

DRY VALLEY RIM WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 94,308 acres

The Dry Valley Rim WSA (CA-020-615) is located in Washoe County, Nevada (76,177 acres) and Lassen County, California (18,131 acres). The WSA contains 94,308 acres of public land and surrounds 338 acres of private land located in 8 parcels varying in size from 40 to 160 acres.

The western boundary is the Skedaddle Road. The southern boundary is segments of the Wendel-Sand Pass road. The eastern boundary is the Pipe Springs and Dry Valley roads and a two mile segment of the Smoke Creek Road. The northern boundary is the Smoke Creek Ranch Road and an unnamed dirt road on the northeast side of the WSA that connects to the Smoke Creek Road.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 52,395 acres recommended for wilderness 45,127 acres recommended for wilderness in Nevada 41,913 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate 52,395 acres as wilderness and to release 41,913 acres uses other than wilderness. There are 7,268 acres within California that are recommended for wilderness and 10,863 acres are recommended for other uses. There are 45,127 acres within Nevada recommended for wilderness and 31,050 acres are recommended for other uses.

Resource conflicts are with motorized use of these areas for hunting access, potential utility corridor development, and activities of the Sierra Army Depot that affect naturalness within the southern end of the WSA.

Recreational values of this area are excellent. Hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and opportunities for experiencing solitude, and isolation all combine to offer a variety of primitive recreation.

Management of the area to preserve wilderness qualities will be possible in the area recommended for wilderness because 1) there are no significant resource conflicts with wilderness; 2) the majority of motorized access routes (35 of the 47 miles of access ways in the WSA) that serve 80% of the hunters using the WSA are specifically excluded from the recommended wilderness to insure that hunter access remains available; 3) private inholdings are small, isolated, undeveloped parcels that do not have and are not expected to need developed access; 4) no economically valuable mineral resources occur within the area recommended for wilderness.

Impacts on naturalness due to clouds from the demolition activities of Sierra Army Depot are the basis for recommending for uses other than wilderness the southern four miles of the WSA.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Dry Valley Rim WSA is predominantly natural with minor human imprints that have negligible effect on naturalness in the area as a whole. The area is a north-south trending fault-block that rises gradually from the western side of the WSA to the abrupt 500' to 1500' face of Dry Valley Rim located along the eastern side of the WSA. Sagebrush and grass are the predominant vegetation throughout the WSA.

Livestock developments consist of 21 small stock ponds 1 acre or less in size, 3 developed springs and 12 miles of vehicle access ways leading to the spring and ponds. The ways also are used for hunter access. The ways and water developments are substantially unnoticeable due to their location in drainages where adjacent slopes screen them from view in the surrounding area.

B. Solitude: The large size, 20 miles north-south, and steep, eastern escarpment of the recommended wilderness area provides a wide variety of areas where isolation and solitude can be found. The western slope of the WSA is not highly varied topographically, but contains numerous small rims and shallow canyons that provide many isolated areas that offer good opportunities for solitude. On the east and north, steep canyons afford excellent areas for isolation and solitude.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft which creates temporary effects on solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The unit's rugged, eastern 1/3 and northern upland is of particular interest to persons seeking exploration in rugged canyon areas. Excellent opportunities for viewing wildlife also occur on the broad western slopes of the WSA where wintering deer and antelope herds can be readily observed. Bands of resident wild horses and burros are also common in this area.

D. Special Features: This area does not contain any special features.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The area recommended for wilderness designation is manageable as wilderness because 1) there are no significant resource conflicts with wilderness; 2) through boundary adjustments made as part of this recommendation all major vehicle access routes have been included in the non wilderness areas; 3) private inholdings, four small, isolated 40 and 80 acre tracts, are not expected to be developed because of their inaccessible locations on the steep escarpment of Dry Valley Rim; 4) no economically valuable mineral resources exist within the area recommended for wilderness.

Boundaries of the recommended wilderness follow contours or legal lines through areas where steep slopes prevent vehicle access. In more open areas, boundaries are set back from regular travel routes on access ways so as to improve manageability by allowing for access to popular areas along and/or at the end of those ways while prohibiting vehicle use beyond those destinations.

Closure of two access ways at the recommended wilderness area boundaries will be feasible due to terrain features and periodic field patrols during fall hunting season. Through boundary changes the majority of peripheral motorized access ways (35 miles) were deleted from the recommended wilderness area. Closure of the remaining four access ways (12 miles) is necessary to maintain the wilderness qualities of solitude and naturalness in the core of the area recommended for wilderness.

The areas recommended for nonwilderness contain open terrain readily accessible to four-wheel drive vehicles. Effective closure of the ways and prohibition of vehicle use through these open areas would require regular enforcement of the nonmotorized provisions of wilderness designation.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

BLM data in the Affected Environment section of the Eagle Lake-Cedarville EIS (1987), indicated the WSA has unknown potential for oil and gas, and has approximately 17,400 acres classified as prospectively valuable for geothermal. At the time of the EIS there were 5 placer claims and 1 lode claim located within the WSA, although no development or past history of

mining was known. A mineral survey of the suitable portion of the WSA was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) during 1985. In this survey no metallic mineral resources were identified but two areas were identified as having moderate potential for zeolite. There are no claims remaining in the area recommended for wilderness. Those within the areas not recommended for wilderness are believed to have been located for bentonitic clays. The Oil-Dri Corporation currently holds claims on 598 acres of public land on lands not recommended for wilderness. Oil-Dri Corporation is applying for patent on these lands.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

In the Eagle Lake-Cedarville Wilderness EIS the Susanville District Advisory Council identified the following interests and resources to be represented on an eight-member Technical Review Team (TRT): livestock adjacent land owners; wildlife-agencies-sportsmen; wilderness-environmental-dispersed recreation; minerals energy-utilities; wild horses; motorized recreation; cultural-historical-archaeological; BLM. The team's recommendation of 56% suitable and 44% nonsuitable was supported by the Susanville District Advisory Council and by BLM and is the recommended action for this WSA.

Issues analyzed by the TRT and in the EIS were: a wilderness complex where five adjacent WSA's separated only by boundary roads including Dry Valley Rim WSA would be managed as a wilderness complex inclusive of the road the quality of the wilderness resource and how much was appropriate to be preserved and managed as wilderness; concern that wilderness would prevent potential mineral development, livestock management activities; motorized recreation access for hunting; concern that wilderness would limit management of wildlife (installation of water catchments/guzzlers) as well as wild horses and burro populations; and concern that wilderness would preclude development of potential high-voltage electric transmission lines through the region.

342 comments were received that addressed this WSA specifically or as part of general comments on all WSA's in the draft EIS. Of those 342 comments, 12 were oral statements received at the three public hearings held on the draft EIS and 330 were written comments. 37 respondents supported all wilderness, 8 supported no wilderness and 292 supported partial wilderness recommended by BLM. Five respondents supported more wilderness than was addressed in the draft EIS.

Those favoring wilderness cited the WSA's natural character, large size (94,308 acres), opportunities for primitive recreation (mainly hiking and wildlife observation) and opportunities for solitude. Inclusion of the area in the National Wilderness Preservation System as representative of volcanic land forms in the desert shrub ecosystem was also cited. The WSA's unique fault-block landform and expansive vistas across the Smoke Creek Desert were also mentioned by wilderness advocates.

Those opposed to wilderness cited concern that despite livestock's grandfathered provisions in the Wilderness Act, livestock management activities, particularly motorized access for water facility inspection and maintenance and sheep camp movement, would be restricted. Restrictions or prohibition on development of new water facilities, springs and stock ponds, was also cited as reasons for opposition to wilderness. Others opposed to wilderness cited the elimination of possible mineral development in designated wilderness as a general reason without reference to specific mineral values within the WSA. Lassen Motorcycle Club opposed wilderness designation and pointed out that the club members enjoy trail riding through the area recommended for wilderness. Sierra Army Depot and Lassen County were opposed as they felt wilderness

designation would lead to eventual restriction of the activities of the nearby Sierra Army Depot Demolition Area.

All of the following local and state agencies supported the draft EIS partial wilderness alternative: Nevada County (California) Supervisor Joel Gustafson; The State of Nevada through the Nevada Clearinghouse; The Nevada Division of State Parks; and the California Department of Fish and Game.

Lassen County Board of Supervisors and the Department of the Army supported the non-wilderness alternative.

The Nevada Department of Minerals said if the claims in T.30N., R.19E., Sections 7 and 8 at the end of a cherrystemmed road were excluded from wilderness (which they are), they had no objection to the remainder of the area being recommended for wilderness.