

THE SAGEBRUSH PILLOWS WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

"As you approach from the south east the sage-covered landscape billows in a series of rolling hills resembling pillows. As one wanders through the landscape there is a hint of sage which invigorates the senses."

Kurt Kunkle, Denver



Fall foliage and colorful geology paint quite a picture along the banks of the Dolores River.

Photo © Jack Treece



Taken from the west bank of the Dolores River, north of Gateway and just outside the WP, the alpenglow is visible on the Palisade in the distance.

Photo © Lee Gelatt

A Wilderness Deserving Landscape – Located five miles northwest of Gateway on the eastern side of the Dolores River, the Sagebrush Pillows Wilderness Proposal (WP) includes two large expanses of shrublands divided by a single drainage. These bisected brushy meadows, directly west of the Palisade WP, appear as two large pillows in an undulating, semi-desert landscape of shrub lands and pinion-juniper woodlands. As a wilderness area directly adjacent to the Palisade (the two are separated by a BLM route known as Sheep Creek Rd) Sagebrush Pillows improves habitat and experiential connectivity between the Palisade and banks of the Dolores River.

Geology, Ecology, & Wildlife Habitat – The desert shrublands of Sagebrush Pillows overlay rocky plains, the remnants of ancient seas. This ecosystem bears more resemblance to Utah, with blackbrush and Mormon tea yielding to pinion pine and juniper in higher elevations. The area provides important connectivity for game species, including deer, elk, and mountain lion. The especially low elevation of the Dolores River corridor in this area, combined with an arid environment, supports habitat for sensitive species like Gray vireo and Long-nosed leopard lizard.

Rich History & Iconic Western Landscape – The southern portion of the proposal includes a handful of historic uranium exploration routes which provide a keen example of how landscapes, undisturbed over time, will reclaim their own wild beginnings.

Wilderness & Adjacent Backcountry Recreation – While this proposal certainly provides an opportunity for, in particular horseback riders, to access the Palisade's western wilderness without encountering motorized vehicles, the recreation related components of this WP are experienced, for the most part, from the adjacent backcountry lands. For example, rafters can enjoy the quiet solitude of this undeveloped stretch of river, from Sheep Creek Rd ATV riders can enjoy the vast, unfettered views stretching to the river, campers can enjoy the gurgle of the river, and star-gazers can continue to explore the way stars rise and fall against the towering backdrop of red rocks which flank this section of river. An area affectionately called 'Silhouette Canyon' by local astronomers.

The Sagebrush Pillows WP contains 5,143 acres of federal land.

