

## WALL CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 46,305 acres**

The Wall Canyon WSA (CA-020-805) is located in Washoe County, Nevada in the northwestern corner of Nevada. The WSA includes 46,305 acres of BLM lands and surrounds 1,220 acres of private inholdings (Table 1). The nearest towns and cities are Cedarville, California (25 miles northwest), Susanville, California (70 miles southwest) and Reno, Nevada (120 miles south). The eastern boundary is formed by the Wall Canyon and Pinto Springs Roads and private lands. The northern boundary is formed by private lands and the western boundary is formed by a combination of private lands, the Devine Spring Road and the Packsaddle Spring Road. All of the boundary roads are narrow, infrequently maintained dirt and gravel roads.

The WSA includes approximately 15 percent of the Hays Canyon mountain range. The WSA encompasses portions of the top of the range and the eastern slopes. The topography and vegetation are typical of mid-elevation Great Basin mountainous areas with abundant canyons, buttes, rims as well as upland benches and wide valley floors all dominated by sagebrush communities. Elevations within the WSA range from 5300 to 7340 feet.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Final Eagle Lake-Cedarville Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement completed in October 1987. There were three alternatives analyzed in the EIS; an all wilderness, no wilderness (which is the recommendation of this report) and partial wilderness where 26,818 acres would be designated as wilderness and 19,487 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -           0 acres recommended for wilderness 46,305 acres recommended for non-wilderness**

The recommendation for the Wall Canyon WSA is to release all 46,305 acres for uses other than wilderness (Map 1). All wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. Although the recommendation is not the all wilderness alternative, it will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The minimum wilderness values described in the 1964 Wilderness Act are present in the WSA and conflicts between wilderness and other resources are not significant. It was determined that this WSA does not contain any outstanding features that made it special or unique from the surrounding lands. Other nearby WSA's had outstanding or unique characteristics that make them better representatives for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. It was felt that given the lack of special features, and the lack of quality wilderness values that releasing the WSA for uses other than wilderness would be the most appropriate recommendation.

The special public involvement process which was used in the Eagle Lake-Cedarville Wilderness EIS could not reach consensus for this WSA. They were split over the issue of the quality of the wilderness values.

The character of the WSA is mostly natural. Small scale human intrusions are scattered rather evenly across the entire WSA. These include livestock management projects and vehicle ways. These intrusions would remain due to regular maintenance of the livestock projects. The WSA is a typical example of mid-elevation mountainous areas in the northern Great Basin. The past human activities have had relatively little impact

on the overall character of the landscape and are substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole. However, the unit does not contain any unique feature or combination of natural features which would make it an outstanding area from the point of view of naturalness.

Although the WSA contains opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, these values were not judged to be exceptional from a regional standpoint. Other nearby WSA's contain much higher values for wildlife observation, hiking, sightseeing, horseback riding and non-motorized hunting. The available opportunities for primitive recreation are not anticipated to change in the foreseeable future with or without wilderness designation due to a projected lack of future development activities. Although the WSA contains important archaeological sites, wilderness designation would not offer significant additional protection to these resources. The archaeological protection laws and regulations would be applied with or without wilderness designation.

The conflicts between wilderness values and other resources are relatively minor. The major use of the WSA is by cattle during the summer and wildlife yearlong. Due to regionally high densities of sage grouse, the WSA does receive moderate recreational use by hunters for a two month period in late summer and early fall. During hunting season, management of vehicles on the eastern portions would be a problem if the area was designated wilderness. There are existing access ways and no topographic or vegetation barriers to prevent vehicles from using the existing ways or from travelling cross country. Mining claims occur on less than 200 acres near the northwest corner of the WSA. The mineral potential is rated as low and no mineral development is anticipated. None of the identified resource conflicts would significantly reduce wilderness values over the long term.

The Wall Canyon WSA differs little from much of the surrounding region other than its lack of roads. It's wilderness values are not judged exceptional to the region. Other nearby WSA's were judged to have higher wilderness values that would make them better representatives to be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

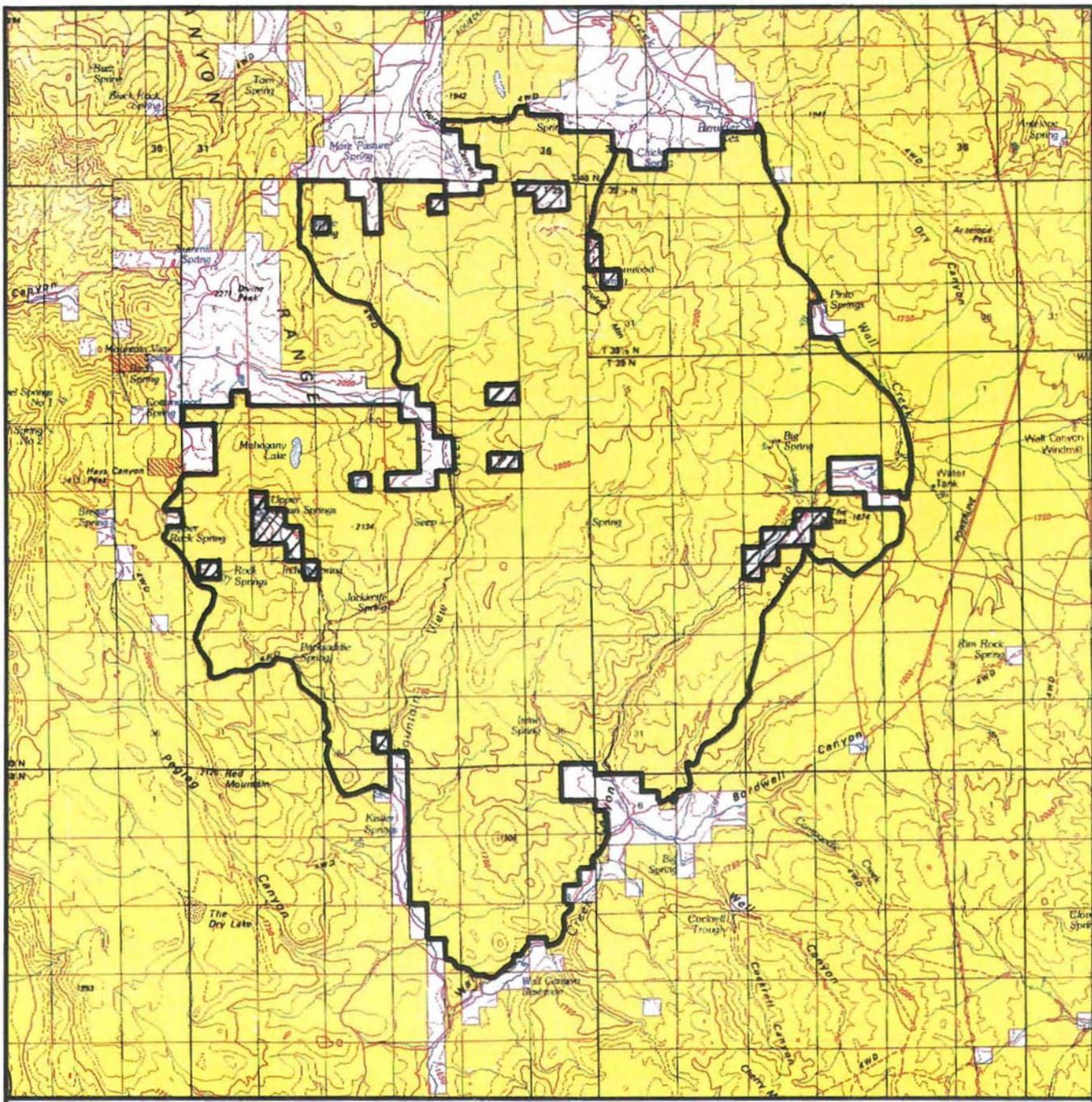
Table 1  
Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>	
BLM (surface and subsurface)	46,305
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (State, private)	<u>1,220</u>
Total	47,525
 <u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>	
BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	<u>0</u>
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0
 Inholdings (State, private)	 0
 <u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>	
BLM	46,305
Split Estate	<u>0</u>
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	46,305
 Inholdings (State, private)	 1,220

T40N

T39N

T38N



R19E

R20E



RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS - NONE



SPLIT ESTATE - NONE



RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS-



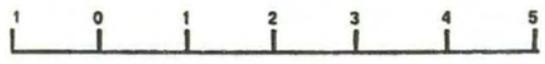
STATE - NONE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS - NONE



PRIVATE -



MILES

Wall Canyon Proposal

CA-020-805 February 1990



### **3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

**A. Naturalness:** The Wall Canyon WSA is predominantly natural with limited human imprint.

The WSA encompasses most of Boulder Mountain and the upper portions of Wall Canyon. The character of the terrain is high desert, sagebrush country with open vistas broken by narrow canyons lined with lichen covered rocks and grey-green brush fields. Boulder Mountain is a mid-elevation, northern Great Basin environment. The grey-green big sagebrush fields give way to scattered patches of dark green aspen stands and mahogany thickets. It is not uncommon to see small bunches of mule deer and pronghorn antelope as well as golden eagles from a vantage on Boulder Mountain. In the WSA, the imprint of man's work is related to facilities to support livestock grazing and access roads and ways for construction and maintenance of the facilities as well as for hunting.

The facilities to support livestock grazing include 13 reservoirs, 11 developed springs and 24 miles of fence. Twelve miles of the fence follow bladed lines. All of the projects are judged to be of low profile and hence of low impact to naturalness.

The access ways total 16 miles in length. Most of the ways within the WSA receive use only by light vehicles during hunting season and thus, are little more than narrow tracks through the sagebrush. Thus, the ways are of relatively low impact on naturalness. However, the low use levels the ways receive is sufficient to maintain them in their present condition and they are not reverting back to a natural state.

The human related impacts are fairly evenly distributed over the WSA.

**B. Solitude:** The WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude over the entire WSA. The boundary roads receive very light use and would have virtually no influence on solitude. The rugged terrain, tall sage-brush and stands of aspen, mahogany and juniper all provide screening to enhance visitor solitude.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The WSA has limited opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation through hiking, horseback riding and wildlife observation. The WSA has two perennial streams and several live springs which appeal to visitors.

**D. Special Features:** The WSA supports high archaeological values due to the presence of water and topographic diversity. Several square miles of the region have been surveyed, revealing a highly complex settlement pattern: temporary camps and hunting related lithic scatters on the benches and slopes above drainages, rim-edge chipping stations, many reoccupied camps along major drainages, temporary campsites at stream confluences, canyon rock shelters, and massive obsidian sources. Several archaeological districts of potential National Register quality have been identified.

#### **Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System**

**A. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems:** Wilderness designation of the Wall Canyon would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System or to Nevada. This WSA is in the sagebrush-steppe desert ecosystem. At the present time, there are four existing wilderness areas; Jarbidge and Santa Rosa in Nevada, South Warner in California and Craters of the Moon in Idaho, within this ecotype. This information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2  
Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	Area	Acres	Areas	Acres
<u>NATION WIDE</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush Province Sagebrush Steppe	4	131,199	138	4,356,340
<u>NEVADA</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe	2	86,907	34	1,252,442

**B. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation with 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	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	Areas	Acres	Areas	Acres
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	45	4,967,230	175	6,945,487
<u>California</u>				
Chico	16	1,286,873	13	430,822
Sacramento	48	5,039,817	87	2,479,541
<u>Idaho</u>				
Boise	22	937,766	172	5,127,039

**C. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas:** The WSA is within a 50 mile radius of 6 BLM WSA's recommended for wilderness designation. The South Warner Wilderness, administered by the Modoc National Forest is the only designated wilderness area within 50 miles of the WSA.

**Manageability** (the area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character).

The WSA could be managed as wilderness to preserve the values currently existing. The steep slopes, tall, dense sagebrush and juniper trees and the presence of large rocks would largely restrict vehicles to the boundary roads and make closures of internal ways effective. The only potential problem would occur if private land owners wanted improved access to their parcels in the northern portion of the WSA. The creation of improved roads could impair the BLM's ability to manage the affected lands as wilderness. This improvement of access is unlikely to occur due to the use of the parcels for livestock grazing.

The only portion of the WSA which would not be easily manageable is along the southern edge, adjacent to private property. The topography is flat to gently sloping with low growing vegetation. The private property is inhabited by sage grouse and during the hunting season, hunters and their vehicles regularly

stray from the boundary roads and private lands onto the WSA in search of birds.

**Energy and Mineral Resource Values**

The BLM minerals investigations, which included consultations with industry, did not identify any significant potential for mineral development. There are no mineral leases in this WSA. The WSA is considered by USGS to have no potential for oil and gas. Nine mining claims (180 acres) were located in 1984 on the northwestern portion of the WSA. No known mineral exploration activities have occurred on these claims since they were filed. There are no sand and gravel use areas in this WSA.

Since the area was recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation there was no mineral surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Mines and/or the U.S. Geological Survey.

**Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation on non-designation of the area as wilderness.

**Table 4  
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**

<u>Issue Topics</u>	<u>Proposed Action (No Wilderness/No Action)</u>	<u>All Wilderness Alternative</u>	<u>Partial Wilderness Alternative</u>
Wilderness Values	Naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be slightly reduced over the long term as a result of an increase of 100 visitor days of ORV use. Special features would not be impacted.	Opportunities for solitude and naturalness would be slightly enhanced over existing levels. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation would not be impacted.	Naturalness and opportunities for solitude would negligibly improve on 26,818 acres. There would be no impacts to opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. On the 19,487 acres not designated, there would be slight reductions of naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. There would be no impacts on special features.
Mineral Resource Development	Exploration and development could occur. There would be no impacts on mineral resource development.	Exploration and development within the entire 46,305 acre WSA would be prohibited. Due to a lack of known values, there would be no significant impacts.	Exploration and development would be prohibited on 26,818 acres. Due to a lack of known values, there would be no significant impacts. The remaining 19,487 acres would be available for mineral resource development.
Recreational ORV Use	Use would increase by 100 visitor days over the long term. There would be no impacts.	All 700 visitor days of recreational ORV use would be foregone or displaced. However, 350 visitor days would continue without the use of motorized vehicles.	No significant impacts. All use displaced by the wilderness designation would be absorbed on other public lands.

**Local Social and Economic Considerations**

Social and economic factors were not an issue for the Wall Canyon WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments/Involvement

During the inventory phase, BLM received 29 comments regarding the Wall Canyon WSA. Twenty-three of the comments either supported wilderness designation, or study for wilderness designation. Six comments objected to the area being designated a WSA because of private inholdings and the presence of roads and livestock related projects. Values specific to this WSA were also mentioned during the inventory phase. They include the scenic quality and wildlife values associated with Wall Creek, a perennial stream in the WSA. Several letters mentioned the Wall Canyon sucker a potentially new species of fish.

The Susanville District Advisory Council (DAC) after reviewing the BLM Wilderness Study/EIS Process, recommended to the District Manager and California State Director that the Technical Review Team Process be used to assist the BLM in preparing the Draft Wilderness EIS. The Technical Review Team (TRT) process was developed by the Modoc/Washoe Experimental Stewardship Committee. It was used as a tool to lessen the chances of polarization of interest groups and provide the Bureau with better quality public input for decision making purposes through a consensus recommendation process.

The Council selected an eight member team, representing the following resources and interests:

- Livestock-Adjacent Landowners
- Wildlife-Agencies-Sportsmen
- Wilderness-Environmental-Dispersed Recreation
- Minerals-Energy-Utilities
- Wild Horses
- Motorized Recreation
- Cultural-Historical-Archaeological
- Bureau of Land Management

The Team spent one afternoon touring the WSA by helicopter and several subsequent meetings in discussions of wilderness suitability for the WSA. The Team agreed that 19,487 acres should not be recommended as wilderness. The opinions on the remaining 26,818 acres, the core of the WSA, were split between a wilderness and nonwilderness recommendation. The issue which divided the Team was the wilderness quality of the WSA. Consensus was required before a recommendation would be passed onto the District Advisory Council. This was the only area of thirteen in the Eagle Lake-Cedarville EIS that consensus could not be reached.

During the formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 349 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Written comments consisted of 333 letters while 16 oral comments were received at three public hearings. Twenty-five comments support no wilderness while 316 comments supported designation of all or a portion of the WSA as wilderness. Eight comments took no position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the lack of resource conflicts, the scenic qualities and values associated with the perennial streams and wildlife populations. Virtually all of the comments contained generic listing of the values within the WSA.

Those opposing wilderness designation were concerned with impacts of wilderness designation on grazing and future mineral exploration. All of these concerns were generic listings of potential grazing and mineral problems.

The State of Nevada through its Governor's Consistency Review, the Office of Community Services, the Nevada Division of State Parks and the Nevada Department of Minerals all supported the recommendation of no wilderness. The Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Environmental Protection Agency all commented on aspects of the EIS but did not take a position on wilderness designation.