

WHITE KNOB MOUNTAINS

Proposed Action (No Wilderness Alternative)

Under the proposed action, the entire 9,950 acres of the White Knob Mountains WSA would be recommended for nonwilderness uses. The primary impacts under this alternative relate to the development of mineral 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 9,950 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, however, wilderness values would be lost as a result of mineral development along the WSA's eastern boundary in Waddoups Canyon, oil and gas development near the head of Schoolhouse Canyon, and gravel extraction on the WSA's southwestern boundary.

It is assumed that three existing lode claims along the WSA's eastern boundary in Waddoups Canyon would be explored. This would require construction of one mile of new road; the claims are close to an existing road so the requirements for additional road is small. Development activities on each claim would include 20 acres of surface disturbance associated with tailing piles, adits, loading areas, and buildings. The three claims, then, would have a total of 60 acres of surface disturbance and a total of one mile of new road.

One oil and gas well is anticipated to be drilled near the head of Schoolhouse Canyon. Access for this well would be from the Waddoups Canyon Road over the ridge to the west side of Schoolhouse Canyon. This would require two miles of new road to get into Schoolhouse Canyon; there would be 10 acres of surface disturbance at the well site associated with the drill pad and equipment parking areas.

The single gravel pit along the WSA's southwestern border requires no new road, but would entail five acres of surface disturbance.

While somewhat isolated from one another, the three aforementioned activities would combine to reduce the naturalness of the area. The development of the three lode claims in Waddoups Canyon would impact the perception of naturalness on approximately 240 acres immediately surrounding the claims due to the visibility of the estimated surface disturbance of the claims. The gravel pit would impact naturalness on only twenty acres because of its small size and limited activity. Conversely, the oil and gas well would negatively affect naturalness on 720 acres. During the exploratory phase, the noise of the machinery, the lights, the new road, and the machinery itself would combine to reduce naturalness in an area much larger than the actual surface disturbance.

During the well's production phase, impacts to naturalness would be lessened, but it would still impact the perception of naturalness on 320 acres. This includes the impacts of the access road, the well, and the collection and storage facility.

Opportunities for solitude would also be negatively impacted by mineral development. Sights and sounds from traffic, construction, and production would reduce the quality of solitude to the same degree as naturalness. Outstanding opportunities for solitude would be lost on a total of 980 acres from all energy and mineral activities.

Sights and sounds from recreational ORV use would also have an adverse impact on solitude. However, this impact would be minimal because ORV use is estimated to be only 50 visitor days annually and is expected to remain below 100 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future.

Other recreation uses would increase slightly but would remain below 150 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future. This increase would not significantly impact opportunities for solitude.

Conclusion: The White Knob Mountains WSA's wilderness values of naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude would be lost or impaired on 980 acres, or 10% of the WSA. Naturalness and solitude on 8,970 acres would be subject to loss in the long-term, but no impairing activities are anticipated in the foreseeable future.

Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use

The WSA would be open to ORV use. The two miles of new road associated with oil and gas development in Schoolhouse Canyon would make the north-central portion of the WSA more accessible to ORV users. However, recreational ORV use is projected to remain below 100 visitor days annually for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion: While some of the WSA would be more accessible, recreational ORV use would remain below 100 visitor days annually. There would be no significant impact on recreational ORV use.

Impacts on Development of Energy and Mineral Resources

All lands within the White Knob Mountains WSA would remain open for mineral entry and leasing. All potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes a moderate favorability for the discovery of oil and gas, low to moderate favorability for metallic minerals, and moderate favorability for saleable minerals (sand and gravel).

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

All Wilderness Alternative

Under the All Wilderness Alternative, all 9,950 acres of public land in the White Knob Mountains 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

The entire WSA would be recommended for wilderness so wilderness values on the 9,950 acres of the WSA would be protected by legislative mandate. Mining claims in the WSA with valid existing rights could be fully developed if a validity examination showed that the claims held sufficient quantity and quality of material so that a prudent man could expect a reasonable return on his investment. For the existing claims in the WSA, it is assumed for purposes of analysis that the claims would not satisfy a validity examination and thus, could not be developed. Wilderness designation would also withdraw the WSA from any future mineral entry and possible development. Wilderness values of naturalness and solitude would be retained in the WSA.

An estimated 50 visitor days annually of ORV use would be foregone under the All Wilderness Alternative. This would enhance naturalness and opportunities for solitude within the WSA.

Conclusion: Wilderness values would be retained on all 9,950 acres of the White Knob Mountains WSA. Negative impacts on 980 acres would not occur.

Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use

Wilderness designation would close the entire 9,950 acre White Knob Mountains WSA to all forms of recreational ORV use. The present level of 50 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 50 visitor days annually would be foregone. The impacts of displacing this use to other nonwilderness public land would be negligible.

Impacts on Development of Energy and Mineral Resources

Wilderness designation would withdraw all 9,950 acres of public land within the WSA from all forms of mineral entry and leasing, subject to valid rights at the time of designation. There would be no oil and gas development activities.

Prior to commencing work on the existing claims in the WSA, a validity examination must show that the claims hold sufficient quantity and quality of material so that a prudent man could expect a reasonable return on his investment. For purposes of analysis, it is assumed that the

existing claims within the WSA would not pass a validity examination and thus, could not be developed. Other, as yet undiscovered energy and mineral resources could not be developed.

There would also be no further sales of sand and gravel from within the WSA. This would be a negligible impact, however, because ample supplies exist outside the WSA.

Conclusion: Opportunities to explore for and develop potential metallic mineral deposits and sand and gravel would be foregone. There would be no oil and gas development activities.