

WILDERNESS EVALUATION

For The

Range Rescission Act Project

Fall Creek Allotment
Tunsten Allotment
Painter Basin Allotment
North Fork Duchesne Allotment
Lake Basin Allotment

Ashley National Forest
High Uintas Wilderness
Roosevelt-Duchesne Ranger District

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INTRODUCTION

Livestock grazing often conflicts with recreational use in the High Uintas Wilderness. It can displace visitors, make popular camping areas highly undesirable, and compete with recreational stock for limited forage. Grazing can also alter *natural conditions* and diminish *wilderness character*, which are primary wilderness management objectives. All of these impacts can affect wilderness experiences, which are unique and often very personal to wilderness visitors. Many wilderness visitors feel that grazing is an inappropriate use of wilderness resources and that it conflicts with the fundamental tenets of wilderness. Others are not as sensitive to grazing impacts. In any case, grazing was explicitly grandfathered into the Wilderness Act of 1964 and cannot be restricted for any of these “social” reasons. Livestock grazing also has biophysical impacts, which must be left to other specialists to evaluate. Consequently, this report can offer little meaningful guidance, though there are implications for wilderness management that should be considered.

The social impacts of grazing will be the primary focus of this report, specifically the collective impact of grazing on wilderness experiences in the High Uintas Wilderness. Though there has been much research on this topic, very little field data has been collected specifically for the High Uintas Wilderness that is relevant to this report and no primary social science research has been completed. Consequently, this report is based on recent wilderness manager site visits, wilderness ranger field reports, trailhead registers, secondary research, professional education and judgment, three years as the local wilderness manager, and 25 years of personal experiences in the High Uintas Wilderness and other wildlands.

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The High Uintas Wilderness was designated as such under the Utah Wilderness Act of 1984, pursuant to the Wilderness Act of 1964. Consequently, management objectives for the wilderness stem from these two acts of Congress. Broadly stated, the High Uintas Wilderness is to be managed for:

- ❖ Natural conditions and wilderness character or “wildness”
- ❖ Ecological health and integrity
- ❖ Education on wilderness values (physical, spiritual, and experiential)
- ❖ Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation
- ❖ Special provisions found in both acts, such as grazing and water use

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive wilderness management plan, the Ashley and Wasatch-Cache National Forests launched a cooperative planning process using the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) model in 1991. The *High Uintas Wilderness (HUW) Management Plan* was the product of this process and it amended both forest plans in 1997. The *HUW Management Plan* prescribes desired conditions within the

wilderness, divides the wilderness into three different desired condition classes, and includes 27 standards and guidelines addressing a comprehensive set of physical and social components of wilderness to ensure desired conditions are met. Fourteen of the standards were identified as key indicators that require monitoring in order to identify deviations from desired conditions.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 recognizes livestock grazing as an appropriate use of wilderness. However, the effects of livestock grazing should be consistent with desired conditions and should not result in impacts that exceed monitoring standards. While there are locations in the High Uintas Wilderness in which desired conditions have not been attained or have been lost or standards have been exceeded, at least in part due to grazing, these are generally limited in space and time and responsible permit administration should mitigate most grazing impacts outside of the acceptable range. In some cases, however, it may be difficult to distinguish recreation impacts from grazing impacts and determine an appropriate remedy.

Class I Areas

The area is characterized by an unmodified natural environment. Human induced change is temporary, minor, and less than in Class II and III. Soil compaction and minor vegetation loss associated with human related activities are temporary, discontinuous, and limited in extent to the area of activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt natural processes within the watershed.

By managing the area to maintain very low use levels, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined recreation are available. There are few, if any, system trails. Appropriate and properly designed system trails that pass through Class I are considered corridors and are maintained. Encounters with other groups and rangers are rare. Both the outfitted and general public disperse use and practice Leave No Trace ethics and skills. Regulations are communicated to visitors primarily outside the wilderness. Few direct contacts by wilderness rangers are made, unless needed to monitor conditions or address problems. Generally, Class I areas are defined outside permitted livestock allotments, except areas within allotment boundaries that are unsuitable, vacant, or unused (due to physical barriers or quality of forage). Lakes are generally not stocked with fish.

Class II Areas

The area is characterized by a predominantly unmodified natural environment. Some human induced change is evident but generally not persistent and less than in Class III. Soil loss, compaction, and minor vegetation loss associated with human activities are discontinuous and limited in extent to the area of activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt natural processes within the watershed.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation exist. Compared to Class III, fewer areas of concentrated visitor use occur. In areas of

concentrated human use, dead and down firewood is available but may be scarce. Developed, maintained, and signed system trails exist. Encounters with other groups, rangers, and wilderness ranger camps are less than Class III but more than Class I. Both the outfitted and general public practice Leave No Trace ethics and skills. Where regulation is needed to prevent deterioration of the wilderness resource and visitor experience, it is communicated to visitors primarily outside the wilderness and on-site. Livestock grazing and fish stocking may occur.

Class III Areas

This area is characterized by a predominantly unmodified natural environment. Human induced change is greater than in Class I and II and could persist from year to year. Soil loss, compaction, and minor vegetation loss associated with human activities are discontinuous and limited in extent to the area of activity. Human induced changes to soils, water and air quality, wildlife habitats, natural fire regimes, and vegetation do not disrupt natural processes within the watershed.

Concentrated use is more common than in Class II, but it is managed to augment opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. During peak season and at popular sites, outstanding opportunities for solitude are more limited than in Class I and II. In popular campsites, dead and down firewood may be unavailable. Well-maintained and signed system trails aid visitors. Encounters with other groups, rangers, and wilderness ranger camps are more common than in Class I and II. Both the outfitted and general public practice Leave No Trace ethics and skills. Where regulation is needed to prevent deterioration of the wilderness resource and visitor experience, it is communicated to visitors both outside of the wilderness and on-site. Livestock grazing and fish stocking may occur.

Visitors may come in contact with water impoundments or snow measurement devices. Repair, reconstruction, or stabilization of water impoundments and associated activities (borrow sources, access roads) are performed so the ability of soils to support naturally occurring vegetation is not diminished.

Wilderness Monitoring

MONITORING INDICATOR SUMMARY TABLE

| INDICATOR | | INTENT | STANDARD |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| Air Quality | MA-01-001 Deposition | Indicator of pollutants in the air. | Nitrate and sulphate loading does not exceed 3-5 kg/ha per year each. |
| | MA-01-002 Standard Visual Range | Indicator of air quality impacts from human activities outside of the wilderness. | Long-term visual range impairment from human activities does not exceed 10% of the 90 th percentile in Class 2 Wilderness Airsheds. Short-term (14-day) visual range impairment from human activities does not exceed 20% of the 90 th percentile in Class 2 Wilderness Airsheds. |
| | MA-01-003 Surface Water Alkalinity | Indicator of watershed ability to neutralize or buffer acids deposited by precip/dust. | Alkalinity falls no more than 10% below baseline in all surface waters. |
| Water & Soil | MA-01-004 Coliform Bacteria | Indicator of human or livestock waste being introduced into surface waters. | State of Utah water quality standards are met for acceptable amounts of coliform bacteria in waters for their specific beneficial uses, as defined by the <i>Standards of Quality for Waters of the State</i> . See Utah Division of Water Quality Rule R317-2-14: www.waterquality.utah.gov . |
| | MA-01-005 Soil Erosion in Condition Class 1 | Indicator of both site productivity and water quality. | No more than 15% of use areas have Erosion Class 1 characteristics. None have Erosion Class 2 or 3 characteristics. |
| | MA-01-006 Soil Erosion in Condition Class 2 | Indicator of both site productivity and water quality. | No more than 25% of use areas have Erosion Class 1 characteristics. No more than 15% of use areas have Erosion Class 2 characteristics. None have Erosion Class 3 characteristics. |
| | MA-01-007 Soil Erosion in Condition Class 3 | Indicator of both site productivity and water quality. | No more than 50% of use areas have Erosion Class 1 characteristics. No more than 25% of use areas have Erosion Class 2 characteristics. None have Erosion Class 3 characteristics. |
| Vegetation | MA-01-016 Sensitive Plant Habitat | Indicator of sensitive plant species viability (two species). | No more than 10% of the habitat for HUW sensitive plant species (landtypes UB1, 2, and 3) is adversely altered by human uses. |
| | MA-01-017 Ground Cover | Indicator of desired plant communities and overall condition of the watershed. | At least 85% of potential natural ground cover is maintained in all HUW alpine, aspen, and riparian vegetation types. |
| Fire | MA-01-018 Natural Fire Regime | Indicator of the natural processes found in wilderness. | Wildland fire is managed to play, to the extent possible, its natural role in the ecosystem. Prescribed fires are managed according to the <i>HUW Fire Management Plan</i> found in the <i>HUW Final EIS</i> , 1997 (FSM 2324.2). |

MONITORING INDICATOR SUMMARY TABLE

| INDICATOR | | INTENT | STANDARD |
|------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Recreation | MA-01-035 Campsite Density | Indicator of solitude. | Condition Class 1: Occupied campsites are one mile apart. Condition Class 2: Occupied campsites are ¼ mile apart. Condition Class 3: Occupied campsites are 200 feet apart. |
| | MA-01-036 Campsite Impact Index | Indicator of impacts to vegetation, soils, and aesthetics from human recreation use. | <p>1) <i>Ashley National Forest</i> Condition Class 1: No campsites have a site impact index (SII) over 40. Condition Class 2: No more than 10% of campsites have an SII over 40. Condition Class 3: No more than 20% of campsites have an SII of 50 or more.</p> <p>2) <i>Wasatch-Cache National Forest</i> Condition Class 1: No campsites have a site impact index (SII) over 40. Condition Class 2: No more than 10% of campsites have an SII of 50 or more. Condition Class 3: No more than 20% of campsites have an SII of 50 or more.</p> |
| | MA-01-038 Group Size | Indicator of impacts to natural resources and quality of wilderness experience. | Group size does not exceed 14 persons and 15 head of pack and saddle stock. This is a change from the original standard, which varied with condition class, resulting from an appeal of the <i>Record of Decision</i> in 1997. |
| | MA-01-044 Firewood Availability | Indicator of impacts to vegetation, soils, and aesthetics from human recreation use. | <p>1) <i>Ashley National Forest</i> None. This indicator is shown on the monitoring table attached to the <i>Record of Decision (ROD)</i> and incorporated therein. However, the standard was omitted from the <i>ROD</i> text.</p> <p>2) <i>Wasatch-Cache National Forest</i> Prohibit campfires where the firewood supply is depleted and continued fire building threatens the wilderness qualities of the area.</p> |

WILDERNESS RESTRICTIONS

The Wilderness Act of 1964 requires the management of human impacts and the protection of wilderness character to ensure that it remains "*unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as wilderness.*" Simply designating a wilderness does not assure its preservation. Management is needed to minimize the impacts of the wilderness visitor on the immediate environment and the experiences of other visitors. Wilderness management employs both social and natural sciences to preserve the qualities for which wilderness was established.

Restrictions are an important tool in the wilderness management toolbox and are often necessary to achieve wilderness management objectives. Wilderness education remains the primary and preferred method of minimizing impacts to wilderness resources and experiences. But, when this fails and conditions degrade below acceptable levels, restrictions are needed. Both General Prohibitions and Special

Orders apply within the High Uintas Wilderness, to both visitors and permittees (unless authorized). Since the impacts of livestock should be largely mitigated by responsible permit administration, restrictions are primarily concerned with the impacts of the permittees themselves (and their employees).

Livestock permittees are frequently found in violation of one or more restrictions, and they are currently regarded as a law enforcement problem. In 2005, for example, a wilderness ranger documented five violations in a single cattle camp in Swasey Hole. In 2004, four violations were documented in a single sheep camp in Painter Basin. In 2003, there were similar reports from both cattle and sheep camps in Oweep, Rock Creek, Brown Duck Basin, and other areas. Per District Ranger direction, violation notices are not written for these incidents. Instead, administrative actions are relied upon to ensure permittee compliance.

General Prohibitions

General prohibitions apply to the entire National Forest System. The number of general prohibitions is staggering, but there are only a few (6) that concern most wilderness visitors. The following acts are prohibited:

- ❖ Using motorized equipment or any form of mechanical transport in a wilderness. This includes, but is not limited to: motor vehicles, chain saws, generators, bicycles, hang gliders, wagons, carts, and the landing of aircraft, unless specifically exempted by legislation.

Under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, wheelchairs are exempted from this prohibition for mobility-impaired persons, as long as the chair is suitable for indoor use.
- ❖ Failing to properly dispose of all garbage (pack it out) and leaving human waste in an exposed or unsanitary manner.
- ❖ Damaging, altering, or removing any natural feature or other property of the United States. This includes, but is not limited to: falling or damaging trees, trenching, and vandalism.
- ❖ Constructing any structure or improvement. This includes, but is not limited to: hitchrails, furniture, shelters, and rafts.
- ❖ Leaving a fire without completely extinguishing it.
- ❖ Discharging a firearm within 150 yards of an occupied area, across a body of water, or in any unsafe place or manner. Wilderness areas are not appropriate places for target practice.

Special Orders

Special orders apply specifically to the High Uintas Wilderness or all National Forests in Utah or the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service. There is only a handful (10) that concern most wilderness visitors. The following acts are prohibited within the High Uintas Wilderness:

- ❖ Groups exceeding 14 persons and 15 head of stock. Groups exceeding this size must divide into separate parties and remain at least one mile apart at all times, including meals, stops, and camps.
- ❖ Camping within 200 feet of any occupied campsite, designated trail, or water source, terrain permitting.
- ❖ Building a campfire within 1/4 mile of a location closed to campfires. Effective September 2, 2005, many locations are closed to campfires on the Ashley National Forest, generally destination lakes.
- ❖ Restraining a saddle or pack animal for longer than one hour within 200 feet of a water source or tying an animal directly to a tree for more than one hour. Animals must be moved sooner if damage to the tree, soil, or vegetation at the base of the tree is occurring.
- ❖ Shortcutting a switchback in a trail.
- ❖ Overnight grazing by saddle or pack stock in Chain Lakes Basin.
- ❖ Camping for a period longer than 14 consecutive days in a single drainage and within one mile of previous campsite.
- ❖ Using salt to attract wildlife. Applies to all wilderness areas in the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service.
- ❖ Using a wagon or cart. Applies to all wilderness areas in the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service.
- ❖ Using hay or straw that has not been certified as weed-free by the State or County or grain products that do not comply with the Utah Commercial Feed Act. Applies to all National Forests in Utah.

SITE-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

Fall Creek

Condition Class: The entire allotment is within Class II. Actual conditions within the allotment generally reflect desired conditions, with a few highly-localized exceptions on system trails or near popular campsites at destination lakes. Nearly all known impacts are currently recreation-related.

The Fall Creek Allotment has not been grazed for many years but remains an active allotment. Known conflicts between livestock grazing and wilderness visitors are currently very rare but occasionally result from cattle wandering into the area from a neighboring allotment. If the allotment should ever be put back into use, however, the potential for conflict is “moderate.” Conflicts would likely be low in frequency but high in severity, since many visitors to remote portions of the wilderness seek and expect a more “pure” wilderness experience. Perhaps partly due to the lack of grazing activities, the area is now known to offer a high quality wilderness experience. The actual number of visitors potentially affected is unknown.

The Fall Creek Allotment includes a few destination lakes and a section of the popular Highline Trail. Anderson and Phinney Lakes receive moderate use and are particularly favored by large stock groups, though backpackers are increasingly attracted to them as well. Ledge Lake is a popular stopover on the Highline Trail for thru-travelers heading to or from nearby Deadhorse Pass. Other recreational use is largely limited to travel along the Highline Trail. Visibility from the trail is excellent and visitors can see most of the scenic headwall of Upper Fall Creek.

This report is based on a 2004 wilderness site visit, wilderness ranger reports, trailhead registers, and personal and professional experiences. Photos were also taken of the area, which are available upon request.

Tungsten

Condition Class: The entire allotment is within Class II, though livestock is moved through a Class I area to reach the allotment. Actual conditions within the allotment generally reflect desired conditions, with a few highly-localized exceptions on system trails or near popular campsites. Most known impacts are currently recreation-related, though visitor comments clearly suggest that livestock grazing is a source of impact to the wilderness experiences of some visitors.

Conflicts between livestock grazing and wilderness visitors are currently “moderate” in the Tungsten Allotment but are expected to rise with increasing use of the southwestern approach to King’s Peak. Conflicts are generally low in frequency but high in severity, since many visitors to remote portions of the wilderness seek and expect a more “pure” wilderness experience. Though much longer, the southwestern approach on King’s Peak from the Center Park or Swift Creek Trailheads through the Upper Yellowstone offers much more solitude and a superior wilderness experience to the busy Henry’s Fork route, and it is being chosen by an increasing number of groups specifically for these reasons. These groups are likely to be sensitive to grazing. The actual number of visitors potentially affected is unknown.

The Tungsten Allotment includes no destination lakes, but it does include a long section of the popular Highline Trail, serves as the southwestern approach on Kings Peak, and is a crossroads for visitors traveling through the high country over Smith’s Fork, Anderson, Tungsten, and Porcupine Passes. Recreational use of the allotment is largely limited to travel along system trails, but some solitude-seeking backpackers

enjoy camping in the area as well. Visibility is excellent and visitors can see most of the scenic headwall of Upper Yellowstone Creek.

This report is based on a 2003 wilderness site visit, wilderness ranger reports, trailhead registers, and personal and professional experiences. Photos were also taken of the area, which are available upon request.

Painter Basin

Condition Class: Most of the allotment is within Class II, though livestock is moved through a Class I area to reach the allotment. The allotment contains a small Class III area in the northwestern portion of Painter Basin associated with heavy use of the Highline Trail by groups ascending King's Peak. Actual conditions within the allotment generally reflect desired conditions, with a few highly-localized exceptions on system trails or near popular campsites. Most known impacts are currently recreation-related, though visitor comments clearly suggest that livestock grazing is a source of impact to the wilderness experiences of some visitors. There are several known violations of restrictions by livestock permittees in this area.

Conflicts between livestock grazing and wilderness visitors are currently "moderate" in the Painter Basin Allotment. Conflicts are generally high in frequency but low in severity. Most groups bound for King's Peak choose the Henry's Fork-Painter Basin route. This use represents a large and increasing number of visitors, but they are typically focused on reaching the summit, rather than a wilderness experience, and are not likely to be sensitive to grazing. Some groups bound for King's Peak, however, use the southeastern approach from the Uinta Canyon Trailhead through Uinta Canyon or Atwood Basin. Though much longer, this route is sometimes chosen by groups that seek more solitude and a superior wilderness experience to the busy Henry's Fork route. These groups are likely to be sensitive to livestock grazing. The actual number of visitors potentially affected is unknown.

The Painter Basin Allotment includes no destination lakes, but it does include a long section of the popular Highline Trail, serves as the southeastern approach on Kings Peak, and is a crossroads for visitors traveling through the high country over Gunsight, Anderson, Fox-Queant, and Trail Rider Passes. Recreational use of the allotment is largely limited to travel along system trails, but some solitude-seeking backpackers enjoy camping in the area as well. Visibility is excellent and visitors can see most of the scenic headwall of the Upper Uinta River.

This report is based on wilderness ranger field reports, trailhead registers, and personal and professional experiences (including a 2001 visit). Photos were also taken of the area, which are available upon request.

North Fork Duchesne

Condition Class: The wilderness portion of the allotment (approximately 1,800 acres) is entirely within Class II. Absent any field data, actual conditions within the allotment are unknown but are assumed to be well within desired conditions, since it is rarely grazed

due to its extremely steep and rocky topography. Nearly 100% of the wilderness acres are considered “non-suitable” for grazing.

There is little or no active grazing within the wilderness portion of the North Fork Duchesne Allotment. Since there is also little or no recreational use of the area, there are no known conflicts between livestock grazing and wilderness visitors. If conflicts were to occur, however, they would be high in severity, since visitors to this area would likely be seeking and expecting a more “pure” wilderness experience. There are no system trails passing through the area, it contains no destination lakes, and topography is extreme. The only notable potential for recreational use exists in the highest elevations of the Shale Creek drainage, but it is difficult to access. The actual number of visitors potentially affected is unknown.

This report is based on a topo map review, wilderness ranger opinions, and personal and professional experiences in the area.

Lake Basin

Condition Class: The wilderness portion of the allotment (estimated at 100 acres) is entirely within Class III. Absent any field data, actual conditions within the allotment are unknown but are assumed to be well within desired conditions, since the area is extremely steep and almost entirely rock talus.

There is no active grazing within the wilderness portion of the Lake Basin Allotment. Granddaddy Basin, the most heavily visited area in the wilderness, is immediately adjacent to the allotment. However, there is little or no recreational use of the allotment itself and there are no known conflicts between livestock grazing and wilderness visitors. An occasional visitor to Granddaddy Basin may climb East Granddaddy Mountain to enjoy the outstanding view from the summit. So, if the area were grazed, a potential for conflict exists, but visitors to this area are typically less sensitive to livestock grazing and both the frequency and severity of such a conflict would be low. The actual number of visitors potentially affected is unknown.

This report is based on a topo map review, wilderness ranger opinions, and personal and professional experiences in the area.

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