

# Fiftymile Bench

## Findings

| INVENTORY UNIT ACRES                              |       |               |
|---|-------|---------------|
| Federal   | State | Total         |
| <b>With Wilderness Characteristics</b>            |       |               |
| 12,500  | 300   | 12,800 (100%) |
| <b>Without Wilderness Characteristics</b>         |       |               |
| 0   | 0     | 0 (0%)        |
| <b>Inventory Unit Total</b>                       |       |               |
| 12,500  | 300   | 12,800        |
| <b>Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics</b> |       |               |
| None  |       |               |

The entire Fiftymile Bench inventory unit (12,800 acres) has wilderness characteristics. The boundary of the unit has been drawn to eliminate several developments, including a spring development, water catchments, a water tank, a communication site, stock ponds, and heavily used camping areas near Sooner Rocks. The unit appears natural and provides visitors with outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive recreation. Sooner Rocks is a renowned and easily reached scenic and rock climbing attraction featured in many regional guides. In addition to climbing, other outstanding primitive recreation opportunities include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, sightseeing, and photography. Only a primitive dirt road separates the unit from the adjoining Fiftymile Mountain Wilderness Study Area.

## Unit Description

The unit is within the BLM's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Fiftymile Bench is a prominent 1,000-foot escarpment, above the Hole-in-the-Rock Road and below the Straight Cliffs and Fiftymile Mountain.

Fiftymile Bench offers views of the southern part of the Escalante Canyons to the Colorado River, the Waterpocket Fold, the Henry Mountains, Bears Ears, the San Juan Triangle, and Navajo Mountain. The lower bench near the Hole-in-the-Rock

Road contains the weirdly eroded Sooner Rocks sandstone outcrops. Vegetation on Fiftymile Bench is predominantly piñon-juniper woodland and sagebrush, while the lower bench is mainly blackbrush, sagebrush, and rabbitbrush.

Evidence of oil and gas exploration can be found throughout the unit, especially in the northern portion, but the impacts are fading. There are a series of grazing developments on Fiftymile Bench and a couple of spring developments on the lower bench. Some recreational use, mainly hunting, occurs on Fiftymile Bench.

## Wilderness Characteristics

### Naturalness

Overall, the unit appears natural and has wilderness characteristics. Human impacts are substantially unnoticeable and rapidly being reclaimed through natural processes. Evidence of past oil and gas exploration (seismic lines and two drill pads) has largely disappeared and is unnoticeable to casual observers. Most identified vehicle ways are from past seismic exploration lines, many of which are washed out and impassable. Several stock ponds and their associated access routes on Fiftymile Bench appear to be abandoned or are substantially unnoticeable.

The boundary of the unit has been drawn to eliminate some small areas found to lack wilderness characteristics because of a spring development, two catchments and water tanks, five stock ponds, and a communication site. Heavily used and impacted camping areas adjacent to the Hole-in-the-Rock Road and Sooner Rocks also lack naturalness. Five routes servicing range and communication developments have been cherry-stemmed from the unit.

## Outstanding Opportunities

### Solitude

The unit provides outstanding opportunities for solitude because of vegetative and topographic screening. The rim of Fiftymile Bench is densely forested and screened with piñon and juniper, offering visitors isolation from each other while viewing a largely uninhabited landscape. Much of the area below the escarpment, although unforested, has enough topographical variation to provide screening. The unit's remoteness adds a sense of seclusion in an area of wide-open spaces and expansive vistas.

### Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The entire unit provides outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. This is an excellent area for travel by foot or horseback. There are opportunities for rock climbs and scrambles among the eerily eroded potholes of Sooner Rocks and colorful hoodoo areas. From the rims, visitors are treated to unsurpassed vistas of the canyon country, including views of the southern Escalante Canyons to the Colorado River, the Waterpocket Fold, the Henry Mountains, Bears Ears, the San Juan Triangle, and Navajo Mountain.

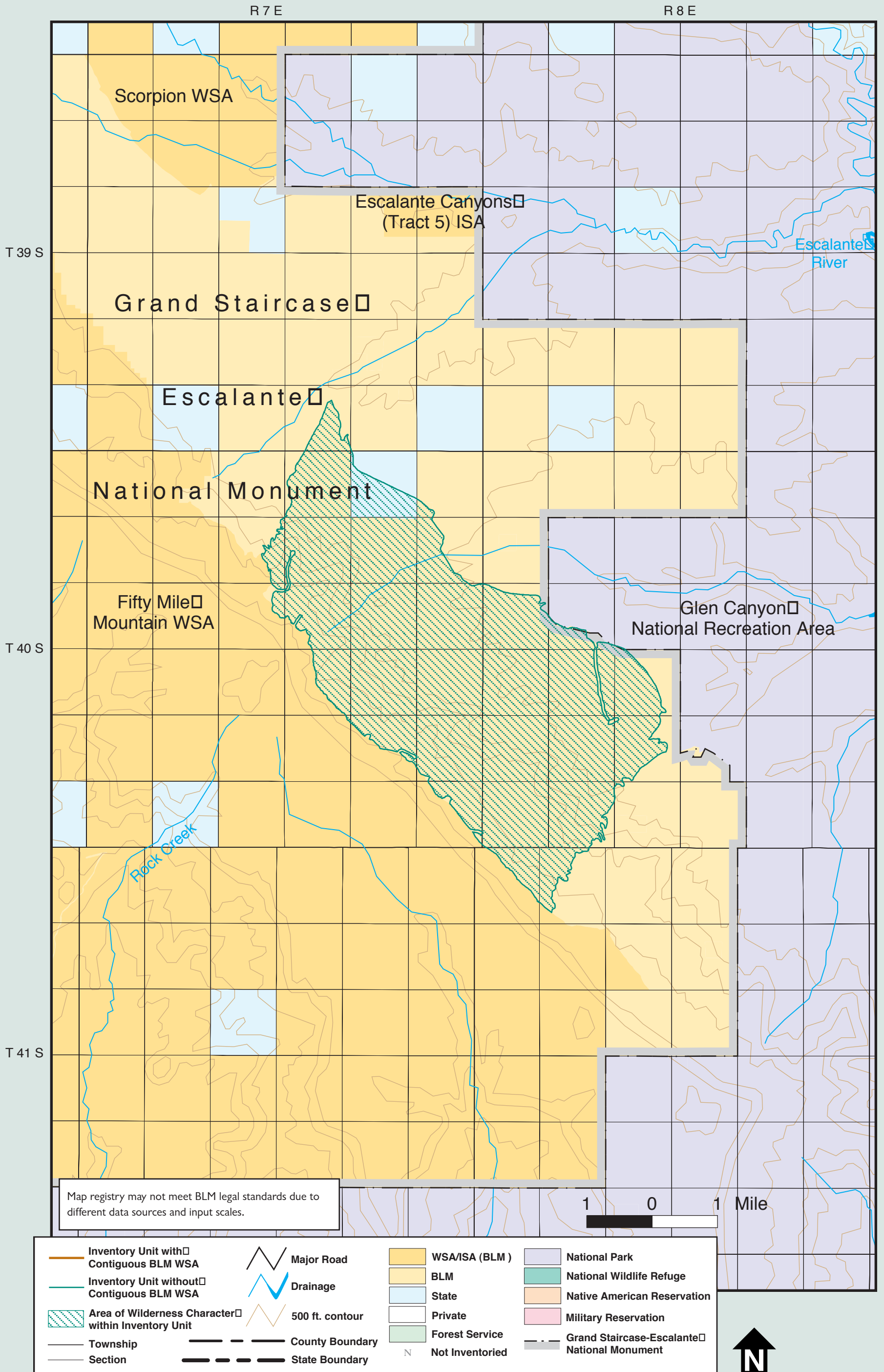
## Supplemental Values

The cliffs supporting Fiftymile Bench are a striking feature for visitors on the Hole-in-the-Rock Road. The cliffs contain many clusters of balanced or pedestal rocks, known as hoodoos. Sooner Rocks provides outstanding examples of the "mega-potholes" found in some of the sandstone formations in the Glen Canyon area; this site is easily accessible to the public from the Hole-in-the-Rock Road.



FIFTYMILE BENCH— Outstanding opportunities for rock climbing and scrambling are possible among the eerily eroded potholes of Sooner Rocks.

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SOUTH CENTRAL REGION—Fiftymile Bench