

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Hunter Canyon

Hunter Canyon is a wonderful place to ride horses. The scenic narrow canyon is surrounded by awesome rock formations. It is uniquely home to diverse vegetation from desert to pine, and provides important winter range for deer and other wildlife. An abundant creek cascades through the canyon spilling over mammoth boulders and feeding the desert ecosystem below.

NJ Fulmer, Grand Junction

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 32,126 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 3,360 acres
BLM Field Office: Glenwood Springs Field Office (Glenwood Springs)
Location: The Flat Tops Addition is located 20 miles northeast of Glenwood Springs, straddling the border of Garfield and Eagle Counties, on the edge of the Flat Tops Wilderness.

Wilderness Qualities

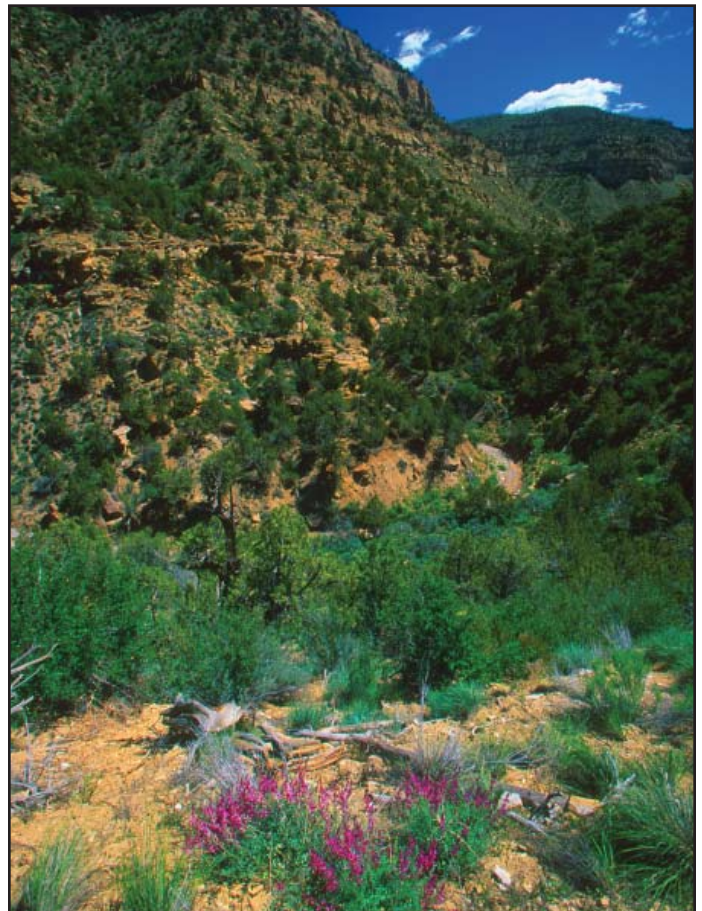
Hunter Canyon is an area of striking contrasts, ranging from narrow serpentine canyons snaking their way out onto the plains of the Grand Valley to lofty, chalk-colored cliffs that form a magnificent escarpment at the headwaters of the area. Hunter Canyon offers perhaps the best opportunity for protection of a complete, continuous range of ecosystems running from the arid areas of the Grand Valley to relatively lush Douglas fir forests in adjacent upland mesas.

Hunter Canyon itself carves a deep, winding swath of a type uncommon in the Bookcliffs of western Colorado. The canyon breaks abruptly through the sheer, cliff-forming Mesa Verde Formation and out onto the Grand Valley. The stream undercuts the rock walls, creating narrow defiles in the canyon's upper reaches, one of which can be waded to a point beneath a towering waterfall. Large, isolated ponderosa pines line the canyon bottom, providing welcome shade in the noonday summer sun. The deep canyon gives way to high mesas covered by sage, mountain mahogany, and pinyon-juniper forest. As one goes higher, nearing the 8,400-foot mark, the rolling forests and gentle canyons ultimately culminate in an escarpment of chalk-white cliffs of the Green River Formation which create a dramatic backdrop to Hunter Canyon. These wetter, higher elevations provide evidence of increased vegetative vigor in the form of Douglas fir, aspen, and flowering shrubs.

An area of particular interest in one of Hunter Canyon's tributaries is referred to locally as "Moon Valley". Vivid

yellow, green, purple, and blue-gray hues color the landscape here, creating outstanding photographic opportunities.

As one of the least developed regions of the Bookcliffs, Hunter Canyon offers a haven for abundant wildlife. Black bear are common, as are mountain lions and their prey, mule deer. Hunter Canyon serves as a winter concentration area for these deer, and elk grace the higher elevations of the area. Because of their inaccessibility by vehicle, the far reaches of Hunter Canyon offer some of the best hunting in the Grand Valley.



Vivid colors of "Moon Valley".

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The mouth of Hunter Canyon is readily accessible from Grand Junction. For this reason, and because of its stunning beauty, Hunter Canyon is a popular recreation area for Grand Junction residents. Horseback riding and hiking are particularly popular pursuits.

Resource Information

Hunter Canyon lies in a broad region of the Bookcliffs with underlying potentially-developable coal reserves. Areas where exploratory drilling for coal has occurred have been excluded from the proposed wilderness. No coal leases underlay Hunter Canyon. The Dorchester Coal mine proposal to the west was abandoned in 1990.



Juniper snag on the mesa.

Hunter Canyon possesses moderate potential for oil and gas reserves. Much of the area is presently covered by oil and gas leases which have production from existing wells that are located on portions of leases outside the proposed wilderness. In recognition of the area's outstandingly unique and irreplaceable natural values, BLM has placed the canyons themselves and the area's steep slopes off-limits to surface occupancy for oil and gas exploration, and has developed protective stipulations for much of the rest of the area. These stipulations are to protect visual resources and back-country uses on highly unstable slopes and cover almost 11,000 acres in the western portion of the area.

The Hunter Canyon drainage is closed to new road construction. Previous attempts at road construction within the area have been obliterated by flash floods and mudslides. Unfortunately, BLM allowed emergency construction of a road along the drainage to two isolated gas wells in 1987.

Hunter Canyon is presently managed for semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation; motor vehicles are limited to existing routes. Wilderness designation will thus have little, if any, additional impact on current recreational use of the area.

Hunter Canyon has a portion of five livestock allotments for cattle. These portions amount to several hundred AUMs of authorized livestock use during the summer months. No range improvements are planned for the area.

Hunter Canyon is a headwaters area that straddles the watershed divide between Roan Creek and the Grand Valley.

Boundary Issues

The citizens' proposed boundaries for Hunter Canyon generally conform to BLM's original Hunter Canyon-Garvey Canyon roadless area inventory unit. This boundary takes in most of the Hunter Creek watershed, including its Middle Fork, up to and including the massive escarpment at its head. Portions of several creeks on the north and east sides of this escarpment are also contained within the area, including Lefthand Draw and Corcoran Wash. The western portion of the area encompasses the watershed divide between Kimball Creek and Garvey Canyon.

The CWP western boundary generally follows Garfield County Road 205 in Big Salt Wash and the eastern boundary follows the Corcoran Wash Road. The northern boundary generally follows private property lines, vehicle routes and natural features. The southern boundary of the unit follows natural features and roads.

