

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Diamond Breaks

Occasionally, I stumble across an amazing place which one almost wouldn't want to tell anyone about. The wildness of Diamond Breaks elicits such a response. I try to capture a sense of place and experience with language like "topographically diverse, ecologically rich, and visually stunning", but the words simply cannot replace the experience of being there.

John Saunders, Steamboat Springs

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 34,009 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 36,430 acres
BLM Field Office: Little Snake Field Office (Craig)
Location: Diamond Breaks is located astride the Colorado-Utah state line in northwestern Colorado, adjacent to Dinosaur National Monument and Browns Park National Wildlife Refuge. It lies in Moffat County, Colorado and Daggett County, Utah.

Wilderness Qualities

Diamond Breaks gets its name from the breaks in Diamond Mountain carved by Hoy, Chokecherry, Davis, and other creeks as they drain into the Green River. Local tradition has it that nearby Diamond Mountain was named after the exploits of a shyster in the late 1800s who lured unsuspecting Eastern investors into parting with their money in a get-rich-quick diamond mining scheme.

Diamond Breaks is distinctive for its variety of topography and vegetation. Pinyon-juniper covered ridges and peaks rise to 8,700 feet, a startling contrast to the gentle, sagebrush-covered plain of Browns Park. The rugged mountains of Diamond Breaks are broken by open draws and stands of aspen, providing a complement to the Green River's mighty Canyon of Lodore in adjacent Dinosaur National Monument.

The semi-arid mountains of Diamond Breaks in conjunction with the canyons of Dinosaur National Monument create an extended, all encompassing ecosystem.

The ridges and peaks of Diamond Breaks offer spectacular panoramic views of the snowcapped peaks of the Uintas, Flat Tops, and Zirkels as well as the Green River plain, Canyon of Lodore, and gentle Cold Spring Mountain. A majestic ponderosa pine forest covers the southern edge of the area, growing out of red sandstone slickrock in many places. The open draws and hillsides present a rainbow of color in

early spring as flowers bloom among the sagebrush.

Diamond Breaks has high potential for significant archaeological finds. Granaries, petroglyphs, and widespread lithic scatter dating to the Fremont era have been recorded in the area. There are rumors of wickiups as well.

The area is rich in wildlife including mule deer, elk, black bear, and mountain lion. Diamond Breaks provides critical winter range for deer and elk, and is a major portion of the range for a herd of 250-300 elk. Pronghorn antelope roam the lower valleys near the wildlife refuge. Diamond Breaks contains sage grouse production areas as well.

Resource Information

NBLM concludes that Diamond Breaks possesses no real mineral potential. There are no mineral leases within the area, and Diamond Breaks is located in a part of the Craig District with no known potential for oil and gas deposits.



The hillsides of Diamond Breaks present a rainbow of color in early spring as flowers bloom among the sagebrush

One grazing allotment covers the entire area. Livestock use is confined to the open, sagebrush-dotted draws of Diamond Breaks as the majority of the area's steep, brushy slopes are inhospitable to cattle. The central and northern portions of Diamond Breaks are not allotted to grazing. Several stock troughs and eroding vehicle ways are located in draws within the area, but these are widely scattered and generally screened by vegetation.

Though Diamond Breaks contains stands of aspen, Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine, the potential for commercial forestry operations or fuelwood is largely nonexistent due to the widely scattered nature of these inaccessible stands and their remoteness from markets.

Diamond Breaks WSA is closed to motorized travel other than on a few hundred acres limited to designated trails.

Several intermittent streams drain through Diamond Breaks into the Green River. Seventeen springs are known to exist in the unit, seven of which have private water-rights owners. No upstream water rights exist because the proposed southwest boundary has been drawn to exclude Dry Creek.

Boundary Issues

When BLM completed its study in 1991, the agency recommended that additional lands outside the WSA boundary be included in the proposed wilderness, adding approximately 1,200 acres on the north side in the vicinity of Chokeycherry, Yellow Jacket, and Warren Draws. This addition would include low elevation sagebrush plains along the breaks of Diamond Mountain, making the wilderness boundary contiguous with the boundary of the National Wildlife Refuge.

In addition, citizens propose adding 1,200 acres of the south half of Pitt Draw to complement the north half of the draw that is already within the WSA boundaries. This acreage was excluded by BLM during its inventory on the basis of lack of solitude, but it makes little sense that one slope of a drainage provides outstanding



Green River and Diamond Breaks. (Mark Pearson)

solitude and the other half does not.

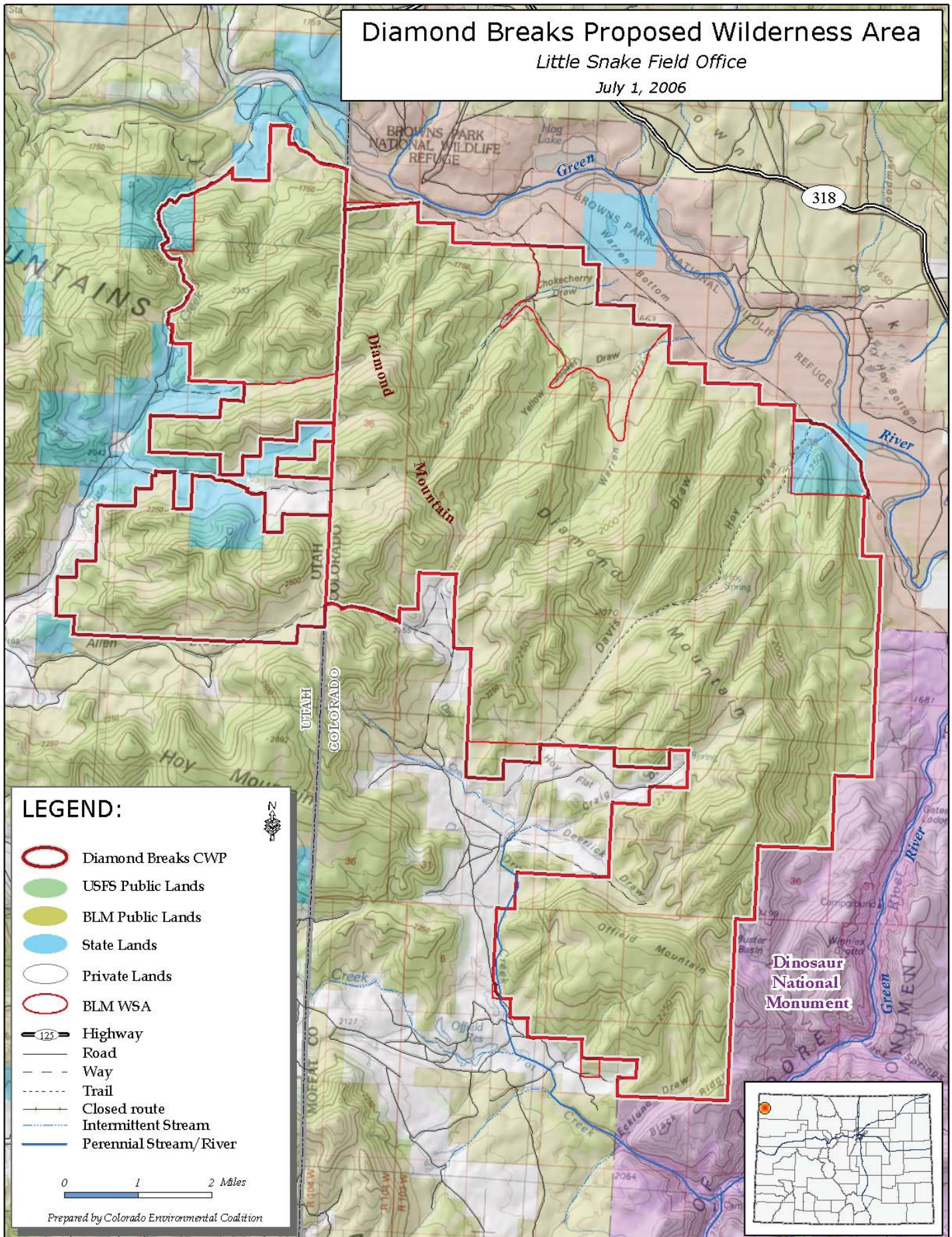
Citizens also propose the addition of 3,600 acres on the area's west boundary to include a major drainage between Allen and Marshall Draws. This 3.5 mile long drainage consists of lush, flower-covered meadows and dense thickets, surrounded with ridges capped by rock outcrops that afford unrestricted views of the three-state region. Douglas fir and aspen hug the north slopes of the ridges, creating unexpected forest glens in this semiarid region. Inclusion of this drainage would improve access into Diamond Breaks from the west side.

The CWP boundary includes 8,200 acres in Utah administered by the Colorado office of BLM out of Craig. These lands are included in the Colorado proposal in order to follow a common sense topographic and administrative boundary. The CPW boundary also encompasses two Colorado state school sections totaling 1,275 acres as well as about 690 acres of Utah state school lands.














Diamond Breaks Proposed Wilderness Area

Little Snake Field Office

July 1, 2006



LEGEND:

-  Diamond Breaks 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 2 Miles

Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition