

32-9 BLACK CANYON

The April 1980 proposed decision included the following evaluation of wilderness characteristics.

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 5,400 acres of BLM land. This figure differs from the 5,220 acres shown in the August 1979 report. The initial inventory located the southern boundary along a legal subdivision. After reevaluation in the field it was determined that a more appropriate boundary would be a way near the subdivision line, resulting in an increase in 180 acres. The unit lies in the foothills of the Lemhi Range between the Birch Creek and Little Lost River Valleys. The rugged Lemhi Range rises from the southern unit boundary to a height of 7,455 feet in the northwest portion. Several deep canyons cut the area with steep rock walls and intermittent streams. Junipers outline the stratification of sedimentary rocks on the upper slopes. A few dense patches of Douglas fir occur on higher points in the unit. A sagebrush/bunchgrass community dominates the lower slopes and canyons.

NATURALNESS:

Two vehicle trails penetrate the unit from the south following canyon bottoms. A faint spur trail runs a short distance to Jackknife Cave on the west wall of the eastern canyon. A barbed wire fence is located in the northeast portion of the unit.

External influences are considered minimal, and include distant sights of agricultural lands and associated structures and the Department of Energy facilities to the east.

Even though the unit is small, the natural features of the area are so prominent and of such high interest that the casual observer would tend to overlook the imprints of man in favor of examining the natural features. The area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature.

SOLITUDE:

Extensive topographic variation combined with some vegetative screening make opportunities for solitude outstanding. The deep, winding canyons, caves, rock outcrops and scattered junipers offer outstanding opportunities for visitors to avoid others within the unit.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

Opportunities for rock-climbing and spelunking are outstanding in this unit. The many rock outcrops, faces and cliffs provide excellent possibilities for climbing. Numerous caves are located in the area and these offer opportunities for exploring. Hiking up the canyons and viewing the variety of beautiful rock formations is also an outstanding opportunity. The unique geologic features found in this area combined with wildlife populations make this unit a good location for photography. Overall the quality of recreational opportunities is considered outstanding because of the exceptional or unusual natural features and recreational attractions throughout the unit.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

Rock formations in this unit have important geologic, scenic, and educational values.

The unit is also important habitat for the prairie falcon, golden eagle, kestrels, Cooper's hawk, goshawk, sharp-shinned hawk, great horned owl, and red-tailed hawk. In addition, this area is historic bighorn sheep range. The unit is of important archaeological value, containing numerous rock shelters, pictographs and surface lithic scatters. Locations in the unit show evidence of human use dating back 10,000 years.

REHABILITATION:

Vehicle trails and ways are considered light and should revegetate through natural processes.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments that agreed with the proposed decision recognized that the unit has some jeep trails and that agricultural development can be seen from a few viewpoints in the unit.

However, they felt the trails would easily revegetate through natural processes and that the unit contains sufficient topographic and vegetative screening to hide external human imprints. Screening was also stressed as contributing to outstanding opportunities for solitude. Comments pointed out that the unit has exceptional natural features that provide an outstanding primitive recreation attraction. The unit's archaeological sites and wildlife habitat were identified as important supplemental values.

Other comments did not support further study, emphasizing that the unit does not appear natural because of vehicle trails and a livestock fence. They also stressed that the views of agricultural and other developments, the unit's small size, lack of water, and presence of rattlesnakes makes opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation less than outstanding.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

The unit appears natural, displays an unusual diversity of landforms, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and important supplemental values. Topography and vegetation screen a visitor well from external sounds and views. Water is not necessary for a primitive recreation experience; the absence of it offers a risk or challenge to the primitive recreationist. The same may apply to rattlesnakes, which to some are a part of the Western outdoor experience.

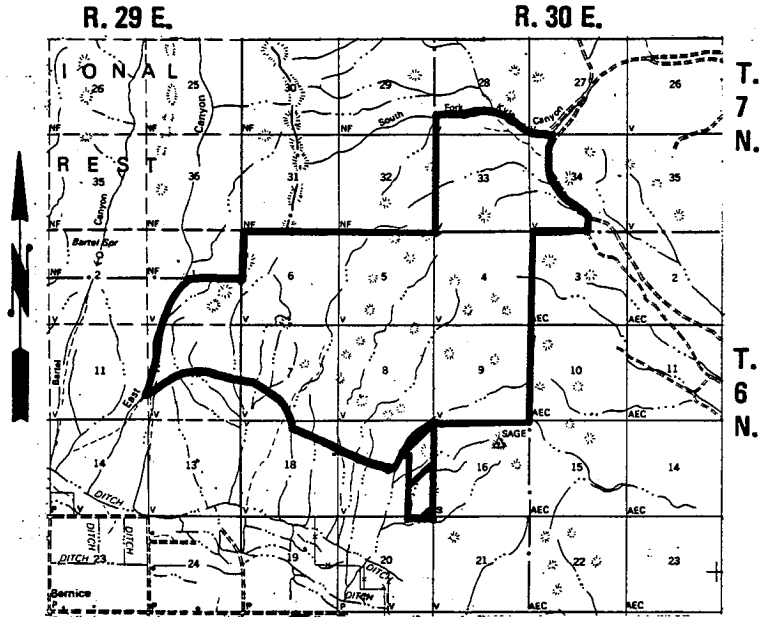
The reference in the proposed decision to rehabilitation was to portions of the unit that meet the naturalness criteria, not to portions that do not.

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DECISION:

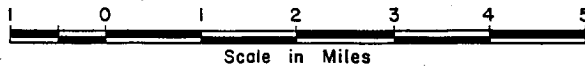
No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. A unit of 5,400 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the solitude-recreation criteria.

32-9
BLACK CANYON



LEGEND

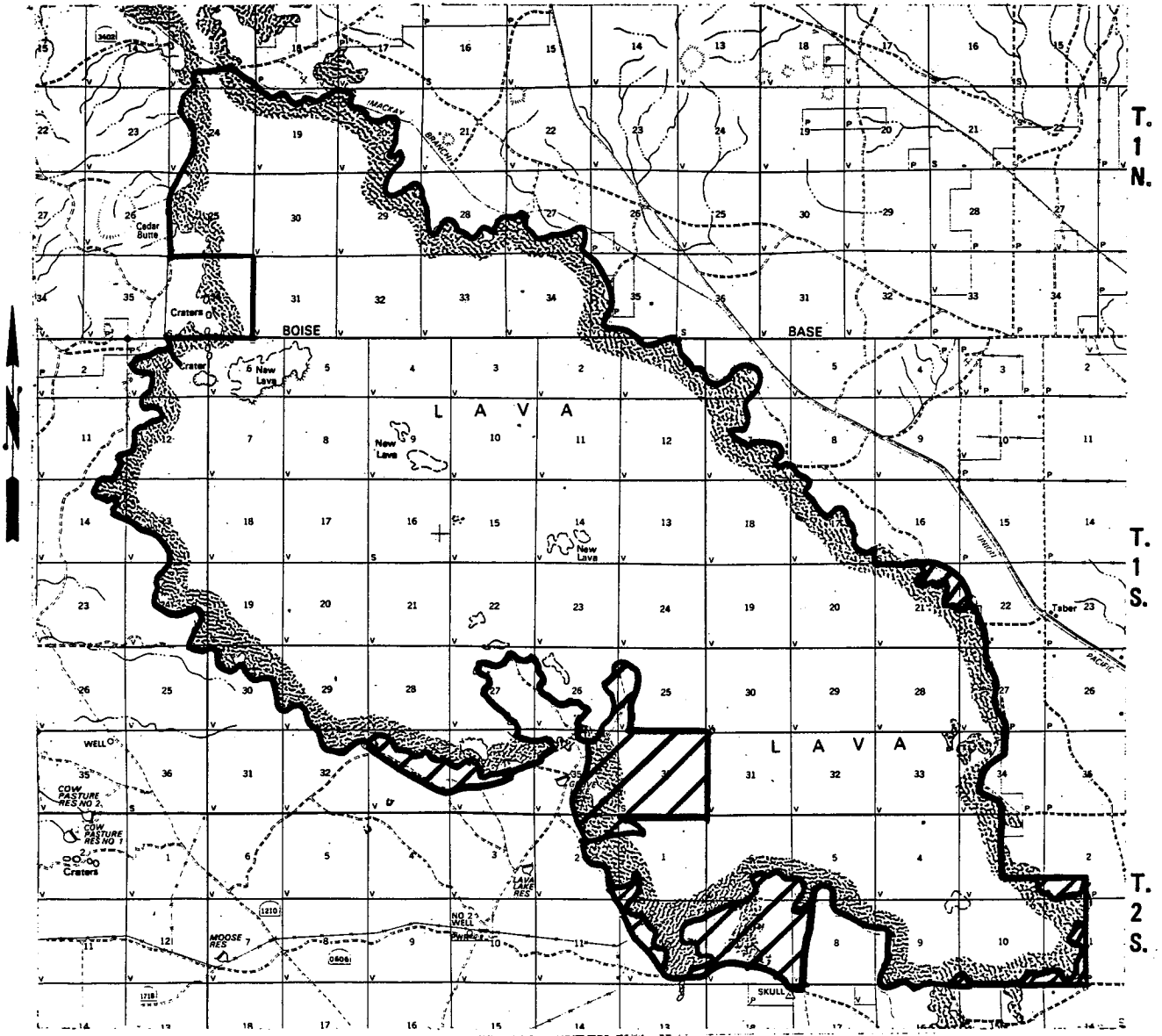
-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
-  AREA WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS





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CEDAR BUTTE

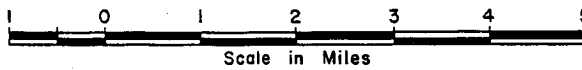
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LEGEND

-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
-  AREA WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS



The April 1980 proposed decision included the following evaluation of wilderens characteristics.

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 38,820 acres of BLM land with two State section inholdings. It is located just south of Atomic City with the northern tip of the unit lying five miles east of Big Southern Butte. The unit contains all but the northern tip of the Cerro Grande lava flow, which dates back to 10,780 ± 300 years old. Several more recent flows overlie the old flow. Volcanic features including blow-out craters, lava tubes and caves characterize the area. The source vent represents the highest point in the unit at 5,235 ft. Nowhere in the area does elevation drop below 4,600 ft. illustrating the unit's flat topography. The vegetation in the northern portion is characterized by bunch grasses, concentrated in the lava cracks where soil accumulation is greatest. Junipers and sage become more prevalent toward the central and southern portions where greater soil development has occurred.

NATURALNESS:

While the unit boundary tends to follow the edge of the lava flow, certain areas along the perimeter include a narrow margin of desert range. These are the most impacted areas, in particular, land adjacent to agriculture areas along the southeast corner of the lava flow where dumps, rock piles and vehicle ways exist. A livestock trough and some small excavations occur in the northwest corner. Numerous crested wheatgrass seedings are visible along this same margin on the unit's west side. Three sections of wooden drift fences have been placed within the unit along railroad tracks on the north boundary. Boundary adjustments have excluded these impacts. Approximately four miles of vehicle ways are visible on the lavas. They are apparent more from their affect on the low vegetation rather than from any impact on the substrata. Their overall impact is minor and easily absorbed due to the size of the unit. A portion of the lava flow has been designated as a community pit, where the public can collect lava rock after obtaining a permit from the BLM. The section includes a large portion of the main source vent. Several small lava removal sites occur along the road leading to the main source vent, but the impact is not substantial. As most of the impacts are located just inside the unit boundary but outside the actual flow, the border has been adjusted to follow the lava edge. These adjustments eliminate impacts to naturalness on the east and west sides of the unit.

SOLITUDE:

Desert shrubs, grasses and juniper dominate the unit and offer little vegetative screening. Topographic screening is considered moderate overall, due to the general open and flat character of this lava landscape. The numerous depressions and lava swells provide adequate screening for visitors to avoid others within the unit. Other than the occasional passing of a train on the northeast and agricultural activities to the east, external influences are non-existent. Due to the unit's large size and sufficient relief, opportunities for solitude are considered outstanding.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

The rugged nature of the unit offers outstanding opportunities for various recreational activities in an uncommon environment. Collapsed lava tubes, fissures and craters provide excellent exploratory possibilities for hikers, photographers, and geologists. Camping on the lava flow constitutes another unusual yet rewarding recreational activity for the enthusiast willing to pack water. Similarly, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing could provide risk and challenge for the winter recreationist. Due to the unit's large size and exceptional or unusual natural features and recreational attractions, opportunities for primitive recreation are considered outstanding.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

In addition to its scenic quality, the scientific and geologic significance of this lava flow is the greatest supplemental value. This uncommon landform offers unique educational opportunities to a variety of disciplines including geology, botany, zoology and ecology. The flow also provides important habitat for rabbits, coyotes, reptiles, bobcats, and mule deer. Booming grounds for sage grouse have been identified in the flow.

REHABILITATION:

The community pit area has only minor and sparsely distributed evidence of lava rock collection. These man-caused signs would eventually disappear as the lichen cover returned and weathering processes took effect. Closing the vehicle ways leading to these sites would eliminate any further impacts.

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments that agreed that the unit qualified as a study area were not detailed as to the reasons why it qualified. Other comments did not favor further study, mentioning roads, a powerline, crested wheatgrass seedings, and a reservoir; and indicating that they adversely affect naturalness and opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

Other comments stated that nearby agricultural sounds have a negative influence on the unit's naturalness and were disruptive to solitude. Solitude was also cited as less than outstanding because the unit lacks vegetative and topographic screening.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

The developments listed above are quite a distance outside of the unit and are not significant enough to affect the unit's wilderness values. These factors are not imposing enough to disqualify this large area from further study. A unit this large does not need good screening to provide outstanding opportunities—space and limited topographic relief is sufficient.

The reference in the proposed decision to rehabilitation was to portions of the unit that meet the naturalness criteria, not to portions that do not.

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DECISION:

No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. A unit of 35,700 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the solitude-recreation criteria.

The April 1980 proposed decision included the following evaluation of wilderness characteristics.

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 68,920 acres of BLM land with four State land inholdings totalling 2,560 acres, and a 40-acre private inholding. The BLM acreage figure differs from the 66,200 acres shown in the August 1979 report due to a more accurate calculation of acreage. The unit is located five miles west of Idaho Falls. As a general rule, the edge of the lava flow forms the boundary on the north, east and west sides. Morgan's Pasture, a private agricultural area, with numerous developments, forms part of the unit's southern boundary. The unit consists almost entirely of a 4,100-year old "pahoe-hoe" lava flow. Very small amounts of desert land occur inside the boundaries. Various volcanic features including collapsed lava tubes, cones, caves, fissures and the source vent are found throughout the flow. Vegetation on the lava is typically a pioneer type including lichens, mosses and grasses; junipers and ferns appear in some of the cracks. The flow ranges from 4,600 to 5,350 feet in elevation.

NATURALNESS:

Boundary adjustments have been made to exclude agricultural trespass, several ways, and other impacts, decreasing the unit by 2,720 acres. The remainder of the unit is free from man-caused impacts due to difficult vehicular access onto the rugged lava. Fifteen ways enter the unit, but none are substantial nor extend over one mile. Along the powerline and road forming the southmost boundary and in some northern sections, garbage dumps are found just inside the border. Some disturbance and ways indicate a possibility of unauthorized lava removal. External influences consist of scattered dumps, views of agricultural activity, farm roads and highways and the cities of Idaho Falls and Shelley. These are visible from the edges of the unit and from the higher points within, but are not considered substantially imposing.

SOLITUDE:

Desert shrubs, grasses and juniper dominate the unit and offer little vegetative screening. Topographic screening is considered moderate overall, due to the general open and flat character of this lava landscape. The numerous depressions and lava swells provide adequate screening for visitors to avoid others within the unit. External influences are not considered significant. Due to the unit's large size and sufficient relief, opportunities for solitude are considered outstanding.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

The unit offers outstanding opportunities for recreational activities. Volcanic forces have created lava tunnels which can be explored as well as a myriad of volcanic features that provide excellent subjects for photographers and geology buffs. Sight-seeing is outstanding for botanical and zoological features. Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing could offer physical and mental challenge to winter explorers. For those willing to brave the rough portions of lava, hiking the area allows the visitor to discover its unique beauty. Camping constitutes another unusual and rewarding activity for the enthusiast willing to pack in water. Due to the unit's large size and exceptional or unusual natural features and recreational attractions, opportunities for primitive recreation are considered outstanding.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

The scientific, educational, and scenic values of this unit are significant. A large portion of the unit has been designated a National Natural Landmark due to its unusual occurrence within the Snake River Plain. It includes excellent examples of "pahoe-hoe" lava features of geologic importance. The ecology of the lavas is unique, a prime illustration of pioneering plant communities. The ferns in the deep cracks are a botanical anomaly. Prehistoric and historic sites of archaeological value are present.

REHABILITATION:

If protected from vehicle use, the ways entering the unit should revegetate with natural processes. Trash and garbage could be cleaned up using hand labor.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments that supported further wilderness study gave the following reasons why the unit should be studied:

- The unit is natural in appearance. Human imprints that are present along the unit boundary are of minor significance; naturalness would be met if a boundary adjustment were made. The suggested adjustment was to exclude sections in the southeastern part of the unit containing bladed vehicle trails. The area is close to major population centers, yet so expansive and relatively untouched that human imprints are scarcely noticeable.
- Opportunities for solitude are outstanding. Visitors need only walk in 200 yds. to feel isolated. The little but sharp relief in the lava provides adequate screening for reducing encounters with others. Good camping sites are visually isolated from each other. Solitude would not be diminished if others were in the area. Size and topography allow for outstanding solitude.
- Opportunities for primitive recreation are outstanding. The unusual lava landscape provides opportunities for sightseers, geologists, photographers, hikers, etc. The area has real challenge for backpacking, low-skill rock climbing and desert survival. Recreation would be primitive because there are no roads, running water, or marked trails.
- Supplemental values are numerous and important. Those mentioned include: public education and scientific study of a large and recent lava flow, primitive vegetation, unique geological features, wildlife habitat, and one of a kind zoological and botanical sightseeing.

Other comments that did not favor further study gave the following specific reasons:

- The unit is not natural. The recommendation to drop 2,720 acres is supported because it does not meet the criteria. Surrounding sights and sounds detract from the unit's naturalness.
- Solitude is not outstanding. The unit's southern boundary consists of a road and powerline making a wilderness experience difficult because of sights and sounds of man associated with the road. Agricultural activities in the surrounding countryside are visible. Sights and sounds of tractors and other farm equipment penetrate and detract from the unit's solitude.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

The suggested boundary adjustment to exclude bladed trails in the southeastern part of the unit was further field checked. Access to these trails is blocked by agricultural activities. The trails are not maintained for continuous and regular use and do not appear to be frequently used. They are very difficult to locate and follow, and show only intermittent construction. In many places weathering has erased signs of earlier use. They can be found and followed from an aircraft but are not apparent from the ground. These trails do not have a significant influence on naturalness when considering the unit as a whole.

Sights and sounds surrounding the unit are not sufficient to disqualify the unit. Because of the unit's large size, excellent configuration and adequate topographic screening, the external views of human activity are not imposing. Once into the lava flow, a visitor need only travel a short distance to feel isolated. The many depressions, lava features and the area's vastness give a visitor unlimited opportunities to avoid external influences.

The reference in the proposed decision to rehabilitation was to portions of the unit that meet the naturalness criteria, not to portions that do not.

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DECISION:

No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. A unit of 66,200 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the solitude-recreation criteria.

