Mussentuchit Badlands

Findings

INVENTORY UNIT ACRES		
Federal	**State**	**Total**
With Wilderness Characteristics		
23,900	2,600	26,500 (96%)
Without Wilderness Characteristics		
1,200	0	1,200 (4%)
Inventory Unit Total		
25,100	2,600	27,700
Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics		
None		

Most of the Mussentuchit Badlands inventory unit (26,500 acres) has wilderness characteristics. However, about 1,200 acres lack wilderness characteristics, including the Mussentuchit Sand Dune (a small, but popular off-highway vehicle play area on the unit's eastern side), a small area sandwiched between two cherry-stemmed roads in the vicinity of Sand Cove Spring, an area in the northwestern corner that contains a scattering of reservoirs and livestock watering facilities, a small area in the unit's northeastern corner containing Road End Reservoir and a short line of fence, and a very small reservoir on the unit's eastern boundary. The unit's diverse terrain, including evidence of past volcanic activity, provides the vast majority of the unit with outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.

Unit Description

The Mussentuchit Badlands inventory unit is located in the extreme southwestern corner of Emery County approximately six miles south of Interstate 70. The unit's westernmost tip extends into Sevier County. The Cedar Mountain inventory unit is adjacent to the east, and the Limestone Cliffs inventory unit is adjacent to the west. The unit is bounded on all sides by county-maintained roads. It is used primarily for livestock grazing and recreation, with hiking, sightseeing, photography, and riding off-highway vehicles (OHVs) being the most popular. OHV use occurs mostly in the immediate vicinity of the Mussentuchit Sand Dune.

The unit's topography is divided between the relatively flat, rolling lands of the Blue Flats area to the west and the much more extensive badlands topography occupying the eastern three-quarters of the unit. The Mussentuchit Badlands are extremely rugged, with a labyrinth of literally hundreds of washes, draws, ravines, and gullies. While some of the unit is barren, sparse vegetation, mostly desert shrubs and grasses, covers much of the landscape. Scattered juniper and piñon dot the landscape's higher elevations. Tamarisk and occasional cottonwood trees appear along wash bottoms and adjacent to several man-made reservoirs.

Wilderness Characteristics

Naturalness

Overall, the unit largely retains its natural character. A seismographic survey line was found to be substantially unnoticeable, as were three fences. A reservoir, an access way, and livestock watering facilities located to the north and west of Twin Peaks are not natural and have been cherry-stemmed, along with the road providing access to the Twin Peaks area. The nearby road extending into Sand Cove Spring, along with the area between it and the cherry-stemmed road extending to the reservoir, are likewise not natural appearing and lack wilderness characteristics. All other vehicle ways in the vicinity of Twin Peaks are neither used nor maintained, so the surrounding area retains its natural appearance.

The multitude of reservoirs, vehicle ways, and livestock watering facilities in the northern portion of Blue Flats combine to make the area unnatural in appearance. However, the balance of Blue Flats shows no evidence of man-made intrusions and is natural-appearing. A small operational clay mine, short access road, and 0.75 mile road extension in the southwestern portion have been cherry-stemmed from the unit.

Outstanding Opportunities

Solitude

The Mussentuchit Badlands inventory unit provides outstanding opportunities for solitude, particularly in the badlands' rugged labyrinth of literally hundreds of washes, draws, ravines, and gullies. The only areas providing marginal opportunities for solitude are the Musssentuchit Sand Dune, Blue Flats, and Last Chance Desert (from the county roads to that point where tributaries to Last Chance Wash and the badlands cliffs on the southwestern side of the unit meet).

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for participation in dispersed, undeveloped recreation activities are outstanding within the unit. Hiking, sightseeing, and photography are the primary visitor activities. In addition, the Mussentuchit Badlands are included in a geologically unique region of the San Rafael Swell (through the unit's classic examples of exposed igneous dikes and glacier-deposited volcanic boulders), so outstanding opportunities exist for environmental education and the study of geology and landforms. Only the Mussentuchit Sand Dune, Blue Flats, and Last Chance Desert areas provide marginal opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Overall, this unit offers some of the finest opportunities for photography in the region; in fact, it has been cited in guidebooks and other literature as a "photographers' heaven."

Supplemental Values

As previously mentioned, the Mussentuchit Badlands inventory unit has exceptional value as a recreational sightseeing area because of the exposure of igneous dikes and the presence of glacier-deposited volcanic boulders evidencing the area's volcanic activity. Of equal importance is its value as a geologic type site and as a classic field example for scientific/educational geologic study. This unit also exhibits evidence of visitation and use by early native Americans, most notably in the vicinity of Mussentuchit Wash.

MUSSENTUCHIT BADLANDS—The inventory unit has exceptional scenic values, including dramatic exposures of igneous dikes or "fins".

Scott Abdon

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