



vegetated and open terrain provides good access and the ability to manage these areas, although not impossible, would require frequent seasonal patrols to regulate the off-road use by hunters and other off-road recreationists.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The central portion of the Rawhide Mountain WSA is generally in a natural state. The central portion of the range is extremely rugged with elevations ranging from 5,360 feet to over 5,100 feet. Within the range remote drainages and basins are enhanced by pristine riparian settings around springs. The mountainous portions are a maze of peaks, outcrops, and drainages which support a wide variety of vegetation and wildlife. The roadless nature of the interior core has served to preserve the rugged naturalness of this portion of the Hot Creek Range.

Rawhide Peak is painted with a multi-colored strata of rock ranging from yellow to red. The canyons leading into the core of the WSA are composed of craggy rock outcrops bathed in brilliant red and orange, which contrast sharply with the bright green of pinyon pine.

Within the boundaries of the WSA are approximately seventeen miles of vehicle ways and one spring development. The vehicle ways are in the valley portion of the WSA. The spring development and water trough are located in the southeastern corner of the WSA. A total of approximately fifteen acres are involved. While these human imprints are within the WSA, the area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man substantially unnoticeable.

**B. Solitude:** Solitude is a guaranteed quality in the mountainous part of the WSA, and the opportunities for enjoying it are outstanding. The mountains are not a single ridgeline; instead they occur as a number of interconnected by distinguishably separate peaks over the area. Undulating mountain slopes are blanketed by dense stands of pinyon pine, juniper, and mountain mahogany, here and there interrupted by bright green pockets of riparian vegetation.

The dense tree cover coupled with the deep, narrow canyons enhances the screening to the extent that secluded spots can be found almost anywhere. Because of this more than adequate screening, the lack of any single destination point with strong drawing power, the large number of canyons providing access routes to the core of the WSA, this high level of opportunity can be sustained even with fairly heavy use.

In the eastern foothill region the opportunities for solitude are limited to rather wide, shallow drainages. On the flats, that lie along both the eastern and western borders, where the vegetation is low growing shrubs, opportunities for solitude are almost impossible to find.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Many forms of recreation can be pursued in the WSA, including hiking, hunting, nature study, photography, and camping. While there are good opportunities for all of these activities, neither their diversity or quality is considered to be outstanding. The quality of recreation opportunities varies with topography. In the mountainous areas, opportunities for recreation are good, made so by variations in land forms and natural features. However, visual and ecological diversity decreases at the lower elevations, especially along the expansive alluvial benches bordering the WSA. Opportunities for recreation and visual satisfaction are greatly lower here than in the mountainous areas.

**D. Special Features:** There are charcoal kilns within this WSA. These kilns were built in the 1870's to provide charcoal for the smelting furnaces of nearby mining districts. The kilns are built of red brick, are oval in shape with a diameter of 25 feet at the base and a height of approximately 30 feet. The Tybo Kilns, located in the Rawhide Mountain WSA, are on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### **4. MANAGEABILITY**

The mountainous core of the Rawhide Mountain WSA is considered to be manageable over the long-term due to the rough and rugged character of the terrain and the limited accessibility. Recreation use is expected to remain fairly low into the foreseeable future, with exception during the hunting season, so that little effort would be needed to monitor recreationists and their impacts. There are no state or private inholdings within the WSA.

Manageability problems would stem from the development of mines. If existing claims are found to have a valid discovery, development would disturb the wilderness values on and in the immediate vicinity of the operations. Surface disturbance would result in modified land forms and the construction of haul roads. Mineral exploration and development is expected to occur regardless of wilderness designation.

The open nature of the terrain provides for easy access to off-road vehicle use. Frequent patrols may be necessary during the hunting season to ensure vehicle use is confined to existing roads and trails.

#### **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

The Rawhide Mountain WSA contains 14 oil and gas leases covering approximately 13,280 acres. Three plans of operation have been filed with the BLM. The mountainous portion of the WSA lies within the Tybo Mining District, one of the major districts in northern Nye County. A small area of potential for precious metals exists along the northern boundary of the WSA, adjacent to the Tybo Mining District. There is good potential for geothermal and oil and gas resources in the valley areas of Hot Creek and eastern Stone Cabin Valleys.

Since the publication of the EIS, mining activities have increased in this WSA. A high level of exploration and development would be expected in the first few years, if this area is not designated wilderness. It is Since the publication of the EIS, mining activities have increased in this WSA. projected there would be five plans of operation per year the first few years. Due to the high potential for metallic minerals, it is anticipated that at least two mines will be developed on the 913 existing mining claims in the foreseeable future. It is expected the wilderness values would be lost, as a result of mineral development, in the area between Midden Mountain and Twin Peaks.

#### **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process.

During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 6 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. One individual and one state agency favored the Rawhide Mountain WSA designation and two individuals, one mining organization and one mining company opposed this designation.

Reasons supporting designation were: kilns on the National Historic Landmark Register, high scenic and cultural resources.

Reasons supporting nondesignation were: enormous mineral and energy potential, known occurrence of minerals (Tybo).

The State, during its consistency review, concurred with the Preferred Alternative of nonwilderness.