

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude vary considerably within the WSA. The alluvial fans provide no topographic and only minimal vegetative screening. The lower reaches of the mountainous terrain consist of moderately dissected canyons with only limited vegetative screening. The sheer number of roads and ways, mining activity and lack of topographic and vegetative screening adversely affect solitude opportunities. This is particularly true around Fondaway, Cox and Silver Hill Canyons and the old Dixie townsite.

Solitude opportunities are good to excellent in the central, mountainous portion of the range, particularly north of Fondaway Canyon where the single ridgeline to the south spreads out into a more highly dissected configuration.

Since 1968, the Fallon Naval Air Station (NAS) has conducted air warfare training in the restricted airspace which blankets the entire Stillwater Range WSA. Aircraft often make low level flights up the canyons of the WSA, and this unit and the Job Peak WSA are subject to more low level tactical flights than the other WSAs in the District. The Navy is in the process of increasing air operations over the Stillwater Range WSA. With an increase in air operations by the Navy, impacts upon solitude in the WSA could be severe. While it is difficult to accurately estimate the actual impact of these operations, it must be assumed that given the frequency of operations currently being considered, solitude opportunities may be diminished even further and there could be an additional adverse impact to the overall wilderness quality of the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: There are few points of interest to attract a visitor. Colorful geologic formations and rugged terrain around Mississippi Canyon are probably the most interesting features of the WSA. Although the majority of the area is essentially natural in character, there is little that distinguishes it from numerous other Great Basin mountain ranges or which makes it particularly unique. There are no major peaks and even the highest country in the WSA is somewhat rolling and lacks a timber line. There are few points of interest and no features which require an extended visit in order to see. Water is scarce and a visitor would find it difficult to avoid the impacts of human activity should he stray from the central core of the area.

D. Special Features: The fault scarp on the east side of the WSA along the base of the mountains is a result of the 1954 earthquake. It is easily seen and in places the earth has been displaced six to seven feet. A few wooden buildings are still partially standing at the old mining camp site in upper White Cloud Canyon and large stacked piles of cut cord wood intended for use in the smelters at Coppereid, outside the WSA, can still be found in some of the side canyons north of White Cloud Canyon. Desert bighorn sheep, once native to the range but eliminated by poaching and the transmittal of diseases by domestic sheep which grazed the area until the 1940s, were successfully reintroduced into the WSA in 1985.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The western side of the WSA has eight cherrystem roads and four ways crossing the alluvial fan and providing access into the mountainous portion of the area. The northwest corner of the unit has over seven miles of ways in less than four square miles. Almost all of these roads and ways provide access to areas of either current or former mining activity. It would be difficult to control off-road vehicle use in these areas. Seven roads and three ways are found on the east side of the WSA. These roads and ways provide access to range improvements and areas of former mining activity.

In the northeast portion of the WSA, a cherrystem road around Eagle Mountain comes within a mile of the old Dixie townsite and the Dixie Comstock Mine, effectively isolating this area from the rest of the WSA. Along with the two ways north of this road it would be difficult to effectively manage this portion of the unit as wilderness. Two private inholdings, totalling almost 620 acres, are located in the WSA.

The central, mountainous part of the WSA could be effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character. The primary difficulty to management would involve on-the-ground location of a boundary between wilderness and nonwilderness lands.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The entire WSA is considered to have moderate to high favorability for the occurrence of metallic minerals and is believed to be one of the best "...potential areas for future metallic mineral finds of all the WSAs studied in the Basin and Range province..." (GEM, 1983). Mineral exploration has occurred throughout the Stillwater Range since the mid-1800's. Geothermal and precious metal developments are located both adjacent to, and in close proximity to, the WSA. Nonmetallic minerals within the WSA include fluorspar, limestone, and sand and gravel. Overall, favorability for the occurrence of economic nonmetallic mineral deposits is considered low.

Strategic and critical minerals known to occur within the WSA include tungsten, copper, lead and fluorspar.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

A total of 45 comments, which specifically mentioned the Stillwater Range WSA, were received on the draft EIS. Twenty-four commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Twenty-one commentors supported no wilderness for the WSA.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the area's scenic quality, outstanding solitude and primitive recreation opportunities and lack of resource conflicts in the core of the WSA. Those opposing designation stated that the area is roaded and has been mined for over 100 years, has no solitude due to aircraft overflights, and has high mineral potential. In addition, several commentors reiterated an opposition to wilderness in general.

The National Park Service, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of the Navy, the State of Nevada and the Churchill County Commissioners all commented on the draft EIS. The Park Service was concerned about preservation of cultural resources. The Department of the Navy felt that if the area was designated as wilderness, air warfare training activities could be constrained at some future date. The Governor of Nevada's consistency review supported the Proposed Action and concurred with the recommendation not to designate the Stillwater Range WSA as wilderness. Churchill County voiced a general opposition to any wilderness designations within the county and endorsed the Proposed Action, citing the high mineral potential of the area, lack of wilderness characteristics and impacts to solitude from low flying aircraft from NAS Fallon. The other agencies did not identify any specific jurisdictional conflicts with any of the alternatives.

Three comment letters were received on the final EIS. The EPA made a general statement that water and air quality would receive additional protection in those areas recommended for wilderness designation, however, they did not make any comment regarding those areas, including the Stillwater Range WSA, not recommended suitable. The Department of the Navy felt that certain terms in the document required clarification. Two individuals submitted a general protest letter which stated that the EIS violated NEPA and should be totally rewritten.