

Wilderness Act Compatibility Evaluation

Land Donation

Date: 3/24/2016

This evaluation is prepared to document whether the parcels proposed for addition to the wilderness through donation under the provisions of Section 6(a) of the Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577) are compatible with management under the Wilderness Act.

I. Name, Size, and Location of the Parcels Proposed to be Included in the Adjacent Wilderness:

Rimrock Rose Ranch Property: 3,355 acres located in T. 16 N., R. 22 E., T. 16 N., R. 23 E., and, T. 17 N., R. 23 E., San Miguel County, NM. Parcels as identified on the attached map, and legally described on the attached deed.

II. BLM Office and State:

Taos Field Office, New Mexico

III. County

San Miguel County

IV. Congressional District:

3rd Congressional District, Representative Ben Ray Lujan

V. Narrative of Wilderness Compatibility:

1) Adjacency to Wilderness:

The Rimrock Rose property is adjacent to the 16,030 acre Sabinoso Wilderness designated under Public Law 111-11. Approximately 3,355 acres of the property are adjacent to the Wilderness. Upon acceptance of the donation, the resulting size of the Sabinoso Wilderness would be 19,385 acres.

2) Undeveloped:

The property appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable. One parcel contains a road not consistent with wilderness designation. This road leads to a 40 acre private parcel in Canyon Largo in Township 16 North, Range 22 East, Section 21 SW ¼, New Mexico Meridian. Parts of this road were engineered and cut into side slopes and surfaced with gravel. This road provides access to the Wilderness, but makes approximately

five acres of the property on which it is located unsuitable for wilderness designation. Both the BLM and the donor agree on the necessity of separating this parcel from the lands offered for wilderness donation in order to also provide public access to the private property. An easement on this road will transfer to the BLM which will provide non-motorized access to Canyon Largo and the Wilderness. No part of the Wilderness currently has public access.

A bladed dirt road continues east from the private property in Canyon Largo approximately 2 ½ miles to where it intersects BLM lands. Short portions of this road show evidence of minimal construction such as berms and the clearing of vegetation to provide vehicle passage. There are no additional elements of road construction. The donor has discontinued use of the road by motor vehicles with the intent of future use by hiking and horseback only. The donor is donating the property without any reservation in the title for this road. No other claim of an easement to this road exists. The road may easily reclaim naturally or be converted to a hiking and equestrian trail, consistent with a wilderness designation.

Past 2 ½ miles, the above route enters BLM land and no longer exhibits any features of construction. This route was determined, at the time the area was established as a WSA in 1980, to not meet the definition of a road in that it was not constructed or maintained for regular vehicle use. It continues as a rough vehicle trail, and could be reclaimed or be converted to a hiking and equestrian trail, consistent with a wilderness designation.

Grazing has been discontinued on the property by the donor. The property includes 3.5 miles of fence, and five cattle watering developments. The donor is in the process of removing the wells, water troughs and corrals which will not be present when the property is received by the BLM. The remaining fence is substantially unnoticeable and similar to other grandfathered livestock grazing developments existing within wilderness.

An abandoned house and outbuilding are located on the plateau above the Canyon. The donor is in the process of removing these developments and they will not be present when the property is received by the BLM. The access road to these buildings, approximately one mile in length, may be reclaimed through natural processes or minimal agency action and made consistent with a wilderness designation.

There is no evidence of mining activity within the property. A mineral report was completed for the adjacent Sabinoso Wilderness Study Area in 1987 and concluded no metallic mineral present, no oil and gas present (based on nearby drill holes that did not indicate geology suitable to, or the presence of hydrocarbons), and low to moderate potential for uranium. Because the property is adjacent to the Sabinoso Wilderness (formerly the Sabniosio WSA prior to 2009), the same geological conditions are expected to prevail on the donated property. Some parts of the donation

property include mineral rights while others do not. Of the property that does include mineral rights, some of that is jointly owned with a mineral consortium that, if the minerals were to be developed, would be owed half the proceeds. However, since the mineral potential is low, there is no expectation of mineral development coming to fruition.

3) Natural:

The property is in a natural state and ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. Though some changes have occurred, such as limited (and typical for the area) introduction of non-native vegetation and alterations of the natural fire cycle, there have not been changes which would require substantial restoration efforts.

4) Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:

The property offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The property includes a winding canyon with woodlands, forest, and riparian vegetation that provides topographical and vegetative separation and screening from other visitors. The property itself includes scenic attractions in the form of colored sandstone cliffs and treed slopes which provide a desirable recreational setting. The opportunities of solitude and primitive recreation are outstanding in combination with the Sabinoso Wilderness, as well as independently on the donation property. Indeed, the property itself would become a major attraction of the Wilderness in providing primitive and unconfined recreation.

An intermittent stream runs at the bottom of Canon Largo which is the largest and deepest of the canons, dropping from the Canadian Escarpment outside the western edge of Sabinoso Wilderness. As a source of drinking water, the stream is unreliable because it runs underground for much of its reach northeast to the Canadian River and takes time to be recharged seasonally.

Much of the use is expected to occur in the part of Canyon Largo at the base of the gravel road and near a stream flowing down Higgins Canyon (located just out of the proposed wilderness addition). Consequently, opportunities for solitude in this part of the donated property would be reduced. Some visitors would take progressively longer trips down the canon and onto the rim of the escarpment (into the existing wilderness) depending on their skill and resources. Although water may be available at times in some places further up the canon, visitors may have to carry their water to achieve these longer trips. These more distant locations would be the areas where solitude is outstanding.

Annual visitor use has been virtually zero since only adjacent private property owners can access this public land. With new public access acquired by the donation, it is anticipated there will be a fair amount of keen interest by people who have wanted to visit and/or hunt. The first year or two after acquiring the donation, the visitation may be at its highest ever. It is then expected to drop off to only local users who reside within 100 miles of Sabinoso Wilderness.

At any rate, this area is not accessible from major travel routes or population centers. The type of activities engaged in is expected to be hunting, horseback riding, hiking, backpacking, and wildlife and nature viewing.

5) Other Features of Value:

The property contains other features of value in addition to those described above. The property has high scenic values because of the sandstone cliff walls of Canyon Largo and the ponderosa and cottonwood trees that grow within it. Based on the presence of cultural resources on adjacent BLM lands, the property is expected to contain prehistoric and historic cultural resources of interest. Canyon Largo forms a logical travel corridor between the plains and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and this is anticipated to have resulted in uses which would be evident in the archeological resources on the property. A large pueblo ruin is believed to be located on the property based on initial evaluations. Based on what is known on adjacent public land, the property is expected to contain wildlife of interest, including important habitat for amphibians.

VI. Finding

Approximately 3,350 acres of the 3,355 acre property is compatible with management under the Wilderness Act and donation under the Authority of Section 6(a). Except for the above described road affecting approximately five acres, the property is roadless and consistent with the undeveloped qualities of wilderness. The ecological condition of the property is substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. The opportunities for solitude and a primitive and unconfined form of recreation on the property are consistent with designation as wilderness. The property contains scenic, historic, and ecological features of scientific and educational value.

Approximately 3,350 acres of the Rimrock Rose property described in this Evaluation is manageable as wilderness in conjunction with the adjacent Sabinoso Wilderness. All features on the wilderness donation property which are inconsistent with a wilderness designation will have been removed prior to donation. There are no conflicting land uses which would impede management as wilderness.

The property also includes approximately five acres which may not be accepted as an adjacent land donation under Section 6(a) of the Wilderness Act. An additional benefit is that these parts of the donation not manageable as wilderness (and so would be donated under the authority of Section 205 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (Public Law 94-579) provide public road access (including an easement on adjoining private land), which to date is not present for the Sabinoso Wilderness. The acquired access will make it possible for the public to realize the recreational purposes of the Wilderness.

VII. Recommendation:

The Rimrock Rose property totaling 3,350 acres should be included as part of the Sabinoso Wilderness through Section 6(a) of the 1964 Wilderness Act. The wilderness values of the property compliment and enhance those of the adjacent Sabinoso Wilderness. There are no encumbrances on the property or features to the property that would make it incompatible for management as Wilderness in the short or long term.

The western wilderness boundary should include most of the donated lands in T16N, R22E, Section 21. Near the southwestern corner of Section 21, the wilderness boundary would exclude about five acres to the east and north encompassing the first switchback of the road coming down the rim and providing access to a 40 acre private lot. For effective management of visitor use, vehicle parking should be located on the rim outside of the wilderness boundary. Motorized use should be restricted on the steep gravel road and it should be used as a non-motorized trail.

This recommendation is consistent with the intent of the donation from the donor.

Prepared by


Tami Torres, Outdoor Recreation Planner

3/24/16
date

Approved by


Sarah Schlanger, Taos Field Manager

3/24/16
date

