

# Shafer Canyon

## Findings

| INVENTORY UNIT ACRES                              |       |             |
|---|-------|-------------|
| Federal   | State | Total       |
| <b>With Wilderness Characteristics</b>            |       |             |
| 1,900   | 0     | 1,900 (56%) |
| <b>Without Wilderness Characteristics</b>         |       |             |
| 1,200   | 300   | 1,500 (44%) |
| <b>Inventory Unit Total</b>                       |       |             |
| 3,100   | 300   | 3,400       |
| <b>Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics</b> |       |             |
| Canyonlands National Park-Shafer Canyon Unit      |       | 2,320       |

Part of BLM's Shafer Canyon inventory unit (1,900 acres) has wilderness characteristics in conjunction with the contiguous Shafer Canyon Unit of Canyonlands National Park, which has been administratively endorsed for wilderness by the National Park Service (NPS). The BLM inventory unit includes the red-rock cliffs immediately below Dead Horse Point State Park.

A total of 1,500 acres lacks wilderness characteristics because of impacts upon naturalness from uranium mining, oil and gas exploration, and other activities.

## Unit Description

The Shafer Canyon inventory unit is located along the border of San Juan and Grand Counties about 15 air miles southwest of Moab (1 hour by vehicle). Most of the unit's northern boundary is adjacent to Dead Horse Point State Park. On its western side, in the East Fork of Shafer Canyon, the unit is contiguous with the Shafer Canyon Unit of Canyonlands National Park. The eastern portion of the

inventory unit is basin-like and includes the lower portions of the cliffs and talus slopes below Dead Horse Point State Park, as well as a larger open area of small ravines and gently sloping flats between the talus slopes and the Potash boundary road. The south-central portion of the unit is almost all cliffs and talus slopes between the Dead Horse Point State Park boundary and the Potash road. Overall, the unit is characterized by reddish bare-rock surfaces on the cliffs and talus slopes, with sparse, low-growing vegetation on the flatter areas. Utah junipers are widely scattered in protected areas.

The unit is highly visible as the immediate foreground view from Dead Horse Point State Park. The Potash boundary road provides access to the Shafer and White Rim trails in Canyonlands National Park and is frequently used by commercial four-wheel drive tour operators, drivers of off-highway vehicles, and mountain bikers. Several areas along the south-central part of the unit are used as vehicle-accessible campsites. Desert bighorn sheep, known to occupy the unit, are hunted when permits are available. The area is currently leased for livestock grazing, and there is evidence of past uranium exploration and oil and gas drilling in portions of the unit.

## Wilderness Characteristics

### Naturalness

Most of the western portion of the unit is natural, with the exception of the disturbed and still noticeable uranium exploration area in the northwestern corner of the East Fork of Shafer Canyon. The eastern part of the area has lost its natural character, primarily as a result of past uranium

mining and oil and gas exploration, as well as its proximity to potash mining operations.

## Outstanding Opportunities

### Solitude

Most of the western portion of the unit has outstanding opportunities for solitude in conjunction with the contiguous Shafer Canyon Unit in Canyonlands National Park, which has been endorsed by the NPS for wilderness designation.

### Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

A portion of the unit provides outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation when considered in conjunction with the contiguous Shafer Canyon Unit of Canyonlands National Park, which has been endorsed by the NPS for wilderness designation. In the natural part of the western portion of the unit, there are opportunities for hiking, viewing unusual rock formations, and primitive camping in the East Fork of Shafer Canyon. The rest of the natural portion is either all cliff and talus slope or immediately adjacent to the well-traveled Potash road. Desert bighorn sheep are hunted in the unit when permits are available.

## Supplemental Values

The talus slopes and red-rock cliffs of the unit are highly visible scenic areas from Dead Horse Point State Park and the Potash boundary road. The unit contains both desert bighorn sheep and peregrine falcon populations. Petrified wood associated with the Chinle formation is also found in the area.

SHAHER CANYON—The highly scenic sandstone cliffs north of the Shafer Trail are just one of the area's outstanding features.



Jerry Sintz

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