

Mancos Mesa

Findings

INVENTORY UNIT ACRES		
Federal	State	Total
With Wilderness Characteristics		
62,600	9,000	71,600 (86%)
Without Wilderness Characteristics		
11,300	300	11,600 (14%)
Inventory Unit Total		
73,900	9,300	83,200
Contiguous Area-Wilderness Characteristics		
Mancos Mesa WSA (UT-060-181)		51,440

About 71,600 acres of the Mancos Mesa inventory unit have wilderness characteristics. The unit retains its generally natural appearance with the exception of about 11,600 acres below the eastern rim of the mesa, which lack wilderness characteristics because of disturbance from old uranium exploration activities. The bladed scars have eroded, making them mostly impassable, but they are still substantially noticeable. The remainder of the unit, including the large mesa dissected by spectacular Moqui and Steer Pasture Canyons, provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Unit Description

The Mancos Mesa inventory unit is located in southwestern San Juan County about 50 miles west of Blanding. It is contiguous to BLM's Mancos Mesa Wilderness Study Area (WSA) as well as the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA). The terrain consists of a westward-sloping mesa top angling down towards Lake Powell. Elevations transition from over 6,700 feet in the eastern portion of the unit to less than 4,500 feet in its western portion. The mesa is dissected east to west by Moqui Canyon, a major 20-mile canyon with sheer walls rising over 600 feet. Areas of concentrated wind-blown sand have created several steep sliding sand areas in Moqui Canyon. Six miles of Steer Pasture Canyon add to the broken terrain in the southeast portion of the mesa. The mesa is primarily Navajo Sandstone, with Wingate Sandstone in the inner canyons. The mesa top terminates in the east and southeast at a rim defined by an 800-foot sheer cliff. Beneath the rim are highly eroded badlands. Vegetation consists of blackbrush, piñon, juniper, Mormon tea, buffaloberry, cacti, yucca, Indian ricegrass, and other sparse perennial and annual grasses. Cottonwood trees and riparian vegetation can be found adjacent to springs and in the bottoms of major canyons.

Human uses have included grazing, mineral exploration, and recreation. Most mineral exploration was for uranium around 1979. Recreational use includes hiking, camping, hunting, exploring for cultural sites, and driving off-highway vehicles.

Wilderness Characteristics

Naturalness

The unit generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature and retains its natural character, with the exception of the area below the eastern rim. This narrow area between the rim and the boundary road is heavily impacted by old uranium exploration scars, consisting of bladed routes to numerous old drill holes. These scars have eroded severely, making them mostly impassable, but they are still visible and are substantially noticeable. Other human impacts include a few substantially unnoticeable vehicle ways, fences, small stock ponds, and old faint seismic lines. These impacts are widely scattered and are all well screened by the unit's broken terrain and vegetation.

Outstanding Opportunities

Solitude

The unit provides outstanding opportunities for solitude. The varied topography, including over 20 miles of Moqui Canyon and its tributaries and 6 miles of Steer Pasture Canyon, provide abundant opportunities to find isolation in a secluded

place. The unit's large size, its blocked configuration, and the vegetative screening provided by the piñons and junipers, as well as the cottonwoods in the bottom of Steer Pasture Canyon, also contribute to the unit's outstanding opportunities for solitude.

Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The rugged nature of the terrain, excellent geologic scenery, and unique landforms provide truly outstanding opportunities for dispersed, undeveloped recreation. There are opportunities for hiking, backpacking, camping, sightseeing, photography, nature study, and exploring and viewing cultural resources. The view from the top of the mesa over the sheer-walled cliff is very impressive. The badlands between the cliff and boundary roads provide a highly scenic, colorful, and challenging area for hiking, exploring, and photography. The two major canyons (Moqui and Steer Pasture) also provide excellent hiking opportunities in a remote, rugged setting.

Supplemental Values

The scenic quality of the unit is exceptional. Scenic highlights include Moqui and Steer Pasture canyons, views from the top of the mesa cliff, and the Red House Cliff badlands below the southern cliff.

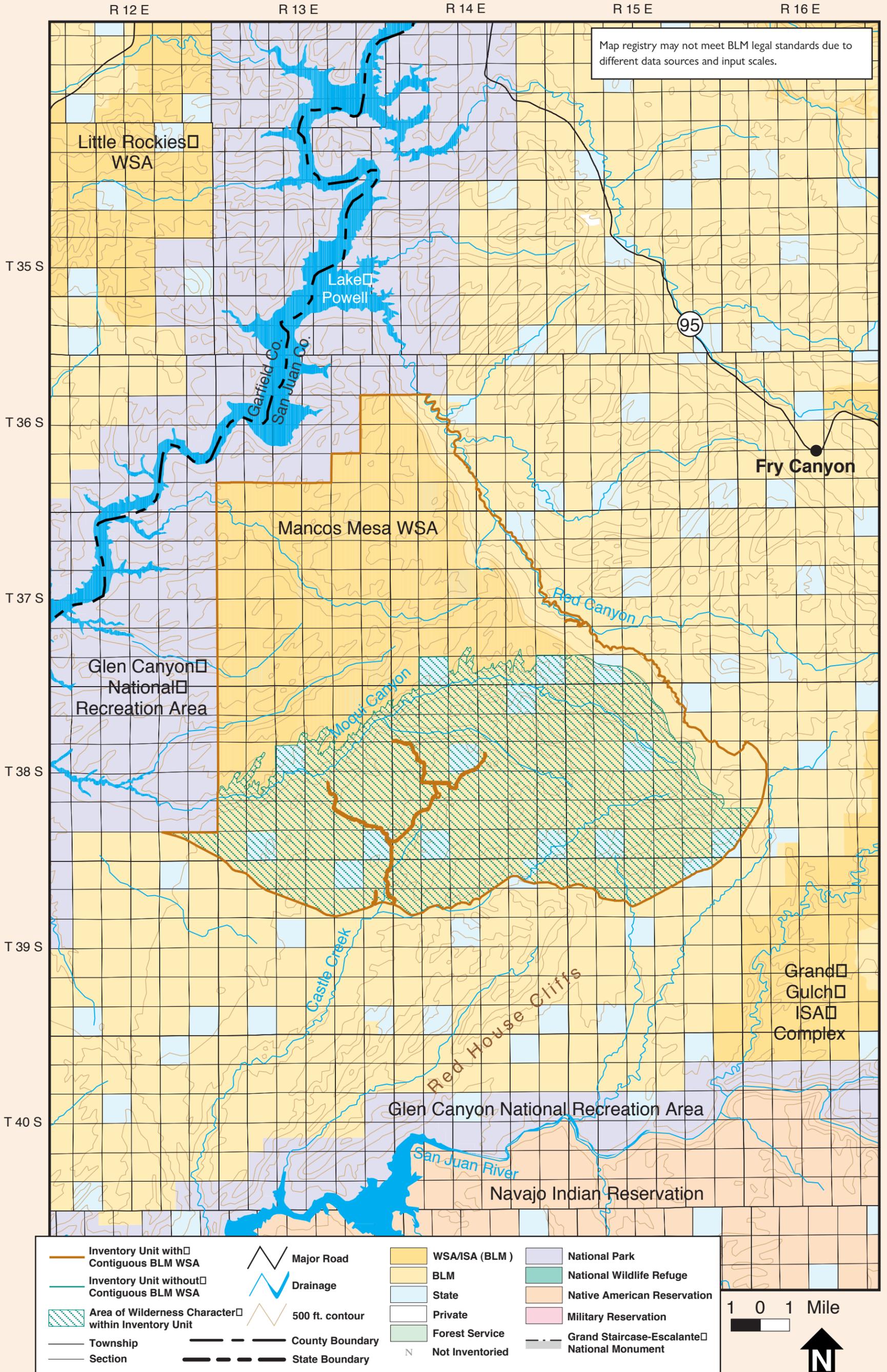
The area provides desert bighorn sheep habitat, although numbers are presently low. Archaeological values are thought to be significant, based upon surveys within contiguous NRA lands. During the field evaluation for this report, several ruins and petroglyphs, were observed.

MANCOS MESA—Moqui Canyon is just one of the scenic highlights that adds to the long list of exceptional supplemental wilderness values for this inventory unit.



Eric Finstick

Mancos Mesa



SOUTHEAST REGION—Mancos Mesa