

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Prairie Canyon

Prairie Canyon is the kind of place only a true lover of wilderness will like. It is rough country filled with steep canyons and thick vegetation. I love Prairie Canyon because it's quiet and seldom visited and you can truly get away from it all.

Kurt Kunkle, Rifle

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 18,687 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: not studied
BLM Field Office: Grand Junction Field Office (Grand Junction)
Location: Prairie Canyon is located in the Bookcliffs 25 miles northwest of Fruita and adjacent to the Colorado-Utah state line.

Wilderness Qualities

The topography of Prairie Canyon is very rugged, with jutting rimrock, sloping benches, and steep canyon walls. The primary geologic formation is Mesa Verde sandstone with Green River formation along the northern portions. The area provides a good representation of the Bookcliff geology and ecology.

Most of the area is covered by scattered pinyon-juniper woodlands. However, vegetation ranges from semi-desert shrublands up to mountain brush and mixed conifer, including Douglas-fir and aspen groves. The area provides habitat for deer and elk, which are hunted here.

Bald eagles hunt in Prairie Canyon. In addition, the Colorado Division of Wildlife has identified the Prairie Canyon area as suitable habitat for the burro owl, which has been observed in the west-central portions of the Bookcliffs where the Prairie Canyon proposed area is located.

This elongated unit (about 14 miles long and two miles wide) extends from the Grand Valley (elev. 5,100 feet) to the Colorado-White River Divide (elev. 8,700 feet). It is contiguous with 1,500 acres of roadless BLM land in the Craig District and approximately 13,000 acres of roadless BLM land across the state line in Utah.

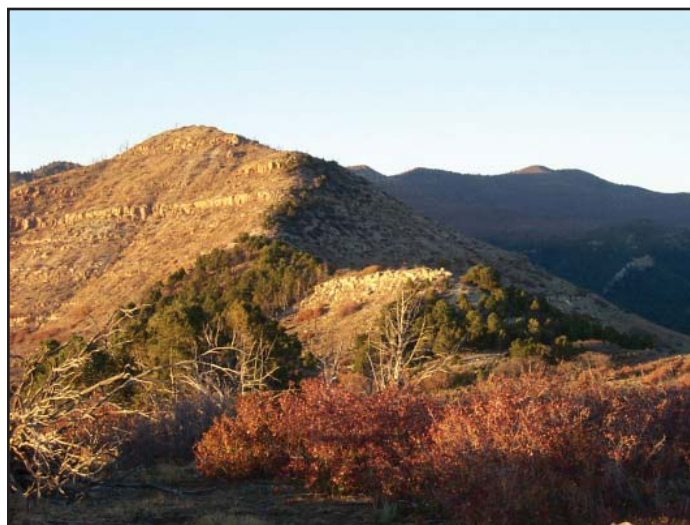
Resource Information

There are no known mining claims within this area, but there is potential for coal mining. Portions of the unit is under oil and gas leases.

The primary use of the area is for livestock grazing and the unit is covered by a grazing permit issued by the BLM.

There is a fence along part of the northern boundary and four fences cross Prairie Canyon. An old, silver trailer is located near the mouth of Hells Hole Canyon and an old pole corral is at the mouth of Cottonwood Canyon.

Prairie Canyon is primarily a headwaters area, with several intermittent drainages flowing into the area's upper reaches.



Late afternoon light colors Prairie Canyon. (Kurt Kunkle)

Boundary Issues

A gas road dividers Prairie Canyon into two separate units. Utah citizens have proposed a wilderness area called Hells Hole (15,000 acres of BLM and scattered state lands) that is adjacent to Prairie Canyon on the other side of the Colorado-Utah state line.

The western boundary of the area follows the state line, which divides the Prairie Canyon unit from the Hells Hole proposed area in Utah. The northern boundary follows and excludes vehicle routes and parcels of private property along the upper reaches of Prairie, Buttermilk, and West Canyons. The eastern boundary follows and excludes the Baxter Pass Road, and private property. The southern boundary follows and excludes a gas well service road that leaves the Baxter Pass Road and cuts down a ridge to the Prairie Canyon road excludes various gas roads in the bottom of Hells Hole Canyon.



Sunset behind the CWP.

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Prairie Canyon Proposed Wilderness Area

Grand Junction Field Offices

July 1, 2006

