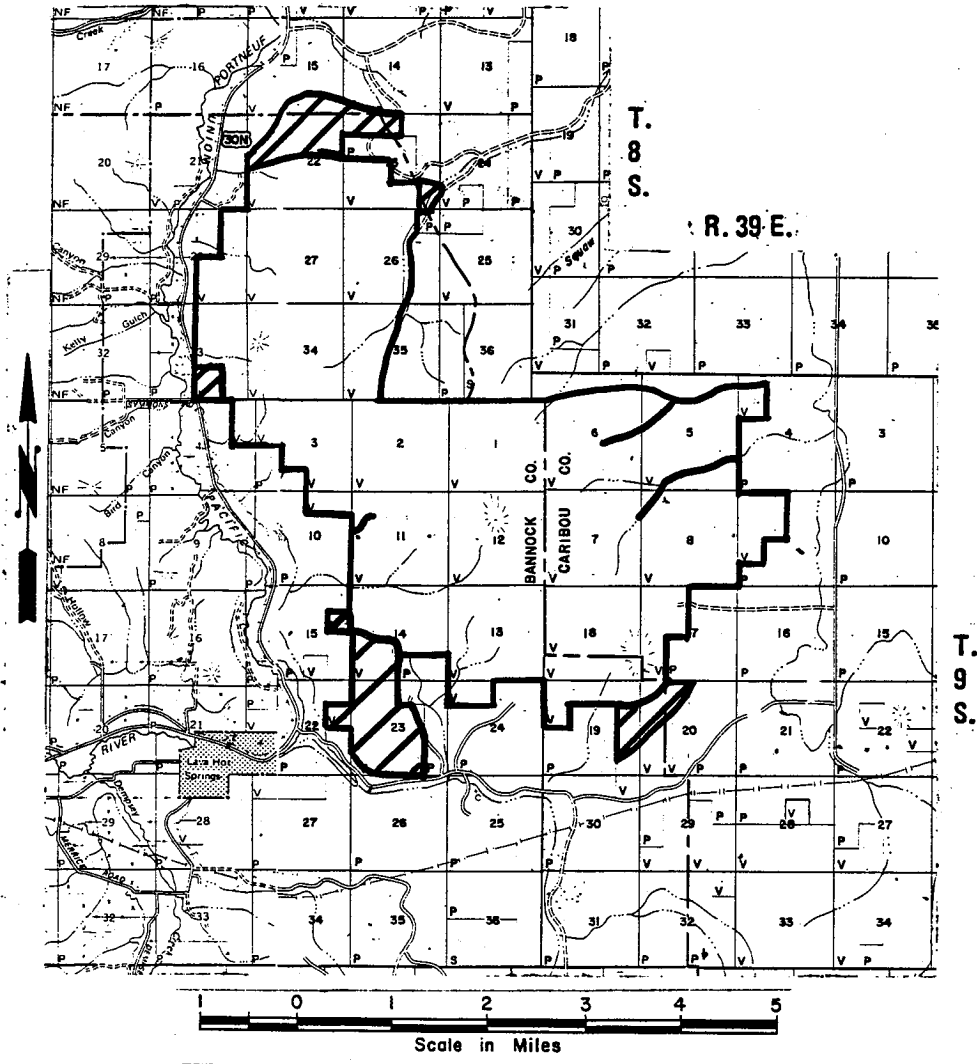




BURLEY DISTRICT
UNIT IDENTIFIED AS A
WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

28-1
PETTICOAT PEAK



LEGEND

-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
-  AREA WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS

28-1 PETTICOAT PEAK

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

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 13,046 acres of BLM land, in an irregular configuration approximately five by seven miles, and is located one mile northeast of Lava Hot Springs. The unit is in the Fish Creek Mountain Range just east of the Portneuf River. Topography is rough and mountainous with elevations ranging from 8,033 feet on Petticoat Peak in the central portion to 5,500 feet in the southwest portion of the unit. Many canyons and ridges radiate from the mountain peak. Vegetation consists of junipers, mountain shrubs and sagebrush in the western portion of the unit. Douglas fir intermingled with aspen, mountain shrubs and Limber pine dominate the eastern half of the unit.

NATURALNESS:

Almost all of the imprints of man are found along the boundaries or in near proximity to the dead-end roads and ways within the unit. Five roads and 17 ways are scattered throughout the unit, however the majority of these access routes are very short (under $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in length), dead-end up the various drainages, and are reverting back to a natural condition due to little or no use. Minor woodcutting areas can be located off a number of the ways. Hunter-sheep camps are located at the end of most ways, however these camps generally have no impact on the naturalness of the unit. Several old stock reservoirs and trash sites have been located within the unit, providing only a small localized impact. Due to the rough terrain and dense vegetative cover the ways and other imprints of man generally provide individual localized impacts only, with no significant impact on the naturalness of the unit as a whole.

SOLITUDE:

With several peaks over 7,000 feet throughout the unit, in combination with numerous canyons and variety in terrain and elevation there are opportunities for solitude that are considered outstanding. The canyons and drainages are well vegetated with a variety of species including bitterbrush, snowberry, mountain maple, mountain mahogany, juniper, Douglas fir and quaking aspen. The higher elevations are dominated by fir and aspen that provide excellent vegetative screening for outstanding opportunities for solitude. Major outside influences such as the Fish Creek Highway along the southeast portion, along with irregular configurations in conjunction with ways have caused the trimming of a total of 1,688 acres in the north, southwest and southeast portions as lacking outstanding opportunities for solitude and recreation. The Union Pacific Railroad passes within $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the unit on the west and within three miles on the east. However, use on this track is not considered to be a major outside influence due to its intermittent nature and the screening available.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

The variety of terrain and vegetative cover provides excellent habitat for mule deer and grouse. This provides unconfined recreation opportunities for big game and upland game hunting. The many high peaks and meadows provide opportunities for camping, hiking, horseback riding, and photography. Although a variety of opportunities exist, these are not considered to be outstanding.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

Portions of the unit contain habitat of peregrine falcon, whooping crane and bald eagle, endangered species; and the spotted bat, bobcat, Canada lynx and pigeon hawk on the sensitive list. A portion of the unit is critical winter range for mule deer.

REHABILITATION:

All of the ways within the unit could revert to a natural condition if closed to vehicular traffic.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Comments that supported the unit as a study area gave the following specific reasons:

- Some imprints of man exist but they are not substantially noticeable and will return to a natural state if left alone.

- Unit contains opportunities for solitude such as in small timbered valleys far away from major roads.
- Opportunities for solitude can be found beyond and along the access routes.
- Broken topography provides outstanding opportunities for solitude.
- Provides outstanding opportunities for hiking, photography, hunting, ski touring, sightseeing.
- Beyond the access routes the area provides ample vegetation along primitive trails, where motorized vehicles are unable to travel.
- Good cross section of plant and animal community; very few areas have habitat for elk and mountain lion in wilderness setting in southeast Idaho. Unique ecological system should be protected.
- Area is critical mule deer winter range; heavy vegetation provides excellent habitat for wildlife.

Comments that disagreed with the proposed decision gave the following specific reasons:

- The area is not a roadless area; there are dead-end roads and jeep trails up many canyons, making 5,000 roadless acres impossible.
- The area has developed springs and salt grounds within it.
- On both sides of the mountain range, in the bottom of each canyon (the main canyons) is a road that is used by ranchers, hunters, and the general public for outings. It is doubtful that the bottoms of the canyons could return to original state.
- Five roads and seventeen vehicle ways are scattered throughout the unit; these adversely affect the unit's naturalness.
- Timber was logged within the unit some years ago.
- Roads and trails come within 1/2 mile of connecting across the ridge.
- The area is not large, containing only 13,046 acres.
- Opportunities for solitude are not outstanding due to Union Pacific trains passing on the west and north sides of the unit almost every hour, with whistles audible from any area inside the unit.
- In many areas heavy truck traffic from the highway is audible.
- From any high elevation the visitor must be aware of man's imprint through all types of development from towns, farming, roads, railways, etc., outside the unit.
- Sights and sounds of man will not afford a visitor outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation.
- Man's use for recreation is limited by lack of water and very few grass patches.
- Man can walk out of area in any direction in 30 minutes to one hour.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

Roadless/Naturalness:

Opponents to study area identification for the unit felt the cherry-stemming of dead-end roads was not consistent with the roadless requirement in the BLM inventory policy. Also, many felt that all vehicle routes were roads, therefore, affecting the naturalness of the unit, as well as splitting the unit into roadless areas of less than 5,000 acres.

Under the BLM guidelines a study area is defined as a roadless area of 5,000 acres or more (or of sufficient size) within which can be found wilderness characteristics. A roadless area is any land (regardless of size of configuration) lying between two or more roads (including dead-end roads) and/or state and private land. Therefore, by definition, a study area may be defined by the physical edge of roads. Consequently, roads which define boundaries cannot be used to declare an area "roaded."

The field inventory identified several vehicle routes that showed evidence of having been improved and maintained by mechanical means to insure relatively regular and continuous use. These routes are classified as roads and continue as vehicle ways (maintained solely by passage of vehicles) inside the unit until they dead-end.

Two of the roads are boundary roads for the unit, the Right Fork of Red House Canyon Road and the North Canyon Road. The others are cherry-stem roads that penetrate the unit, and include Upper Mill Creek Road and Right Fork of North Canyon Road.

There are numerous vehicle ways that penetrate the unit. Most of the ways are found in drainages and show evidence of having been bladed and maintained at one time. Most ways are less than .4 mile in length and are reverting to a natural condition due to little or no use. The longest route goes up Rindlishbaker Canyon as a road for 1.2 miles, then continues as a vehicle way for .8 mile and ends near the top of the ridge in a dry meadow. Due to the rough terrain and dense vegetation cover, the cherry-stem roads and vehicle ways provide individual localized impacts only, with no significant impact on the naturalness of the area as a whole.

One comment felt the Bureau had missed a road, the road that goes up the ridge west of Clark Spring through a piece of private property, but this road was identified in the inventory and is part of the unit's eastern boundary line. This area was field checked again and the road was reconfirmed as part of the eastern boundary.

All maintained water developments were found to be outside the proposed boundaries. The few saltblock areas, old stock reservoirs, and old wood-cutting sites found within the study area provide individual localized minor impacts only, with no significant impact on the naturalness of the area as a whole.

A ten-acre materials site thought to be just outside the proposed area was actually found to be just inside the western boundary. The materials site has not been used in years, but definitely shows the imprint of man's work.

The reference to rehabilitation in the proposed decision was to areas that already met the naturalness criteria, not to areas that did not.

Solitude:

Several of the comments indicated that train and vehicle noises from outside the unit adversely affect opportunities for solitude. Others felt the visibility of man's imprints outside the unit from the top of ridges also affected the opportunities for solitude.

The Union Pacific Railroad tracks are near the study area boundary; approximately 24 times a day trains can be heard and seen from certain portions of the area for very short time periods. The majority of the area has excellent variety of terrain and vegetation cover that gives the visitor opportunities for solitude where the sights and sounds of the trains and vehicles cannot be seen or heard.

Primitive Recreation:

The area does offer a number of recreation opportunities, but these are not considered outstanding.

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DECISION:

No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. However, additional field evaluation indicated a need to drop a 60-acre area affected by the materials site as noted in the naturalness section. A unit of 11,298 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the solitude criteria.