



The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defenders Program

End of year report

2022

Protecting Wilderness, Wildlife
and Water in New Mexico



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Introductory Statement

The Dave Foreman Wilderness Defender Program assigned volunteers to wildland areas to collect gps data about the conditions of these places. This report is a general overview of the data collected in our pilot year (2022), with many areas not yet visited.

We launched this program with the intention of cultivating deeper connections with New Mexico's wild landscapes as staff working to protect public lands but also as volunteers wanting to contribute service to the environments that exist in our high desert home. Knowledge, community and accountability is what we hoped to have gained, and we think we made a good start! We still have so much to improve on and we are learning as we go.

We hope this report will shed light on some of the issues on the ground and act as a jumping-off point for further protection and ongoing stewardship of New Mexico's Public Lands.



The Stats

94 total signups
23 Active Defenders that visited assigned areas
8 Wildland Areas
~ 400 Volunteer Hours
11 Written Reports

218 Data Points Collected

- 34 Access Point Features
- 39 Wilderness Characteristic Features
- 9 Road Features
- 43 Ecological Impact Features
- 25 User Trail Laine Features
- 68 Developed/Recreational Features

Key Terms

WSA - Wilderness Study Area - an area with wilderness qualities to be managed as a wilderness area, though it does not have the full designation.

IRA - Inventoried Roadless Area - areas inventoried by Forest Service to have no roads.

FS Recommended Wilderness - An area inventoried and recommended for wilderness designation within US Forest Service Management planning documents.

NM Wild Inventoried Area - Inventoried area with wilderness characters and minimal roads (inventoried by New Mexico Wild)

Access - How a visitor accesses a wildland or Wilderness Study Area

Wilderness Characteristics - A data point used to describe Wilderness qualities. This follows the protocol for conducting a Wilderness Inventory.

Maintenance Level Roads - Roads data defines boundaries and internal roads to be decommissioned during designation process.

- **Maintenance Level 1** - Roads that are closed to public motorized access. There will be signs such as vegetation regrowth on these roads.
- **Maintenance Level 2** - Usually high-clearance or 4WD only. Generally, ML2 roads act as boundaries for our wilderness inventory units.

Ecological Impacts

- **OHV Incursions** - Off-road vehicles trespassing in areas that are not open to public or within boundary lines. Marked by off-road vehicle tire tracks
- **Tree Cutting** - Illegal sawing down of trees by the public or agencies for resource use. Not allowed within National Parks, Wilderness areas and other designated areas. Not the same as prescribed thinning.
- **Graffiti** - Spray paint, pain, pen, or carving into trees, signs, kiosks, facilities, etc.
- **Vandalism** - All other types of destruction of public land.
- **Trash/Dumping** - Larger scale trash dump areas either front country or back country Pick up any small scale trash if you have the means.
- **Riparian Damage** - Habitat damage, erosion, pollution, invasives, etc. within the immediate river ecosystem corridor.
- **Cattle/Cattle Impacts** - Any signs of cattle or ecosystem damage from cattle in areas they potentially should not be in.
- **Bicycle Tracks** - Bicyclists trespassing in areas that do not allow the usage of any kind of vehicle, such as Wilderness Study Areas. Marked by off-road tracks.

User Trails - User trails are created by hikers, horseback riders, bicycles, or stock (cattle, etc.) They are not officially designated trails for the area.

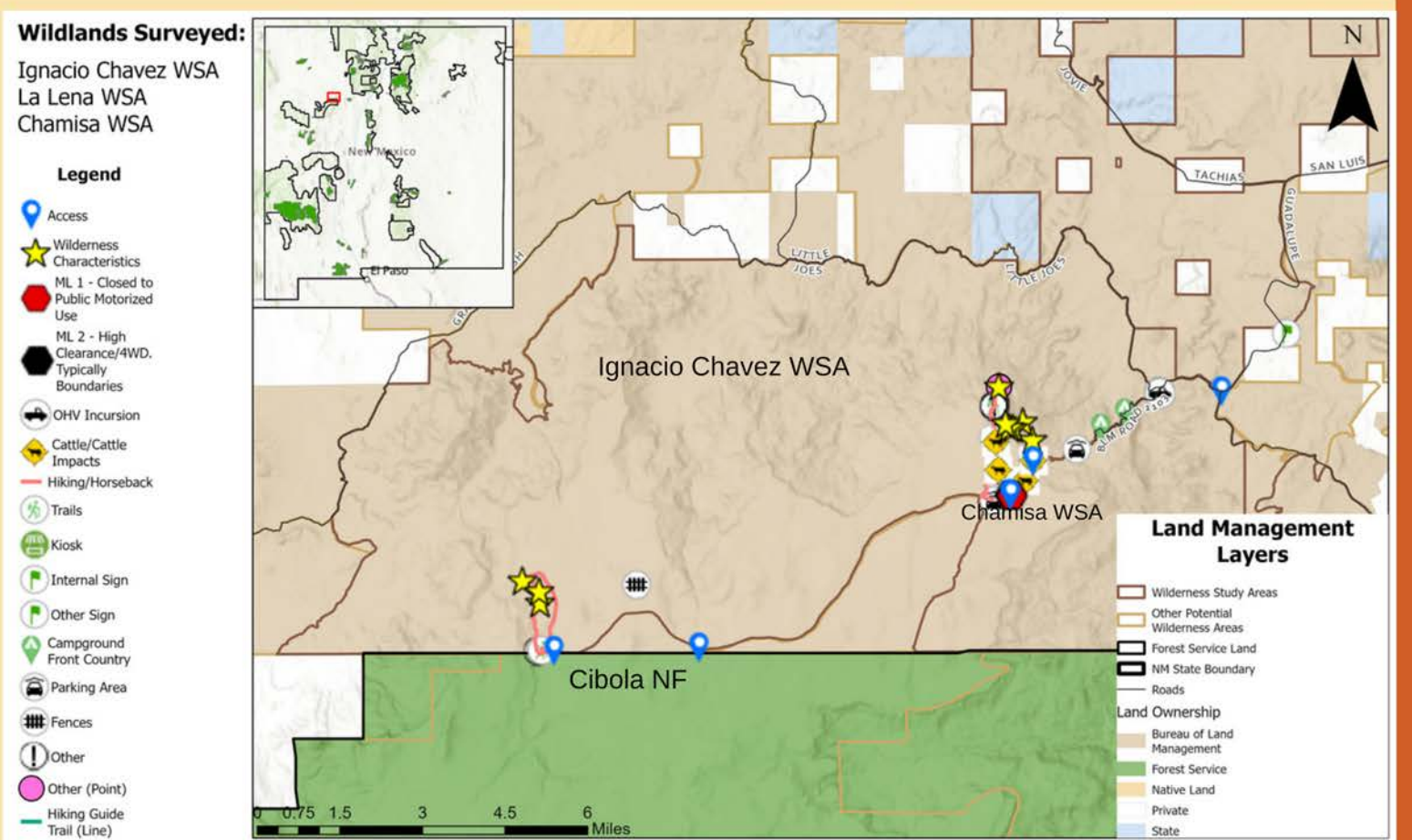
Developments/Recreation - The Developments & Recreation data point is used to collect data on developments and/or recreational facilities present in these areas. This could mean signage, parking areas, buildings, campsites, etc.

Cabezon Complex

Boca Del Oso



Paul Karas



Wilderness Defenders:

Emma Yoder

Mike Osborn

Paul Karas

Will Ribbens

Access Points: 6 points collected

4 access points to Ignacio Chavez WSA were recorded. These include the main access and signs to the Wilderness Study Area as well as multiple access points into the boundary. Access to this Wilderness Study Area is very good. The road is well maintained but post rainstorms should be avoided as mud and Manca shale will get your vehicle stuck. Many of the access points are along BLM Road 1103 a top the mesa. Access points are marked by no trespass gates administered by the



Will Ribbens

BLM. Some of these gates have trail route access around them with some worn trails used by recreators, cattle and wildlife. Some are gates have no clear foot path through.

2 access points were collected at BLM signs symbolizing access to Chamisa WSA and La Lena WSA. Not much more has been collected on access to other WSA's or Inventoried areas in the Cabezon Complex Area.

Wilderness Characteristics: 9 points collected

This area remains predominantly wild. All of the points collected were related to the Ignacio Chavez Wilderness Study Area. Wilderness Defender data showed thriving forest ecosystems, desert wildlife, geological features, panoramic views, water ways and opportunities for solitude are all present here. The biggest threat to Wilderness Character would be the excessive amount of decommissioned roads and cattle trails that braid through the WSA.

Roads: 2 points collected

One of the points describes the *main access road* to Ignacio Chavez WSA. Good condition at the time of recording, spots of mud and erosion along the way. Does get maintained yearly.

Another road point that was collected is supposed to be closed to public access, however it does seem as if folks are using it to access "Ned Tank", a water source that cattle were using. Generally, most of the travel routes within the wilderness are decommissioned level 1 roads. More data needs to be collected on these roads and trails alike.

Ecological Impacts: 6 points collected

4 points related to cattle damage or the presence of cattle in Ignacio Chavez WSA. Cattle are permitted in this area though signs of some overuse are occurring, including long cattle trails and wallowing sites creating bare soil spots.



Paul Karas



Paul Karas

1 point related to mountain bike use within Ignacio Chavez WSA. Tracks were identified from the main access BLM Road 1103 headed north towards Boca del Oso Lookout. This area may see some mountain biking incursions due to the CDT route that intersects Ignacio Chavez WSA west to east.

1 related to vehicle use within the Chamisa WSA. Vehicle tracks were identified allong BLM Road.

1103 to the south, within the boundary for Chamisa WSA. These tracks were located surrounding a used campfire ring and camping spot. No WSA boundary signage was around to deter folks from camping there.



User Trails: 2 user trail lines collected

The trails were recorded within the Ignacio Chavez Wilderness Study Area. As there are no official trails within the Ignacio Chavez Wilderness Study Area, many of the old, decommissioned roads make up the travel routes within the WSA boundary. Beyond those old travel routes within the boundary, other routes have been created from recreational use.

Two were identified this season:

A $\frac{3}{4}$ mile trail from an old internal dirt road out to Boca Del Oso Overlook

A $\frac{1}{2}$ mile route from San Luis Campground headed north towards CDT trail at the east end of the WSA.

Developments/Recreation: 14 points were collected related to developments and recreation in this area.

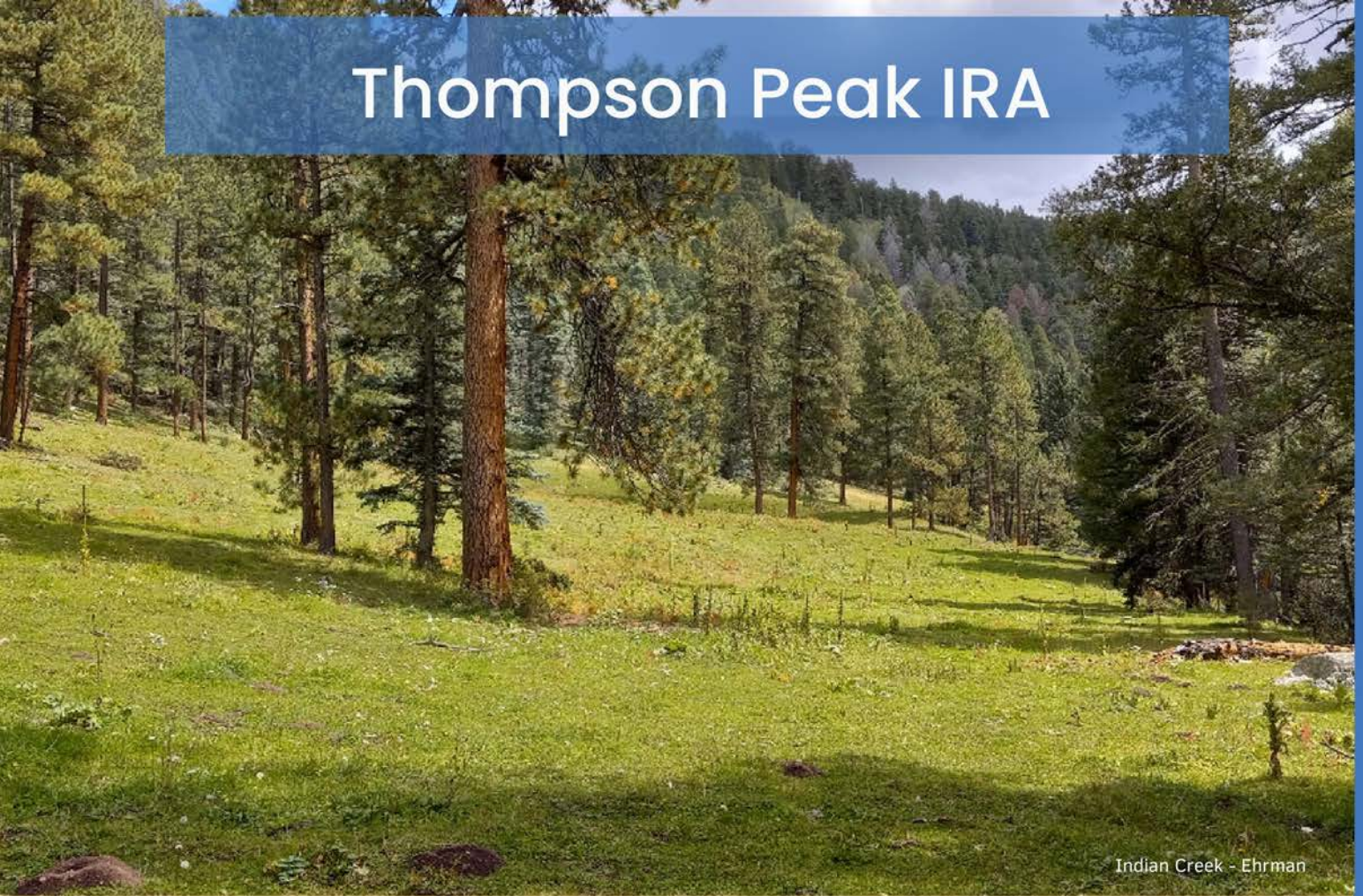
3 points related to parking areas in this complex area. 2 of which were recorded as parking and access for Ignacio Chavez WSA. 1 problem parking lot area was created by vehicles parking off road within the Chamisa WSA. The area is not signed at the Chamisa boundary. Other points such as grazing fence lines, spring infrastructure, trailheads, campfire rings, and other signage were recorded.



Summary and Recommendations:

This complex which is comprised of 5 WSA's and other inventoried wild areas remains mostly wild and undeveloped. Our surveys mostly focused on the Ignacio Chavez WSA this season. This area is well signed besides from a few problem areas that could use some WSA or No vehicle use signs on the boundaries. Cattle trails seem to braid and carve the land atop the mesa. Some of these could be naturalized or adopted into an official trail system. Some of the old 'decommissioned' roads have seen some usage perhaps from ranchers who have permits to graze cattle on the land.

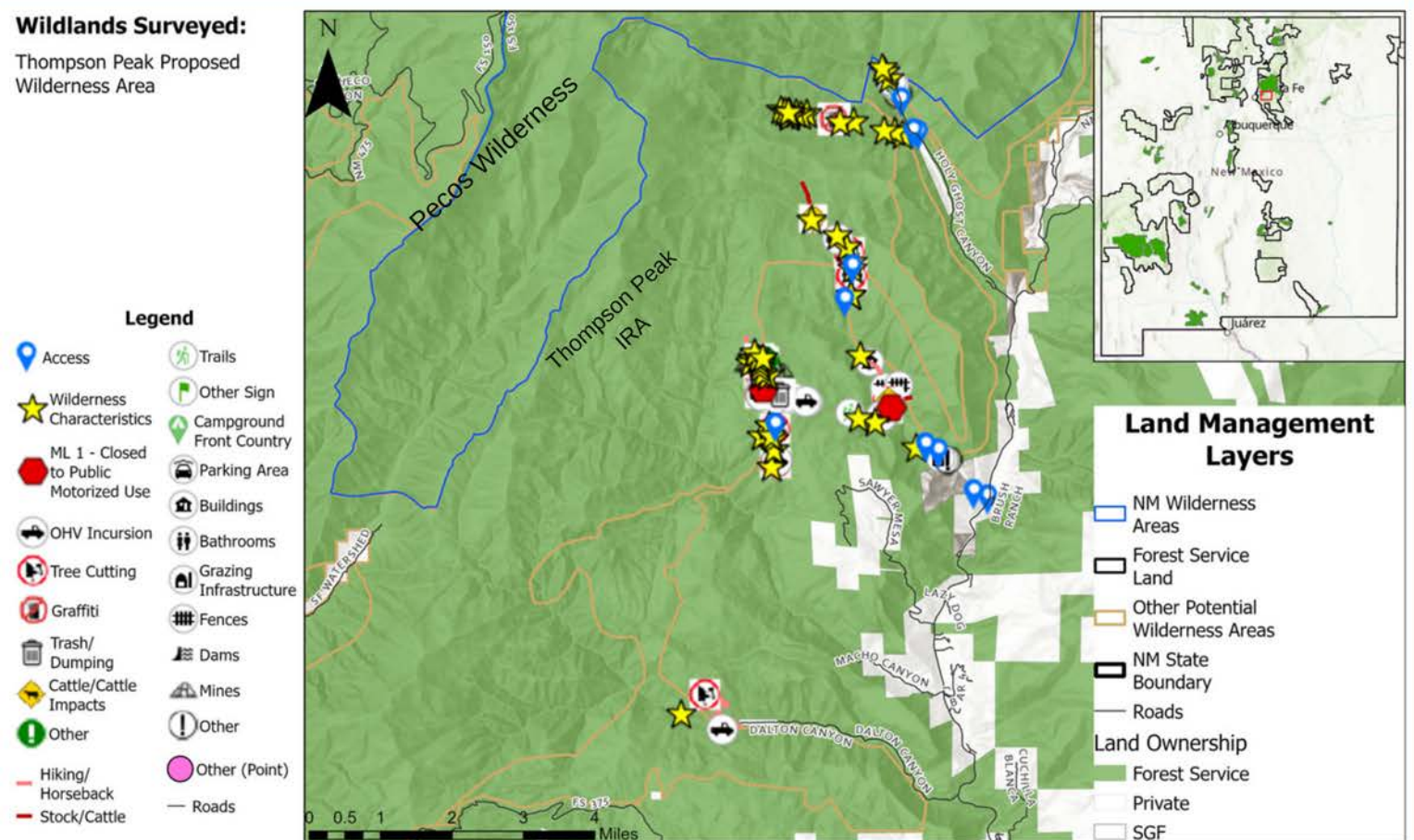
Thompson Peak IRA



Indian Creek - Ehrman

Wildlands Surveyed:

Thompson Peak Proposed Wilderness Area



Wilderness Defenders:

Steve Ehrman

Tina Ehrman

Will Ribbans

Access Points: 10 points collected

There were 3 points related to the *Holy Ghost & Doctor Creek area*. The access to this area is through a commonly used group camping area. The easiest access to the path is by following Doctor Creek right off the campground. There is a parking lot for the public that was also noted.

There were seven points related to the *Indian Creek Area*. Defenders located a road that was not on the map that leads into the FS IRA. Another road was located along Indian Creek; also, not marked on the map. A branch was noted to have fallen into an access road. There is private land in the area with locked gates, but defenders marked the unlocked gate at Indian Creek and NM Highway 63.

**Wilderness Characteristics:****45 points collected**

The area remains predominantly wild. All points were collected within Sawyer Canyon, Indian Creek and Doctor Creek areas. Wilderness defender data shows aspen, cacti, and ponderosas growing well in the area, as well as beautiful flowing streams and creeks surrounded by dense forest. The biggest threat to wilderness character is chainsaw use, grazing, old and new mining threats, and off road vehicle use.

Roads: 2 points collected

One point informs that the map has an old road marked as a trail. The other describes that the roads have been used recently though they should be closed to public.

Ecological Impacts: 28 points collected

One point collected related to graffiti and carvings on numerous aspen trees along the

trail. Eight points collected related to OHV Incursions; fresh tracks were very prominent because of the recent showers at time of collection. Tracks were also recorded in a meadow within the boundary of the IRA in Dalton Canyon.

Two points were related to cattle impacts; showing prominent tracks along a stream where they cross.

Twelve points were related to tree cutting with a chainsaw. Defender data shows that the use of the chainsaw had been recent and very prominent in some areas to open both marked and

unmarked roads. Four points were related to trash and dumping. Some were left behind by mining and grazing operations. A small trash dump was discovered on the side of the road. Trash was also collected in a campsite area with fire rings.

One point was related to extensive mining activity, resulting in eroded hillsides.

User Trails: 7 lines collected

Five of the lines collected were recorded around the Indian Creek area. The trails consist of cattle trails, old logging roads, and old mining roads.

Two of the lines collected were in the Dalton Canyon area. One was a road, not marked on the map, up to a ridge road. The other marks an old access road along the creek, displaying minimal use.

Developments/Recreations: 37 points

Twenty-two points were related to residual mining shafts, related pipes drill holes and other mining infrastructure to grazing infrastructure.

One of the points was a very under kept structure, littered with trash and debris from collapsing buildings.

Three points were related to old roads that have now been used as trails, sometimes used by ATVs.

One point marked an earthen dam and overflow pipe.

Three points were fences along the old road in the northeast direction.

One point marked the debris of an old building.

One point marked that there was need of signage to distinguish between public and private land.

Four points associated with Holy Ghost Campsite.

Summary and Recommendations:

The area surveyed is currently managed as an IRA and is also a recommended Wilderness Area by the Santa Fe National Forest. This area is extremely wild with little to no trails within the area, mostly hiking up drainages and along old logging and mining roads. There is signs of developments from old Conoco mining infrastructure, grazing and old roads. New Mexico Wild is in support of further protections for this region.



Quebradas Complex



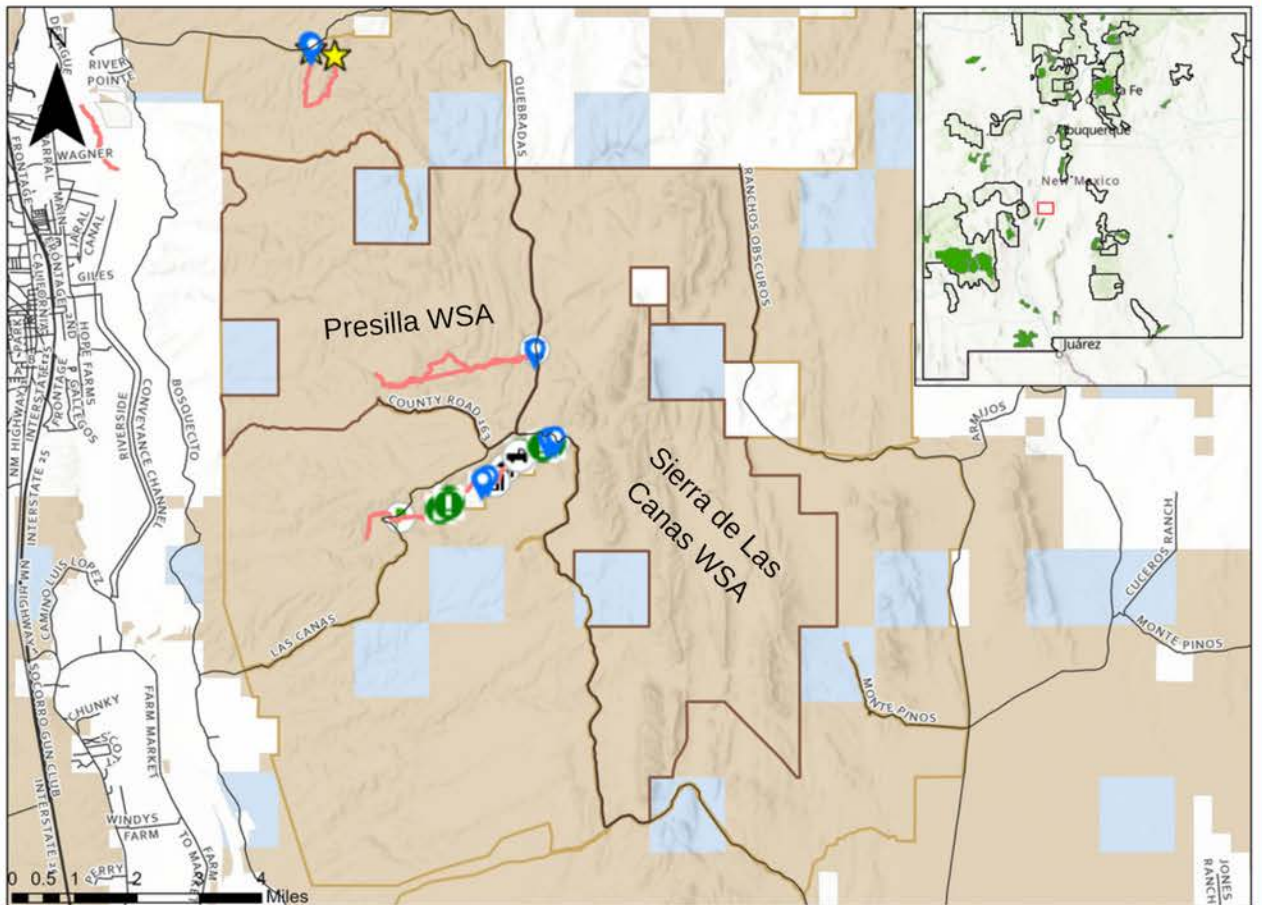
Heather Kline

Wildlands Surveyed:

- Quebradas
- Presilla Wilderness Study Area
- Loma de las Cañas Study Area
- Arroyo del Tajo

Legend

- Access
- Wilderness Characteristics
- OHV Incursion
- Other
- Hiking/Horseback
- Boundary Sign
- Parking Area
- Grazing Infrastructure
- Wilderness Study Areas
- Other Potential Wilderness Areas
- Roads
- Land Ownership**
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State
- SGF

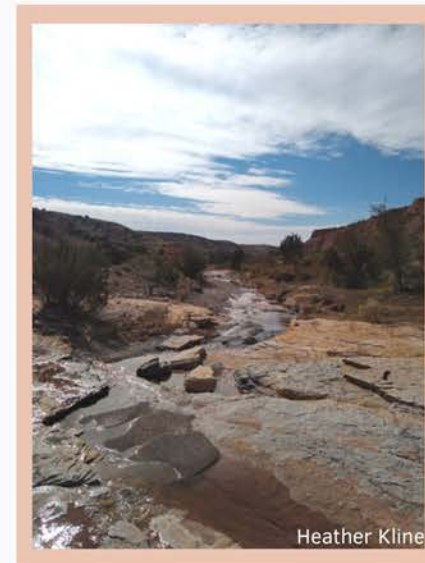


Wilderness Defenders:

Heather Kline Silke Bletzer
 Gennie Barrett Blaine Wimberly
 Richard Barrett

Access Points: 4 points collected

Two access points were collected in the Amado Spring area. These points provided details on an OHV road leading into the arroyo. One *access point* was collected near the Arroyo de las Cañas, marking the beginning of the trail. The *last access point* was collected near the Arroyo del Tajo. The data shows it at the start of the Tajo Canyon trail. Defenders noted no signage to enter the area from the north side, but there is a small sign pointing to the Quebradas from the south.

**Wilderness Characteristics: 2 points collected**

Both points were collected in the Amado Spring area. The spring provided an oasis with cottonwood trees attracting many birds. Interesting rock formations were also recorded in this area. During warmer months, numerous wildflowers can be seen. Wildlife can also be observed if you keep an eye out. The night time scenery includes bats and the billions of stars in the milky way.

Roads:

There was evidence of OHV usage, but no significant damage was recorded. There is signage at the spring that prohibits vehicle traffic beyond a certain point. The Johnson Hill area's roads were noted to be rocky yet easily passable by

passenger cars. Main road is in good shape, but if there is rain, the road can be washed out and muddy in places.

Ecological Impacts:

With the exception of signs of cattle and a few shotgun and caliber shells and casings, the area was relatively clean. Minor vehicle incursions in a few of the arroyos.

User Trails:

One line collected along Arroyo Del Tajo. This trail is unofficial and follows the canyon. *One line collected* along Arroyo De Las Cañas. This trail is apparent on maps of the area.

Developments/Recreations:

Three main camping areas that are large enough for vehicle access, but none of them are established areas designated for camping. All of the camping areas have rock fire pits that are in good shape. There is old fencing near a spring, along with a pipe to draw water.

Summary and Recommendations :

The Quebradas Complex is predominantly wild with minimal developments or evidence of humans. Geology and solitude was noted to be outstanding. Our defenders noted the area was mostly clean and lacked excessive trash that is typically seen in other Public Land areas. There were some signs of OHV usage within the boundary. Signage appears to be good, though more could be installed to note WSA and boundaries, trailheads, parking areas, etc.

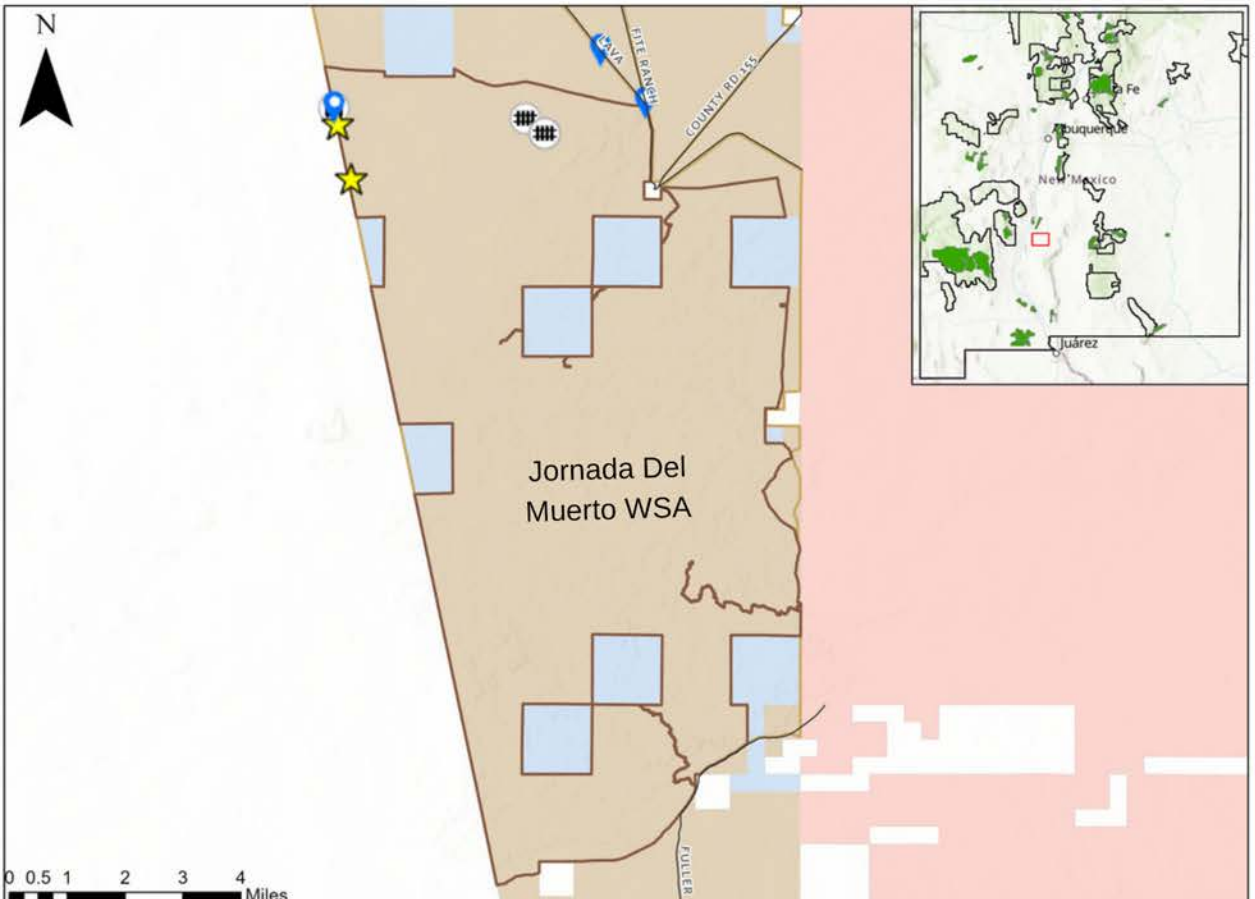
Jornada Del Muerto Complex



Paula Metzner

Wildlands Surveyed:

Jornada de Muerto
WSA



Wilderness Defenders: Paula Metzner

Access Points: 3 points collected

Outside of the points taken, there are many access points. *One point* was recorded at Jornada Del Muerto WSA's North West gate that was closed off with rusty wire.

One point was taken at Fite Ranch with information on directions to get to the correct entrance.

The last point was recorded at the North gate. This point provides information for entering the WSA correctly and successfully.

Wilderness Characteristics: 2 points collected

Both of the points collected were recorded in the North West area, close to the access point recorded. There is wild and rugged terrain in all directions providing a remote feeling. Wired fencing is prominent in the area due to the private lands that surround the WSA. There are trails along side the fencing, most likely from deer.



Paula Metzner

Roads:

There is a dirt road that is best suited for higher clearance vehicles, as it goes through some shallow arroyos that are sandy. There are also many scattered roads that are not documented on existing maps.

Ecological Impacts:

No ecological impacts recorded at this time.

User Trails:

There are occasional animal trails throughout the area explored, but there were no user trails seen.

Developments/Recreations:

There are a few places outside of the gate that have room for cars to pull over and park. There were no signs of campgrounds or other developments recorded.

Summary and Recommendations:

There is no signage on the way to the WSA to indicate that it is there. The signs on the access gates are worn out and barely legible. You can barely see the sign that says Closed to Motor Vehicles. Updated signage needed to better protect area and guide recreation. More data needs to be collected in this area.



Paula Metzner

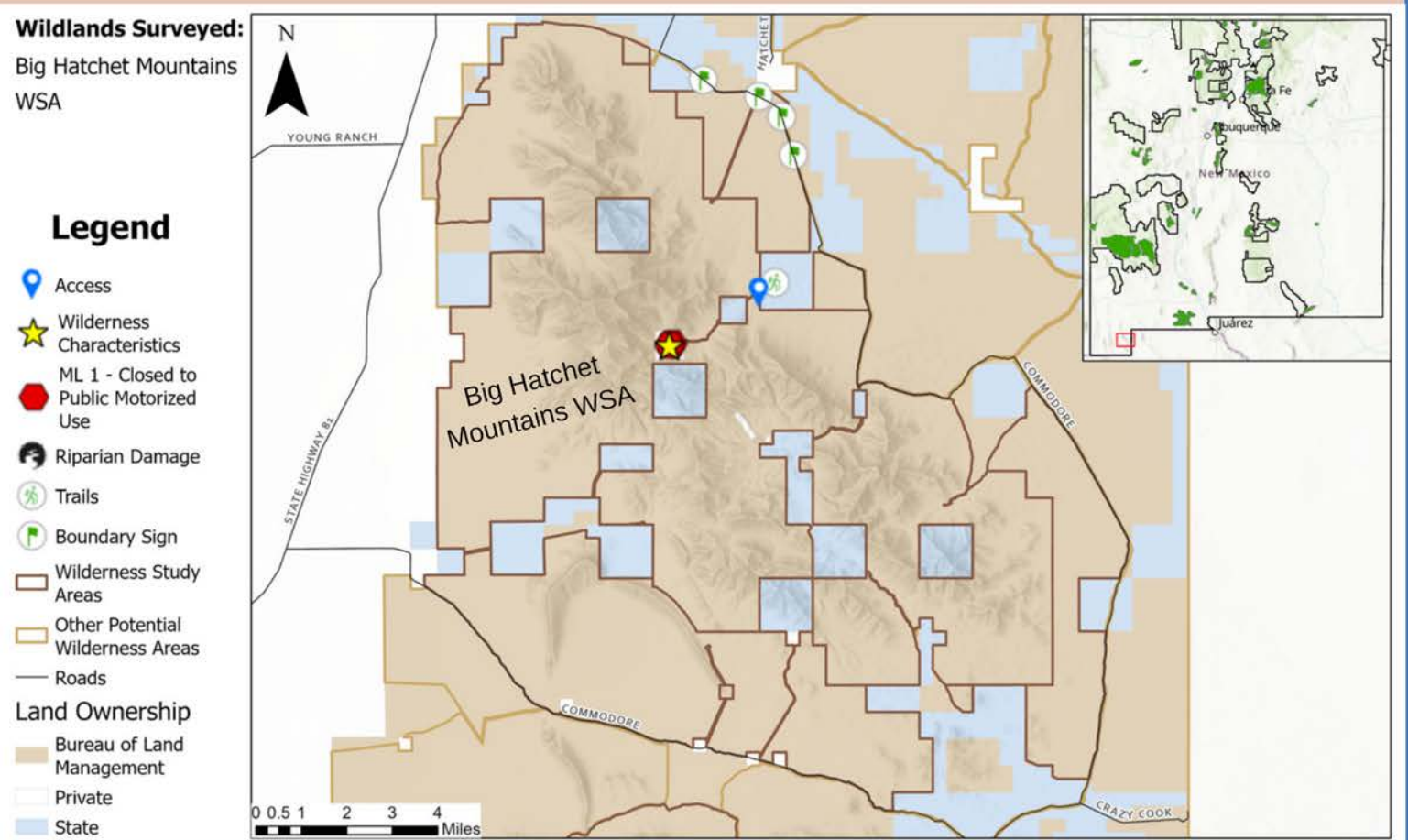


Paula Metzner

Big Hatchet Mountains



Sergio Delgado



Wilderness Defenders:

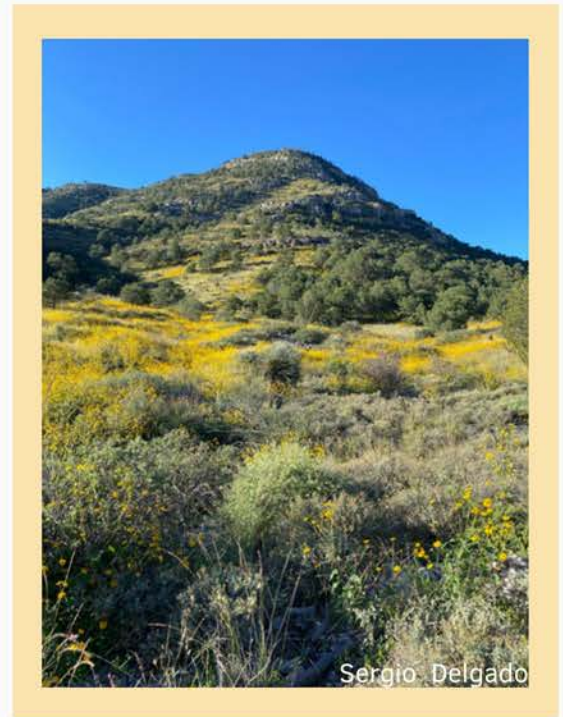
Sergio Delgado

Access Points: 1 point collected

There is a wilderness boundary sign immediately after private land on BLM road. Many of the roads are difficult to get past without a high clearance vehicle. The road in Thompson Canyon ends about a mile after you have to leave your car.

Wilderness Characteristics: 1 point collected

Area is very remote and remains natural besides the BLM and ranch roads in the vicinity as well as the ranchers who live and work near the base of the mountain. Further near the mountain base and canyon, you are able to access with aid of old ranch/BLM road, a wide range of natural flowers including wild sunflowers and grasses as well as piñon and juniper which are more abundant in higher elevations. Mature Ocotillo and lots of agave/Sotol plants on the alluvial fan that leads into Thompson Canyon with little signs of impact from grazing cattle. Several different species of birds and butterflies including several Monarch butterflies in these wildflower patches. Lizards and Kangaroo rats were abundant on ground in the morning and night time respectively. Sheer limestone cliffs can be observed on approach and become more prominent the closer to the base of the mountain. Signs of water include several washouts on overgrown BLM/ranch road.

**Roads: 2 points collected**

The access road is rugged with a few small washouts. Commodore Rd is marked with BIM access signage. This road is very rugged, with several washouts and dips, would be impassable at certain points when raining. Once you get to Thompson Canyon the road is impassible because of a steep washout.

Level 2 Roads:

County Rd C11/Hatchet Rd, main access road, moderate condition, very bumpy throughout but nevertheless accessible with high clearance vehicle. Despite moderate condition makes for slow traversing even with 4WD high clearance and lifted Jeep Wrangler due to several washouts and erosion from rains and water runoff from Big Hatchet mountains. Commodore Rd which borders

WSA is also in moderate condition due to washouts from water run off from nearby mountains. Both roads could be impassable during rainstorms.

Level 1 Roads: Ranch/BLM road that leads into Thompson Canyon on northern portion of Big Hatchet mountains is very overgrown but appears to be used intermittently by ranchers as it does connect several portions of private land in-between WSA boundaries. Road does not have any clear indication that is closed to public after leading out of private land into Thompson Canyon and is clearly marked by signage indicating to users that they've entered a WSA.



Ecological Impacts: 1 point collected

No clear signs of human impact deep in the Thompson Canyon area of Big Hatchet Mountain WSA which was main focus of first excursion. Spotted several invasive Morning Glory weeds but these could be native growing Ipomoea tricolor. There were also a few rock fire rings on side of BLM road, but appeared to be several months old.

**User Trails: 1 line collected**

The only trail encountered was the Continental Divide Trail which intersected BLM/ranch road on the way to Thompson Canyon. Trail in this area looked overgrown and was only identifiable by BLM signage in that particular section.

Developments/Recreations:

No visible developments inside WSA boundaries but cattle fencing and cattle guards long the wilderness study area boundaries.

Summary and Recommendations:

Area remains wild. There are some OHV incursions happening from ranchers accessing the area. Road maintenance is needed on access road to WSA. More recreation opportunities such as hiking trails with clearly marked trail heads. More signage on access roads into WSA.



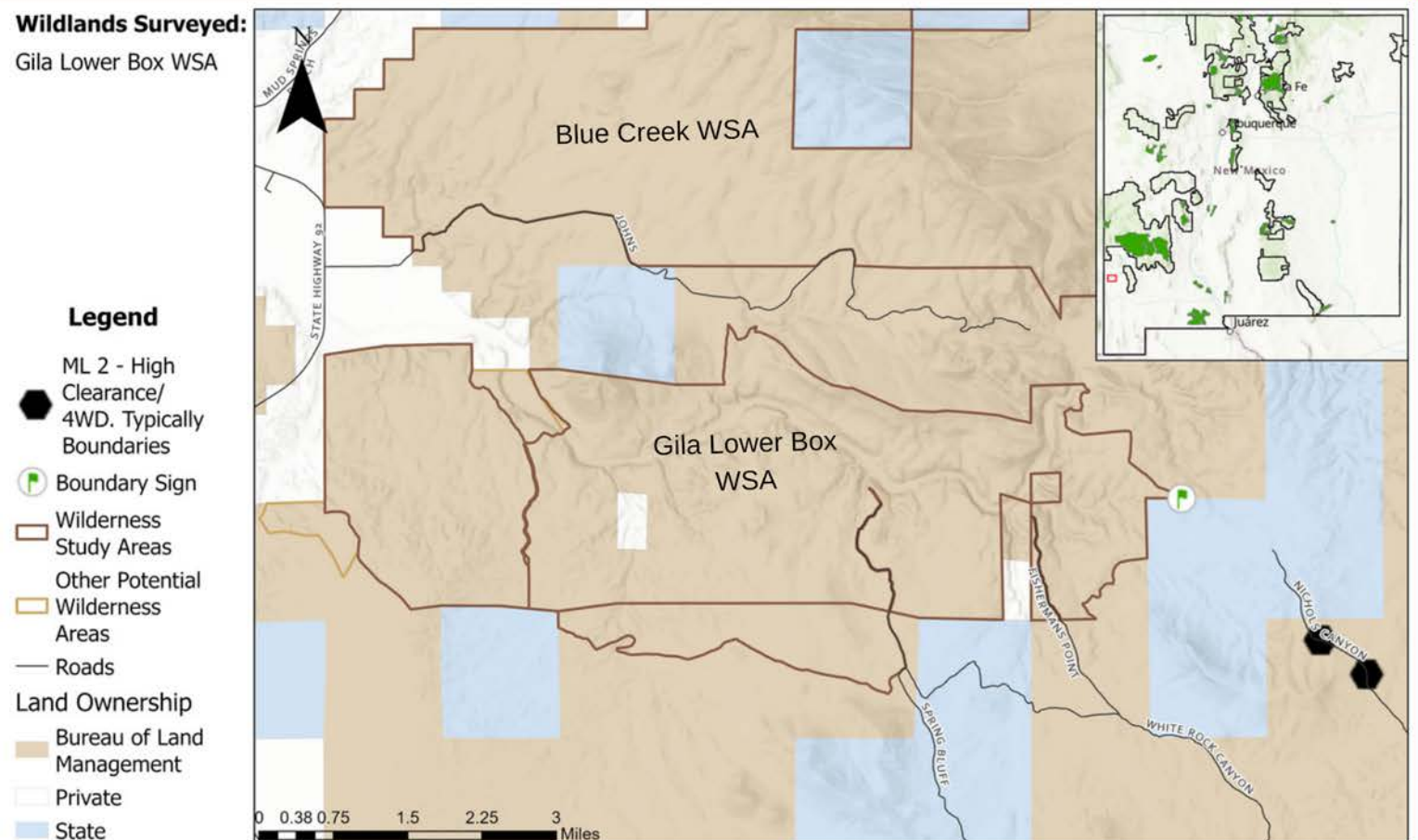
Gila Lower box wsa



Morgan Paige

Wildlands Surveyed:

Gila Lower Box WSA



Wilderness Defenders:

Morgan Paige

Access Points:

The Nichols Canyon Road (County Road A024) access does require high clearance 4WD and is significantly washed out in several places.

Wilderness Characteristics:

The area is extremely natural with excellent vistas and geological features.

Roads:

The access road requires a high clearance 4WD vehicle. The road can be severely washed out during certain points in the year.

User Trails:

There were no signs for user trails noted.

Ecological Impacts:

There were no signs of significant ecological impact. The only signs of human activity were the road at the boundary line and the very occasional sounds of aircrafts in the distance.

Developments/Recreations:

There are no signs of campsites or developments. However, there seem to be campsites at the end of Nichols Canyon Road, not in the WSA.

Other:

Data points were saved to an Area map created by the defender. Points were collected around the road condition and the boundary sign.

**Summary and Recommendations:**

From the small amount of data collected, area seems to be wild with little impacts from humans. Not enough data points or trips to the area to provide an adequate summary or recommendations at this time. More trips to the area will be made in the future.

Florida mountains

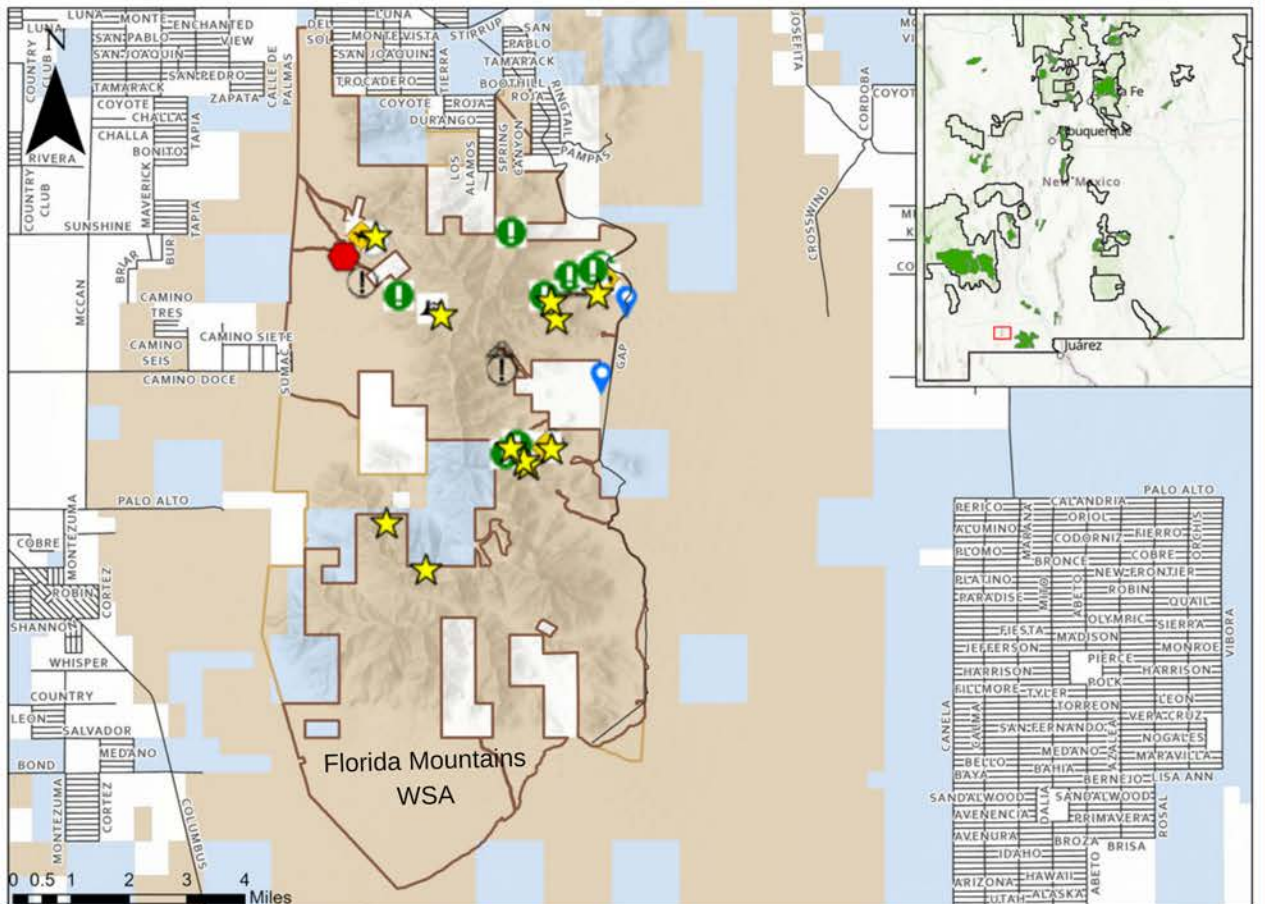


Devon Fletcher

Wildlands Surveyed: Florida Mountains WSA

Legend

- Access
- Wilderness Characteristics
- ML 1 - Closed to Public Motorized Use
- OHV Incursion
- Cattle/Cattle Impacts
- Other
- Dams
- Mines
- Other
- Wilderness Study Areas
- Other Potential Wilderness Areas
- Roads
- Land Ownership**
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State
- SP



Wilderness Defenders:

Devon Fletcher

Access Points: 2 points collected

One access point was located near the *Lobo Draw*, and deemed problematic in the future because of the surrounding private land.

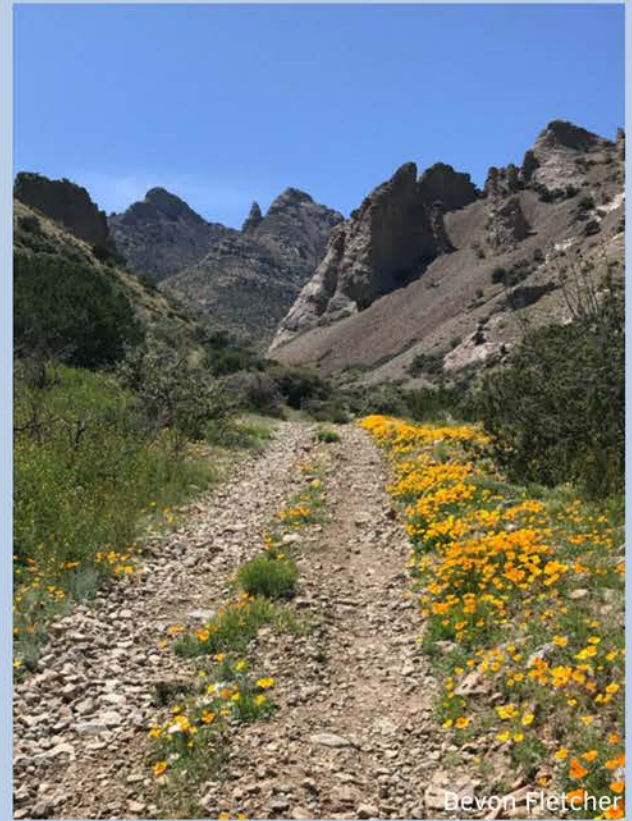
The second access point is a *Gap Road* closer towards Headquarters Draw, that can be severely washed out depending on the season.

Wilderness Characteristics:**11 points collected**

One point was collected in the *Tubb Spring/Capitol Dome Draw* area. Hoodoos, towers, pinnacles, fins, spires were some of the geological features noted. There were also large piñons, ephemeral waterfalls and cascades in the beautiful trail-less area.

Another point was collected by *waterfall canyon*. Water could be seen trickling here even during very dry spring conditions. There are high peaks of range, waterfalls, and large trees. Access to this area is very steep.

Three points were collected in the *Second Saddle* area. These points were recorded as very natural; providing views of rock formations and high ridges and peaks, good grasses, piñons, and junipers. Further into the area, a canyon with small soapberry trees, rock formations and wildflowers can be seen. Four points were collected in and to the west of Byers Spring. The area was surprisingly thick forested area of piñon and junipers.



Devon Fletcher



Devon Fletcher

There are great views of Gym Peak and surrounding ridges, as well as open meadows that would be great for camping.

The last two points were collected in the *Rugged Canyon Area*. This area is very secluded with little signs of water and views of western escarpment.

Roads: One point collected

A ML 1 road was collected near Capitol Dome Draw. It was not recorded on the map but still seemed to be in use, but not often. The road connects to another road that leads to a spring.



User Trails:

There were no signs for user trails noted, however, there were signs of cattle.

Ecological Impacts: 12 points collected

three points for cattle impacts were present throughout the area. Damage was obvious for several acres in the Tubb Spring area. The damage was minimal east of Second Saddle, but grazing was evident. To the west of Three Little Hills, Cattle were seen camped near the spring. The

improvements made to this area are no longer functioning. *One point* was categorized as *OHV Incursion* with a road going past the spring for a quarter of a mile. *Eight points* were categorized as other with recommendations to better access roads.

Developments/Recreations: 6 points collected

The old fencing in the Second Saddle area disrupts the very natural scenery that surrounds it. There is damming in the waterfall canyon area. Historic ruins can also be seen in Byer Spring. Mining sites were recorded mostly to the easter sides of the Florida Mountains.

Summary and Recommendations:

The one road point that was collected should be left out of the WSA, as well as the stretch past the open gate and spring. The road with the OHV incursion point in the Tubb Spring area should be cherry stemmed to better define WSA boundary and provide adequate access. Grazing does seem to be impacting the area.



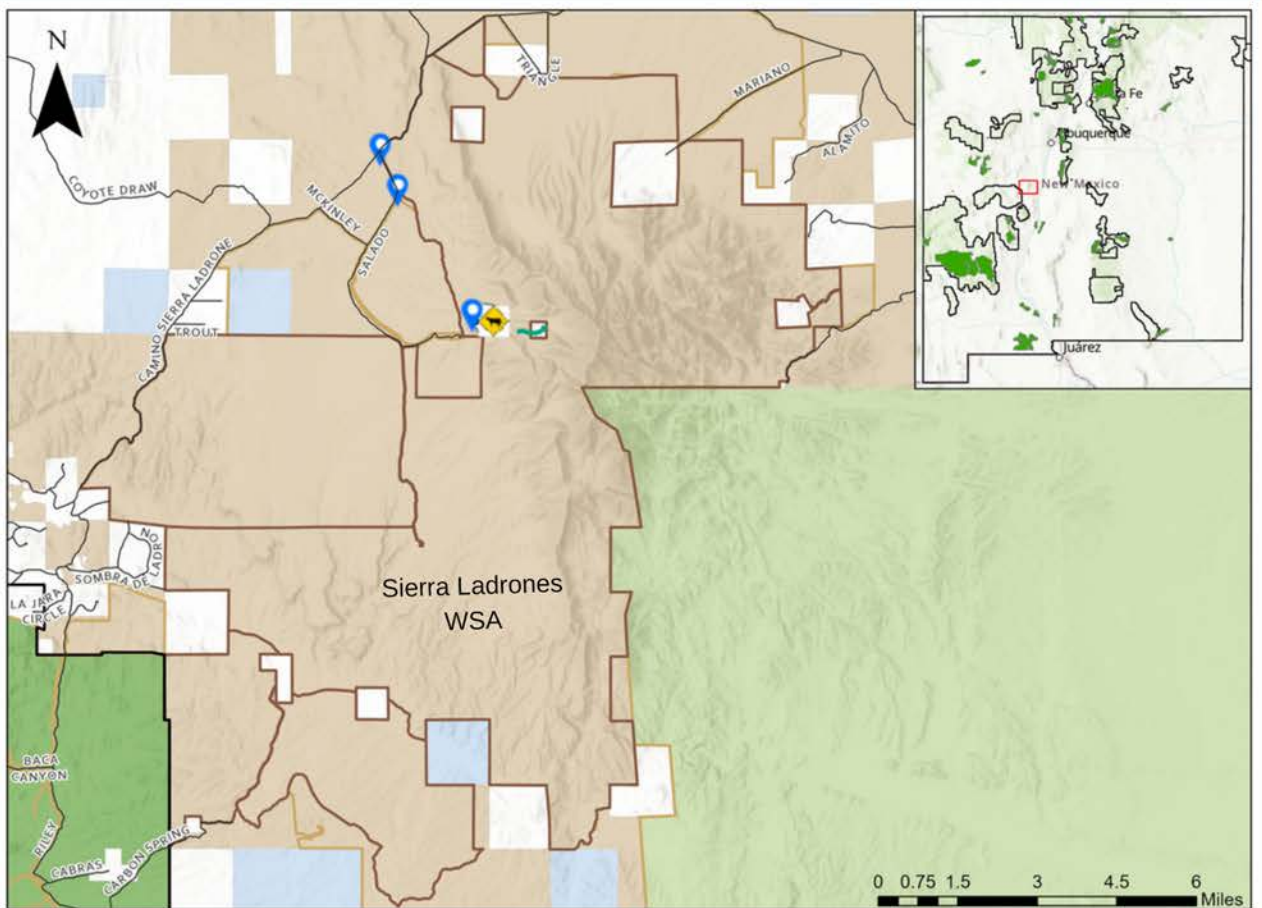
Sierra Ladrones WSA



Michael Perry/Paul Meeker

Wildlands Surveyed:
Sierra Ladrones WSA

- Legend**
- Access
 - Cattle/Cattle Impacts
 - Buildings
 - Other
 - Other (Line)
 - Hiking Guide Trail (Line)
 - Forest Service Land
 - Wilderness Study Areas
 - Other Potential Wilderness Areas
 - Roads
 - Land Ownership**
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - Forest Service
 - FWS
 - Private
 - State



Wilderness Defenders:

Paul Meeker

Access Points: 1 point collected

The point was collected at *Sierra Ladrones West Approach*. It's an old cattle gate at the end of a road. Exit I-25 South at Bernardo and head SW on Old Highway 60. Turn S on CR 12/Camino Ladrones and W on Ladrones Road. Visitors need to be careful because of the private land owners. Some of the gates are not marked definitively, making it difficult to navigate where the WSA begins.

Wilderness Characteristics:

The viewpoints area amazing, with better views of surrounding mountain and landscape when its a clear day.

Roads:

The road after the access point goes more to the left than the map shows. It is also a road that requires a vehicle with 4WD.

User Trails:

The trail explored was the Sierra Ladrones & Landon Peak Trail. It and the Ladron Peak West Approach trail (also AllTrails) are the only two identified hiker trails that are

identified. The only evidence of human use along this trail was a single mountain bike track in soft sand that did not appear recent.

Ecological Impacts: 1 point collected

There were cattle along CR 12 and Ladrones Road but nothing appeared amiss as in too many, etc.

Developments/Recreations:

Though they do exist, no recorded signs of developments or recreation infrastructure in this area at this time.

Summary and Recommendations:

Access to the area was difficult for defenders due to private land adjacent to WSA. Signage was confusing or not present. Not many data points were collected at this time but reports of cattle impacts were made. More survey and data needs to be collected.

