

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

SIZE AND PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

The unit contains 65,134 acres of BLM land, in an irregularly shaped area $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles by nine miles, with two private and five state inholdings. It is located 25 miles southwest of Bruneau. The unit lies on a flat to gently rolling plateau sharply dissected by seven meandering, vertical-walled canyons, the major drainage being that of Big Jack's Creek. Vegetation is dominated by northern desert shrub species with heavy riparian vegetation along the canyon bottoms.

NATURALNESS:

The eastern periphery of the unit contains a number of ways and bladed fire lines, the most prominent penetrating into the unit two miles. One bladed fire line system in the northeast portion of the unit is considered a significant scar. An east-west fence line also extends from the eastern boundary to Big Jack's Canyon in the northeast portion of the unit. Five ways penetrate into the unit as much as five miles from the western and southern boundaries to the canyon rims. A number of small stock ponds are scattered around the periphery of the unit in association with the intruding ways and roads.

Because of the flatness of the terrain on which the imprints occur, most are considered substantially unnoticeable except at close distances. As a whole, the unit appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature. In the eastern periphery of the unit 3,926 acres should be trimmed from further consideration because of very noticeable bladed fire lines or ways which, in association with state land, isolate these acres from the remainder of the unit.

SOLITUDE:

The dominance of low shrubby vegetation affords minimal vegetative screening over much of the unit. Only in the heavy riparian vegetation of the canyon bottoms is vegetative screening good to excellent. Topographic screening is minimal on the plateaus. However, the numerous, deep, meandering canyons dissecting the plateau offer excellent topographic screening over much of the unit. In addition, the dispersion of canyon systems over the unit would tend to distribute use more evenly and reduce visitor contacts. The large size of the unit combined with excellent dispersion potential affords outstanding opportunities for solitude. Only in the southern portion, where intruding boundary roads in conjunction with state and private lands cause a narrow confining configuration are opportunities for solitude limited. These areas, totalling 6,375 acres, should be trimmed from further consideration.

PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION:

Primitive recreational opportunities within the unit are primarily associated with the canyons and include camping, backpacking, nature photography, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing. The recreational opportunities are generally considered to be outstanding because of the exceptional or unusual natural features and recreational attractions in the canyons. Only in the southernmost portion where the canyons are shallow are opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation considered less than outstanding because of the narrow confining configuration resulting from intruding boundary roads and state and private lands. These acres should be trimmed from further consideration as indicated in the solitude narrative.

SUPPLEMENTAL VALUES:

The deep meandering canyons of the unit are of exceptional scenic value. Red-banded trout, a sensitive species, are found in limited numbers in the Big Jack's Creek drainage. The unit contains potential bighorn sheep habitat and some antelope winter range.

REHABILITATION:

A portion of the unit is sufficiently natural in character to qualify as a Wilderness Study Area. However, it may be possible to further remove the imprints of man from portions of the unit by hand labor or natural regeneration. Rehabilitation potential will be considered in detail during the study phase of the wilderness review process.

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PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY:

Of the comments in support of a study area, most were in favor of identifying 54,800 acres as in the proposed decision, with two asking for an expansion of the area to the south. Specific reasons given for supporting study area identification included the following:

- The unit is quite natural in appearance because imprints of man were few and widely scattered over a large area with good shape or configuration.
- Opportunities for solitude in the unit are outstanding because of the sense of remoteness on the large plateau areas, the meandering character of the canyons and the absence of external influences.
- Opportunities for primitive recreation in the unit are outstanding because of the attractive recreation features of the canyons and the diversity of recreation opportunities on both the plateau and in the canyons, including hiking, hunting and photography (hiking opportunities being the activity most frequently mentioned).
- The unit has exceptional or outstanding supplemental values, including outstanding scenery, wildlife values (bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope, sage grouse and redbanded trout habitat), geological values, and unique desert plant communities. Supplemental values (particularly scenic and wildlife values) were the most frequently stated reasons for identifying the unit as a study area.

All of those opposed to further wilderness consideration for the unit felt that the unit did not meet the roadless definition because the area was covered or crisscrossed with roads, many of which were well traveled and man-made. In addition, the majority of the comments stated that the unit was not natural because of the number of existing roads, fences and water developments. Maps were provided showing roads and other imprints of man.

Additional specific reasons given for opposing study area identification included the following:

- Opportunities for solitude were not outstanding because of the open character of most of the unit, the lack of sufficient vegetative screening, and frequent low-flying military aircraft operating in an east-west corridor through the middle of the unit. The influence of low-flying aircraft was the most frequently stated reason for the lack of solitude.
- Opportunities for primitive recreation were not outstanding because of the dry, flat and hot environment over much of the unit and the negative effect of vehicle traffic over nearby roads on a primitive hiking experience.
- An existing management plan specifying the development of a well and pipeline system seriously conflicts with further wilderness consideration of the unit. The well, which is already built, would supply water to the western plateau regions via a pipeline which has yet to be built.

COMMENT EVALUATION:

Roadless/Naturalness:

The maps supplied by those who felt that the area was not roadless or natural were reviewed for previously uninventoried roads or other imprints of man. The maps showed six vehicle routes within the study area that are claimed to be roads which had been previously identified in the proposed decision as ways maintained solely by the passage of vehicles. All other vehicle routes shown on the maps were previously identified as roads in the proposed decision and were used to delineate the boundary.

The six vehicle routes identified within the study area were classified as ways because they clearly and obviously show no sign of construction or maintenance by mechanical means. In all cases, these ways are 2-wheel tracks crossing relatively flat open plateau country with sagebrush vegetation growing between the tracks. In one case, the way has been so infrequently traveled in recent years that the wheel tracks have all but been obliterated by vegetative growth over much of its length. In another case, the wheel tracks of the way lying north of Big Jack's Creek canyon in the center of the unit become increasingly less noticeable as one travels from the western boundary eastward to the canyon of Big Jack's Creek. The other ways located in the northern and southern portions of the unit have well established wheel tracks over much of their length, but damage to vegetation between the wheel tracks by the passage of vehicles is generally limited.

Because of the location of these ways on relatively flat ground, they generally cannot be seen except when standing on or very close to them. Likewise, the impact of water developments or fences is extremely localized. Encounters with any imprints of man are extremely brief and very infrequent due to the wide dispersal of the imprints. A visitor can walk for days within this unit and encounter few if any visible signs of man's work. Therefore, the imprints of man cannot be considered substantially noticeable. The reference to rehabilitation in the proposed decision was to areas that already met the naturalness criteria, not to areas that did not.

Solitude:

The primary reason given for opposition to the proposed decision was that frequent low-flying military aircraft impact solitude. It is agreed that these aircraft have an impact upon the achievement of solitude as well as a sense of naturalness. However, these low-level flights are considered temporary impacts. If through the study process it is recommended that this unit be designated wilderness, the BLM could negotiate with the Air Force to alter the course of these low-level flights to eliminate their impact.

It is generally recognized that the lack of topography and tall vegetation does limit the opportunity to achieve solitude unless the area involved is large. Low vegetation on flat terrain can provide excellent screening if given a large enough area to allow other visitors or external influences (vehicles on boundary roads) to blend or disappear into the landscape. This unit is large enough to allow a number of user groups or external influences to blend into the landscape. Only in narrowly configured areas such as those excluded to the south of the study area boundary can sufficient blending of external influences not be achieved.

Not only does large size in combination with low vegetation provide sufficient screening, it also provides a sense of remoteness or vastness to an area, adding to the solitude experience. In this unit, the vast flat landscape is frequently dissected by deep, narrow, meandering draws and canyons which add to the sense of remoteness. These canyons offer over 50 miles of excellent topographic screening as well as aid in dispersing visitors over a number of different isolated plateau areas within the unit. Therefore, the large size of the unit in combination with the dispersion potential of the canyons and topographic screening of the canyons affords outstanding opportunities for solitude.

Primitive Recreation:

The opportunity to achieve quality primitive recreation experiences is dependent upon a unit's size and ability to provide exceptional or unusual natural features and recreation attractions. Exceptional natural features are those which provide exceptional scenery, diversity of landform and/or mobility of travel for a visitor, and would result in a strong recreation attraction to an area for one or more types of activities.

The exceptional scenic beauty of the Big Jack's Creek canyon and adjoining canyons and the diversity of landform between canyons and plateaus combined with the large size of the unit affords outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation. The steep canyon of Big Jack's Creek can give a sense of confinement to the visitor. However, the number of miles of canyon, as well as the numerous side canyons available for escape onto the plateaus, greatly diminish this sense of confinement and give a visitor mobility throughout the unit.

A hot and dry desert environment does not preclude the opportunity to have an outstanding recreation experience if one is prepared, it adds to the physical challenge of the experience. Palatable drinking water and heat are not a serious limitation to using this area if visits are conducted at the right time of the year and water sources within the canyons are chemically treated and/or boiled. Sufficient water supplies can be readily carried across plateau areas between canyons.

Conflicting Resource Values:

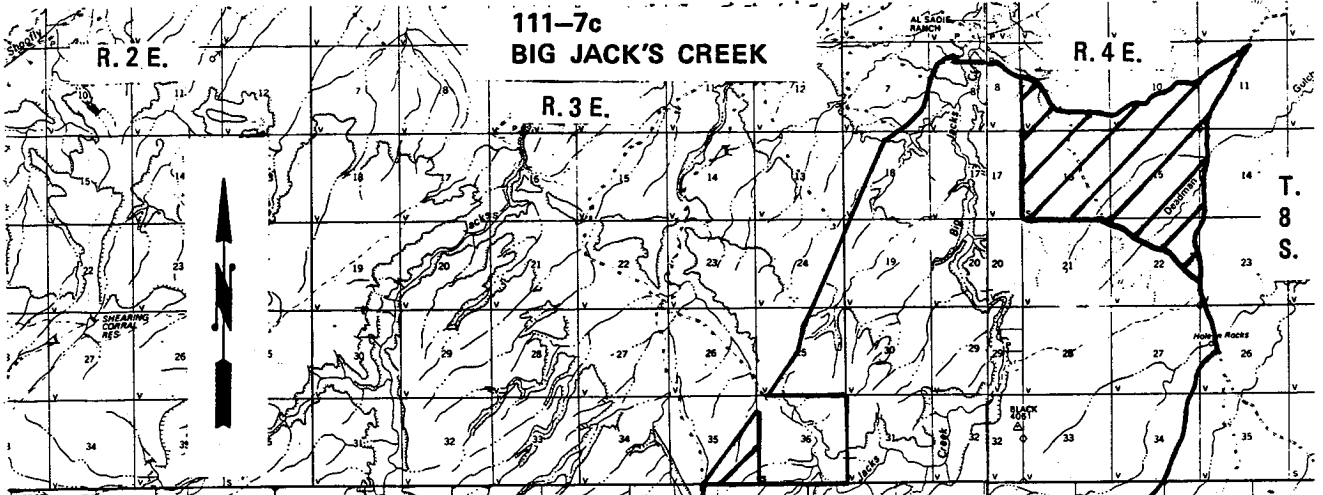
The plan to construct a water pipeline system in the western plateau region of the unit was recinded when a serious conflict between wildlife values and livestock values was identified. Because of this conflict, the implementation of the pipeline plan will not take place until the completion of the Bruneau planning effort. The conflict between this pipeline and wildlife values as well as wilderness values will be assessed to determine if the pipeline plan should be implemented.

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

DECISION:

No new information was received through public comments that would warrant a change in the decision. A unit of 54,833 acres is identified as a wilderness study area as it meets the naturalness and the solitude-recreation criteria.

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BIG JACK'S CREEK



LEGEND

-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREA
-  AREA WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS

