

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units



Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units, Royal Gorge Field Office

Photo: John Stansfield

The intent of this report is to present objective data to illustrate that the area in question qualifies as Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC), in accordance with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Manuals 6310 and 6320. The information presented in this report meets the minimum standards for review of new information per Manual 6310, and accordingly BLM must review this information and make its findings and documentation of the review process available to the public as soon as practicable.



Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units

BLM Royal Gorge Field Office, Front Range District
BLM Unit Identifier: CO-020-006 (Crown Point)
CO-020-007 (Little Fountain Creek)
CO-020-009 (Stanley Creek)

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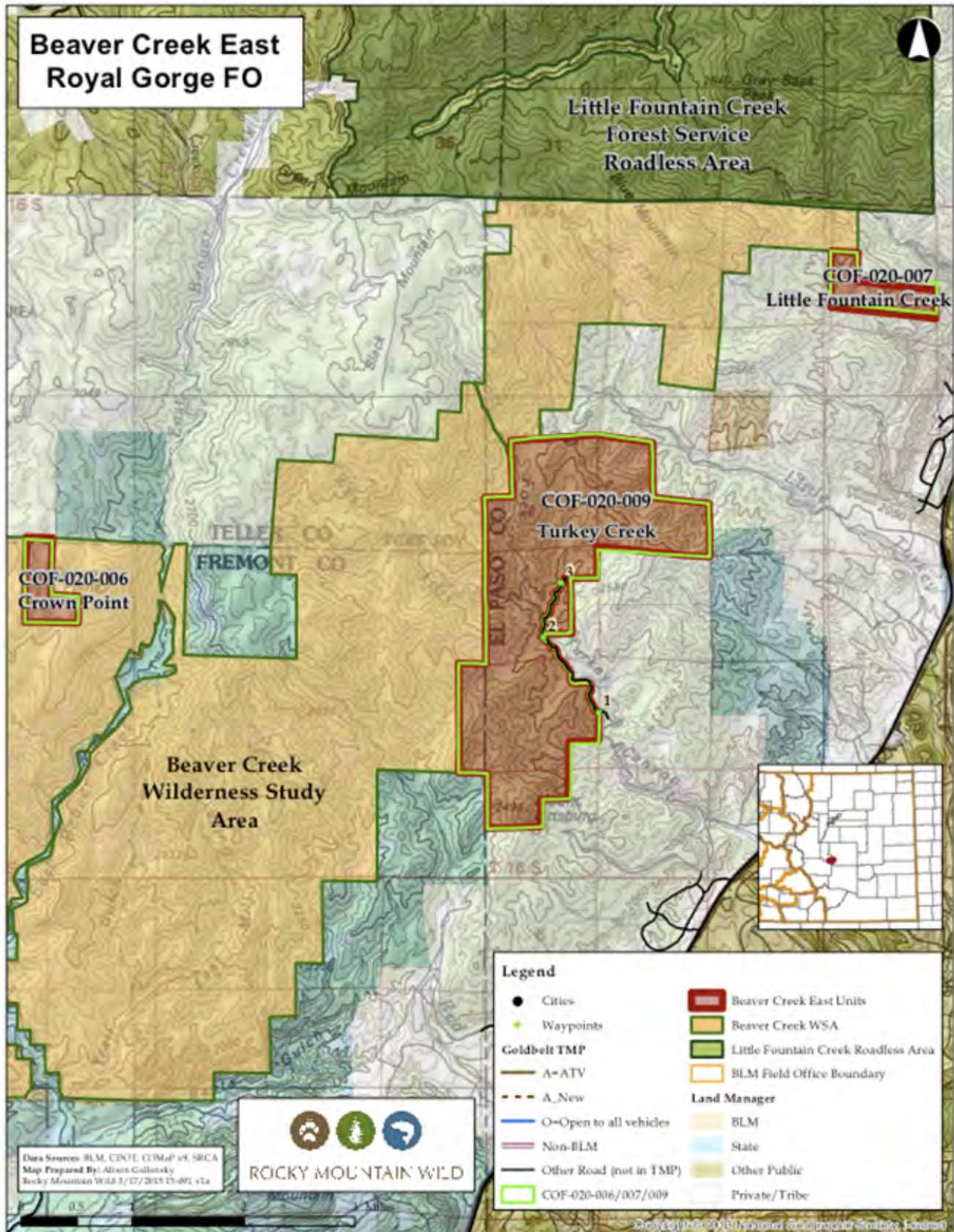
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FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE PRAIRIES





Overview

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) is comprised of BLM lands contiguous with the Beaver Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA), lying east of Beaver Creek and East Beaver Creek. The proposed LWC is made up of three units that comprise approximately 2,800 acres, with the majority of the acreage contiguous east of the WSA. The proposed LWC is located about 17 miles to the northeast of Cañon City, CO and 25 miles southwest of Colorado Springs, CO. Two of the units reside in southwest El Paso County and one in northeast Fremont County.

The Beaver Creek WSA consists of over 26,000 acres of public lands in rugged granite canyonlands, valued for its varied ecosystems, supporting significant wildlife and fish habitat. Contiguous BLM land to the north and east share these values and can expand the overall wilderness core by 2,800 acres. Over half of the WSA, 13,734 acres, resides within the Beaver Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which also encompasses the northern contiguous unit. The WSA, along with the proposed contiguous units, also support high biodiversity areas recognized as Potential Conservation Areas (PCA) by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP).

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC is largely bordered by private property. All three units are bordered by private property, where it does not border the WSA, making public access only available via the rugged Beaver Creek WSA.

While none of the units meet the size requirement of 5,000 acres, they may qualify for Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) protection as they are “contiguous with lands which have been formally determined to have wilderness or potential wilderness values, or any Federal lands managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics” – including Wilderness Study Areas (BLM Manual 6310, p 5).

The BLM inventoried these three units contiguous to Beaver Creek East as part of their overall LWC inventory for the region, and found wilderness characteristics on all units. These three units are delineated in green on the above map. The northern unit was identified as COF-020-006 (Crown Point), and consists of 153.8 acres. The northeastern unit, COF-020-007 (Little Fountain Creek), consists of 199.8 acres. The eastern unit and by far the largest, COF-020-009 (Turkey Creek), is made up of 2,489.7 contiguous roadless acres. The BLM reports for these areas only provided supporting photopoint data for the latter unit, Turkey Creek.

Wildlife species with high habitat and range values can be found in the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC, including swift fox, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, black bear, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, black bear, and mountain lion. Critical and valued bird species identified in this area include the Mexican spotted owl, the American peregrine falcon, and the bald eagle, all listed as Species of Most Concern. The imperiled fish species, the greenback cutthroat trout can be found in the Turkey Creek unit.

Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation are abundant in the 2,800 acre contiguous roadless units that form the proposed Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units LWC. The steep rocky terrain, mid-elevation and high-elevation mixed forests, and vegetated drainages, provide



extensive opportunity for solitude in the forms of isolation, remoteness, lack of visitation and vegetative and topographic screening. Similar to the contiguous WSA, primitive recreation abounds in all seasons, including hunting, fishing, backpacking, hiking, wildlife viewing, bird watching, and photography.

BLM's Manual 6310 states that the boundary delineation for a LWC unit "is generally based on the presence of Wilderness Inventory Roads" but can also be based on property lines between different types of land ownership or on developed rights of way (Manual 6310, p 4). These were the parameters Wild Connections used to define the boundaries of the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC. Only after the true boundaries of the contiguous roadless unit are identified can an objective and thorough assessment of that unit's wilderness characteristics be made.

In the spring of 2013, Wild Connections produced a preliminary boundary delineation for this unit based on the size and contiguity requirements stated in Manual 6310 (p 6). Due to the lack of public access into the unit, much of the assessment for the proposed LWC will be based on the contiguous WSA, BLM's 2013 LWC reports, supplemental data, and previous Wild Connections' trips to the area. Our goal was to assess this area for wilderness characteristics, based on BLM's Manual 6310, and report our findings to the BLM's Royal Gorge Field Office in efforts to identify potential wilderness areas to expand "wildlands" corridors in central Colorado.



Discussion of Wilderness Characteristics including Boundary Delineations

I. The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC meets the minimum size criteria for roadless lands.

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC comprises approximately 2,800 contiguous roadless acres. While none of these lands meet the minimum size criteria of 5,000 acres for a potential LWC, all of the units meet the size requirements for wilderness characteristics as “they are contiguous with lands which have been formally determined to have wilderness or wilderness potential values, or any Federal lands managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics” (BLM’s Manual 6310, p 5). BLM’s designated Beaver Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA) meets these qualifications and borders all three contiguous units. With regard to route determination, this manual states that a “way” maintained solely by the passage of vehicles does not constitute a “road” for purposes of inventorying wilderness characteristics. A “way” that is used on a continuous and regular basis still does not constitute a road. Additionally, a vehicle route that was constructed by mechanical means, *but is no longer being maintained by mechanical methods* is also *not* a road. By comparison, a Wilderness Inventory Road (WIR) is a vehicle road that has “been improved and maintained by mechanical means to ensure relatively regular and continuous use” (Manual 6310, p 11). Wild Connections’ inventory of this area used the above definitions to determine whether routes are or are not considered WIRs based. Routes that did meet the criteria for WIRs were removed from the unit as cherrystems.

For the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC, much of the BLM’s assessment of the LWC boundaries and characteristics appear to be largely accurate.

The Crown Point unit (COF-020-006) is bordered by the Beaver Creek WSA to the east, south, and west. Private property borders the unit to the north. This unit lies in between East Beaver Creek and West Beaver Creek, consisting of the foothills and drainages of Crown Point (9,922 ft), which is located less than one-half mile east in the WSA. The unit totals approximately 200 acres. There are no routes into this unit, via public or private property; however one could backcountry traverse into the unit from the contiguous WSA.

The Little Fountain Creek contiguous unit (COF-020-007) is bordered by the Beaver Creek WSA to the north, with private property bounding all other sides. This unit is contiguous with the northeasterly corner of the WSA and represents the easternmost section of this contiguous wilderness core. This unit totals approximately 200 acres. There are also no routes into this unit, with the only public access available via the WSA to the north.

The Turkey Creek contiguous unit (COF-020-009) is bordered by the Beaver Creek WSA to the west. The remainder of the unit is insulated by private property. This unit totals approximately 2,400 acres. There is one route into the unit, not open to the public, accessed via the Schmidt Construction quarry to the southeast. The BLM inventoried this route (CO-020-009-A) as a WIR as it has a non-exclusive right of way, was constructed by mechanical means (bladed), shows improvement by mechanical means (drainage), is maintained (hand tools), and is regular and continuous to an



extent. CO-020-009-A forms the eastern border of the unit from Waypoint 1 to Waypoint 2, where it enters the unit. The BLM has this route, which becomes inventoried as CO-020-009-B within the unit, as a cherrystem WIR to Waypoint 3, where the route splits and continues as two separate ways along natural features. The WIR will be removed as a cherrystem from Waypoint 2 to Waypoint 3, initially constructed to access an old homestead within the unit and is currently being used and maintained by a private landowner through an easement.

The BLM inventoried an additional seven more routes in this unit, all stemming from the WIR. While these routes may have been constructed by mechanical means, they were developed at least 50 years ago for timber harvest, however the routes are now heavily revegetated and have shown no signs of recent use. Wild Connections agrees with the BLM's assessment of these routes that they will remain within the unit as ways.

II. The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC is primarily affected by the forces of nature.

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC is primarily affected by the forces of nature, with human impacts considerably unnoticeable within the units. There is no motorized public access to any of the units, with public access limited to traversing the backcountry via the contiguous Beaver Creek WSA. The one WIR that borders and enters any unit (Turkey Creek) is limited to the right-of-way users and BLM administrative access. Other routes found within this unit showed a lack of motorized use and an overall apparent lack of regular use, with the forces of nature reclaiming many of the former roads, according to the BLM. Other human impacts in the proposed LWC were minor and will be detailed below with the overall naturalness characteristics of each unit.

The Crown Point unit ranges in elevation from approximately 9,000 ft in the south to 9,600 ft near the northeastern boundary. The vegetation in the unit primarily consists of a Douglas fir and aspen high-elevation mixed forest with ponderosa pine mixing in as well. The higher elevation areas also support Engelmann spruce, bristlecone pine, and limber pine. A riparian drainage also flows north-south through the unit, eventually flowing to East Beaver Creek.

The BLM inventory of this unit found a historic cabin and homestead within the unit, of which only the foundation and old timbers remain. These historical human impacts offer supplemental value that enhance the wilderness character of this unit. The BLM also inventoried historic selective timber harvesting and a few old routes that access the cabin and into the lower drainage, of which have not been used for many decades, are overgrown with vegetation, and barely visible even on the ground. In sum, the BLM found that "from the accumulative amount of human use and activity, in relation to the size of the parcel, the inventory has shown that the unit, CO-020-006, has primarily been affected by forces of nature" (p 3). Wild Connections supports the BLM's naturalness inventory and assessment of this unit.

The Little Fountain Creek unit is rugged and rocky, varying in elevation from about 6,700 ft to 7,600 ft. The vegetation in this unit is primarily comprised of a pinyon-juniper woodland and Gambel oak



scrubland. Little Fountain Creek flows just north of the unit, with the unit mostly consisting of the southern ridge that forms this creek.

The BLM found no significant impacts within this unit, with minor human impacts limited to old selective timber harvesting. The BLM reported that vegetation has reclaimed these areas, making the impacts not significant to the natural landscape as “the unit has been primarily affected by the forces of nature” (p 2). Wild Connections supports the BLM’s naturalness inventory and assessment of this unit.

The Turkey Creek unit ranges from approximately 8,500 ft to 6,800 ft, encompassing a diversity of ecosystems. Much of the unit is steep and rocky, supporting a pinyon-juniper woodland and Gambel oak scrubland. Ponderosa pine, blue spruce, and Douglas fir mix in and comprise the forests in the higher elevation areas. Turkey Creek flows through the unit, with two documented waterfalls, and supports rich riparian life. The West Turkey Falls can be viewed in Waypoint 4, from a 1997 hike with Pikes Peak Group Sierra Club and BLM staff. Waypoint 5, from the same trip, captures the diverse ecosystems in the unit – including riparian vegetation near Turkey Creek, followed by dense mixed coniferous forests that lead to rocky montane grasslands.

The BLM reported a few minor human impacts for this unit in the form of routes and historical structures. CO-020-009-A, which borders the unit to the east and enters the unit as a cherrystem, will be removed from the unit as a WIR. This boundary road also removes human impacts to the east, as documented by the BLM. The BLM found several routes that branch off of this road that were constructed by mechanical means, however are heavily revegetated and have not seen regular or continuous use in a long time. They will remain within the unit as ways and do not affect the overall naturalness of the unit.

The BLM also found several historic structures and sites along the WIR, including an old homestead, Mink Ranch, which has two multi-room buildings and several other wooden and stone structures. Other historic sites include “old foundations, collapsed structures, corrals and pit toilet remnants. The historic disturbance adds supplemental value, and will not affect the naturalness of the area” (p 3). The BLM also references old selective logging, however goes on to assert that it is substantially unnoticeable within the unit.

While there are a few minor human impacts spread throughout the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC, these are examples of “human-made features” that are considered substantially unnoticeable and thus do not hinder wilderness characteristics (BLM Manual 6310, p 6). Many of the human impacts are now considered historical, adding supplemental value to the units. What was found and inventoried in these units do not affect the natural integrity or the apparent naturalness of the units overall (BLM Manual 6310, p 6-7).

III. The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC offers many opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. There are vast opportunities for solitude given the



topographic variety, dense vegetation, the few public entry points, and lack of trails (motorized and non-motorized). The rugged wooded hills, canyons, and cliffs provide excellent screening from unnatural sights and sounds. The numerous gulches and drainages, cutting through rocky canyon terrain also provide outstanding opportunity for solitude. Furthermore, the lack of visitation and overall use in these units provide outstanding opportunities for respite and remoteness just about anywhere in the proposed LWC.

Consisting of over 2,800 acres of contiguous unroaded wilderness land, the proposed LWC offers a multitude of primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities as well. There are outstanding opportunities for hiking, backpacking, camping, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, bird watching, horseback riding, and photography. Waypoint 6 views an excellent opportunity for hiking in the (upper) Turkey Creek unit, from a 1997 hike with Pikes Peak Group Sierra Club and BLM staff. There are excellent opportunities for hunting within this unit; high value animal species and habitat are documented in the section below. The BLM sums up this section well in their Turkey Creek report, stating, “the recreational opportunities become outstanding due to the challenging topography and vast opportunities for overland travel” (p 4).

IV. The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC has supplemental values that would enhance the wilderness experience and should be recognized and protected.

Wild Connections inventory of the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC indicates numerous supplemental values that contribute to the overall experience of visiting this area and provide additional evidence that this unit's unique qualities should be recognized and protected. The majority of these values support the area's regional ecological importance and rich biodiversity. The supplemental values presented below are not intended to be exhaustive, rather a summarization of some of the widely known significant values for which basic data was available to complement our on-the-ground inventory.

The Crown Point unit is completely encompassed in the greater 13,734 acre Beaver Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This unit also partially contains a Potential Conservation Area (PCA) along its eastern border, Blue Mountain to Phantom Canyon, for high biodiversity significance (B3), identified by the [Colorado Natural Heritage Program's \(CNHP\)](#). This Blue Mountain to Phantom Canyon PCA consists of multiple localized sites, with one located in Little Fountain Creek just north of the Little Fountain Creek unit and another contained almost completely within the Turkey Creek unit. These PCAs are recognized for high biodiversity significance (B3) because they support a good occurrence of the globally vulnerable and state critically imperiled bird species, the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*). These sites also support the occurrences of the globally and state vulnerable endangered species, the American Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*). The Mexican spotted owl is also a Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) threatened species, a US Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program's (WCRP) Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) Species of Most Concern, and Partnership in Flight Priority Bird. The American Peregrine Falcon is a CPW species of concern, BLM sensitive, and WCRP's CWCS Species of Most Concern.



The Turkey Creek unit partially supports two more PCAs. The Red Creek Canyon PCA in the southwest unit has high biodiversity significance due to an excellent occurrence of the globally vulnerable riparian natural community, Douglas fir - river birch (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* - *Betula occidentalis*) woodland. The northeast portion of the Turkey Creek unit contains part of the Aiken Canyon PCA for very high biodiversity significance (B2) due to an excellent to good occurrence of the globally imperiled mountain mahogany / needle-and-thread grass community (*Cercocarpus montanus* / *Hesperostipa comata*), an excellent occurrence of the globally vulnerable pinon pine / Scribner's needle-grass community (*Pinus edulis* / *Achnatherum scribneri*), and an excellent occurrence of the globally unranked mesic oak thicket community (*Quercus gambelii* - *Cercocarpus montanus* / *Muhlenbergia montana*). In addition, there is an extant occurrence of a globally imperiled (G2/S2) plant, Fendler's townsend-daisy (*Townsendia fendleri*).

The Little Fountain Creek unit is completely contained in the greater Fountain Creek PCA, recognized for general biodiversity interest (B5) as it supports fair occurrences of the apparently globally secure but locally restricted or vulnerable wintering bird species, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). The bald eagle is also a Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) species of concern, a WCRP's CWCS Species of Most Concern, and Partnership in Flight Priority Bird.

Other significant and valued bird species have also been identified in the area. In addition to the Mexican spotted owl, Peregrine Falcon, and bald eagle, the proposed LWC supports wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) roost sites, overall range, winter range, and winter concentration area.

High habitat and range values for many other animal species have also been identified in the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC. [Rocky Mountain Wild's \(RMW\) Assessment of Biological Impact \(ABI\)](#) documented the following mammals and associated values within the unit: swift fox overall range (*Vulpes velox*); Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis Canadensis*) overall range, summer range, and winter range; black bear (*Ursus americanus*) overall range, summer concentration, and fall concentration; elk (*Cervus Canadensis*) production area, overall range, summer range, winter range, severe winter range, and summer concentration area; mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) overall range, summer range, winter range, severe winter range, and winter concentration area; white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) overall range and concentration area; mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) overall range; Brazilian free tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) overall range; Aberts squirrel (*Sciurus aberti*) overall range; and Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*) overall range.

A few of these species garner additional recognition. The swift fox is listed as a threatened species by CPW as well as Colorado BLM sensitive. The Brazilian free tailed bat is a Colorado state ranked critically imperiled species. Preble's meadow jumping mouse is a CPW threatened species and a WCRP's CWCS Species of Most Concern.

Additionally, the globally imperiled fish species, the greenback cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii stomias*) can be found in the Turkey Creek (and Little Fountain Creek) watersheds.

The Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units support these species as part of a much greater connectivity corridor. In addition to the contiguous 26,000 acre Beaver Creek WSA, there are large cores of similar BLM land with wilderness characteristics to the west in BLM's Gold Belt Byway and



Arkansas Canyonlands regions. The Pike National Forest, part of the greater two million acre plus Pike and San Isabel National Forest, is located north of the proposed LWC units. The Nature Conservancy's 1,621 acre Aiken Canyon Preserve is located to the southeast, preserved "for a mosaic of habitat types – including shrublands, tallgrass prairie meadows, pinyon juniper woodlands and mixed coniferous woodlands" – similar ecosystems to the proposed LWC and contiguous WSA. These core areas, including the proposed LWC units, not only present a vast corridor for species of the mountains and foothills but also provide critical linkage for the flora and fauna of the diverse western great plains to the east and the Upper Sonoran zone to the south.

There are also historical structures, buildings, and sites within the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units, as referenced in the previous section. Waypoint 7 views historic saw mill ruins and historic collapsed building structures in the (upper) Turkey Creek unit, from a 1997 hike with Pikes Peak Group Sierra Club and BLM staff. These historical features offer supplemental value, further enhancing the wilderness characteristics of the proposed units.

The BLM also attributes supplemental value to the two waterfalls found within the Turkey Creek unit. As referenced in the naturalness section, Waypoint 4 views the West Turkey Creek Falls in this unit.

The 2,800 acre proposed wilderness is noteworthy for its disparate geological features. The BLM makes note of the unique geological ridge that makes up the Little Fountain Creek unit. All three units are from the Early Proterozoic Age with primary rock types of granite and granodiorite. The southern half of the Turkey Creek unit is from the Middle Proterozoic Age with the same rock types. The BLM notes in their Turkey Creek report that much of the base rock observed in this area is granite. There is also a section in the Turkey Creek unit that extends from the southwest into the central unit that has rock types consistent with biotite gneiss and schist from the Early Proterozoic Age. The above geological data was obtained from the [United States Geological Survey's \(USGS\) Mineral Resources](#) on-line spatial data, selected for Colorado's geology.

Summary Conclusion

Based on Wild Connections' inventory and review of BLM's inventory reports, the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC qualifies as Land with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) in accordance with BLM's Manual 6310. These three units are contiguous to BLM's Beaver Creek WSA, comprising over 2,800 contiguous roadless acres, which expands the overall Beaver Creek wilderness core area. Given the contiguity of the units, lack of significant human impacts, disparate topography, diverse ecosystems, and abundant wildlife, the Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC offers outstanding wilderness characteristics - including apparent naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.

The boundaries and wilderness characteristics identified by the BLM generally align with Wild Connection's inventory. While much of the proposed LWC consists of untrammelled wilderness, human impacts were found. As referenced – former roads, old selective timber harvesting, and historical buildings, structures, and sites – make up the human impacts within the units.



Nevertheless these are minor human impacts, consistent with BLM Manual 6310, as the natural integrity and the apparent naturalness of the proposed LWC units in total are not compromised.

Wild Connections' inventory has documented the necessary boundaries as well as the wilderness characteristics within the unit. This overview provides new information, primarily in the form of supplemental values, documenting that the approximately 2,800 acre Beaver Creek WSA East Contiguous Units proposed LWC meets wilderness criteria. This area garners Lands with Wilderness Characteristic status and its wilderness values should be protected and preserved. It is imperative that the BLM recognize and protect these values in their land management decisions, so that these unique and abundant wilderness qualities are sustained.

Beaver Creek East WSA Contiguous Units Proposed LWC Waypoints

The following photographs correspond with the numbered Waypoints in the above Beaver Creek East Contiguous Units proposed LWC report. Note that these Waypoints are not located on the above map due to the lack of geo-data. They are all located in the Turkey Creek unit (COF-020-009).



Beaver Creek East Contiguous Units (4)
View of West Turkey Creek Falls
(p. 8,11)



Beaver Creek East Contiguous Units (5)
View of diverse ecosystems in the
Turkey Creek unit (p. 8)



Beaver Creek East Contiguous Units (6)
Excellent opportunity for hiking in the Turkey Creek unit (p. 9)



Beaver Creek East Contiguous Units (7)
Historic saw mill ruins and building structures in the Turkey Creek unit (p. 11)