

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

Roan Plateau

The Roan Plateau is known to have the highest concentrations and the most diversity of plants and animals in the state. Right off I-70, this biological oasis is very accessible to the public and will make an important addition to our nation's protected places.

Janey Hines

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 40,494 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 14,129 acres
BLM Field Office: Glenwood Springs Field Office
Location: The Roan Plateau towers above Interstate 70 about 10 miles northwest of Rifle in Garfield County.

Wilderness Qualities

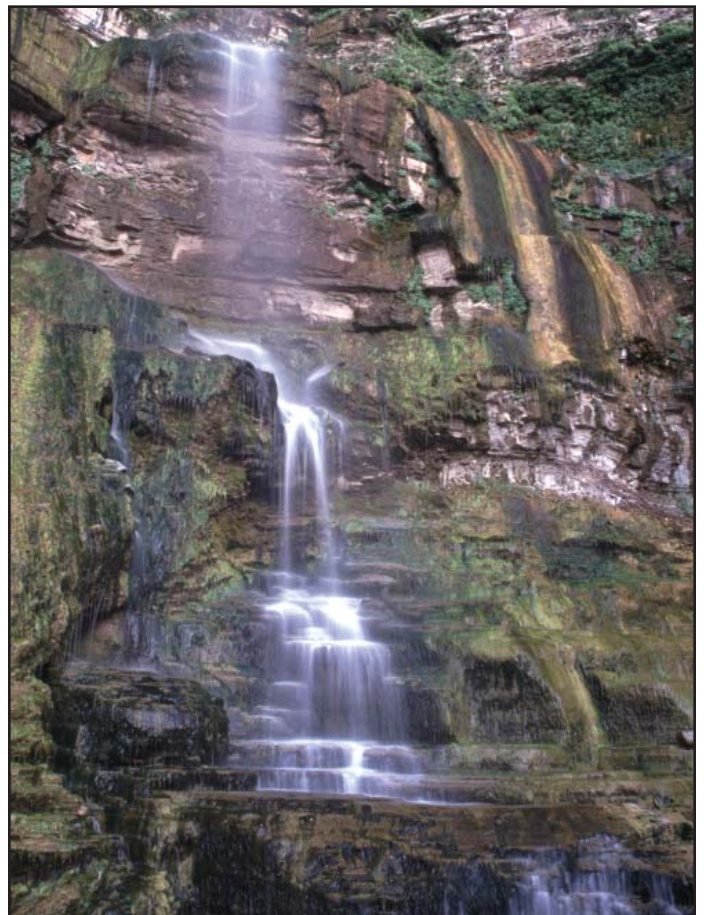
The Roan Plateau is immediately familiar by form – if not by name – to anyone who travels Interstate 70 between Rifle and Grand Junction. The Roan Plateau towers more than 3,000 feet above the highway, the massive cliffs at its rim composed of the Green River Formation sandstone and shale. A dark brown line is apparent in the cliffs, even from I-70, and denotes the presence of an oil bearing strata called the Mahogany Ledge.

For decades, the Roan Plateau was managed by the U.S. Department of Energy as a Naval Oil Shale Reserve. Various experimental recovery techniques were explored at Anvil Points, but the technological and environmental hurdles have proven too great to count this oil shale as a realistic source of petroleum products. The oil-bearing layers of the Green River Formation thicken as one moves north into the Piceance Basin. Consequently, most commercial oil shale development efforts took place farther north, and left the Roan Plateau relatively unscathed.

In 1997, management of the Roan Plateau was transferred from the Energy Department to the BLM. With BLM's assumption of management of the Plateau, a formal inventory was conducted of the area's wilderness character in 2000.

The Plateau's gentle valleys and rolling hills end abruptly in the 1,500-foot deep canyons carved by the East Fork and East Middle Fork of Parachute Creek on the Plateau's western edge. A 200-foot waterfall denotes the East Fork's drop-off of the Plateau. A similar sized

waterfall pours off the East Middle Fork, but is located on private land farther west. This unique geology, with high waterfalls plunging off the edge of the Plateau, creates perfect isolated conditions for native Colorado River cut-throat trout to thrive. The geologic isolation protects the native cutthroat's genetic purity by eliminating the possibility of hybridization by rainbow trout invading from downstream. Consequently, Northwater, Trapper, and East Middle Fork Parachute creeks all contain only Colorado River cutthroat trout. The East Fork of Parachute Creek and JQS Gulch have both cutthroats and non-native brook trout.



East Fork Parachute Creek Falls. (Mark Pearson)

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The Plateau presents a mosaic of vegetation, with broad stands of aspen intermixed with sagebrush meadows. On the wetter north-facing slopes, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir invade aspen stands. Douglas-fir, blue spruce, and cottonwoods dominate the streamside vegetation.

The Roan Plateau provides ideal habitat for large herds of mule deer and elk. Black bear and mountain lion also frequent the area. The Roan Plateau hosts an abundance of rare and imperiled native plant communities, including cliff seeps containing rare hanging gardens. The Green River Formation, through which the Plateau's valleys are cut, contains abundant fossils. Many birds of interest can also be found within this unit including the Cooper's hawk, boreal owl, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, and sharp-shinned hawk. One watch listed species of butterfly, the green-winged hairstreak, is also present.

The proposed wilderness includes four units:

The **East Fork** includes 14,342 acres and 22 miles of mainstem and tributaries of the East Fork of Parachute Creek. The Colorado Natural Heritage Program identified the East Fork as a "Very Significant" conservation site in 1996. This biologically diverse site hosts 21 elements tracked by the Natural Heritage Program including: nine significant natural plant communities, one BLM sensitive fish (the Colorado River cutthroat trout). Five rare species of birds, four rare plants, one rare butterfly, and one rare mammal. The unit also contains cliff seeps which support one of the best known populations of Hanging Garden *Sullivantia*. Other significant values of the East Fork unit include a 200-foot high waterfall, paleontological resources in the Green River Formation and historic land uses including prehistoric Indian hunting grounds, and ranching-related structures from the late 1800s.

Trapper Creek contains 11,373 acres and includes the scenic canyons of Trapper and Northwater Creeks. Both drainages support a small population of Colorado River cutthroat trout. Three miles downstream of the headwaters of Northwater Creek, the stream cuts through the Green River formation and creates a series of pool drops that are excellent habitat for trout and provides scenic interest for visitors to



Anvil Points unit. (Mark Pearson)

the valley bottoms. In 1996, the Colorado Natural Heritage Program conducted a biological survey on the Roan Plateau which included this unit and found ten "significant" elements. These elements include two rare plants, two populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout, several wetland plant communities, as well as one raptor and two bird species of concern.

Northeast Cliff contains 5,847 acres on the east-facing slope of the Roan Plateau. Steep, dramatic shale cliffs, deep gulches, and rugged ridges dominate the unit's topography. The elevation drops from 9,200 feet along the rim to about 6,500 feet in the canyons below. The stark contrast of the vertical barren cliffs with the heavily vegetated slopes accentuates this unit's rugged character and exceptional scenic qualities. This unit also includes excellent examples of an old-growth Douglas-fir community and habitat for the uncommon three-toed woodpecker. There is one 40 acre in-holding in the northern quarter of the unit.

Anvil Points: This 5,338-acre unit includes the prominent Anvil Points which dominate the southern cliff face of the Roan Plateau. The Anvil Points are the main landscape feature north of the I-70 corridor between the towns of Parachute and Rifle. Sheer, steep, dramatic shale cliffs dissected by deep gulches, and rugged ridges dominate the unit's topography. The elevation drops from 9,200 feet along the rim to about 6,500 feet in the canyons below. The Anvil Points Rim was studied by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program in 1996 and found to harbor the Parachute penstemon that has been located in only one other place in the

world. The unit also includes Yellow Slide that has been claimed to be a meteor impact site.

Resource Information

Most of the area is free of oil and gas leases. Two mineral leases existed at the end of 2001 – one lease of 166 acres with no surface occupancy stipulations in the East Fork unit, and a second lease covering 3,061 acres in the Anvil Points unit. The status of future leasing will be determined as BLM completes an amendment to its land use plan to cover the newly acquired lands on the Roan Plateau.

No mining claims exist in the area because it was withdrawn from mineral entry while under management of the Department of Energy.

The area is extensively used for livestock grazing, with 20 permittees on eight allotments grazing cattle and sheep.

Motorized travel is limited to existing routes until BLM completes the management plan.

There are 48 recorded water rights, nearly all within the East Fork and Trapper Creek units.



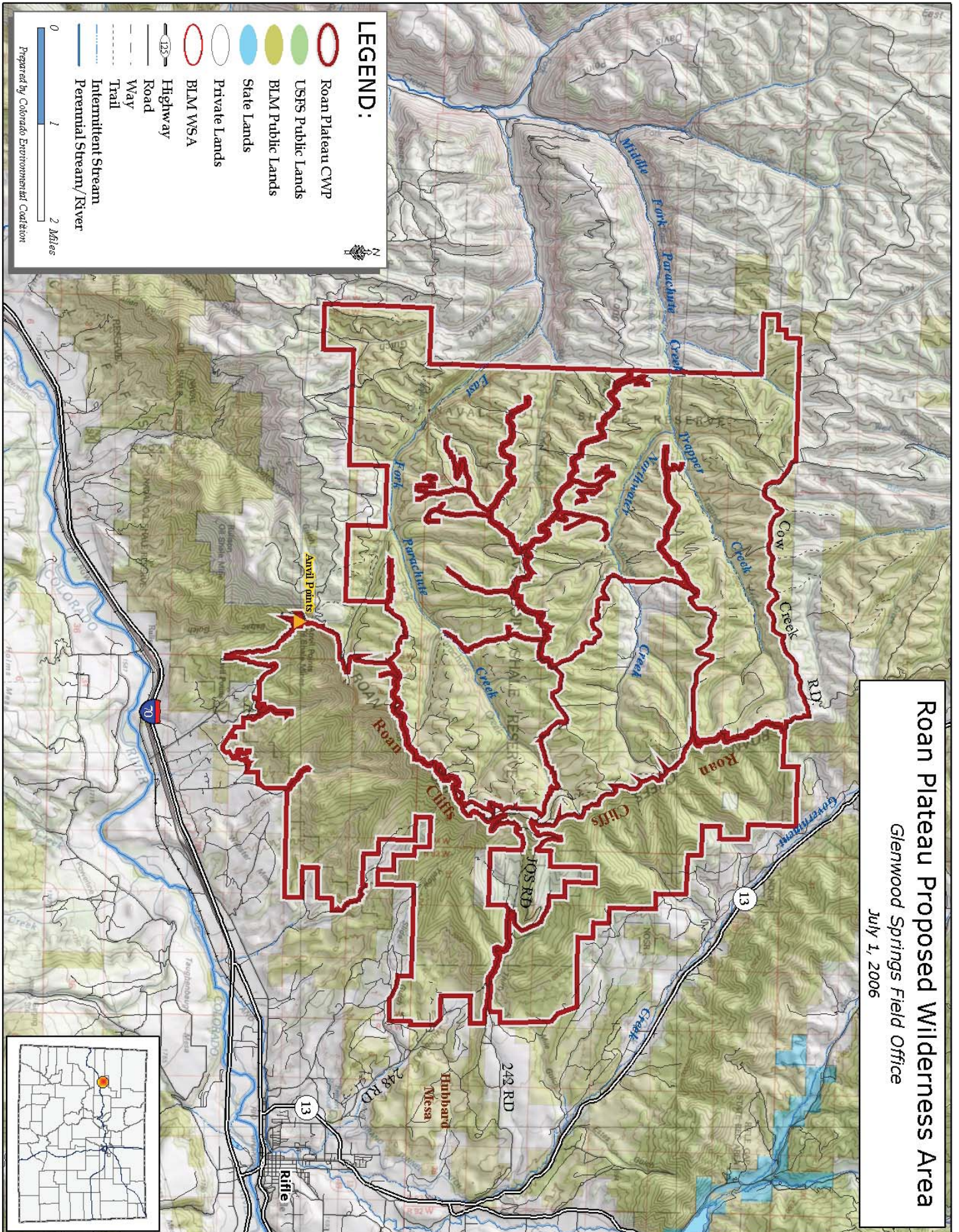
Moonrise behind the cliff face of the Roan Plateau.

Boundary Issues

Roan Plateau is broken into four units with distinct characteristics. Two units incorporate the major stream valleys on the Plateau's rolling tablelands – East Fork of Parachute Creek and Trapper Creek.

The other two units incorporate the badlands slopes and sheer cliffs of the Plateau's rim – Anvil Points and Northeast Cliffs.

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LEGEND:

- Roan Plateau CWP
- USFS Public Lands
- BLM Public Lands
- State Lands
- Private Lands
- BLM WSA
- Highway
- Road
- Way
- Trail
- Intermittent Stream
- Perennial Stream/River

0 1 2 Miles
Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition

Roan Plateau Proposed Wilderness Area
Glenwood Springs Field Office
July 1, 2006

