



United States Department of Agriculture

Wilderness Recommendation Process – Inventory, Evaluation, and Analysis (Alternative Development)

Carson National Forest New Mexico



Forest Service

Carson National Forest

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Commonly Used Acronyms

ATV	all-terrain vehicle
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CO	Colorado
FSH	Forest Service Handbook
FSYU	Federal Sustained Yield Units
GIS	Geographic Information System
NF	national forest
NM	New Mexico
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NMED	New Mexico Environment Department
OHV	off-highway vehicles
PJ	piñon-juniper
WUI	wildland-urban interface

Wilderness Recommendation Process

The 2012 planning rule requires each national forest to identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and to determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation (36 CFR 219.7 (c) (2)). Forest Service directives (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70) for implementing the 2012 Planning Rule provide further guidance on how to complete this process in four steps:

Step 1: Inventory

The [Inventory](#) step efficiently, effectively, and transparently identifies all lands in the Carson National Forest (NF) that may have wilderness characteristics. This step primarily looks at the size, roads, and other improvements found within landscapes, to determine if an area should be carried forward to the Evaluation step. Only those lands that meet the required criteria (FSH1909.12, Chapter 70, section 71.2) are carried forward.

Step 2: Evaluation

The [Evaluation](#) step looks at the lands that were brought forward from Inventory and evaluates them based on the five wilderness characteristics (FSH 1909.12, chapter 70, section 72.1) as defined in the [Wilderness Act of 1964](#).

Step 3: Analysis

The Analysis step identifies the effects any recommended wilderness would have on the ecological, social, and economic landscape. The results of the Analysis help inform the determination of which lands may be carried forward for final Recommendation. The draft forest plan and alternatives incorporate some, none, or all of the lands from Evaluation, depending on the theme of the alternative. The environmental impact statement documents the Analysis of anticipated effects, if lands were to be managed as wilderness, under the proposed forest plan and each alternative.

Step 4: Recommendation

A wilderness Recommendation may be proposed as part of the draft forest plan and alternatives to the draft plan. The final Recommendation step makes a recommendation for specific areas to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System as part of the final Record of Decision in the forest plan revision process. Note that only Congress can create new wilderness areas. This final recommendation is just that, a recommendation.

The Carson NF has completed the Inventory, Evaluation, and draft Analysis steps. The methods for the first two steps and results are described in two sections in this document. The first section provides information about the Inventory process and results. The second section provides an area by area Evaluation of wilderness characteristics of inventoried lands. The forest has incorporated none, some, or all of the areas brought forward into the Evaluation step into the draft forest plan and alternatives, depending on the theme of the alternatives. These have been analyzed within the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Public Involvement for the Wilderness Recommendation Process

The Carson NF held three public meetings in January 2016 to introduce the wilderness recommendation process and present proposed Inventory criteria. Meetings were held from 6-8 p.m. in Tierra Amarilla, Taos, and Mora, NM. The forest solicited public feedback on two questions: (1) Was the list of proposed criteria appropriate and were they being applied appropriately? and (2) What does wilderness mean to you or how do you feel about wilderness? These questions were also posted on the forest's website for two weeks to allow comment from a wider audience. The responses to these [questions](#) were consolidated and published as a report that is available on the Carson NF's website. Many comments were more appropriate to the later Evaluation or Analysis steps, and have been addressed there. Some comments had to do with opening or closing roads, which is not a decision to be made through the wilderness recommendation process. Most comments related to the proposed Inventory criteria and process had to do with the need to exclude additional improvements such as acequias, trick tanks, corrals, etc. It was determined that these improvements would be better addressed during the Evaluation and Analysis Steps, as removing them from Inventory had little impact on the resulting map.

The criteria were applied to develop a draft Inventory map which was released to the public on January 26, 2016. The map was made available for comment online through the [Carson NF Forest Plan Revision website](#) and also as a hardcopy at each Carson NF ranger district office. Comments on the criteria, how they were applied, and whether any excluded areas should be re-added to the Inventory and taken into the Evaluation step were accepted for 30 days. Comments could be given through an online interactive map, by email, by mail, or in person at any ranger district office. Comments that related to a specific Inventory polygon were responded to. Those comments and responses, as well as all other comments received, are published on the Carson NF Forest Plan Revision website. As a result of public comments, seven polygons totaling 15,303 acres were re-added to the Inventory, because they were either adjacent to lands administered by the USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and managed to protect wilderness characteristics, or adjacent to lands on the Rio Grande NF that may be inventoried as part of its wilderness process.

A final Inventory map was released to the public on February 29, 2016. Six public meetings were held in April and May 2016 to present the map, explain the Evaluation step to follow, and solicit feedback on the proposed Evaluation process and Evaluation considerations. Meetings were from 6-8 p.m. in Abiquiu, Amalia, Taos, and Peñasco, NM, and Manassa, CO. A second meeting was held in Abiquiu, NM. The forest presented a general overview of the wilderness process and, in particular, the Evaluation step, explained the five wilderness characteristics to be evaluated, and presented proposed attributes of an area that would be considered when conducting the Evaluation. The public was asked to provide feedback on the proposed considerations for evaluating wilderness characteristics and then to apply the considerations to specific Inventory polygons. All public [comments for Inventory and Evaluation steps](#) were compiled and are available on the Carson NF Forest Plan Revision website.

Based on public feedback, some of the considerations for evaluating wilderness characteristics were clarified. These considerations were used to evaluate wilderness characteristics for each inventoried area. A preliminary evaluation was released for public review on June 15, 2016, and

included a draft map of areas evaluated as having wilderness characteristics and the corresponding summary reports for each inventoried area. The map and documentation were made available online and as a paper copy at each Carson NF ranger district office. The public was able to provide comment online, via email, via mail, or in person at any ranger district office. On June 15, 2016, the Carson NF held a meeting in Taos for elected officials and discussed the wilderness process, the Evaluation map, and the general forest plan revision timeline. In addition, the Carson NF planning team attended several meetings to present the wilderness process, explain the Evaluation process, present the draft Evaluation results, and assist attendees with providing comments. These meetings included a meeting hosted by the NM Department of Agriculture (Abiquiu 6/21/2016), in which all permittees with grazing allotments that overlapped an evaluation area were invited. On June 29, 2016, Rivers and Birds hosted a meeting in Taos, in which representatives of special interest groups and some unaffiliated members of the public were invited. The NM Land Grant Council hosted a meeting in Cebolla on July 12, 2016, for all land grant heirs with interest in any of the areas that were evaluated as having wilderness characteristics. Representatives from the Carson NF attended the Land Grant Consejo meeting on June 4, 2016, in Tierra Amarilla to present and discuss wilderness, and presented before the Interim Land Grant Legislative Committee on July 12, 2016, in Peñasco. As a result of public comments and more accurate on-the-ground information, four evaluation area's names were changed, and 25,789 acres were reevaluated for wilderness characteristics after the preliminary evaluation.

Since 2016, the draft wilderness evaluation document was posted on the plan revision web page and hard copies were placed at each district offices for the public to review and provide feedback. A preliminary draft forest plan was posted in July 2017 and an updated version which incorporated public feedback was posted again in December 2017. The forest also spent time meeting with groups or individuals who requested a meeting, which included the NNMSA, The Wilderness Society, land grants, acequias and tribes, to discuss wilderness and other plan revision comments.

In August 2017 the Carson NF held 4 placed based meetings to discuss potential management areas in four areas, which included recommended wilderness, around the forest that were of special interest to local communities, land grants, tribes, recreation users, and conservation groups. The meetings were a way for the forest to hear collectively from these users but also for them to hear from each other how they value and use the forest.

The Carson NF held monthly open houses beginning in August 2016 to allow the public to speak with and ask questions of Carson NF personnel on the many documents, including wilderness being developed as part of the draft forest plan and draft EIS.

Tribal Engagement for the Wilderness Recommendation Process

Involvement with federally recognized Tribes has been ongoing. A letter announcing the initiation of the Wilderness Recommendation Process and the first set of meetings was sent to the 17 tribes with an interest in the Carson NF. A letter explaining the Evaluation step and a copy of the draft Evaluation map was sent to each tribe following its release. Representatives from the Carson NF attended the Regional Forester's Tribal Consultation meeting on June 14, 2016, in which wilderness was a topic of discussion. The forest planner and forest archeologist/tribal

representative met with the Jemez Pueblo on June 28, 2016, Picuris Pueblo on July 18, 2016, Taos Pueblo on July 27, 2016 to discuss the Wilderness Recommendation Process and the draft Evaluation results.

The forest held a tribal roundtable session in April 2017, inviting 16 tribes who have expressed interest in the cultural, spiritual, and historical importance of the Carson NF lands. The roundtable sessions were developed to allow the tribal partners to talk with forest leadership about what they wanted from forest management, including recommended wilderness, what things they thought worked well, and how we could go forward collectively as we develop and implement the new plan. The Carson NF also participated in two Regional tribal roundtables held by the Southwest Regional Forester. These discussions brought together all of the national forests in New Mexico to discuss, learn, and collaborate with tribes around forest plan revision, including recommended wilderness.

Since 2017, to better hear from the tribes, the Carson NF participated with several tribes (Taos Pueblo, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris Pueblo, Santa Clara Pueblo, and the Jicarilla Apache Nation) quarterly to discuss current issues and potential projects. These quarterly discussions also included updates and information sharing around the plan revision process, including recommended wilderness.

Inventory

Inventory is the first step in the Wilderness Recommendation Process. It identifies which lands to be evaluated for wilderness characteristics by using criteria. The criteria help to determine which lands should move forward in the process, or which already have certain conditions that don't make them viable for further consideration. During Inventory, any private land within the forest boundary was not included for consideration and existing designated wilderness areas were also removed from further consideration. Generally, the Inventory criteria are based on the size of the parcel, if the landscape has open roads, and the types of improvements (such as structures) found within the landscape. The Inventory step also considers how substantially noticeable these improvements are.

The Carson NF started the Inventory step using the definitions and requirements found in the directives for recommending wilderness during forest plan revision (FSH 1909.12, 71.2). After developing the draft criteria using directive guidance, the forest asked the public to help confirm the criteria or make changes or adjustments to the criteria. The Inventory criteria were finalized after internal review and input from the public. The criteria used to create the Inventory for the Carson NF are:

Size: Blocks of land must be 5,000 acres or larger to be included in the Inventory. Smaller areas were added back into the Inventory if:

1. they are adjacent to an existing wilderness, or other lands that are being managed to preserve their primitive character, or
2. they are of sufficient size and geography that they may be effectively preserved, used, and managed in an unimpaired condition.

Roads: Roads open to motor vehicle use, based on the most recent motor vehicle use maps (MVUM) were removed from the Inventory. To capture the actual influence of roads, all open

roads identified on the MVUM were buffered by a minimum of 100 feet on either side. Some roads identified on the MVUM have either 150 or 300 foot corridors for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval. Where those corridors exist, the buffer was extended to match that distance delineated on the MVUM. Sixteen permitted roads that are not open to the public, but are permitted for administrative, maintenance, or other uses were also buffered by 100 feet and removed from further consideration.

Improvements: Only those improvements that are not substantially noticeable in the area as a whole were included in the Inventory. The Carson NF defined substantially noticeable to mean the improvements are visually apparent on aerial photographs at a scale of one inch to one mile. The list below includes improvements that were considered substantially noticeable and were removed from the Inventory.

- Surfaced runways or landing pads with permanent structures. None exist on the Carson NF.
- Clearcut forested areas larger than 10 acres (e.g., regeneration harvest areas, unshaded fuelbreaks, and piñon-juniper chaining).
- Complexes of vertical structures over 20 feet tall that: (1) require regular access for maintenance; (2) have associated ground disturbance that is one acre or greater; and (3) occur in a complex with a density of 3 or more per 500 acres. The entire complex-affected area was removed from Inventory. This resulted in one single tower complex removed from further consideration.
- Water developments with windmills that are over 20 feet tall that: (1) have associated ground disturbance of one acre or greater and (2) occur in a complex with a density of 3 or more per 500 acres. On the Carson NF, no windmills occur in a complex of 3 or more; therefore, none were removed.
- Complexes of gas extraction wells that occur in a complex with a density of 3 or more per 500 acres were considered. Again, the entire complex-affected area was removed from Inventory. Some areas on the Jicarilla Ranger District met this complex criterion and were removed from further consideration.
- Open pit mines were considered. None exist on the Carson NF.
- Recreation areas were considered. Recreation management areas (e.g. ski areas and developed campgrounds), as defined by the current forest plan, were removed from further consideration.
- Powerlines and pipelines with a cleared corridor were considered. No known above-ground pipelines greater than 6 inches occur on the Carson NF. A 100-foot corridor was applied to powerlines with a visible corridor on aerial photos and these areas were removed from further consideration.
- Structures that occur as a complex were considered. Structures were defined as a building that is mapped in the Carson NF's GIS database. A complex of structures was defined as 3 or more per 25 acres. The entire complex-affected area was removed from Inventory. Twenty complexes of buildings were removed from further consideration.
- Railroads were considered. One railroad crosses the Carson NF. It was buffered by 100 feet and the buffered area was removed from further consideration.

- Dams were considered. One concrete dam occurs on the Carson NF. The footprint of the dam was removed from further consideration.

Once the above criteria were applied and areas removed, acreages were calculated for each of the remaining areas and any that were smaller than 5,000 acres were reviewed to see if these areas were geographically manageable to preserve primitive character. Inventory Areas that were smaller than 5,000 acres, but larger than one acre and adjacent to an existing designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, national monuments, or other similarly protected lands were added back in, as these areas could possibly be managed in an unimpaired condition to preserve primitive character. All other Inventory Areas that were smaller than 5,000 acres but were not adjacent to existing wilderness or similarly protected lands were removed from the inventory. These areas were found to have little topographic definition to be able to manage in an unimpaired condition as these areas were surrounded by existing open roads or private land and were in impaired condition due adjacent activities and accessibility. This resulted in 88 discrete areas totaling 880,594 acres that would be carried into the Evaluation Step. Each of these areas were labeled with their Inventory numbers as a way of referencing each area throughout the process.

Seven areas were re-added to the Inventory, based on feedback from the public and better site-specific information. Reasons for re-adding areas were either the area was adjacent to BLM lands that may be managed to protect wilderness character or adjacent to lands on the Rio Grande NF that may be inventoried as part of its Wilderness Recommendation Process. A total of 15,303 acres were added back into the Inventory between draft and final. The final Inventory was 895,897 acres. Some of the comments received during the preliminary Inventory were related to areas that were already included in the Inventory. Some comments were more appropriate for Evaluation and were carried forward and used to inform the Evaluation step.

Inventory Results

About 60 percent (895,897 acres) of the Carson NF was included in the Inventory. Table 1 and Figure 2 through Figure 5 show lands included in the Inventory and the ranger district on which they are located.

The Carson NF is made up of the Questa, Camino Real, Tres Piedras, El Rito, Canjilon, and Jicarilla Ranger Districts. Their locations are shown on the map below.

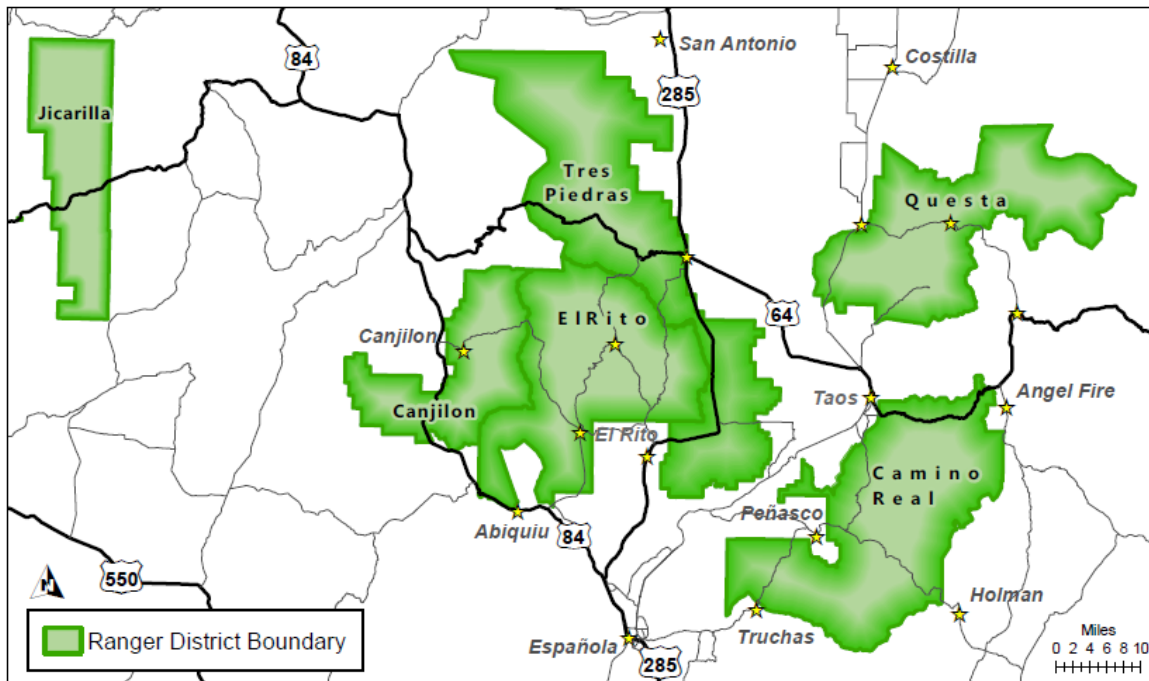


Figure 1. Ranger districts on the Carson National Forest

Table 1. Inventoried lands acres by ranger district and evaluation areas

Ranger District	Inventory Number ¹	Acres
Camino Real	C1	5,077
Camino Real	C2	5,196
Camino Real	C3	5,304
Camino Real	C4	19,091
Camino Real	C5	6,075
Camino Real	C6	6,183
Camino Real	C7	6,887
Camino Real	C9	9,155
Camino Real	C10	12,869
Camino Real	C11	13,710
Camino Real	C12	14,846
Camino Real	C13	21,874
Camino Real	C14	52,625
Camino Real	C15	61,619
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW1	322

¹ Each of inventory area were labeled with Inventory number as a way of referencing each area throughout the process.

Ranger District	Inventory Number ¹	Acres
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW2	393
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW3	400
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW4	484
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW5	523
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW6	745
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW7	902
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW8	1,130
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW9	1,134
El Rito and Canjilon	W1	5,405
El Rito and Canjilon	W2	5,432
El Rito and Canjilon	W3	5,484
El Rito and Canjilon	W5	5,828
El Rito and Canjilon	W6	6,022
El Rito and Canjilon	W8	6,479
El Rito and Canjilon	W9	6,802
El Rito and Canjilon	W15	8,034
El Rito and Canjilon	W16	8,045
El Rito and Canjilon	W18	9,466
El Rito and Canjilon	W19	10,347
El Rito and Canjilon	W22	13,202
El Rito and Canjilon	W23	13,839
El Rito and Canjilon	W24	17,199
El Rito and Canjilon	W25	14,455
El Rito and Canjilon	W26	24,717
El Rito and Canjilon	W28	27,399
El Rito and Canjilon	W31	36,354
El Rito and Canjilon	W32	39,929
El Rito and Canjilon	Wxs596ADD	304
El Rito and Canjilon	Wxs671ADD	1,113
Jicarilla	J1	5,757
Jicarilla	J2	8,343
Jicarilla	J3	9,178
Jicarilla	J4	9,327
Jicarilla	J5	19,212
Questa	ChW1	1
Questa	ChW2	2
Questa	ChW3	7
Questa	ChW4	21

Ranger District	Inventory Number ¹	Acres
Questa	ChW5	2,866
Questa	ChW6	4,789
Questa	LpW1	364
Questa	LpW2	2,042
Questa	Q1	5,807
Questa	Q2	6,475
Questa	Q3	9,544
Questa	Q4	33,562
Questa	Q5	69,682
Questa	Qxs162ADD	3,660
Questa	WpW1	11
Questa	WpW2	11
Questa	WpW3	50
Questa	WpW4	324
Questa	WpW5	1,600
Questa	WpW6	3,454
Tres Piedras	CbW1	3
Tres Piedras	CbW2	5
Tres Piedras	CbW3	7
Tres Piedras	CbW4	9
Tres Piedras	CbW5	12
Tres Piedras	CbW6	13
Tres Piedras	CbW7	22
Tres Piedras	CbW8	23
Tres Piedras	CbW9	805
Tres Piedras	W4	5,539
Tres Piedras	W7	6,126
Tres Piedras	W10	6,902
Tres Piedras	W11	7,139
Tres Piedras	W12	7,157
Tres Piedras	W13	7,543
Tres Piedras	W14	7,906
Tres Piedras	W17	8,958
Tres Piedras	W20	11,842
Tres Piedras	W21	12,162
Tres Piedras	W25	5,760
Tres Piedras	W27	25,680
Tres Piedras	W29	31,738

Ranger District	Inventory Number ¹	Acres
Tres Piedras	W30	31,838
Tres Piedras	Wxs573ADD	208
Tres Piedras	Wxs701ADD	2,304
Tres Piedras	Wxs710ADD	3,271
Tres Piedras	Wxs723ADD	4,445
Total	95	895,897

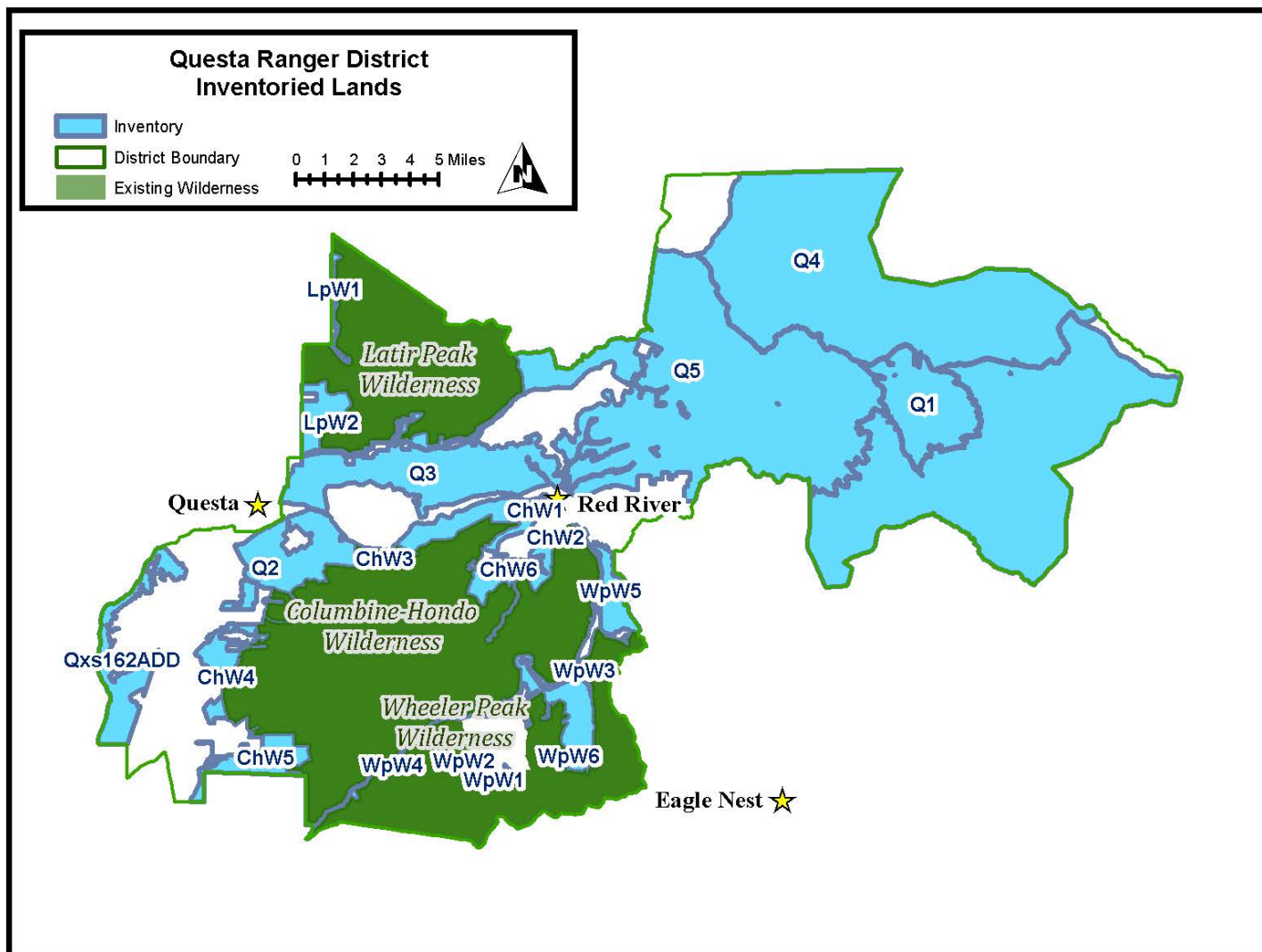


Figure 2. Questa Ranger District inventoried lands

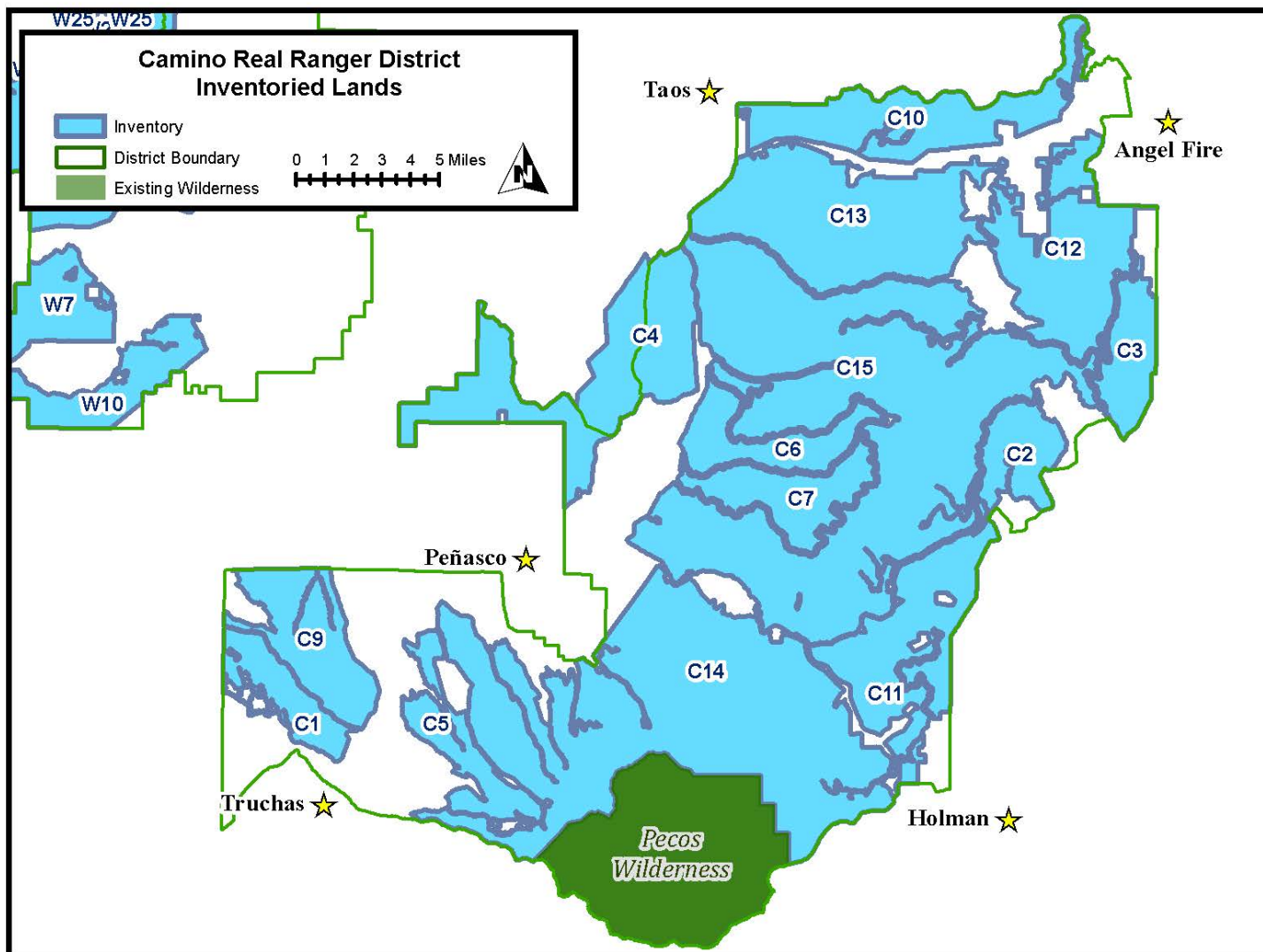


Figure 3. Camino Real Ranger District inventoried lands

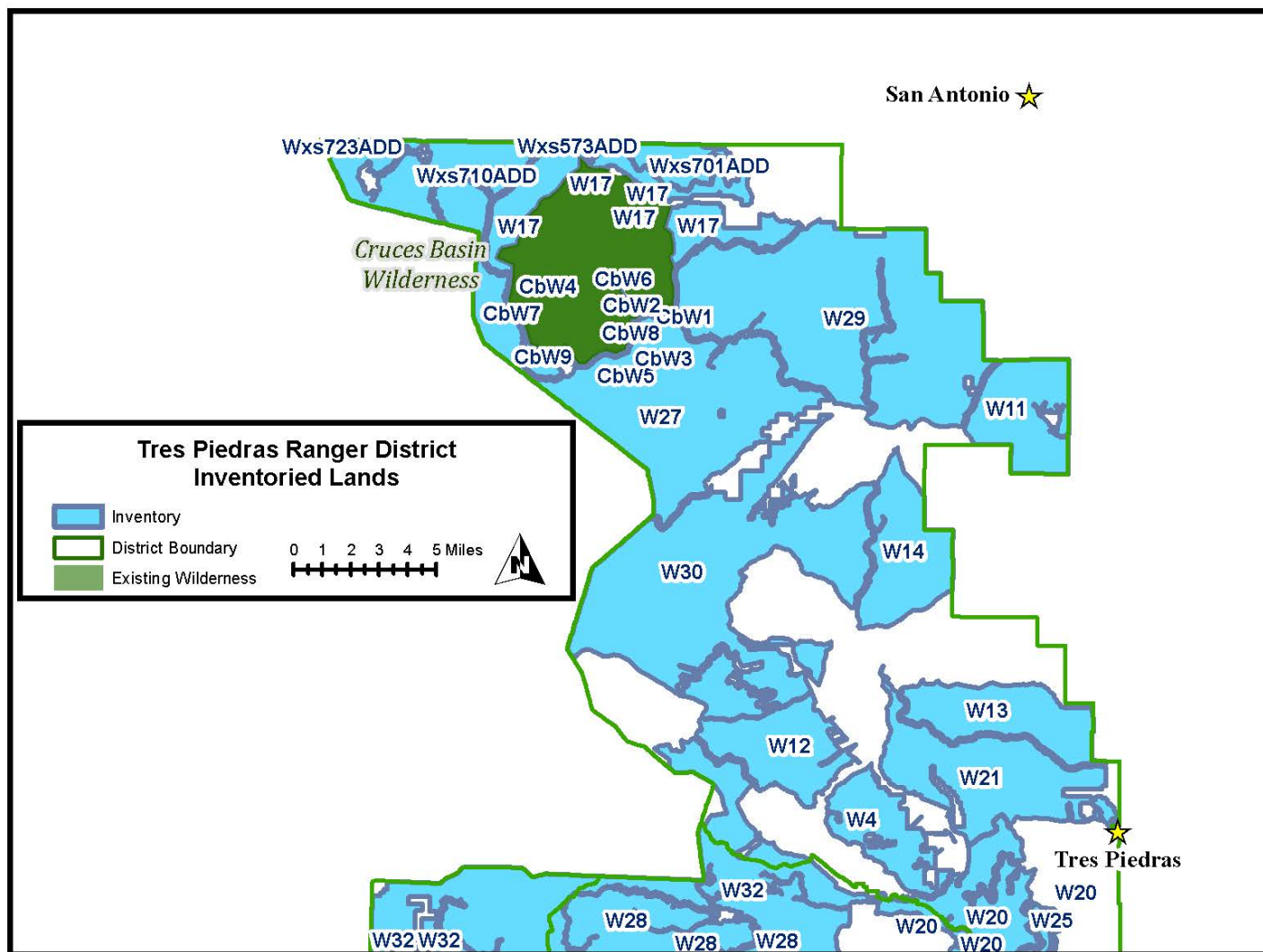


Figure 4. Northern part of the Tres Piedras Ranger District Inventoried Lands

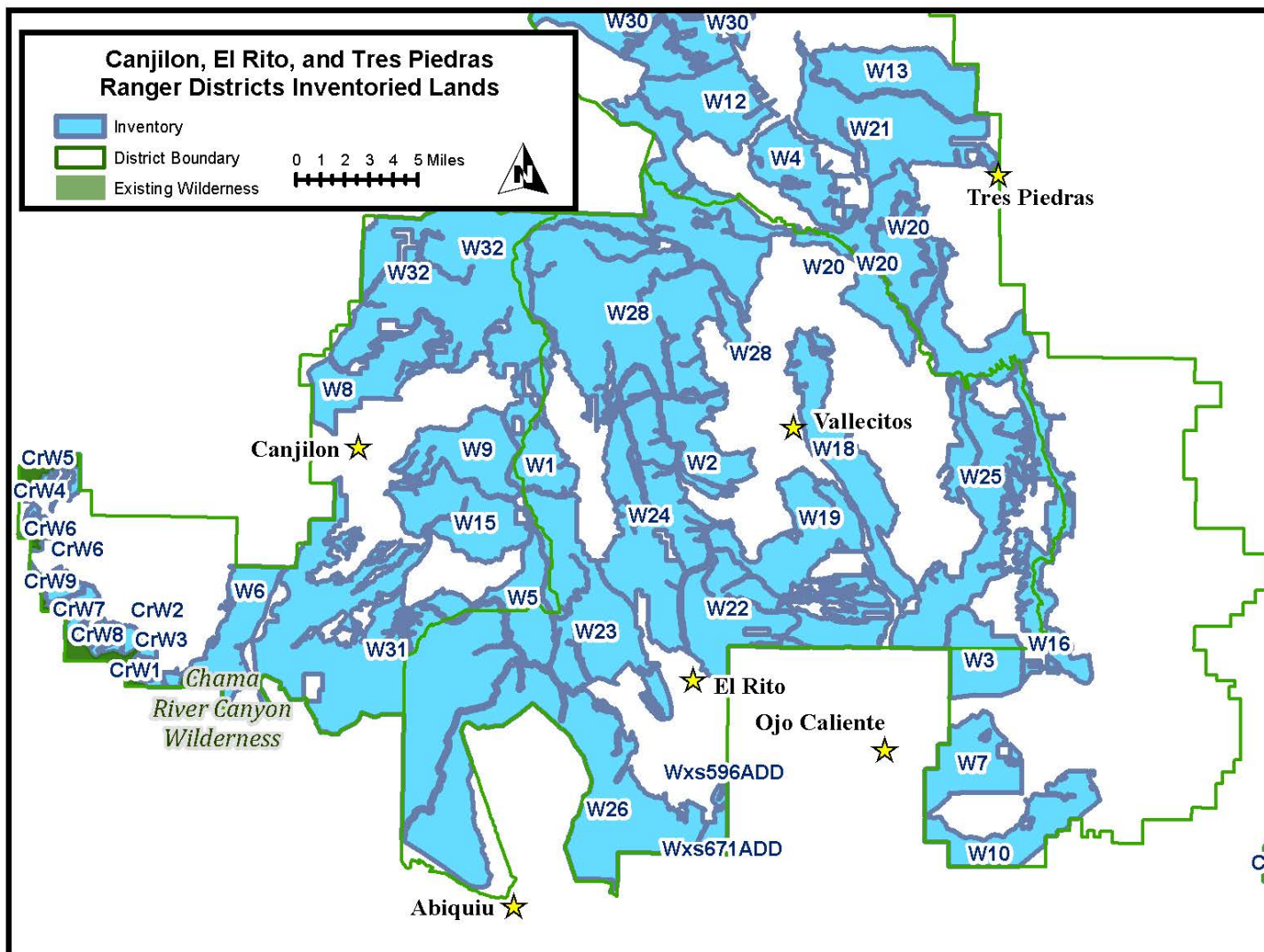


Figure 5. Canjilon, El Rito, and the southern part of Tres Piedras Ranger District inventoried lands

Evaluation

The purpose of the Evaluation step is to determine if the lands included in the Inventory have wilderness characteristics. Lands evaluated as having wilderness characteristics may then be carried forward into the Analysis step. The results of the Analysis help inform the determination of which lands may be carried forward for final Recommendation. The draft forest plan and alternatives incorporate some, none, or all of the lands from Evaluation, depending on the theme of the alternative. The environmental impact statement (EIS) documents the Analysis of anticipated effects, if lands were to be managed as wilderness, under the proposed forest plan and each alternative.

Wilderness character is defined by five wilderness characteristics described by the Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964, with direction from Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70, section 72.1) on land management planning. To determine potential suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, the Forest Plan Revision Team, extended team members, and district employees evaluated each inventoried area, using the five wilderness characteristics as defined below:

Characteristic 1: Apparent naturalness

Addresses the question: Does the area generally appear to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable? Consider such factors as:

- The composition of plant and animal communities. The purpose of this factor is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural (for example, past management activities have created a plantation style forest with trees of a uniform species, age, and planted in rows);
- The extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention; and
- The extent to which improvements included in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness.

Characteristic 2: Opportunities for solitude or unconfined recreation

Addresses the question: Does the area have outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? The word "or" means that an area only has to possess one or the other. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.

Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area. Factors to consider may include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area.

Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.

Characteristic 3: Size

Addresses the question: Is the area of sufficient size to practically manage it for its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition?

Characteristic 4: Ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values (Outstanding Values)

Addresses the question: Does the area contain ecological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value? These are not required to be present, but should be identified and evaluated where they exist. Such features or values may include:

- Rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems. Rare can be determined locally, regionally, nationally, or within the system of protected designations.
- Outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features.
- Historic and cultural resource sites. (Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056)).
- Research natural areas.
- High quality water resources or important watershed features.

Characteristic 5: Manageability of wilderness characteristics

Addresses the question: Can the area be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics? Consider such factors as:

- Shape and configuration of the area;
- Legally established rights or uses within the area;
- Specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics;
- The presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area; and
- Management of adjacent lands.

To facilitate the Evaluation, all inventoried lands were grouped together by either watershed boundaries or allotment boundaries, and called evaluation areas.

Table 2 and Figure 6 show these evaluation areas, the inventory numbers included in these areas, and the acres of inventoried lands within each evaluation area. The names of four evaluation areas have been changed in response to public comments during the initial Evaluation released for comment in June of 2016. Embudo Creek Watershed was changed to Camino Real South; Petaca was changed to Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes; Cruces Basin and San Antonio was changed to Tres Piedras North; and Arroyo Seco Watershed was changed to Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch. All inventoried lands within each evaluation area were individually evaluated for wilderness characteristics, but discussed as a whole within each evaluation area.

Table 2. Evaluation areas, Inventory Numbers within Evaluation Areas, and acres on each ranger district

Ranger District	Evaluation Area	Inventory Numbers ¹	Acres
Camino Real	Camino Real South	C1, C5, C9, C11, and C14	86,643
Camino Real	Luna-Coyote	C2 and C3	10,500
Camino Real	Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed	C6, C7, C12, C13, and C15	111,408
Camino Real	Taos Canyon	C10	12,869
Camino Real	Warm Spring-Miranda	C4	19,091
El Rito and Canjilon	Alamosa	W18, W19, and W22	33,016
El Rito and Canjilon	Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds	W8, W28, and W32	73,807
El Rito and Canjilon	Comanche East Canyon	W3, W16, and W25	27,984
El Rito and Canjilon	El Rito-Lobato	W1, W2, W23, W24, W26, Wxs596ADD, and Wxs671ADD	68,008
El Rito and Canjilon	Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch	W5, W9, W15, and W31	57,018
El Rito and Canjilon	Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater	CrW1, CrW2, CrW3, CrW4, CrW5, CrW6, CrW7, CrW8, CrW9, and W6	12,056
Jicarilla	Jicarilla	J1, J2, J3, J4, and J5	51,816
Questa	Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments	ChW1, ChW2, ChW3, ChW4, ChW5, ChW6, Q2, WpW1, WpW2, WpW3, WpW4, WpW5, and WpW6	19,612
Questa	Latir Wilderness Accompaniments	LpW1 and LpW2	2,085
Questa	Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon	LpW2, Q3, and Q5	23,557

¹ Each of inventory area was labeled with Inventory number as a way of referencing each area throughout the process.

Ranger District	Evaluation Area	Inventory Numbers ¹	Acres
Questa	Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments	Qxs162ADD	3,660
Questa	Valle Vidal	Q1, Q4, and Q5	95,351
Tres Piedras	Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul	W7 and W10	13,028
Tres Piedras	Rio Tusas Watershed	W4, W12, W20, and W25	30,298
Tres Piedras	Tres Piedras North	CbW1, CbW2, CbW3, CbW4, CbW5, CbW6, CbW7, CbW8, CbW9, W11, W17, W27, W29, W30, Wxs573ADD, Wxs701ADD, Wxs710ADD, and Wxs723ADD	116,479
Tres Piedras	Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes	W13, W14, and W21	27,611
Total	21	95	895,897

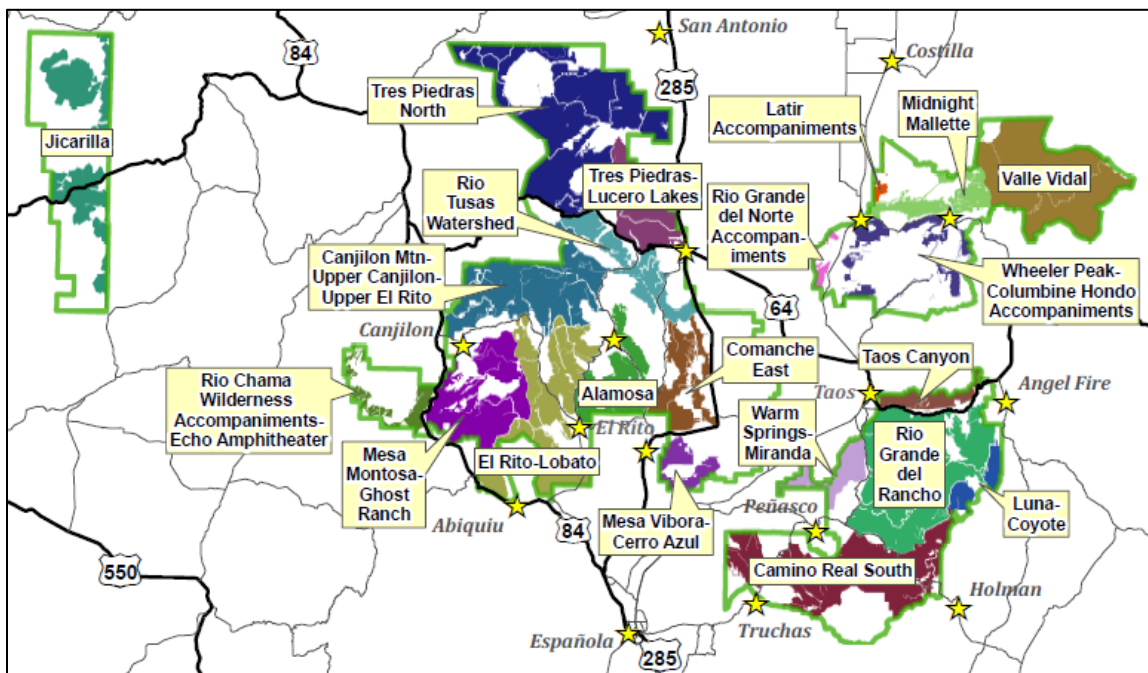


Figure 6. Evaluation areas

The evaluation of inventoried lands for wilderness characteristics was a qualitative evaluation. A preliminary evaluation was released to the public June 2016 for comment. As a result of public comments and more accurate on-the-ground information, four evaluation area's names were changed, and 25,789 acres were reevaluated for wilderness characteristics after the preliminary evaluation.

The Evaluation is sorted first by ranger district, then by the evaluation areas within each of the ranger districts, and finally by the narrative discussion of the five wilderness characteristics within each evaluation area.

There were several resources used to inform the evaluation that included: 1) on-the-ground knowledge of Forest Service personnel, 2) aerial photos, 3) GIS data, 4) field visits, 5) knowledge of our cooperating agencies¹, and 6) input from the public.

The evaluation of inventoried lands for wilderness characteristics was a qualitative evaluation. Using the tools and information described above, a narrative discussion for each wilderness characteristic in each evaluation area was developed. To determine if an evaluation area or part of an evaluation area has wilderness characteristics, Wilderness Characteristics 1-5 were evaluated individually for each evaluation area and then a collective determination was made which considered all of the characteristics together for each evaluation area. In other words, an evaluation area needs to have both Wilderness Characteristics 1, 2, and 5 for an area to have wilderness characteristics. The evaluation area is then evaluated for Characteristic 3, size. If the area is less than 5,000 acres, other factors (e.g., ability to be managed to retain wilderness characteristics, adjacency to other federal lands with wilderness characteristics) must be considered to make a final determination. If Wilderness Characteristic 4 exists, the evaluation must also meet all of the other criteria as described above.

Evaluation Process

The forest tried to be as thorough as possible in describing manmade activities or structures (identified using the tools and information described above) within or adjacent to the evaluation areas and where they were located. Adjacent manmade activities could affect apparent naturalness and/or solitude and unconfined recreation. Outstanding values (Characteristic 4) were discussed only if they existed within an evaluation area. Management of evaluation area and of adjacent federal lands was also taken into consideration when the area was evaluated for wilderness characteristics. When Evaluation Areas were evaluated, Characteristic 1, 2, and 5 were evaluated first, then Characteristic 4, and then Characteristic 3. Below the characteristics will be discussed in the order they were evaluated.

¹ The Carson National Forest has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with 14 key state and local government entities and two Indian Tribes to involve them as cooperating agencies in revising and updating its existing forest plan. Members of Carson NF's Government Working Group include Counties of Colfax, Mora, Rio Arriba, and Taos, Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Colfax, East Rio Arriba, San Juan, Taos, and Western Mora, NM Acequia Commission, NM Land Grant Council, NM Environment, Surface Water Quality Bureau, NM Department of Agriculture, NM Department of Game and Fish, NM State Forestry, Picuris Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, and Jicarilla Apache Nation.

How we considered Characteristic 5 - Manageability.

When evaluating for manageability, we considered areas which would conflict with managing the area for wilderness characteristics. The rationale for removing these specific areas from further evaluation is described below:

Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit

The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” Given that the management for a federal sustained yield unit requires timber harvesting projects and large scale motorized and mechanized equipment use, the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit will be removed from portions of Evaluation Areas.

Wild Horse Territories

The Carson NF has four federally designated wild horse territories; however, only the Jarita Mesa and Jicarilla Wild Horse Territories are occupied and have management plans. Mesa Montosa and Mesa de las Viegas were declassified as wild horse territories in the 1986 Carson Forest Plan, and these territories do not have management plans. The Forest Service is required to manage these wild horse herds to protect the herd and maintain ecological integrity of the land. The management plans for these areas require managing population numbers by capturing and transporting excessive members of the herd. This generally requires the use of all-terrain vehicles and motor vehicles with trailers, which are stated as management tools in the plan. Given the management requirements necessitated by the existing federal designation, the management to preserve wilderness characteristics in these two Wild Horse Territories is precluded by the previous existing designated use of the area as directed by the territories’ management plans. For this reason, these two Wild Horse Territories were removed from portions of Evaluation Areas.

Acequias

Acequias predate the National Forest Reservation and are afforded special rights and status under National Forest System management. Under the Chief’s Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. A 100-foot buffer was drawn around known acequias that have legally existing water rights and the right-of-way to maintain structures (i.e., headgates, flumes, channel), to include the use of motorized or mechanized equipment.

Acequias are historic ditches throughout the forest that bring water from rivers and streams to communities for irrigation purposes. They are generally community-run through associations headed by a majordomo (ditch master) and date back to the time of Spanish settlement in the 1500s. These waterways are still in use today for the original purposes for which they were established.



Figure 7. Acequia de Arriba del Llano de San Miguel (C14)

Wildland Urban Interface

Fire Management Unit 1 areas are WUI areas on the Carson NF that are near towns or villages. WUI areas that require intensive management of fuels and intrusive suppression action if a fire occurs. This makes it difficult to manage to preserve wilderness characteristics. As documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, these units are under current fire management direction, which states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property.

Shape and Configuration

Shape and configuration consideration was contingent upon pinch points. A pinch point is a strip of land within an inventoried area that is less than ¼ mile wide between existing roadways. This pinch point could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics.

Valle Vidal Private Property

During the Inventory step, portions of land within Valle Vidal (Q5) were misidentified as National Forest System lands. Further inspection during Evaluation found they were private lands belonging to Vermejo Park.

Example of how we considered Characteristic 5- Manageability

Figure 8 shows an example inventory polygon XXX (5,343 acres), which is an example scenario of areas which would conflict with managing the area for wilderness characteristics (Characteristic 5) could look like within an inventory polygon. For the sample scenario, 10 percent (532 acres) of Inventory Area XXX would be evaluated as areas which would conflict with managing the area for wilderness characteristics.

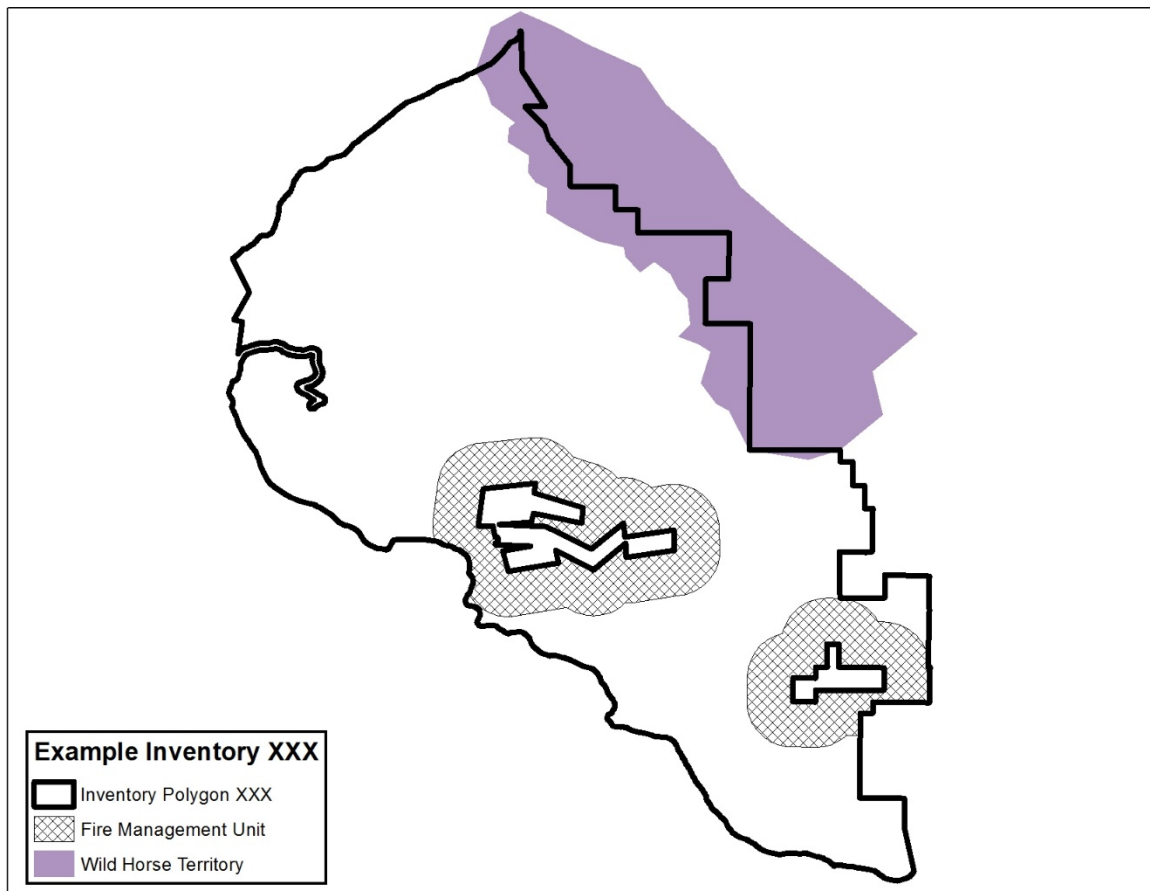


Figure 8. Areas evaluated as areas which would conflict with managing the area for wilderness characteristics in example Inventory XXX.

How we considered Characteristic 1 - apparent naturalness.

When evaluating for apparent naturalness, we considered the extent to which manmade improvements and activities existing in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness. These manmade improvements or activities included mines that are still in use or have been rehabilitated in the last 15 years, old logging roads that are still visible and were GPSed on the ground, range and wildlife improvements (e.g. spring developments, cattle guards, trick tanks, and corrals), and evidence (e.g. stumps and slash) of logging activities that have occurred within the last 10 years. Figure 9 shows an example inventory polygon XXX, which is an example scenario of what naturally apparent manmade improvements and activities could look like within an inventory polygon.

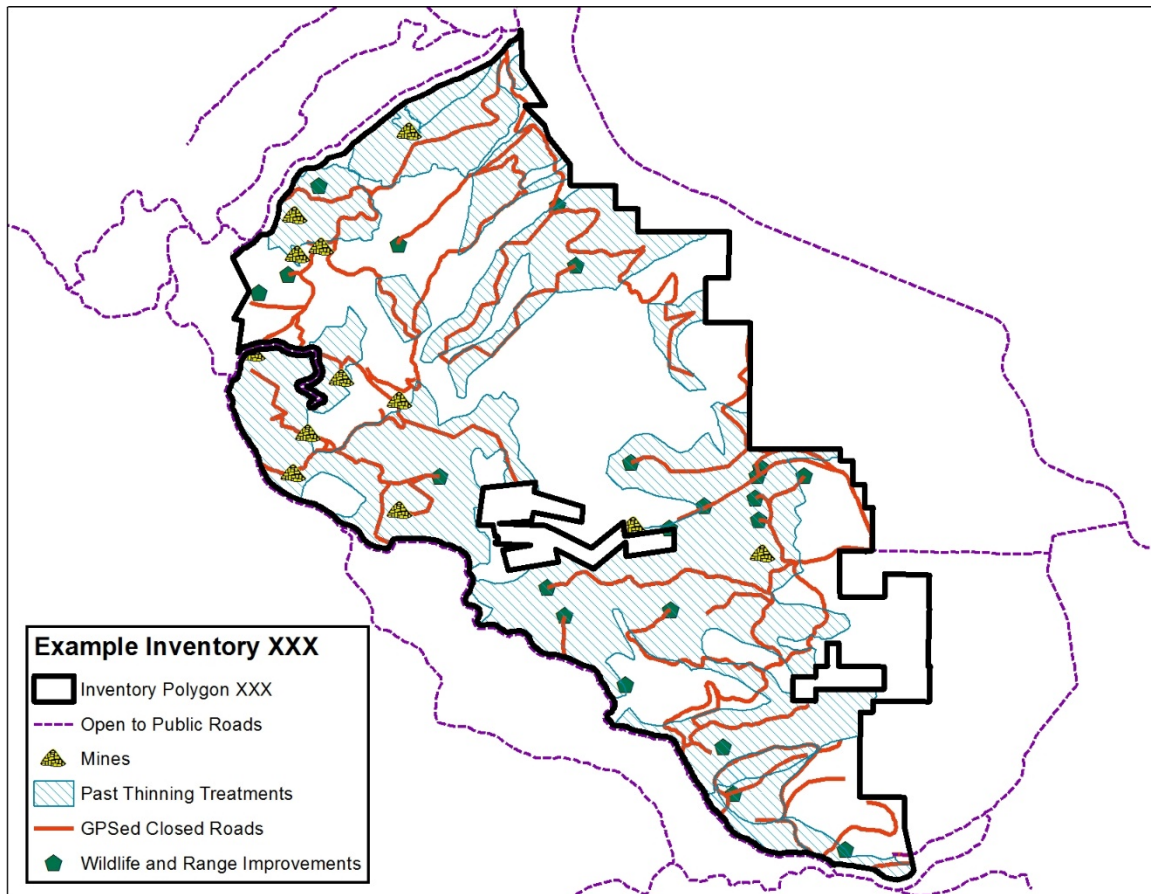


Figure 9: Example of manmade improvements and activities that are apparent within Scenario Inventory Area XXX

The forest evaluated where and how prevalent these activities or improvements occurred within all inventoried lands of the evaluation area. For the sample scenario, 54 percent (2,897 acres) of Inventory Area XXX would be evaluated as lacking apparent naturalness. Figure 10 shows the areas evaluated in this example that were determined to have apparent naturalness (2,446 acres or 46 percent) within Inventory polygon XXX.

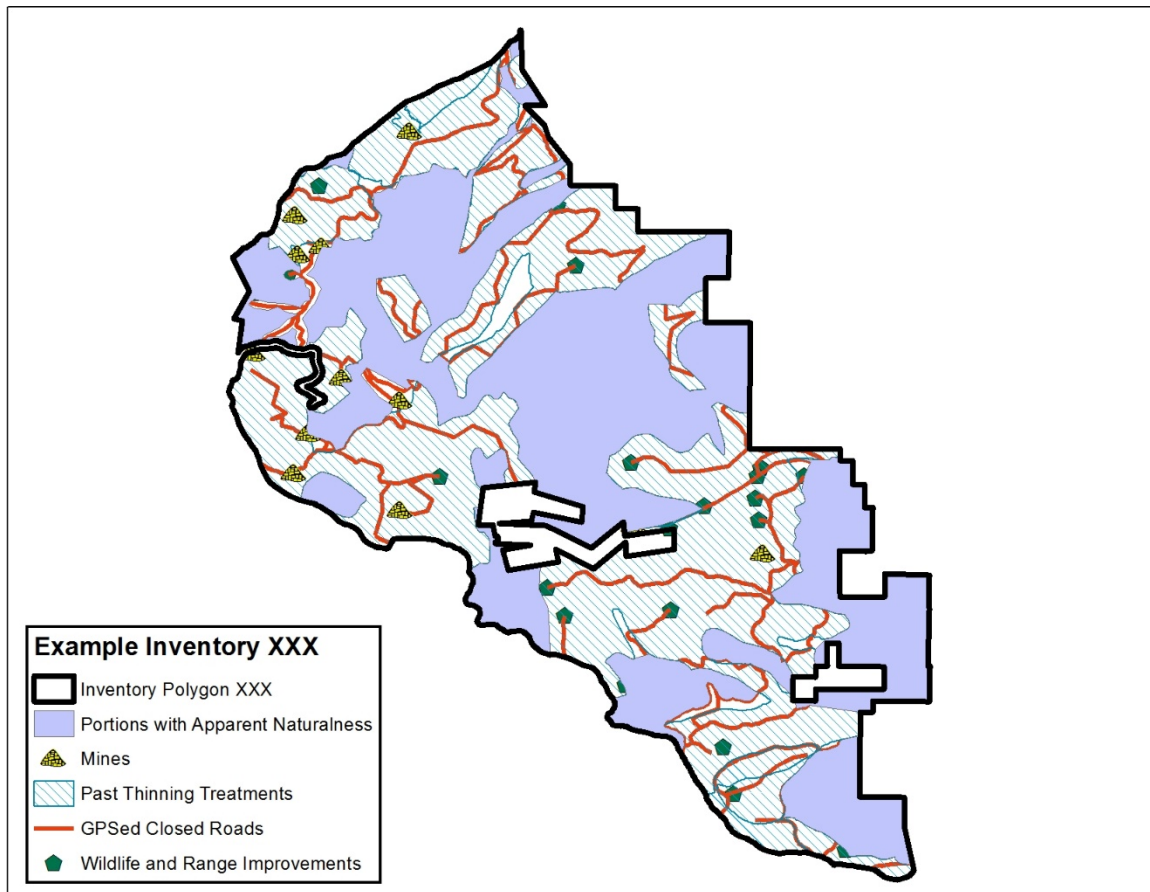


Figure 10: Areas evaluated as having apparent naturalness in example Inventory XXX

How we considered Characteristic 2- solitude or unconfined recreation.

When evaluating for solitude, we considered pervasive sights and sounds from just outside and within the evaluation area. A 0.25-mile buffer around noise factors was used to address potential noise issues. Factors included chainsaw noise from fuelwood gathering along existing open roads, train whistles, vehicle noise on existing roads, and areas currently open to snowmobile use during the winter. For the example scenario, 75 percent (4,009 acres) of Inventory polygon XXX would be evaluated as having solitude characteristic (Figure 11).

When evaluating for unconfined recreation, we considered the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. A majority of the inventory polygons are evaluated as having unconfined recreation. Figure 11 shows areas evaluated as having both solitude and unconfined recreation (71 percent or 3,778 acres) within Inventory polygon XXX.

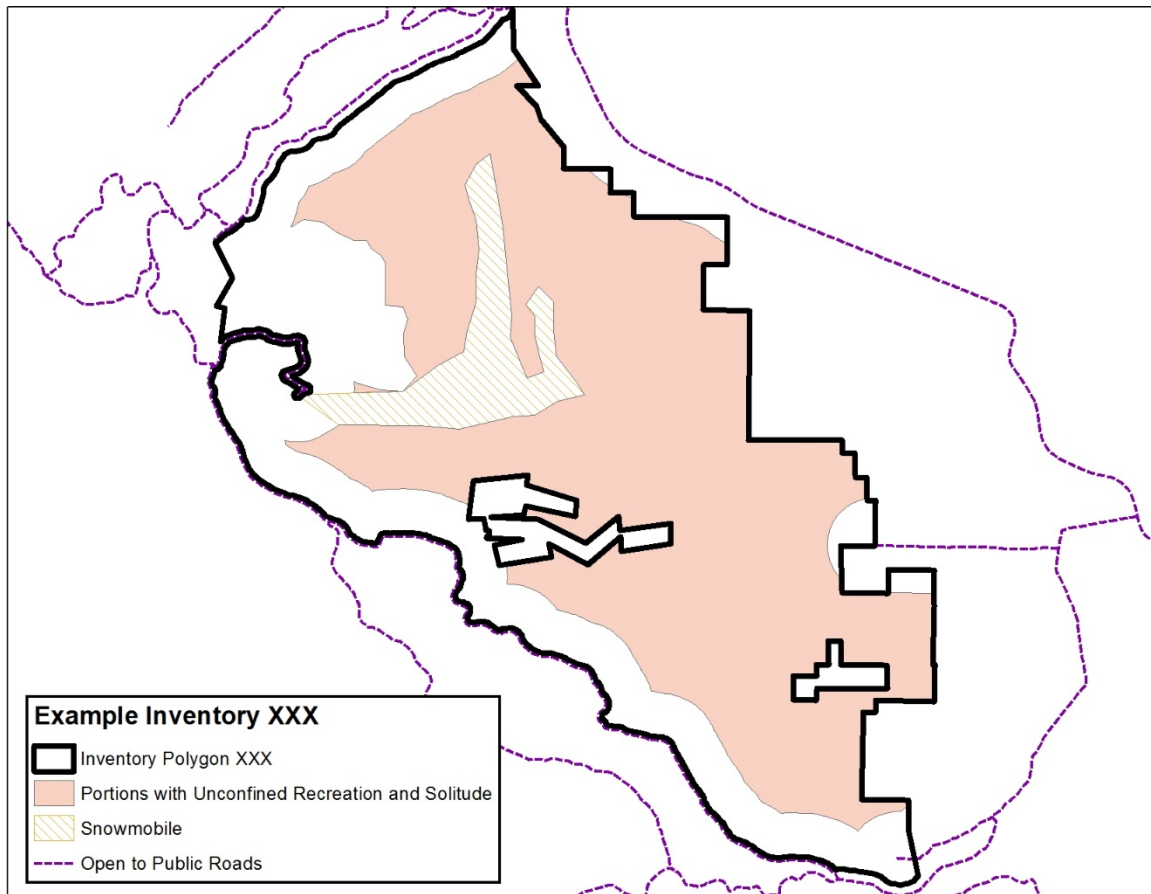


Figure 11: Areas evaluated as having solitude and unconfined recreation in example Inventory XXX

How we considered Characteristic 4 - outstanding values.

Outstanding values (Characteristic 4) were evaluated only when they were found to exist within an evaluation area. Factors included rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems; outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; historic and cultural resource sites; and high-quality water resources or important watershed features. Figure 12 shows where some outstanding features were evaluated in Inventory XXX. For this example, scenario, a national historic trail and eligible wild and scenic rivers were included within Inventory polygon XXX.

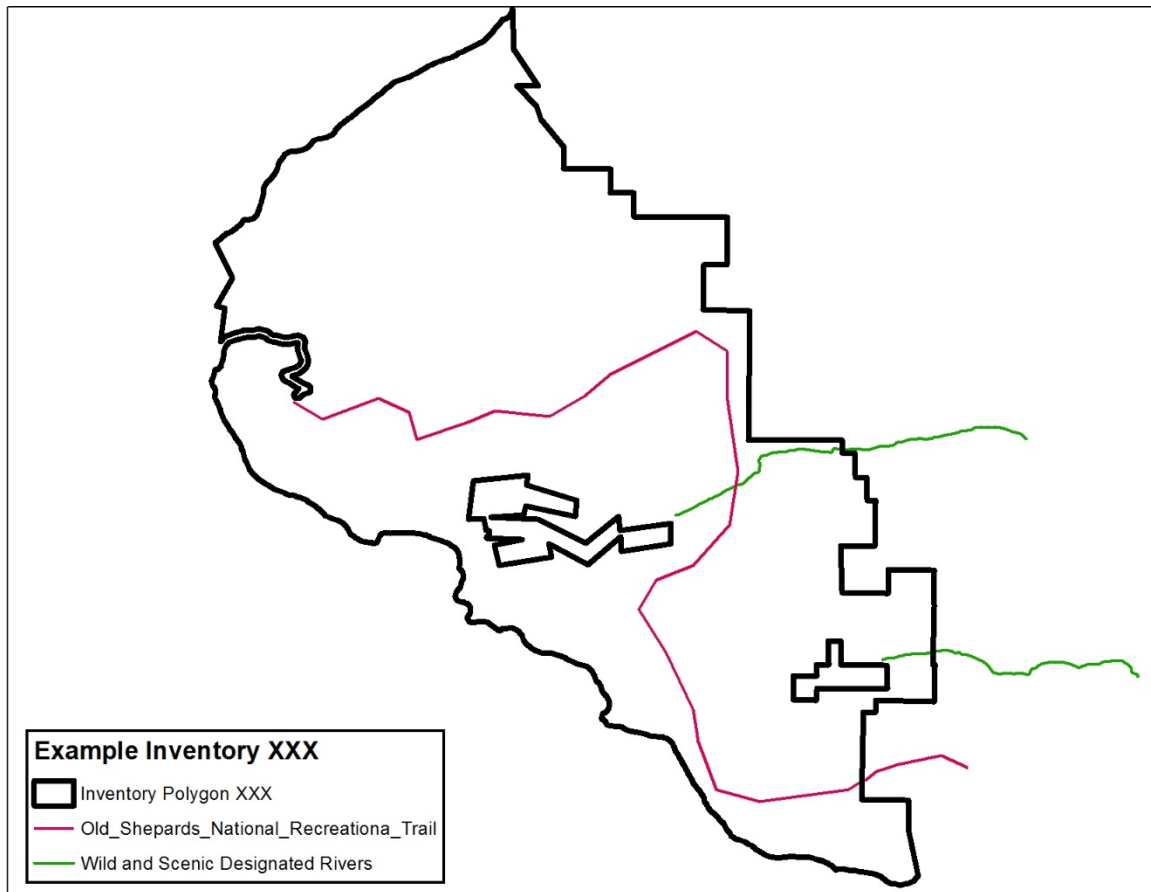


Figure 12: Outstanding Values within Example Inventory XXX

How we considered Characteristic 3 - size.

For the final step, Characteristics 1-4 were then evaluated all together for each evaluation area. The forest considered if the areas with characteristic 1, 2, and 4 are of sufficient size (characteristic 3) to practically manage it for its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Figure 13 shows the portion of Inventory polygon XXX that were evaluated as having Apparent Naturalness, Solitude, Unconfined Recreation, Outstanding Values, and Manageability (33 percent or 1,781 acres of Inventory XXX).

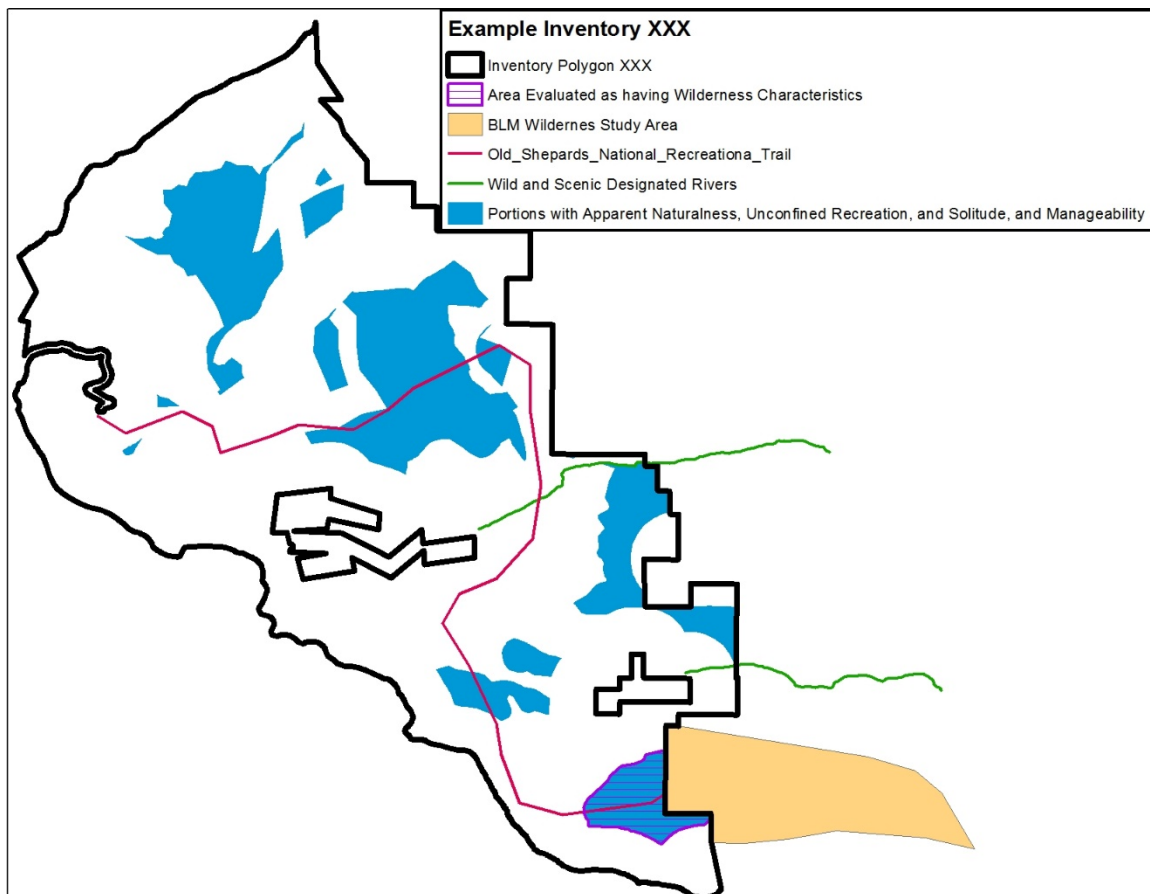


Figure 13: Portion of Example Inventory XXX that were evaluated as having Apparent Naturalness, Solitude, Unconfined Recreation, Manageability, and Outstanding Values

For the example scenario Inventory polygon XXX, the remaining acreages that were evaluated as having characteristics 1, 2, 5, and sometimes 4 are less than 475 acres individually. Upon review, there are 101 acres that are adjacent to a BLM Wilderness Study Area, and if this area was to be managed in conjunction with the BLM Wilderness Study Area, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole. The remaining 1,148 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. Therefore, 101 acres would be evaluated as having wilderness characteristic for our scenario and the remaining acreages would be evaluated as have wilderness characteristics, due to lack of apparent naturalness (54 percent), limited solitude or unconfined recreation (29 percent), manageability (10 percent), and size.

Scenario Evaluation Determination

101 acres of Inventory XXX are evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus were included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. This portion makes up 2 percent of the polygon. Therefore, 101 acres were evaluated as having wilderness characteristic for our scenario and the remaining acreages do not have wilderness characteristics, due to lack of apparent naturalness (54 percent), limited solitude or unconfined recreation (29 percent), manageability (10 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Evaluation

In June of 2016 the Carson NF completed an initial evaluation to determine if the evaluation areas had wilderness characteristics. This initial evaluation was posted on the forest plan revision web page for public review and comment. As a result of public comments and more accurate on-the-ground information, four evaluation area's names were changed, and 25,789 acres were reevaluated for wilderness characteristics after the preliminary evaluation. The evaluation determination, which includes any new information since the initial evaluation, summarizes the results of each evaluation area and identifies those lands which have wilderness characteristics.

When Evaluation Areas were evaluated, Characteristic 5, 1, and 2 were evaluated first, then Characteristic 4, and then Characteristic 3. The evaluation of these characteristics will be discussed in the order they were evaluated: Characteristic 5 (Manageability), Characteristic 1 (Apparent Naturalness), Characteristic 2 (Solitude or Unconfined Recreation), Characteristic 4 (Outstanding Values), and then Characteristic 3 (Size).

Camino Real Ranger District

The Camino Real Ranger District is the closest district to Taos, NM, and serves 32 unincorporated communities and two Native American Pueblos that depend on the district for wood and other forest products. The district ranges in elevation from 7,000 feet to 13,024 feet in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and offers a mild climate with both highly-developed and dispersed recreational opportunities. At the lower elevations, the Camino Real Ranger District has open sagebrush and piñon-juniper vegetation communities, at mid elevations there is ponderosa pine, and at the higher elevations there is spruce-fir to alpine and tundra vegetation communities. Aspen is fairly common at all elevations above 8,000 feet.

At 314,408 acres, the Camino Real Ranger District is home to one the nation's premiere mountain biking opportunities via the South Boundary Trail. The trail offers 22 miles of downhill single and double track, which passes through deep and evergreen forests, aspen glades, and meadows.

In addition to summer activities, Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort, one of New Mexico's oldest ski areas, offers family-friendly winter sports opportunities covering a wide variety of terrain for both the experienced and inexperienced skier and snowboarder.

Some of the best and easiest hiking trails are on the Camino Real Ranger District. For example, the Devisadero Loop Trail is a six-mile loop that is just outside the Town of Taos. This trail offers a moderate 1,100-foot elevation gain and great views of Taos, Wheeler Peak, and Taos Pueblo lands. The trek takes hikers through various habitats along the trail, from piñon-juniper on the south to ponderosa pine and spruce on the north-side of the loop.

In addition to hiking and mountain biking, motorized use is also increasingly popular with ATV, full-size vehicle, and motorized single-track (motorcycle) users throughout the district.

The Camino Real Ranger District is home to one designated wilderness area. The Pecos Wilderness is co-managed with the Santa Fe National Forest, with the northern 24,735 acres falling on the Camino Real Ranger District, making up approximately 7.8 percent of the district.

The Santa Fe NF takes the lead in managing this wilderness area. The Camino Real Ranger District had 240,511 acres of inventoried lands.

Evaluation Areas on the Camino Real Ranger District

Camino Real South

This evaluation area was originally called the Embudo Creek Watershed Evaluation Area in the preliminary evaluation. In response to public comment, it was changed to Camino Real South. This evaluation area includes the Santa Barbara Creek, Rio Pueblo, and Rio Trampas, consisting of 86,643 acres of inventoried lands (C1, C5, C9, C11, and C14¹).

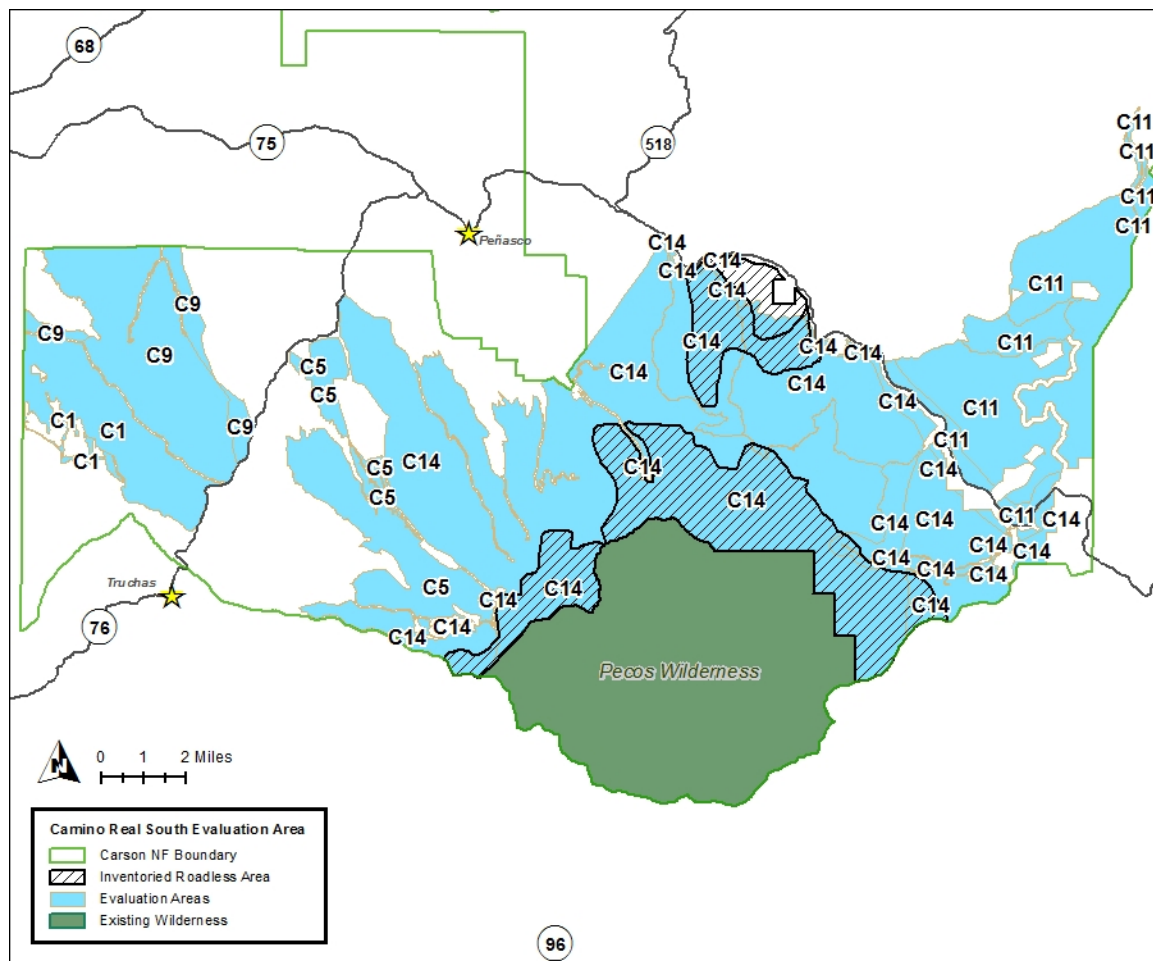


Figure 14. Camino Real South Evaluation Area (includes Rios Pueblo, Santa Barbara, and Trampas)

Manageability

12 percent of the Camino Real South Evaluation Area (C5, C11, and C14) could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has acequias, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and shape and configuration issues within it. Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26,

¹ Each inventory area was labeled with a unique Inventory number as a way of referencing each area throughout the wilderness recommendation process.

1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 6,130 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of C5 and C14 (Figure 7). Fire Management Unit 1 areas are WUI areas on the Carson NF that are near towns or villages. As documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, these units are under current fire management direction, which states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 3,815 acres from C11 and C14 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 321 acres (C1, C9, and C14) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

38 percent of the Camino Real South Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible stumps, slash, and old logging roads from past/current thinning projects, current open motorized trails, current fuelwood gathering, and current fuelwood partnership blocks (central C9, southeast C9, western C14, southeastern C14, central C11, and northwestern C11). Overlapping these thinning project and old roads are range and wildlife improvements (e.g. exclosures, fish barriers, spring developments, trick tanks, and instream structures) and illegal dumpsites that combined, contribute to the lack of apparent naturalness. Historic acequias (irrigation ditches), with valid existing water rights, originate on the Carson NF and feed private inholdings throughout C9 and C14. A permitted irrigated hay field that is harvested annually is in western C14.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, C9 lacks apparent naturalness across 3,077 acres (33 percent), C11 lack apparent naturalness across 4,178 acres (30 percent), while C14 lacks apparent naturalness across 25,716 acres (49 percent). Combined, 38 percent of the Camino Real South Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining, 53,672 acres scattered across Camino Real South Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness, and are mostly within inventoried roadless areas¹.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the 2001 Roadless Rule included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.



Figure 15. Alamos fish barrier (eastern C14)



Figure 16. Illegal dumpsite (C9)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Camino Real South Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along motorized trail corridors, where solitude is less common, to remote, undeveloped areas in the backcountry, with little use and no development. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including driving for pleasure, mountain biking, fall leaf viewing, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), and horseback riding in the summer.

63 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while the entire evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This area is highly used for recreation and cultural activities by the communities of Peñasco, Tres Ritos, Chamisal, Ojo Sarco, and El Valle. This area also serves as a gateway into the north end of the Pecos Wilderness for local residents, as well as those visiting from outside the area (all of C14). This is especially true for the developed recreation areas that are adjacent to the inventoried lands within this evaluation area. These include Sipapu Ski and Summer Area in northcentral C14, Hodges Campground (western C14), Trampas Campground and Trailhead (western C14), Santa Barbara Campground and Trailhead (western C14), Agua Piedra Campground and Day Use Site (northern C14), Angostura Trailhead (eastern C14), Alamitos (Serpent Lake) Trailhead (eastern C14), and La Junta Campgrounds (C11), with hardened campsites, fishing piers, parking areas, and day use areas. These developed recreational activities contribute to lack of solitude on 4,210 acres (8 percent) of C14 and 137 acres (1 percent) of C11. Vehicle and chainsaw sounds along the roads and within current fuelwood partnership blocks are evident within 5,735 acres (62 percent) of C9, 10,638 acres (20 percent) of western C14, 4,244 acres (8 percent) of southeastern C14, 13,478 acres (26 percent) of central C14, and 6,631 acres (13 percent) of C11.

Given the high levels of use this area receives from adjacent access roads for fuelwood gathering (chainsaw and vehicle noise), the ski area, campgrounds, trailheads, as well as ATVs and other motorized vehicles, about 54,570 acres (63 percent) of the Camino Real South Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation, which are within an existing inventoried roadless area.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values within this evaluation area include Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams (southeast C14 and northcentral C11), eligible wild and scenic rivers (throughout C14 and C11), high alpine peaks (southern C14), Jicarita Peak National Recreation Trail 27 (southern C14), and remnant structures and logging evidence from the 1907-1928 Santa Barbara Pole and Tie Company and Trampas Lumber Company (throughout C14). A majority of these Outstanding Values are found with the Inventoried Roadless areas (preliminary evaluated areas of C14 v and x) that are adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness.



Figure 17. Looking into the existing Pecos Wilderness

Size

There are 34,126 acres (39 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have apparent naturalness, solitude, unconfined recreation, and manageability. The largest of these areas is 12,597 acres consist of outstanding values, and is found adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness and within an Inventoried Roadless area. The remaining acreages are less than 2,500 acres individually. Only one area, totaling 2,340 acres is adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the existing Pecos Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole. The remaining areas of less than 2,500 acres are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, these remaining 19,189 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads or private land and are currently in impaired condition due adjacent activities and accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

Portions of C14 (labeled C14v and C14x) are evaluated as having wilderness characteristics (Characteristics 1-5), and thus were included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. C14v is approximately 12,597 acres and C14x is 2,340 acres, making up 17 percent of the Camino Real South Evaluation Area, 2 percent of forest-wide inventoried lands, and 1 percent of the Carson NF. Within in C14v and C14x, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and

wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon, making opportunities to feel alone possible in much of the area. Other outstanding values include the Jicarita Peak National Recreation Trail (though there are higher value, more popular trails in the area) and remnant structures and logging evidence from the 1907-1928 Santa Barbara Pole and Tie Company and Trampas Lumber Company.

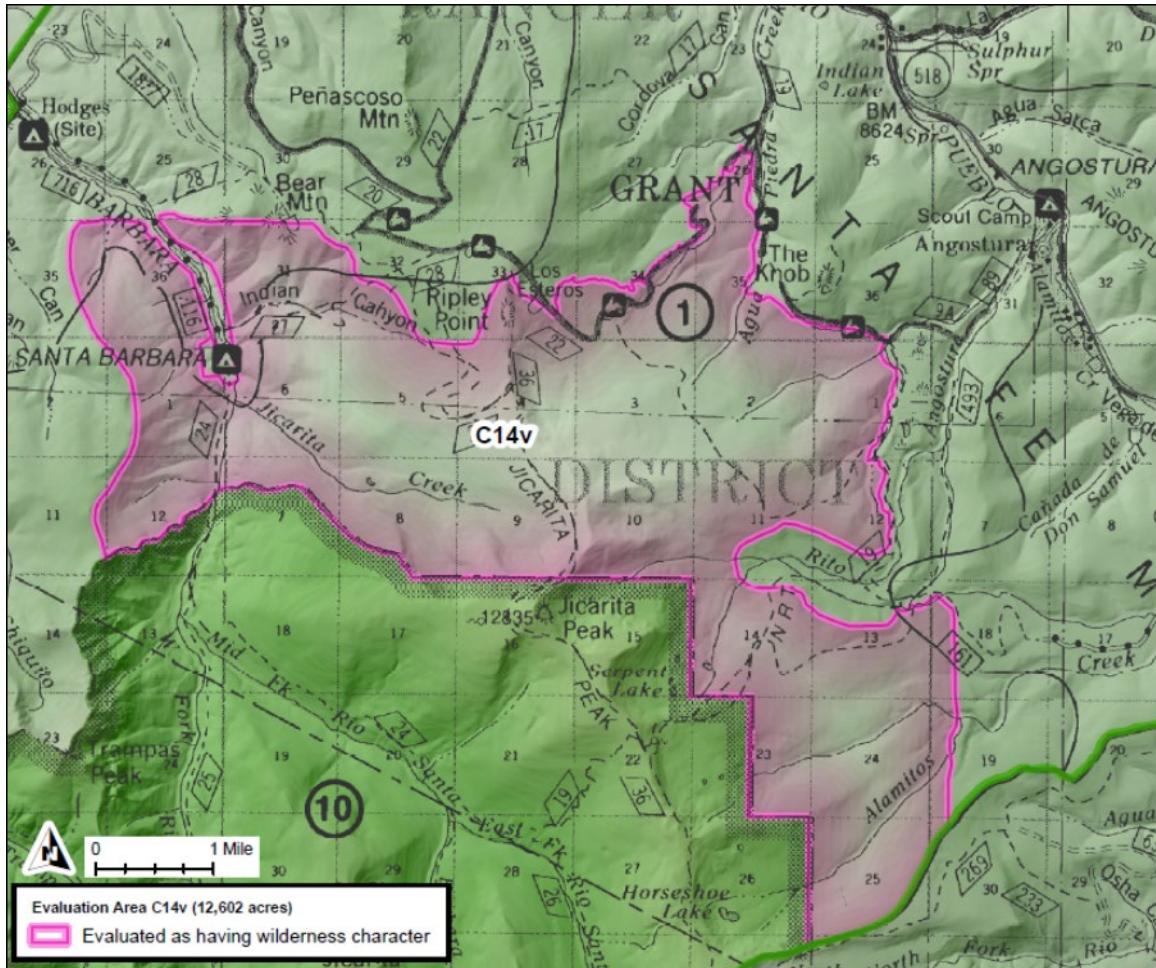


Figure 18. Camino Real South C14V evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

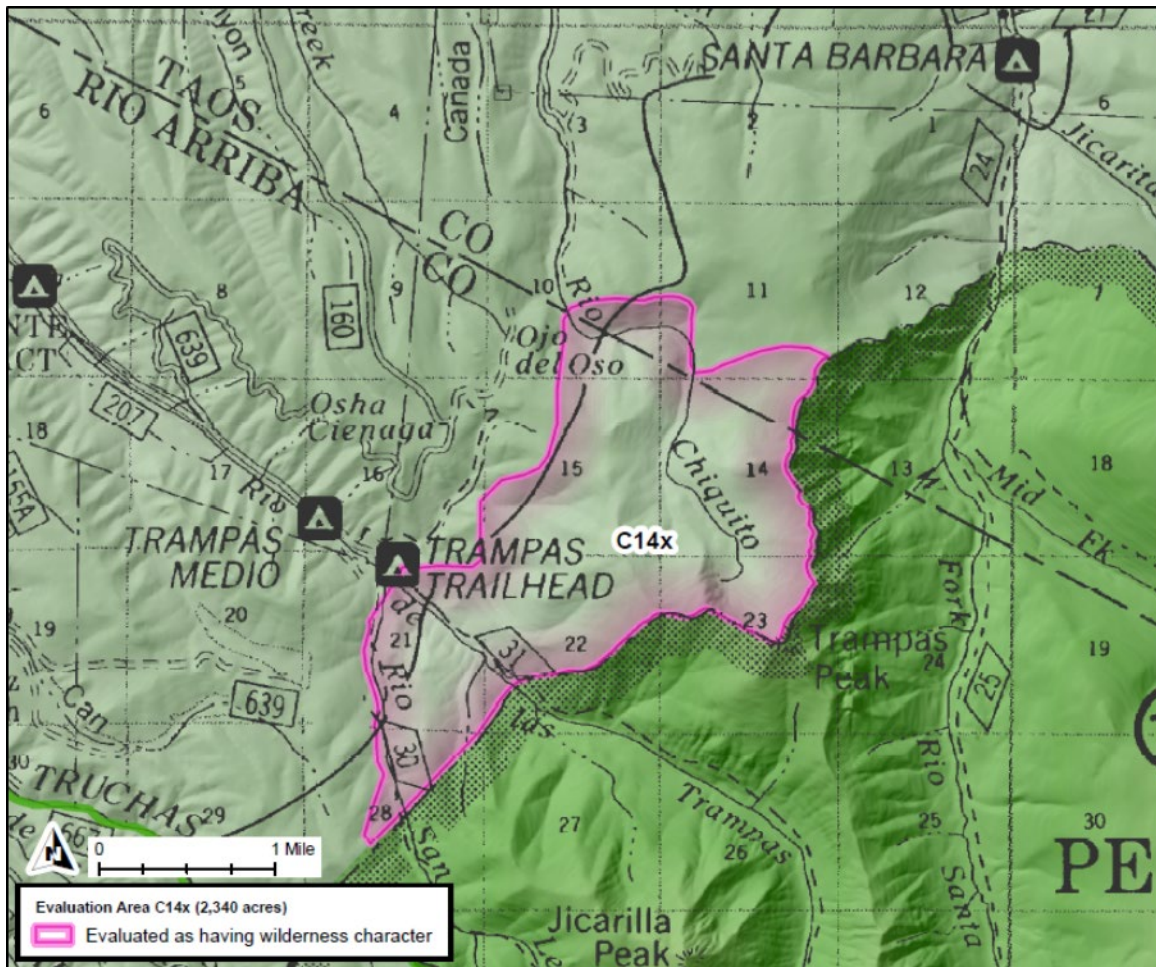


Figure 19. Camino Real South C14X evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (12 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (38 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (37 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Luna-Coyote

The Luna-Coyote evaluation area consists of 10,500 acres of inventoried lands (C2 and C3) to be evaluated.

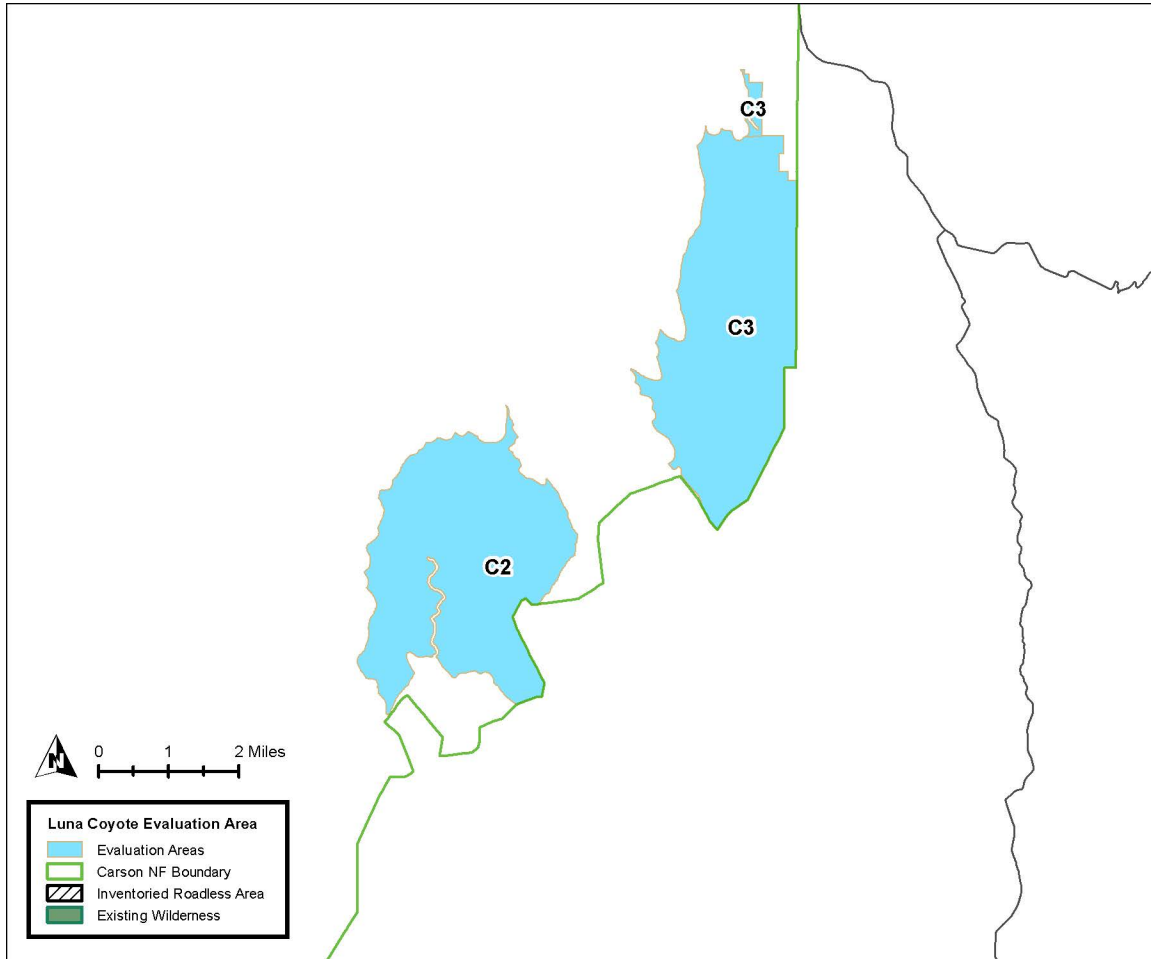


Figure 20. Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area

Manageability

1 percent of the Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area (C3) could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has shape and configuration issues within it. There is 42 acres (C3) that are $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

36 percent of the Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area does not have apparent naturalness. Along the borders of this area there are visible impacts from fuelwood gathering, including stumps and slash. On the western border of C2 there is terracing visible from past thinning projects and old roads that are still visible on the landscape (northern C3 and, western C2, and southwest C2) are visible impacts to apparent naturalness. Overlapping these fuelwood gathering areas, historic thinning projects, and old roads are range and wildlife improvements (e.g. spring developments,

cattle guards, and a corral), that combined, detract from the natural appearance of the landscape and serve to highlight the human activity occurring in the area.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, C2 lacks apparent naturalness across 1,786 acres (34 percent), while C3 lacks apparent naturalness across 1,997 acres (38 percent). Combined, 36 percent of the Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 6,717 acres are scattered across the Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area and do have apparent naturalness.

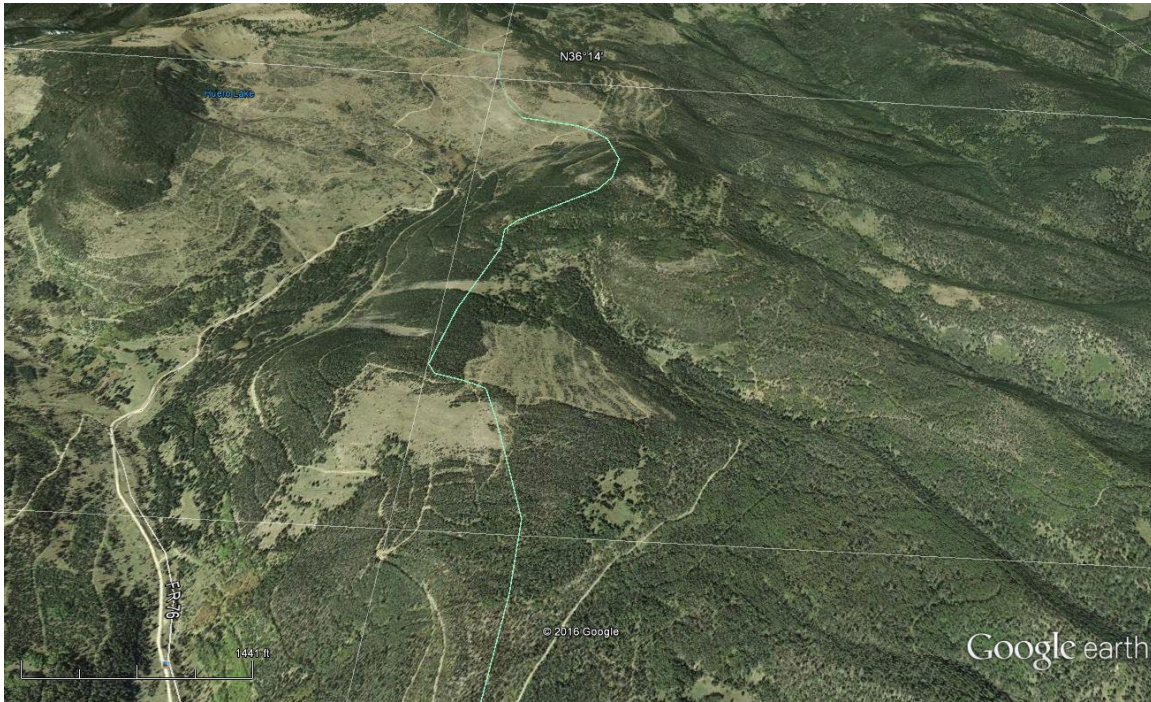


Figure 21. Google Earth imagery of old roads and thinning projects (western C2)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries where solitude is less common, to undeveloped areas. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including driving for pleasure, hiking, fishing, hunting, and camping (developed and dispersed).

39 percent of this evaluation area offers opportunities for solitude, while the entire evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This evaluation area is highly used for recreational and cultural uses by the communities of Holman, Mora, Chacon, Angel Fire, and Black Lakes. Most of the high use consists of fuelwood gathering (within C2 and C3) through Forest Service-issued permits, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping (including car camping), and ATV use, especially on Forest Road 76, which borders both C2 and C3. Sounds from the high use of roads and chainsaws are evident within 3,333 acres (64 percent) of C2 and 2,958 acres (29 percent) of C3.

Due to the lack of solitude from adjacent access roads for fuelwood gathering as well as ATVs and other motorized vehicles, only 4,103 acres (39 percent) of Luna-Coyote has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

There are no outstanding values within the Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area.

Size

There are 3,623 acres (35 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have apparent naturalness, solitude or unconfined recreation, and manageability. These remaining acreages are less than 1,700 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. The largest being around 1,600 acres, and the smallest being around 75 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads and are currently in impaired conditions due to adjacent activities and accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

The Luna-Coyote Evaluation Area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (1 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (36 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (61 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed

The Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed Evaluation Area consists of 111,408 acres of inventoried lands (C6, C7, C12, C13, and C15) to be evaluated.

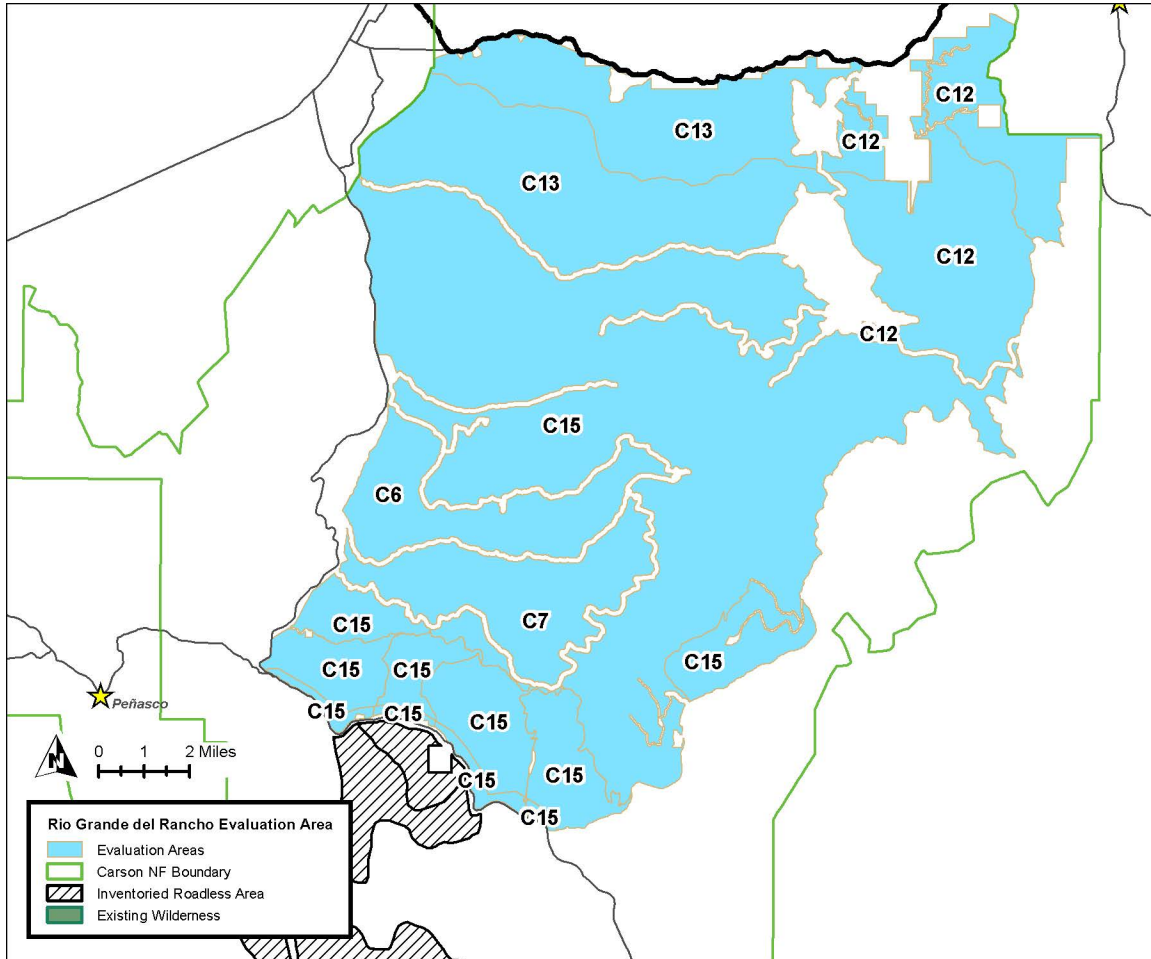


Figure 22. Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed Evaluation Area

Manageability

22 percent of the Rio Grande del Rancho Evaluation Area (C12, C13, and C15) could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and shape and configuration issues within it. Fire Management Unit 1 as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 24,447 acres from C12, C13, and C15 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 84 acres (C12) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

51 percent of the Rio Grande del Rancho Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness because of visible evidence of exploration activities for decorative rock (western C15 and C7), visually

apparent logging roads (all inventoried lands except western C15), currently open motorized trails, and large infestations of invasive weeds (approximately 110 acres in C6 and C15). Overlapping these old logging roads, decorative rock explorations, and invasive weeds are infrastructure associated with range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, fish barriers, trick tanks, and stock tanks (throughout C12 and C15). All these things combined contribute to the lack of apparent naturalness. An electronic site is also visually noticeable from southeast C15. On the east side of C15 is an old sanitation clear cut called “Little Korea”, which degrades the apparent naturalness of the area as well. C12, C13, and C15 lack apparent naturalness, as these areas have numerous stumps from the extensive fuelwood gathering with chainsaws along existing open roads through Forest Service-issued permits from the communities of Taos, Ranchos de Taos, Talpa, and Llano Quemado.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, C6 lacks apparent naturalness across 4,918 acres (800 percent), C7 lacks apparent naturalness across 4,149 acres (60 percent), C12 lacks apparent naturalness across 6,086 acres (41 percent), C13 lacks apparent naturalness across 5,629 acres (11 percent), while C15 lacks apparent naturalness across 35,961 acres (70 percent). Combined, 65 percent of the Rio Grande del Rancho Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 30,133 acres scattered across Rio Grande del Rancho Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness.

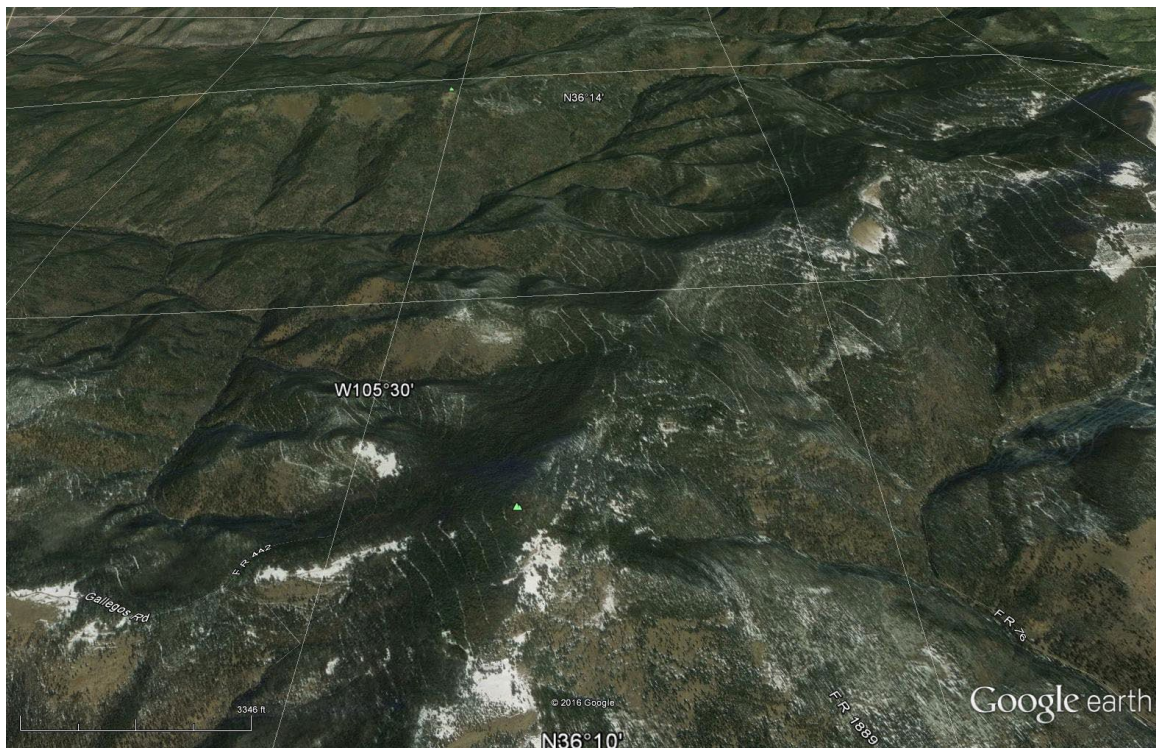


Figure 23. Google Earth imagery of old logging roads (eastern C15)



Figure 24. Wildlife Improvement (western C15)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Rio Grande del Rancho Watershed Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along motorized trail corridors where solitude is less common, to undeveloped areas. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including driving for pleasure, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), horseback riding in the summer, and snowmobiling in areas identified for snowmobiling through the 1986 Carson Forest Plan.

86 percent of the evaluation area offers opportunities for solitude, while all of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This area is highly used by the communities of Taos, Ranchos de Taos, Talpa, and Llano Quemado. A contributing factor to the high levels of use is proximity to the Town of Taos, the largest population center in the area. Taos' close proximity to the evaluation area offers easy, year-round access by various types of users and a residential feel. Most of the lack of solitude and unconfined recreation from activities can be found adjacent to the open roads. These activities include sounds from vehicles for various recreation and traditional uses, chainsaws for fuelwood gathering and latilla harvesting, and snowmobiling. A majority of this area was identified for cross-country snowmobiling through the 1986 Carson Forest Plan. Snowmobile use, snowmobile noise, vehicle noise, and chainsaw noise are evident within 4,500 acres (73 percent) of C6, 2,930 acres (43 percent) of northeast C7, 3,146 acres (34

percent) along edges of C12, 2,461 acres (19 percent) of southern C13, and 23,378 acres (46 percent) of eastern C15.

Outstanding Values

The outstanding values found within this evaluation area include a proposed research natural area (C7), eligible wild and scenic river (C15), and the Pot Creek Cultural Interpretative Site (west central C15), which includes Pot Creek Pueblo, the largest prehistoric adobe pueblo north of Santa Fe and which is along the highway.

Size

There are 30,133 acres (27 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 4,000 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas, the largest being around 4,000 acres and the smallest being around 13 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads and are currently in impaired conditions due to adjacent activities and easy accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (22 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (51 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (14 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Taos Canyon

This evaluation area consists of 12,869 acres of inventoried lands (C10).

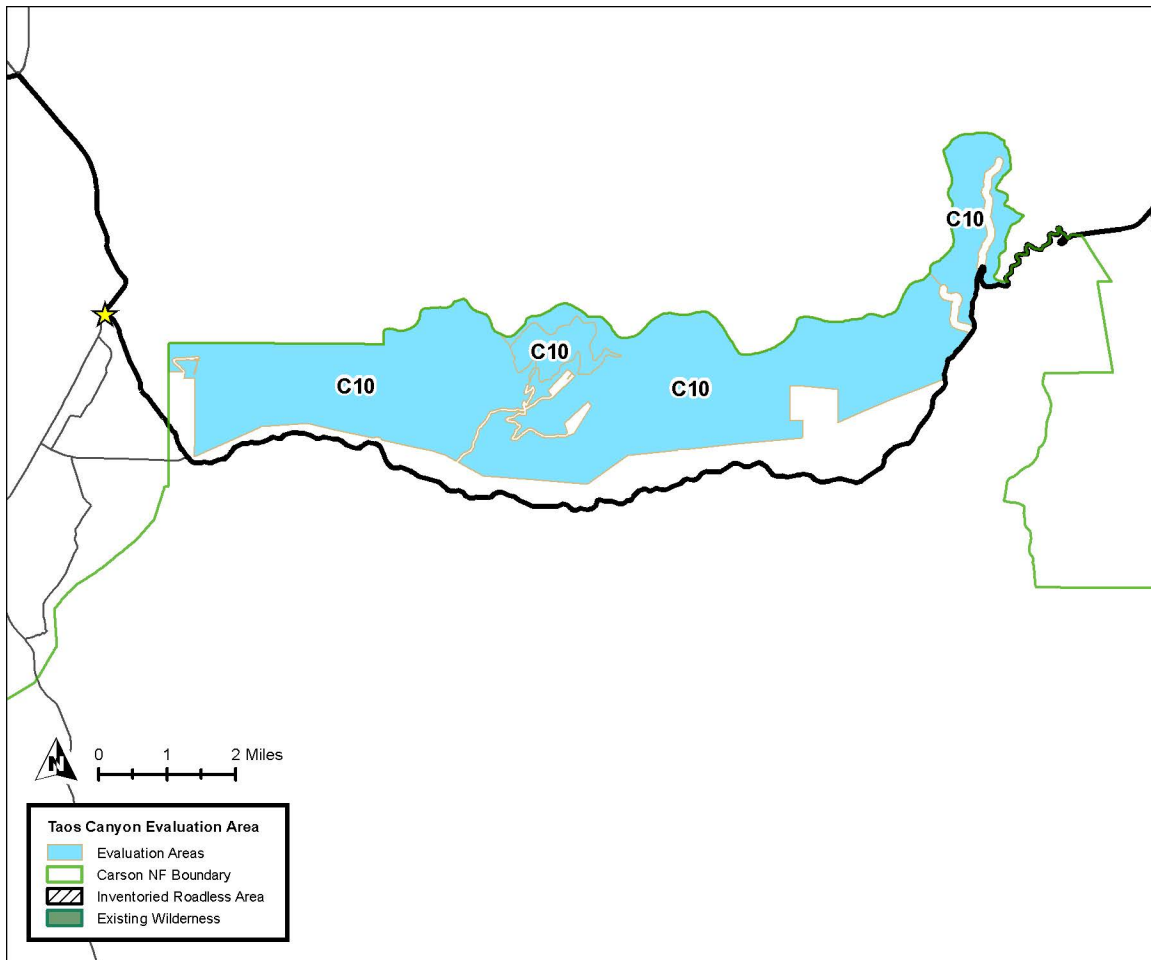


Figure 25. Taos Canyon Evaluation Area

All of this evaluation area was removed from further wilderness Evaluation, because of Characteristic 5 – Manageability. All inventoried lands were within Wildland Urban Interface.

The Wildland Urban Interface category includes the Fire Management Unit 1 (FMU 1) designation. These units are under current fire management direction through the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, which states that fire is not desired and is to be suppressed. Given that the management for a FMU1 unit requires fire suppression by any means necessary to protect life and property, these units were removed from further evaluation.

Warm Springs-Miranda

The Warm Springs-Miranda Evaluation Area consists of 19,091 acres of inventoried lands (C4).

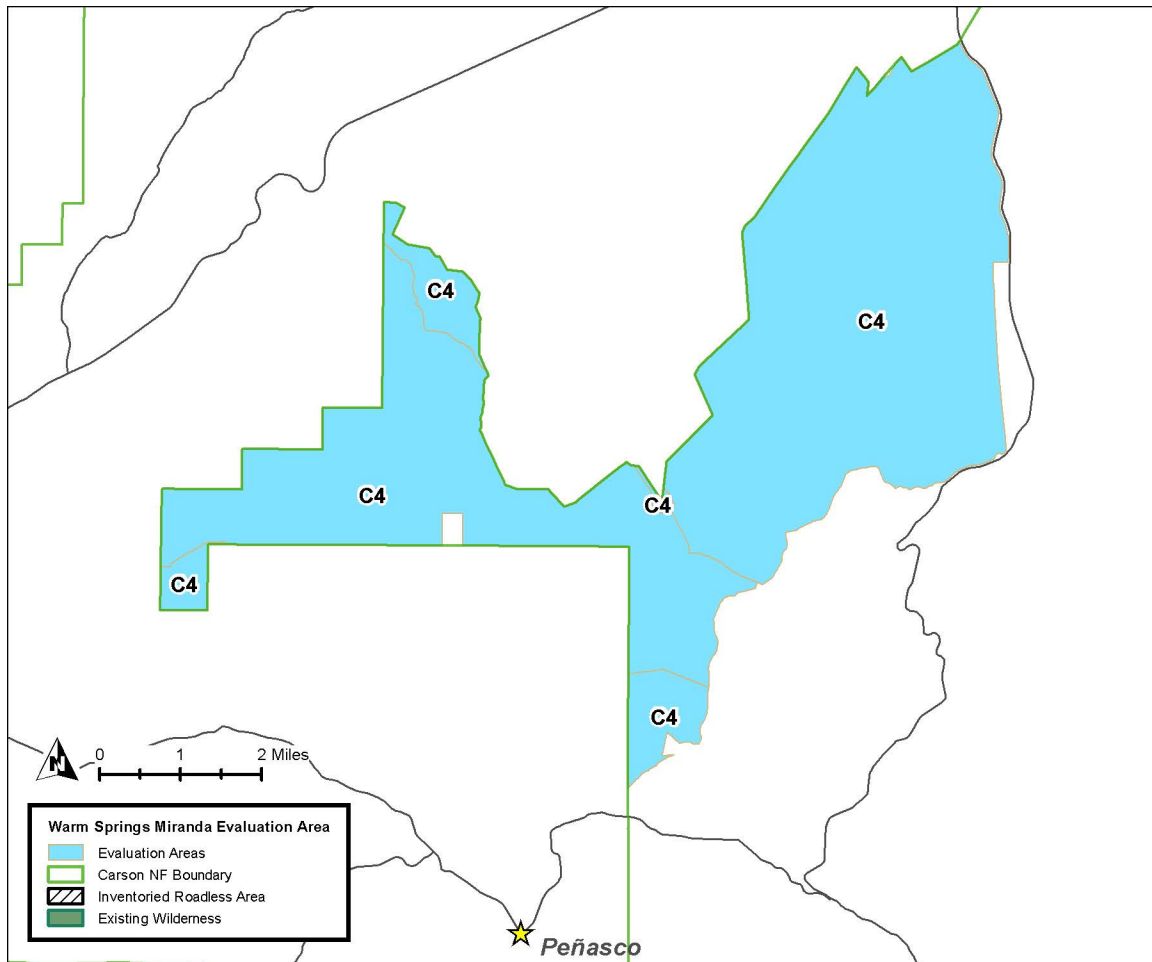


Figure 26. Warm Springs-Miranda Evaluation Area

Manageability

All lands within Warm Springs-Miranda Evaluation Area could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

37 percent of the Warm Springs-Miranda Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from past thinning projects (east central and southwestern C4) and visually apparent logging roads (all of C4). Overlapping these past thinning and visually apparent logging roads are historic mining adits (southwestern C4) and range and wildlife improvements, such as trick tanks, spring developments, stock tanks, and exploratory water wells (northeast and southwest C4). Picuris Peak lookout tower and electronic site are visually apparent and there are multiple illegal dumpsites in the northern portion. All of these factors are evidence of the heavy influence of human activity and there is little in the way of apparent naturalness within C4.



Figure 27. Picuris lookout and electronic site (C4 on eastern edge of C4b)



Figure 28. Slash and stumps from past thinning projects (C4b)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

29 percent (5,611 acres) of northern (4,743 acres of namely the Miranda Canyon area) and central (868 acres) C4 offers limited opportunities for solitude, because this area is already highly used by the communities of Taos, Llano, Ranchos de Taos, Vallecitos, Peñasco, and Picuris Pueblo for fuelwood gathering through Forest Service-issued permits or access to the Picuris Lookout. Chainsaw noise from fuelwood gathering is pervasive throughout northern C4. 71 percent (13,480 acres) of inventoried lands outside of the northern and central C4 do offer opportunities for unconfined recreation, as there are limited non-motorized trails and no other developed recreation structures.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values within C4 include the hydrothermal spring (central C4) and eligible wild and scenic rivers (central C4). The hydrothermal spring and one eligible river are found with acreages with solitude or unconfined recreation and natural apparentness. This acreage is less than 1,500 acres in size.



Figure 29. Warm Spring headwater

Size

There are 12,032 acres (63 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 4,000 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. The largest is around 3,900 acres and the smallest is around 898 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition due to adjacent activities.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to lack of apparent naturalness (37 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (29 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process. After the preliminary evaluation, C4b was determined to not have wilderness characteristics because of more accurate site-specific information that finds more evidence of old roads, mines, stumps, and slash on the landscape.

El Rito and Canjilon Ranger Districts

El Rito Ranger District

At 264,536 acres, the El Rito Ranger District is located on the west side of the Carson National Forest, between the Tres Piedras and Canjilon Ranger Districts. Elevation of the El Rito Ranger District ranges from 6,000 to 10,000 feet and the vegetation varies with the elevation. Piñon-juniper dominates in the lower elevations, ponderosa pine is found in the mid elevations, and fir and spruce communities are above 9,000 feet. Aspen is fairly common at all elevations above 8,000 feet.

The El Rito Ranger District serves the community of El Rito, in addition to many small communities in Rio Arriba County. These rural communities look to the El Rito Ranger District for their many traditional, historical, and cultural uses, such as livestock grazing, fuelwood gathering, and harvesting of other forest products.

The ranger district provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities as well as various natural resources, with a long history of traditional and cultural uses. The El Rito Ranger District is also home to one of two functioning federal sustained yield units in the entire United States. The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was established in 1948 to provide employment opportunities, sawtimber, and other forest products. The unit is made up of over 73,400 acres.

The ranger district also administers the Jarita Mesa Wild Horse Territory. The bloodline of the wild horses dates back to the late 1700s, when the conquistadores came from Spain to Northern New Mexico.

Recreational activities on the El Rito Ranger District include hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and rock climbing. The area is known for excellent trout fishing and there is also a 4-mile corridor of beautiful campsites along El Rito Creek. The Potrero cliffs draw a lot of rock climbers from the area and many rock climbing routes are available, along with a large dispersed campground.

Canjilon Ranger District

The Canjilon Ranger District adjoins the El Rito Ranger District along its eastern boundary. This ranger district is made up of 137,910 acres, with elevations ranging from desert shrub grasslands at 6,500 feet to alpine, high mountain meadow, spruce-fir at 11,000 feet. Piñon-juniper vegetation and scattered ponderosa pine can also be found at mid-elevations. The high desert landscapes are rich in fossils, including the New Mexico State's fossil, the Coelophysis.

Echo Amphitheater is located on the Canjilon Ranger District. This is a natural stone amphitheater made of sandstone cliffs that formed over thousands of years.

Three lakes make up Trout Lakes and provide excellent fishing, surrounded by high elevation forests. Canjilon Lakes and Canjilon Lakes Campground offer spectacular views of Sierrita de Canjilon, as well as the surrounding national forest. The campground at this site offers campsites along the shore of six small ponds, with picnics spots at Upper Canjilon Lakes. During the winter months, snowmobiling and some cross-country skiing opportunities exist throughout the meadows surrounding Sierrita de Canjilon.

As with other ranger districts on the Carson National Forest, the rural communities surrounding the Canjilon Ranger District make a living based on Northern New Mexico traditional uses, including raising livestock, logging, and cutting fuelwood or other forest products.

The Chama River Canyon Wilderness is partially within the Canjilon Ranger District. This wilderness area encompasses 50,300 acres, but only 2,949 of those acres are on the Carson National Forest, making up approximately 2.1 percent of the Canjilon Ranger District. The Santa Fe National Forest manages the entire Chama River Canyon Wilderness.

The Canjilon and El Rito Ranger Districts combined had 271,889 acres of inventoried lands.

Evaluation Areas on the El Rito and Canjilon Ranger Districts

Alamosa

The Alamosa Evaluation Area consists of 33,016 acres of inventoried lands (W18, W19, and W22) to be evaluated.

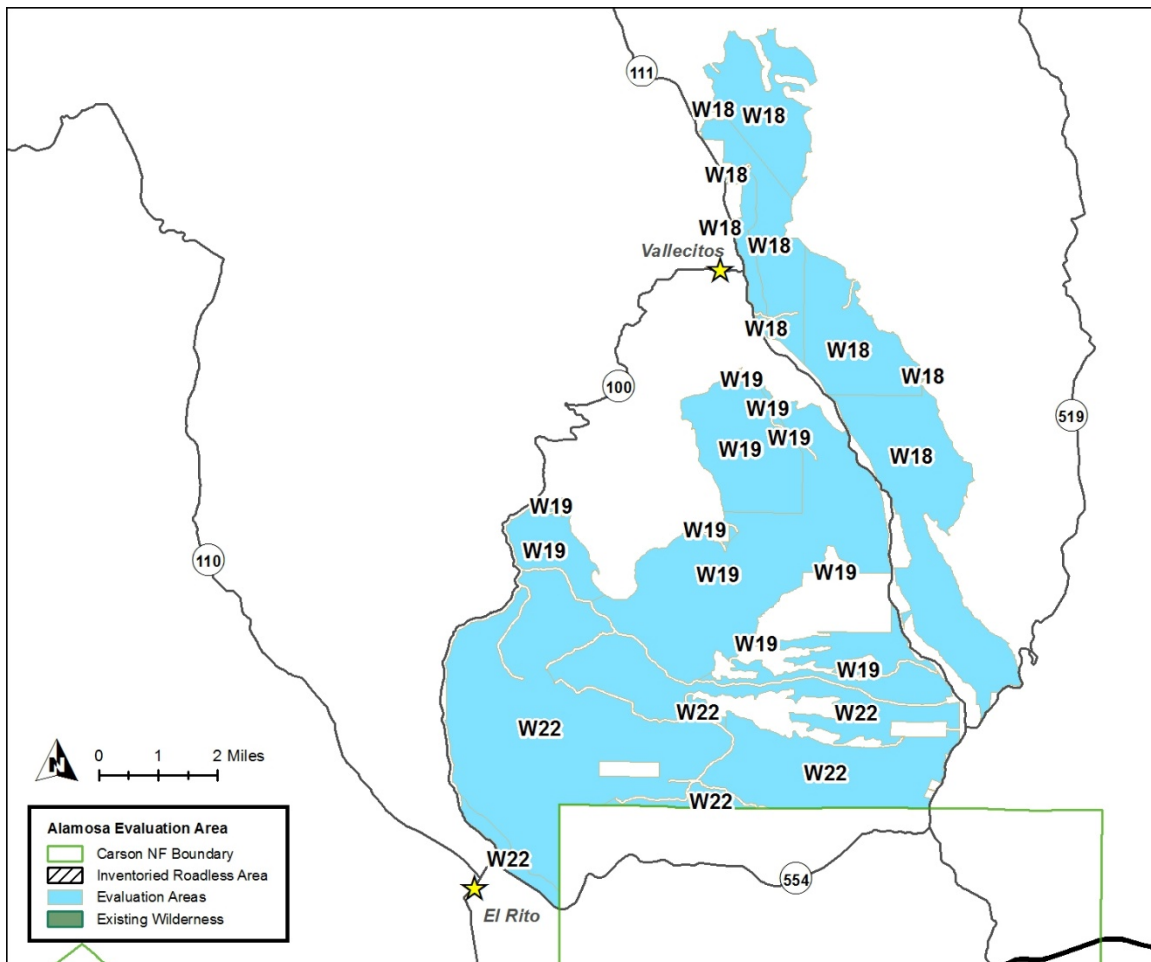


Figure 30. Alamosa Evaluation Area

Manageability

37 percent of the Alamosa Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and shape and configuration issues within it. The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” As such 11,669 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in all of W18 and parts of W19. Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 450 acres from W19 and W22 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 176 acres (W19 and W22) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

9 percent of the Alamosa Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness due to past and current restoration projects (Alamosa Canyon, Agua/Caballos, El Rito wildland urban interface, and Stone Canyon) that have altered the apparent naturalness of central and eastern W19 and eastern W22. Evidence of these activities include stumps, slash, visible historic logging roads, ungulate trailing routes, head cuts, abundance of non-native vegetation, streambank shearing, and streambank channel widening. Within southwestern W22, a large painted letter “E” is visible on a hillside and is currently maintained by the students of El Rito, a tradition that has spanned many generations. Within central W19, there is a visible powerline that traverses the area, and two water towers are located within both W22 and W19. Overlapping the apparent natural areas are range improvements, such as spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and a corral, which are scattered in eastern W22 and southern W19. W22 is a popular rock climbing destination. Bolted routes and motor vehicle access are found along the northwestern edge, in addition to dispersed camping around popular rock climbing sites. There are also permitted cemeteries within W22 and W19 that alter apparent naturalness near the town of El Rito and Vallecitos.



Figure 31. Google Earth imagery of painted E (W22)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, W19 lacks apparent naturalness across 1,092 acres (11 percent), while W22 lacks apparent naturalness across 1,893 acres (14 percent). Combined, 9 percent of the Alamosa Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 30,031 acres scattered across Alamosa Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in the Alamosa Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries, to undeveloped areas away from roads with less use and development. A variety of recreational activities, including driving for pleasure, hunting, rock climbing, and camping (developed and dispersed), occur along permanent roads surrounding the evaluation area.

86 percent (28,344 acres) of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while all of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. Noise from roads for pleasure driving, dispersed camping, and fuelwood gathering is evident along the edges of W19 and W22, but drops off rapidly where topographic barriers occur.

Outstanding Values

There are no outstanding values within the Alamosa Evaluation Area.

Size

There are 14,522 acres (43 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 3,100 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition, due to being surrounded by existing open roads, private lands, having private land inholdings, and being easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics due to manageability (37 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (9 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (14 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Sierrita de Canjilon “Canjilon Mountain”, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed

This evaluation area consists of 73,807 acres of inventoried lands (W8, W28, and W32) to be evaluated.

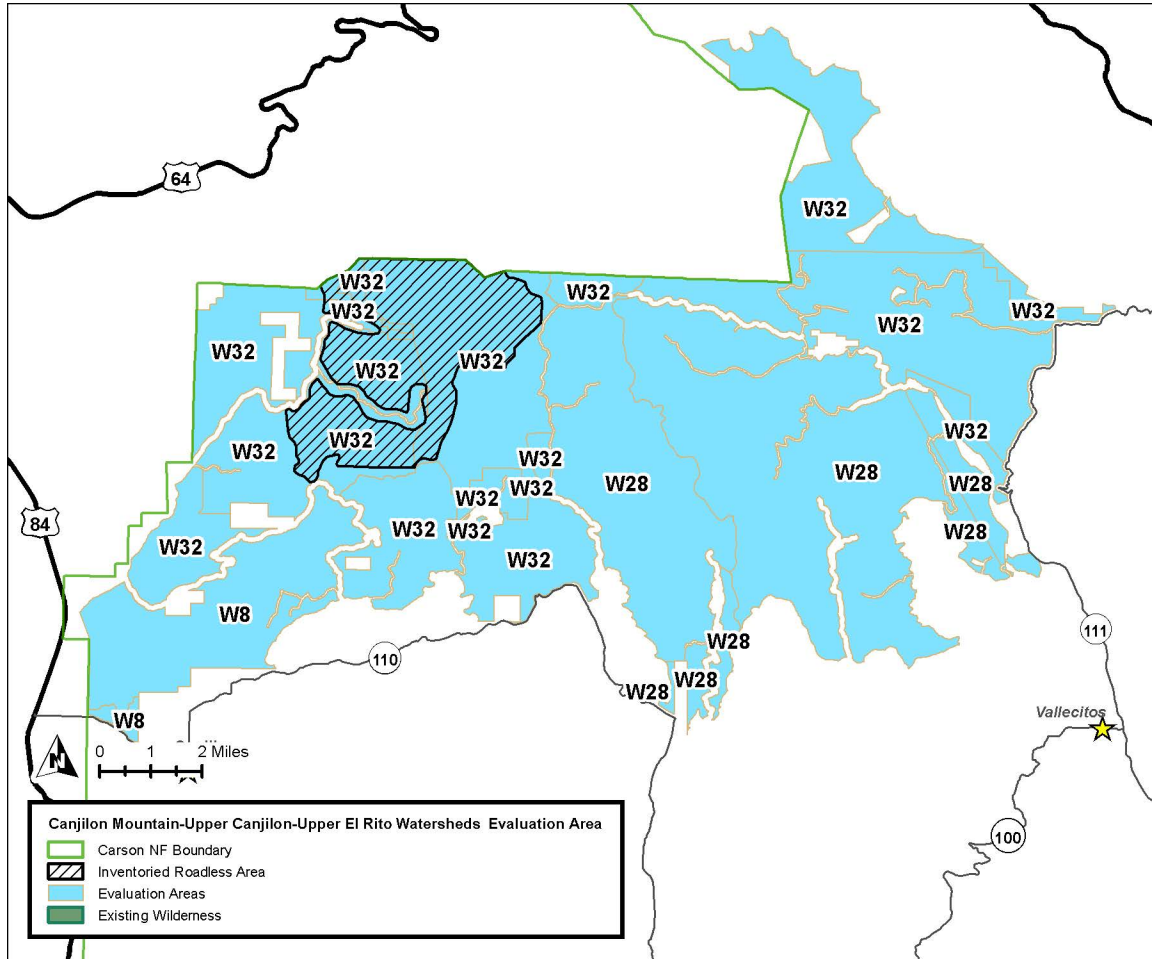


Figure 32. Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed Evaluation Area

Manageability

50 percent of the Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit, Wild Horse Territories, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and shape and configuration issues within it.

The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” As such 31,885 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of W28 and W32. Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 4,501 acres from W8 and W32 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 556 acres (W32) that are within Wild Horse territories. There is 86 acres (W28) that are

¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

18 percent of the Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness because of visible past thinning projects (slash, stumps, terracing), which include Canjilon wildland urban interface (W8), Montoya (W8), and US 84 thinning projects (W32 and W8). Also, within this evaluation area are visually apparent old roads (throughout the evaluation area) and visual evidence of past mining activities such as mine adits and waste piles (west central W32). Overlapping the past thinning, old roads, and past mining activities are range and wildlife improvements, such as spring developments, trick tanks, wells, stock tanks, and fish barriers that combined, contribute to the lack of apparent naturalness. These improvements detract from a natural landscape within these areas.

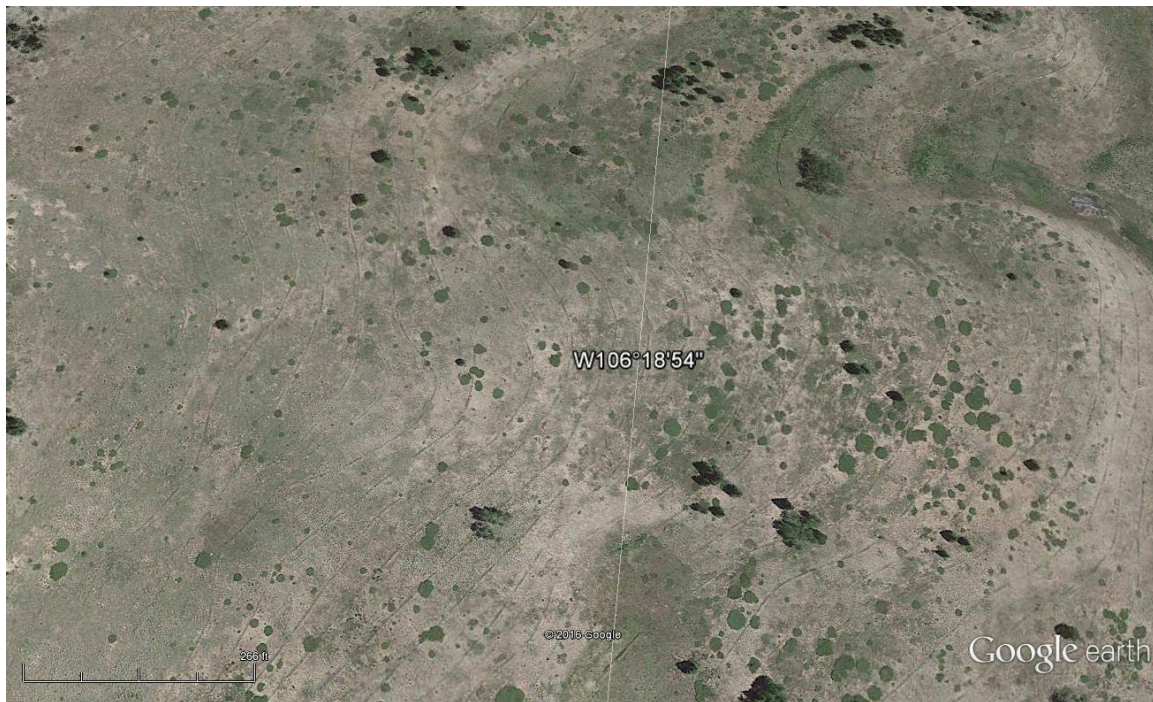


Figure 33. Google Earth imagery of terracing (W32)



Figure 34. El Rito Creek fish barrier (W28)

Canjilon Lakes and Canjilon Creek are the main water sources for the Canjilon community (W32). Being the main water source, there are several improvements with road access for maintenance from the lakes to the village of Canjilon. The water is also stored in a constructed water tower within southern W32. These structures and facilities detract from the apparent naturalness of W32.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, W8 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,936 acres (45 percent), W28 lacks apparent naturalness across 4,040 acres (15 percent), while W32 lacks apparent naturalness across 6,447 acres (16 percent). Combined, 36 percent of the Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 60,384 acres scattered across Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness and are mostly within inventoried roadless area¹. These areas also offer diverse landscapes, including steepness and rolling hills, in addition to meadows and wetlands.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the 2001 Roadless Rule included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in this evaluation area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors where solitude is less common, to remote, undeveloped areas in the backcountry with little use and little development. A great variety of recreational activities, including driving for pleasure, autumn leave viewing, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), horseback riding in the summer, and snowmobiling in the winter occur in this evaluation area.

80 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while all of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This area is a high use recreation area and cultural activities for the communities of Canjilon, Abiquiu, Española, and Tierra Amarilla. This is especially true around the highly-used, developed recreation sites in and around Trout Lakes and Canjilon Lakes. The access roads to these lakes are continually used during the summer by ATVs and motor vehicles, as well as in the winter by snowmobiles. Noise from fuelwood gathering (chainsaw and vehicle noise), snowmobiling, and developed recreation is evident along the edges of these inventoried lands, but drops off rapidly where topographic barriers occur. These recreational and cultural activities contribute to lack of solitude on 1,841 acres (28 percent) of W8, 5,285 acres (19 percent) of W28, and 7,338 acres (18 percent) of W32. About 59,343 acres (80 percent) of the Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation; most of which is within inventoried roadless areas.

Outstanding Values

Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations are found in streams within W28 and eastern W32, there are eligible wild and scenic rivers within W28 and eastern W32, and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail is located in central W32. Portions of all three of these outstanding values are found within an inventoried roadless area (preliminary evaluated area W32a).

Size

There are 17,071 acres (23 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. The largest of these areas is 6,998 (W32a) acres and is primarily within an inventoried roadless area which contains outstanding values. The remaining acreages are less than 2,500 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, these remaining 10,073 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads or private land and are currently in impaired condition due adjacent activities and accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

A portion of W32 (labeled W32a) is evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus is included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. W32a is approximately 6,998 acres, and is 9 percent of the Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watershed Evaluation Area, 1 percent of inventoried lands, and less than 1 percent of the Carson NF. After the preliminary determination, 365 acres were removed as having wilderness characteristics from W32a, because of more accurate site-specific information of terracing that was evident on aerial photos and on the landscape.

Within W32a, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area, other than range fencing, is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Outstanding values include the Continental Divide Trail and Canjilon Mountain.

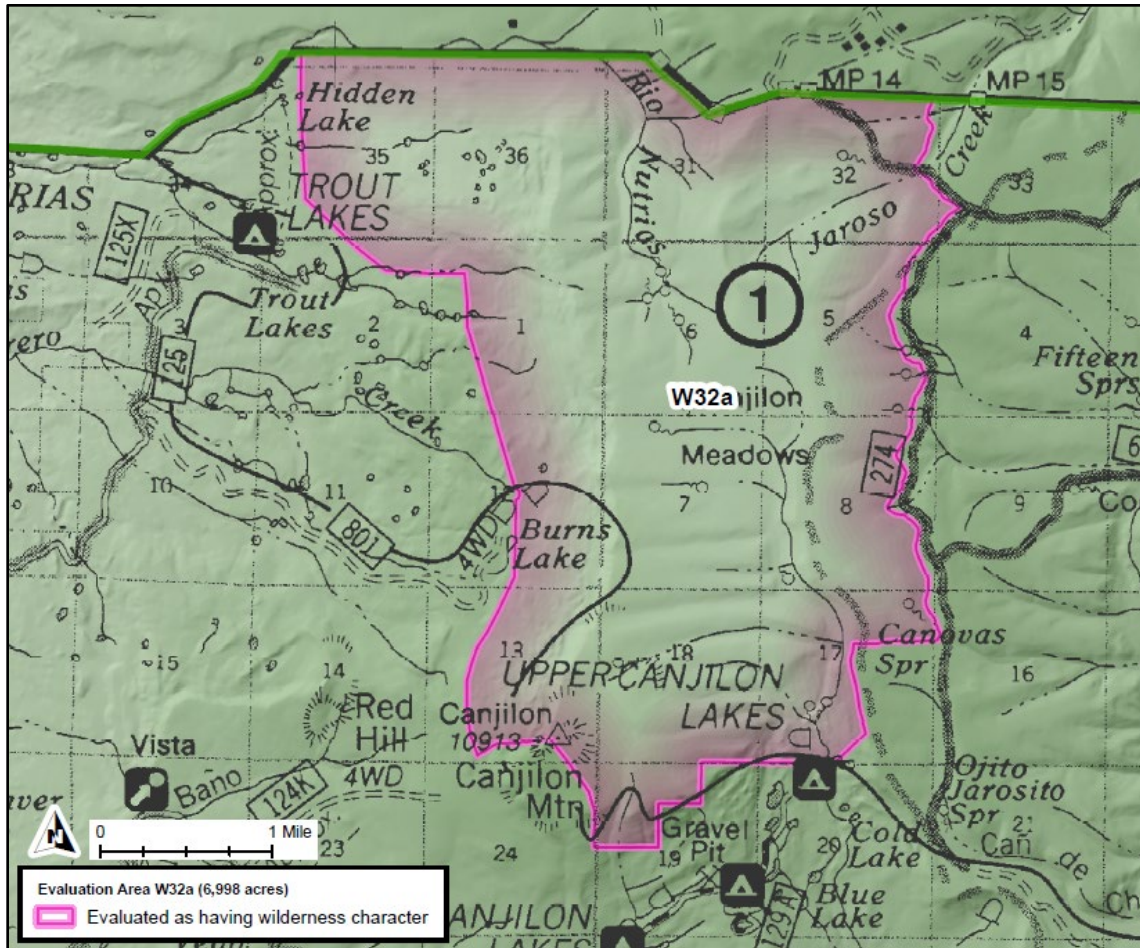


Figure 35. Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds W32a evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (50 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (18 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (20 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Comanche East

This evaluation area consists of 27,984 acres of inventoried lands (W3, W16, and W25) to be evaluated.

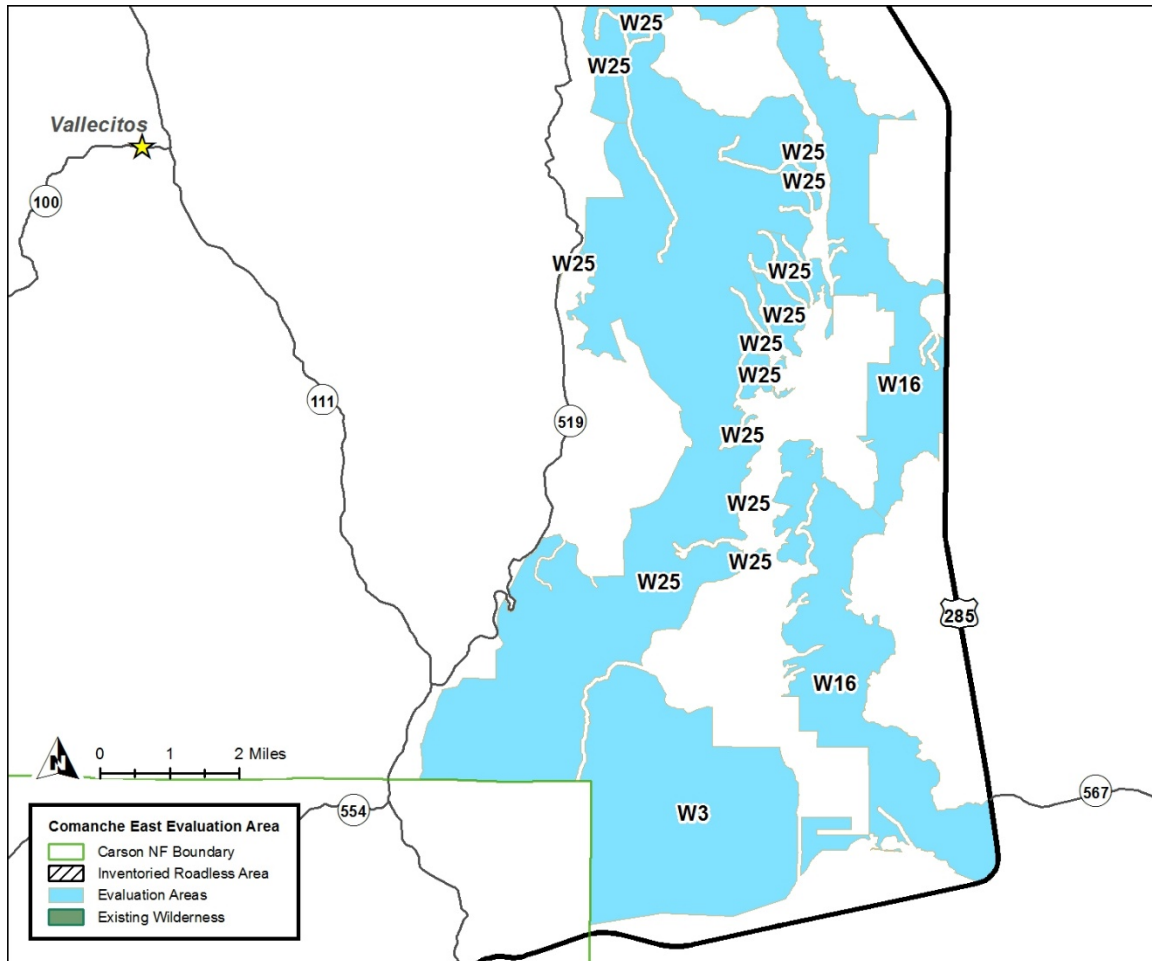


Figure 36. Comanche East Evaluation Area

Manageability

1 percent of the Comanche East Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has shape and configuration issues within it. There is 282 acres (W16 and W25) that are $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

19 percent of the Comanche East Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. Ungulate grazing, past and current sagebrush treatment projects, historic mica mining, and closed roads have altered the apparent naturalness of both W3 and W25. Evidence of these past activities include reseeding, trailing routes, headcuts, abundance of non-native vegetation, pits, tailing piles, adits, streambank shearing, and streambank channel widening throughout this evaluation area. Overlapping these features are infrastructure associated with range improvements, such as

spring development (W3), trick tanks (southeastern W3 and northern W25), stock tanks (W3 and northern W25), and corral (western W25) that combined contribute to lack of apparent naturalness. According to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), Rio Tusas is listed as impaired within W25. As such, riparian improvement projects, such as enclosures and bank stability structures, have recently been implemented. Impacting the natural setting of northern W25 is a large well and pipeline that runs for several miles across NFS and private lands.



Figure 37. Mica mine tailing and mine shaft (W25)

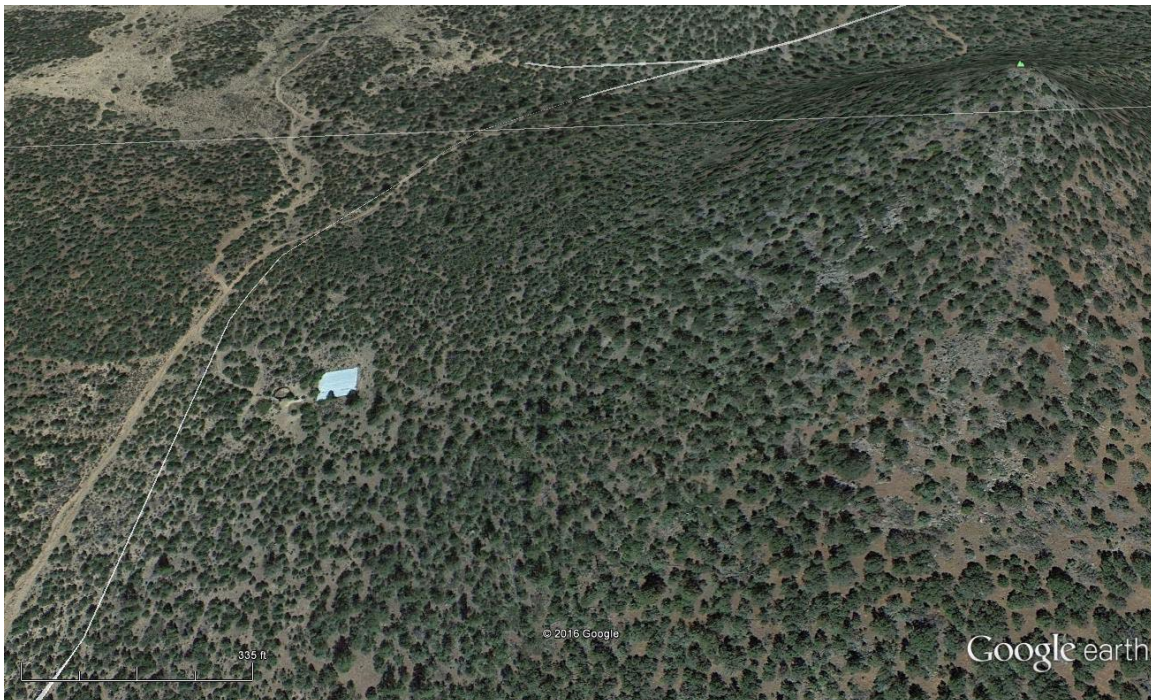


Figure 38. Google Earth imagery of range improvement in northern W25

When all of these visibly apparent features are overlaid with each other, W3 lacks apparent naturalness across 877 acres (16 percent), while W25 lacks apparent naturalness across 4,343 acres (33 percent). Combined, 19 percent of the Comanche East Evaluation Areas lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 22,764 acres scattered across the evaluation area do have apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Comanche East Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors where solitude is less common, to less-developed areas away from roads with less use. A variety of recreational activities, including driving for pleasure, hunting, and camping (developed and dispersed), occur in the evaluation area.

79 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while the entire evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. Some use that contributes to the lack of solitude and unconfined recreation along the edges of this evaluation area consists of traditional fuelwood gathering, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping (including car camping), and mica mining for the communities of Vallecitos, Petaca, and Servilleta Plaza. Roads, chainsaw noises, and recreation sounds are evident along the edges of W3 and W25, but drop off rapidly where there are topographic barriers. About 53,713 acres (79 percent) of the Comanche East Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

There are no outstanding values within the Comanche East Evaluation Area.

Size

There are 19,818 acres (70 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acres are less than 3,000 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. The largest is around 3,000 acres and the smallest is around 11 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition due to being surrounded by existing open roads, private lands, having private land inholdings, and being easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (1 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (19 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (22 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

El Rito-Lobato

This evaluation area consists of 68,008 acres of inventoried lands (W1, W2, W23, W24, W26, Wxs596Add, and Wxs671Add) to be evaluated.

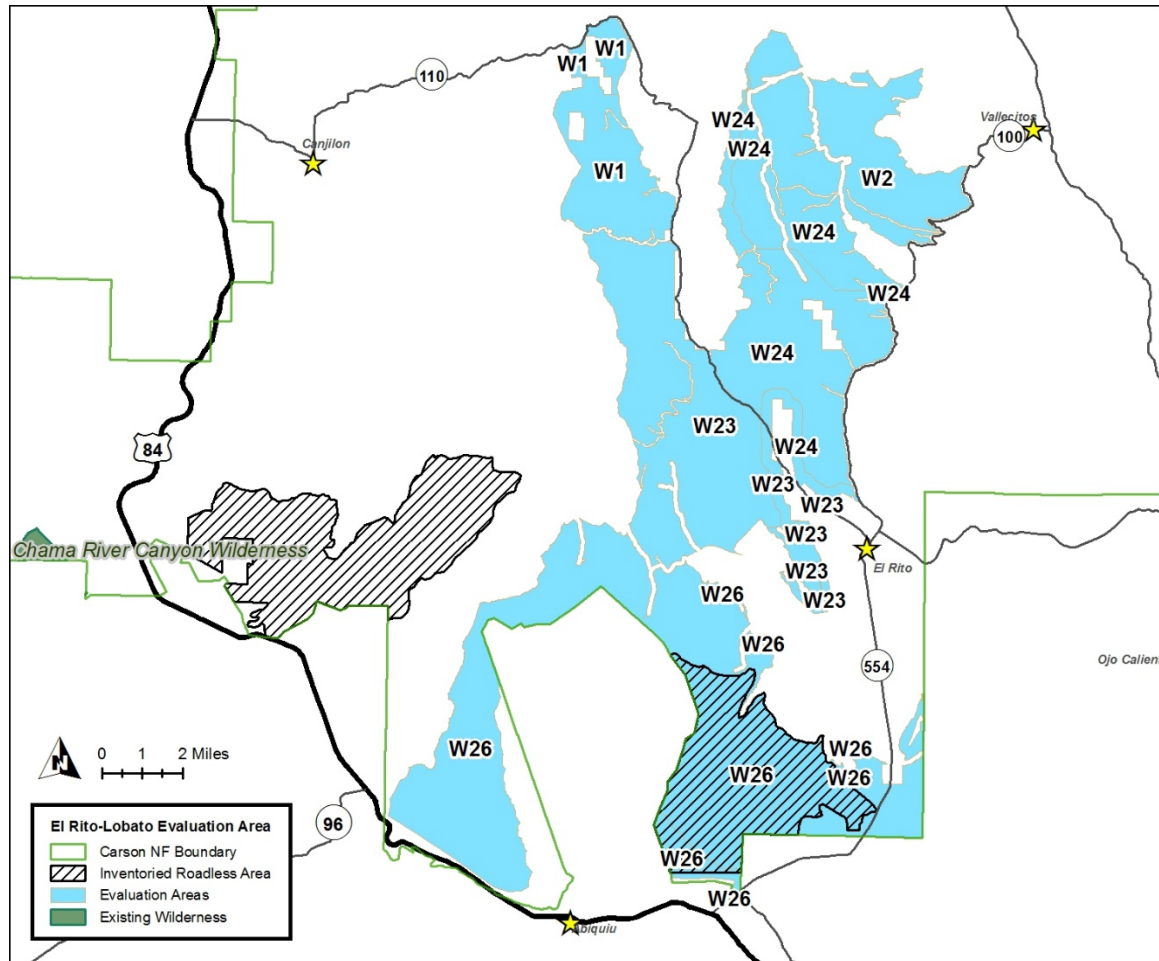


Figure 39. El Rito Lobato Evaluation Area

Manageability

23 percent of the El Rito Lobato Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit, Acequias, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and shape and configuration issues within it.

The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” As such 13,409 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of W2 and W24.

Under the Chief’s Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 20 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of W23, W26 and Wxs596ADD.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 2,289 acres from W23 and W24 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 310 acres (W1 and W26) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

24 percent of the El Rito-Lobato Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible features (stumps, slash, and burned trees) left from past and current restoration projects, including El Rito Canyon, Alamosa, and Stone Canyon in W23 and W24. Also, within this evaluation area is a powerline and utility corridor (northern W26) that is highly visible, and closed roads that are visually apparent throughout W23, W24, northern W26, western W26, and Wxs596Add. Overlapping these restoration projects, old roads, and powerline corridor are several historic and presently active flagstone and sand quarries in W26, Wxs596Add, and Wxs671Add. These quarries have left visible scars on the landscape and show evidence of human activity, especially the active quarries. In addition, numerous range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, pit tank, exclosures, and a corral are scattered throughout W23, W26, north W24, and east W24. El Rito-Lobato is also highly popular for rock climbing (W23 and W24). Bolted routes and motor vehicle access are found within W23 and W24, in addition to dispersed camping around popular rock climbing sites. W26 is also highly used for permitted movie filming, which has altered the natural appearance in some areas from repeated use.

In addition, inventoried roadless areas¹ within W26 and Wxs671Add do not offer apparent naturalness. Their settings are more urban than pristine, due to the housing areas that are visible and adjacent to both inventoried roadless areas.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the 2001 Roadless Rule included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.



Figure 40. Flagstone mine adit (W26)



Figure 41. Rock climbing (W24)

When all of these visibly apparent features are overlaid with each other, W23 lacks apparent naturalness across 7899 acres (57 percent), W24 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,918 (17 percent), W26 lacks apparent naturalness across 5,208 acres (21 percent), Wxs559Add lacks apparent naturalness across 304 acres (100 percent), and Wxs671Add lacks apparent naturalness across 131 acres (12 percent). Combined, 24 percent of the El Rito-Lobato Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 51,548 acres scattered across El Rito-Lobato Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in El Rito-Lobato Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors, where solitude is less common, to areas with little use and minimal development. A variety of recreational activities, including driving for pleasure, mountain biking, hiking, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), rock hounding, rock climbing, and horseback riding occur within this evaluation area.

79 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while 91 percent of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This area is used by residents of El Rito, Ojo Caliente, Abiquiu, Española, and Santa Fe, in addition to non-local visitation for the area's recreation opportunities. This is especially true around the highly-used and developed El Rito Campground (edges W23 and W24) and roads. Noise from roads and fuelwood gathering (chainsaw noise) is evident along the edges of W23, W24, W26, Wxs596Add and Wxs671Add, but drops off rapidly where topographic barriers occur. Within W23 extremely popular rock climbing takes place and contributes to the lack of unconfined recreation with trail networks and a parking area.

Outstanding Values

Found throughout El Rito-Lobato Evaluation Area are outstanding geologic features comprising of red and tan sandstone, sand towers, and cryptogamic soils. It also includes a nationally designated historic trail (W23 and W26).



Figure 42. Sand towers (W26)

Size

There are 25,654 acres (37 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 4,500 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness. The largest is approximately 4,300 acres in size and is partially within an Inventoried Roadless Area, and the smallest is around 5 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in impaired condition due to being surrounded by existing open roads and, private lands, having private land inholdings, and being easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (23 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (24 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (21 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch

This evaluation area was originally called the Arroyo Seco Watershed. In response to public comment, it was changed to Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch. This evaluation area consists of 57,018 acres of inventoried lands (W5, W9, W15, and W31) to be evaluated.

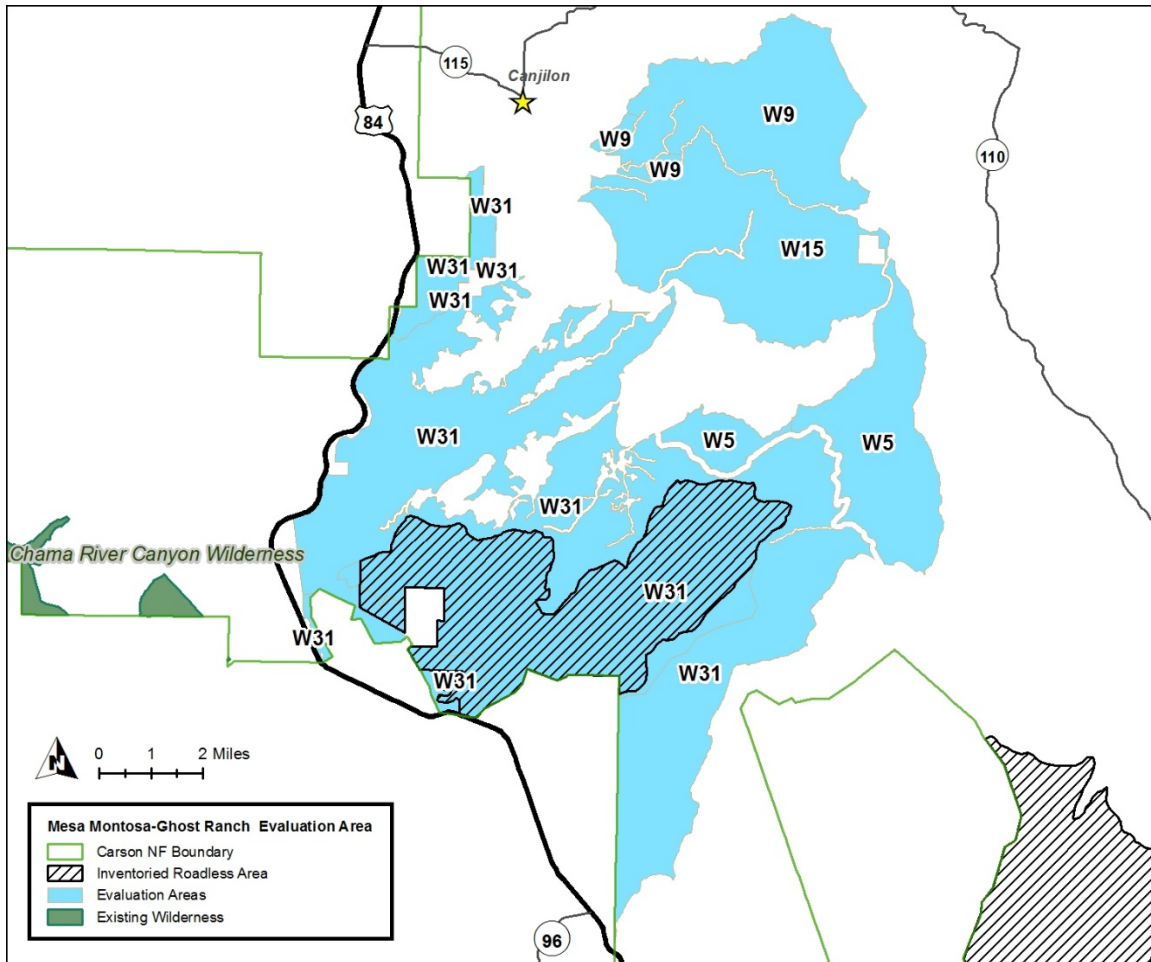


Figure 43. Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area

Manageability

3 percent of the Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and shape and configuration issues within it.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 1,312 acres from W31 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 333 acres (W3, W5, and W9) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

40 percent of the Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible stumps, slash, and old logging roads from thinning projects (Lopez Canyon (W15) and Canjilon wildland urban interface (W31)), past timber activities (northern W9, southern W15, and northern W31), and visible brush hogging from past and current large landscape scale brush hogging projects (Juan Domingo Habitat Improvement Project (northwestern W31) that are visually apparent across the landscape. Also, W31 has several historic and current flagstone quarries, where collection is performed through mechanized means. This has left several scars and detracts from the apparent naturalness of the area. The mesas of W31 are also frequently used for permitted movie filming, which has altered the natural appearance in some areas due to repeated use. Overlapping all these visible activities are numerous range and wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and corrals, which are also scattered throughout W9, W15, northern W31, and eastern W31, detracting from its apparent naturalness and demonstrating evidence of human activity that is noticeable across the landscape. Lastly, a high concentration of invasive weeds within the area gives an unnatural appearance and results in a departure from natural conditions within drainage bottoms.



Figure 44. Juan Domingo habitat improvement project (W31)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, W9 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,165 acres (32 percent), W15 lacks apparent naturalness across 6,059 acres (75 percent), while W31 lacks apparent naturalness across 14,817 acres (41 percent). Combined, 40 percent of the Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 33,977 acres do have apparent naturalness based on the steep rock formation, minimal improvements, and inventoried roadless area.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and

along trail corridors where solitude is less common, to remote, undeveloped areas in the backcountry with little use and no development. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including driving for pleasure, hiking, dispersed camping, and horseback riding. Noise from roads and recreation is evident along the edges of this evaluation area, but drops off rapidly where topographic barriers occur.

71 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while 100 percent of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. Noise from the highway vehicle and fuelwood gathering (chainsaw and vehicle) is evident along the edges of these inventoried lands. Also, along the south western edge of W31, adjacent private land gives this area a more-developed feel. These activities contribute to the lack of solitude on 2,719 acres (40 percent) of W9, 3,633 acres (45 percent) of W15, and 10,272 acres (29 percent) of W31. About 40,394 acres (71 percent) of the Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation; most of which is in inventoried roadless.

Outstanding Values

About 30 percent of W31 in the south has outstanding geologic formations of red and tan sandstone made famous by artist Georgia O’Keeffe. Rare plants are also found throughout the area, including Chacon milkvetch, Chama blazing star, and tufted sand verbena. Additionally, people travel to this evaluation area to collect fossils. Portions of all these outstanding values are found in the inventoried roadless area.



Figure 45. Sandstone formations (W31d)

Size

There are 26,685 acres (46 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. The largest is

approximately 11,479 acres in size and is mostly within an inventoried roadless area. The 9,165 acres (19 percent) remaining acreages are less than 3,200 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness. Upon review, these smaller acres (19 percent) lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in unimpaired condition due to being surrounded by existing open roads and private lands, having private land inholdings, and being easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

A portion of W31 (labeled W31d) is evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus was included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. W31d is approximately 11,479 acres in size, and is 20 percent of the Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch Evaluation Area, 1 percent of both inventoried lands and of the Carson NF. Within W31d, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are high quality opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon making opportunities to feel alone possible in much of the area. Other outstanding values include sandstone cliffs, fossils, and rare plants, including Chacon milkvetch, Chama blazing star, and tufted sand verbenas.

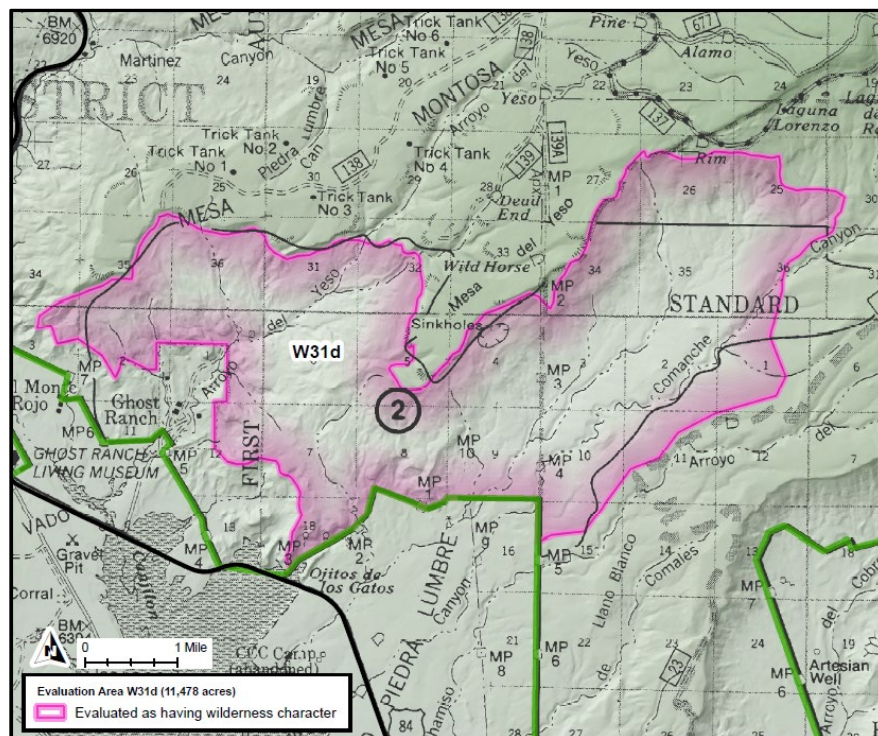


Figure 46. Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch W31d evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (3%), lack of apparent naturalness (40 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (29 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater

This evaluation area consists of 12,056 acres of inventoried lands (CrW1- CrW9, and W6) to be evaluated.

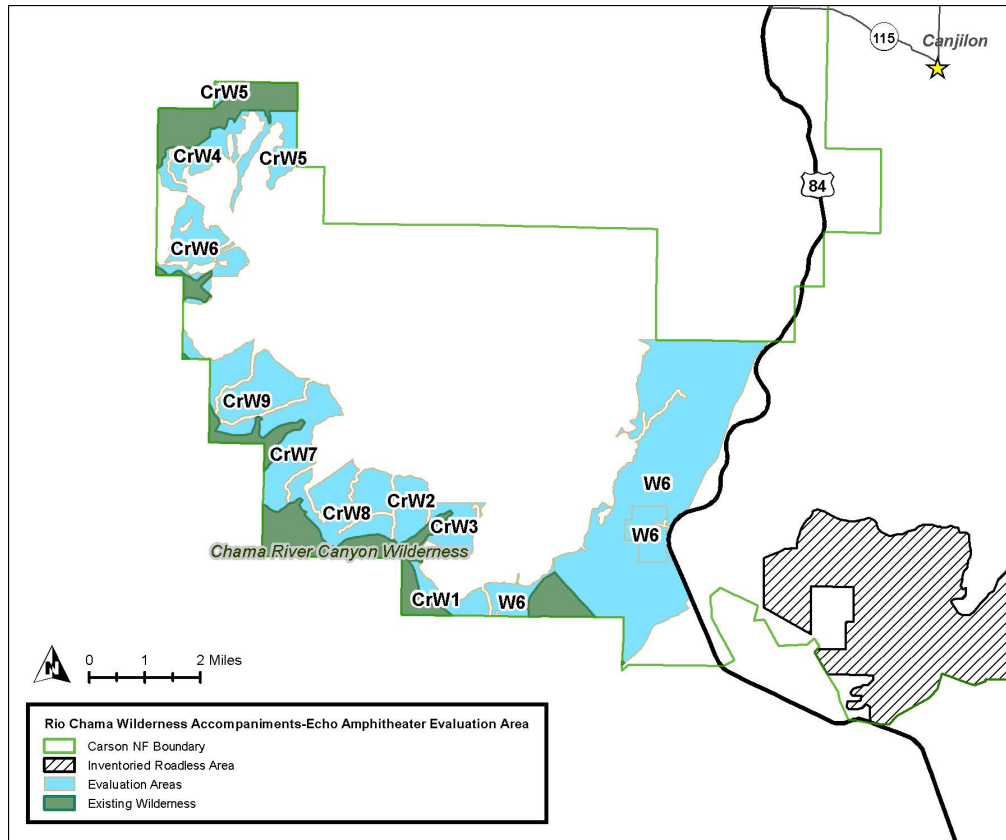


Figure 47. Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area

Manageability

4 percent of the Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) within it.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 456 acres from W6 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

18 percent of the Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness because of visible impacts (sage brush removal, stumps, and slash) left from past and current Mesa de las Viejas Winter Range restoration projects (CrW1-CrW9), past chaining projects (CrW1-CrW9), and closed roads (CrW2, northern CrW4, eastern CrW5, CrW6, CrW7, eastern CrW8, southern W6, and northeastern W6) that are still visually apparent across the landscape. Overlapping these treatment areas and old roads are range and

wildlife improvements, such as guzzlers, spring developments, trick tank, stock tanks, and a corral (scattered throughout CrW1, CrW3, CrW4, CrW5, CrW7, CrW9, and southern W6). These improvements detract from apparent naturalness and offer visual impacts from developed infrastructure and evidence of human activity. Within W6 is La Virgin Maria religious shrine that people pilgrimage to, from as far away as Santa Fe. At least twice a year, large pilgrimage events take place to this religious shrine in addition to regular visitation. Southern W6 is also highly used for permitted movie filming, which has altered the natural appearance in some areas from repeated use.



Figure 48. La Virgin Maria shrine (W6)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, CrW1 lacks apparent naturalness across 46 acres (14 percent), CrW2 lacks apparent naturalness across 34 acres (9 percent), CrW3 lacks apparent naturalness across 90 acres (23 percent), CrW4 lacks apparent naturalness across 80 acres (17 percent), CrW5 lacks apparent naturalness across 73 acres (14 percent), CrW6 lacks apparent naturalness across 234 acres (31 percent), CrW7 lacks apparent naturalness across 27 acres (30 percent), CrW8 lacks apparent naturalness across 126 acres (11 percent), CrW9 lacks apparent naturalness across 292 acres (26 percent), and W6 lacks apparent naturalness across 950 acres (16 percent). Combined, 18 percent of the Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 9,858 acres scattered across Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness and are steep rock formations, have minimal improvements, or are within the canyon of the Rio Chama Wilderness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

42 percent of this evaluation area determined not to have wilderness characteristics offer limited opportunities for solitude, because it is already a high use recreation area for the communities of Canjilon, Abiquiu, Española, and Tierra Amarilla, in addition to non-local visitation. This is especially true around the heavily used and developed Echo Amphitheater and

Rim Vista, as well as the religious shrine within W6. CrW1-CrW9 are also highly popular for driving for pleasure and scenic driving to overlook the Rio Chama Wilderness. 69 percent of Crw1-Crw9 does not lend itself to this wilderness characteristics because of flat terrain and lack of screening due to noise from roads along the edges of these areas. These recreational and cultural activities contribute to lack of solitude on 273 acres (84 percent) of CrW1, 328 acres (83 percent) of CrW2, 285 acres (71 percent) of CrW3, 448 acres (92 percent) of CrW4, 410 acres (78 percent) of CrW5, 336 acres (45 percent) of CrW6, 622 acres (69 percent) of CrW7, 1,019 acres (90 percent) of CrW8, 1,083 acres (96 percent) of CrW9, and 2,170 acres (36 percent) of W6.

All of this evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. About 5,052 acres (42 percent) scattered throughout Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation. About 18 percent of CrW5b and CrW6c are within Rio Chama Canyon and adjacent to the Rio Chama Wilderness and offer similar opportunities for solitude as the designated wilderness area.

Outstanding Values

18 percent of CrW5b and CrW6c both have outstanding features because of the geology found within the Rio Chama Canyon of the Rio Chama Wilderness.

Echo Amphitheater also has outstanding geologic features of red and tan sandstone made famous by the artist Georgia O'Keeffe in the middle of W6. Rare plant communities of Chacon milkvetch, Chama blazing star, and tufted sand verbena also exist in this evaluation area.



Figure 49. Echo Amphitheater (W6)

Size

There are 4,600 acres (38 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have apparent naturalness and solitude or unconfined recreation. The largest of these acres is just over 3,000 acres, the rest were less than 100 acres in size. CrW5b and CrW6c are both less than 5,000 acres, but are adjacent to a designated wilderness area. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the existing Rio Chama Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole, which would then meet the size requirement. Upon review, only CrW5b and CrW6c have geographical definition as they are with the Rio Chama Canyon and touch the rim to be maintained for preservation in an unimpaired condition. The rest of the acreages lack geographical definition to

maintain these areas for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition as these areas occur on flatter terrain and are surrounded by roads, making them easily accessible and prone to vehicular intrusion.

Evaluation Determination

Portions CrW5b and CrW6c are evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus were included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. CrW5b is approximately 82 acres and CrW6c is 21 acres in size, and both are adjacent to the Rio Chama Wilderness. These are 1 percent of the Rio Chama Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater Evaluation Area, and less than 1 percent of both inventoried lands and the Carson NF.

Within CrW5b and CrW6c, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the areas in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure is absent inside the areas and does not significantly detract from apparent naturalness. Opportunities exist to engage in primitive recreation including: hiking, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities inside the RWMA are rare and the adjacent Chama River Canyon Wilderness provides opportunities to feel alone. No other outstanding values have been identified.

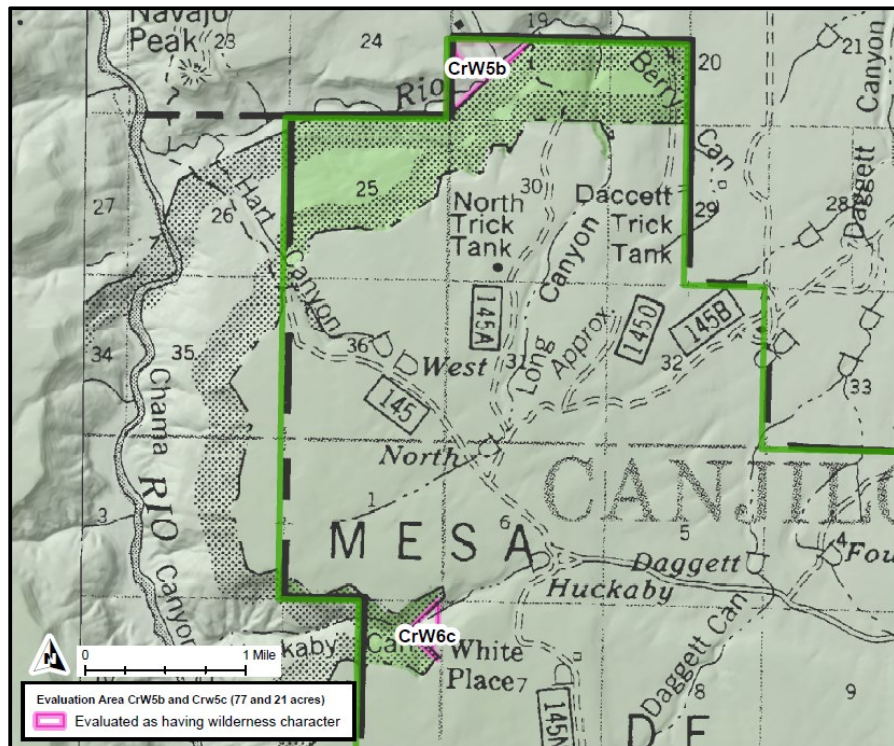


Figure 50. Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater CrW5b and CrW6c evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (4 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (18 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (58 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Jicarilla Ranger District

The Jicarilla Ranger District consists of more than 153,439 acres of NFS lands in northwestern New Mexico. The ranger district is on the eastern edge of the San Juan Basin and ranges from 6,500 to 7,300 feet in elevation, which is largely dominated by sagebrush and other desert vegetation. A moderate climate prevails in the area, with warm spring, summer, and fall temperatures. It serves over 100,000 people in San Juan County and is located 50 miles from Bloomfield, NM.

The San Juan Basin is one of the highest producing natural gas basins in the country, representing as much as 10 percent of the nation's supply. Natural gas production is the prevalent use of the ranger district, with 97 percent of the district leased. Over 800 active wells are located on the Jicarilla Ranger District, which contribute more than \$28 million to the Department of Treasury each year in gas receipts.

The primary recreational uses on the Jicarilla Ranger District are big game hunting and wild horse viewing. Deer and elk are the most popular game species and account for the majority of hunting. Additionally, the northern one-third of the ranger district was designated as the Jicarilla Wild Horse territory by U.S. Congress in 1971.

The Old Spanish Trail, a designated National Historic Trail, crosses the northeast corner of the ranger district. The Old Spanish Trail is a historic horse and burro pack route that connected Santa Fe, New Mexico to Los Angeles, California and was developed primarily for trade in the 1700s. Given its rich cultural history, the district is also known for its one-of-a-kind artifacts that are on display at the ranger district office. Approximately 10 percent of the district has been surveyed for heritage resources and over 700 sites have been found to date.

Evaluation Areas on the Jicarilla Ranger District

This evaluation area consists of 51,816 acres of inventoried lands (J1-J5).

All of the inventoried lands within this district were removed from further Evaluation because of Characteristic 5 – Manageability. All inventoried lands were either within Wildland Urban Interface or within a Wild Horse Territory.

The Wildland Urban Interface includes the Fire Management Unit 1 (FMU 1) designation. These units are under current fire management direction through the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, which states that fire is not desired and is to be suppressed. Given the management for a FMU 1 requires fire suppression by any means necessary to protect life and property, these units were removed from further evaluation. The Jicarilla Ranger District contains gas wells that span the entire district, which is the primary reason why the larger part of the district falls into FMU 1.

The Jicarilla Wild Horse Territory is also on the Jicarilla Ranger District, and was removed from further evaluation. The Forest Service is required to manage these wild horse herds to protect the herd and maintain ecological integrity of the land. The management plans for these areas require managing population numbers by capturing and transporting members of the herd. This generally requires the use of all-terrain vehicles and motor vehicles with trailers, which are stated as management tools in the plan. Given the management requirements necessitated by the existing federal designation, the management to preserve wilderness characteristics in the

Wild Horse Territories is precluded by the previous existing designated use of the area as directed by the territories' management plans. All inventoried lands found within the Jicarilla Ranger District from further Evaluation and will not be carried forward into evaluation as these areas were not evaluated to have wilderness characteristics.

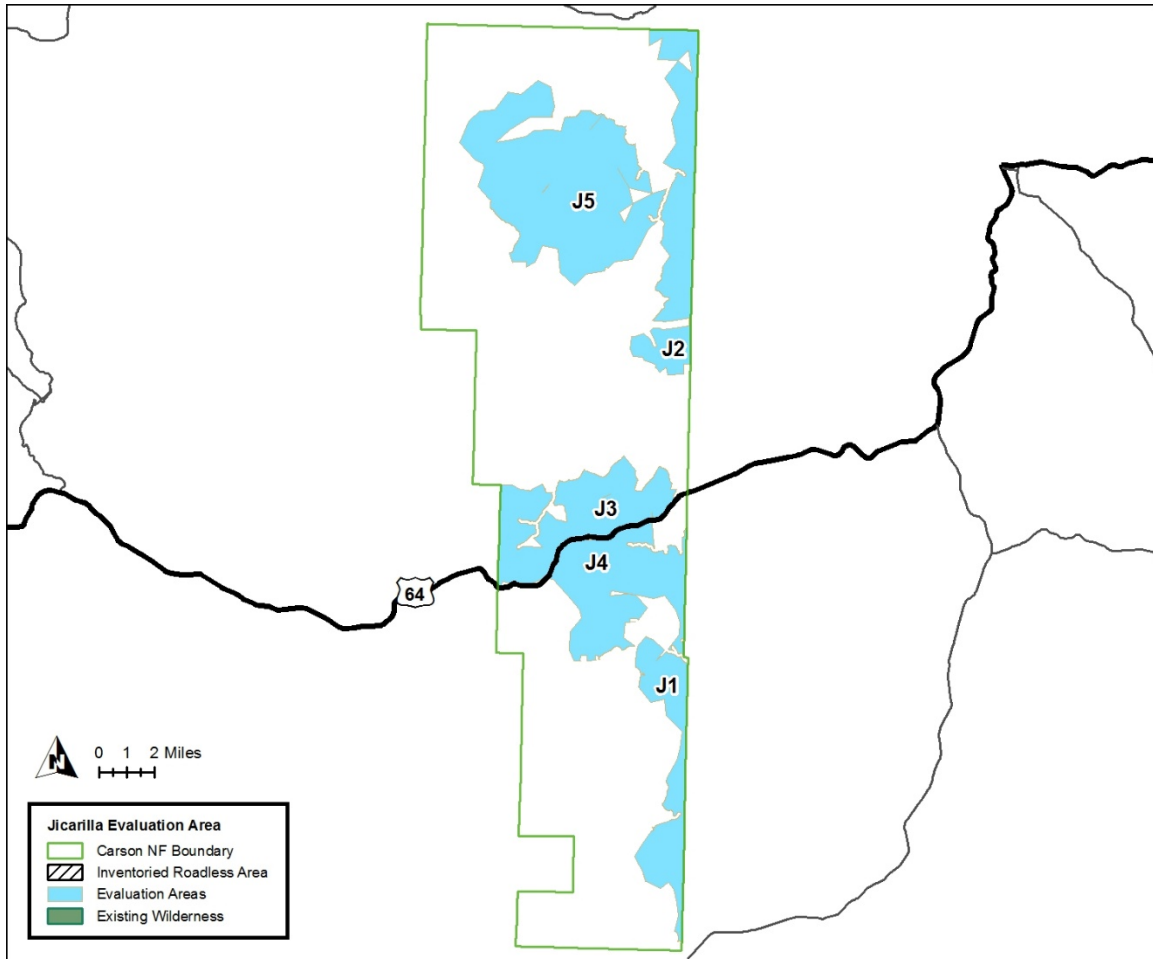


Figure 51. Jicarilla Evaluation Area

Questa Ranger District

The Questa Ranger District is north of Taos, NM and primarily serves the communities of Questa, Cerro, Red River, Arroyo Seco, Taos, and Taos Ski Valley. The ranger district spans into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, with elevations ranging from 6,600 feet at the bottom of the Rio Grande Gorge to 13,161 feet at the top of Wheeler Peak (the tallest peak in New Mexico). Open sagebrush and piñon-juniper are located at the lower elevation, ponderosa pine at mid-elevation, and spruce-fir to alpine and tundra vegetation communities at the higher elevation. Aspen is fairly common at all elevations above 8,000 feet.

Questa Ranger District has generally a mild climate, with diverse opportunities for both summer and winter activities. At nearly 260,381 acres, the ranger district is perhaps best known for its skiing opportunities and Valle Vidal, considered by many as a crown jewel of Northern New Mexico. Valle Vidal is a 100,000-acre swath of lush meadows, dense forests, craggy peaks, and clear streams. It is well known for its wildlife, as well as its outstanding scenic and recreational opportunities.

Three of the Carson NF's four ski areas (Taos Ski Valley, Red River Ski and Summer Area, and Enchanted Forest Cross-country Ski and Snowshoe Area) are located on the Questa Ranger District, the largest, Taos Ski Valley, is internationally known and is a destination experience. During the summer, all three ski areas also offer a range of activities from hiking to mountain biking.

Much of the local economy around the Questa Ranger District is based on recreation and tourism, but some rural communities make a living from traditional Northern New Mexico uses involving raising livestock, logging, and cutting fuelwood or other forest products.

The Questa Ranger District administers the Latir Wilderness (20,405 acres), Wheeler Peak Wilderness (18,457 acres), and the recently designated (2014) Columbine-Hondo Wilderness (approximately 43,706 acres with final acres yet to be determined). These three wilderness areas make up approximately 31.7 percent of the ranger district. The Questa Ranger District had 144,265 acres of wilderness inventoried lands.

Evaluation Areas on the Questa Ranger District

Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments

This evaluation area consists of 19,612 acres of inventoried lands (ChW1-ChW6, Q2, and WpW1-WpW6) to be evaluated.

Congressional action that took place in 2014 influenced how this area is evaluated. Based on 2014 legislation, portions of the Wheeler Peak Wilderness, along the Lost Lake Trail 91 and 56, were removed as part of the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness designation, to allow mountain bikes (southeast WpW6, see map below). Since the removed area was recently evaluated by Congress, it will not be carried forward into this Evaluation.

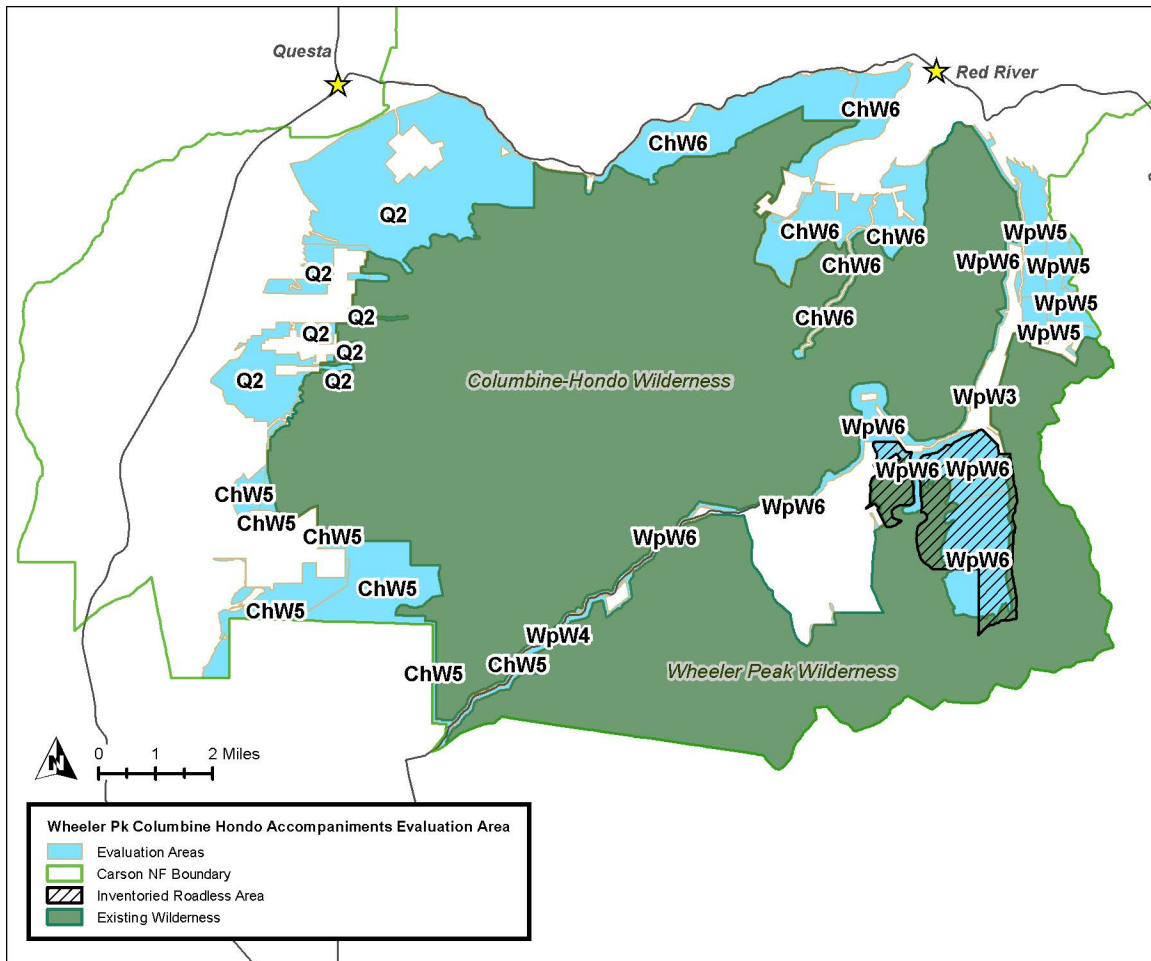


Figure 52. Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area

Manageability

44 percent of the Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) within it.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 8,533 acres from ChW1-ChW6, Q2, and WpW1-WpW6 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

18 percent of the Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. There are visible impacts (bulldozer lines from firefighting efforts during the 1996 Hondo Wildfire in Q2, including dozer lines, erosion control structures, and reforestation plantings. Thinning treatments used to combat an *lps* beetle outbreak, which began in 2002 and is still ongoing, have added to the impacts on apparent naturalness in ChW5. There is a powerline just south of San Cristobal and in Hondo Canyon that takes away the

apparent naturalness of ChW5. ChW5, ChW6, and WpW6 typically offer more of a developed feel, due to the visibility of houses, telephone lines, or adjacent open roads and highways.

Q2 and ChW6 has obvious evidence of ancillary activities from the molybdenum exploration, such as mountains of waste rock, exploratory roads, and test pits, which detract from the apparent naturalness within Q2 and ChW6. There is an electronic site (called Flag Mountain) and associated access road for multiple agencies on a hilltop just south of Questa within Q2 that is apparent from within the area. Southern ChW5 near Gallina Peak is surrounded by private land, mine adits, and has old roadbeds that are still evident throughout it. Within WpW6 there is an administration road allow access to private property which is inhabited year around.



Figure 53. Flag Mountain electronic site (Q2)

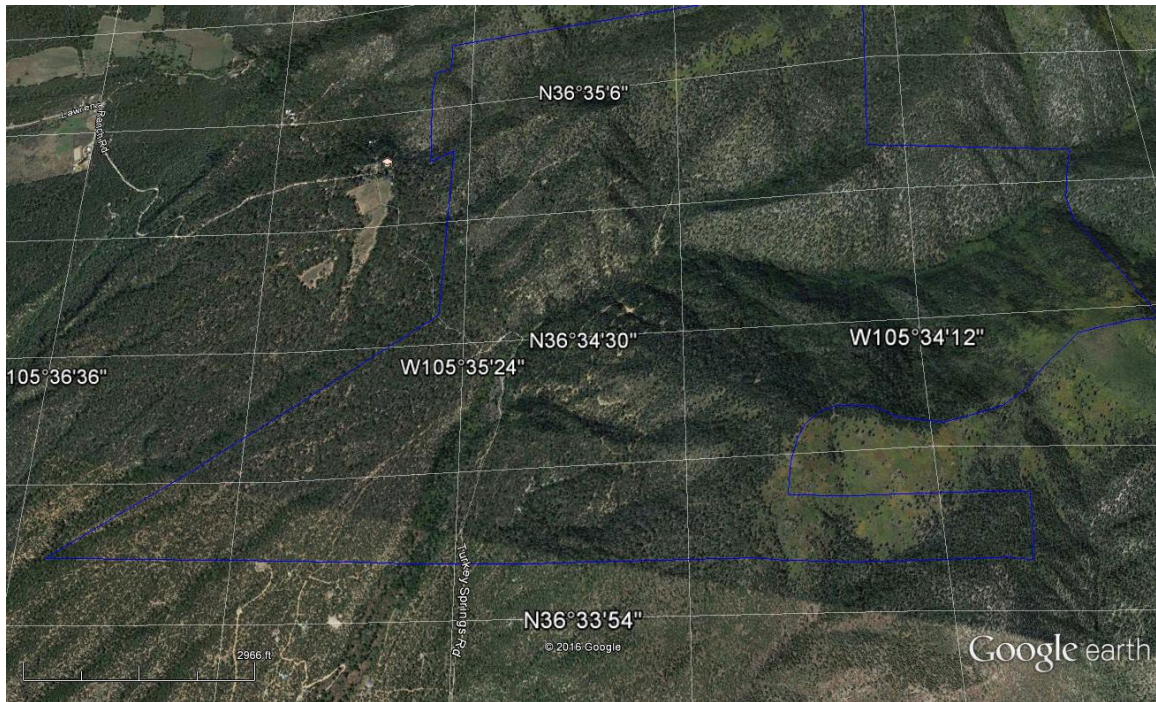


Figure 54. Google Earth imagery showing visually apparent roads of southern ChW5 (outlined in blue)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, Chw5 lacks apparent naturalness across 230 acres (8 percent), CHW6 lacks apparent naturalness across 665 acres (14 percent), Q2 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,436 acres (38 percent), and WpW6 lacks apparent naturalness across 158 acres (5 percent). Combined 18 percent of the Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 16,123 acres scattered across Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area range from areas of development, with higher concentrations of people near roads; to developed recreation sites that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors where solitude is less common; to semi-remote, undeveloped areas. There is also a great variety of recreational activities, including driving for pleasure, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), and horseback riding in the summer.

88 percent of the Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area offers opportunities for solitude, because it is highly used by the communities of Questa, Lama, San Cristobal, Gallina, and Red River. The area also serves as a destination point for people residing outside of New Mexico who come to visit the developed recreation areas of Goose Lake, Fawn Lakes, Junebug, and Columbine campgrounds, as well as the area around the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness. These campgrounds and lakes adjacent to ChW6 are some of the most highly-used recreation sites on the Carson NF and remain full throughout the summer season. Other uses include fuelwood gathering with chainsaws within Q2, and Chw5. Noise from roads,

fuelwood gathering (chainsaw noise), and developed recreation sites are evident along the edges of CHw5, Chw6, and Q2, but drop off where topographic barriers occur.

Also, the western and southern portions of ChW5 and Q2 and northern WpW6 have limited opportunities for solitude, because of the private land inholdings that are dispersed throughout these areas. These private land inholdings consist of concentrated populations, including townships, private corporations, and residential inholdings. These recreational and cultural activities contribute to the lack of solitude on 161 acres (6 percent) of Chw5, 849 acres (18 percent) of CHw6, 1,181 acres (18 percent) of Q2, and 157 acres (5 percent) of WpW6.

This entire evaluation area does offer opportunities for unconfined recreation. About 8,731 acres (88 percent) of the Columbine-Hondo and Wheeler Peak Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

Cryptogams are found throughout ChW5 and an eligible wild and scenic river is within WpW6.

Size

There is 4,518 acres (23 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 975 acres individually. There are several portions that are 20 acres or less in size, but are adjacent to a designated wilderness. Upon review, these portions (including adjacent to wilderness) lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in unimpaired condition due to being surrounded by existing open roads and private lands, having private land inholdings, and being easily accessible

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (44 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (18 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (12 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Latir Wilderness Accompaniments

This evaluation area consists of 2,085 acres of inventoried lands (LpW1 and LpW2d) to be evaluated.

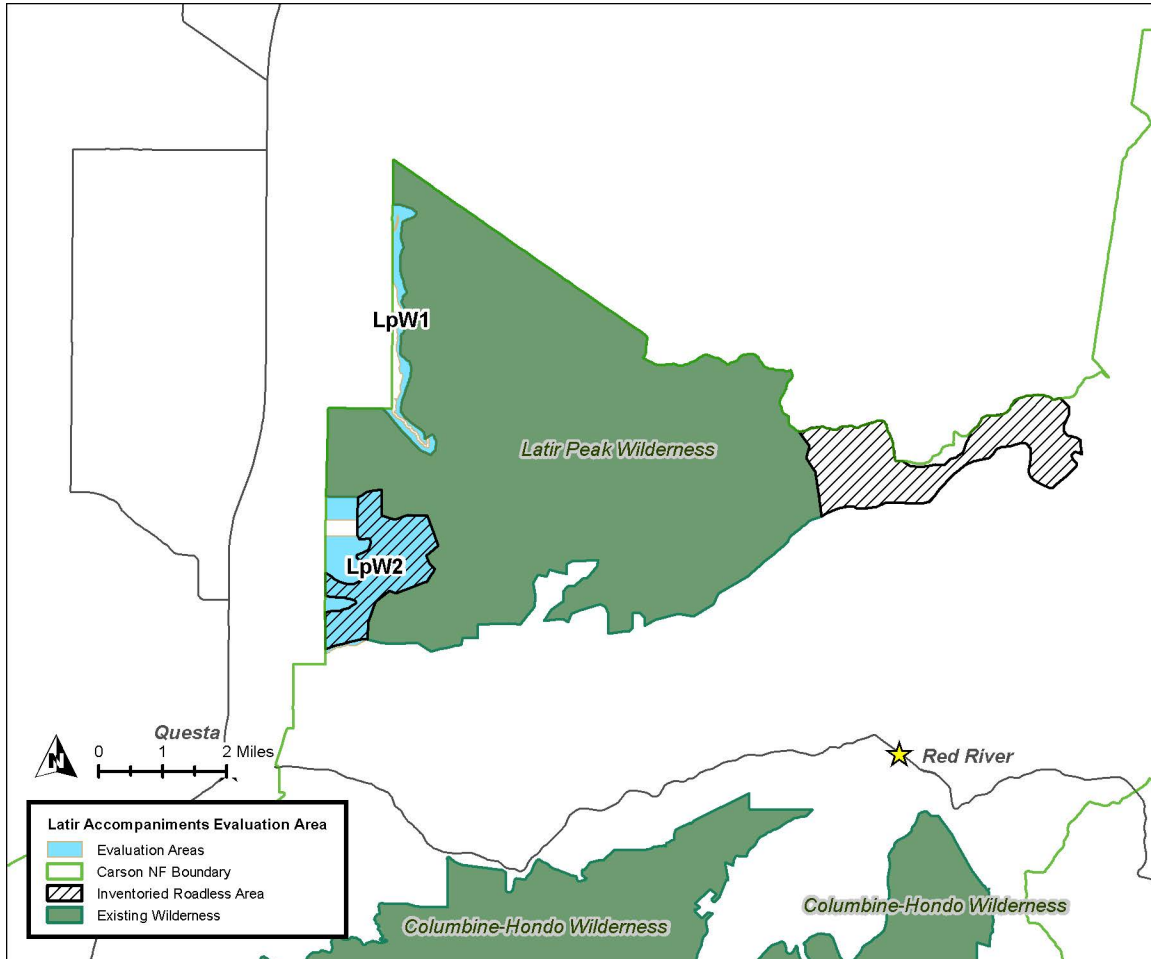


Figure 55. Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area

Manageability

1 percent of the Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has acequias within it. Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 4 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of LpW1. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

34 percent of the Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of the visible impacts from current fuelwood gathering activities, including stumps and branch debris piles (northern LpW2d), noticeable roadbeds created by unauthorized motor

vehicle use (middle and southern LpW2d), and past mining activities that include tailings piles (scattered throughout LPW2d). All of LpW1 has an acequia running through it.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, LpW1 lacks apparent naturalness across 361 acres (100 percent), and LpW2d lacks apparent naturalness across 339 acres (20 percent). Combined, 34 percent of the Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 1,381 acres scattered across Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area do have apparent naturalness.



Figure 56. User-created road (LpW2)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

63 percent of the Latir Wilderness Accompaniments Evaluation Area does offer opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation. These opportunities are mostly found within the inventoried

roadless area¹, since these portions have no improvements, designated non-motorized trails, and experience low levels of use. LpW1 and LpW2d outside of the inventoried roadless area, does not offer solitude as the sights, sounds, and uses from fuelwood gathering (chainsaw noise), adjacent houses, and private land can be pervasive throughout most of this area. LpW1 and LpW2d typically offer more of residential feel, due to the visibility of houses, telephone lines, and associated access roads from adjacent private lands and ditch.

Size

There are 1,098 acres (52 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 930 acres individually. Some of these acreages are adjacent to wilderness; however, they lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in unimpaired condition. Upon review, all 1,098 acres (including adjacent to wilderness) lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in unimpaired condition due to being surrounded by existing open roads and private lands, or having private land inholdings that make the areas easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (1 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (34 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (37 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the 2001 Roadless Rule included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.

Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon

This evaluation area consists of 23,557 acres of inventoried lands (Q3, Q5, and LpW2) to be evaluated for wilderness characteristics.

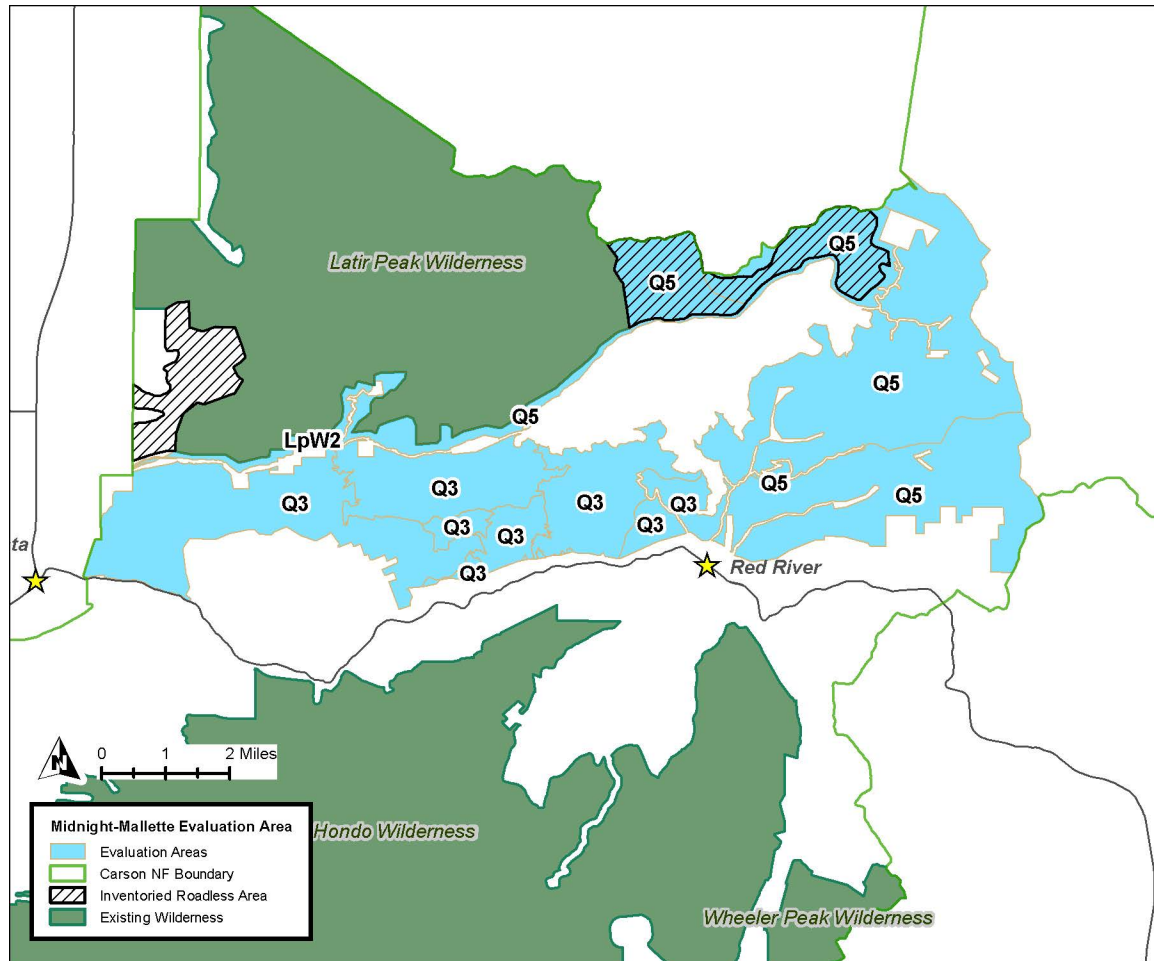


Figure 57. Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area

Manageability

28 percent of the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has acequias and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 19 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of LpW2. Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 6,688 acres from Q3 and Q5 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

31 percent of the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of the visible impacts from past thinning projects, historic mining activities, and closed roads that are still evident on the landscape in eastern Q5 of this evaluation area. This area contains a historic mining district with two associated towns (eastern Q5). Tailing piles, mine adits and shafts, as well as historic buildings, are evident on the landscape. Mining reclamation work took place in this area in 2010. There are also two snowmobile warming huts in eastern Q5.

Installed to protect Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams, wetlands, and Arizona willow populations, numerous wildlife exclosures are also scattered throughout eastern Q5. Motorized access routes are used to maintain them. Two electronic sites with associated motorized access routes for maintenance are located on the far eastern boundary of Q5, as well. LpW2 and western Q5 lack apparent naturalness as these areas have numerous stumps from the extensive fuelwood gathering with chainsaws through Forest Service issued permits from the communities of Cerro, Red River, and Questa. Within the center of Q3 there are several miles of currently open-to-the-public motorized trails that contribute to the lack of apparent naturalness.



Figure 58. Midnight Mine reclamation (Q5)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, Q3 lacks apparent naturalness across 3,477 acres (36 percent), Q5 lack apparent naturalness across 3,635 acres (26 percent), and LpW2 lacks apparent naturalness across 128 acres (44 percent). Combined 31 percent of the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area lacks apparent

naturalness. The remaining 16,317 acres (69 percent) does have apparent naturalness, some of which is within inventoried roadless area that is adjacent to the Latir Wilderness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

42 percent of this evaluation area offers opportunities for solitude, while all of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation during the winter. This area receives high recreation use by the communities of Questa, Cerro, and Red River, in addition to serving as a tourist destination throughout the entire area, except within portions of the inventoried roadless area (Q5). For example, this area attracts tourists to Red River in the summer for various types of motorized recreation experiences (adjacent to Q5 and with middle of Q3) and in the winter for snowmobiling in Q5. This area has been identified for snowmobiling through the 1986 Carson Forest Plan. The breathtaking view from Greenie Peak and the historic structures of Midnight Town and Anchor Town are also a tourist draw. Given the high levels of motorized use and snowmobiling surrounding Q5 and within the middle of Q3, the sounds from these activities can be pervasive throughout the area. Other uses that have high participation rates include fuelwood gathering with chainsaws along all open roads (most of Q5 and all of LpW2).



Figure 59. Snowmobiling in Midnight Meadows (Q5)

These recreational and cultural activities contribute to the lack of solitude on 3,374 acres (48 percent), within Q3, 3,635 acres (38 percent) within Q5, and 289 acres (99 percent) within LpW2. About 13,731 acres (58 percent) of the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon

Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation, some of which is within inventoried roadless. Within inventoried roadless area¹ there are few improvements, no roads, and only one trail.

Outstanding Values

The Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area contains outstanding values, including scenic vistas from Greenie Peak, eligible wild and scenic rivers, Rio Grande cutthroat trout streams, and Arizona willow, all within eastern Q5 (15 percent). The area also has historic values related to Midnight Town, Anchor Town, old timber mills, mining claims, and telegraph line within eastern Q5 (20 percent).

Size

There are 5,313 acres (23 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have apparent naturalness and solitude or unconfined recreation. One of these areas is 1,165 acres (Q5n) and is found adjacent to the Latir Wilderness and within inventoried roadless areas. If this area were to be managed in conjunction with the existing Latir Wilderness, it would be over 5,000 acres as a whole. The remaining acreages are less than 1,200 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, these remaining 4,148 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads or private land and are currently in impaired condition due adjacent activities and accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

A portion Q5 (labeled Q5n on map) is evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus was included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. Q5n is approximately 1,165 acres in size, and is 5 percent of the Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Evaluation Area and less than 1 percent of both the inventoried lands and of the Carson NF. Within Q5n, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. Some high-quality opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation exist in the area including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon, making opportunities to feel alone possible in much of the area, especially away from Forest Road 134. No outstanding values were identified.

¹ The definition of an inventoried roadless area for the 2001 Roadless Rule included: undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process.

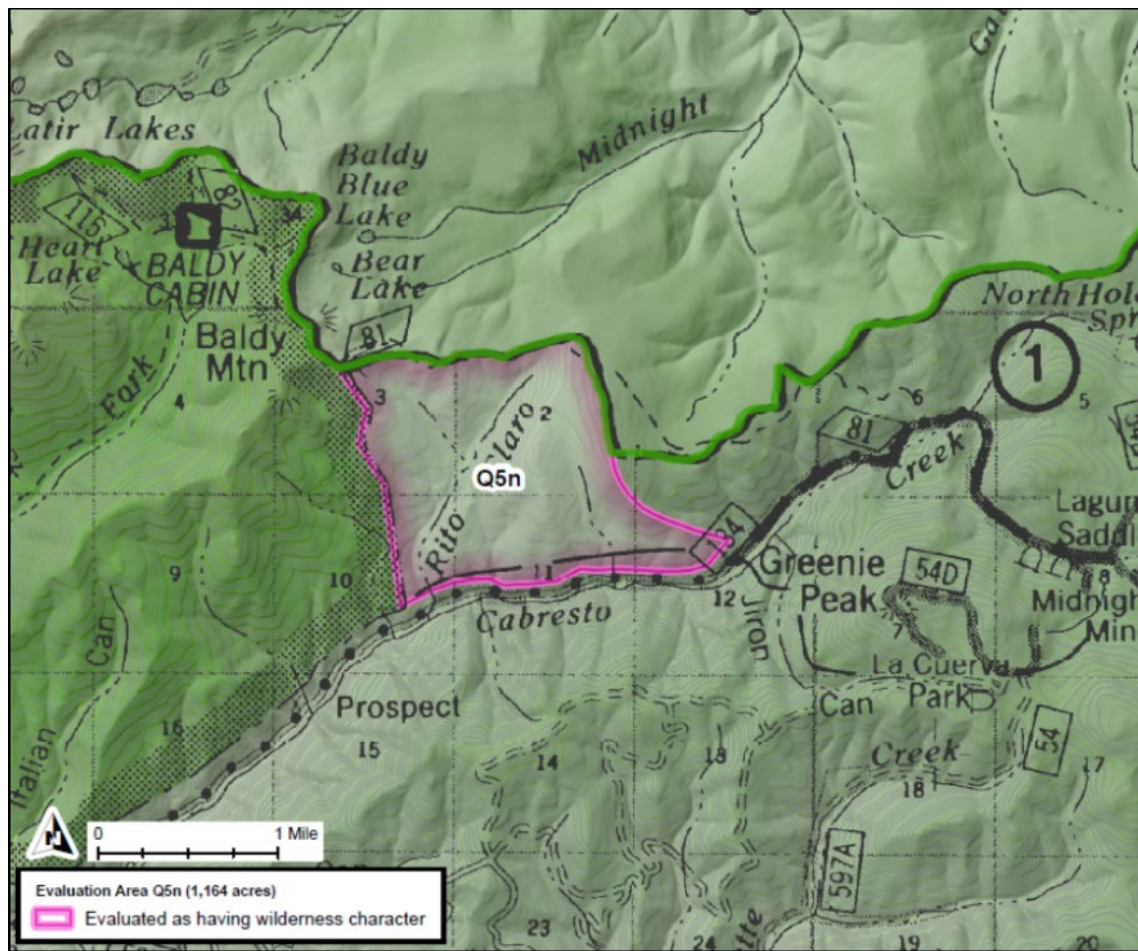


Figure 60. Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon Q5n evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics due to manageability (28%), lack of apparent naturalness (31 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (42 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments

This evaluation area consists of 3,660 acres of inventoried lands (Qxs162ADD) to be evaluated.

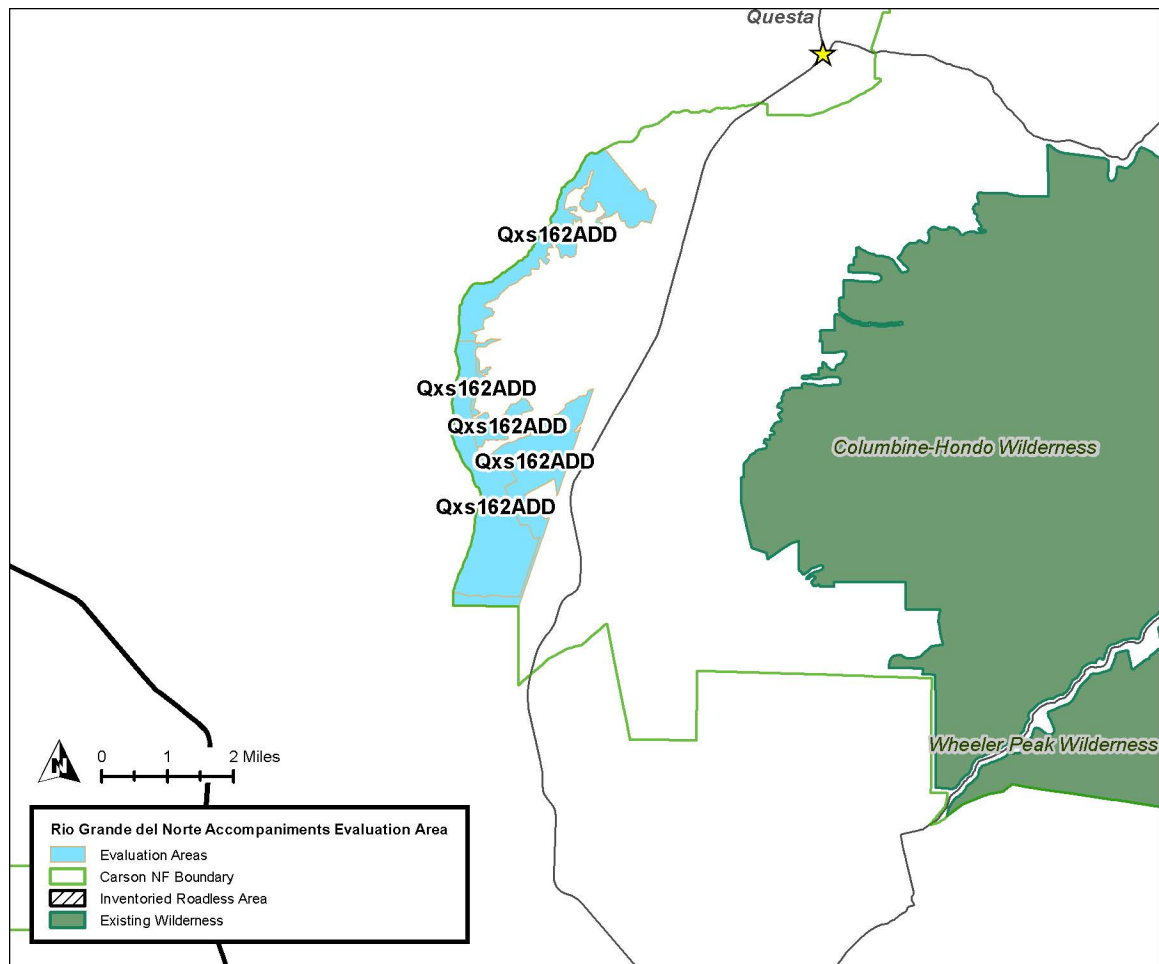


Figure 61. Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area

Manageability

30 percent of the Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) within it.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 1,183 acres from Qxs162ADD that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

16 percent (581 acres) of Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible impacts from thinning project Garrapata South, a powerline, and visually apparent logging roads from past timber activities from Garrapata South. Thinning and fuelwood treatments used to combat an *Ips* beetle outbreak, which began in 2002 and is still

ongoing, have added to the impacts on apparent naturalness as well. These projects required motorized access and use of chainsaws.

The remaining 3,079 acres (89 percent) scattered across Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness. Some of these acres are within the Rio Grande Gorge.



Figure 62. Stump and slash from fuelwood treatment for beetle infestation

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

76 percent of the area offers opportunity for solitude, while the entire evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. Noise from developed campgrounds, fuelwood gathering (chainsaw and vehicle noises), and vehicle noises on open-to-public roads is evident along the edges of this evaluation area, especially the northern acreages. These activities contribute to the lack of solitude on 892 acres (24 percent). About 2768 acres (76 percent) of the Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation, most of which is within the Rio Grande Gorge.

Outstanding Values

The Rio Grande del Norte Accompaniments Evaluation Area contains scenic vistas overlooking the Rio Grande, a designated wild and scenic river, eligible wild and scenic river, and the geologic feature of the Rio Grande gorge itself. There are also cryptogams found throughout the area.



Figure 63. Rio Grande Gorge

Size

There are 1,240 acres (33 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. The largest of these areas is 1,049 acres, and is within the gorge and onto the rim. This area would need to be managed in conjunction with the BLM's existing Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, across the gorge, since it is less than 5,000 acres on its own, which at this time is not attainable.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (30%), lack of apparent naturalness (16 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (24 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Valle Vidal

This evaluation area consists of 95,351 acres of inventoried lands (Q1, Q4, and Q5) to be evaluated. For the purpose of this evaluation, Valle Vidal will be discussed as East-side Valle Vidal and West-side Valle Vidal. These portions are split by the geological Rock Wall feature.

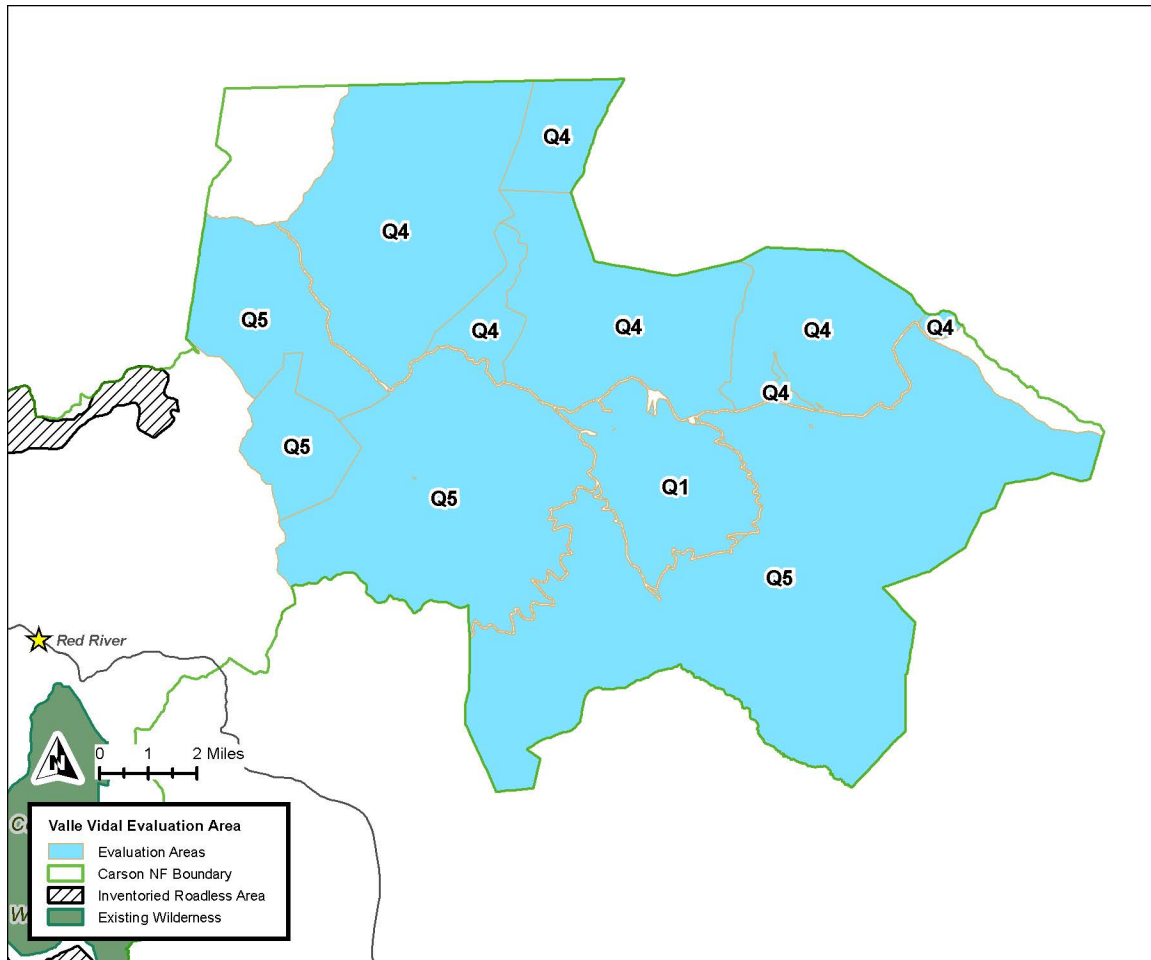


Figure 64: Valle Vidal Evaluation Area

Manageability

4 percent of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has acequias, Valle Vidal Private Property, and shape and configuration issues within it.

Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 237 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of Q4. There is 123 acres (Q1, Q4, and Q5) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area.

During the Inventory step, portions of land within Valle Vidal (Q5) were misidentified as National Forest System lands. Further inspection during Evaluation found they were private lands

belonging to Vermejo Park. This correction resulted in the removal of the Valle Vidal La Belle area from further Evaluation. Removing the Valle Vidal La Belle area also split the remaining inventoried lands, because of a road (not open to public) needed to access this block of private land. The total acres removed was 2,902 acres (less than 1 percent of inventoried lands) from the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

50 percent of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. Eastside portions in Q1 and Q5 lack apparent naturalness, because of the visible impact from firefighting efforts during the 2002 Ponil Complex Wildfire that includes bulldozer lines, erosion control structures, invasive weeds, and reforestation plantings. Also noticeable throughout East-side Valle Vidal are closed and permitted administrative roads (center Q4 and throughout Q5).

Overlapping the Ponil fire and the not-open to public roads are range, wildlife, and stream improvements. These include range rider camps (Q5), streambank stability structures (along streams in Q1, Q5, and Q4), erosion control structures (Q5 and Q1), 14 windmills (Q5 and Q4), exclosures (Q5 and Q4), stock tanks (Q5), a fish barrier (Q4), and a corral (Q5). Most of these improvements have motorized access (administrative routes for maintenance) in them (Q4 and Q5).



Figure 65. Windmill range improvement (Q4)

Also overlapping is the historic Ring Ranch site (north in Q5) used for education and parking. Philmont Scout Ranch has three permitted camps with access routes and a designated mountain bike trail that are heavily used and noticeable in the evaluation area (Whitman Vega Q4, Sealy Canyon Q5, and Ring Place Q5). These camps house a permanent crew of 10 people throughout the summer, and over 4,000 scouts visit these camps each year (over 13,000 days and nights camping). Once a week, a vehicle supply run is made to each camp by the permitted motorized access routes. The Boundary electronic site and an administrative/maintenance route is visually apparent from the southwest portion of Q5.



Figure 66. Philmont Boy Scouts on permitted mountain bike trail (east Q4)

Portions of West-side Valle Vidal Evaluation Area also lack apparent naturalness because of visible impacts from past thinning projects and old logging roads from past timber activities scattered throughout the entire area (Q1, Q4, and Q5). Similar to East-side Valle Vidal, there are numerous range and wildlife improvements and infrastructure that overlap these past thinning projects and old logging roads, such as range rider camps (Q5), streambank improvement structures (all streams in Q5 and Q4), exclosures (Q4 and Q5), a fish barrier (Q4), and a corral (Q5). Most of these improvements have motorized access routes for maintenance. There is also

the Ortiz electronic site and associated motor vehicle access route that is visually apparent from within the southwestern portion of Q5.



Figure 67. Installation of a wetland improvement structure (Westside Q5)

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other for both the eastside and westside Valle Vidal, Q1 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,673 acres (46 percent), Q4 lacks apparent naturalness across 17,932 acres (53 percent), while Q5 lacks apparent naturalness across 27,223 acres (39 percent). Combined, 50 percent of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 47,523 acres scattered across Valle Vidal Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness, especially around Little Costilla Peak and Ash Mountain.

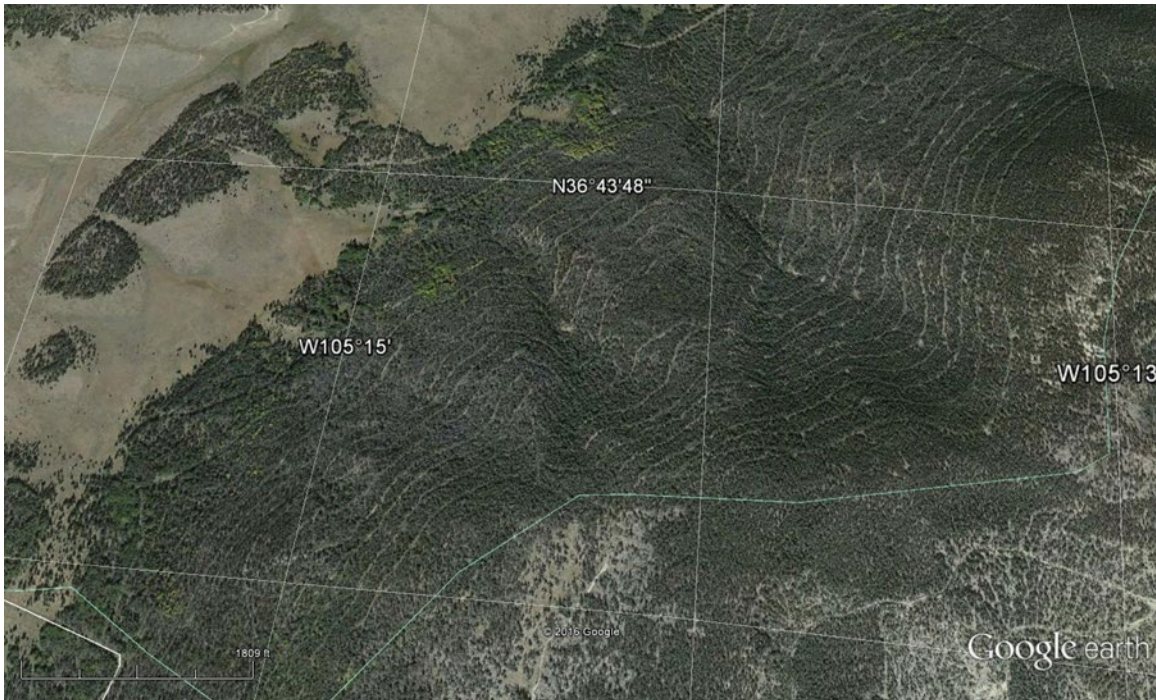


Figure 68. Google Earth imagery of old logging roads in southeastern portion of Q5

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

All of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area offers unconfined recreation, because there are no established trails, only four roads that are open to the public, and all vehicle camping must occur in an established campground adjacent to Q1, Q4, and Q5.

77 percent of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area offers opportunities for solitude. The East-side Valle Vidal is a high use recreation destination point, in addition to the use brought in by Philmont Scout Ranch through special use permit (Q4 and Q5). Philmont Scout Ranch alone has three permitted camps with motorized access routes and a 10-person permanent crew throughout the summer. Over 4,000 scouts visit these camps each year (over 13,000 days and nights camping). The southern part of West-side Valle Vidal is frequently used during the winter by snowmobiles (Q5, which was identified for snowmobiling through the 1983 Valle Vidal Multiple Use Guide and 1986 Carson Forest Plan), and noise from this activity is pervasive throughout Q5.

These activities contribute to the lack of solitude on 5,105 acres (88 percent) of Q1, 5,061 acres (15 percent) of Q4, and 12,018 acres (17 percent) of Q5. About 73,167 acres of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values in the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area include the outstanding national resource waters (ONRWs, all rivers of the Valle Vidal), eligible wild and scenic rivers (Q4 and Q5), Little Costilla Peak (alpine ecosystem, Q4), Ash Mountain (shale rock peak, Q4), Rio Grande cutthroat trout, possible ptarmigan, the Rock Wall geologic feature, large open valleys, Beatty Lake salt playas, and pure bristlecone pine stands. This area also contains historic outstanding values such as Ring Ranch, Ring Town with cemetery, Ponil Town with cemetery, McCrystal Place, railway

beds, smelters, timber mills, Clayton Camp, La Belle Town, La Cueva Camp, Old Shuree, Shuree Lodge, and telegraph line.



Figure 69. View from Ash Mountain (Q4g)

Size

There are 28,110 acres (29 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. The largest being approximately 9,361 acres, and are primarily surrounding the Little Costilla Peak. The outstanding values found within this area include ONRWs, Little Costilla Peak (alpine ecosystem), Ash Mountain (shale rock peak), Rio Grande cutthroat trout, possible ptarmigan, the Rock Wall, large open valleys, and pure bristlecone pine stands. The bristlecone pine stand has the state's largest bristlecone pine tree.

The remaining acreages are less than 2,900 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, 18,749 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition.

Evaluation Determination

A portion of Q4 (labeled Q4g) is evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus was included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. Q4g is approximately 9,361 acres, which is 10 percent of the Valle Vidal Evaluation Area and is 1 percent of both inventoried lands and of the Carson NF.

Within Q4g, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are high quality opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon, making opportunities to feel alone possible in much of the area. Outstanding values include the Bristlecone Pine stand, Ash Mountain (shale rock peak), and the Rock Wall geologic feature.

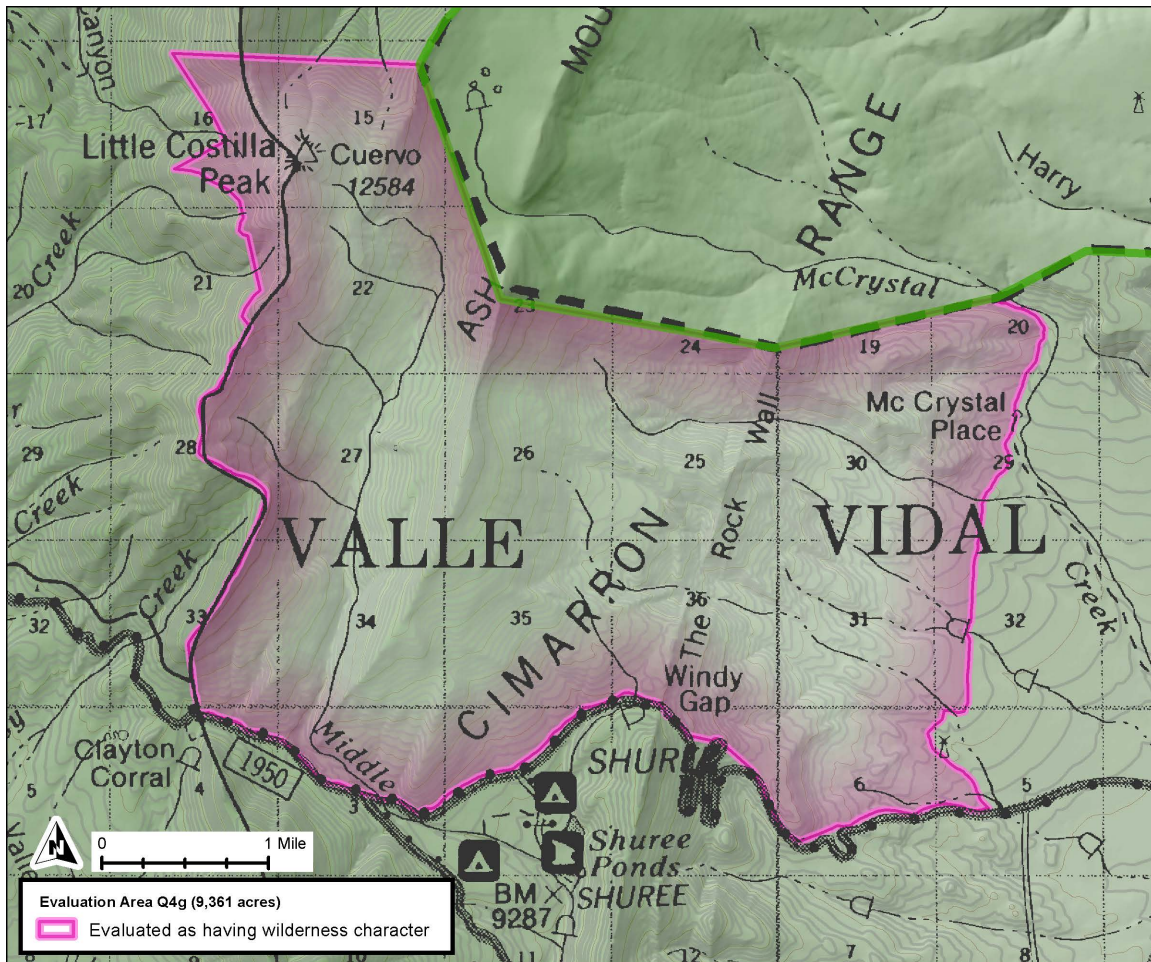


Figure 70. Valle Vidal Q4g evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (4 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (50 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (23 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Tres Piedras Ranger District

The Tres Piedras Ranger District is located on the west side of the Carson NF, west of the Rio Grande Gorge, and is named for the large outcrop of rocks near the ranger district office. It is the largest ranger district on the Carson National Forest, consisting of 355,682 acres. The climate around Tres Piedras is very pleasurable, with over 300 days of sunshine and clear skies. The district itself ranges from 7,000 feet in elevation to 11,000 feet, where vegetation communities change as the elevation increases. Open sagebrush and piñon-juniper dominate in the lower elevations (7,000-8,000 feet), at which point ponderosa pine ranges from 8,000 to 9,000 feet. Above 9,000 feet, fir and spruce communities dominate the landscape. Aspen is fairly common at all elevations above 8,000 feet.

The Tres Piedras Ranger District serves the community of Tres Piedras, NM, as well as Taos and Ojo Caliente, NM, and Alamosa, CO. Ranching is one of the larger occupations in the Tres Piedras area and has the strongest influence on the ranger district's program of work.

One of the ranger district's most distinctive features is San Antonio Mountain, rising to 10,908 feet elevation, above surrounding sagebrush flats. It is the largest free-standing mountain peak in the lower 48 of the U.S. and is easily visible from many locations across Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. In addition, Hopewell Lake, about 60 miles west of Tres Piedras, is a recreational hotspot featuring fishing and developed campgrounds.

At its peak more than 100 years ago, the Tres Piedras Ranger District provided grazing for nearly two million sheep. Along with livestock, the terrain carried massive products of the lumber industry. The railroad helped facilitate the removal of several million board feet of ponderosa pine taken from the mountains for rail expansion across the U.S. On the northern part of the ranger district, segments of the railroad now serve as an attraction, offering beautiful mountain scenery while riding on a narrow-gauge steam train (one of the few left in the U.S.) along the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad.

One designated wilderness area is located on the Tres Piedras Ranger District. The Cruces Basin Wilderness is in the northern portion of the district and consists of 18,867 acres, making up approximately 5.3 percent of the ranger district. The Tres Piedras Ranger District had 187,416 acres of inventoried lands.

Evaluation Areas on the Tres Piedras Ranger District

Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul

This evaluation area consists of 13,028 acres of inventoried lands (W7 and W10) to be evaluated.

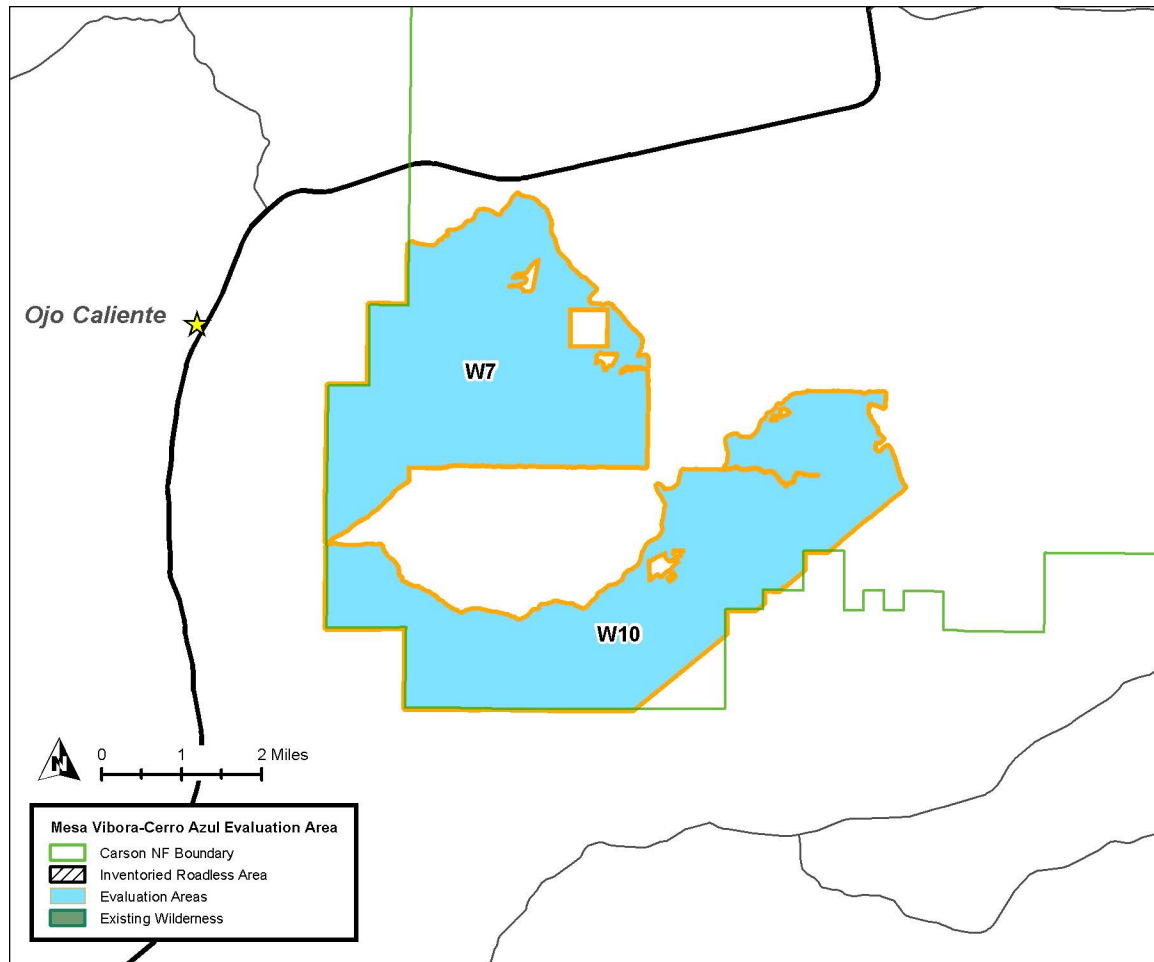


Figure 71. Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul Evaluation Area

Manageability

All lands within Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul Evaluation Area could be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics

Apparent Naturalness

76 percent of the Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. This area, in the early 2000's, was impacted by an *Ips* beetle outbreak. Currently, more than 50 percent of the larger, older piñon trees are dead. Only younger trees (less than 50 years old) remain in clustered stands. The piñon juniper forest in this area has also been heavily impacted by thinning and fuelwood harvesting treatments to counter an *Ips* beetle outbreak. Numerous stumps and slash are visible across the landscape. In addition, there are range and wildlife improvements, such as water pipe line, spring developments, trick tanks, and water storage tanks, scattered

throughout W10 and southern W7. Old roads that are still apparent on the ground and roads used to maintain wildlife and range improvements also detract from the apparent naturalness of this area, especially where people have driven off of these roads to avoid vehicle damage and getting stuck in the mud of highly erosive soils throughout W7 and W10.

When all of these detractors are overlaid with each other, W10 lack apparent naturalness across 5,808 acres (84 percent), while W7 lack apparent naturalness across 4,118 acres (67 percent). Combined, 76 percent of the Mesa Vibora-Cerro Azul Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 3,110 acres scattered across Mesa Vibora- Cerro Azul Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness.



Figure 72. Range improvement and road access to range improvement (W10)



Figure 73: Piñon Beetle Killed Trees

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

25 percent of this evaluation area does offer opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation around Mesa Vibora and Cerro Azul due to the steepness of the terrain. The rest of the area (75 percent) does not lend itself to this wilderness characteristics because of flat terrain, lack of screening, and current uses such as fuelwood harvesting of beetle killed trees (chainsaw noise) and piñon gathering (vehicle noise). This area does not tend to draw people in for recreation, except for hunting and to hike up Cerro Azul and Mesa Vibora, where opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation can be found and are presently taking place.

Outstanding Values

Cerro Azul (eastern W10) and Mesa Vibora (northern W7) are outstanding geological features (historic volcanoes). There are remnants of a historic trail that could possibly be the Chili Line in this area as well.



Figure 74. Cerro Azul

Size

There are 3,110 acres (24 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. However, the largest of these acres is just over 1,000 acres. The rest were less than 300 acres in size. Upon review of these acres, they lack geographical definition to maintain these areas for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition, as these areas occur on flatter terrain, making them easily accessible and prone to vehicular intrusion.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics due to lack of apparent naturalness (76 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (75 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Rio Tusas Watershed

This evaluation area consists of 30,298 acres of inventoried lands (W4, W12, W20, and W25) to be evaluated.

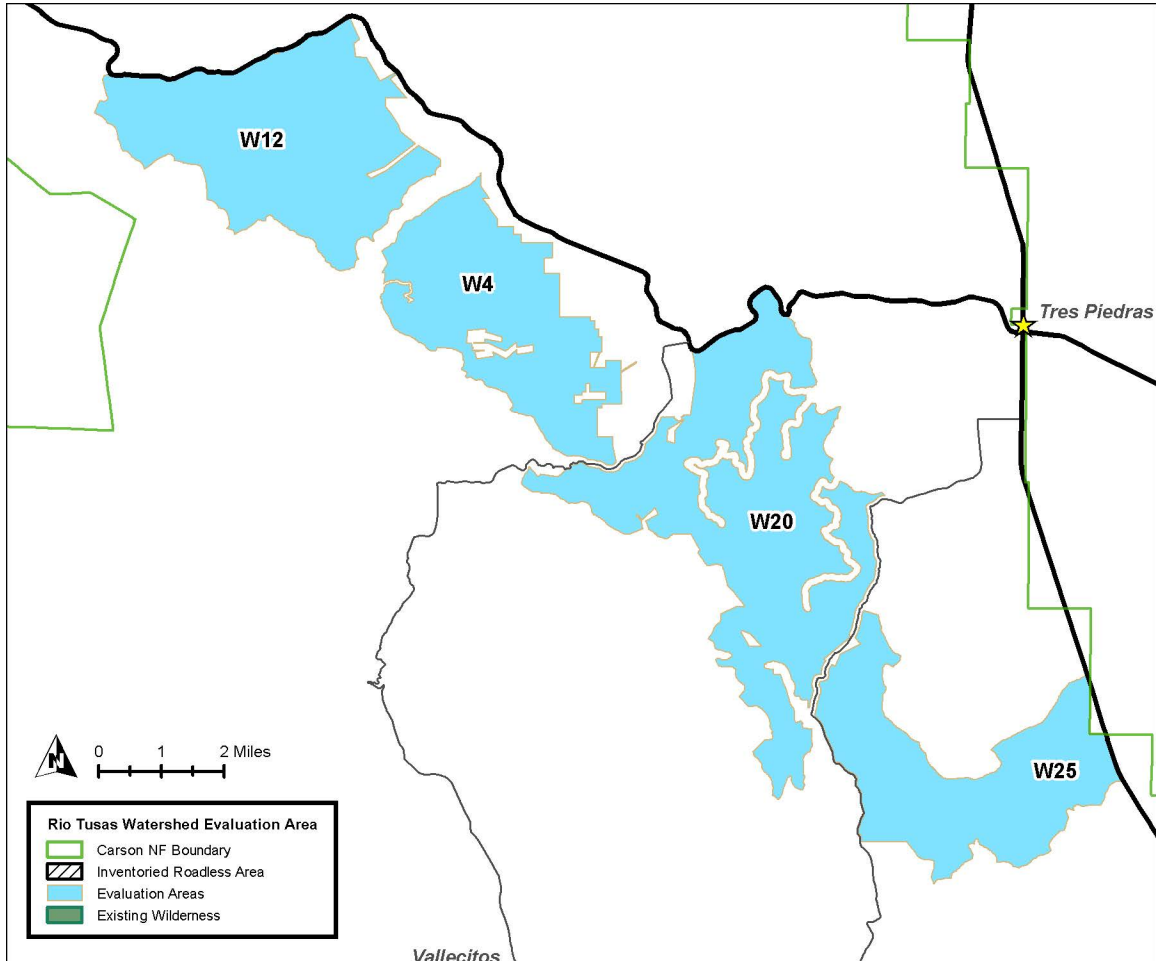


Figure 75. Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area

Manageability

8 percent of the Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit and Wild Horse Territories within it.

The Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was congressionally established under Public Law 273 in 1947 to “promote the stability of forest industries, of employment, of communities, and of taxable forest wealth, through continuous supplies of timber.” As such 1,106 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of W20. There is 1,257 acres (W20) that are within Wild Horse territories. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

57 percent of the Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area does not offer much in the way of apparent naturalness because of visible impacts (slash, stumps, terracing) from past thinning projects (Red Mesa (W25), Willow (W12), Gulch (W12 and W4), and Dry Lakes (W20)) and historic roads that are still apparent on the landscapes and which impact apparent naturalness in W12 and W4. Previous mining for mica and gold within W12 has altered the stream channel and land around an historic town with waste piles and terracing. Overlapping the past thinning, old roads, and past mining activities, are various types of infrastructure, including wells, trick tanks, stock tanks, water storage tanks, and exclosures for both livestock grazing and wildlife, which are scattered throughout the entire area detract from the natural setting, and are evidence of human activity. Additionally, there is a lookout tower and electronic site on Kiowa Mountain that is visually apparent from eastern W20.



Figure 76. Slash and stumps in Dry Lakes thinning project

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, W4 lacks apparent naturalness across 3,609 acres (24 percent), W12 lacks apparent naturalness across 6,181 acres (86 percent), W20 lacks apparent naturalness across 6,640 acres (56 percent), and W25 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,989 acres (52 percent). Combined, 57 percent of the Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining 13,141 acres of the Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness.

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Rio Tusas Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors where solitude is less common, to undeveloped areas. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including OHVing, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, dispersed camping, and horseback riding in the summer.

63 percent of this evaluation area offers opportunities for solitude, while 100 percent of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This area is a high-use area for cultural activities for the communities of Antonito, Co and Taos, Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes, and Las Tablas, NM. Some of this high use on the open roads that divide this evaluation area consists of fuelwood gathering, OHVing, dispersed camping (including car camping), and hunting. Noise from these activities is evident along the edges of inventoried lands, but drops off rapidly where topographic barriers occur. There are some opportunities for solitude on the east side of Kiowa Mountain, due to limited access and lower levels of use compared to the rest of the area. These cultural activities contribute to lack of solitude on 1,347 acres (25 percent) of W4, 922 acres (13 percent) of W12, 6,492 acres (55 percent) of W20, and 2,450 acres (44 percent) of W25. About 19,087 acres (63 percent) of the Rio Tusas Watershed Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

Outstanding values that can be found in the area include an eligible wild and scenic river (W20), and the rare plant small-head goldenweed (W4). The historic mining town of Good Hope is also located within W12.

Size

There are 8,239 acres (29 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 2,100 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness. The largest is approximately 2,033 acres in size and the smallest is around 3 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads, private lands, and/or have private land inholdings.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics due to lack of manageability (8 percent), apparent naturalness (61 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (40 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics were not included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes

This evaluation area was originally called the Petaca Evaluation Area in the preliminary evaluation. In response to public comment, it was changed to Tres Piedras-Lucero Lake. This evaluation area consists of 27,611 acres of inventoried lands (W13, W14, and W21) to be evaluated.

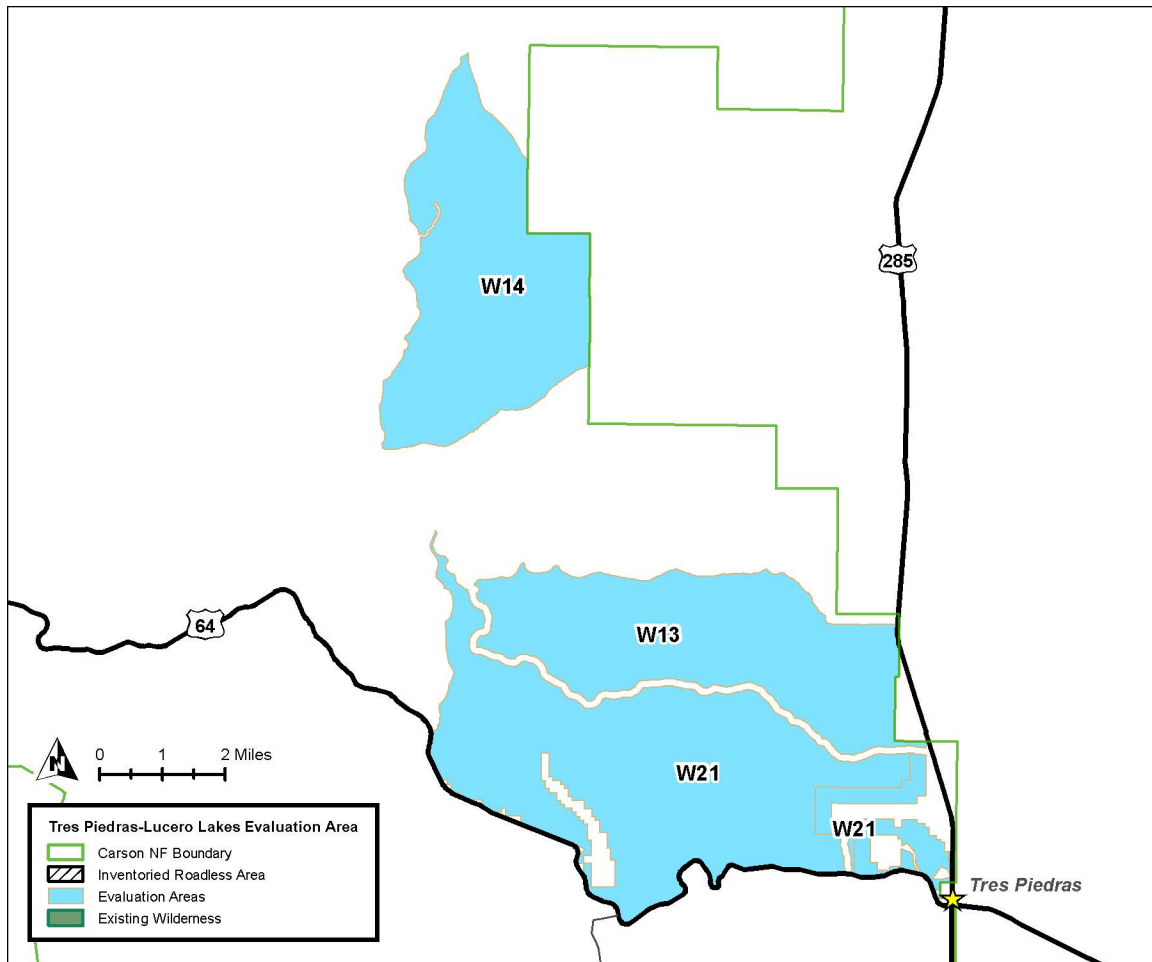


Figure 77. Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes Evaluation Area

Manageability

4 percent of the Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes Evaluation Area could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and shape and configuration issues within it.

Fire Management Unit 1 areas as documented in the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, states that fire is never desired and will be suppressed to protect life and property. As such, there was a total of 1,168 acres from W13 and W21 that could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. There is 63 acres (W13 and W21) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

19 percent of the Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible stumps and slash from past thinning projects, which include Tio Gordito (eastern W21) and Arroyo Aguage del las Petaca-Lucero Lakes (western W13, southern W14, and northeastern W21). Also, within this evaluation area are visually apparent old roads (southern W14, western w13, and throughout W21) and visually evidence of past mining activities such as mine adits and waste piles for mica and gold (eastern W13 and W21). Overlapping these past thinning, old roads, and past mining activities are range and wildlife improvements, such as exclosures, stock tanks, and trick tanks, scattered throughout this entire area that combined contribute to the lack of apparent naturalness. These improvements detract from a natural landscape within these areas. Debris from several abandoned range and wildlife improvements (i.e., culverts, trick tanks, spring developments) detract from the apparent naturalness of this area as well.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, W13 lacks apparent naturalness across 835 acres (11 percent), W14 lack apparent naturalness across 957 acres (12 percent), while W21 lacks apparent naturalness across 3,463 acres (28 percent). Combined, 19 percent of the Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining, 22,356 acres scattered across Tres Piedras-Lucero Lakes Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness.



Figure 78. Google Earth imagery of Lucero Lake exclosure

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Tres Piedras-Lucero Lake Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along motorized trail corridors, where solitude is less common, to remote, undeveloped areas in the backcountry, with little use and no development. There is also a great variety of recreational

activities here, including hiking, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), and horseback riding in the summer.

73 percent of the area offers opportunities for solitude, while the entire evaluation area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. Vehicle and chainsaw sounds along the roads especially in the fall are evident within 2,223 acres (30 percent) of W13, 1,961 acres (25 percent) of W14, and 3,167 acres (26 percent) of W21.

Outstanding Values

The rare plant small-head goldenweed exists within eastern W13 and south central W21.



Figure 79. Small-headed goldenweed

Size

There are 16,131 acres (58 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. These remaining acreages are less than 4,200 acres individually and are not adjacent to any wilderness. The largest is approximately 4,100 acres in size and is partially within W14 and the smallest is around 2 acres. Upon review, these acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas are surrounded by existing open roads, private lands, have private land inholdings, and are easily accessible.

Evaluation Determination

This evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics due to manageability (4 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (19 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (27 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics were not included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Tres Piedras North

This evaluation area was originally called the Cruces Basin and San Antonio Evaluation Area in the preliminary evaluation. In response to public comment, it was changed to Tres Piedras North. This evaluation area consists of 116,479 acres of inventoried lands (CbW1-CbW9, W11, W17, W27, W29, W30, Wxs573Add, Wxs701Add, Wxs710ADD, and Wxs723Add) to be evaluated.

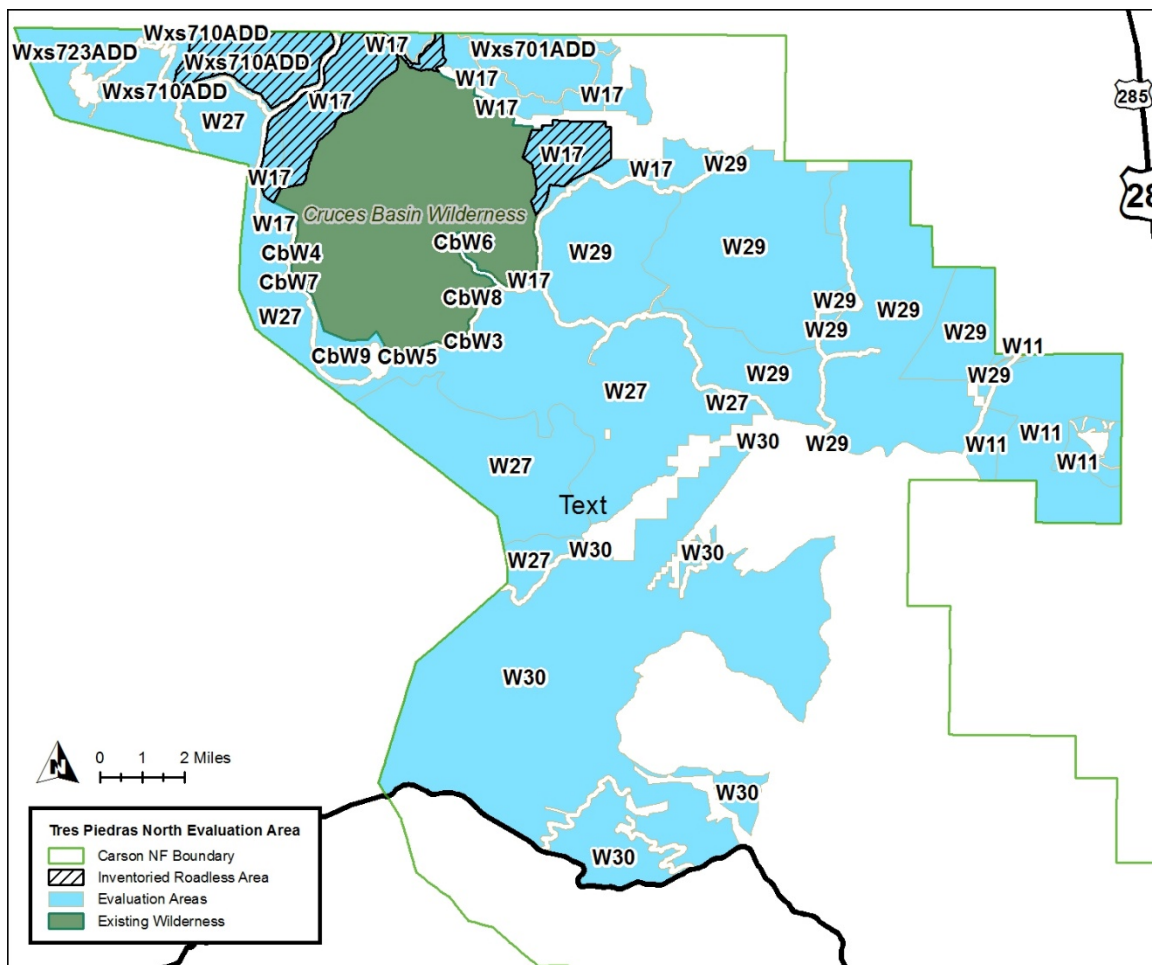


Figure 80. Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area

Manageability

1 percent of the Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area (W11, W17, W27, W29, and W30) could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics as it has acequias and shape and configuration issues within it. Under the Chief's Policy relating to the Act of July 26, 1866 (Revised Statute 2339), continuing routine operation and maintenance of acequias is allowed without special use authorization being required. As such 15 acres could not be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics in parts of W11 and W29. There is 282 acres (W17, W27, W29, and W30) that are ¼ mile wide pinch points within this evaluation area. These acres were removed from further evaluation.

Apparent Naturalness

13 percent of the Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness, because of visible stumps, slash, and old logging roads from past/ current thinning projects (northern W17, eastern W27, western W29, Wxs723 ADD, Wxs710ADD, all of W30, and Wxs701ADD). Overlapping these thinning projects and old roads are mine pits and mine tailing piles from historic mining operations (W30), and various types of infrastructure for both livestock grazing and wildlife are scattered throughout western and eastern W17 and W27, western W29, eastern W29, W11, and Wxs701Add. These infrastructures include exclosures, fish barriers, spring developments, trick tanks, stock tanks, and a corral. Within W11 (San Antonio Mountain) is a designated electronic site that supports multiple communications towers and antennas that serve across northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. These structures are visually apparent from portions of W11. Irrigation ditches are present within southeastern W27 and W30, which serve private land inholdings.

When all of these visibly apparent items are overlaid with each other, CBW1-CBW9 lacks apparent naturalness across 132 acres (15 percent), W11 lacks apparent naturalness across 854 acres (12 percent), W17 lacks apparent naturalness across 115 acres (1 percent), W27 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,549 acres (10 percent), W29 lacks apparent naturalness across 2,340 acres (7 percent), W30 lacks apparent naturalness across 8,259 acres (26 percent), Wxs701ADD lacks apparent naturalness across 801 acres (36 percent), Wxs710ADD lack apparent naturalness across 236 acres (7 percent), while Wxs723ADD lacks apparent naturalness across 384 acres (9 percent). Combined, 13 percent of the Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area lacks apparent naturalness. The remaining, 100,780 acres scattered across Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area does have apparent naturalness, and are mostly within inventoried roadless areas, or adjacent to the existing Cruses Basin Wilderness.



Figure 81. Wildlife Trick Tank (W27)



Figure 82. Tio Grande fish barrier (W30)



Figure 83. Part of San Antonio electronic site (W11)

Solitude or Unconfined Recreation

Recreation settings in Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area range from areas of development and higher concentrations of people near roads that make up area boundaries and along trail corridors where solitude is less common, to remote, undeveloped areas in the backcountry with little use and no development. There is also a great variety of recreational activities here, including driving for pleasure, mountain biking, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping (developed and dispersed), horseback riding in the summer, and cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter.

64 percent of Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area offers opportunities for solitude, while 61 percent of the area offers opportunities for unconfined recreation. This Evaluation Area is a destination point for people visiting the Carson NF from outside the neighboring communities, which contributes to the high use numbers on the existing roads, especially along Forest Road 87. This is especially true around lakes (northern W27), adjacent campgrounds (northern W27, W29, and W17), San Antonio Mountain (W11) and W30 north of Hopewell Lake. In addition, the sound impact from the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Train in the summer can be heard in the adjacent northern W17, Wxs701Add, and Wxs573Add. W27, W17, W29, W30 during the winter has a high amount of snowmobile use, which was identified as a snowmobiling area in the 1986 Carson Forest Plan. These developed recreational activities contribute to lack of solitude on 187 acres (23 percent) of CBW9, 293 acres (4 percent) of W11, 301 acres (3 percent) of W17, 483 acres (2 percent) of W27, 425 acres (1 percent) of W29, and 676 acres (1 percent) of W30. Vehicle, snowmobile, and chainsaw sounds along the roads are evident within 358 acres (40 percent) of CBW1-CBW9, 764 acres (11 percent) of W11, 1,376 acres (15 percent) of W17, 14,042 acres (55 percent) of W27, 4,664 acres (15 percent) of W29, 28,070 acres (88 percent) of W30, and 2,803 acres (27 percent) of Wxs573ADD, Wxs701ADD, Wxs710ADD, and WXS723ADD. All of these factors serve to affect a sense of solitude.

About 74,367 acres (64 percent) of the Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area has both solitude and unconfined recreation.

Outstanding Values

This area contains the Rio San Antonio gorge (eastern W29), San Antonio Mountain (W11), streams with Rio Grande cutthroat trout populations (W27), Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (W30, W27, and W17), speckled granite outcrops, eligible wild and scenic rivers, and the existing Cruces Basin Wilderness. San Antonio Mountain (W11) is the largest free-standing mountain in the Lower 48. It is the tallest of the “Cerros”, a solitary volcanic peak rising out of the desert floor. There is a crater (caldera) at the summit with unique alpine grassland ecology. This area contains the renowned SAM Cave, one of the oldest lava tube(s) in North America, with some of the oldest mammalian fossils ever found (W11).



Figure 84. Rio San Antonio gorge (W29c) and San Antonio Mountain (W11)

Size

There are 64,677 acres (55 percent) scattered throughout this evaluation area that have manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation. There are two areas within this Evaluation Area that are larger than 5,000 acres individually. These include W27a (7,117 acres) and W29e (10,000 acres) and both of these areas consist of outstanding values. There are three areas that are less than 5,000 acres in size individually, but could be managed in conjunction with existing Cruces Basin Wilderness (W17f (1,675 acres) and W17k (2,670 acres)), or in conjunction with newly designated BLM San Antonio Wilderness (W29c (2,491 acres)) to be over 5,000 acres as a whole. The rest of the areas with manageability, apparent naturalness, and solitude or unconfined recreation (40,724 acres) are less than 4,300 acres in size and are not adjacent to any wilderness or other protected areas. Upon review, these remaining 40,724 acres lack geographical definition to maintain these acreages for preservation and/or use in an unimpaired condition. These areas have cherry-stem roads containing NFS roads that could encourage vehicle encroachment, are very flat terrain, have private land inholdings, or are currently in impaired condition due adjacent activities and accessibility.

Evaluation Determination

Portions of W17 (labeled W17k, W17F), W27 (labeled W27a), and W29 (labeled W29c and W29e) are evaluated as having wilderness characteristics, and thus were included in the next stage of the wilderness recommendation process, Analysis. W17f is approximately 1,675 acres,

W17k is 2,670 acres, W27a is 7,117 acres, W29c is 2,491 acres, and W29e is 10,000 acres. These make up 21 percent of the Tres Piedras North Evaluation Area, 3 percent of inventoried lands, and 2 percent of the Carson NF. After the Preliminary Evaluation, W27c and W29e were reevaluated and found to have wilderness characteristics, because of better site-specific information that finds fewer old evident roads evident, and also W27c is not within the Rio San Antonio project.

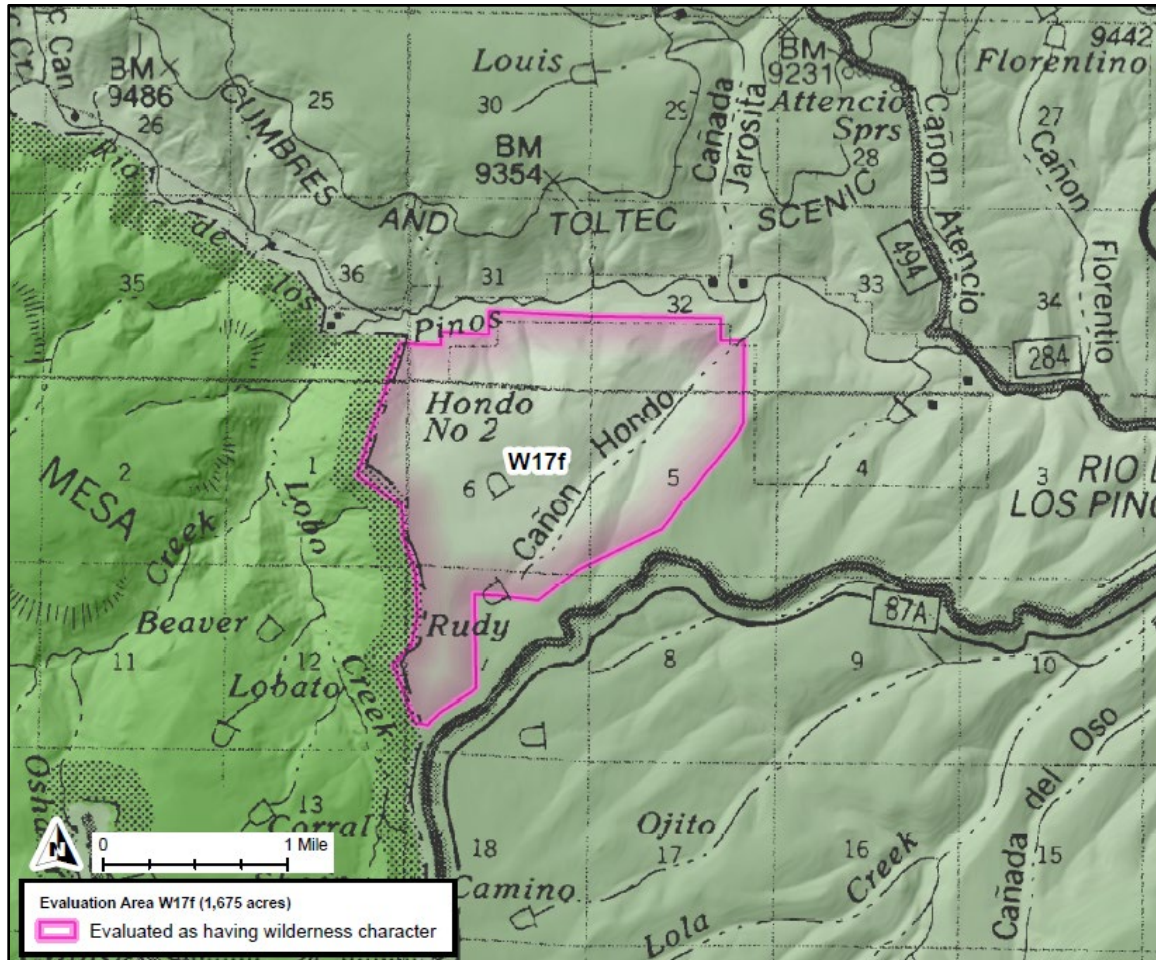


Figure 85. Tres Piedras North W17f evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

Within W17f, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon during sometimes of year providing opportunities to feel alone. No outstanding values were identified.

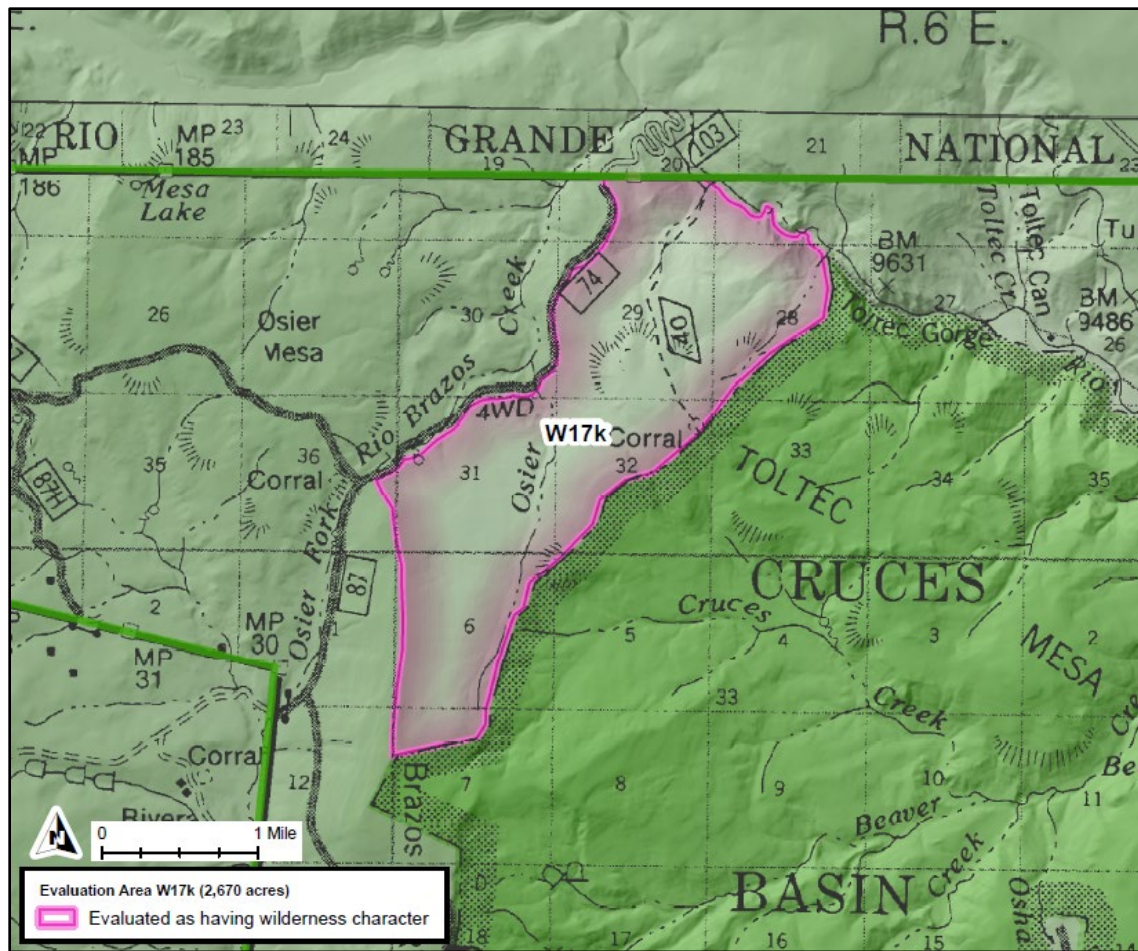


Figure 86. Tres Piedras North W17k evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

Within W17k, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure other than range fencing is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon at sometimes of year, making opportunities to feel alone possible in the area. Outstanding values include the Continental Divide Trail.

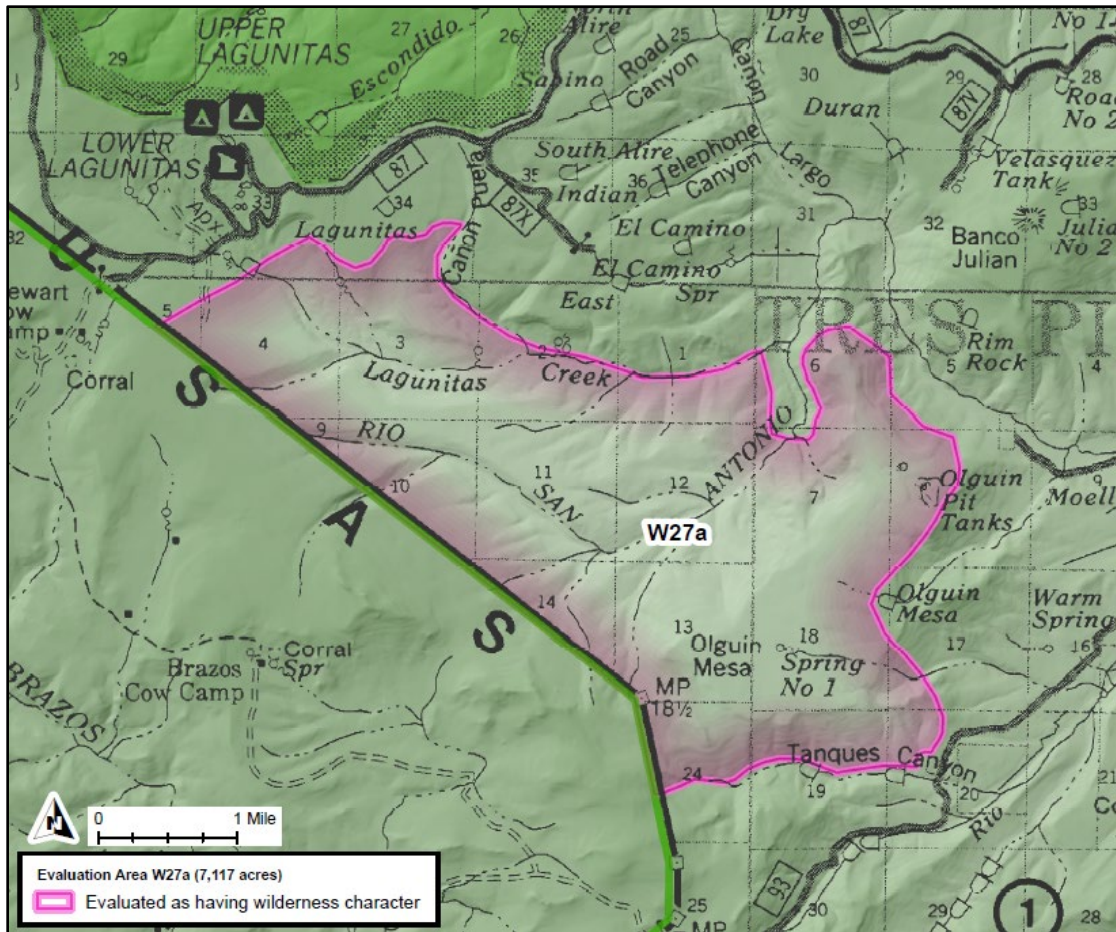


Figure 87. Tres Piedras North W27a evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

Within W27a, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and does not detract from apparent naturalness. There are high quality opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon during sometimes of year providing opportunities to feel alone. Outstanding values include the Continental Divide Trail.

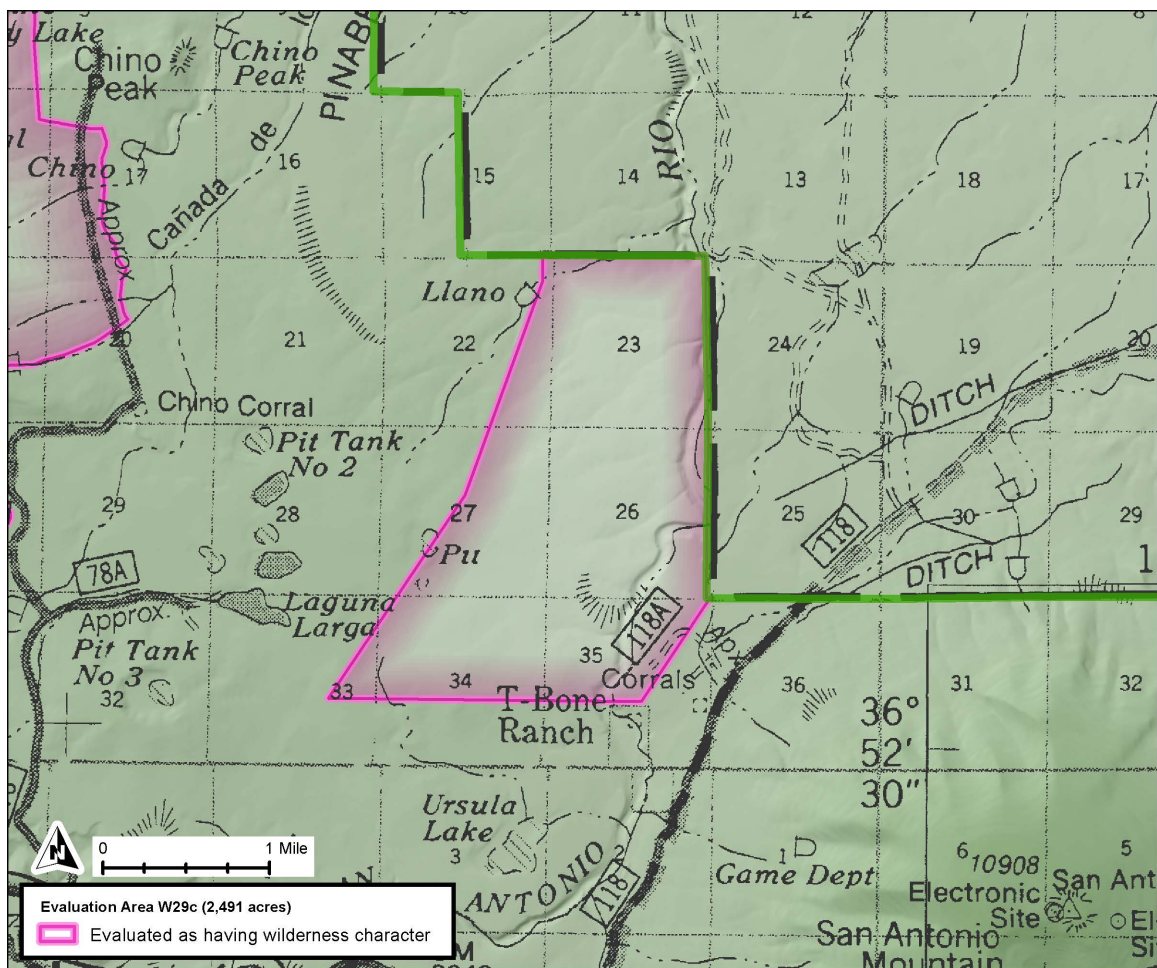


Figure 88. Tres Piedras North W29c evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

Within W29c, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. An exception is fence line impacts, which concentrate wildlife and livestock impacts and movements. At certain times of year evidence of trailing and different utilization levels may be apparent. Infrastructure other than fencing is rare inside the area and does not significantly detract from apparent naturalness. Opportunities exist to engage in primitive recreation including: hiking, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are rare at sometimes during the year, providing opportunities to feel alone in parts of the area. Outstanding values include the Rio San Antonio Canyon geology.

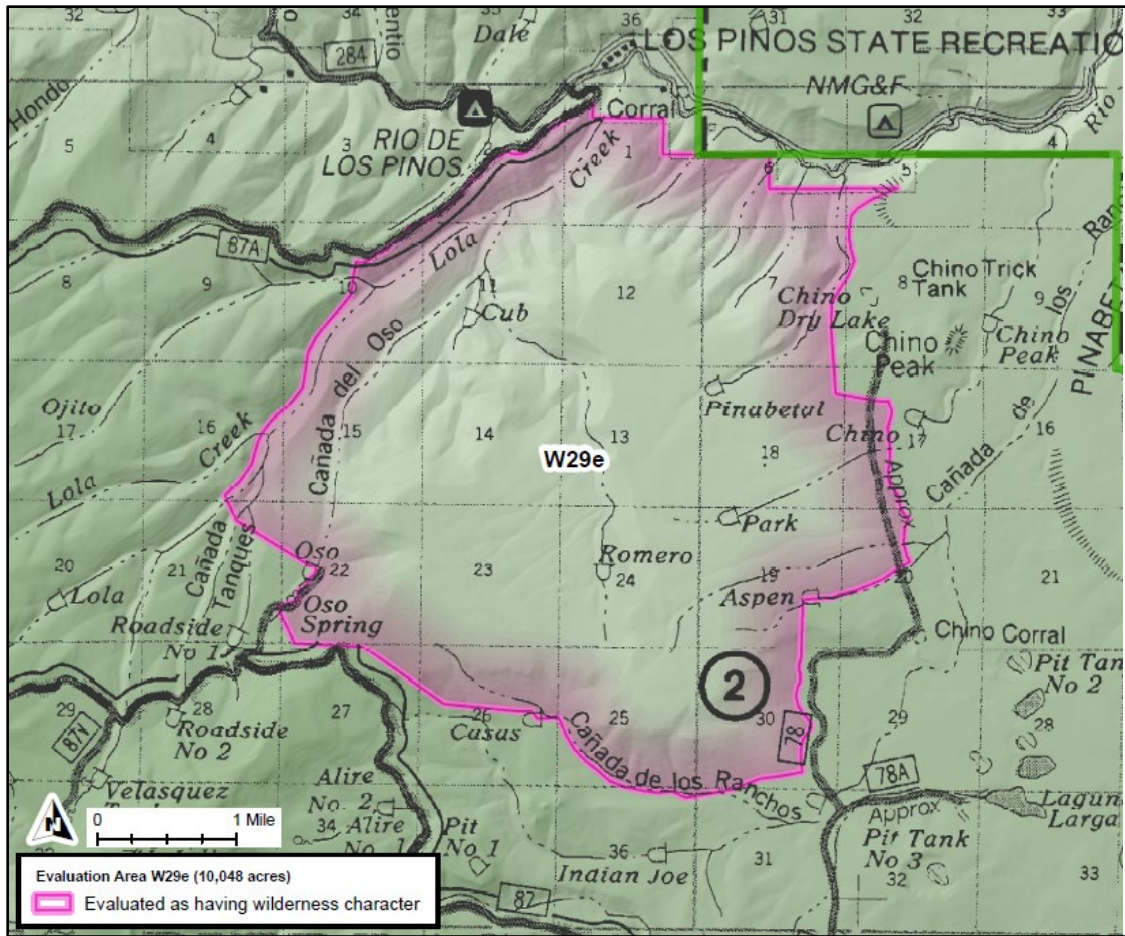


Figure 89. Tres Piedras North W29e evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

With W29e, plant and animal communities appear natural and appear to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area in the absence of human intervention. Infrastructure in the area is rare and only detracts from apparent naturalness in confined, surrounding areas. There are opportunities to engage in primitive and unconfined recreation including: hiking, horseback riding, viewing natural landscapes, and wildlife viewing. Human activities are uncommon at sometimes of year, providing opportunities to feel alone. Other outstanding values have been identified.

The rest of the evaluation area does not have wilderness characteristics, due to manageability (1 percent), lack of apparent naturalness (13 percent), lack of solitude or unconfined recreation (36 percent), and size. Areas determined to not have wilderness characteristics will not be included in the Analysis step of the wilderness recommendation process.

Evaluation Results

About 8 percent of the inventoried lands were evaluated as having wilderness characteristics. That is approximately 5 percent of the entire Carson NF. Table 3 and Figure 18 through Figure 89 show lands evaluated as having wilderness characteristics by ranger district.

Table 3. Lands evaluated as having wilderness characteristics

Ranger District	ID Number	Evaluation Area	Acres	Percent of Evaluation Area	Percent of Inventoried Lands	Percent of Carson NF
Camino Real	C14v	Camino Real South	12,597	15	1	1.00
Camino Real	C14x	Camino Real South	2,340	3	0.3	0.20
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW5b	Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater	82	1	0.01	0.01
El Rito and Canjilon	CrW6c	Rio Chama Wilderness Accompaniments and Echo Amphitheater	21	0.2	0.002	0.001
El Rito and Canjilon	W31d	Mesa Montosa-Ghost Ranch	11,479	20	1	1.00
El Rito and Canjilon	W32a	Sierrita de Canjilon, Upper Canjilon-Upper El Rito Watersheds	6,998	9	1	0.50
Questa	Q4g	Valle Vidal	9,361	10	1	1.00
Questa	Q5n	Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon	1,165	5	0.1	0.10
Tres Piedras	W17f	Tres Piedras North	1,675	1	0.002	0.001
Tres Piedras	W17k	Tres Piedras North	2,670	2	0.3	0.20
Tres Piedras	W27a	Tres Piedras North	7,117	6	1	0.50

Ranger District	ID Number	Evaluation Area	Acres	Percent of Evaluation Area	Percent of Inventoried Lands	Percent of Carson NF
Tres Piedras	W29c	Tres Piedras North	2,491	2	0.3	0.20
Tres Piedras	W29e	Tres Piedras North	10,000	9	1	1.00
Total			67,996		8	4.6

Analysis

As required by the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Regulations (planning rule) the Carson National Forest (NF) has completed both the [Inventory](#) and [Evaluation](#) of lands to determine if they have wilderness characteristics. The result are in 13 areas, totaling 67,996 acres, which were evaluated as having wilderness characteristics. That is approximately 8 percent of inventoried lands and 5 percent of the entire Carson NF. These lands have characteristics that could make them appropriate to include in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). The third step, prior to recommending any lands for inclusion in the NWPS is to analyze the effects that any wilderness recommendation would have on the ecological, social, and economic landscape (Forest Service's Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70)).

Based on the evaluation and input from the public, the Responsible Official determined that the 13 areas on the forest with wilderness characteristics would be carried forward for analysis in one or more of the alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In this document and for the remainder of the Wilderness Recommendation Process (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70) the areas evaluated as having wilderness characteristics are referred to as Area Evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics (AEWC). AEWCs are not recommended wilderness, as no wilderness would be recommended until a record of decision has been made for the revised forest plan.

The following section will discuss how each of the 13 areas evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics are incorporated into alternatives as recommended wilderness management areas. For each Area Evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics that are included in one or more alternatives, the following criteria will be identified for each area evaluated with wilderness characteristic by alternative:

1. Name of the area and number of acres in the area to be considered for recommendation.
2. Location and a summarized description of a recommended boundary for each area. To identify a clearly defined boundary for each area, how well the location of the boundary will support management of the area for wilderness and other adjacent uses is evaluated. Where possible, boundaries should be easy to identify and to locate on the ground. Potential boundaries may be identified as follows, listed in descending order of desirability:

- a. Use of natural features that are locatable both on the map and on the ground. Examples include, but are not limited to perennial streams, well-defined ridges, mountain peaks, and well-defined natural lake shorelines. If a stream is used, note whether the thread (centerline of a stream) or either bank (to mean high water line) has been used as the boundary.
 - b. Use of human-made features that are locatable on the map and on the ground. Examples include, but are not limited to roads, trails, dams, powerlines, pipelines, and bridges. Where a human-made feature is used, note whether the feature itself forms the boundary or whether the boundary has been set back from the feature, and by what distance. Setbacks should be used only where necessary for future maintenance of the human-made feature.
 - c. Use of previously surveyed lines or legally determined lines such as section and township lines, section subdivision lines, metes and bounds property lines, county or State boundaries, or National Park or Indian Reservation boundaries.
 - d. Use of a straight line from one locatable point to another. These points should normally be high points in the landscape as they must be visible to be effective.
 - e. Use of a series of bearings and distances between locatable points as in a metes and bounds survey. Use this technique when other methods are not available or practicable.
3. A brief description of the general geography, topography, and vegetation of the recommended area.
 4. A brief description of the current uses and management of the area.
 5. A description of the area's wilderness characteristics and the ability to protect and manage the area so as to preserve its wilderness characteristics.
 6. A brief summary of the factors considered and the process used in evaluating the area and developing the alternative(s).
 7. A brief summary of the ecological and social characteristics that would provide the basis for the area's suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The identification of above criteria and effects any recommended wilderness would have on the ecological, social, and economic landscape are discussed by alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and are not discussed within this document.

Areas Evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics (AEWC) Alternative Development

What follows is a discussion of each alternative being analyzed in the DEIS and how each of the 13 areas with wilderness characteristics fit within each alternative (Table 4). The planning team, with involvement from the 19 cooperating agencies assisting in the revision of the forest plan and input from the Carson NF leadership team, proposed to the Responsible Official which of the alternatives each area best fit within.

Alternative 1, No Action – current forest plan (1986)

This alternative would continue existing forest plan direction and management. Under the current forest plan, many ecological resources (vegetation, riparian areas, grasses, and soils) are currently departed from historical conditions and are in need of restoration. Fire-dependent ecosystems are departed and prone to uncharacteristic, stand-replacing wildfire; grass communities and understories are less productive than they were historically; soil function is reduced on much of the forest; and aquatic and riparian ecosystems are functioning, but many are impaired. The forest's ability to contribute to social, cultural, and economic resources is impaired, due to a loss of available forage for livestock and wildlife; sustainable recreation opportunities that do not meet the needs of forest users; and departure of vegetation and water resources that has reduced our ability to provide for traditional uses. The current forest plan includes only those areas currently designated as wilderness; and did not include recommended wilderness.

AEWCs were not included in this alternative.

Alternative 2, Proposed – draft proposed forest plan

This alternative would provide management that balances restoration of ecological resources with providing ecosystem services. The draft proposed forest plan defines desired characteristics for forested ecosystems, including species composition; structural elements, such as tree spacing, density, and grouping; and disturbance regimes, including frequency, severity, intensity, and extent, through a balanced approach of mechanical thinning and fire. Wildlife habitat and connectivity for maintaining at-risk species is emphasized. The draft proposed forest plan defines desired conditions and includes objectives and strategies for restoring and protecting springs, wetlands, and other natural waters that maintain function, habitat, and water quality. The draft proposed forest plan defines desired conditions to increase grass production and availability and maintain or improve soil condition and function. There is an increased focus on riparian management and stream restoration; the draft plan works to decommission or eliminate old forest roads and routes, while maintaining appropriate access for the public. Recreation opportunities and improvements in recreation infrastructure are emphasized. Lastly, the draft proposed plan puts a greater emphasis on traditional communities and uses, recognizing the importance of forest management to contributing to cultural, social, and economic needs.

A total of 9,189 acres of AEWCS (14 percent of areas evaluated as having wilderness characteristics) are included in this alternative. The AEWCS that were included in this alternative are those areas where the protection of wilderness characteristics: 1) would not limit management activities for restoration of fire dependent ecosystems (ponderosa pine forests and dry mixed conifer) and water resources; 2) would not limit the important ecosystem services (e.g. mountain biking tourism, fuelwood gathering) this area provides for local communities, and (3) the area boundary is easily identifiable based on existing natural features, locatable human-made features, or existing surveyed lines.

AEWCS included in this alternative (Figure 90) for analysis as recommended wilderness are:

- Midnight Meadow and Mallette Canyon Q5n (1,165ac) – This AEWCS is not a highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystem or an important area for providing ecosystem services and is adjacent to the Latir Wilderness.

- Tres Piedras North W17k partial (1,038 ac) - This AEW is not a highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystem or an important area for providing ecosystem services. The Continental Divide Trail runs through 24 ac and were excluded. The area boundary is easily identifiable based on existing natural features, locatable human-made features, or existing surveyed lines.
- Valle Vidal Q4g partial (5,314 ac) – This partial AEW is not a highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystem or an important area for providing ecosystem services. There are 3,986 ac that are highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystems and are excluded. The area boundary is easily identifiable based on existing natural features, locatable human-made features, or existing surveyed lines.
- Tres Piedras North W29c (1,896ac) - The area boundary was strictly incorporated into alternative 2 because it is easily identifiable based on existing natural features, locatable human-made features, or existing surveyed lines. This AEW is not a highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystem or an important area for providing ecosystem services.
- Rio Chama CcW5b (82ac) and Rio Chama CrW6c (21 ac) - These AEWs are not highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystems or important areas for providing ecosystem services.

The AEWs not included in this alternative:

- Camino Real South C14x, Camino Real South C14v, Tres Piedras North W17F, Tres Piedras North W27a, Tres Piedras North W29e, Ghost Ranch W21d, and Sierrita de Canjilon W32a were not included as AEWs in this alternative as these AEWs are mostly highly-departed, fire-dependent ecosystems or important areas for providing ecosystem services such as fuelwood gathering, mountain biking on the Continental Divide trail, act.

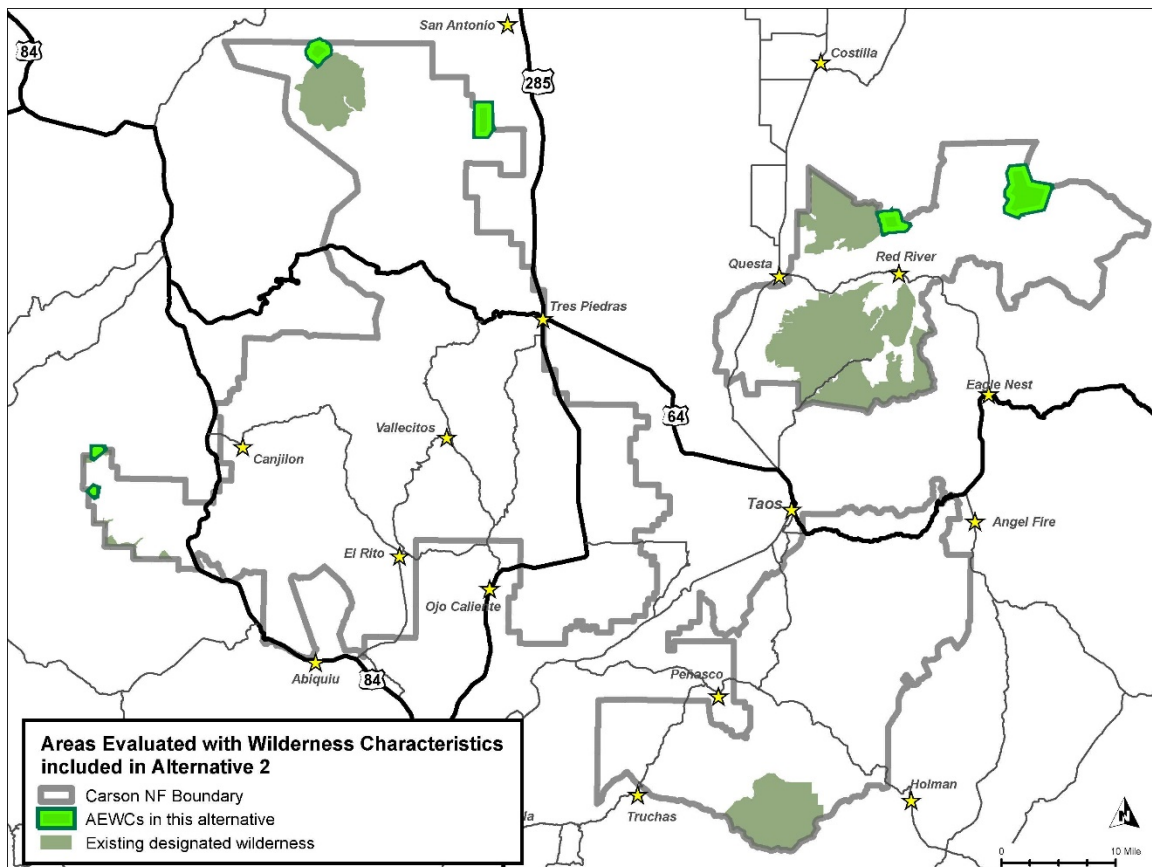


Figure 90: Alternative 2 Proposed Wilderness Analysis Areas

Alternative 3 – emphasizes utilization of forest resources

This alternative would emphasize recreation opportunities; motorized access for forest users; and increased opportunities for access and use for traditional users and for commercial timber harvesting for local businesses. Habitat and connectivity for at-risk species, watershed restoration and riparian rehabilitation, and vegetation treatments to decrease the risk of fire and improve forest and watershed health are still important, but are not the emphasis of this alternative. The emphasis is on utilization, which may result in less decommissioning of roads, trails, and routes, a greater emphasis on road and trail maintenance, an increased trail system, and more opportunities for motorized recreation. This alternative has an increased emphasis on mechanical thinning and timber harvest to support local economies and uses less fire as a management tool. Forest product removal would require more temporary roads.

Utilization of forest lands is the intent of this alternate, and protection of wilderness characteristics would limit management activities proposed under this alternative. As such, no AEWCs are included in this alternative.

Alternative 4 – emphasizes natural processes

This alternative places a greater emphasis on preserving the ecological integrity of forest lands. It allows for natural fires to burn, emphasizes prescribed fire as a restoration management tool, and decreases the amount of mechanized thinning. The management areas in this alternative

have all been removed as suitable for timber, decreasing opportunities for fuelwood and timber harvesting. It provides greater protections for water resources, specifically key wetlands, and protections for wildlife movement, specifically wildlife migration routes for big game, and protection areas for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. It recognizes the value of, and has protections for, the Valle Vidal area. This alternative provides for greater effort to decommission both forest and non-system roads, reduce or eliminate temporary roads, and reduce the number of forest service system and non-system roads as well as temporary roads. There is a decreased emphasis on motorized use, both winter cross-country and motor vehicle use.

Recommended wilderness is generally compatible with this alternative. A total of 45,473 acres of AEWs (67 percent of areas evaluated as having wilderness character) are included in this alternative. Partial or whole AEWs included in this alternative are those areas where protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use that could otherwise occur. AEWs were included in this alternative if the AEWs was: 1) outside an Inventoried Roadless Area, or 2) within an Inventoried Roadless Area where motorized trail or snowmobile use is allowed.

The AEWs included in this alternative (Figure 91) for analysis as recommended wilderness are:

- Valle Vidal Q4g (9,361ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Tres Piedras North W27a (7,117ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Tres Piedras North W29c (2,491ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Tres Piedras North W29e (10,000ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Rio Chama CrW5b (82ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Rio Chama CrW6c (21ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.
- Tres Piedras North W17f (1,675ac) is within Inventoried Roadless Areas, but motorized snowmobile use occurs within the Inventoried Roadless Area.
- Tres Piedras North W17k (2,670ac) is within Inventoried Roadless Areas, but motorized snowmobile use occurs within the Inventoried Roadless Area.
- Sierrita de Canjilon W32a (6,998ac) is within Inventoried Roadless Areas, but motorized snowmobile use occurs within the Inventoried Roadless Area.

- Camino Real South C14v partial (5,057ac) is not within Inventoried Roadless Areas, therefore protection of wilderness characteristics would limit commercial timber harvest or motorized use.

The AEWCs not included in this alternative:

- Camino Real South C14 v partial (7,540ac or 60%), Ghost Ranch W21d, Midnight Meadow and Mallette Canyon Q5n, and Camino Real South C14x are within inventoried roadless areas, which limits timber harvest and contains no motorized use (no motorized trails or snowmobile use). These areas do provide traditional and cultural uses (e.g., grazing, hunting, herb gathering) and are watersheds for downstream communities. These are not areas where fire is likely to be used as a management tool.

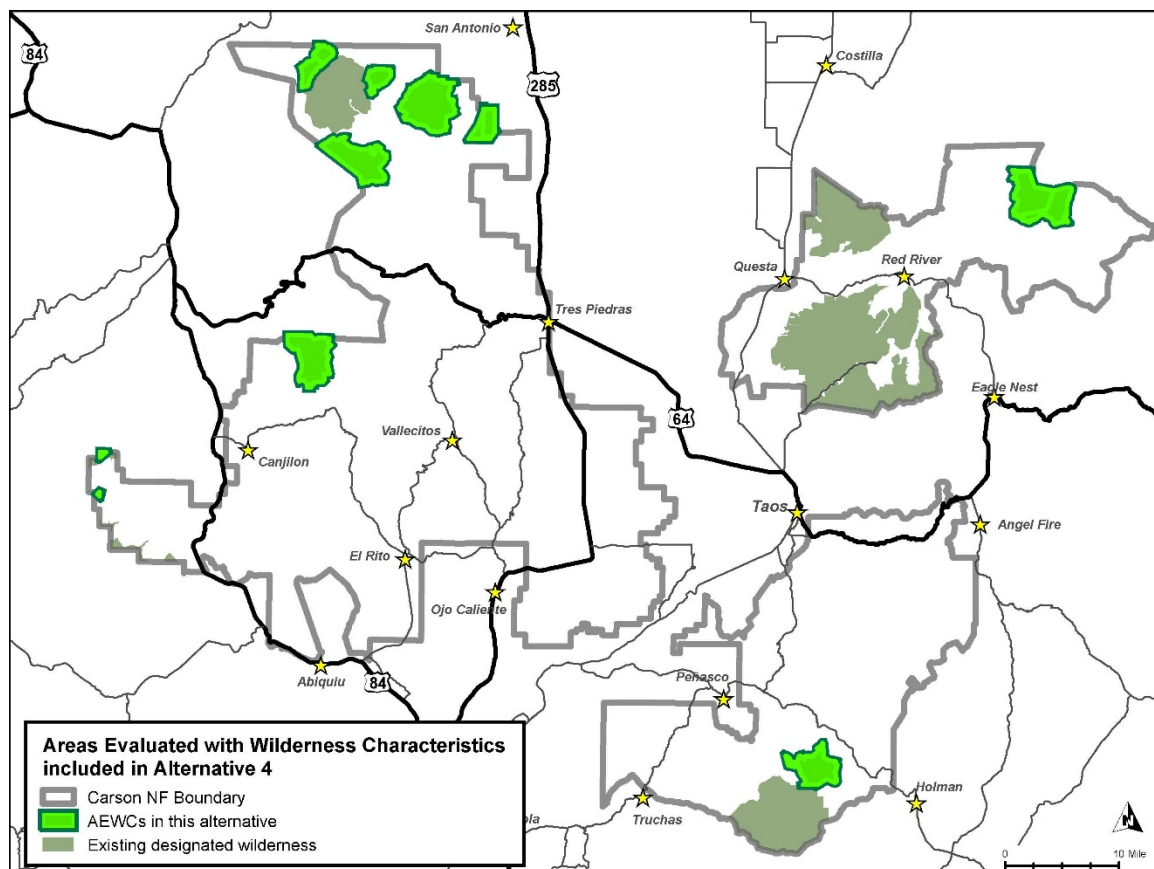


Figure 91: Alternative 4 Proposed Wilderness Analysis Areas

Alternative 5- emphasized increase wilderness opportunities

This alternative would emphasize maximum wilderness opportunities. As such, all AEWCs were included in this alternative for a total of 67,996 acres (Figure 92).

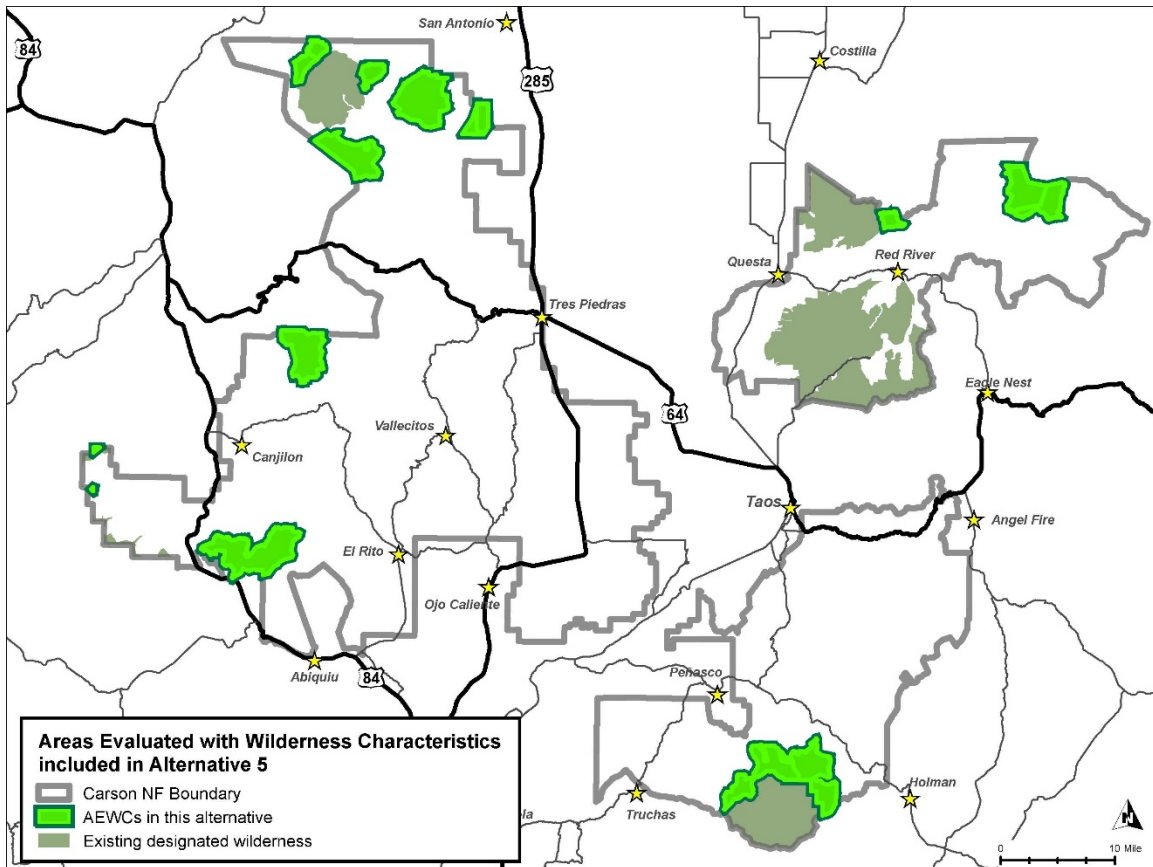


Figure 92: Alternative 5 Proposed Wilderness Analysis Areas

Table 4: AEWs acres by alternative

Area Evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics, Evaluation Number, Acres	Alt 1., No Action-current forest plan (1986) Acres (Percent)	Alt. 2, proposed-draft proposed plan Acres (Percent)	Alt. 3-emphasizes utilization of forest resources Acres (Percent)	Alt. 4-emphasize natural processes Acres (Percent)	Alt. 5-emphasize potential wilderness Acres (Percent)
Valle Vidal Q4g: 9,361 ac	0 (0%)	5,314 (57%)	0 (0%)	9,361 (100%)	9,361 (100%)
Midnight Meadow and Mallette Canyon Q5n: 1,165 ac	0 (0%)	1,165 (100%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	1,165 (100%)
Camino Real South C14v: 12,597 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5,057 (40%)	12,597 (100%)
Camino Real South C14x: 2,340 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	2,340 (100%)
Tres Piedras North W17f: 1,675 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1,675 (100%)	1,675 (100%)

Area Evaluated as having Wilderness Characteristics, Evaluation Number, Acres	Alt 1., No Action-current forest plan (1986) Acres (Percent)	Alt. 2, proposed-draft proposed plan Acres (Percent)	Alt. 3-emphasizes utilization of forest resources Acres (Percent)	Alt. 4-emphasize natural processes Acres (Percent)	Alt. 5-emphasize potential wilderness Acres (Percent)
Tres Piedras North W17k: 2,670 ac	0 (0%)	1,038 (39%)	0 (0%)	2,670 (100%)	2,670 (100%)
Tres Piedras North W27a: 7,117 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7,117 (100%)	7,117 (100%)
Tres Piedras North W29c: 2,491 ac	0 (0%)	1,896 (76%)	0 (0%)	2,491 (100%)	2,491 (100%)
Tres Piedras North W29e: 10,000 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10,000 (100%)	10,000 (100%)
Rio Chama CrW5b: 82 ac	0 (0%)	82 (100%)	0 (0%)	82 (100%)	82 (100%)
Rio Chama CrW6c: 21 ac	0 (0%)	21 (100%)	0 (0%)	21 (100%)	21 (100%)
Ghost Ranch W21d: 11, 479 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11,479 (100%)
Sierrita de Canjilon W32a: 6, 998 ac	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6,998 (100%)	6,998 (100%)
Total Acres	0 (0%)	9,189 (14%)	0 (0%)	45,473 (67%)	67,996 (100%)

Please see the Carson NF Draft Land and Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement for the analysis of these AEWCs as recommended wilderness by alternative.