

## BURNT CREEK

### Proposed Action (No Wilderness Alternative)

Under the proposed action, the entire 24,980 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA would be recommended for nonwilderness uses. The principal impacts under this alternative relate to the development of oil and gas resources and the resultant impacts on wilderness values in the long-term.

#### Impacts on Wilderness Values

The entire WSA would be recommended for nonwilderness uses and none of the wilderness values on the 24,980 acres of the WSA would receive the special legislative protection provided by wilderness designation. The short-term impact of this action would be negligible because little development activity is anticipated in the short-term whether or not the area is designated wilderness.

In the long-term, wilderness values would be lost as a result of oil and gas development in the Short Creek drainage. It is anticipated that one well would be drilled in this drainage. Access to the well would be up the existing Short Creek Road to its end, then continue up the west side approximately one mile to the well site. There would be 10 acres of surface disturbance at the well site associated with the drill pad and equipment parking areas. Such a development would negatively affect the perception of naturalness on 975 acres, the estimated area in which at least some portion of the man-made development could be seen by the casual visitor. Impacts include the noise of the machinery, lights, new road, and the machinery itself; these would be obvious intrusions into an otherwise natural appearing landscape.

Opportunities for solitude would also be lost because of oil and gas development. Sights and sounds of traffic, construction, and production would decrease one's chances of finding solitude to the same degree as naturalness. Outstanding opportunities for solitude would thus be lost on 975 acres in the Short Creek drainage.

Sights and sounds from recreational ORV use would also have an adverse impact on solitude but the impact would be minimal because ORV use levels are low. Presently, ORV use is estimated to be 100 visitor days annually and is expected to remain below 200 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future.

Other recreation uses would increase slightly but would remain at levels below 200 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future. This increase would not significantly affect opportunities for solitude.

Conclusion: The Burnt Creek WSA's wilderness values of naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude would be lost on 975 acres. Naturalness and solitude on 24,005 acres would be subject to loss in the long-term but no adverse activities are presently anticipated.

## Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use

The Ellis-Pahsimeroi MFP limits ORV use in the Burnt Creek WSA to existing roads and ways. This designation would continue to be in affect once the WSA was released for nonwilderness uses. The mile of new road associated with the Short Creek oil and gas well would add little to the vehicle accessibility of the WSA as a whole. Recreational ORV use is projected to remain below 200 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion: There would be only a minor increase in accessibility in the WSA and ORV use is expected to remain below 200 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future. There would be no significant impact to recreational ORV use.

## Impacts on Development of Energy and Mineral Resources

All lands within the Burnt Creek WSA would remain open for mineral entry and leasing. All potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes a moderate favorability for discovery of oil and gas.

Conclusion: Potential mineral resources would be available for development. This would be a beneficial impact to the development of mineral resources in the Burnt Creek WSA.

## Partial Wilderness Alternative

Under the Partial Wilderness Alternative, 8,300 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA would be recommended for wilderness while 16,680 acres would be recommended for nonwilderness uses (See Map 6).. The primary impacts under this alternative relate to the development of oil and gas resources and the resultant impacts on wilderness values in the long-term.

## Impacts on Wilderness Values

None of the wilderness values on 16,680 acres would receive special legislative protection provided by wilderness designation. The short term impact of this action would be negligible because little development activity is anticipated in the next five years.

In the long-term, wilderness values on 16,680 acres are expected to suffer adverse impacts or be lost due to oil and gas exploration and development. One oil and gas well is expected to be drilled in the Short Creek drainage, outside but adjacent to the area recommended for wilderness under this alternative. The well would entail 10 acres of surface disturbance and one mile of new road. As a result, the wilderness value of naturalness would be lost on 975 acres, including 225 acres inside the area recommended for wilderness.

In addition to naturalness, activities associated with oil and gas development would adversely impact the wilderness value of outstanding opportunities for solitude. Sights and sounds from traffic, construction, and production at the wellsite would lower the quality of solitude on 975 acres, again including 225 acres inside the area recommended for wilderness.

Sights and sounds from recreational ORV use in the nondesignated area would also have an adverse impact on solitude, but the impact would be minimal because ORV use is estimated to be less than 65 visitor days annually. Recreational ORV use is expected to remain below 150 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future, so the long-term impact of ORV use on the wilderness value of solitude would be negligible.

Wilderness values on 8,300 acres would be protected by legislative mandate. Wilderness designation would withdraw these lands from mineral entry and leasing and would eliminate the potential for future mineral development on 8,300 acres. Wilderness values of naturalness and solitude would benefit from this action.

An estimated 35 visitor days annually of recreational ORV use would be eliminated from the wilderness portion of the WSA. Although encounters between ORV users and other recreationists are infrequent at current levels of use, the elimination of ORV use would benefit the wilderness value of solitude because visitors would not encounter or hear ORV users in the area. Beneficial effects to naturalness due to elimination of ORV use would be negligible because current use levels are quite low.

Conclusion: Wilderness values of naturalness and solitude would be adversely affected on four percent (975 acres) and retained on 33% (8,300 acres) of the WSA. Wilderness values on 63% (15,705 acres) of the WSA would be subject to loss in the long-term but no adverse activities are presently anticipated.

#### Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use

The Ellis-Pahsimeroi MFP limits ORV use in the Burnt Creek WSA to existing roads and ways. This designation would continue in the 16,680 acres of nonwilderness in the WSA. The mile of new road associated with the anticipated oil and gas well in the Short Creek drainage would add little to the accessibility of the WSA. Recreational ORV use in the 16,680-acre nonwilderness portion of the WSA is projected to remain below 150 visitor days annually in the foreseeable future.

An estimated 35 visitor days annually of recreational ORV use would be eliminated from the 8,300-acre designated wilderness portion of the WSA. Future opportunities for ORV-oriented recreation in this portion of the WSA would be foregone. However, there are similar or superior opportunities for ORV use on public land throughout the region. Any ORV use displaced from this portion of the WSA upon designation would be absorbed on the surrounding public land.

Conclusion: Recreational ORV use would continue at a level below 65 visitor days annually on 16,680 acres of nonwilderness; 35 visitor days annually of ORV use would be eliminated from the 8,300 acre wilderness portion of the WSA. Future opportunities for recreational ORV use on 8,300 acres would be foregone.

#### Impacts on Development of Energy and Mineral Resources

The 16,680 acres of the WSA recommended for nonwilderness uses would remain open to mineral entry and leasing. All potential mineral resources in this portion of the WSA would be available for development. It is anticipated that one oil and gas well would be drilled in the Short Creek drainage.

The 8,300 acres of the WSA recommended for wilderness would be withdrawn from all forms of mineral entry and leasing. However, there are no plans to develop any mineral resource within the 8,300-acre area recommended for wilderness, nor are there any projections favorable for such developments.

Conclusion: Potential mineral resources would be available for development on 16,680 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA. Opportunities to develop mineral resources on 8,300 acres would be foregone. This impact would be minimal because future projections do not indicate the likelihood of mineral development in this portion of the WSA.

#### All Wilderness Alternative

Under the All Wilderness Alternative, the entire 24,980 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA would be recommended for wilderness. The primary impacts of this alternative relate to the mineral withdrawal and ORV closure in designated wilderness.

#### Impacts on Wilderness Values

Wilderness values on the entire WSA (24,980 acres) would receive the special legislative protection provided by wilderness designation. Wilderness values of naturalness and solitude would benefit from this action because 975 acres of the WSA would not be impacted by oil and gas development activities.

An estimated 100 visitor days annually of recreational ORV use would be eliminated from the WSA by wilderness designation. Although encounters between ORV users are infrequent with current levels of use, the elimination of ORV use would benefit the wilderness value of solitude because visitors would not encounter or hear ORV users in the area. Beneficial effects to naturalness due to elimination of ORV use would be negligible because the present level of use is low.

Conclusion: Wilderness values would be maintained on all 24,980 acres of the WSA. Because development of potential oil and gas resources would be foregone, adverse impacts to naturalness and solitude would not occur on 975 acres that would otherwise be disturbed.

## Impacts on Development of Energy and Mineral Resources

Wilderness designation would withdraw all 24,980 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA from mineral entry and leasing, subject to valid existing rights at the time of designation. No mining claims currently exist in the WSA. The opportunity to explore for and develop mineral resources, including oil and gas, would be foregone.

Conclusion: Opportunities to explore for and develop potential energy and mineral resources would be foregone on 24,980 acres.

## Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use

Wilderness designation would close the entire 24,980-acre Burnt Creek WSA to all forms of recreational ORV use. An estimated 100 visitor days annually of ORV use in the WSA would be eliminated. However, there are similar or superior opportunities for ORV use on public land throughout the region. Any ORV use displaced from the WSA upon wilderness designation would be absorbed on the surrounding public land.

Conclusion: Recreational ORV use of 100 visitor days annually would be foregone; the impacts of displacing this use to other nonwilderness public land would be negligible.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHORT-TERM USE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE  
MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

If a WSA is not designated wilderness, all present, short-term uses would continue. Off-road vehicle use, timber harvest, mining, and mineral leasing activities could reduce the wilderness values over the long-term.

If an area is designated wilderness, it would ensure the long-term productivity of ecosystems and would maintain or enhance present wilderness values. Motorized vehicles could no longer be used except where prescribed by an area's wilderness management plan. Mineral resources would not be available for location and development after December 31, 1983.

IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

Activities such as mining, mineral leasing, and material sales, could create an irreversible commitment of the wilderness resource in part or all of a WSA, if not designated as wilderness. Wilderness designation would not create an irretrievable or irreversible commitment of resources within a WSA. Designation would restrict or stop development activities and maintain an area's natural condition. If, in the future, Congress decides it would be in the national interest to develop certain resources within a wilderness, they can modify the law to allow it.