

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PLANNING PROCESS

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to manage 56,830 acres within three wilderness study areas (WSAs) for uses other than wilderness. The three WSAs include 31-14 Appendicitis Hill (21,900 acres), 31-17 White Knob Mountains (9,950 acres), and 45-12 Burnt Creek (24,980 acres). The proposed action differs from that described in the Draft Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), in that the draft proposed to manage and preserve wilderness characteristics on 8,300 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA. The proposed action was changed to manage this acreage for nonwilderness uses. If the Proposed Action in this EIS is accepted by Congress, this document will also serve as a part of the process amending the wilderness decision concerning the Burnt Creek WSA in the Ellis-Pahsimeroi MFP.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) mandates Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to manage the public lands and their resources under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Wilderness values are identified as part of the spectrum of multiple land use values to be considered in BLM inventory, planning, and management. Section 603 of FLPMA requires a wilderness review of BLM roadless areas of 5,000 or more acres and roadless islands. The BLM inventory process identified wilderness study areas which have the mandatory wilderness characteristics (size; naturalness; solitude and/or primitive recreation opportunities). Suitable or unsuitable wilderness recommendations for each WSA will be presented to the President by the Secretary of the Interior. The President will then make recommendations to the Congress. Areas can be designated wilderness only by an act of the Congress. If designated as wilderness, an area would be managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The three WSAs being studied are covered by two Management Framework Plans (MFPs); these are the Big Lost MFP and the Ellis-Pahsimeroi MFP. The WSAs are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1
List of Wilderness Study Areas

<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>MFP</u>
Appendicitis Hill	ID-31-14	21,900	Big Lost
White Knob Mountains	ID-31-17	9,950	Big Lost
Burnt Creek	ID-45-12	24,980	Ellis-Pahsimeroi

Location

The WSAs are located in east central Idaho near Arco, Idaho (Maps 1 & 2). WSAs 31-14 and 31-17 are five and ten miles northwest of Arco respectively. WSA 45-12 is thirty-five miles north-northwest of Arco and east of Borah Peak, the highest point in Idaho.

Environmental Issue Identification/Scoping

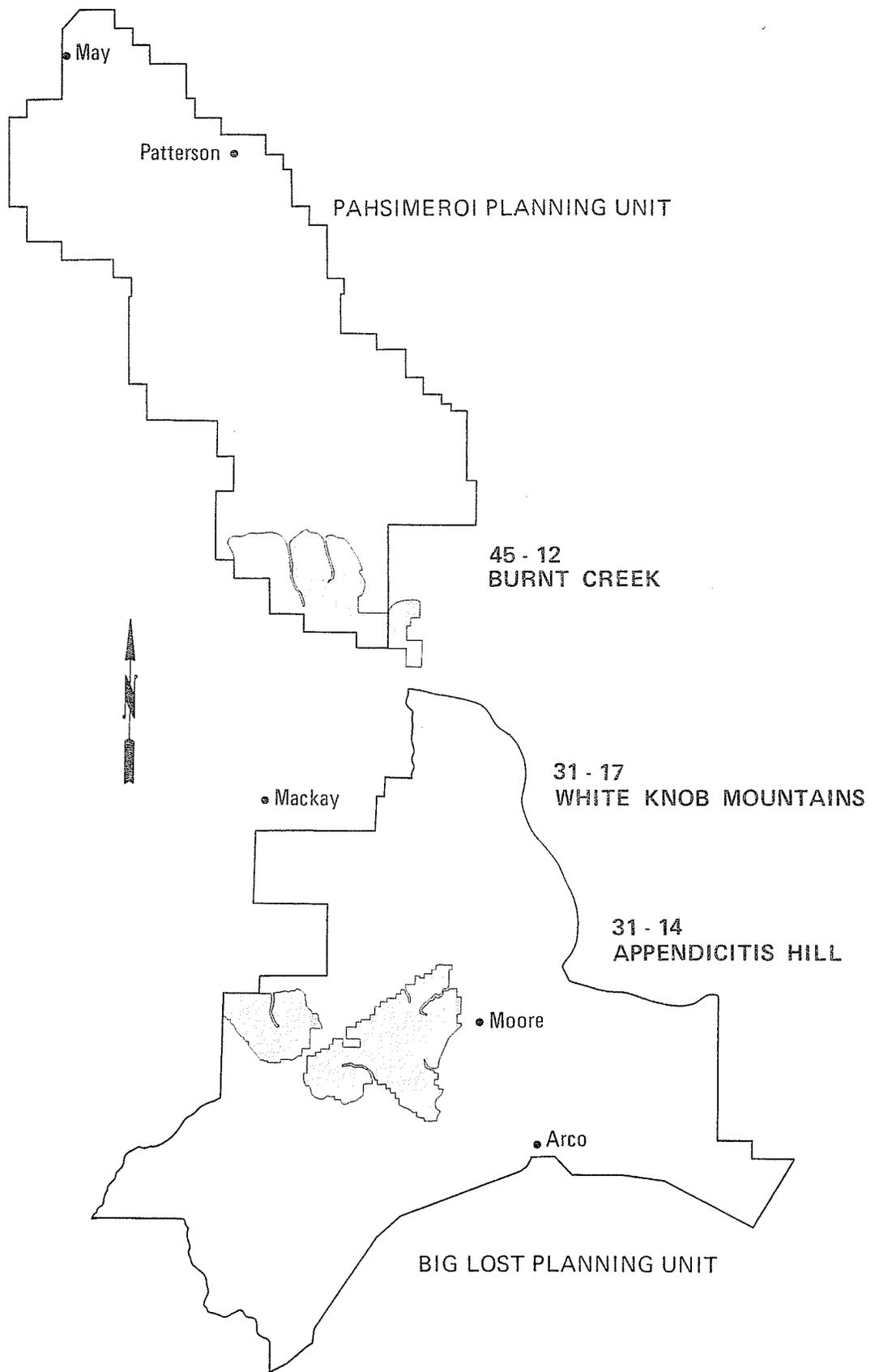
The scoping process for the Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement encompassed issues identified by the BLM staff, the public, and government agencies at all levels. Scoping occurred throughout the development of the Big Lost and the Ellis-Pahsimeroi Management Framework Plans (MFPs). Numerous meetings were held with individuals, interest groups, industry representatives, and governmental agencies. Open houses were held in May, Idaho (05/06/81 and 09/30/81), Arco, Idaho (08/09/82) and Mackay, Idaho (09/01/82).

The draft Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Wilderness EIS was released for public review and comment on August 25, 1983. The formal comment period was open until October 27, 1983. Public hearings were held at Arco, Idaho (09/26/83) and Challis, Idaho (09/27/83). As a result of the public review, an additional alternative was identified for Appendicitis Hill, in which 13,670 acres of the WSA were identified for management as wilderness. This alternative is analyzed herein.

During the scoping process consultation continues with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concerning the presence or absence of sites in the WSA that would be eligible for nomination for listing on the "National Register of Historic Places". Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerning threatened and endangered species has occurred. The environmental issues selected for analysis in this EIS follow:

1. Impacts on Wilderness Values - The wilderness values of naturalness, solitude, and primitive recreation could benefit from wilderness designation. The same values may be adversely affected by uses and actions that would occur should the WSA not be designated wilderness. The significance of these beneficial or adverse impacts is an issue for analysis in the EIS.

2. Impacts on the Development of Energy and Mineral Resources - Wilderness designation could affect the ability to explore for and develop undiscovered mineral resources by withdrawing designated lands from mineral entry. The effect of wilderness designation on the development of mineral resources is an issue for analysis in the EIS.



Location of Wilderness Study Areas Within the Big Lost / Pahsimeroi Study

3. Impacts on Recreational Off Road Vehicle Use - Wilderness designation would eliminate the use of recreational ORVs in the WSAs. Eliminating this use could affect the availability of opportunities for ORV recreation and shift ORV uses currently occurring in the WSA to adjacent lands. The impact of wilderness designation on recreational ORV use in the vicinity of the WSAs is an issue for analysis in this EIS.

4. Impacts on Mule Deer Winter Range in the Appendicitis Hill WSA - The Big Lost MFP calls for improving mule deer crucial winter range in the Appendicitis Hill WSA by mechanically thinning a 500 acre stand of decadent mountain mahogany. Wilderness designation could preclude such thinning. The impacts of wilderness designation on the ability to improve 500 acres of mountain mahogany for mule deer habitat is an issue for analysis in the EIS.

5. Impacts on Timber Management in the Appendicitis Hill WSA - The Big Lost MFP calls for 300 acres of commercial thinning of Douglas fir in the Appendicitis Hill WSA. Wilderness designation could preclude such timber management practices in the WSA. Thus, impacts of wilderness designation on timber management in the Appendicitis Hill WSA is an issue for analysis in the EIS.

The following issues were identified in scoping, but were not selected for detailed analysis in this EIS. The reasons for setting the issues aside are discussed below.

1. Impacts on Livestock Operations - Concerns were raised that livestock operators could be required to modify their operations within designated wilderness in a manner that would have significant adverse economic impact on their business. This issue was considered but dropped because the BLM's wilderness management policy provides for the continued use of wilderness areas for livestock operations at historic levels. Although the management practices of livestock operators in the WSAs would be more closely regulated, they would continue as they did prior to wilderness designations subject to reasonable regulations. The few proposed range improvements are small scale and similar to existing improvements. The wilderness management policy allows these types of improvements in order to continue the existing livestock program. While this issue has been dropped from analysis, a brief description of the planned livestock program has been included because this is a significant nonconforming use which is specifically allowed by Congress and which includes all lands in the WSA.

2. Impacts on Cultural Resources - Consultation with the SHPO's office during scoping determined that there are no cultural sites within the WSA that are eligible for nomination for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The archaeological sites that do exist in the area would be protected with or without wilderness designation. Since the management of cultural resources would not vary significantly, with or without wilderness designation, the issue of impact to cultural resources was dropped from further analysis.

3. Impacts on Water Quality - Concerns were raised regarding how water quality would be effected by wilderness designation or nondesignation in each of the WSAs. This was dropped from analysis in the EIS because the primary influence on water quality in these WSAs (livestock use) would not vary sufficiently with either designation or nondesignation. Other activities such as planned commercial thinning of Douglas fir and potential mineral development are absent or would affect such a small area that their influence on water quality would be negligible.

4. Impacts on Endangered Species - In a 1980 survey for threatened or endangered plants in the BLM's Big Lost and Mackay Planning Units (an area which encompasses all three WSAs), no threatened or endangered plants were found. There has been one unconfirmed sighting of a peregrine falcon in the Appendicitis Hill WSA and one confirmed sighting of a peregrine falcon in the Burnt Creek WSA. Based on estimates by BLM wildlife biologists, however, there are no resident populations of peregrine falcons in the WSAs. Therefore, this issue was dropped from further analysis.

5. Impacts on Wildlife - General concerns regarding impacts of wilderness designation or nondesignation on wildlife were raised during the formal comment period. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game noted that the partial wilderness alternative for the Burnt Creek WSA would benefit wildlife. This issue was dropped from further consideration in the EIS because projected developments in the three WSAs would not result in any significant change to any specific wildlife population or habitat, with or without wilderness designation, except where noted in the issues selected for analysis. None of the projected oil and gas development or range projects fall within the 8,300 acres originally proposed for wilderness in the Draft EIS.

6. Impacts on Forest Management - An issue dealing with the effect of wilderness designation on forest management in the Burnt Creek WSA and White Knob Mountains WSA was considered but not included in this EIS. White Knob Mountains contain no commercial timber. Burnt Creek does have 429 acres of commercial timber, but the timber is expected to remain uneconomical to harvest for at least the next twenty years and possibly longer if the current balance between supply, demand, and cost structure remains consistent. No timber sales are planned for these two WSAs so forest management was dropped as an issue.

The Planning Process, Selection of the Proposed Action and Development of Alternatives

The Planning Process and Selection of the Proposed Action

Development of the proposed action is guided by requirements of the Bureau's Planning Regulations, 43 CFR, part 1600. The BLM's Wilderness Study Policy (published February 3, 1982, in the Federal Register) supplements the planning regulations by providing the specific factors to be considered during the planning sequence in developing recommendations.

The proposed action (Map 3) recommends nonwilderness designation for three WSAs totaling 56,830 acres. The WSAs include Appendicitis Hill (21,900 acres), White Knob Mountains (9,950 acres), and Burnt Creek (24,980 acres). This proposed action differs from the proposed action in the draft Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Wilderness EIS in that the draft proposed to recommend 8,300 acres of Burnt Creek for wilderness designation. The proposed action was changed to manage the Burnt Creek WSA for nonwilderness uses.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action Selected for Analysis

A range of alternatives from resource protection to resource production was formulated and evaluated for the three WSAs. The alternatives assessed in this EIS include: 1) a no wilderness alternative for each WSA; 2) an all wilderness alternative for each WSA; and 3) a partial wilderness alternative for Appendicitis Hill and Burnt Creek.

The partial wilderness alternative for Appendicitis Hill is an additional alternative that was not analyzed in the draft EIS. Public comment on the draft supported consideration of the Appendicitis Hill WSA with boundary adjustments to eliminate lands that are accessible to motorized vehicles. The adjusted boundary was suggested by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and is included in this alternative.

In this document, the no action alternative as required by NEPA, and the no wilderness alternative are equivalent. Both advocate a continuation of current management framework plans.

The all wilderness alternative represents the maximum possible acreage that could be recommended for wilderness designation.

Partial wilderness alternatives can make recommendations ranging between the no wilderness and all wilderness alternatives. A partial wilderness alternative can recommend for designation something less than the entire acreage of the WSA.

Alternatives Considered But Dropped from Analysis

Burnt Creek

An additional partial alternative was suggested by Scott Ploger, President of the East Idaho Chapter of the Committee for Idaho's High Desert. The intent of his alternative is to include the major ridgelines in the wilderness area in order to protect scenic views. This proposal was reviewed by BLM in the field. It was felt that it is impossible to separate the ridgelines from their foothills and lower slopes. Disturbed lower slopes would not only ruin the view from, but the view of the ridgelines proposed for protection. Consequently, it is felt by BLM that this proposal would not improve the quality of wilderness values and if modified to do so it would be equal to the All Wilderness Alternative.

White Knob Mountains

A partial wilderness alternative that would recommend for wilderness something less than the entire acreage of this WSA was considered by BLM but dropped because no boundary was found that would significantly reduce resource conflicts, improve the quality of the wilderness values, or improve the WSA's manageability while maintaining essential wilderness values.