

Fish Slough

CA-010-080

FISH SLOUGH WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-080)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 15,331 acres

The Fish Slough WSA is located in northern Inyo County and southern Mono County, approximately six miles north of Bishop, California. The WSA includes 14,700 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, no State lands, and 631 acres of private inholdings (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The northern boundary of the WSA follows non-public land and an improved ranching road to the east, then heads south along Fish Slough county road. Along Fish Slough Road the boundary travels an irregular pattern adjacent to the county road, public land, and private land until it meets Casa Diablo County Road. The boundary follows Casa Diablo County Road in a northwesterly direction until it meets a 750 KV powerline right-of-way. The western boundary proceeds north along the right-of-way until it intersects the private land and improved ranching road on the north.

The WSA is situated in the west margin of the Basin and Range geomorphic province and lies in the southern portion of the Volcanic Tableland, a geological result of cinder and hot gas eruptions from vents in Long Valley which occurred 700,000 years ago. This unique landscape is characterized by a series of successive rhyolitic ash deposits which culminate in a broad tableland terrain feature. Topography is mostly gentle and rolling. Volcanic terraces and abrupt cliffs resulting from an echelon fault scarps (a series of parallel scarps formed by faulting activity) are evident in this WSA. Elevation ranges from 4,382 feet to 5,800 feet. Numerous canyons and drainages dissect the eastern portion of the unit. Fumarolic mounds and ridges dot the landscape adding scenic variety. The pastel volcanic color tones provide striking visual effects by the sun's low angle during morning and evening hours. The vegetation, which is uniformly distributed throughout, consists mostly of Great Basin shrubs. No permanent water source exists in the WSA.

The eastern three-fourths of the WSA is part of the Fish Slough Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The ACEC management plan prescribes protection of the aquifer recharge source within the WSA in order to maintain the wetland habitat which lies outside and adjacent to the WSA.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Various suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the Benton-Owens/Bodie-Coleville Wilderness Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Three different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EISs: all wilderness, partial wilderness recommending approximately 99% of the area suitable, and no wilderness.

2.	<u>RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE</u> ---	0	acres recommended for wilderness
		14,700	BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in this WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

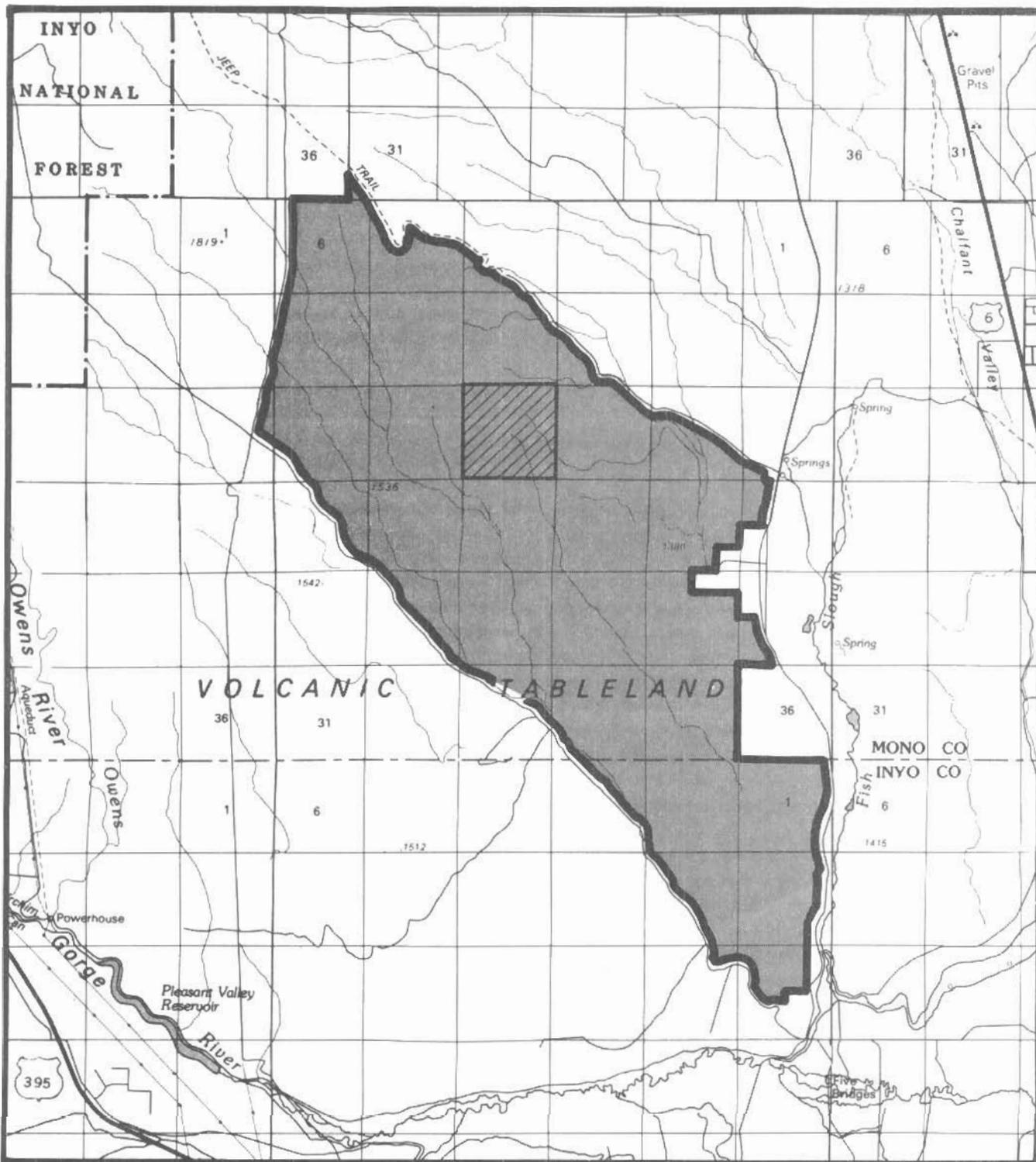
The WSA is recommended non-suitable because of manageability concerns, the potential for mineral occurrence, and future transmission line expansion needs outweigh the area's wilderness values.

Much of the WSA's relatively flat, broad topography renders it vulnerable to vehicle encroachment. The lack of natural barriers along the boundaries would make it extremely difficult to manage as wilderness. Vehicles such as four-wheel drive, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and mountain bikes can easily drive off the boundary roads into this sparsely vegetated WSA. Substantial signing and fencing as well as intensive patrolling would be required to protect the area. There are approximately eight miles of routes of travel including primitive ways, washes and other unmaintained routes of access which will remain available for vehicular use.

Solitude can be disrupted visually and from noise of periodic vehicle use occurring on roads which surround the WSA. Additionally, the 750-KV transmission line along the western boundary of the unit visually limits solitude locally. Some portions of the WSA allow unobstructed views of the transmission line up to a distance of three miles.

Resource conflicts in the WSA include moderate potential for nonmetallic minerals and geothermal resources. There is current interest in the area to quarry decorative building stone known as Bishop tuff.

The Benton-Owens Valley Management Framework Plan prescribes a half-mile-wide utility line corridor along the western boundary where a transmission line currently exists. This corridor lies in the WSA one-quarter mile east of the present transmission-line corridor along the 2-1/2-mile west boundary. There is a high demand to use this corridor. Most recently, Oxbow Geothermal Corporation demonstrated a need to utilize this corridor for construction of an electric transmission-line. Additionally, several utility/energy organizations have expressed support to accommodate future use in this corridor.



NONE

RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



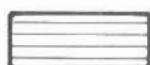
RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



SPLIT ESTATE

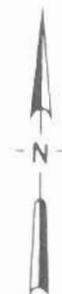


STATE



PRIVATE

**Fish Slough
Proposal
MAP-1**



010-080
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	14,700
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	631
Total		<u>15,331</u>
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		<u>0</u>
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	14,700
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>14,700</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The Fish Slough WSA has generally retained its primeval character and influence. The WSA is a landscape characterized by a series of volcanic terraces and an echelon fault scarps. Numerous canyons and drainages dissect the eastern portion of the unit.

Toward the western edge the topography is more gentle and rolling. The WSA supports a uniform composition of shadscale scrub such as spiny hopsage, shadscale, ephedra, dalea, and cholla. During certain years, wildflowers are prevalent. There are very few human influences in the WSA. Approximately eight miles of primitive vehicle routes are located in the WSA. These vehicle routes are substantially unnoticeable in the WSA as a whole.

2. Solitude: The WSA's large size and gently rolling topography provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and freedom of movement. An electric transmission line parallels the western boundary just outside the WSA and visually affects opportunities for solitude locally.

Additionally, the outside visual and noise influences of periodic vehicle use on the eastern and southern boundary roads would slightly diminish solitude along the WSA's east and south edges.

This WSA may be overflowed in the future by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission during approved military operations. The visual intrusions and associated noise create temporary effects on solitude which are deemed acceptable and necessary as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation abound within the WSA. Area visitors can participate in backpacking, camping, nature appreciation, historical sightseeing, scenic photography, hunting, horseback riding, and other activities. No permanent water sources exist in the unit; backpacking is limited by the need to or cache water. Most primitive recreation activities would occur in the cooler winter and spring months.
4. Special features: The WSA contains several features of significance. The area contains geological curiosities such as an echelon fault scarps and fumarolic mounds. Wildlife values of the WSA include crucial winter habitat for mule deer. The mule deer rely on the unit's topographical relief for protective cover from the Volcanic Tableland's strong winter winds. The WSA also contains cultural values of significance such as petroglyphs, hunting sites, etc.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 14,700 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Great Basin Sagebrush ecosystem. The Fish Slough WSA would not increase the diversity of the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	1	32,407	55	1,190,575
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	0	0	19	206,109

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of four major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Los Angeles/Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Riverside/San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	170	6,904,809

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of three BLM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation. The John Muir and the Ansel Adams Wilderness, 15 and 30 miles to the west, respectively, are the nearest designated wilderness areas. These wilderness areas are administered by the Inyo National Forest. Other nearby designated wilderness areas include Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks which are managed by the National Park Service and the Hoover Wilderness which is managed by the Toiyabe and Inyo National Forests.

C. Manageability

The Fish Slough WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with difficulty. The predominant gentle nature of the rolling landscape and its sparse vegetation make the WSA susceptible to indiscriminate off-road vehicle use. Frequent signing, fencing most of the border, providing detailed maps, and intensive patrolling would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. The broad, flat nature of the WSA is easily penetrated by vehicles of all types. The WSA contains few natural barriers to prevent vehicles from entering the area. Constant surveillance would be required to protect the area's wilderness values.

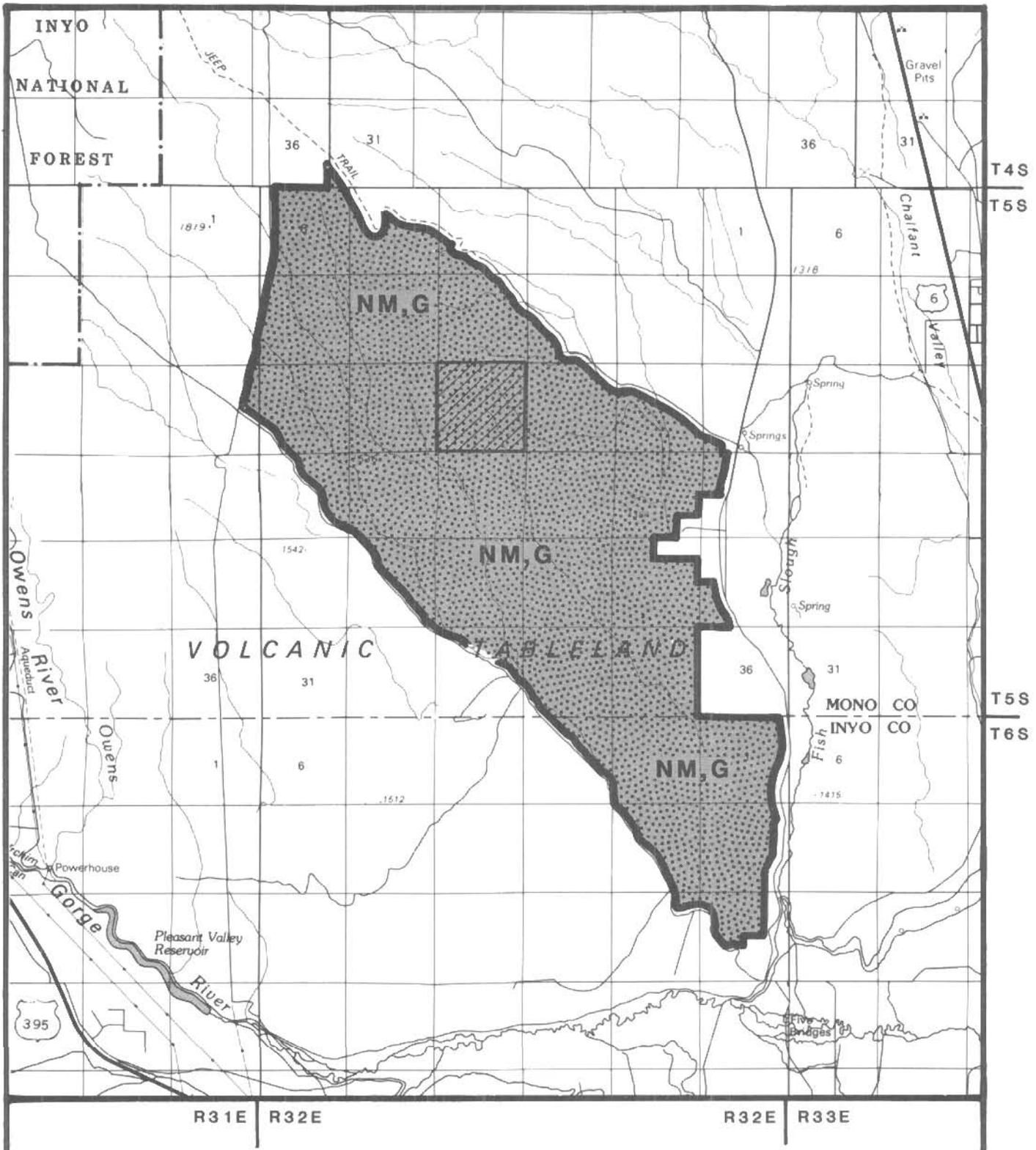
Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

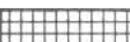
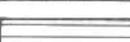
D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at the time of preliminary suitability recommendation: A portion of the Fish Slough WSA (mostly in T. 5 S., R. 32 E.) is in the BLM Casa Diablo Geology-Energy-Mineral (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). BLM G-E-M data used in the Affected Environment section of the Benton-Owens Valley, Bodie-Coleville Study Areas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 1987 indicated that the WSA has low potential for metallic minerals, no potential for oil and gas, moderate potential for non-metallic minerals (Bishop tuff), and very low potential for uranium and thorium.

The WSA has moderate potential for non-metallic minerals due to the presence of Bishop tuff. Bishop tuff is a common variety decorative stone currently in demand. The Fish Slough WSA has moderate non-metallic resource potential but the non-metallic potential for the adjacent Volcanic Tableland WSA is high and for adjacent Casa Diablo WSA is low. This is because there is more historical development of Bishop tuff building stone in the Volcanic Tableland WSA and no historical development in the Casa Diablo WSA. Also, the better proximity to markets and geologic nature of the materials is such that the Volcanic Tableland WSA has a high potential. The WSA has moderate potential for geothermal resources according to the BLM classification scheme and was classified as being prospectively valuable for geothermal resources by the U.S. Geological Survey ("Lands Valuable for Geothermal Resources", unpublished USGS map, revised July, 1985). There were no mining claims in the WSA in 1987 when the EIS was prepared.

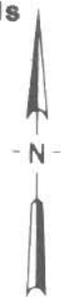
2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: No U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) or U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) mineral surveys were conducted in this WSA. BLM records dated March 24, 1988, showed no unpatented mining



-  **NONE** Recommended for Wilderness
-  Recommended for Non Wilderness
-  Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness
-  Split Estate
-  State
-  Private

- Explanation**
-  High Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
 -  Moderate Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
 - M** Moderate Mineral Potential Location in a High Mineral Potential Area
 - H** High Mineral Potential Location in a Moderate Mineral Potential Area

- Commodity Symbols**
- G** Geothermal
 - NM** Non-metallic



**Fish Slough
Mineral Resource Potential**



**Map-2
010-080**

claims, mineral leases, or mineral material sales contracts/permits in this WSA. No new data has been generated since the EIS of 1987.

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resource alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Wilderness - Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

Table 4 - Comparison of Impacts of the Proposed Action and the Alternatives

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	<p>Mining activities associated with the 5-acre quarry for decorative building stone and development of the 2-1/2-mile transmission-line corridor along the western boundary would result in the primary impacts on wilderness values. The perception of naturalness would be impaired over 2,400 acres and there would be a direct loss of naturalness on 5 acres. Solitude within the WSA would be diminished within a 600-acre area surrounding the mining activities resulting in a moderate impact. Additional short-term disruptions to solitude would occur within an area of 2,000 acres along the transmission-line corridor during powerline construction activities. Projected motorized recreation use (550 visitor days) and livestock grazing activities including construction of 1 mile of fence would result in slight to minor impacts to wilderness values. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would be slightly impacted on a localized basis as a result of projected motorized recre-</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would retain and slightly enhance wilderness values by eliminating 350 visitor days of motorized recreation use as well as precluding mining for decorative building stone and development of the transmission line corridor within the WSA along the western boundary. The proposed livestock fence would result in slight to minor localized impacts to wilderness values and impair the perception of naturalness on 50 acres. Special features including habitat for reintroduced pronghorn antelope, cultural values, and geological features would be slightly enhanced.</p>	<p>Wilderness values would be retained and slightly enhanced within the 15,102 acres of the WSA (over 98%) designated as wilderness. Motorized recreation use (350 visitor days) and mining activities for decorative building stone would be eliminated, benefiting wilderness values. The proposed 1-mile livestock fence would result in slight to minor impacts to wilderness values and impair the perception of naturalness on 50 acres. Special features including habitat for pronghorn antelope, cultural values, and geological features would be slightly enhanced.</p> <p>Within the 229 acres of the WSA not designated wilderness, development of the 2-1/2-mile transmission-line corridor would result in adverse impacts on wilderness values including impairing the perception of naturalness within a 2,000-acre viewshed that extends into the designated portion of the WSA. Short-term disruptions would also occur</p>

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (cont.)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values (continued)	ation use, mining of decorative building stone, and development of the transmission line corridor. There would be slight localized impacts to special features.		within the same 2,000-acre area as a result of power-line construction activities within the transmission-line corridor.
Motorized Recreation Use	There would be no impacts on motorized recreation use which is anticipated to increase slowly from the existing 350 visitor days to a total of 550 visitor days.	Motorized recreation use would be prohibited and 350 visitor days would be foregone within the WSA. Due to the projected low level of use within the WSA and the availability of opportunities on public lands outside the WSA, there would be a minor impact on motorized recreation use.	Motorized recreation use would be prohibited and 350 visitor days would be foregone within the designated portion of the WSA which amounts to over 98% of the WSA. There is no motorized vehicle use or existing primitive vehicle routes within the remaining 210 acres of the WSA not designated wilderness. Overall there would be a minor impact on motorized recreation use.
Transmission-Line Corridor Development	There would be no impact on development of the one-half-mile-wide transmission-line corridor. The one-quarter mile width within the WSA would be available for use along 2 1/2 miles of the west boundary.	There would be a minor impact on development of the transmission-line corridor. Wilderness designation would preclude use of one-quarter mile of the one-half-mile-wide corridor. The remaining one-quarter-mile width is outside the WSA and would be available for use. However, should the Casa Diablo WSA also be designated wilderness there would be a potential moderate impact to the future development of the transmission-line corridor, since this corridor would be entirely within the areas designated as wilderness.	There would be no impact on development of the one-half-mile-wide transmission-line corridor. The one-quarter mile width within the WSA along 2 1/2 miles of the west boundary would be in the portion not designated as wilderness.

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Mining of Decorative Building Stone	There would be no impact on the mining of decorative building stone. Mineral sales would be permitted. A 5-acre quarry for Bishop tuff is projected for the WSA.	Mining of decorative building stone, including a projected 5-acre quarry for Bishop tuff would be prohibited. There would be only a minor impact as Bishop tuff is available in areas outside the WSA.	There would be a minor impact on mining of decorative building stone within the 15,102 acres of the WSA designated wilderness. Wilderness designation would prohibit mineral sales including a projected 5-acre

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

During the inventory phase, a few comments were received addressing the area's high wildlife values and the potential need for transmission-line corridor expansion.

After inventory, comments were received during the wilderness study process. Comments recommended wilderness designation, noted opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, noted the groundwater aquifer capability for the area and indicated the boundary transmission line is a visual intrusion.

During the study, a public meeting and public hearing were held in association with the draft EIS. The public meeting was held in Markleeville, and the public hearing in Bishop, California. A total of 83 written and oral comments were received. Thirty-three comments supported the Bureau's recommendation. Forty-two comments supported the all-wilderness alternative, and eight comments supported the partial-wilderness alternative.

Although no Federal agency comments were received specific to this WSA, the Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration submitted a general written comment requesting the Bureau provide transmission-line corridor space for future construction of transmission lines on public lands. No State agency comments were received specific to this WSA.

The Inyo County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution opposing any additional wilderness areas in Inyo County. No comments specific to the Mono County portion of the WSA were received from Mono County.