

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Granite Creek

Now this is wild country! Our hike to Granite Creek was spectacular and the creek needs further exploration. This desert, riparian ecosystem filled with mature cottonwoods, a gushing creek, lush vegetation, and Remote with a capital R makes Granite Creek "Wilderness" in our book.

Mark Schmalz, Grand Junction

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 14,089 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Grand Junction Field Office (Grand Junction)
Location: Granite Creek straddles the Colorado-Utah state line in Mesa County, Colorado and Grand County, Utah, approximately 30 miles southwest of Grand Junction.

Wilderness Qualities

Granite Creek is part of the Dolores Triangle, a remote section of land known for superb big-game hunting and primitive recreational opportunities throughout a range of ecosystems, from riparian to montane, in elevations ranging from 4,500 - 8,000 feet.

The site contains a concentration of rare plant communities. Although many of the communities present at the site are relatively widespread, most are in good to fair condition. Protection of this site would encompass a significant representation of this ecosystem.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife has identified Granite Creek as suitable habitat for the pikeminnow, humpback chub, Mexican spotted owl, western burro owl, southwest willow flycatcher and whooping crane. There have been sightings of peregrine falcons and of bald eagles. There are also existing Colorado Natural Heritage Program conservation sites for the peregrine falcon within the Granite Creek area.

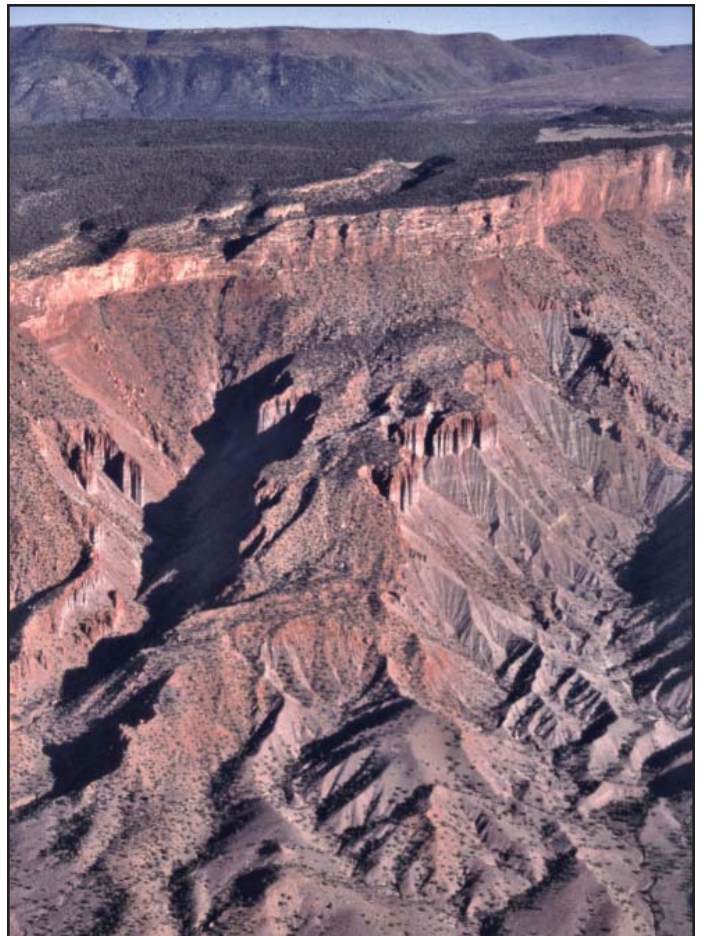
This unit is comprised of two, formerly separate units – Granite Creek and Renegade Creek – divided by a road. The Granite Creek area features a redrock sandstone canyon tributary to the Dolores River that cuts as deep as 800 feet and is highlighted with picturesque rock fins, columns, windows and buttes. The high, eastern end of the creek is relatively open and straight, but by the time it approaches its confluence with the Dolores, the stream is so serpentine that it takes seven miles to travel just three linear miles.

From many scenic viewpoints in this area there are

spectacular views of the Dolores and Colorado River canyons. Views to the west include the snow-capped La Sal Mountains and to the north the distant Bookcliff Mountains. The mesa uplands are gentle slopes covered by aromatic pinyon-juniper forests.

Granite Creek flows through a lush riparian ecosystem of cottonwoods and box elders with grasses and shrubs growing in the flood plain and furnishing forage for deer and elk. Trout fishing occurs in the perennial Granite Creek.

Granite Creek has been identified as critical winter



The Granite Creek area features a redrock sandstone canyon tributary to the Dolores River that cuts as deep as 800 feet. (Jeff Widen)

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

range. The Colorado Division of Wildlife estimates that a herd of 150-300 elk winter in the area. Black bears, mountain lions, and bald and golden eagles also inhabit this area. Desert bighorn sheep are found on Scharf Mesa to the west, and the imperiled peregrine falcon nests along the Dolores River canyon.

Hunters frequent the area for big game, due in large part to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the region, and the canyon is a popular day hike for Dolores River boaters. In addition, the area is well suited to primitive recreation opportunities, including horseback riding, scenic viewing, day hiking, nature observation and photography.

Renegade Creek consists of mountain slopes, mesas, and a rambling creek bottom. The mesas staircase down from Pinon Mesa and include several isolated mesas in the western part of the unit. The mountain sections vary from gentle to steep, depending upon aspect, and are forested with pinyon-juniper woodlands. The mesa tops are covered with sagebrush and mountain brush. The creek bottom is riparian, with grasses and cottonwoods.

Resource Information

Granite Creek has little potential for locatable minerals, according to BLM geologists and the USGS geology map of the area. In any case, the BLM would not allow surface occupancy of mineral leases on much of the area to protect the scenic cliffs and canyon. There are no oil and gas leases with the proposed wilderness. The Renegade Creek part of the unit has mining claims along the Ryan Creek Road, but no claims exist within Granite Creek.

According to the BLM's Grand Junction Resource Management Plan, there are no commercially viable stands of timber or pinyon-juniper woodland within the Granite Creek WSA.

Portions of two cattle grazing allotments cover Granite



Granite Creek flows through a lush riparian ecosystem.

Creek, one managed by the Mountain Island Ranch which is currently applying the Holistic Resource Management method. The only range improvements within the unit are a stock pond in the extreme southeast corner of the unit and a fence on the southern boundary at the state line.

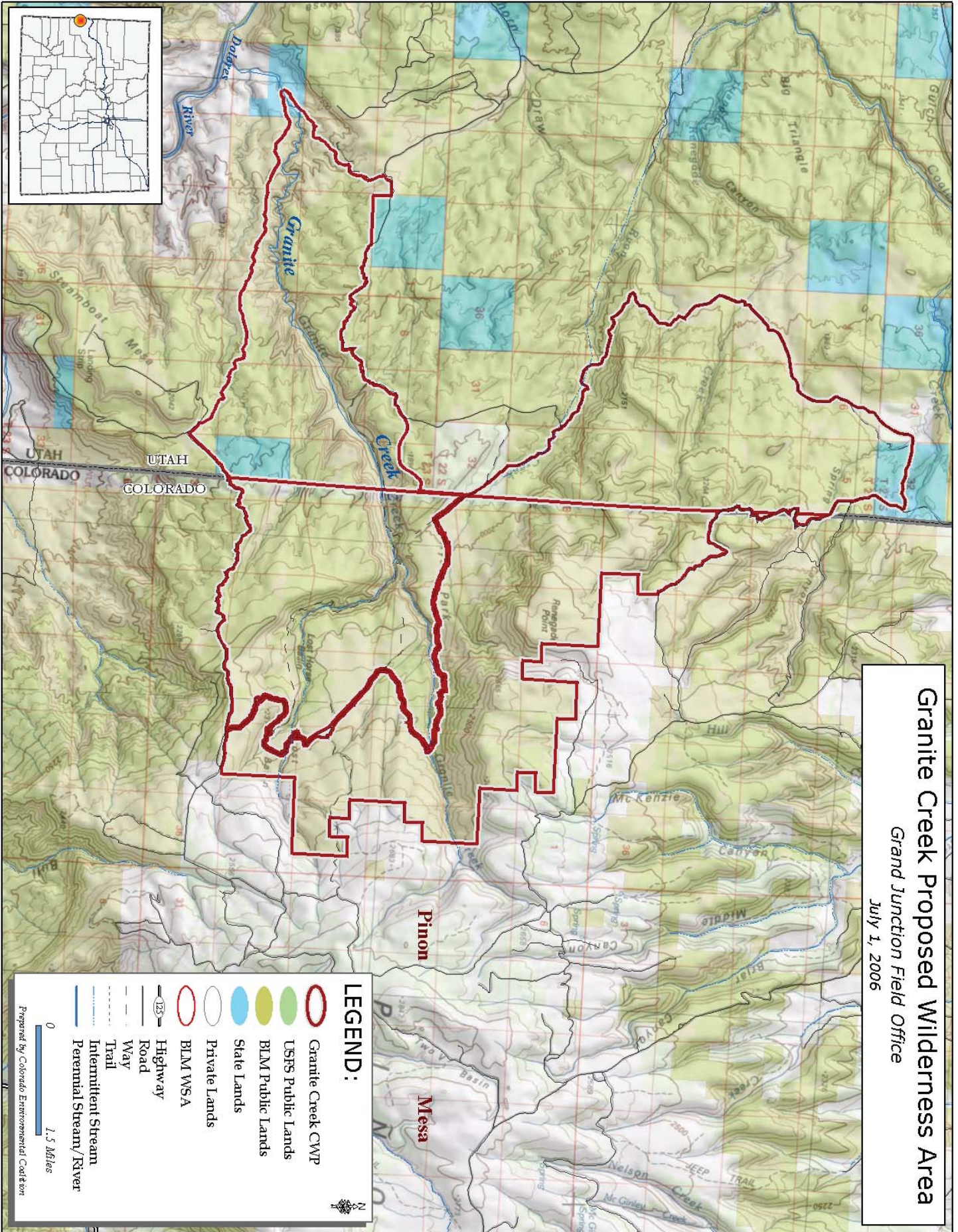
Motorized vehicle use is limited to the existing roads and trails that define the area's perimeter.

Granite Creek is a perennial stream, draining the higher elevations of Pinyon Mesa to the east. Several large springs in the canyon supply much of the year-round flow. There are no water diversions on the creek.

Boundary Issues

The Granite Creek WSA boundary is marked by a circuit of unnumbered vehicle routes that circle Granite and Renegade Creeks, and by logical topographical features of both canyons. The CWP boundary includes 13,800 acres in Colorado and about 12,500 acres in Utah, although the entire area is managed by the Colorado BLM because of geography.

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal



Granite Creek Proposed Wilderness Area
 Grand Junction Field Office
 July 1, 2006