**Cibola National Mt. Taylor Mountain Ranger District**

*Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser

Phone: 505-306-5212

Email: vseiser@unm.edu

Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: **D2\_5K6** Zuni Mountain Division, Mt. Taylor RD including **Little Water Canyon**

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

This section of the Zuni Mountains has a free-flowing stream with associated riparian habitat, a rare year-round water feature in this desert environment. Riparian area includes moisture loving plant and animal species not found in the surrounding drier environment. Serves as a water source for desert species as well. Stream banks are easily trampled and need special protection. Area is highly scenic and undeveloped.

 *Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

Riparian area includes moisture loving plant and animal species not found in the surrounding drier environment.

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

Report of timber cutting along northern edge, but significant regeneration has restored natural appearance.

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

Cherry-stemmed road enters area from the north. Report of a well at Yellow Spring.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

Area provides excellent opportunity for solitude. Riparian area attracts surrounding wildlife and supports moisture-loving species, providing unusually good opportunity for wildlife viewing and photography. Area is desirable for hiking and horseback riding. Because of fragility of environment, stream banks may need protection from the compaction caused by camping and pasturing of horses.

**Cibola NF Mt. Taylor RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: **D2\_5K6** Zuni Mtn Div. Little Water Canyon page 2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

The area straddles the Continental Divide and is cross-cut with canyons. It is far from the sights and sounds of civilization, with excellent opportunities for solitude. Surrounding region has little development and is low use.

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity?*

Riparian area attracts surrounding wildlife and supports moisture-loving species, providing unusually good opportunity for wildlife viewing and photography. Area is desirable for hiking and horseback riding. Because of fragility of environment, stream banks may need protection from the compaction caused by camping and pasturing of horses.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?*

Not applicable.

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

*Question 4a. Rare plant or animal communities?*

Little Water Canyon has a free-flowing stream with associated riparian habitat, a rare year-round water feature in this desert environment. Riparian area includes moisture loving plant and animal species not found in the surrounding drier environment. Serves as a water source for desert species as well.

*Question 4b. Outstanding landscape features? Unique geologic features? Scenic features?*

The area straddles the Continental Divide and is cross-cut with canyons. High ground has scenic vistas across the Zuni Mountains. The canyons have beautiful walls.

*Question 4c. Historic & cultural resource sites? Structures, relics or RR beds?*

No information on this point.

Question 4e. Water resources or watershed features?

Little Water Canyon has a free-flowing stream with associated riparian habitat, a rare year-round water feature in this desert environment

**Cibola NF Mt. Taylor RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: **D2\_5K6** Zuni Mtn Div. Little Water Canyon page 3

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Criterion 5-Management*

This area may be suitable for designation as a special management area to allow study of isolated riparian plant and animal communities within a desert environment.

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

The area is surrounded by Forest Service land and is far from any urban area. Because of fragility of riparian environment, stream banks may need protection from the compaction caused by camping and pasturing of horses. There is a single cherry-stemmed road entering from the north.

**Cibola National Forest Mt. Taylor Ranger District**

*Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser

Phone: 505-306-5212

Email: vseiser@unm.edu

Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: **D2\_5K8** Gooseberry Springs and upper slopes of Mt. Taylor, Mt. Taylor Division, Mt. Taylor RD

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

This is a beautiful area on the Continental Divide that I have visited periodically over the last 25 years. It encompasses aspen groves and high alpine meadows. It includes the popular Gooseberry Springs trail but is largely undisturbed, with commanding views over distant vistas.

 *Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

It encompasses aspen groves and high alpine meadows, with habitat deer, turkey and other mountain creatures.

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

There are reports of some mining disturbance, but the views all along the major trail Gooseberry Springs are highly natural. The view from the summit to the north does reveal communication towers on La Mosca Peak, which is outside the designated polygon. That aside, the vista in all directions is superb.

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

North, west and south sides of area are bordered by roads. As a whole, the area retains a natural appearance.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation year-round, including hiking, camping, horse travel, wildlife viewing and photography, snow shoeing and x-country skiing.

**Cibola NF Mt. Taylor RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: : **D2\_5K8** Mt. Taylor Div. Gooseberry Springs and upper slopes page 2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

Good opportunity for solitude, especially in the eastern less visited portion of the area. The area is surrounded by National Forest to the north, west and south, , providing a buffer from the only sizable town in that part of the state. Development of surrounding land is minimal. Half of the eastern border is Laguna Pueblo land.

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity?*

Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation year-round, including hiking, camping, horse travel, wildlife viewing and photography, snow shoeing and x-country skiing.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?* Not applicable

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

Mt. Taylor is the highest peak in western New Mexico and an important landmark on the Continental Divide. It is a sky island of alpine meadows and aspen groves, rising out the surrounding desert. It is snow capped in winter, providing snowplay opportunities rare in this part of the state.

*Question 4a. Rare plant or animal communities?*

Alpine meadows.

*Question 4b. Outstanding landscape features? Unique geologic features? Scenic features?*

At 11,000 feet, Mt. Taylor is the highest peak in western New Mexico and an important landmark on the Continental Divide. The view from the top encompasses hundreds of square miles almost devoid of obvious human development.

*Question 4c. Historic & cultural resource sites? Structures, relics or RR beds?*

Traditional Native American practices and sites have been reported. Recent history includes an annual Winter Quadrathelon and a Fall 50K foot race that are important to the local community.

Question 4e. Water resources or watershed features?

A series of natural springs fed by snowpack.

**Cibola NF Mt. Taylor RD** *Evaluation Criteria Definition Matrix and Comment Form*

ID: : **D2\_5K8** Mt. Taylor Div. Gooseberry Springs and upper slopes

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Criterion 5-Management*

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

Area can be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics. It is surrounded by National Forest on three sides and partly bordered by Laguna Pueblo on the fourth side. Agreements with local tribes facilitate traditional use. Special use permits for annual Winter Quadrathelon and a Fall 50K foot race could be grandfathered in. Urban interface is not an issue—the nearest town is miles away. Unauthorized motorized use would need to be monitored—there is still local opposition to the Travel Management Plan.

**Cibola National Forest Mt. Taylor Ranger District**

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Address 11024 Montgomery NE #272, ABQ NM 87111

Inventory ID/Location: **D2\_ADJ3** Northeast Corner of Mt. Taylor Division, Mt. Taylor Ranger District

*Criterion 1-Apparent Naturalness:*

This remote, hard to access area is adjacent to the BLM Chamisa Wilderness Study Area. I was part of a group that attempted to visit it in 2013, approaching from the east on 4-wheel drive BLM roads and hiking toward the National Forest boundary. We ran out of time to complete the journey. From what could be seen from vantage points, this area of the National Forest has the same natural character as the BLM WSA and should be treated as a continuation of it.

 *Question 1a. Composition of plant and animal communities? Invasives?*

*Question 1b. Ecological conditions associated with area w/o human intervention? Change from historical conditions? Vegetation restoration treatments? Natural appearance?*

*Question 1c. Improvements? Landing zones? Roads or unauthorized routes? Fencing or pipelines? Mining activity? Range or wildlife improvements? Watershed treatments? Departure from naturalness of area as a whole?*

I talked with local ranchers about how to access this area from the National Forest side and was told that even though there is a road marked on the map, it is in very poor condition, making the area very difficult to access. The naturalness of the area seems intact.

*Criterion 2-Opportunities for solitude or primitive & unconfined recreation?*

This is a remote, difficult to access, rarely visited area with high potential for solitude. Recreational opportunities include horseback riding and back packing.

*Question 2a. Pervasive impacts on opportunity for solitude? Topography, sights and sounds of civilization? Proximity to recreation developments and high use areas?*

This is a remote, difficult to access, rarely visited area with high potential for solitude. It is far from the sight and sound of civilization. There are no settlements or development anywhere near.

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ID: **D2\_ADJ3** Northeast Corner of Mt. Taylor Division p.2

Date: September 24, 2015 Name: Virginia Seiser vseiser@unm.edu

*Question 2b. Primitive & unconfined recreation opportunity? Yes.*

Recreational opportunities include horseback riding and back packing.

*Criterion 3-Stand-alone area <5,000 acres not adjacent?* Not applicable*.*

*Criterion 4- Unique and outstanding qualities?*

Shares the characteristics of the BLM Chamisa Wilderness Study Area.

Question 4e. Water resources or watershed features?

Several springs marked on map.

*Criterion 5-Management*

The area should be managed under similar guidelines as the adjacent BLM Wilderness Study Area.

*Question 5a. Can area be managed to preserve wilderness characteristics? Configuration? Relevant laws? Non-federal lands? Management of adjacent lands? Cultural & traditional uses? Wildland urban interface? Management activities or restrictions? Motorized uses? Special use permits? Cherry-stemmed roads?*

The area is bordered by BLM Wilderness Study Area to the north, National Forest to the west, and private ranch land to the south. The area appears to be roadless. There is no urban interface nor any nearby settlements.

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