

R20622 Sheep Mountain 17,614 Acres

Overview

Location and vicinity: The Sheep Mountain area is located in the Sheep Mountain Geographic Area on the Laramie Ranger District in Albany County. It is

approximately 30 miles west of Laramie (T.14 and 15 N., R. 77W.). Access is provided by Highways 130 and 11 to the north and west and Highway 230 to the south. All-weather Forest Road 311 approaches the southwestern boundary of the area, and a number of four-wheel-drive roads approach the eastern boundary. Access is limited because the area is surrounded almost entirely by private land.

Geography: The area around Sheep Mountain is relatively flat plains. The entire roadless area is the mountain itself. There are no rivers associated with the area, but the mountain in the divide between the Little Laramie River and Laramie River Drainages. The highest point on the mountain (9,560 feet) is on the main Sheep Mountain Trail. It is unique because it is an overthrust, or a mountain formed by the upthrusting of material within the earth, which reverses the usual order of fossils found in the Earth.

Topography: The primary feature of the area is Sheep Mountain – a hog back ridge that is separate from the main mountain range. The ridge is approximately ten miles long and three to four miles wide, and elevations range from about 8,000 to 9,560 feet. There are abruptly steep foothills with rocky outcrops. The areas along the north and east are relic landslides and prone to further movement if disturbed by mass earth movements such as earthquakes or slumping. The area includes some of the upper drainages of the Little Laramie River (draining to the west and northwest) and the Laramie River (draining to the east and southeast).

Vegetation: Vegetation in the area is comprised of 5% Aspen, 1% Douglas fir, 12% grasslands, 51% Lodgepole pine, 1% non-forested, 6% Ponderosa Pine, 23% shrubs, and 1% spruce-fir. There is one species of sensitive plants in the area (Hoary Willow).

Soils: Soils are generally shallow, gravelly coarse loams on the upper part of Sheep Mountain, and the soils become deeper and finer as they get closer to the bottom and into the riparian areas. The soils were formed from granite parent material, and have moderate erosion potential.

Current Uses of the Area: The area is Game Refuge, so its primary purpose protection and propagation game animals and birds. Opportunities for recreation include mountain biking, horseback riding, and hiking along the trails on Sheep Mountain. Hunting and fishing are permitted in accordance with State law based on a 1942 Cooperative Agreement between the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and the Forest Service Department of Agriculture. There is no use of this area in the winter. Trails on the mountain are steep and moderately difficult.

Table C-111. Management area acres for Alternative A, Sheep Mountain Roadless Area.

Alternative A Management Area	Acres
3.54 Special Wildlife Areas (Sheep Mountain)	5,352
3.56 Aspen Maintenance and Enhancement	755
5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range	11,507

Appearance: The area is a steep-sided hogback ridge with sagebrush at the lower elevations, aspen-filled drainages and rolling hills with lodgepole pine stands on the long, wide top of the mountain.

Surroundings: The area slopes off to plains on all sides but the west. To the west, the Snowy Range portion of the Forest is visible across the large valley of the Little Laramie River drainage. The mountain slopes off into flat private rangelands.

Key attractions: The area was established as a Game Refuge in 1924. It is important winter range for deer and elk. Other than the distinctive position of the ridge itself and the phenomenal view of the Laramie Valley from the Mountain, there are no special scenic landmarks on the area.

Capability

Environment-

Opportunity for solitude: The relatively large size of the area, moderate topographic and scattered vegetative screening and distance from perimeter to core provide for moderate opportunities for solitude. Lights from the City of Laramie, highways and ranches are visible intrusions. Airplanes fly over the area regularly.

Naturalness: The natural integrity of the area is relatively intact and the area has a moderate to high degree of naturalness. Brook trout have been introduced in Fence Creek to provide fishing opportunity. Evidence of human activity or presence includes a trail through the middle of the area, an irrigation ditch, old mining digs, an overhead telephone line, two miles of water transmission line, fences, signs of dispersed recreation use and four-wheel – drive roads.

Challenge- There are relatively few unusual opportunities for challenging experiences in the area, however there are opportunities for adventure, self-reliance and orienteering. Challenges that are typical of the Rocky Mountains such as limited access and harsh weather conditions are present in the area.

Outdoor recreation opportunities-The factors listed in Opportunity for solitude, moderate diversity of opportunity and very limited development give the area an overall moderate rating for opportunity for primitive recreation. Mountain bikers, hikers, and horseback riders use the trails in the area because of its scenery and challenge.

Special Features-

Education: Sheep Mountain has many opportunities for education. Winter grazing by deer and elk creates observation opportunities. Sheep Mountain has been the subject of many archaeological and research queries. Also, the University of Wyoming conducts vegetation studies in the area.

Scenic Features: Sheep Mountain has no extraordinary scenic features, other than itself. The Mountain itself, because of its position offset from the rest of the Snowy Range and its appearance, is a unique scenic feature.