

Oquirrh Mountains

Findings

INVENTORY UNIT ACRES		
Federal	State	Total
With Wilderness Characteristics		
8,300	0	8,300 (100%)
Without Wilderness Characteristics		
0	0	0 (0%)
Inventory Unit Total		
8,300	0	8,300
Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics		
None		

The entire 8,300-acre Oquirrh Mountains inventory unit possesses wilderness characteristics. While the boundary of the unit was drawn to exclude disturbed canyon bottoms, many other canyons, mountain slopes, and ridge tops still retain their apparent naturalness, with the imprint of human developments being substantially unnoticeable. There are outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Deeply incised canyons and heavily wooded mountain slopes contribute to the opportunity for solitude. A variety of primitive recreation opportunities are available, including hunting, hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, and nature study.

Unit Description

The Oquirrh Mountains inventory unit is in Tooele County about 25 air miles southwest of Salt Lake City. Two parcels of private land have been cherry-stemmed from the unit, along with their access roads.

Following an exchange with Kennecott Utah Copper Corporation and other parties, the BLM acquired ownership of a large block of public lands on the west slope of the Oquirrh Mountains. To facilitate an interdisciplinary land-use planning effort, these lands were inventoried to determine whether or not wilderness characteristics is present.

The unit includes the west slope of the Oquirrh Mountains from the crest of the mountain range westward to the foothills. The Oquirrhs are steep, rugged, and highly dissected with numerous canyons. Elevation varies from about 5,000 feet for the lower slopes on the western boundary to over 9,300 feet at Nelson Peak. Vegetation includes sagebrush and grasses on the lower elevation foothills, oak shrub on the warmer and drier southern and western slopes, Douglas fir and aspen on the cooler and wetter northern and eastern slopes, and Gambel's oak and big tooth maple in the canyon bottoms.

Uses include hiking, backcountry driving, hunting, and livestock grazing. Communication sites and domestic water developments are also present.

Wilderness Characteristics

Naturalness

Given the steepness of the mountain, nearly all human development has occurred in the major canyons. Despite human impacts on the natural condition of portions of the unit, most of the area still retains its natural condition, with human impacts throughout the unit remaining substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole. A cherry-stemmed road in Murray Canyon provides access to the town of Lincoln's water system. While it could be argued that the route in Bates Canyon is not a road, the combination of the route and considerable human development (cabins, water developments, fences, and an all-terrain vehicle trail) has left this canyon bottom significantly impacted, so it has been cherry-stemmed from the unit. Like Bates Canyon, Pole Canyon has also been significantly impacted by a vehicle route and associated development (a school bus, campers, and water developments), so this disturbance has also been cherry-stemmed from the unit. There are few human imprints in the remainder of the area. Because of the steep rugged topography, dense vegetation, and size of the unit, the landscape still retains its overall naturalness.

Outstanding Opportunities

Solitude

Portions of the mountain range provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. Despite all of the activity and use occurring on adjacent lands, the Oquirrh Mountains inventory unit provides outstanding opportunities to find solitude. The terrain and vegetation provide screening. The mountain range is incised by many deep

canyons that twist and turn their way down the mountain. Canyon bottoms are densely forested with oak shrubs, Gambel's oak, big tooth maple, quaking aspen, and Douglas fir. The north and east-facing slopes and side canyons are also densely forested with Douglas fir, white fir, and quaking aspen. South and west-facing slopes, while more open, are covered with thick oak shrub. The upper ends of Pass and Flood Canyons in the south and other side canyons offer opportunities to be alone. While main ridge tops expose the visitor to long, distant views of developments outside the unit, they also provide opportunities to experience solitude.

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The Oquirrh Mountains separate the West Desert of Utah from the extensive development of the Wasatch Front. The unit provides a unique setting for a variety of primitive recreation uses within one hour's driving time of the metropolitan areas of the Wasatch Front, and within a few minutes of the small but growing communities in Tooele Valley. The proximity of this natural setting to such a large population, coupled with the wide variety of primitive recreational activities available in the unit, provides outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Within the unit, visitors can participate in such activities as hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, hunting, horseback riding, photography, and nature study.

Supplemental Values

The Oquirrh Mountains inventory unit contains botanical and archaeological values. Within the range of elevations are three representative life zones: Upper Sonoran, Transition, and Canadian. A hybrid oak species, a cross between turbinella oak and Gambel's oak, may occur in the unit. In the past, the Oquirrh Mountains supported one of the oldest mining districts in Utah. While there is little evidence of past mining, the minor disturbances do add historic interest.

OQUIRRH MOUNTAINS—The upper end of Pass Canyon, one of several canyons in the Oquirrh Mountains inventory unit that provide outstanding primitive recreational opportunities.



Steve Knox

Oquirrh Mountains

