

SWEETWATER

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TO: Sweetwater County Residents, Members of the Public and other Stakeholders
FROM: Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners
DATE: Wednesday, February 21, 2018
RE: Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) Maps and Summaries

Dear Sweetwater County Residents, Members of the Public and other Stakeholders:

Sweetwater County greatly appreciates your interest in Sweetwater County BLM WSAs. It also greatly appreciates your valuable time in reviewing the attached WSA summaries and in preparing any comments that you may like to submit to Sweetwater County (see included Sweetwater County WSA comment form). Your comments are especially valuable since they will help guide the Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners in making future county recommendations regarding these areas to the BLM and Wyoming congressional senators and representatives. In addition, to submitting the on line comment form, the Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners will be accepting public comments at a formal public hearing scheduled at its next regular board meeting set for Tuesday, March 6, 2018. The time of this hearing is yet determined and will be advertised.

This notebook contains summaries of the 13 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) that are wholly or partially located in Sweetwater County. These 13 WSAs are summarized under 12 notebook tabs because Devils Playground and Twin Buttes WSAs were combined into one WSA unit called Devils Playground/Twin Buttes by the 1991 BLM recommendation to Congress. Sweetwater County shares two WSAs, Whitehorse Creek and Honeycomb Buttes, with Fremont County (see the included BLM 1991 Recommendation WSA summary map). The 13 WSA encompass approximately 247,000 acres or approximately 3.7 percent of Sweetwater County.

Each WSA summary contains the following information presented in the following order: BLM WSA Summaries, General Location Maps, Resource Maps, BLM 1991 Congressional Recommendation, WSA Background/Narrative and General Notes and Comments.

This information was derived the following sources: BLM personnel and documents, Google Earth, USGS Maps, the Wyoming Natural Resource and Energy Explorer (NREX), the Wyoming Oil and Gas Commission Reservoir Information Tool, retired BLM personnel, NGOs, staff experience and other sources.

Through the use of this wide range of resources, it was the intent of staff to provide balanced perspective on each WSA regarding mineral development, recreation, wildlife and the potential for wilderness. It was also the intent of staff to provide the board a beginning point for discussing options for the future of Sweetwater County WSAs. This future could include partial or full release, wilderness designation, or designation with other protective overlays such as ACECs, Conservation Areas, Special Management Areas and others.

In reviewing this notebook, it is important to understand the history of the development of WSAs. The 1964 Wilderness Act created the National Wilderness Preservation System that combined federal lands that were designated by Congress as “wilderness areas” into a single system of administered lands for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner that would leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and provided for the protection and preservation of the wilderness character of these areas.

The Wilderness Act directed the BLM to identify lands that were suitable for preservation within the wilderness system. These identified areas were named Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs).

In 1980, the BLM districts in Wyoming completed their identification of WSAs and then made WSA recommendations to the BLM Wyoming State Office. Between 1980 and 1990, these WSAs were further

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analyzed in Environmental Impact Statements (EISs). These EISs became the foundation for the 1991 State BLM WSA Recommendation to Congress. To date Congress has not acted upon these recommendations. In regard to the WSAs within Sweetwater County, the BLM 1991 Wilderness Recommendation, proposed that Devils Playground, Twin Buttes and Oregon Buttes WSAs be recommended in their entirety for wilderness designation. Further, it recommended that Buffalo Hump, Sand Dunes, Honeycomb Buttes and Adobe Town be partially recommended for wilderness designation and that Whitehorse Creek, Alkali Draw, South Pinnacles, Alkali Basin/East Sand Dunes and Red Lake be dropped from consideration.

Also, when reviewing the WSA summaries, it may be helpful to understand the basic BLM process for inventorying wilderness. This process includes the following steps:

1st Step (Size): Does it meet the minimum size of 5,000 acres? If not, is the size manageable for wilderness? Does it have enough space to protect values? Is it of practical size to afford preservation of special features?

2nd Step (Naturalness): Is the unit untrammelled by man? Is the unit acted upon primarily by the forces of nature? If the unit contains evidence of the work of man, are these works substantially unnoticeable?

3rd Step: (Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation): Are there outstanding opportunities for these elements.

Sufficient findings related to all three steps are necessary to make a wilderness recommendation. For more details on how BLM WSA inventories are conducted, please refer to BLM Manual 6310 at the BLM website (https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/uploads/mediacenter_blmmanual6310.pdf)

For ease of thinking about or analyzing the Sweetwater County WSAs, it may be helpful to cluster the WSAs into the three regions that are listed below:

North – (Northern Red Desert) listed as they occur west to east.

- Whitehorse Creek
- Oregon Buttes
- Honeycomb Buttes

Central – (Central Sand Dunes and Red Desert) listed as they occur west to east.

- Buffalo Hump
- Sand Dunes
- Alkali Draw
- South Pinnacles
- Alkali Basin/East Sand Dunes
- Red Lake

South – (South Interstate 80) listed as they occur west to east.

- Devils Playground/Twin Buttes
- Red Creek Badlands
- Adobe Town

Also, provided with the WSA summaries is a recent letter from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department

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outlining the importance of each Sweetwater County WSA in its relative importance to wildlife.

As you review the WSA summaries and attached information, you may have a different perspective than some of the commentary provided, but, since the identification of wilderness is a subjective process, differences can be expected. Please remember that the purpose of this notebook is to attempt to provide a balanced perspective on each WSA and a beginning point for further discussion. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact any of the following Sweetwater County Commissioners.

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