

Appendix O
BLM Lands with
Wilderness Characteristics

BLM LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

In addition to the initial wilderness review required by Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLMPA) that led to the creation of wilderness study areas (WSAs), the Secretary of the Interior is also required to “maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resource and other values,” which encompasses wilderness characteristics as a resource (FLPMA, Section 201).

In July 2011 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director reaffirmed this responsibility via Instruction Memorandum (IM) No. 2011-154, which directed field units to review and update their inventory of lands for their wilderness characteristics and established a uniform protocol for doing so. The same IM emphasized that such an inventory “shall not, of itself, change or prevent change of the management or use of the lands.” Rather, the findings of the inventory are to be considered among all other resource values and potential resource uses during the land use planning process. BLM Manual 6310 was released after IM No. 2011-154 and contains official agency direction for conducting inventory of wilderness characteristics. This inventory was initiated prior to publication of BLM Manual 6310, but completed after release of the manual. Therefore, the inventory was done in accordance with IM No. 2011-154 and BLM Manual 6310.

Lands with wilderness characteristics can generally be defined as unroaded BLM public land areas greater than 5,000 acres in size that have maintained their primitive character and are primarily undeveloped. The inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics further includes unroaded areas of any size adjacent to existing WSAs. BLM Manual 6310 also establishes a protocol for defining “roads” for the purposes of this inventory.

The BLM received a “citizens’ wilderness proposal” from the San Juan Citizens Alliance in 2001 (and an updated version in 2008) containing wilderness characteristic inventory information for four areas on the Tres Rios Field Office (TRFO) (Weber-Menefee, Lower Dolores River Canyon, McKenna Peak, and Snaggletooth) and proposed that these areas be managed for their wilderness characteristics. These areas were considered and given special attention in the inventory process described below.

Background and Methodology

A preliminary geographic information system (GIS) analysis was conducted that isolated areas with no inventoried (GIS cataloged) roads and that were greater than 5,000 acres in size. Per IM No. 2011-154, areas of any size adjacent to existing WSAs or designated wilderness were also identified. The GIS analysis revealed a total of 20 land units totaling 109,484 acres on the TRFO, which were prioritized for further analysis. As needed, the “wilderness inventory road” protocol was employed to verify the “unroaded” status of the various inventory units.

Staff then conducted an office exercise that identified other lands uses, resource development, use restrictions, or any other issues that may conflict with or enhance the potential for protection of wilderness values. Field visits were then conducted to many of the areas, which included a narrative and photo report. Following the criteria provided in IM No. 2011-154, a determination was made as to whether each unit did or did not have wilderness characteristics. Table O-1 shows the 20 analysis units and the determination of wilderness characteristics per unit.

Table O.1: Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Inventory

Weber/Menefee	1	CO-030-251-a	1,157	Yes
	2	CO-030-251-b	5,162	No
	3	CO-030-252-a	355	No
McKenna Peak	4	CO-030-286-a	3,883	No
	5	CO-030-286-b	2,635	Yes
	6	CO-030-286-c	542	No
	7	CO-030-286-d	2,385	Yes
	8	CO-030-286-f	1,578	Yes
Snaggletooth	9a	CO-030-301a	10,144	Yes
	9b	CO-030-301-b	19,518	Yes
Lower Dolores River	10	CO-030-290-a	5,806	No
	11	CO-030-290-b	8,096	No
	12	CO-030-290-c	7,361	No
	13	CO-030-290-d	5,440	No
	14	CO-030-290-e	5,484	No
	15	CO-030-290-f	6,597	No
	16	CO-030-290-g	6,300	No
	17	CO-030-290-h	3,115	Yes
Silverton	18	CO-030-302-a	3,959	No
	19	CO-030-302-b	9,967	No
Totals		20 units	109,484 acres	Yes = 7 units (40,532 acres) No = 13 units (68,952 acres)

Larger-scale area maps and detailed descriptions of the various units of lands with wilderness characteristics can be found in the wilderness characteristics permanent documentation files at the TRFO and in the citizen's wilderness proposal received from San Juan Citizens Alliance.

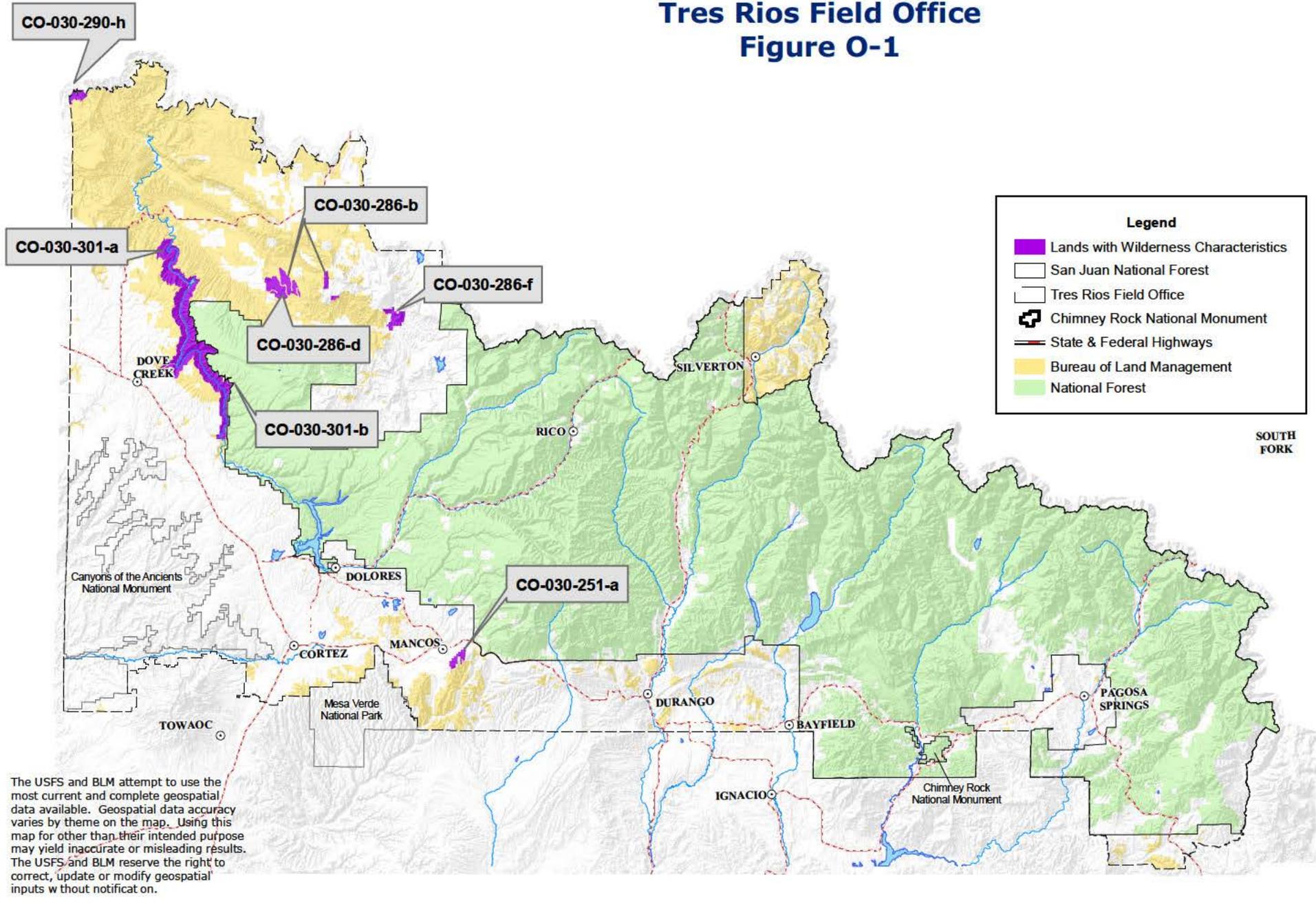
Of the 20 units originally identified, seven units totaling 40,532 acres were found to have wilderness characteristics following research and field evaluations. These seven units were carried forward into the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and their wilderness characteristics are considered among other resource values as directed in IM No. 2011-154. The FEIS describes alternative management strategies for the various units and the anticipated environmental effects of each alternative. The seven inventory units found to have wilderness characteristics within the TRFO are shown on Figure O-1.

The citizens' wilderness proposal last submitted in 2008 by the San Juan Citizens Alliance was considered throughout the inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics and evaluation process. The four areas specified in the proposal (Weber-Menefee, Lower Dolores River Canyon, McKenna Peak, and Snaggletooth) were all either part (or all) of an existing WSA or were found by the agency to contain wilderness characteristics, largely coinciding with the citizens' wilderness inventory. Some areas of private and state lands were excluded during the agency evaluation due to lack of federal jurisdiction, and a few other boundary differences between the citizens' proposal and agency evaluation were noticeable but were not significant. The agency unit evaluation boundaries in some cases exceeded the acreage/geographic scope of the citizens' proposal, such as the Coyote Wash area immediately west of the existing Dolores River WSA and some of the units adjacent to the existing McKenna Peak WSA.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

Tres Rios Field Office

Figure O-1



The USFS and BLM attempt to use the most current and complete geospatial data available. Geospatial data accuracy varies by theme on the map. Using this map for other than their intended purpose may yield inaccurate or misleading results. The USFS and BLM reserve the right to correct, update or modify geospatial inputs without notification.

Unit Evaluations

This section briefly describes each of the 20 inventory units and the subsequent finding for that unit. Detailed descriptions and the completed evaluation worksheets are archived in the permanent documentation files at the TRFO.

Weber/Menefee Area

CO-030-251-a (1,157 acres): This area is immediately north and adjacent to the existing Menefee Mountain WSA (CO-030-251). The area consists of a broad northeast-southwest-trending ridgeline with mixed conifer, pinyon-juniper woodland, and desert scrubland vegetation types.

The area is primarily natural in appearance with minimal evidence of human activity and development within the unit. Expansive views of the La Plata Mountains and the Mesa Verde Escarpment dominate from the area.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-251-b (5,162 acres): This unit straddles a northwest-southeast-trending ridgeline east of the existing Menefee Mountain WSA (CO-030-251). Area vegetation is primarily pinyon-juniper woodland and desert scrub with some pockets of mixed conifer on north slopes.

The area boundary is very irregular and several “necks” within the unit are less than 0.25 mile wide, a configuration that would make the unit’s management and boundary marking impractical. The area’s shape also restricts its ability to provide for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude for visitors.

Public access is blocked almost entirely by private lands, and numerous private developments about the area on both sides. A communication tower group dominates the area’s northern skyline, which is accessed by a maintained road.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-252-a (355 acres): This unit is adjacent to the northern boundary of the Weber Mountain WSA (CO-030-252). Its size, configuration, and lack of public access preclude the availability of primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude. The area is only accessible from the existing WSA by scrambling down steep slopes and cliffs from the mesa top. The unit is surrounded by private lands, homes, and ranching developments to the north.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

McKenna Peak Area

CO-030-286-a (3,883 acres): The analysis area lies south of the Disappointment Valley county road. The unit contains primarily pinyon-juniper vegetation, with some mixed timber on sheltered northern slopes. The dominant feature of the area is a sandstone escarpment that encloses several drainage basins.

After the original GIS analysis, it was determined that this area is not adjacent to the McKenna Peak WSA (CO-030-286) and that the county road was not included in the roadless analysis. The GIS analysis was therefore redone and the resulting unit was less than 5,000 acres and was dropped from further consideration.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-286-b (2,635 acres): This analysis unit actually consists of several sub-units, all adjacent to the existing McKenna Peak WSA (CO-030-286). The sub-units were considered as a whole as they had many similarities, including vegetation types, topography, and physical proximity.

The area consists primarily of desert scrub with some pinyon-juniper woodland in the higher elevations. The area is dominated by the McKenna Peak escarpment and is dissected by numerous arroyos interspersed with small mesas. The unit is part of the Spring Creek Wild Horse Herd Management Area. Several horses were present during the field visit.

Although several BLM roads are present between the sub-units, the area is wild and remote and contains opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-286-c (542 acres): This unit was also misidentified as adjacent to the existing McKenna Peak WSA (CO-030-286) due to the county road being inadvertently not included in the original roadless GIS analysis. The area was therefore dropped from further consideration due to its size (< 5,000 acres).

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-286-d (2,385 acres): This unit is adjacent to the existing McKenna Peak WSA (CO-030-286). This unit was originally greater than 5,000 acres after the preliminary GIS roadless analysis, but once again the county road was inadvertently excluded. After including the county road, the unit was recalculated at 2,390 acres and, because of its adjacency to the existing WSA, was still eligible for further analysis.

The area consists primarily of desert scrub with some pinyon-juniper woodland in the higher elevations. The area is dominated by the McKenna Peak escarpment and is dissected by numerous arroyos interspersed with small mesas. The unit is part of the Spring Creek Wild Horse Herd Management Area. Some stock developments are present near the county road, which are accessible by vehicle on roadways.

Although adjacent to the county road, the lack of traffic and human presence allows for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation within the area.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-286-f (1,578 acres): This unit lies north of the Disappointment Valley county road and is adjacent to private property on the west side. The area consists of desert scrub, pinyon-juniper woodland, and some small pockets of timber on northerly slopes.

The steep and rugged terrain of the unit lends itself to solitude and primitive and unconfined forms of recreation. The area is undeveloped and primitive in nature, and motor vehicle restrictions have led to natural rehabilitation of two-track routes leading into the area.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

Snaggletooth Area

CO-030-301a (10,144 acres): This unit contains BLM lands west of the county road through the bottom of the canyon (County Road 14 F in San Miguel County and County Road 10 in Dolores County) from the road up to the canyon rim.

The area is a rugged, primarily undeveloped sandstone canyon country. The area consists of the largest unprotected and undeveloped contiguous BLM lands within the TRFO. Some large ponderosa pine and riparian cottonwood groves are found along the river, but the upland areas are primarily dry

desert vegetation types. The river corridor is heavily used by river runners during infrequent water releases from McPhee Reservoir. Some motorized traffic and access occurs along the county road through the canyon bottom area.

The topography and rugged inaccessibility of upland areas lend themselves to primitive and unconfined types of recreation and solitude.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-301b (19,518 acres): This unit contains BLM lands generally from rim to rim of the Dolores River between Bradfield Bridge and Mountain Sheep Point. Downriver from Mountain Sheep Point, County Road 10 forms the western boundary of the unit and the canyon rim continues to form the eastern boundary.

The area is a rugged, primarily undeveloped sandstone canyon country. The area consists of the largest unprotected and undeveloped contiguous BLM lands within the TRFO. Some large ponderosa pine and riparian cottonwood groves are found along the river, but the upland areas are primarily dry desert vegetation types. The river corridor is heavily used by river runners during infrequent water releases from McPhee Reservoir. Some motorized traffic and access occurs along the county road through the canyon bottom area.

The topography and rugged inaccessibility of upland areas lend themselves to primitive and unconfined types of recreation and solitude.

The unit contains an existing right-of-way (100 feet wide) for an 115kv powerline. This right-of-way bisects the unit, but because it spans the canyon high above the canyon bottom, and maintenance of the right-of-way would not create new ground disturbance, the right-of-way was not used as a boundary to the unit.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

Lower Dolores River Area

CO-030-290-a (5,806 acres): Although it exceeds 5,000 acres in overall area, this unit, located in the Big Gypsum Valley, has an extremely convoluted boundary, private land in-holdings, and adjacent private parcels, all of which are characteristics that preclude effective boundary and protective management. The unit exhibits a desert environment with little screening or cover and also lacks topographical screening.

Evidence of other human activities on adjacent private land (or in-holdings) is evident from within the unit. The unit lacks naturalness, opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, and opportunities for solitude.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-b (8,096 acres): This unit is straddles the lower portion of Disappointment Valley and has significant in-holdings and a convoluted boundary. The unit has low relief and is primary desert scrubland.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development and has been developed for minerals, oil, and gas to a moderate degree in the past. It is expected to be more fully developed over the life of the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Sights and sounds of human activity are often detectable within the unit, detracting from the opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude within the area.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-c (7,361 acres): This unit is composed of desert mesas and canyons, and exhibits the typical pinyon-juniper and desert scrubland vegetation expected in such areas. Although the area exceeds the 5,000-acre minimum criteria under agency direction, the shape of the area and a narrow “neck” in the center of the unit make it difficult to manage for primitive values.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development. Old roads (primarily not inventoried) and other sign of uranium mining (and other extractive) activities are prevalent within the unit, reducing opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude.

The area has been explored and mined for various minerals in the past, including uranium. The area is currently leased for fluid mineral energy resources and is expected to be developed to some degree during the life of the LRMP.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-d (5,440 acres): This unit is again typical of sandstone river canyon country with mesas divided by canyons and primarily pinyon-juniper and desert scrubland vegetation. Four “necks” of roadless area less than 0.25 mile wide nearly divide this unit into four much smaller units.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development. An extensive road network, convoluted boundary, and interspersed private lands make this a difficult unit to manage. Evidence of past and present mining and other extractive industries are prevalent.

Sights and sounds of human activity are often encountered within the unit, detracting from opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-e (5,484 acres): This unit is primarily desert sandstone canyon country of McIntyre Canyon to the north of Horse Range Mesa. Typical vegetation is pinyon-juniper and desert scrubland.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development. Signs of past mining and other extractive activities are prevalent within the area. The area is nearly cut in two by a narrow “neck” of less than 0.25 mile. An aircraft landing strip is partially located within the unit.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are limited by the area’s configuration and proximity to developments. The area’s lack of vegetative and topographic screening reduces opportunities for solitude.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-f (6,597 acres): This unit is composed primarily of a broad sandstone canyon, while the western part of the unit is the highlands of Island Mesa. Typical vegetation is desert scrubland and pinyon-juniper.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development. The area has significant signs of past mining and other extractive activities. Landing strips are present immediately west of the unit on Island Mesa. The area therefore lacks the overall appearance of naturalness.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are limited within the area. Solitude can be found due to the steep topography.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-g (6,300 acres): This unit is primarily sandstone canyons and mesas with typical desert scrub and pinyon-juniper vegetation types. Steep topography falls off into the Silvey’s Pocket area, a long-developed center of mining and grazing activities.

The area is leased for fluid mineral (energy) development. Sights and sounds of human developments such as roads, ranching, and mining are prevalent within the area, detracting from opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-290-h (3,115 acres): This unit is composed of two sub-units separated by a roadway along the canyon bottom. The unit comprises the upper end of Coyote Wash, a significant tributary canyon of the Dolores River Canyon, which shares many of the characteristics of the larger canyon. Both sub-units are adjacent to the existing Dolores River Canyon WSA (CO-030-290).

The area is rich in opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and its topographic screening also allows for solitude within the unit. River users often use Coyote Wash as a hiking side-trip due to its unique features and remoteness.

The area is manageable for protecting wilderness values due to its steep topography, lack of roads and other developments, and it has not been subject to significant extractive industry activities.

Finding: The area contains wilderness characteristics.

Silverton Area

CO-030-302-a (3,959 acres): This area is located east and south of Animas Forks adjacent to the Handies' Peak WSA, which is managed by the BLM Gunnison Field Office. Although a small northern portion is actually contiguous with Handies' Peak, in reality the bulk of the area is convoluted and narrow in shape, trending away from Handies' Peak. It is therefore not really manageable in conjunction with the Handies' Peak WSA, and it also has adjacent private lands, patented and developed mining claims, and narrow "necks" of roadless area that detract from its naturalness and manageability as a protected area.

Although primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities exist, they cannot be considered outstanding when compared to those found nearby in the San Juan Mountains. Solitude is limited within the area due to private developments, mining activities, and the narrow and convoluted shape of the unit.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

CO-030-302-b (9,967 acres): This unit comprises the precipitous mountain area north of Silverton between the Cement Creek and Animas River drainages. Although relatively large in acreage, this unit has several factors that detract from its naturalness and manageability as a protected area. About 13,000 acres of adjacent and/or overlapping land area is permitted by the BLM for the operation of the Silverton Mountain ski area. Developed ski areas are typically incompatible with management of wilderness values and the permit authorizes actions inconsistent with protection of wilderness values.

Patented mining claims are found throughout the unit and adjacent to it. Reasonable access to these private lands is provided by law, which is typically by vehicles on developed roadways.

Steep mountain topography limits opportunities for development of any kind within this area.

Finding: The area does not contain wilderness characteristics.

Land and Resource Management Plan Alternatives for Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

Almost all of the lands within all seven units that were found to have wilderness characteristics during the wilderness characteristics inventory, with the exception of 3,958 acres, are considered to be managed for their wilderness characteristics in the LRMP alternatives. Alternative C places an emphasis on maintenance of undeveloped and protected areas and therefore proposes that all seven units containing wilderness characteristics be managed for their wilderness characteristics to maximize protection of undeveloped lands. Alternative D, with its emphasis on multiple forms of access and resource use, does not propose management of any lands for their wilderness characteristics. Alternative B offers a balance between these alternatives and proposes that two areas, totaling 11,867 acres, be managed for their wilderness characteristics (portions of units CO-030-290h and CO-030-301b). The rationale for including specific units within Alternatives B and C is provided below.

Unit Co-030-251a: The unit is technically adjacent to WSA (CO-030-251, Menefee Mountain) and is, to a large degree, separated from the adjacent WSA by a maintained road which accesses a communication site that dominates the skyline. The unit wraps around two private land inholdings (with housing developments) and a State managed Section and stair-steps around private lands on the northern boundary. While the combination of adjacent impacts (the maintained road, communication tower, and private land developments) and irregular shape (at times less than 1/8 of a mile wide) do not preclude management of the unit for inventoried wilderness characteristics, these impacts are pervasive and omnipresent and would make management for those characteristics significantly challenging. Thus under the preferred alternative, BLM proposes not to manage this unit for its inventoried wilderness characteristics, and to emphasize ongoing management of the unit for other resources and activities. Lands in this unit would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C.

Unit Co-030-286b: This unit is adjacent to a WSA (Co-030-286, McKenna Peak). The majority of the acreage falls within the Spring Creek Herd Management Area, creating management conflict concerns, while also affording some protective management of the landscape. These considerations resulted in the proposal to not manage this unit for its wilderness characteristics under the preferred alternative and to emphasize management of the herd area instead. Lands in this unit would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C.

Unit Co-030-286d: This unit projects from the adjacent WSA (Co-030-286, McKenna Peak). The unit falls within the Spring Creek Herd Management Area, creating management conflict concerns, while also affording some protective management of the landscape. These considerations resulted in the proposal to not manage this unit for its wilderness characteristics under the preferred alternative and to emphasize management of the herd area instead. Lands in this unit would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C.

Unit Co-030-286f: This unit is technically adjacent to WSA Co-030-286 (McKenna Peak), though the connection is a very narrow strip of land in the northwest corner of the unit. A stock pond is located 1.5 miles into the unit. While not in and of itself 'substantially noticeable', it is accessed via a route (BLM Road 4741) determined to be a 'wilderness inventory road' through a route analysis (completed on 10/2/2012). This road nearly completely bisects the unit, results in narrow (1/3-1/2 mile wide) and irregular unit configuration. While not precluding management of the unit for inventoried wilderness characteristics, it makes management for those characteristics significantly challenging. Thus under the preferred alternative, BLM proposes not to manage this unit for its inventoried wilderness characteristics, and to emphasize ongoing management of the unit for other resources and activities. Lands in this unit would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C.

Unit Co-030-290h: This unit forms a natural extension of the Lower Dolores River WSA (Co-030-290). While there is an unimproved, primitive road which runs down the bottom of the canyon, there

is no legal access to the route either from the eastern (Utah) end of the wash, nor from the western end of the wash (Lower Dolores River WSA). The full inventoried area consists of 3,115 acres, and 1,144 acres are proposed to be managed for wilderness characteristics in Alternative B. The portion of the unit located between the rims of the canyon feature is proposed for management for the inventoried wilderness characteristics present within the unit in Alternatives B and C.

Unit Co-030-301a: This unit is a long and narrow, comprised mostly of vertical cliff features on the west and a County Road (CR 14F/10) in the canyon bottom along the east. Motorized use along the county road can be very heavy at times (such as during periods of boatable water on the Dolores River). External impacts are seasonally pervasive and omnipresent. The presence of the road makes it difficult for the BLM to ensure outstanding opportunities for solitude into the future over the life of the plan, based on present knowledge of the resources, ongoing uses, and valid existing rights in the area. The road and its use do not preclude management of the unit for inventoried wilderness characteristics, but makes management for those characteristics significantly challenging. Thus under the preferred alternative, BLM proposes not to manage this unit for its inventoried wilderness characteristics, and to emphasize ongoing management of the unit for other resources and activities. About 9,123 acres in this unit would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C, which does not include about 931 acres above the canyon rim.

Unit Co-030-301b: The northern portion of this unit is long and narrow, comprised mostly of vertical cliff features on the east and a boundary County Road (CR 14F/10) on the west in the canyon bottom along the west. Motorized use along the County Road can be very heavy at times (such as during the boating season on the Dolores River). External impacts are seasonally pervasive and omnipresent. The presence of the County Road jurisdiction makes it difficult for the BLM to ensure outstanding opportunities for solitude into the future over the life of the plan, based on present knowledge of the resources, ongoing uses, lack of control of level of the County Road improvements into the future, and valid existing rights in the area. The road and its use do not preclude management of the northern portion of the unit for inventoried wilderness characteristics, but makes management for those characteristics significantly challenging. Thus under the preferred alternative, BLM proposes not to manage this northern portion of the unit for its inventoried wilderness characteristics, and to emphasize ongoing management of the unit for other resources and activities. The majority of the remaining lands in this area would be managed for their wilderness characteristics in Alternative C, with the exception of 1,598 acres.

The southern portion of the unit (rim to rim between Bradfield Recreation Site and Mt. Sheep Point) is not encumbered by the effects of the County Road nor existing routes along the canyon rim, and is proposed for management for the wilderness characteristics present in this portion of the unit under alternatives B and C.