



Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Bitter Creek Addition

The Bitter Creek unit straddles the Colorado/Utah state lines high in the remote Book Cliffs. While other areas in the region have experienced the ever increasing impacts of oil and gas roads, pipelines and development, the proposed Bitter Creek wilderness unit remains intact and is an exceptional wilderness quality area.

Ray Bloxham, Salt Lake City

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 3021 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: White River Field Office (Meeker)
Location: An extension of Utah's Bitter Creek Wilderness, the proposed Bitter Creek Wilderness area is located along the Colorado-Utah border in Garfield County.

Wilderness Qualities

The Bitter Creek Addition, which surrounds the Book Cliffs Mountain Browse Instant Study Area along the Colorado-Utah border, contains spectacular scenic vistas and offers sublime opportunities for solitude. Deep canyons cut through the pale Mesa Verde sandstone, and crenellated ridges buttress the sky. Within the unit, elevations range from 6,000 to 8,000 feet, and canyon slopes rise 600 to 800 feet. Bitter Creek and Rat Hole Canyon, two major drainages, wind through the area, each extending a number of side canyons like fingers into the surrounding mesas.

Vital riparian zones support box-elders and aspens, willows, sedges, and various reptile and amphibian species along the waterways in the canyon bottoms. Many wet meadow areas punctuate the folded landscape and support communities of grasses and wildflowers, insects and birds. At lower elevations, bench- and ridge-top vegetation consists of sagebrush, rabbitbrush, greasewood, and a variety of grasses. Above 7,400 feet, the drainages are dominated by pinyon-juniper woodlands on south facing slopes, and by Douglas-firs and quaking aspens on the northern aspects. Peregrine falcons and golden eagles nest in the cliffs and hunt in the river drainages, deer and elk forage along the mesa tops and in the canyons, and black bears roam the broken terrain.

With its convoluted topography, screening vegetation, and wide variety of plant and animal species, the Bitter Creek Addition provides outstanding opportunities not only for solitude, but also for primitive and unconfined recreation. Hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, photography, and wildlife viewing are all popular in the area and Backpacking and horseback riding opportunities are abundant provided by the area's extensive size and many scenic side canyons.

In addition to the inspiring scenery and vital habitat, a number of pictograph and petroglyph sites, as well as historic homesteads, grace the area, lending it archaeological and historical significance. Queen Chipeta, wife of Ute Chief Ouray, was intelligent, talented, and hard working, a model of constancy and courage during a desperate time. She acted as a messenger of goodwill between Indians and Whites, meeting with President McKinley and performing many acts of kindness and sacrifice, and thus earning her place among tribal leaders. Her eponymous canyon traverses the heart of the Bitter Creek Wilderness in Utah and provides access to many side canyons. Her legend informs the rich cultural heritage of the area.

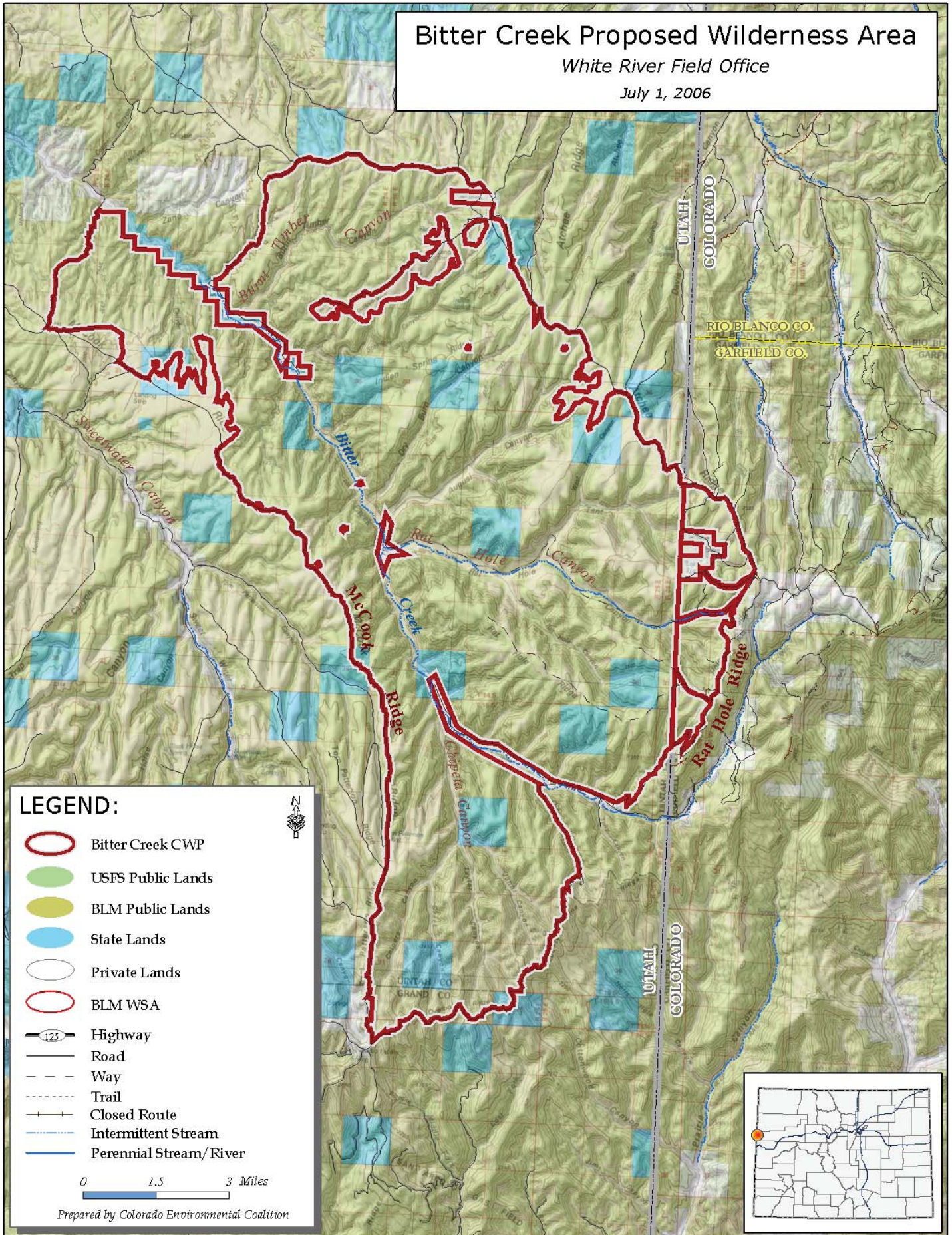
Boundary Issues

Only a small portion of the proposed wilderness is located in Colorado. Approximately 66,200 acres, of wilderness-eligible lands constituting the vast bulk of the proposed wilderness area, are situated just across the state line in Utah.

Bitter Creek Proposed Wilderness Area

White River Field Office

July 1, 2006



LEGEND:

- Bitter Creek CWP
- USFS Public Lands
- BLM Public Lands
- State Lands
- Private Lands
- BLM WSA
- Highway
- Road
- Way
- Trail
- Closed Route
- Intermittent Stream
- Perennial Stream/River

0 1.5 3 Miles

Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition