

North Escalante Canyons

Findings

INVENTORY UNIT ACRES		
Federal	State	Total
With Wilderness Characteristics		
19,700	6,300	26,000 (96%)
Without Wilderness Characteristics		
1,220	10	1,230 (4%)
Inventory Unit Total		
20,920	6,310	27,230
Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics		
North Escalante Canyons/The Gulch ISA (UT-060-054 & UT-060-67)		119,752
Glen Canyon National Recreation Area		

The eleven North Escalante Canyons inventory units surround the North Escalante Canyons/The Gulch Instant Study Area (ISA). Most of the inventory units (26,000 acres) have wilderness characteristics. Several of the units contain evidence of mineral exploration, range developments, and vehicle ways, but these imprints are largely inconspicuous or are being reclaimed by nature. The wilderness characteristics of these eleven units is enhanced by the contiguous ISA. They contain canyons, benches, and tributaries that are all geological and ecological components of the central Escalante River Canyon. These landscape features unite and seamlessly blend with the lands proposed for wilderness within the contiguous ISA and the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA).

Although cherry-stemmed roads and boundary adjustments exclude most significant human imprints, minor portions of the area (1,230 acres) do lack wilderness characteristics because of noticeable human developments such as communication sites and range developments. Several roads to range facilities have been cherry-stemmed from Unit 8. Other range-related features are inconspicuous and have little influence on the unit's natural appearance.

Unit Description

The North Escalante Canyons inventory units are located in eastern Garfield County northeast, east, and southeast of Escalante. All eleven units lie entirely within BLM's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The units encompass a variety of terrain, ranging from benchlands to the spectacular scenery of Wingate Formation escarpments. The predominant vegetation type covering the rough hills, steep-sided buttes, and benches is piñon and juniper woodland, while sagebrush and shrub are found in the

lower elevation valleys. The units' washes and drainages form a linked network, providing a variety of routes to and from the Escalante River. Units 5, 8, 9, and 11 contain intrinsic parts of this pattern. Although the Escalante River and several other canyons are probably the major objectives of current backpacking use, the benches, flats, and sandstone escarpments in the units are also pathways and destinations.

Wilderness Characteristics

Naturalness

Most of the North Escalante Canyons inventory units retain their natural character. Some surface-disturbing activity has occurred in the past, but these human impacts are substantially unnoticeable and are being reclaimed naturally. Most of the identified impacts are single-pass bulldozer routes associated with mineral exploration activities conducted some 30-40 years ago; these are rapidly being reclaimed because of non-use and natural erosion processes. For example, part of an airstrip within Unit 3 created during the mineral exploration boom is now completely revegetated and unnoticeable to all but the most determined and knowledgeable observer. Several grazing stock ponds, vehicle ways, and abandoned drill pads remain within the natural portion of the units, but these too are substantially unnoticeable.

Outstanding Opportunities

Solitude

The inventory units are natural extensions of the North Escalante Canyons/The Gulch ISA and the Glen Canyon NRA, lands that possess outstanding solitude opportunities. In conjunction with the opportunities provided by The Gulch and the Escalante River canyon complexes, opportunities for solitude provided by the inventory units are also outstanding. Moreover, Units 5 and 8 clearly provide some outstanding opportunities for solitude on their own, given their diverse landscapes, vegetative screening, and size. The lands on top of the benches within Units 1, 3, and 4 are lonely and remote; these hidden benchlands are unseen both from the ISA and from the boundary roads below.

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The units are extensions of wild lands within the Glen Canyon NRA and the North Escalante Canyons/The Gulch ISA, lands that possess outstanding primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

The primitive recreation opportunities in the inventory units are outstanding when associated with the nationally celebrated primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities found in the ISA and the NRA. Each inventory unit offers similar opportunities for backpacking, day hiking, horseback riding, camping, sightseeing, and photography. In addition, the areas have outstanding opportunities for the study of geological, historical, and archaeological features.

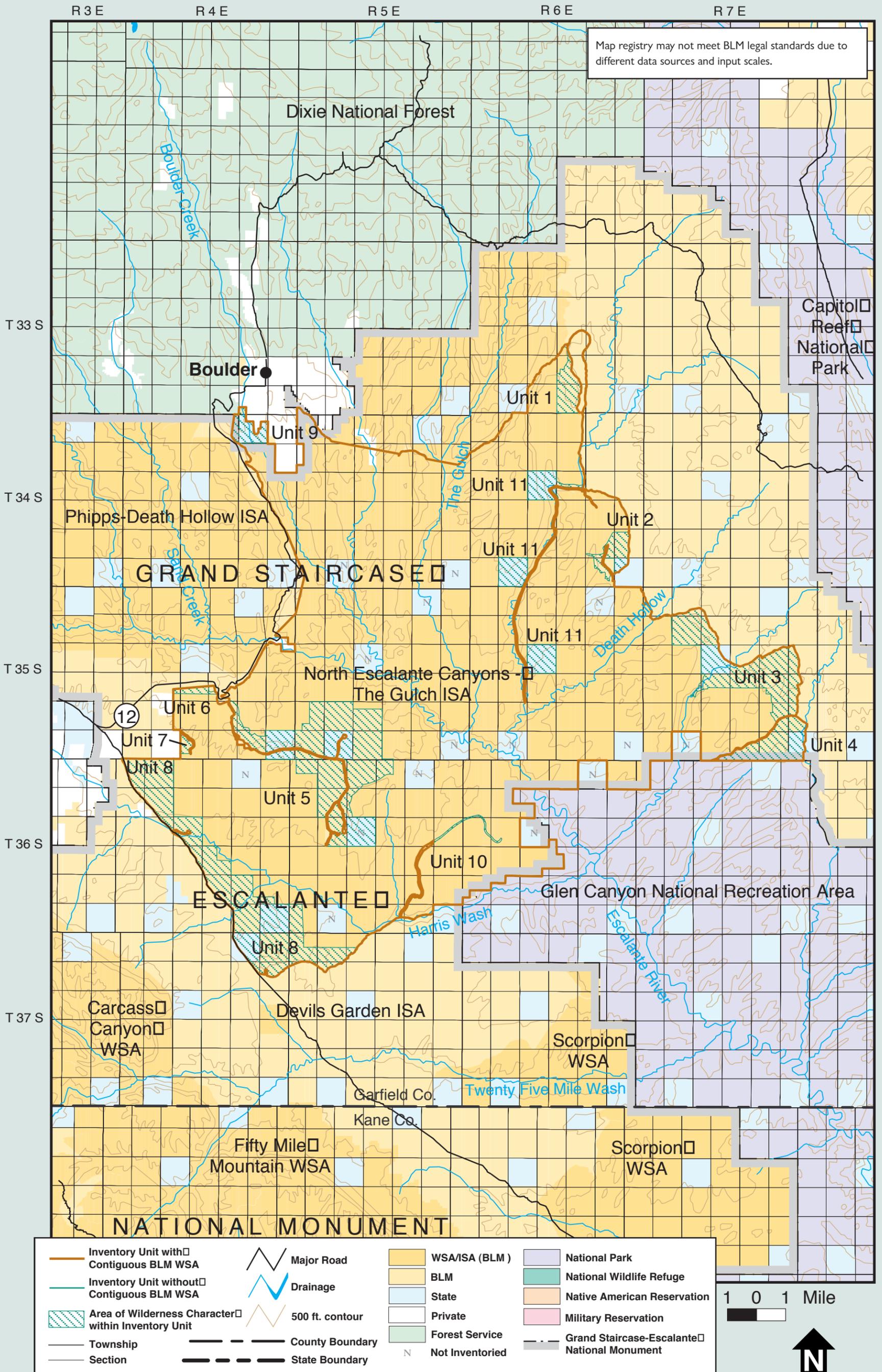
Spectacular views of the sandstone Wingate Formation outcrops of the Wolverine Bench, the Circle Cliffs, and Silver Falls Bench can be experienced in Units 1, 2, 3, and 4. People hiking up to the bench tops are rewarded with even more magnificent views of the Studhorse Peaks, Capitol Reef National Park's Waterpocket Fold, and the Circle Cliffs. Hikes to the Escalante River area are available from Units 5, 8, and 9. Examples include the route from Big Spencer Flat to the Escalante River and another from Little Spencer Flat to Phipps Wash, both in Unit 5. Hiking in scenic Wolverine Canyon within Unit 11 is especially dramatic. The many washes and drainages form a linked trail net, providing a choice of hikes to and from the river.

Supplemental Values

The inventory units possess scenic, geological, and ecological values. Spectacular scenic views of the Circle Cliffs, Capitol Reef National Park, and North Escalante Canyons can be enjoyed by those willing to hike to the top of Silver Falls Bench, or the other mesas in Units 1, 2, 3, and 4. These four units also contain the Wingate, Chinle, and Moenkopi landforms. The Chinle formation contains petrified wood deposits, primarily in Units 1 and 3.

Splendid scenic landscapes are found in Units 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11. Units 1, 2, 3, and 4 contain dramatic cliff lines, escarpments, and buttes making up the west and south sides of the Circle Cliffs area. Unit 9 contains Dry Hollow, while Unit 11 contains part of Wolverine Creek and Wolverine Bench. Units 5, 6, 7, and 8 may have archaeological sites. The historic Old Sheffield Road in Unit 5 and the Hole-in-the-Rock Road in portions of Unit 8 have National Register nomination status.

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SOUTH CENTRAL REGION—North Escalante Canyons