



BLM Citizens' Wilderness Inventory – Ute Mountain Unit Summary

Area Description



The Ute Mountain unit is located about 28 miles north-northwest of Taos, adjacent to the Colorado border in Taos County. It is adjacent to the Rio Grande Gorge inventory unit. The dominant feature in the unit is Ute Mountain itself which rises over 2,600 feet out its surrounding sage plain to top out at 10,093 feet. Ute Mountain makes for a rugged complement to Rio Grande Gorge carved along its western flank. All drainages within the unit lead directly to the Rio Grande or to the Rio Costilla shortly before it carves its canyon down to the Rio Grande. Elevations in the unit range from 7,500 feet to 10,093 feet. Ute Mountain was recently acquired by BLM from a willing seller. It is one of the best public lands acquisitions to occur in many years anywhere in the west.

Wilderness Characteristics

Unit Size:

NMWA's inventory for the Ute Mountain unit identified 12,744 acres of land managed by the BLM as suitable for wilderness designation. There are no private or state trust lands within the unit.

Naturalness:

The Ute Mountain unit appears natural and has maintained its primeval character and influence. Vehicle routes in the unit are unmaintained two-tracks. The BLM has closed most of these, and many have been reclaimed by natural processes. The only developments in the area are fields and watering systems set up by the previous land owner to enhance elk habitat. The unit boundaries exclude these impacts.

Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation:

The Ute Mountain unit provides outstanding opportunities to experience solitude. It is a rugged area that is large enough to allow even a large number of visitors to seek out lonely spots. There are no designated trails, so one will likely be alone even with the popular sport of 'peak bagging'. Ute Mountain will be a draw for this activity because of its height, lonely stature in the plains, and the fact that it is now the highest point on BLM lands in New Mexico. Primitive recreational activities possible in this unit include hiking / 'peak bagging', wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and star gazing.

Supplemental Values:

Scenic – Rising over 2,600 feet from its surrounding plain, the free-standing Ute Mountain is a well known scenic icon of northern New Mexico, though, ironically, many don't know its name. Camping within the unit gives one the stunning backdrop of Ute Mountain while looking down to the Rio Grande Gorge or out to the precipitous rise of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to their terminus in Colorado.

Ecological – Prior to its acquisition by BLM, Ute Mountain was managed as a refuge for elk. The owner installed water sources and planted fields to supply feed, while access by the general public was prohibited. This protective,



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pro-wildlife management no doubt benefitted many creatures beyond the elk. The forested rise of Ute Mountain from the Rio Grande provides a large diversity of habitats. As BLM continues wildlife and botanical inventories, it is expected the area's ecological value will grow.

Geological - The Rio Grande Gorge exists because the Rio Grande River has cut into the thick Servilleta basalt lava flows, which occurred 1.5 to 5 million years ago. These flows lie within the Taos Volcanic Field, the largest volcanic field in the Rio Grande Rift system. Ute Mountain of one several volcanoes that fed lava to this system, but one of the more well known due to its isolation and scenic rise.