

# Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

## Cross Canyon

Rabbit brush and sage go to seed; cottonwoods afire, preparing for winter. The sun warms the jumbled blocks of boulders that line the shallow, wide canyon. Ancient ruins, fragile and exposed, lean against canyon walls. Black on white and corrugated shards litter the ground. On one rock I find three deeply etched spirals of the Basket Makers. Into the large canyon complex I walk, obeying the pull, the call, of Cross Canyon, attending to its story.

Debra Van Winegarden, Durango

**Citizens Wilderness Proposal:** 25,947 acres  
**BLM Wilderness Study Area:** 21,548 acres  
**BLM Field Office:** San Juan Field Office (Durango)  
**Location:** Cross Canyon straddles the Montezuma and Dolores county line in southwest Colorado, overlapping into San Juan County, Utah. Cross and Cahone Canyons are approximately 25 miles northwest of Cortez, Colorado, and can be accessed at various points off the road that runs from Pleasant View and Lowry Ruins to Hovenweep National Monument.

### Wilderness Qualities

The proposed wilderness includes both Cross Canyon and Cahone Canyon Wilderness Study Areas. The canyons comprise the northwest corner of the Canyons of the Ancients, proclaimed a National Monument by President Bill Clinton in June, 2000.

The steep canyon rims drop abruptly from surrounding mesas into 300 to 900-foot deep canyons. Inviting pools and waterfalls fill canyon bottoms lined by graceful cottonwood trees. Cross Canyon contains a lush desert riparian zone.

The long riparian canyons formed by the two WSAs provide a haven for wildlife and were a source of sustenance for Anasazi Indian inhabitants who lived there between 450 and 1300 A.D. The ruins and artifacts left in this area are everywhere, in concentrations of 40 to 60, and occasionally 100, sites per square mile, making it the most dense collection of cultural resources anywhere in America. Undisturbed Cow Mesa attracts particular attention from archaeologists as it was never chained to tear out pinyon-juniper forests. Undisturbed landscape and extensive Anasazi sites make the natural setting of this particular area scientifically priceless. A complete inventory of these sites does not exist, but many are eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. An alarming number of sites suffer from vandalism. Wilderness designation would provide protection by limiting access to horseback or foot.

Kivas and small storage structures are hidden among the rocks and cliffs. Ruin Canyon holds an intact square tower similar to those found at Hovenweep National Monument. The off-chance of discovering rock art on canyon walls or pieces of pottery in the dirt makes exploring these isolated canyons exciting and mysterious.

Cross Canyon would fill an ecological void as a representative of the Great Basin Sagebrush ecosystem, an ecosystem not yet included in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and of the pinyon-juniper ecosystem, of which there are only two representatives in the wilderness system in Colorado.

These canyons possess a rare combination of scenic beauty, remoteness, and archaeological value. Cross Canyon is both a culturally significant and unique addition to the wilderness system

### Resource Information

The USGS mineral report for the area indicates low potential for uranium, the likely target of mining claims.

Numerous pre-FLPMA oil and gas leases occur within the area. There has been no development of these leases to date within the WSAs. As the leases expire, BLM will allow future leasing only with no-surface-occupancy stipulations.



Fall foliage in Cross Canyon CWP.

BLM's management policies indicate an awareness of the area's fragile nature, both ecologically and archaeologically, but fall short of the complete protection afforded by wilderness designation.

There is no commercially valuable timber in the area. Both WSAs are closed to motorized recreation. Portions of three cattle grazing allotments exist in the two WSAs, totaling about 1,415 AUMs. These offer no conflict with wilderness designation.

The stream in Cross Canyon flows briskly year-round and is fed by numerous springs. BLM holds water rights to many of these springs, including a 2.5 gallon-per-minute right for the spring in the middle of Ruin Canyon. The only upstream water rights consist of a couple of conditional and abandoned diversions in the amount of 1-2 cfs, and several developed springs.



Rocky cliff faces in the CWP.

McLean Basin and 200 acres along the south rim of Ruin Canyon.

## Boundary Issues

The proposed wilderness encompasses all of Cross Canyon, running for approximately 20 miles from the Utah state line to the private land at the canyon head near Cahone. Another 23 miles of major tributaries that contain substantial ruins or wilderness values are also included within the proposed wilderness.

All of Cross Canyon WSA and Cahone Canyon WSA are included, as well as the roadless portion of Cross Canyon which separates the two WSAs. The boundaries of this roadless addition of 2,800 acres are defined by the rim of the canyon. Its inclusion would minimize management problems by preventing future vehicle access on old roads and would create one intact, topographic protecting all of this unique canyon ecosystem.

In addition, citizens added approximately 700 acres in



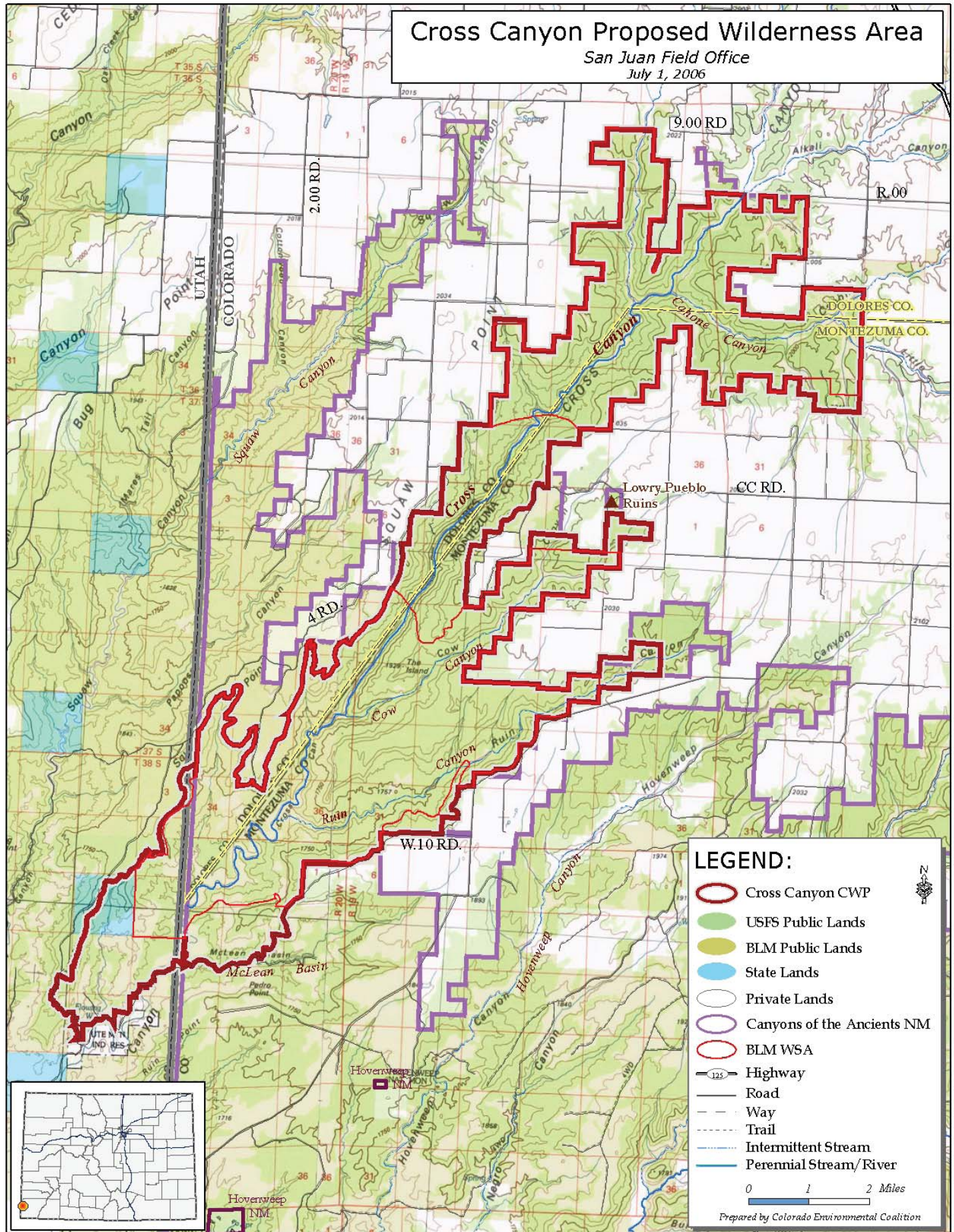
1,000-year-old Anasazi granary. (Mark Pearson)

# Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

## Cross Canyon Proposed Wilderness Area

San Juan Field Office

July 1, 2006



### LEGEND:

- Cross Canyon CWP
- USFS Public Lands
- BLM Public Lands
- State Lands
- Private Lands
- Canyons of the Ancients NM
- BLM WSA
- Highway
- Road
- Way
- Trail
- Intermittent Stream
- Perennial Stream/River

0 1 2 Miles

Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition