

Colorado's Canyon Country Wilderness Proposal

South Shale Ridge

As a photographer and hiker, there is not a place I'd rather go for a day's outing – within an hour's drive of home – than South Shale Ridge. The few dirt roads that criss-cross the area provide adequate and easy access to most of the good parts. No new roads are needed, and any form of development, beyond what already exists, would be a tragedy for this very special, incredibly fragile place.

David Cooper, Grand Junction

Citizens Wilderness Proposal: 27,569 acres
BLM Wilderness Study Area: 27,631 acres
BLM Field Office: Grand Junction Field Office (Grand Junction)
Location: South Shale Ridge is located in Mesa and Garfield counties, two miles west of DeBeque and five miles north of Interstate 70.

Wilderness Qualities

Portions of South Shale Ridge might easily be called "Colorado's Bryce Canyon". The south face of the ridge is a steep, multicolored escarpment of vivid purples, oranges, and reds. Towering Douglas firs grace the landscape at the west end of the area, providing a refreshing contrast to the stark terrain of the ridge itself. South Shale Ridge is a highly eroded feature of the Wasatch Formation, ranging in elevation from 5,000 feet at its eastern base to 8,076 feet on the summit of Corcoran Peak. Over 40 miles of twisting arroyos carve through this rugged and colorful landscape, often opening into secluded parks at their sources.

A number of outstanding special features complement the area's rugged beauty. "Goblin Valley" is a ghostly collection of white and gray hoodoos guarding the western flank of the ridge. Several rare and endangered plants grow in or near South Shale Ridge. The threatened cactus *Sclerocactus glaucus* grow within the unit and the rare *Phacelia submutica* is suspected to occur there as well. In addition, Pyramid Rock Research Natural Area, just across the road from South Shale Ridge, was designated to protect the endangered Uinta Basin hookless cactus. Pyramid Rock is a local landmark formed of colorful clays and sandstones of the Wasatch Formation.

This area supports large populations of three rare plant species: *Sclerocactus glaucus* (Uinta Basin hookless cactus), *Phacelia submutica* (Debeque phacelia), and *Astragalus debequaeus* (Debeque milkvetch).

Because of South Shale Ridge's prominence, the visitor enjoys sweeping vistas of the Grand Mesa, the San Juan Mountains, the La Sal Mountains, and the scenic ridges of the Roan Cliffs. Raptors soar on the air currents above the ridge, and deer frequent the slopes and valleys of the area.

The primary recreational use of the area is hunting.

South Shale Ridge provides critical winter range for deer and elk.



Perseid meteors over Corcoran Peak. (Jeff Widen)

Resource Information

South Shale Ridge contains by several oil and gas leases. About 25 producing gas wells have been drilled on the periphery of the roadless area along the road that defines the unit's boundary. Additional drilling inside the roadless area will be difficult due to the steep and rugged terrain, and the required road construction would likely result in significant erosion if it were attempted.

In 1990, BLM received a development plan to drill 44 coal-bed methane wells north of South Shale Ridge, but initial exploratory holes turned up dry.

There are no mining claims and no coal resources within the area.

Motorized vehicles are limited to designated routes that amount to two miles within the proposed wilderness.

Portions of seven grazing allotments cover South Shale Ridge. The area's steep ridges eliminate the need for boundary fences and deter livestock from wandering off the allotments.

There are no economically valuable forest resources in the area.

South Shale Ridge is a headwaters area



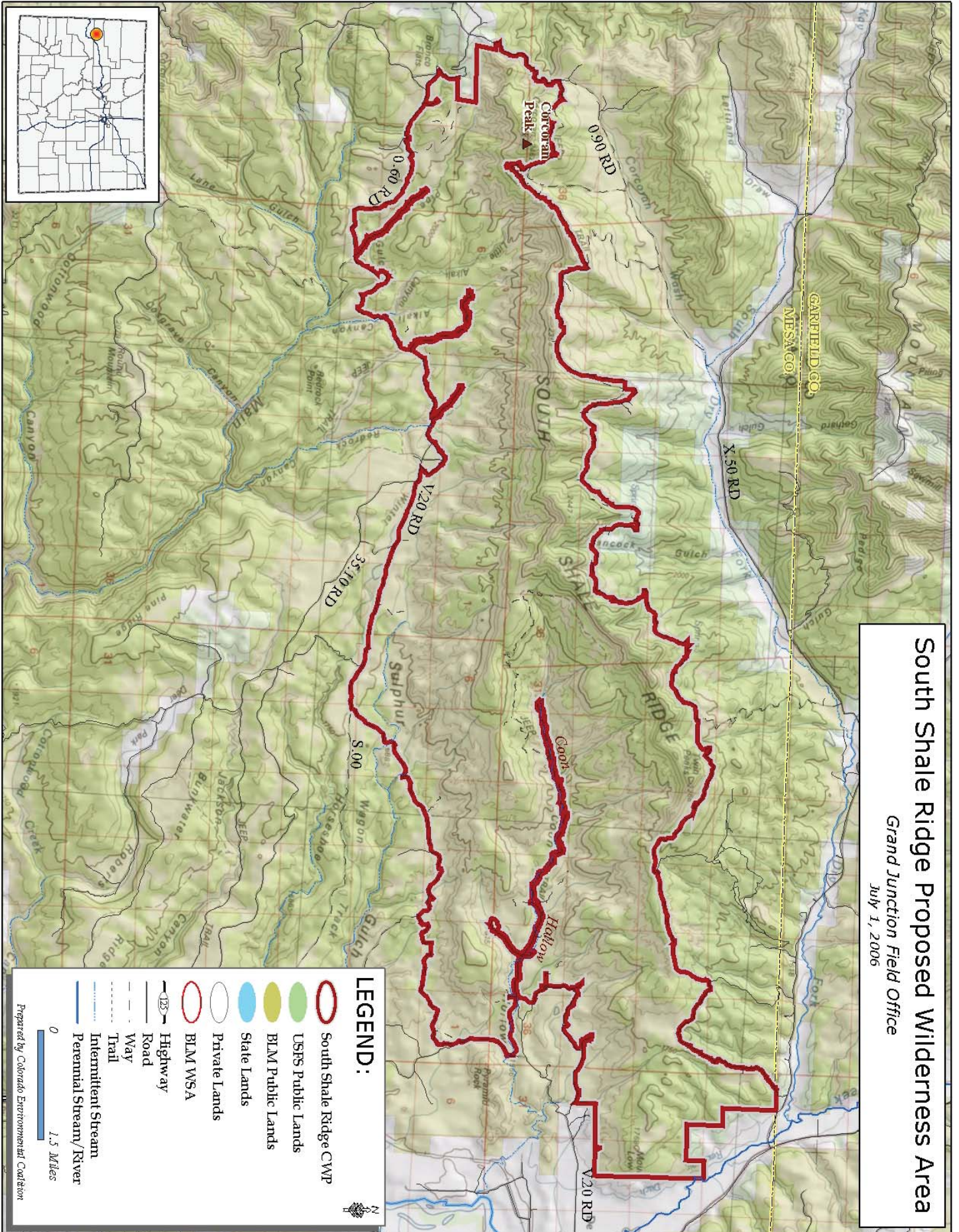
Exposed, multi-colored sandstone cliff faces. (Jeff Widen)

Boundary Issues

The area is well defined by existing roads. The Spear Hunter Access Road defines the northern boundary of the unit. The boundaries of the CWP area are those identified by the Bureau of Land Management during its 1999 reinventory of South Shale Ridge roadless area.



Hoodos in "Goblin Valley". (Jeff Widen)



South Shale Ridge Proposed Wilderness Area
 Grand Junction Field Office
 July 1, 2006

LEGEND:

- South Shale Ridge CWP
 - USFS Public Lands
 - BLM Public Lands
 - State Lands
 - Private Lands
 - BLM WSA
 - Highway
 - Road
 - Way
 - Trail
 - Intermittent Stream
 - Perennial Stream/River
- 0 1.5 Miles
- Prepared by Colorado Environmental Coalition