**Cibola National Forest Mountain Ranger Districts**

***Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form***

The Cibola National Forest plan revision interdisciplinary team developed draft questions and measures to address each of the five wilderness characteristic criteria listed in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70- Wilderness. These are to be used to evaluate the Phase 2 Inventory areas for wilderness characteristics, and are outlined below.

Please use this form to comment on individual areas from the Phase 2 Inventory maps. Please use one form for each individual identification area, and note its identification number and location. If your comment is not addressed in the “considerations” column of each criterion, please include additional information in the “other” narrative section.

You can also comment using the Talking Points Collaborative Mapping Tool available at this website: <https://my.usgs.gov/ppgis/studio/launch/39829>. Please consider the evaluation criteria below when inputting comments on the online mapping tool.

**Inventory Identification Number/Location:**

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| D5-ADJ5 (Sandia Ranger District, East Side of Sandias, South of Ski Area) |

**Criterion 1- Apparent naturalness: The degree to which an area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.**

**Question 1a. What is the composition of plant and animal communities?** The purpose of this question is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural**.**

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| * **Considerations**
 | **Narrative** |
| * How are concentrations of invasive plants and/or animals distributed across the land?
 | **Along NM-536 in the defined area there are significant concentrations of Siberian elm. Tumbleweed or Russian thistle, perennial pepperweed, Scotch thistle, and some Russian olive are also evident in some areas near NM-536.** |
| * Other (Include any additional information related to the question above)
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**Question 1b. What is the extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention?**

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| Considerations | Narrative |
| Extent that current vegetation species composition and structure has changed from historical conditions (pre-EuroAmerican settlement).[[1]](#footnote-1) | **This region is overgrown with higher than natural tree density due to years of fires suppression. Fire risk is increased because of this historical land management practice. The presence of invasive vegetation species has accompanied the increased density of visitors to the area in recent history.** |
| Vegetation restoration treatments (e.g. thinning) or timber harvest areas and distribution across the land (broadly dispersed vs. concentrated). This also includes associated railroad beds, skid trails, and logging decks of timber harvest areas.  | **The canyon bottoms in the area have experienced wood-cutting or timber harvesting, as evidenced by many ax-cut stumps and some areas were thinned during the 1990s and earlier during the rerouting of NM-536. The canyon bottoms served as wagon roads and later as truck access for these activities.**  |
| Does the forest appear natural (consider elements, including but not limited to, vegetation, wildlife, soil, air, etc.)?  | **Sections of the old road to the Crest are still present in addition to the tracks in the canyon bottoms. Recent and older detritus is evident along these access features. There are also old cabin sites on cleared and leveled areas with associated water pipes, drainage tile, and debris, to include an old outhouse. Fire rings are evident in areas where illegal camping is practiced.**  |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) | **The Northeast border of this area abuts NM-536 which detracts from the naturalness of the area. A buffer zone is needed to contain invasive species, manage wild fire risks, and filter human debris in the form of beer cans, clothing, car parts from accidents, and in some cases abandoned cars pushed off the highway.**  |

##### **Question 1c. What is the extent to which improvements[[2]](#footnote-2) included in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness?**

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| Considerations |  Narrative |
| Appearance of airstrips, heliports, and/or landing zones. Include size of area and description of disturbance (soils, vegetation). | **Along NM-536, evidence of disturbance for old roads, water catchments, wagon roads, and cabin sites is very evident.**  |
| Appearance and density of maintenance level 1 roads[[3]](#footnote-3) measured by road length per sq. mile, and spatial distribution (broadly interspersed vs. concentrated), occurrence of stream crossings, and proximity to streams channels. | **All the old roads and wagon trails are down in the canyons adjacent to ephemeral streams.** |
| Appearance and density of unauthorized routes (includes decommissioned, temporary, and user created routes per sq. mile) and distribution (broadly dispersed vs. concentrated, occurrence of stream crossings, and proximity to streams channels. | **There are significant numbers of user-created routes in and around this area, created by hikers, climbers and mountain bikers. Shortcuts from NM-536 to the existing trail network continue to occur because of the proximity to the highway, in many cases crossing ephemeral streams.** |
| Miles of fencing or pipeline per square mile.  | **Evidence of barbed wire fencing to contain grazing animals is evident in a number of locations. Length has not been quantified.** |
| Appearance of areas of mining activity that were not eliminated in the Phase 2 inventory.[[4]](#footnote-4) Include size of area and description of disturbance (soils, vegetation) | **A quarry and several old mineral exploration sites including a 20-foot deep excavation are present in the area, evidence of early road construction and prospecting.** |
| Appearance of range or wildlife improvements that were not eliminated in the Phase 2 inventory. Include size of area and description of disturbance (soils, vegetation). | **A wildlife watering station is present in the area and periodically serviced by USFS vehicles on an old access road.** |
| Appearance of watershed treatment areas (such as contouring, diking, channeling) that were not eliminated in the Phase 2 inventory. Include size of area and description of disturbance (soils, vegetation). | **Along some of the old tracks in the canyon bottoms there is evidence of damming of surface water run-off, presumably for human or domestic animal use.** |
| Extent to which the improvements cause the appearance to depart from apparent naturalness to the area as a whole (Consider improvements listed above as well as water tanks, aviation crash locations, wreckage sites, locations of cemeteries or gravesites, bombing or ordinance locations, and viewshed analysis for proposed developments) | **The historical evidence of human intrusion in the area reflect efforts to modify the natural state of the area which are interesting to observe but detract from the untrammeled naturalness of a suitable wilderness candidate area.**  |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Criterion 2- Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation: the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.**

Note: The word “or” means that an area only has to possess one or the other. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.

**Question 2a.** **Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor’s opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area.**

Note: Factors to consider may include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area.

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |
| Describe the general topography of the area in context of sight, sound, and screening. Can a traveler see or hear evidence of civilization from within the area? Is the area quiet and free from motorized noise? | **The affected trails in this area, Faulty, Trail 195, Sulphur, Trail 281, Bill Spring, Trail 196, and Oso Corridor, Trail 265, are very close to NM-536. The proximity of the highway, the primary access for recreational areas on the East side of the Sandias, can experience considerable traffic and the sound of motorcycles, trucks, and other vehicles can be heard throughout the area, echoing through the canyons. Therefore, accessing the trails listed above would not provide opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation and would not provide a wilderness experience.** |
| Proximity to area of recreation developments and high use areas, private lands and associated infrastructure, non- Forest Service roads, and/or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. Consider effects of the area’s adjacent, cherry-stemmed roads.[[5]](#footnote-5)  | **The area’s proximity to private lands, NM-536, the Sandia Peak Ski Area, and forest picnic sites ensure the affected trails experience high-use in all seasons, impacting opportunities for solitude. More justification for a buffer zone between wilderness and human habitation.** |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Question 2b. Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor’s ability to feel a part of nature.**

Note: Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature. This question also relates to miles of fence information from Criterion 1, Question 1c, due to the potential for miles of fence to restrict unconfined recreation opportunities.

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Describe the types of primitive recreation activities in the area.  | **Few primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities are suitable in the area. There are no surface water features beyond a few ephemeral streams. Camping is not allowed in the Sandias due to perennial fire concerns. Hunting is restricted because of the proximity to inhabited areas and numerous visitors. Visitors are restricted to the existing trail network to minimize excessive spider-webbing of trails.**  |

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| Percent of area with a primitive recreation opportunity spectrum class. [[6]](#footnote-6) |  |

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| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Criterion 3- Stand-alone area of less than 5,000 acres that is not adjacent to existing wilderness or administratively recommended wilderness: evaluate how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.**

There are no stand-alone areas less than 5,000 acres on either the initial inventory or Phase 2 inventory maps. Those who offer such areas for evaluation please identify and describe how it is of sufficient size to make its preservation or use in an unimpaired condition practicable.

**Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities: the degree to which the area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.**

Note: These values are not required to be present in an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist.

**Question 4a. Does the area contain rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems?**

Note: Rare in this context is defined as local or regional.

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Average modeled species richness value from New Mexico Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool. |  |
| Presence of threatened or endangered species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat (from National Heritage database and other data sets as available). |  |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Question 4b. Are there any outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features?**

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Description of any unique geologic features in the area. | **There are no unique geological features in this area considered outstanding.** |
| Presence of outstanding scenic features within the area or percent of area with distinctive scenic attractiveness class.[[7]](#footnote-7) | **This area does not have outstanding scenic features such as overlooks or panoramic views. It is substantially an overly dense forest, significantly affected by pine beetle attacks with the extensive resulting deadfall.** |
| Other (include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Question 4c. Are there historic and cultural resource sites in the area?**

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Presence of structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area. Also consider potential historical railroad beds/berms associated with timber harvest areas from Criterion 1, Question 1b. | **As mentioned in the response to Question 1b, there is evidence of structures from recent history, probably summer or shepherd cabins.** |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

Note: (Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056)).

**Question 4d. Are there any research natural areas?**

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Percent of area that is part of a research natural area. |  |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Question 4e. Are there any high quality water resources or important watershed features?**

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Miles within the area of eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers | **None.** |
| Miles within the area of Outstanding Natural Resource Waters | **None.** |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) |  |

**Criterion 5- Management: the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics.**

**Question 5a. Can the area be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics?**

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| **Considerations** | **Narrative** |

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| Shape and configuration of the area.  | **Proximity to NM-536 would make the area difficult to manage as wilderness. It is long and relatively narrow and better serves as a buffer zone between inhabited areas and the Sandia Mountain Wilderness.** |
| Presence and extent of legally established rights or uses within the area. | **Mountain bikers have extensively used this area for decades. Conversion to wilderness would eliminate legal use by mountain bikers on Oso Corridor, Tree Springs, and parts of Faulty, Sulphur, Bill Spring, and 10k Trails. These trails, in conjunction with the connecting ski area trails, have provided long-established trail-based recreational opportunities for cyclists outside the Sandia Mountain Wilderness. Riders from adjacent private lands, Albuquerque, other parts of NM, and other states have been drawn to this challenging and extensive trail network.**  |
| Presence and extent of any specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics. | **The area is currently designated non-motorized but wheeled transport is allowed.** |
| Presence and extent of non-Federal land in the area  |  |
| Describe management of adjacent lands. | **There is a nearby ski area, managed by Sandia Peak Ski and Tramway.** |
| Describe presence and extent of cultural and traditional uses of the area (e.g. shrines, ceremonial use, etc.) | **There exist a number of unofficial, private memorials away from the trails commemorating passed loved ones.** |
| Presence and extent of wildland urban interface in the area. Include acres if possible.  | **A few miles east of this area are the “East Mountain” residential communities. This area comprises tens of thousands of acres and has about 20,000 residents. The designated area serves as a buffer between the wildland urban interface and the existing Sandia Mountain Wilderness. The proximity of the east mountain inhabitants to the area has engendered a very strong community connectivity to the trail system.** |
| Describe any other management activities or restrictions within in the area (e.g. upcoming management decisions). |  |
| Describe existence and extent of motorized uses within the area (trails, routes, special activities). | **There is no motorized access allowed on the area’s trail network.** |
| Presence and extent of special use permits and authorizations within the area. |  |
| Presence and extent of “cherry stemmed”[[8]](#footnote-8) roads or other linear features. |  |
| Other (Include any additional information related to the question above) | **A few miles east of this region is the East Mountains residential area. The area in question is overgrown due to years of fires suppression; consequently it is at risk of catastrophic fires. Conversion to wilderness will adversely affect fire-fighting in the region, affect travel on NM-536, and could result in loss of life and property in the East Mountains.** |

1. Species composition is the number and proportion of species present. Structure refers to the size, density, and arrangement of plants. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The use of the term “improvements” in this context is taken from the Forest Service Handbook, and means the evidence of past human activities in the area as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a glossary of road terminology, please see the *Cibola National Forest Mountain Ranger Districts Assessment Report, Vol, II*, page 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Appendix A for Substantially Noticeable criteria used in Phase 2 inventory, and Appendix B for results from the Phase 2 Inventory. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The term “cherry stemmed” road refers to a road removed from the inventory using the 30 meter (98.4 feet) road buffer screening from the Phase 1 Inventory process. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Forest Service’s Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) provides a framework which allows administration to manage and users to enjoy a variety of recreation environments. ROS is not a land classification system; it is a management objective, a way of describing and providing a variety of recreation opportunities. A “primitive” ROS class is one typically associated with a largely unmodified environment, a very high probability of solitude, self-reliance, little evidence of people, and no motorized use is permitted. The ROS Inventory Existing Condition maps have been completed for the Forest, and the existing condition of primitive ROS classes is being used as a measure. These maps are only existing condition, and are subject to change based on desired recreation opportunity spectrum classes developed during the interdisciplinary process of Forest Plan Revision. Please refer to the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Handbook and Primer for more information: <http://www.fs.fed.us/cdt/carrying_capacity/rosfieldguide/ros_primer_and_field_guide.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Forest Service’s Scenery Management System (SMS) provides the framework to effectively inventory, assess, and manage scenic resources. Scenic Attractiveness is a component of the SMS inventory, and is the primary indicator of the intrinsic scenic beauty based on commonly held perceptions of preferred scenery and landscape features. The three scenic attractiveness classes are: Class A-distinctive; Class B-typical; Class C-indistinctive. To determine these classes, the landscape elements of landform, vegetation, rocks, cultural features and water features are mapped using General Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey (GTES) information for the Forest, with District personnel input on areas of the Forest that were not picked up at the GTES scale. The Scenic Attractiveness map is based largely on existing landscape features. Refer to the Forest Service Scenery Management Handbook for more information: <http://www.fs.fed.us/cdt/carrying_capacity/landscape_aesthetics_handbook_701_no_append.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The term “cherry stemmed” road refers to a road removed from the inventory using the 30 meter (98.4 feet) road buffer screening from the Phase I Inventory process. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)