

Fish and Owl Creeks

Findings

INVENTORY UNIT ACRES		
Federal	State	Total
With Wilderness Characteristics		
26,410	5,200	31,610 (92%)
Without Wilderness Characteristics		
2,070	600	2,670 (8%)
Inventory Unit Total		
28,480	5,800	34,280
Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics		
Fish Creek Canyon WSA (UT-060-204)		49,650

Most of the Fish and Owl Creeks inventory units (31,610 acres) are natural and have wilderness characteristics. The units with wilderness characteristics enhance the outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the contiguous Fish Creek Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The beautiful forest and sandstone of the upper watershed of Owl Creek, along with the impressive geological and archaeological resources of lower Mule Canyon, are spectacular complements to the WSA. However, a portion of Unit 5 is so heavily impacted by bladed roads, range developments, and woodcutting vehicle ways that it is without wilderness characteristics. The inventory units contain a total of 2,670 acres that are without wilderness characteristics.

Unit Description

The Fish and Owl Creeks inventory units are located in south-central San Juan County about 20 miles southwest of Blanding. They surround the Fish Creek Canyon WSA. Unit 1 includes Cyclone Flat and the upper watershed of the South Fork of Fish Creek; its vegetation is a mixture of sagebrush, rabbitbrush, juniper, and piñon. Unit 2 is a small section on Cedar Mesa between Utah Highway 261 and the WSA boundary. It is south of San Juan County Route 253 and north of the "Emigrant Trail" to Owl Canyon and is covered with piñon and

juniper. Also covered with piñon and juniper, Unit 3 encompasses the headwaters of Owl Creek and is found east of Utah Highway 261, south of the "Emigrant Trail," and north of the Snow Flat Road (San Juan County Route 237). Unit 4 is an area of broken hills between lower Fish Creek and Road Canyon. It is bordered by San Juan County Route 237 on the south, the Comb Wash Road (San Juan County Route 235) on the east, and an unmaintained vehicle way that serves as the Fish Creek Canyon WSA boundary on the north. Road Canyon WSA and a Road Canyon inventory unit are on the other side of San Juan County Route 237.

Unit 5 is the largest and most varied of the units. It includes several miles of spectacular Mule Canyon. Elevation ranges from 4,600 feet to 6,500 feet, with corresponding changes in typical vegetation from the sage/rabbitbrush association to piñon and juniper. Unit 5 is bordered on the east by San Juan County Route 235 (on the other side of which lies the Comb Ridge inventory unit) and on the north by Utah Highway 95, a state land section, San Juan County Route 236, San Juan County Route 233a, and a seismic exploration line. Unit 6 is composed of state land.

Wilderness Characteristics

Naturalness

Inventory Units 1, 2, 3, and 6 appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature and retain their natural character as piñon woodlands and sagebrush flats throughout. Units 4 and 5, although mostly natural in character, contain unnatural portions. However, the major features of Unit 5—Mule Canyon and its tributary canyons—are predominantly natural.

Outstanding Opportunities

Solitude

The inventory units are all contiguous to and logical extensions of the Fish Creek Canyon WSA, which has outstanding opportunities for solitude. Units 1, 2, 4, and 6 provide outstanding opportunities for solitude only when considered in conjunction with the contiguous WSA. Units 3 and 5, on the other hand, are of sufficient size and character to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude on their own.

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The inventory units are contiguous with the Fish Creek Canyon WSA, which has outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. All of the units are logical extensions of the WSA, enhancing its opportunities for primitive recreational pursuits such as horseback riding, hiking, backpacking, photography, and cultural exploration. These opportunities in Units 1, 2, 4, and 6 are outstanding only in conjunction with the WSA. However, the upper reaches of Owl Creek and lower Mule Canyon in Units 3 and 5 provide outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation on their own.

Supplemental Values

Archaeological sites within the inventory units range from lithic concentrations to cliff dwellings and probably number in the hundreds. Scenic qualities are also superb, encompassing impressive vistas of ancient ruins, cottonwood-filled canyons, and spectacular cliffs.



FISH AND OWL CREEKS—The impressive geological and archaeological resources of lower Mule Canyon are spectacular complements to the contiguous Fish Creek Canyon WSA.

Eric Finstick

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