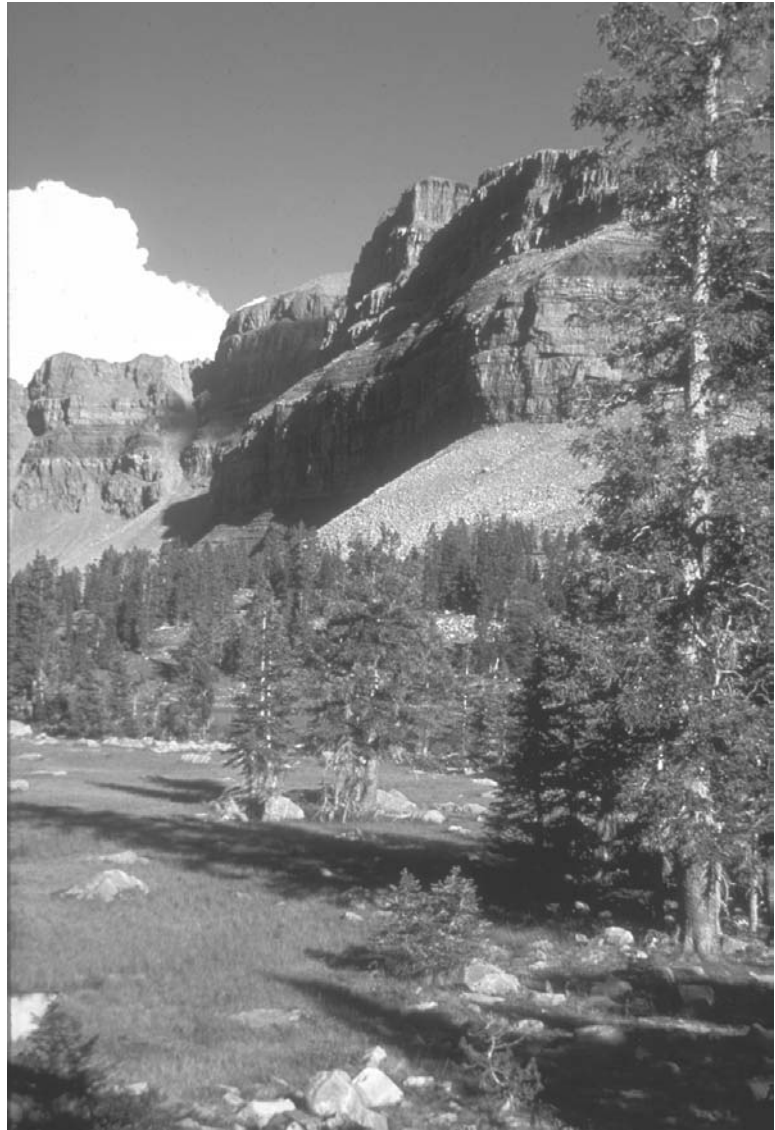




Subalpine meadow near Dead Horse Lake, Uinta Mountains

Eastern Uintas Management Area

Desired Future Conditions

Eastern Uintas Management Area

Setting Description:

Located in the Uinta Mountains, the largest east/west mountain range in the lower 48 States, and found in the northeastern corner of Utah and the southern border of Wyoming, the Eastern Uintas Management Area ranges in elevation from 8,000 feet along the northern Forest boundary to 13,442 feet at Gilbert Peak. Within this Management Area there are three ecological subsections: High Uintas, North Slope Outwash, and Phil Pico Highlands (Nelson 1993) that are managed by two Ranger Districts- Evanston and Mt. View. The diverse landscapes of the Eastern

Uintas include open sagebrush flats, aspen, mixed conifer, and pure coniferous forests, high jagged mountains, semi-circular cirque basins, deep U-shaped river valleys, grassy meadows, alpine tundra and a profusion of lakes, streams and wetlands.

The area offers a variety of recreation opportunities such as backcountry hiking, horseback riding, fishing, camping, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, ATV riding and hunting. The area is also rich in history and community ties to national forest resource uses from extensive tie hacking for construction of railroads, to livestock grazing, oil production, timber harvest, and reservoirs for agricultural irrigation. A network of roads and trails criss-cross the lower slopes providing access for a variety of recreation opportunities and other forest uses. Traveling these routes one climbs from southern Wyoming's gray-green sage prairies and shimmering aspen groves through deep green conifer to views of jagged barren peaks. Upper portions of the area are primarily undeveloped (unroaded) where semi-circular glacial basins surround streams with rich riparian vegetation. These streams often flow from mountain ice and snow melting to lake to reservoir to mountain plain through concave valleys. Giant rock ramparts can be seen at the entrance of the three main rivers: Beaver, Henrys and Blacks Fork flowing from their headwaters in the High Uintas Wilderness. Oil wells and oil production facilities are sprinkled through the lower uplands of the landscape, mostly hidden from a distance by careful design and placement in pockets of vegetation. Remnants of bygone eras can be found throughout the landscape in sagging log cabins, wooden check dams, stumps cut waist high and historic ranger stations.

Watershed Desired Future Conditions:

East and West Fork Smiths Fork of Wyoming would be removed from the State of Wyoming 303(d) list by determining reasons for exceeding Wyoming silt water quality standards and implementing solutions to the problem if it is management related. Bridger Lake, Marsh Lake, and China Reservoir would be removed from the State of Utah 303(d) list by determining reasons for exceeding Utah dissolved oxygen water quality standards and implementing solutions to the problem if it is management related. Bridger Lake would be removed from the State of Utah 303(d) list by determining reasons for exceeding Utah temperature water quality standards and implementing solutions to the problem if it is management related.

Tie-hacking and probably turn-of-the-century grazing have left an impact on most of the watersheds on the North Slope of the Uintas. Tie-hackers cleared obstructions and straightened channels to permit floating of ties to collection points. Anecdotal accounts of turn-of-the century grazing indicate substantial erosion and likely effects on stream channel conditions. This has caused many indirect influences on current management. Restoration of properly functioning stream channels is expected to be a long process that includes careful management of streamside and upland facilities and uses, and consideration of

streamside vegetation management and instream structures to augment the process of restoration.

A priority will be placed on developing and implementing a watershed restoration plan for Archie Creek, a tributary of the West Fork of the Smiths Fork. It has a scoured stream channel and is not in a properly functioning condition. Priority will be placed on determining what vegetation treatments or structures can be used to begin the restoration of this stream channel. Options might include treating adjacent vegetation to encourage regeneration of aspen and willows and subsequent beaver activity and/or installing in-stream structures in the smaller upper tributaries. The lower 2 miles of this stream are on private property. Needs for water downstream from the Forest are increasing as growth and development of adjacent communities occurs. There could be requests to evaluate increased storage in existing reservoirs in the area (Stateline and Meeks Cabin) to meet needs of a growing population.

Biodiversity/Viability Desired Future Conditions:

Vegetation and Disturbance Processes

The forests of the eastern Uintas are characterized by aspen stands along the lower elevation fringes grading into mixed aspen and lodgepole pine and then into vast stands of lodgepole pine and finally into mixed lodgepole pine, subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce in the higher elevations.

These forests are dependent on disturbance to maintain a properly functioning condition. Aspen regenerate through sprouting from roots following fire where lodgepole pine cones opened by the heat of fires spread seed to regenerate a new forest of lodgepole pine. Stands of mixed conifer species regenerate and proceed through successional stages at a slower rate following the less frequent fires at higher elevations. The fires historically responsible for these processes varied in frequency and intensity. It is likely that fires at dryer, lower elevations occurred more frequently and removed encroaching conifers at the same time they regenerated pure aspen stands.

Above the band of pure aspen, mixed lodgepole pine and aspen regenerated concurrently following fires with mixed regimes (some stand replacing and some ground fires). Most of the pure lodgepole pine type appears to have regenerated following large, stand replacing fires. Some of the lodgepole pine stands on drier sites appear to have experienced cycles of surface or mixed severity fires that allowed them to develop an uneven-aged structure.

Upper elevation stands appear to have a relatively infrequent fire history that is probably due in part to the wetter conditions during the fire season. These upper elevation stands are frequently in smaller patch sizes with changes in species composition dependent on how large and intense the fire was and how long

succession from seral lodgepole pine to subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce has been progressing.

Vegetation will be managed for aspen, mixed lodgepole pine and aspen, and lodgepole pine in patch sizes, species composition and stand structure similar to what fire historically created. These treatments will be accomplished through timber harvest, mechanical treatment, prescribed fire, and use of wildland fire as consistent with the mapped management prescription categories. The highest priority for treatment will be the mixed aspen and conifer stands where conifers are gradually replacing the aspen, and in riparian areas where conifers have encroached. This emphasis is intended to improve habitat for a variety of species including beaver. Beaver are an essential ecosystem component due to their important effects on watershed and wetland functions.

The role of fire in the ecosystem has been replaced to some extent by timber harvest over the last 100+ years. Extensive tie-hacking around the turn of the century produced uneven-aged stands in some areas and even aged stands where it was followed by fire. Extensive harvesting on railroad lands intermingled with National Forest land in the West Fork Blacks Fork area has resulted in considerable acreage of 30 to 40 year old stands with mixed species and scattered relic overstory. More recent timber harvest on National Forest land has resulted in primarily even aged lodgepole pine stands intermingled with mature forest on National Forest Land.

The importance of winter range in the Widdop Mountain area will continue to be recognized. Areas dominated by birchleaf mountain mahogany will be managed so that use of browse is at a level that not only provides for the continued maintenance of existing vegetation, but also provides for reproduction and replacement of decadent and dead individuals within the stands. The aspen component of winter ranges will be maintained. Monitoring will continue in cooperation with States of Utah & Wyoming and the Ashley National Forest. The desired condition is to maintain browse utilization at less than 50% on mountain mahogany across the landscape, including all land ownerships.

Botanical Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Protection/Recovery

Management activities within rare plant habitats will maintain or restore and provide for recovery of populations of current and proposed Sensitive plant species and plant species at risk. Livestock grazing intensities will be managed at a level that maintains rare plant habitat dynamics and provides for pollinator diversity. Riparian and aquatic plant habitats and species will be protected from trampling and overuse by recreational users, livestock and grazing wildlife. Energy development and exploration activities will protect current and proposed Sensitive species and their associated habitats. Activities associated with timber harvest will maintain or restore habitat for current or proposed Sensitive species, their habitats, and support a diversity of pollinators. Populations of Uinta

Greenthread will be protected and maintained. Pro-active efforts will be made to educate and inform Forest users of the fundamental importance of plant species to society, plant conservation, and biodiversity. A Conservation Agreement for Uinta Greenthread will be finalized and implemented to protect population viability and ensure recovery.

Wildlife Habitat

Active vegetation management and burning will be used to maintain habitat in areas emphasizing terrestrial wildlife habitat. Road construction or reconstruction is allowed to accomplish this.

Big game winter ranges (generally below 7,000 feet) along the Eastern North Slope of the Uintas will be maintained and enhanced with the goal of holding big game on National Forest longer to help decrease impacts on private lands below. Browse species age classes will be maintained with a higher proportion of older age classes than elsewhere to provide forage above the snow. Big game will continue to be monitored in coordination with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and Wyoming Game and Fish Department to ensure population management prevents habitat deterioration.

Riparian vegetation composition and structure (especially in aspen and willow) will be improved providing habitat for beaver and moose.

Big horn sheep habitat and movements will be monitored. Habitat will be enhanced through burning or other vegetation treatments to open travel corridors and to encourage mixing with Sheep Creek sheep.

Terrestrial Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Protection/Recovery

In Lynx Analysis Units, recreation and vegetation management will conform to the Lynx Conservation Strategy.

Aquatic Conditions

Fish Habitat - Aquatic habitats will be managed to maintain cool, clear water and well-vegetated stream banks for cover and bank functioning. Instream cover, in the form of deep pools and structures such as boulders and logs, will be maintained and their value recognized. Water temperature will be preserved through well-vegetated banks. Natural reproduction will be maintained through minimizing sediment input from roads, trails and campgrounds and providing for instream flows. The values of instream flows for aquatic and semi-aquatic species will be recognized and protected. The importance of the National Forest in the conservation of Colorado River cutthroat trout will be recognized. Work will continue with the States of Utah and Wyoming in pursuit of restoration efforts to maintain and expand Colorado River cutthroat trout. Restoration efforts will emphasize considerations at the watershed scale.

Amphibian Habitat - Marshy edges of ponds or lakes and springs are protected to allow for the development of in-water and riparian vegetation. Soils around water bodies are not compacted and allow for burrowing and over wintering of amphibians including the Boreal Toad.

Roadless Areas Desired Future Conditions:

The Widdop Mountain Roadless Area will be managed to maintain existing uses and motorized access on designated routes consistent with the current Travel Plan for hunting, recreation and other allowable uses. The area will be managed to allow development.

Management in about half of this portion of the High Uintas Roadless Area, primarily in the East, Middle and West Blacks Fork areas, will maintain or mostly maintain roadless values. The remaining portion will be managed to allow development.

Wilderness and Recommended Wilderness Areas Desired Future Conditions:

The High Uintas Wilderness is managed according to the 1997 Forest Plan Amendment. The portion of Upper West Fork Beaver Creek and Middle and East Fork Black's Fork recommended for Wilderness will be managed consistent with this desired future.

Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers Desired Future Conditions:

The Henry's Fork (Henrys Fork Lake to trailhead for scenic, recreational, wildlife and ecological values), East Fork Blacks Fork (headwaters to confluence with Little East Fork for ecological values), Little East Fork (Source to mouth for ecological values), and East Fork Smiths Fork (Red Castle Lake to trailhead for scenic, recreational, wildlife and ecological values) will be managed to protect values which made them eligible in the inventory. Activities within the corridor will maintain a "Wild" classification.

The West Fork Beaver Creek (source to Forest boundary for wildlife and ecological values), Middle Fork Beaver Creek (Beaver Lake to mouth for wildlife and ecological values), and West Fork Blacks Fork (source to trailhead for scenic and ecological values) will be managed to protect values which made them eligible in the inventory. Activities within the corridor will maintain a "Wild" within Wilderness and "Scenic" below Wilderness classification.

The Blacks Fork (confluence West Fork and East Fork to Meeks Cabin Reservoir for historic values) will be managed to protect values which made it eligible in the inventory. Activities within the corridor will maintain a "Recreational" classification.

The West Fork Smiths Fork (source to Forest boundary for historic values) will be managed to protect values which made it eligible in the inventory. Activities within the corridor will maintain a “Scenic” classification

Roads/Trails/Access Desired Future Conditions:

Roads and trails will be designed and maintained to protect watersheds while providing a variety of recreation and access opportunities. Routes in need of improved drainage and/or alignment to minimize impacts to watersheds will be identified and incrementally repaired to achieve access with proper watershed functioning. Access trails will be designed to minimize development in riparian habitat conservation areas (300 feet on each side of the channel). User-created trails will be modified to eliminate or significantly reduce impacts to the stream and riparian vegetation.

Roads and trails will be clearly marked with allowed types of uses, and users will stay on designated routes. Compliance with the current travel plan will be excellent and users will assist with monitoring. Roads and travel ways not needed as part of the road system will be closed and restored to production of vegetation and protection of watersheds. Adequate opportunities for motorized recreation will be provided through a series of designated roads and trails (mostly derived from existing routes) with varying degrees of difficulty, opportunities for scenery, and access to attractions. Loops will be provided where possible. There will be increased opportunity for a recreation east-west transit along the North Slope road system in all seasons.

Recreation Desired Future Conditions:

Recreation will be emphasized in the Management Prescription Category 4.0 at Bridger Lake/East Fork Smiths Fork and Middle Fork Blacks Fork areas.

Wilderness users will find a variety of trailheads with some including easy access for sedans, developed trailhead camp sites, horse loading ramps, corrals, and sanitary facilities while others are little more than a wide spot in the road for parking and require high clearance vehicles to access remoter areas of the High Uintas Wilderness.

Road access on the North Slope will continue to have a variety of conditions and opportunities with standards varying from State highway to roads requiring high clearance vehicles. Some of the rougher roads on dry sites on the North Slope will be open to all vehicles to provide opportunities for people who enjoy taking their 4-wheel drive vehicles on difficult routes. Most of the roads and all of the motorized trails on the North Slope will be open to ATV and motorcycle use. Use of these vehicles will be allowed only on designated routes during non-snow periods to prevent resource damage.

There will continue to be opportunities for mountain bikers to ride several trails that do not allow motorized vehicles as well as all of the trails and roads open to motorized vehicles. There will continue to be opportunities for horseback day rides on non-motorized trails outside of the Wilderness as well as pack trips into the Wilderness.

Campers can find experiences varying from developed campgrounds adjacent to the roads to dispersed campsites adjacent to low standard roads to remote wilderness and non-wilderness backpacking camps. The number of developed areas (campgrounds) will be maintained at the same level as 2000, however changes within existing sites may be made to update the facilities, increase capacity, and address resource concerns. There will continue to be some areas outside of Wilderness that allow larger groups such as boy-scout troops to camp in a remote setting. There will continue to be campgrounds adjacent to lakes and streams with fishing opportunities. Most of the developed and dispersed sites will allow use of ATVs into and out of the camp-site, but to provide some areas with more serenity, some sites will not allow ATVs. There will continue to be several cabins available for rent. Dispersed recreation activities and areas will meet a wide variety of user preferences. Separation of some types of recreation uses is expected to be successful in eliminating or reducing conflicts.

Appropriate densities of motorized dispersed recreation use will be defined and maintained within dispersed recreation corridors with a prescription emphasizing recreation management. Dead Horse and Bridger Lake trail systems will continue to provide an opportunity for ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike enthusiasts with various skill levels to explore a large network of trails with a variety of challenges. Recreationists will keep vehicles and camping impacts within marked areas to ensure use is within sustainable limits for watershed and other resource protection.

Cross-country skiers will continue to find experiences from groomed trails with no snowmobiling allowed (such as in the Henrys Fork area) to remote back-country skiing both inside and outside Wilderness, with little chance of encountering another visitor.

Snowmobilers will continue to find groomed trails like those originating at the Deadhorse trailhead. They can find play areas in open meadows and ridges throughout the Management Area. Snow conditions tend to be better in the Western Uintas MA for snowmobiling than they are on the east end.

Recreation impacts will be monitored, especially in sensitive areas, and users will be informed and will assist with needed changes in management. Designation of sites for dispersed camping will be employed to restrict or mitigate recreation impacts in riparian areas and to aquatic systems, while continuing to provide opportunities in and near these attractive areas. Hardening of sites and use of barriers will be employed where needed to reduce or prevent unacceptable

impacts. In areas where standards for protection of riparian or other ecosystems have been exceeded in the past, efforts to remove use, direct use and/or harden areas will be employed to correct deteriorated conditions and ensure sustainability. Closure of some riparian areas to camping will be accomplished where that use could not be made compatible with standards for protection.

Recreation Special Uses Desired Future Conditions:

There will continue to be outfitted and/or guided opportunities including summer horseback trips, hunting trips, and snowmobile tours. The Forest Service will continue to provide opportunities for local organizations that sponsor events in the Forest, as appropriate and in the public interest. Dog sled races, mountain bike races, road bike races, archery events, retriever dog contests, cross-country ski tours, and yurt rentals are some of the opportunities available.

Heritage Management Desired Future Conditions:

Continue inventory efforts to identify and record all American Indian and early European sites, particularly mining locations, in the area. The local and regional history associated with the tie hack sites will be developed and appreciated. Interpretive brochures and/or trails will be developed in coordination with designation of a historic tie hack district. Investigation in high-altitude prehistoric sites will continue on the Wasatch-Cache NF portion of the Uinta Mountains in coordination with the Ashley NF's ongoing investigations along with interested educational institutions and tribal programs. Historic guard stations will continue to be restored, maintained, and valued as working administrative sites.

Scenery Management

A broad range of scenery will be present within this diverse management area. Modified areas as a result of timber harvest and oil fields to very natural appearing areas are present. The scenery of the area will continue to be a valuable and pleasurable natural backdrop for visitors. Guidelines for scenery management will be applied to project undertakings. The following landscape character themes will be found in the management area as mapped: Natural Evolving in Wilderness and Natural Appearing in all other Prescription areas with scenic integrity objectives of Very High for Wilderness and High for all others except 5.2 which is Low and 8.0 which is Moderate.

Land Ownership Desired Future Conditions:

Because of the inherent complexity of management of checkerboard intermingled private lands, consolidating ownership patterns is generally desirable. Opportunities to block up land ownerships will be pursued, while ensuring that desirable lands are not disposed. Where intermingled lands are not acquired, easements across private lands are a priority.

Timber Management Desired Future Conditions:

Opportunities for timber harvest will continue to be provided in keeping with other resource values. Management in some forested areas will emphasize growth and yield of timber while in others, timber harvest or prescribed fire may be used to provide the disturbance needed to maintain species composition or stand structure and restore properly functioning conditions to forest ecosystems. Christmas trees, post and poles, firewood, teepee poles, sawlogs and other forest products will continue to be provided consistent with other resource management direction.

Management will be designed to reduce the likelihood of forest insect epidemics. This management will maintain a diversity and spatial distribution of age classes in lodgepole pine in the eastern Uintas.

Existing road templates that are needed for future management and administrative needs will be retained. Roads that are closed will be stabilized by scarification, seeding and in some cases removing drainage structures until they are needed again.

Rangeland/Livestock Grazing Desired Future Conditions:

Livestock grazing will be a compatible use in each of the prescription areas within active allotments. It will be adjusted and managed to maintain or improve watershed, terrestrial habitat, riparian and aquatic conditions and minimize conflicts with other uses consistent with management direction for the area. Vegetation will be at or moving toward desired composition, structure and function as described in Forestwide Desired Future Conditions.

Structural improvements such as fences and water developments will be well maintained and serve to improve distribution and control of livestock use. Structural improvements that have been determined as not needed will be removed from the forest. Grazing permit holders will take full responsibility for monitoring use, movement, and control of livestock to meet standards designed to ensure multiple resource sustainability. Grazing systems will provide for rest or deferment of all areas for some portion of the rotation to achieve improved plant vigor and composition.

From the Hayden Fork drainage to the east, if sheep permits for upper elevation allotments are voluntarily waived without a preference, permits will not be reissued and allotments will be closed to domestic livestock for purposes of future bighorn sheep habitat.

The East Fork sheep driveway will be managed as a driveway for as long as it is needed. Permittees take responsibility for following the driveway management plan and minimizing impacts.