

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Oil Spring Mountain

Oil Spring Mountain is an isolated, undeveloped oasis surrounded by natural gas development. This scenic area, located near the Utah border in northwest Colorado, is a haven for mule deer, bear, and elk, and contains many endangered plant species as well as archeological sites. On my third visit to the area I found a pictograph panel overlooking a beautiful sandstone cliff. Not another soul was around for miles.

Brandon Jett, Grand Junction

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 25,005 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 17,740 acres
BLM Field Office: White River Field Office (Meeker)
Location: Oil Spring Mountain is located about 25 miles south of Rangely in Rio Blanco County.

Wilderness Qualities

Oil Spring Mountain is wild, rugged and topped with untracked acres of woods where wild horses are known to live. The blend of dense hardwood stands and open pinyon meadows is unlike any other Colorado wilderness. An endless succession of wooded mesas fades into the blue and gray of the Tavaputs Plateau in Utah. Ravines cut the massive flat-top and escarpments which run north and south for miles to the western tip of Oil Spring Mountain.

In an Oil Spring Mountain, the northern slopes rise through dense conifer forest to small stands of aspen beneath the upper cliffs. On southern exposures, mountain mahogany, oak, pinyon, and juniper prevail. The numerous vegetation types are utilized by a diversity of wildlife. Oil Spring Mountain is a black bear concentration area and mountain lions frequent the area as well. There is an important mule deer migration route on the northeast side of Oil Spring Mountain; the deer summer on the upper slopes and use the lower elevations for winter range. Elk use the upper elevations on a yearlong basis, and an elk winter concentration area is located around Red Cedar Spring.

The highest known cultural resource density (one site per 32 acres) in BLM's White River Resource Area occurs in the area. Artifacts and rock art from prehistoric sites indicate that the area was occupied from approximately 7,000 years ago to the late 1870s. There are three known petroglyph panels within Oil Spring Mountain.

Resource Information

Despite its name, Oil Spring Mountain is considered to have insignificant potential for oil reserves. However, the area does have moderate to high potential for natural gas development. Approximately 10,030 acres, about 40% of the area, are covered by 16 pre-FLPMA leases. There are three producing wells within the edges of the area, and thirteen dry holes. Oil exploration in the region around Oil Spring Mountain began in 1943, but despite this activity around the mountain, little development has occurred since. At best, Oil Spring Mountain contains only 2.5% of the natural gas reserves present in the immediate vicinity.



There are three known petroglyph panels within Oil Spring Mountain. (CU Wilderness Study Group)

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Due to the relatively small nature of the area, much of the potential gas reserves underneath Oil Spring Mountain could be accessed by slant drilling of the pre-FLPMA leases, thereby retaining the irreplaceable wildlife and cultural values of the area while still making use of its energy reserves.

Pre-FLPMA mineral leases carry no right of access across intervening federal lands, so development of the pre-FLPMA leases in Oil Spring Mountain is by no means a foregone conclusion as BLM might claim.

Two livestock grazing allotments overlap with Spring Mountain. Most of the grazing in those allotments occurs outside of the wilderness.

The potential for commercial timber harvesting is insignificant. The area is closed to motorized vehicles.

Oil Spring Mountain is essentially a headwaters area.

Boundary Issues

Citizens propose a major addition of about 6,000 acres northeast of the existing WSA. This addition adds all of the South Fork of Texas Creek and its watershed to the CWP. A vehicle route that is rapidly eroding and revegetating follows the creekbed and would be closed for inclusion within the wilderness.

Citizens also propose a minor addition on the west of about 770 acres of land formerly owned by the Colorado Division of Wildlife and since acquired by BLM. This boundary is conveniently defined by jeep roads in drainages that surround the area.



Oil Spring Mountain CWP.

Oil Spring Mountain Proposed Wilderness Area

White River Field Office

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