Creek Cave, Little Brush Creek Cave, and Dry Fork Creek karst system. On the far western edge of the area, Whiterocks drainage is an example of a glacial-carved valley.

The Vernal Ranger District contains many different types of vegetation. The higher elevation, gently rolling hills in the northeastern part of the area are covered with mixed conifer forests of lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir. Scattered meadow parks, such as Big Park, Manila Park, and Lonesome Park, occur in the forested areas. In the northwest part of the Vernal Ranger District, mountain-top bolliers occur with low-growing sedges and forbs. This allows for sweeping views of the surrounding area. The glaciated cirques, valleys, and side slopes in the western half of the Vernal Ranger District include basins above treeline with alpine plant communities. Below treeline, there are mosaics of wet and dry meadows, mixed with large expanses of conifer forests. An example of the mosaics are the Chepeta Lake area, Dry Fork drainage, and the area north and east of Paradise Reservoir. The mid-elevation plateaus include extensive stands of lodgepole pine and aspen. Large areas of sagebrush and grass occur on these plateaus on Diamond Mountain and Brush Creek Mountain. On the scarp and dip limestone hill slopes, Douglas-fir generally dominates the steeper scarp slopes which are mostly northern, cool aspects. Aspen and Douglas-fir stands are common on the southerly, warmer dip slopes. The stream canyon vegetation is highly variable, with changes in aspect, elevation, and soil features. The riparian areas in the canyon bottoms are one of the few places on the Ashley National Forest where deciduous trees other than aspen are found. The mix of coniferous trees is also more diverse than other forested areas. An example of the vegetation diversity is Dry Fork Canyon.



Figure 22. Blanchett Park looking north



Figure 23. Aspen stand along U.S. Highway 191



Figure 24. Looking down Big Brush Creek Canyon



Figure 25. Big Brush Creek Cave



Figure 26. Grizzly Ridge Meadow looking north



Figure 27. Dry Fork Canyon looking southeast



Figure 28. Looking northwest over East Park Reservoir



Figure 29. Marsh Peak as seen from above Hacking Lack

Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District contains two distinct areas: the northern and southern subareas of the district. The northern subarea contains the Ashley National Forest's portion of the High Uintas Wilderness and the south slope of the Uinta Mountains outside the wilderness. The southern subarea is distinctly different and part of the Tavaputs Plateau.

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District has a moderate developed recreation program including campgrounds, fishing sites, trailheads, 2 lodges or resorts, and interpretive sites. For the purposes of this report, the north and south subareas will be described separately.

Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District North Subarea

Location

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District North subarea is located on the south slope of the western Uinta Mountains. The area's northern border is the divide of the Uinta Mountains and is also the boundary between the Ashley National Forest and the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. The western and southern borders are the Ashley National Forest boundary. The eastern border is the boundary of the Vernal Ranger District and the Roosevelt Ranger District. The nearest population centers are Duchesne and Roosevelt, Utah, but many smaller towns and communities are adjacent to the subarea.

Scenic Character

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District is the background for the western part of the Uinta Basin. The high, snow-covered mountains are visible throughout much of the basin. The area has a long history of human use and habitation. Prehistoric sites have been discovered throughout the area, including in the high mountain valleys and basins in the High Uintas Wilderness. Fur trappers travelled through and trapped beaver in the subarea in the mid-1800s. In 1864, the Uintah Valley Indian Reservation was created. The Duchesne/Roosevelt North subarea was located within the reservation. In 1897, the subarea was designated as the Uinta Forest Reserve, removing it from the Uintah Valley Indian Reservation. The camps were located in the vicinity of the current Uinta River Group Campground, and in the Yellowstone River valley in the vicinity of the current Yellowstone Guard Station. The Civilian Conservation Corp crews worked on building telephone lines, road construction and maintenance, canals, fencing, facility construction, and other projects.

Water storage projects in the Uinta River drainage and the Brown Duck, Garfield, and Swift Creek Basins and were constructed in the early and mid-1900s. These facilities are now located in the High Uintas Wilderness, and some have been breached with the High Lakes Stabilization project. Other water storage and delivery projects, which are outside the High Uintas Wilderness, were constructed at this time, including Moon Lake Dam in 1938. The Colorado River Storage Project Act in 1956 authorized the Central Utah Project. The Upper Stillwater Dam in the Rock Creek drainage and the Strawberry Aqueduct were constructed as part of the Central Utah Project in the late 1980s.

The largest parts of the Duchesne/Roosevelt North subarea are the high-elevation, glaciated mountains and valleys on the south slope of the Uinta Mountains. A ridge forms the spine of the Uinta Mountains and other ridges extend like fingers to the south. These areas were formed from glaciation of the quartzite sandstones and shales of the Uinta Mountain Group. Glaciation formed cirques, basins, lakes, ground moraines, exposed bedrock, and deep gorges.

The summits and slopes of these glaciated mountains are gently rolling rounded bolities in the eastern part of the area and more rugged, Matterhorn-type peaks moving west. Kings Peak, the highest point in Utah

at 13,528, is located in these mountains. Winter snowpack can remain in shaded northern aspects well into the summer. The scoured basins at the head of the glacial valleys contain multiple lakes. Moving downslope, the valleys deepen and in some places there are deep, steep-walled stream canyons of exposed bedrock. South of the glaciated alpine peaks and valleys, plateaus alternate with river valleys formed by glacial outwash. The plateaus are dissected by steep stream drainages. The glacial-outwash river valleys have steep main valley and tributary side slopes. Many of the valley slopes are covered by talus and glacial deposits. The valley bottoms contain floodplains, riparian areas, terraces, and fans. The south slopes of these plateaus are moderately to steeply eroded by stream drainages.

The Duchesne Roosevelt North subarea has a wide range of vegetation types and communities. Vegetation on the high-elevation mountain peaks and rounded bolities varies with exposure and the size of course fragments. Large boulder fields and talus slopes support little vegetation except for lichens. The cliffs and ledges of bedrock support crevice plants. The rounded bolities vegetation is low-growing sedges and forbs. Moving down the valleys between the mountain ridges and bolities, the vegetation changes from alpine grasses and forbs and low-growing shrubs above treeline, to coniferous forests. Engelmann spruce dominates in the high elevations, and lodgepole pine increases with decreasing elevation. There are numerous meadows and willow fields in the valleys, and fens are present as well. In the lower portions of valleys, the vegetation is the most complex in the Uinta Mountains and includes ponderosa pine, limber pine, lodgepole pine, blue spruce, narrowleaf cottonwood, and aspen.

Shrubs, including mountain alder, willow, and dogwood, are also present especially around beaver ponds. On the slopes of these lower valleys, steep canyon walls with cliffs and talus are common, and trees establish to form forests of scattered conifers and aspen growing among the rocks. The warmer south-facing hillsides and benches support sagebrush, mountain brush, and Gambel oak.



Figure 30. Looking down Hades Canyon from road to the Grandview Trailhead



Figure 31. Looking north over Upper Stillwater Reservoir



Figure 32. Looking north over Lower Stillwater Ponds



Figure 33. Aspen on Yellowstone Canyon Road



Figure 34. Looking west from Porcupine Pass, High Uintas Wilderness



Figure 35. Waterfalls in Upper Yellowstone drainage, High Uintas Wilderness



Figure 36. Summit of Kings and Yellowstone Drainage looking south, High Uintas Wilderness



Figure 37. Bollie vegetation on North Pole Pass looking west



Figure 38. Rainbow over Moon Lake

Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South Subarea

Location

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South subarea is physically separated from the rest of the Ashley National Forest and has notably different physical and vegetation characteristics. The subarea is south of Duchesne, Utah. The subarea is bordered primarily by:

- Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation lands on the north;
- Bureau of Land Management administered public lands on the east;
- predominately private land on the south; and
- the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest on the west.

The Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway and Indian Canyon Scenic Byway pass through Indian Canyon in the subarea. The Reservation Ridge Scenic Backway follows Reservation Ridge from U.S. Highway 191 to the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest on the western boundary of the subarea. The backway follows the ridgeline and offers views in all directions.

Scenic Character

Extensive prehistoric sites have been located in the eastern end of the subarea. Nine Mile Canyon, located to the south and southeast of the subarea, contains numerous petroglyphs, pictographs, pit-houses, rock shelters, and granaries from the Fremont and Ute people. Petroglyphs are images created by carving into a rock surface while pictographs are painted on a rock surface. In 1864, the Uintah Valley Indian Reservation was created. The Duchesne/Roosevelt South subarea was located in the reservation. In 1906, the subarea was designated as the Uinta Forest Reserve, removing it from the Uintah Valley Indian Reservation. In 1954, the subarea was transferred from the Uinta National Forest to the Ashley National Forest.

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South subarea is located on the Tavaputs Plateau, an uplifted area in the Green River and Uinta Formations. Elevations range from about 6,000 feet near Gilsonite Draw to 10,336 feet at Strawberry Peak. The south edge of the plateau forms a steep scarp face, with long, gentle ridges separated by deeply incised canyons extending to the north. The plateau lands in the western portion of subarea are narrow or moderately wide. Flat ridges and the canyons have steep walls and very narrow drainage bottoms. In the eastern portion of the subarea, the plateaus are dissected by long canyons with comparatively wide, flat bottoms.

The plateaus and canyons in the western subarea, and some of the plateaus and canyons in the middle of the subarea, have complex vegetation patterns due to the highly varied aspects of the canyons and elevations on the flat ridges. The heads of the drainages support thickets of subalpine fir trees. Moving down the drainages, the northerly exposures of the canyon walls support Douglas-fir and aspen. Pinyon and juniper are scattered on the canyon sides at lower elevations. Spiked big sagebrush stands and open grassy hilltops are found along Reservation Ride and at the upper elevations of some of the flat ridges. They are usually intermixed with conifer and aspen-conifer stands. Farther down the flat ridges, there are small to large stands of mountain big sagebrush.

The vegetation patterns in the plateaus and canyons in the eastern subarea, and some of the plateaus and canyons in the middle of the subarea, also vary with elevation and aspect. Pinyon and juniper woodlands occur on many of the flat plateau lands and the steep canyon walls below about 8,000 feet. Douglas-fir is found on the cool exposures but is much less common than in the western part of the subarea. Most

canyon bottoms include dense thickets of greasewood at the lower elevations and on more saline or alkaline soils. Basin big sagebrush and grass communities replace greasewood at moderate elevation, and rubber rabbitbrush becomes abundant at higher elevations. Black sagebrush forms large stands on the flat ridges and small to large stands of aspen also occur in the moister ridge locations.



Figure 39. Looking down Cow Hollow



Figure 40. Looking down Slab Canyon



Figure 41. Historic corral constructed of pinyon and juniper



Figure 42. View of Upper Right Fork Indian Canyon

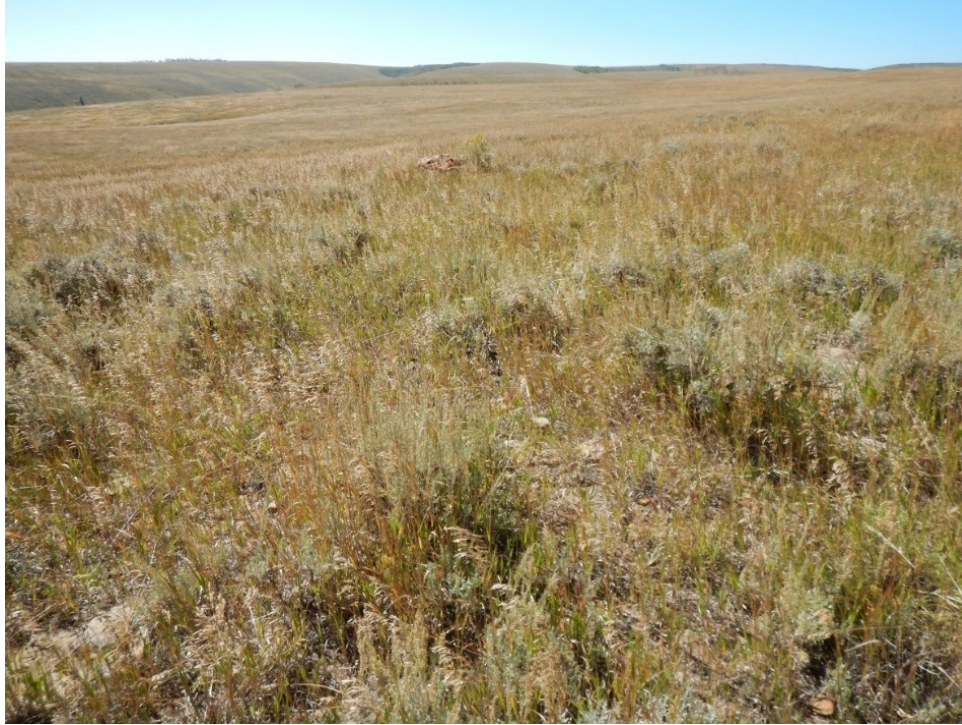


Figure 43. Reservation Ridge

Scenic Attractiveness

Scenic attractiveness mapping gives a relative scenic importance value to the land. The mapping is based on “human perceptions of the intrinsic beauty of the landform, water characteristics, vegetation pattern, and cultural uses” (USDA Forest Service 1995). Scenic attractiveness of landscapes may be altered temporarily or permanently by natural events, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and volcanos. But in most cases, human activities cannot modify scenic attractiveness. The definitions of the 3 scenic attractiveness classifications (USDA Forest Service 1995) are:

- Class A – distinctive: Areas where landforms, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide unusual, unique, or outstanding scenic quality. These landscapes have strong positive attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.
- Class B – typical: Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide ordinary or common scenic quality. These landscapes have generally positive, yet common, attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance. Normally they would form the basic matrix within the ecological unit.
- Class C – indistinctive: Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural land use have low scenic quality. Often water and rock forms of any consequence are missing in class C landscapes. These landscapes have, or are missing, attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.

The Ashley National Forest contains many diverse and distinct special places with unique scenery that enhances the sense of place. The High Uintas Wilderness is a popular destination for visitors looking for solitude, natural beauty, and primitive recreation. This is due to the area’s large alpine valleys, mountain

peaks, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, streams, and rugged rock cliffs. The Flaming Gorge Reservoir is a special place for boating, water sports, and fishing. The backdrop of the sagebrush hills in the north and steep canyon walls and rugged ridgelines in the south enhances the visitors' experience. The Green River, below the Flaming Gorge Dam, is a blue-ribbon trout fishery, and the combination of the red canyon walls and river combine to create a sense of place. The gently rolling landscape, covered in aspen and conifer forests and open meadows in the eastern Uintas, is the setting for family reunions and weekend getaways for people from the surrounding communities. Many of those people return to the same area year after year.

Scenic attractiveness of the Ashley National Forest landscape was mapped in 2008 (figure 43). The percentages by area or subarea is displayed in table 1.

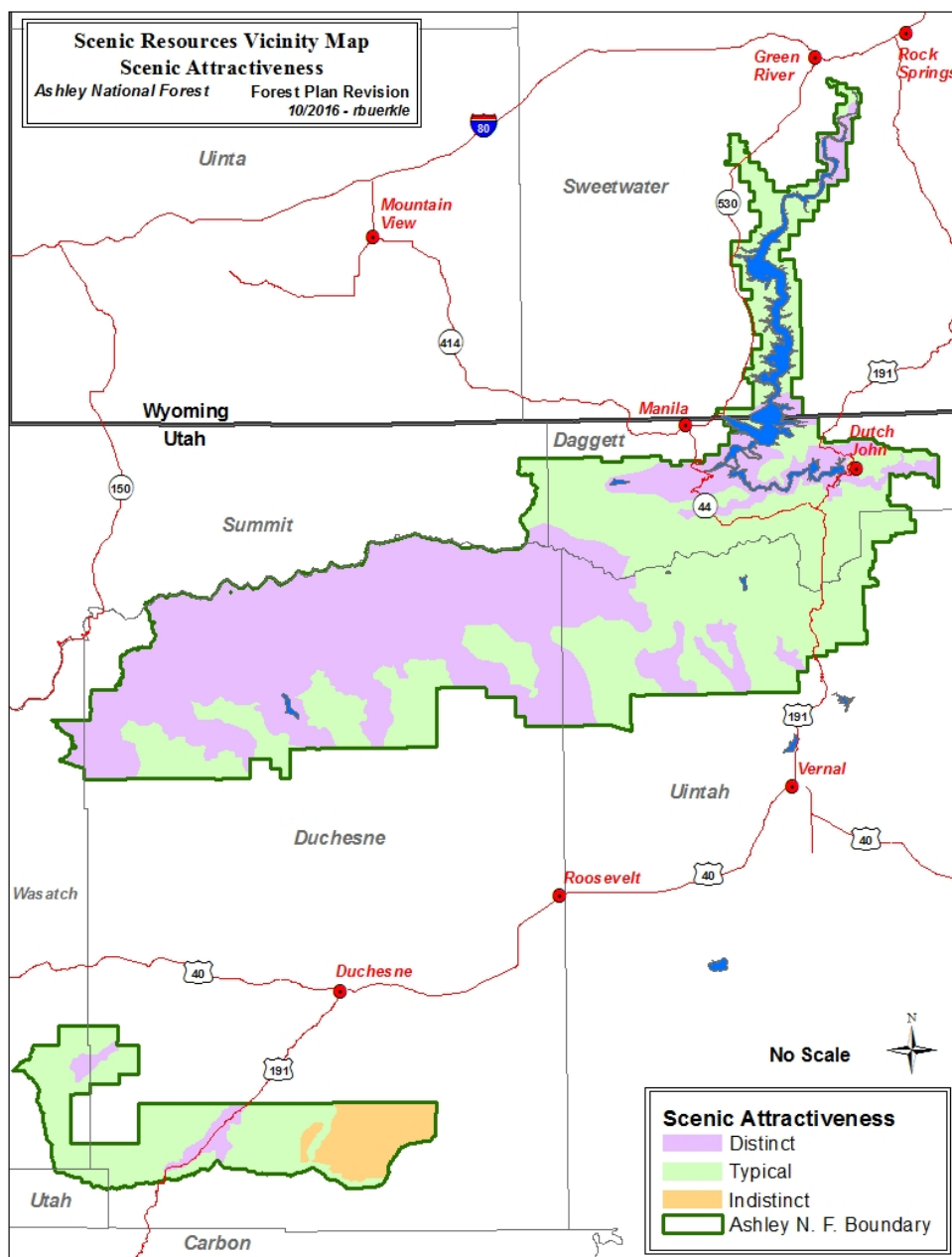


Figure 44. Scenic attractiveness

Table 1. Scenic attractiveness levels: percentages by area or subarea

Area or Subarea	Distinct	Typical	Indistinct
Flaming Gorge Ranger District - North Subarea	18%	82%	0%
Flaming Gorge Ranger District - South Subarea	36%	63%	0%
Vernal Ranger District	32%	68%	0%
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District - North Subarea	77%	23%	0%
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District - South Subarea	8%	69%	23%

Landscape Visibility

People view the Ashley National Forest lands from different locations at different times of the year. A landscape that is easily accessible to viewing by large numbers of people is often subject to greater scrutiny of its landscape character and scenic integrity. Also, people have greater scrutiny of landscape character and scenic integrity when they view landscapes close-up and for longer periods. People have greater scrutiny of landscape character and scenic integrity when landscape compositions focus their attention. Different types of people, engaging in specific activities, have varied concerns about scenic beauty of landscapes. Types of viewers will vary by travel route of use area, such as a developed recreation site or backcountry area. Landscape visibility is made up of scenic concern and distance zones.

Scenic Concern

Concern levels reflect the relative degree of concern people have for the scenery from views. Routes, sites, and areas of the views are identified. Because people view the Ashley National Forest from inside and outside its boundaries, concern levels are also assigned to routes, sites, and areas outside the Ashley's boundary. Concern level 1 indicates the highest viewing importance (view frequency and value of scenery to viewers). Concern level 2 indicates some concern but less importance for viewing than concern level 1 (figure 44). Concern level 3 was not identified on the Ashley National Forest.

Distance Zones

Visibility from places identified as concern level one and two are mapped using three distance zones from the viewing site, route, or area:

- foreground – 0 to ½ mile
- middle ground – ½ to 4 miles
- background – 4 to 15 miles
- areas not seen in these views are mapped as "seldom seen"

More information on identifying concern levels and mapping landscape visibility is available in Agriculture Handbook 701, chapter 4 (USDA Forest Service 1995).

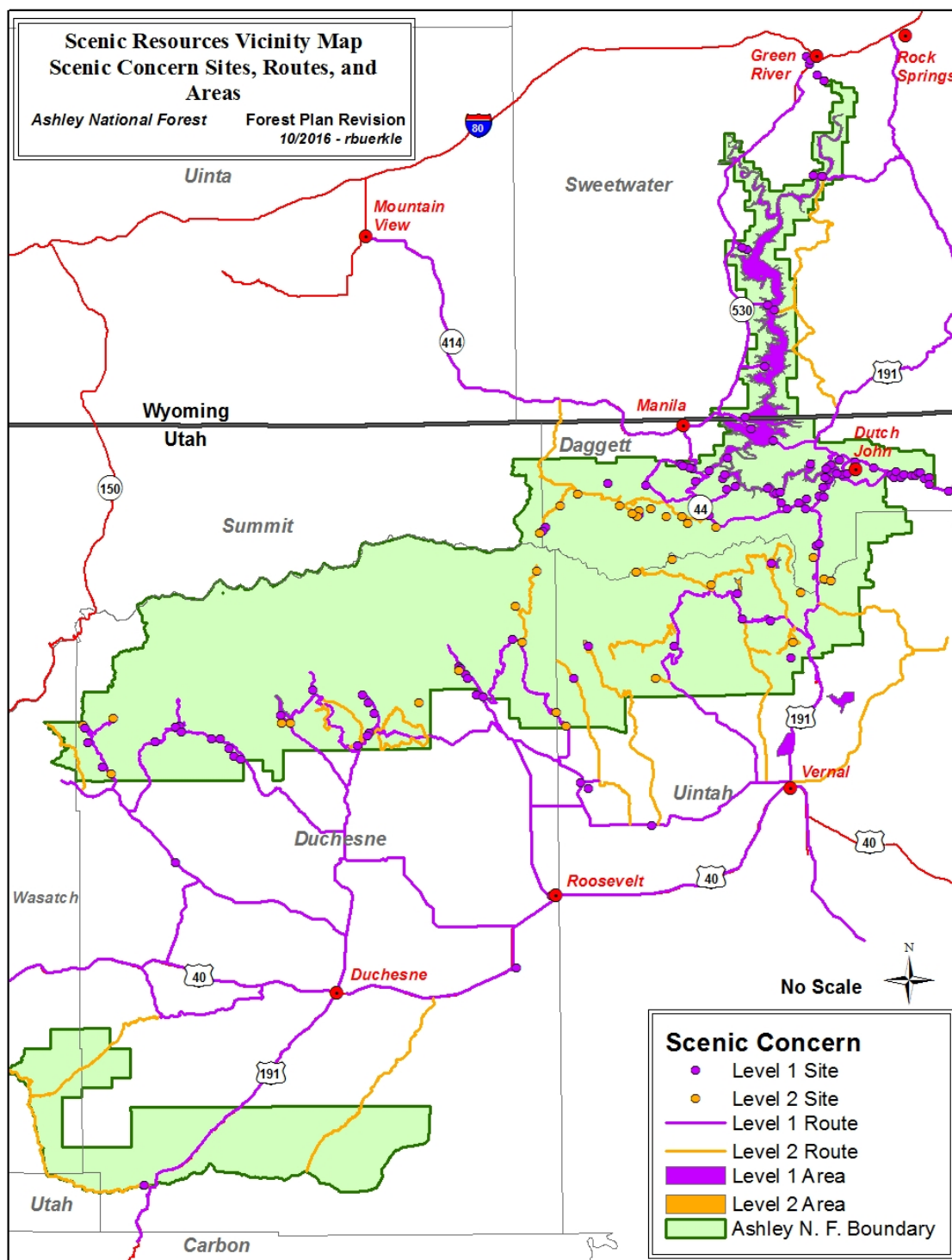


Figure 45. Scenic concern sites, routes, and areas

Existing Scenic Integrity Levels

Scenic integrity is a measure of the degree to which the landscape is perceived as whole, complete, or intactness of the landscape character. The levels of scenic integrity provide a relative measure of deviation from the characteristic landscape within an area. Scenic integrity is determined by the degree of direct, human-caused deviation in the landscape, such as road construction, timber harvesting, and vegetation management. Human alternations can sometimes maintain or raise scenic integrity. Different landscapes have differing abilities to absorb human alterations without loss of landscape character and reduction in scenic condition.

Flaming Gorge Ranger District North Subarea Scenic Integrity

The subarea has a primarily natural-appearing landscape. The recreation facilities around Flaming Gorge Reservoir were mainly constructed in the 1960s by the National Park Service and transferred to the Ashley National Forest in 1968. These areas include Lucerne, Buckboard, Firehole, and Antelope recreation complexes (figure 45). These areas were constructed 1960s-style architecture; some the designs fit in the landscape, but other design features do not. The relatively flat topography makes recreation facilities and the required infrastructure easy to see across the landscape. The open vegetation and relatively flat topography has also allowed easy motorized cross-country travel and there are many Forest Service system and user-created roads and trails surrounding the reservoir. Natural gas pipelines cross through the southwestern portion of the subarea. Groundcover has increased in these disturbed areas of land, forming long straight lines of different form and color. Where the pipeline crosses the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, it is suspended between two towers on each side of the reservoir.



Figure 46. Water tower at Buckboard Recreation Complex

Flaming Gorge Ranger District South Subarea Scenic Integrity

The scenic qualities of the Flaming Gorge Ranger District south subarea attract visitors to the area. The qualities range from the conifer forests and meadows of the plateaus, to the dramatic colorful cliffs of Red Canyon and the Green River corridor below the Flaming Gorge Dam. All the features have the backdrop of the forested slopes and mountain peaks of the Uinta Mountains. The Green River, between the Flaming Gorge Dam and the Ashley National Forest boundary to the east, was found to be suitable as a Scenic – Wild and Scenic River in the 2008 suitability study for the national forests in Utah. The river corridor is recognized as a high-use area for fishing and floating on the nationally recognized blue-ribbon trout fishery. The recreation facilities around the reservoir are also an important part of the landscape. Most facilities were constructed in the 1960s by the Forest Service and used that era’s popular design features. The Red Canyon Visitor Center was completed in 1964 (figure 46). It is perched on a cliff edge high above Red Canyon. The center’s hyperbolic paraboloid roof, also known as a saddle roof, is a stunning piece of architecture. Local rock was also utilized for the exterior façade, which more easily fits into the surrounding landscape. The combination of the architecture and location create a unique visual experience.



Figure 47. Red Canyon Visitor Center

The human-caused Mustang Fire burned more than 20,000 acres of mature pinyon and juniper woodlands surrounding Dutch John in 2002. The Goslin and Dutch John Mountain scenic character changed drastically in form and color as a result of the fire. The dark green of the mature pinyon and juniper has been replaced by brown, yellow, and light green of grasses, bare soil, and rock. The exclusion of fire has also changed the vegetation composition and patterns in the subarea. In the ponderosa pine belt south and west of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, ponderosa pine saplings and Rocky Mountain juniper had begun to increase under the mature tree canopy, reducing the park-like appearance. A majority of the ponderosa pine stands have been treated with prescribed underburning in the last 20 years to remove the understory. In the western part of the subarea, timber clearcuts have been conducted in the lodgepole pine stands. Many of clearcuts occurred in infested lodgepole pine stands during and after the mountain pine beetle

epidemic of the 1980s. Mountain pine beetle mortality of lodgepole pine increased in the western part of the subarea in the 2000s and peaked between 2007 and 2009. Dead and dying trees change the color and composition of the vegetation, especially on hillslopes in viewsheds of popular travel routes and camping areas.

Vernal Ranger District Scenic Integrity

The Vernal Ranger District has an extensive infrastructure of roads and trails, including the Flaming Gorge-Uintas National Scenic Byway and the Red Cloud-Dry Fork Loop Scenic Backway. The Vernal Ranger District is perhaps the most accessible area on the Ashley National Forest and consequently has a long history of varied uses and management activities. The Vernal Ranger District historically had the largest amount of timber harvests on the Ashley National Forest, primarily because of the easier access. Many regeneration timber harvests have been concentrated in lodgepole pine stands in areas with a retention visual quality objective. Old clearcuts and other intensive logging techniques have left straight lines and abrupt changes in vegetation patterns on the landscape. In the 1980s, a mountain pine beetle epidemic in the eastern Uinta Mountains affected the area. Much of the logging activity followed this outbreak. In the western part of the area, mountain pine beetle mortality in lodgepole pine peaked in 2004. The Douglas-fir beetle peaked in the area in 2005. The area affected was primarily in the northeast corner of the area, though some mortality occurred along the U.S. Highway 191 Scenic Byway. Spruce beetle is currently affecting mature Engelmann spruce. Dead and dying trees change the color and composition of the vegetation, especially on hillslopes in viewsheds of popular travel routes and camping areas. Mining activities were limited in the area, and there are scattered remnants of past cabins and facilities. Old sawmill structures and cabins still remain in the area as well.

The gentle rolling topography in the eastern part of the area is easily accessed by motorized vehicles. This accessibility has resulted in many National Forest System roads and trails and also many unauthorized routes which fragment the area.

A transmission line dissects the eastern part of the area, primarily east of, and alongside, U.S. State Highway 191, the scenic byway in the area. Communication towers have been constructed on Grizzly Ridge.

Water storage facilities were constructed throughout the area. The seasonal drawdown of water in these lakes and reservoirs change the appearance by exposing more of the shoreline over the summer and fall months, altering the color and texture of the landscape

The area has a large grazing program. Many cattle producers in the Uinta Basin use the Vernal Ranger District as summer pasture. The effects of grazing livestock are apparent in the area, such as fences and water developments, but the water developments and fences are generally masked by vegetation and are not easily noticeable.



Figure 48. Recent clearcut on the Red Cloud Loop

Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District North Subarea Scenic Integrity

The Duchesne/Roosevelt North subarea has a primarily natural-appearing landscape. The high alpine and mountainous terrain and the designation of the High Uintas Wilderness in 1984 have limited development and management activities. The approximately 274,000 acres of the High Uintas Wilderness administered by the Ashley are in the subarea and have very high existing scenic integrity values. The glacial-carved mountains, canyons, lakes, meadows, cirques, and ridges are the backdrop to any experience in the High Uintas Wilderness. The vast alpine areas above treeline and surrounded by high mountain ridges, create a distinct sense of place. Mountain pine beetle has infested extensive areas of lodgepole pine in the forested canyons in the High Uintas Wilderness, and damage peaked in the area in 2004. In the upper ends of canyons, spruce beetle has caused significant mortality to Engelmann spruce. The insect outbreaks are evident across much of the forested landscape, the effects being a large number of dying trees with red needles and grey dead trees. There is one SNOTEL site, automated snowpack and climate measuring equipment, within the High Uintas Wilderness, but it cannot be viewed from any Forest Service System trails.

In the south end of the subarea, outside the High Uintas Wilderness, the primary travel routes parallel rivers in canyon bottoms and end at facilities located at the wilderness boundary. These travel routes are the primary viewing platforms for visitors. Much of the area surrounding these travel routes is still primarily natural in appearance. Little regeneration timber cutting has occurred since the Ashley forest plan in 1986. Logging prior to the last forest plan in 1986 generally occurred on the plateaus between the canyons and is not readily apparent from the main travel corridors in the canyon bottoms. Lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, and Engelmann spruce mortality from insect epidemics has occurred throughout these canyons and plateaus as well (figure 48).

Water storage and delivery facilities have changed parts of the landscape significantly. The construction of the Upper Stillwater Dam created a large man-made reservoir in the late 1980s. Multiple recreation and administration facilities were constructed on the south end of the 195 feet high by 183-feet-wide roller

compacted concrete dam. The Upper Stillwater Dam is a scenic attraction, especially when the dam is spilling water in the early summer months. The spillway is located over the center of the dam, which creates a long, shallow waterfall down the dam face (figure 49). The subarea has a large grazing program and fences and water troughs are scattered throughout.



Figure 49. Spruce beetle mortality in Upper Lake Fork Basin, High Uintas Wilderness



Figure 50. Upper Stillwater Dam while spilling

Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South Subarea Scenic Integrity

The Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District South subarea has a natural-appearing landscape over much of the subarea, but some areas have large departures from a natural-appearing landscape. These areas are in the eastern part of the subarea and are from the oil and gas activity, range improvements, and chaining. In 2007, Berry Petroleum Company proposed a master development plan for full field development of their leases on the south unit. Between 2009 and 2014, Berry Petroleum Company drilled more than 100 wells, and constructed access routes and oil well pads across their lease areas (figure 50). With the decrease in oil prices in 2015, development slowed significantly, but further development will occur if oil prices increase. Further development will include the construction of well pads, access routes, pipelines, and production facilities. Any oil and gas facilities that were constructed, or have been constructed, have scenic mitigations required. This requirements include low-profile tanks, color schemes to fit into the landscape, and well pad locations that reduce visibility. However, the developments reduce the natural appearing landscape in some way.

Tree mortality from insect epidemics has also affected the scenery in the subarea. In the southwest corner of the subarea, Douglas fir beetle tree mortality peaked in 2005 and has declined since 2008. This area includes Reservation Ridge, Horse Ridge, Fossil Ridge, and other areas. In the eastern part of the subarea, mainly between Chokecherry Canyon and Nutters Ridge, pinyon ips beetle contributed to heavy pinyon pine mortality between 2003 and 2004.

The area has a large grazing program. The effects of grazing livestock are apparent in the area, such as fences, troughs and small water developments, but the water developments and fences are generally masked by vegetation and are not easily noticeable.



Figure 51. Oil pad, well, and tanks in south unit subarea

Chaining has been done in Brundage Canyon (figure 51) and Right Fork of Antelope Canyon. Chaining is when an existing pinyon and juniper forest is removed by dragging a large chain across the area. The pinyon and juniper were removed to allow grasses and forbs to grow and provide more abundant feed for livestock and wildlife. The abrupt edges of the chained areas create lines and forms between vegetation types (pinyon and juniper versus sagebrush and grasslands) that provide a sharp contrast to the unchained areas. The chaining was performed in the late 1970s to early 1980s. In 2009, the chained areas were cleared of encroaching pinyon and juniper. This clearing further outlined the change in form, color, and texture of the chained areas.



Figure 52. Chaining area in Brundage Canyon

Existing Scenic Integrity Levels

Existing scenic integrity levels of very high, high, moderate, and low were mapped in 2008 utilizing the Agriculture Handbook 701 direction (USDA Forest Service 1995) (figure 52). The levels show a condition of the land regardless of where the area is viewed. Scenic integrity levels are very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. The levels are defined below.

- Very high: The characteristic landscape is intact, with only minute deviations.
- High: The characteristic landscape appears intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the landscape character so completely and at such a scale that they are not evident.
- Moderate: The landscape appears slightly altered. Noticeable deviations are visually subordinate to the character.
- Low: The landscape appears moderately altered. Deviations may be dominant but are shaped to borrow from the natural landform and other visual dominance elements (line, form, texture, color). Deviations are also subordinate to the characteristic landscape when viewed as background.
- Very low: Deviations are dominant but borrow from the natural terrain and other elements common to the characteristic landscape.

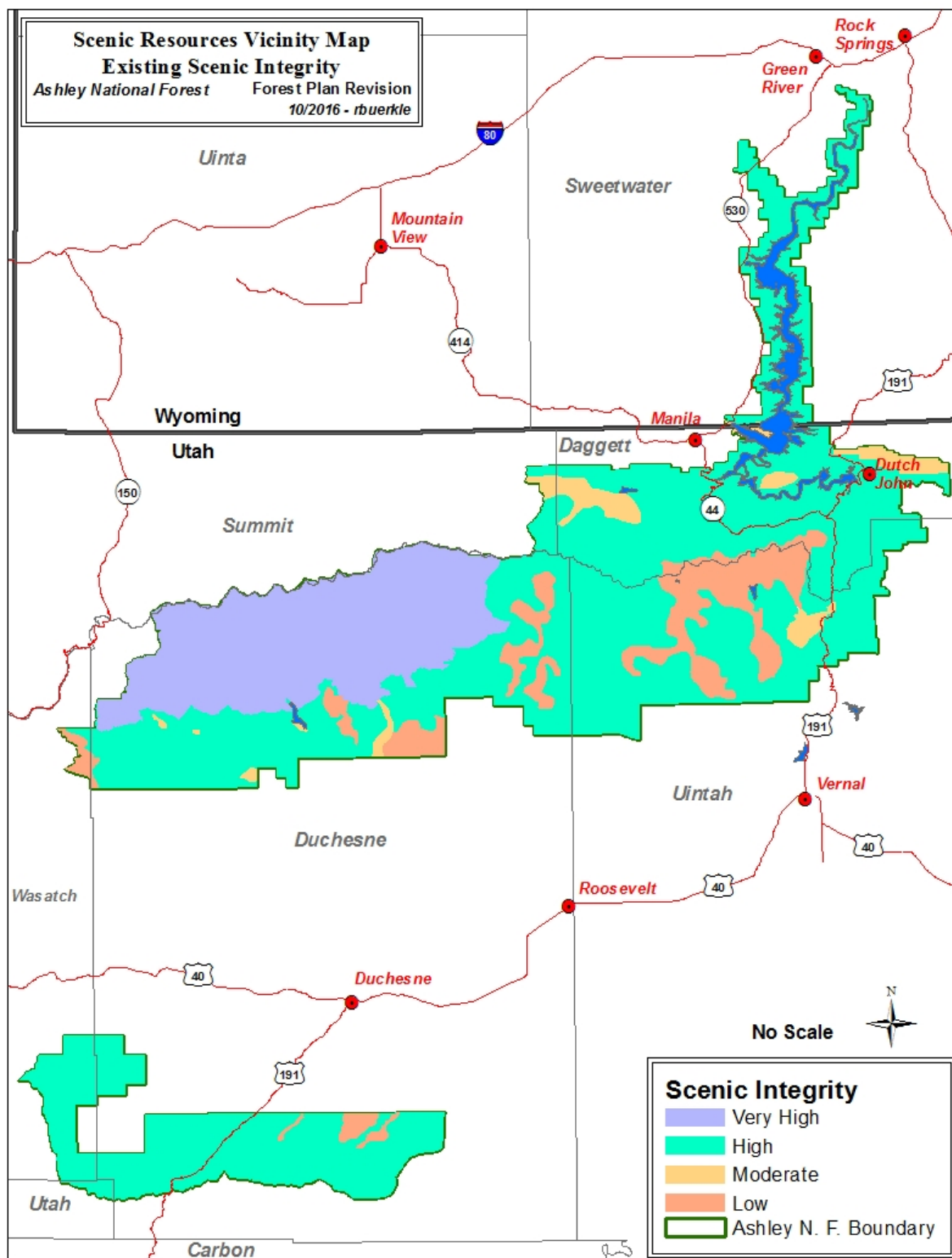


Figure 53. Existing scenic integrity

The 2008 inventory is accurate only for large-scale planning and was not developed to reflect every visually evident deviation on the Ashley. The 2008 scenic integrity levels are still accurate in 2016 because there have not been any clearcuts outside the areas identified for the 2008 mapping project. Also, the oil and gas activities that have occurred since 2008 are primarily located in areas with low scenic integrity. Another factor is that there have not been any high-intensity wildfires since 2008. A high-intensity fire sterilizes the soil and kills the seed bank so revegetation takes longer to occur.

The results of the mapping show scenic integrity is very high on 88 percent, high on 20 percent, moderate on 3 percent, and low on the remaining 9 percent of the Ashley National Forest. The 9 percent with low scenic integrity is mainly the result of clearcuts and other uses such as road construction and chaining. The 2008 scenic integrity percentages, separated by subarea, are identified in the table 2 below.

Table 2. Scenic integrity percentages by area or subarea (2008)

Area or Subarea	Very High	High	Moderate	Low
Flaming Gorge Ranger District - North Subarea	0	99	1	0
Flaming Gorge Ranger District - South Subarea	0	85	13	2
Vernal Ranger District	0	75	2	23
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District - North Subarea	55	37	1	7
Duchesne/Roosevelt Ranger District - South Subarea	0	96	0	4

Trends

The results of the 2012 national visitor use monitoring show the top four recreational uses on the Ashley are passive activities: viewing natural features, relaxing, viewing wildlife, and driving for pleasure.

While many Ashley visitors enjoy these activities in combination with other activities, it is important to note that visitors identify viewing scenery as the top activity performed on their visit to the Ashley National Forest. Recreation use on the Ashley is expected to increase. It will be important to maintain the natural appearing landscapes so visitor's expectations can be met on the Ashley.

Scenic resources could be affected by climate change due to a change in vegetation types, increased intensity fires which denude the landscape, and insect epidemics. Changes in seasonal reservoir and lake levels also can affect scenic resources. Scenic resources could also be affected by future oil and gas development which includes access roads, oil well pads, and pipelines. Large infrastructure projects, such as transmission lines and pipelines, could affect scenic resources depending on the location and type of infrastructure. Wildfire, vegetation treatments, and timber harvests will affect scenic resources. Scenic resources could also be affected by development of private inholdings in the Ashley.

Summary and Conclusions

The scenery on the Ashley National Forest serves as the background to the surrounding communities and for Ashley National Forest visitors. People view the Ashley's landscape from many different viewpoints: travel routes, developed recreation sites, and backcountry areas. The types of visitors to the Ashley are also highly varied, from boaters on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir to all-terrain vehicle users on the Vernal Ranger District to backpackers in the High Uintas Wilderness to the many other activities that visitors participate in on the Ashley.

The scenery on the Ashley is as diverse as the available recreational activities. The Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and High Uintas Wilderness have high scenic values and unique and distinct scenery which are vastly different from one another. The scenery in these two nationally designated areas are an important part of a visitor's recreational experiences, and they add value to peoples' experience.

The Uinta Mountains to the south of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area provide the background to national recreation area visitors. The forested hills, steep canyons, and open meadows on the south slope of the Uintas Mountains add to dispersed recreation experiences on the Vernal Ranger District. The Dry Fork drainage is the most accessible to residents from Vernal. The Dry Fork is a popular location for recreation, and the steep canyon walls and diverse vegetation factor into the area's popularity. The south slope of the Uinta Mountains are the background to the towns and cities in the Uinta Basin. The forested hills, treeless mountain tops, and steep canyons visible from the basin are important factors in the quality of life for residents.

The developed campgrounds and facilities on the Duchesne/Roosevelt North subarea are primarily located in the valley bottoms. The visible scenery in these valleys is a primary reason visitors choose to visit these sites. Many of the local visitors to the Ashley have been returning to the same locations for years for family outings and reunions. Each specific visitor values the natural-appearing landscape in their family's traditional outing locations. The scenic byways and backways on the Ashley are attractions for local residents for viewing scenery and driving for pleasure. The byways and backways are attractions to nonlocal visitors, especially visitors travelling between the national parks in Montana and Wyoming to the national parks in southern Utah.

The Ashley has a primarily natural-appearing landscape with high and very high scenic integrity. However, there are areas across the Ashley with low to moderate scenic integrity. Some of these lands include areas that show contrast in shape, form, and texture with the surrounding natural-appearing landscape. These include past vegetation treatments, road corridors, infrastructure, human-caused wildland fires, and recreation facilities. Areas with low scenic integrity should be analyzed for potential improvement, particular areas that have growth potential in recreation use.

The Visual Management System has been used since the mid-1970s as the preferred analysis tool for determining effects to scenery from proposed activities. The 1986 Ashley forest plan used the Visual Management System to outline the visual quality objectives for a majority of the areas of the Ashley National Forest.

In 1995, the U.S. Forest Service developed an updated version of the Visual Management System: the Scenery Management System. The Scenery Management System is a systematic approach to inventory, analyze, and monitor scenic resources. The system recognizes natural disturbance processes such as fire, insects, and disease to be part of the natural landscape that is dynamic and also important in maintaining healthy, sustainable, and scenic landscapes. The primary components of the Scenery Management System are scenic character, scenic attractiveness, landscape visibility, existing scenic integrity, and scenic classes.

The two systems are structured to primarily emphasize "natural-appearing" scenery, but the Scenery Management System recognizes the positive scenic values associated with some human-modified features and settings that have value for their scenic influence. The Visual Management System is no longer considered to be best available scientific information, as it does not consider natural disturbance regions or valued cultural features of National Forest System landscapes.

The Scenery Management System is used in the context of ecosystem management to determine the relative value, stability, resiliency, and importance of scenery, assist in establishing overall resource

objectives, and ensure high-quality scenery for future generations. National forests are required to transition from the old Visual Management System process used in past forest plans to the new Scenery Management System during forest plan revision, based on Agriculture Handbook 701 (USDA Forest Service 1995).

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