

Around Blue Eagle peak are exposed craggy outcrops of white rock which provide a colorful contrast with the dark green forest canopy blanketing the adjoining mountain slopes. The northern portions of the WSA are dominated with a colorful montage of rolling hills painted in hues of yellow and red.

The majority of human imprints are associated with spring development and water troughs located in the northern corner and along the eastern boundary of the WSA.

B. Solitude: The Blue Eagle WSA contains outstanding opportunities for solitude. The majority of the WSA is comprised of high mountains blanketed with dense stands of pinyon pine and juniper trees at the lower elevations, while at the higher elevations, dense screens of white fir and ponderosa pine ensuring solitude virtually anywhere. The WSA is dissected by several deep, narrow, winding drainages each facilitating opportunities for solitude. The gently rolling hills in the eastern part of the WSA provides for isolation and seclusion enhanced by the dense vegetation which restricts the visibility of the user.

Opportunities for solitude at the lower elevations along the broad alluvial fans are not of the same high quality.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: While the Blue Eagle WSA, combining its size with its diversity of vegetation and topography contains a wide variety of opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, neither their quality or diversity could be considered outstanding or unique.

The deep canyons rising to 9,000 foot peaks provides an excellent stage for hiking, backpacking, and climbing. The numerous springs and meadows interspersed throughout the dense forest canopy provides suitable sites for camping. The wide variety of wildlife, birds, and the variation in form, texture, patterns, color, contrasts of the soil, and the scenery provides good opportunities for the photographer, bird watcher, and sightseers.

D. Special Features: The rare bristlecone pines that inhabit the higher elevations of Blue Eagle peak are a true relic of the past. Their wind sculpted, curved forms can be thousands of years old. Sharing these higher elevations are one of the rare indigenous desert bighorn sheep populations to have survived the intrusions of man in central Nevada. The lower elevations of the WSA provides critical winter range to the bighorns occupying not only the peaks within the WSA but also from other reaches of the Grant range.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The WSA can reasonably be managed as wilderness to preserve values now present in the area. The boundaries generally follow the base of the mountain on the west. Although there are 76 mining claims within this portion of the WSA, no plans of operation have been filed on these claims. Oil and gas activity is anticipated in this portion in the foreseeable future because of a high potential for energy resources in this area.

The addition of 750 acres along the western boundary would create a more manageable area by delineating the boundary based on topographical features. Without the additional 750 acres, parts of the western boundary are land net lines that are impossible to accurately locate on the ground without the high cost of a survey. This 750 acres is capable of being managed as wilderness over the long term.

Within the 1,960 acres formerly not recommended for wilderness, control of ORV use on the alluvial fans, valleys and canyons would require an extensive patrol effort. While current levels of activity on oil and gas leases have been low, a strong potential exists for impairment of wilderness values due to future activities on oil and gas leases that have valid existing rights.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Bureau of Mines conducted a mineral survey of Blue Eagle WSA during 1984 and 1985 with the following conclusion: The entire Blue Eagle Wilderness Study Area has high energy resource potential for petroleum, although appropriate traps have not been identified. Most of the area is covered by oil and gas leases.

Moderate mineral resource potential exists for three types of metal occurrence in five areas. The southwestern corner of the area has moderate potential for tungsten and polymetallic base-metal, the north and central parts have moderate potential for gold, and two areas on the southeastern and western sides have a moderate potential for zinc and antimony. The study area has low resource potential for all other metals, nonmetals, geothermal energy, and coal. The study area has no identified resources.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the inventory phase, five comments were received which stated the area should not be designated a WSA because of roads and the lack of naturalness. Eight other comments were received which favored the area being designated a WSA because of the lack of roads, the outstanding opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation, and naturalness.

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the draft environmental impact statement, Tonopah, Nevada, June 9, 1982, and Reno, Nevada, June 7, 1982. A total of 12 comments were received, of these, nine comments favored wilderness designation and three comments favored a nonsuitable recommendation for the Blue Eagle WSA.

Opposition to the designation stated: The mineral and energy potential requires multiple use (nonwilderness). Extremely important deer migration and wintering area (Potential for future adverse impacts). Current need to provide hunter access. Presence of jasperoid zones in sedimentary rocks and intrusive bodies with tungsten and other metals in known mining districts are strong indicators that ore deposits are nearby.

Support for wilderness designation cited: Outstanding area, Limestone cliffs, bighorn sheep, bristlecone pines, and dwarf white fir are present in the WSA. Contains bighorn sheep which deserve protection. Beautiful mountains with limestone cliffs. Adjacent to Grant-Quinn Canyon U.S. Forest Service proposals and Riordan's Well BLM WSA area. Three-quarters of a million acres of wilderness separated by only a few dirt roads. Adding 750 acres to western boundary will improve management situation. Warrants inclusion due to wilderness values. Contains not only certain wilderness values but scenic, wildlife, botanic, geologic, and cultural resources as well, and all of national importance.

Two state agencies commented in favor of wilderness designation for this WSA. The Nevada Division of State Parks confirmed the BLM analysis. The Nevada Division of Mineral Resources stated that the southwest corner of the WSA be recommended as wilderness due to the low mineral potential. The State, in its consistency letter felt the suitable boundary for the Preferred Alternative should be reduced to exclude an area that has "significant mineral potential outweighing wilderness values".