

Pinnacles

CA-040-303



PINNACLES WILDERNESS CONTIGUOUS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-040-303)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 5,949 acres

The WSA is located in both western San Benito and eastern Monterey Counties. It is located in the Gabilan Range of the Coastal Mountains approximately 25 miles southeast of Salinas, California. The WSA includes 5,949 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. There are no State lands or private inholdings within this WSA (see Map 1 and Table 1).

This WSA contains five separate parcels of roadless, BLM-administered lands which adjoin designated wilderness located within the Pinnacles National Monument. Each parcel is bounded on at least one side by wilderness areas within the Pinnacles National Monument. The remaining sides are bounded by private lands, or by roaded BLM lands.

All of the separate WSA parcels contain steep, rugged topography surrounding small canyons. The topography of the area varies from approximately 800 to 2,750 feet above sea level. The primary vegetation of the WSA is chemise with some oak and pine occurring along intermittent creeks. The separate parcels of this WSA blend in naturally with the rugged terrain of the Pinnacles National Monument Wilderness Area.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Central California Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Three different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness, partial wilderness - recommending 33 percent of the area as suitable, and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE — 1,983 acres recommended for wilderness
3,966 BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

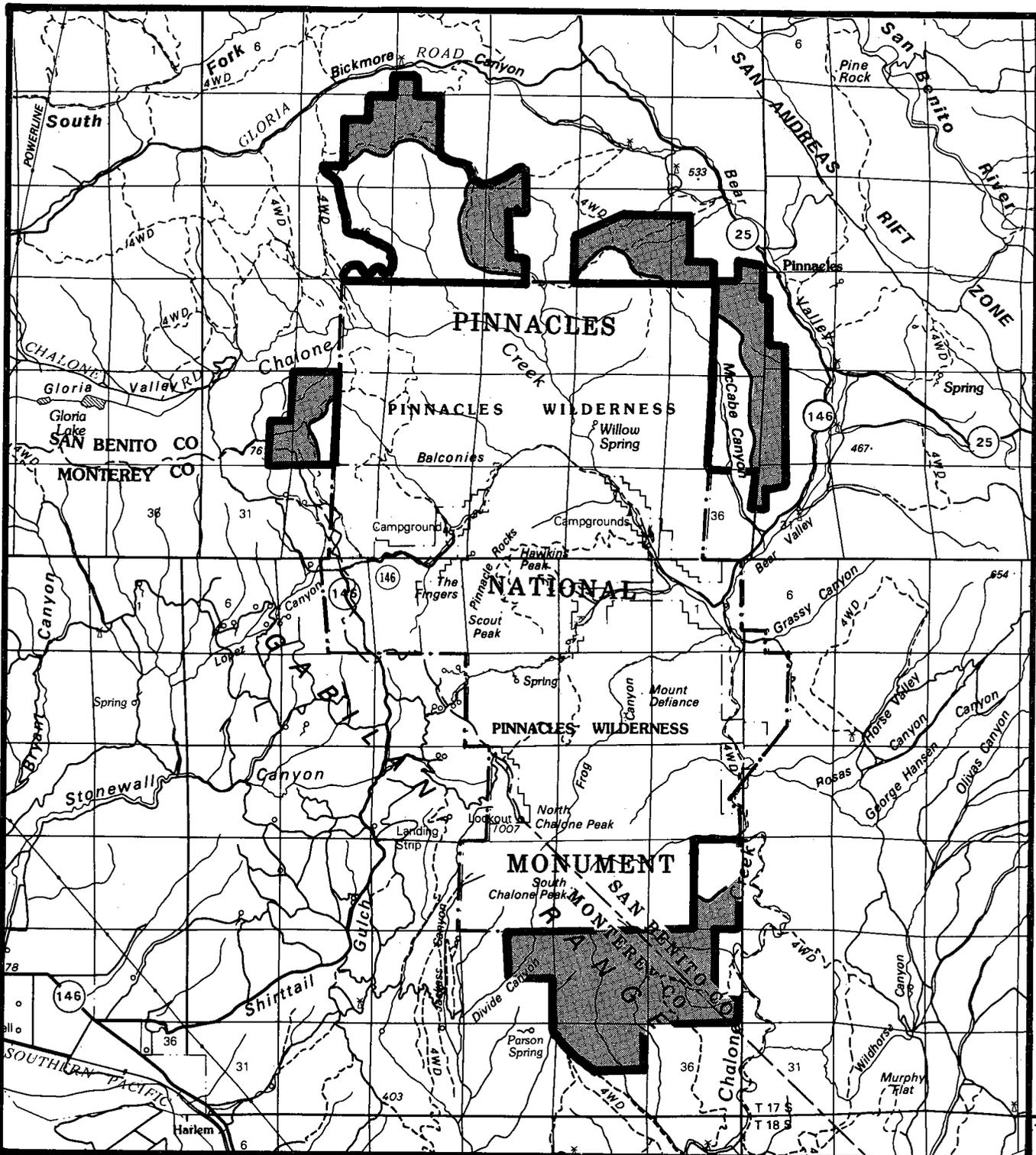
Thirty-three percent of this WSA or 1,983 acres recommended for designation as wilderness, and 3,966 acres in this WSA are released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The 33% partial wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts on the non-suitable portion of the WSA.

Partial wilderness is the recommendation for this unit based on the following rationale: The area recommended as suitable within the watershed/viewshed of the Pinnacles National Monument; management of the Monument's wilderness area would be enhanced by extending the wilderness

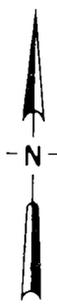
boundaries to easily identifiable topographic features, the recommendation would include a more complete ecosystem and many outstanding features similar to those found within the National Monument.

The portions of the WSA which are recommended as suitable for wilderness designation have their boundaries delineated along the ridgelines. The suitable areas can be seen from within the National Monument and are generally part of the Monument's watershed. Management of these portions of the WSA will complement management of the adjacent wilderness by encompassing a more complete watershed under wilderness management. Overall, the wilderness characteristics for the area are outstanding. The imprint of man's work is substantially unnoticeable throughout the unit. A variety of canyons and ridges serve to isolate the visitor from outside sounds and provide excellent opportunities for solitude.

The remainder of the Pinnacles Wilderness Contiguous WSA (3,966 acres) is recommended as non-suitable for wilderness designation. The manageability problems associated with legal, rather than topographic, boundaries would thus be eliminated. This portion would be managed as outlined in the Hollister Resource Management Plan. This management provides for continued livestock grazing, prescribed burning for brushland management in conjunction with private landowners and the National Monument, and maintenance of visual resources within the viewshed of the Monument. Management of these lands would become more effective with the establishment of the easily identifiable boundary with the partial-wilderness recommendation. There are approximately six miles of routes of travel including primitive ways and other maintained routes of access contained in the WSA.



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  | STATE |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE |



**Pinnacles
Proposal
MAP-1**



040-303
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)	5,949
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
Total		<u>5,949</u>
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	1,983
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		<u>1,983</u>
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	3,966
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>3,966</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA has retained a high degree of natural character. The steep, rugged topography and small canyons are covered with chemise, oak and pine along intermittent creeks. The creeks provide important riparian habitat for wildlife, are aesthetically pleasing, and are probably the most commonly used routes of travel. The parcels of this WSA blend in naturally with the rugged terrain within the Pinnacles National Monument Wilderness Area.

The primary imprint of man's work within the area is associated with firebreaks constructed along some ridgelines. Some vegetation manipulation has occurred in the northern and southern parcels of the WSA. Portions of the WSA located north and east of the Pinnacles Wilderness were burned by a wildfire during the summer of 1978. During fire control operations, numerous

firebreaks were constructed but were reseeded and have largely returned to natural conditions. A prescribed burn escaped in 1984 in a portion of the WSA north of the Monument Wilderness Area. New fire breaks were constructed to control this fire. Firebreaks have been reseeded with native shrubs and are returning to natural conditions. The firebreaks and vegetation manipulation projects are substantially unnoticeable and do not detract significantly from the naturalness of the unit.

2. Solitude: The variety of terrain, canyons along streams and drainages, and primitive character of the adjacent private ranch lands and Pinnacles National Monument provide outstanding opportunities for solitude.

This WSA is periodically overflown by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: The outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation found within the unit are closely associated with the Pinnacles Wilderness and the primitive character of the entire area.
4. Special features: There are spectacular views of the Pinnacles formation within the National Monument from some portions of the WSA, especially the northern parcels. The USFWS Candidate plant species Eriogonum nortonii has been found in one parcel and may occur throughout the area.

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 5,949 acres of the California Chaparral/Chaparral ecosystem. The Pinnacles Wilderness Contiguous 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	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
California Chaparral/ Chaparral	17	462,256	10	81,261
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
California Chaparral/ Chaparral	17	462,256	10	81,261

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 16 major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of these 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>California</u>				
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Salinas-Seaside-Monterey	24	3,676,896	45	644,415
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Santa Cruz	27	3,765,512	32	407,890
Santa Rosa-Petaluma	10	888,579	12	134,167
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Vallejo-Napa-Fairfield	44	4,832,667	74	2,100,862
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921
Yuba City	34	4,951,805	85	2,459,500

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There are no other BLM WSA's within 50 air miles recommended for wilderness designation. The Pinnacles Wilderness Area is adjacent to this WSA and the Ventana Wilderness Area is located approximately 30 miles southeast of the WSA. The former is managed by Pinnacles National Monument and the latter by the Los Padres National Forest.

C. Manageability

The WSA by itself is unmanageable as wilderness due to the size of the parcels and their irregular boundaries which do not follow topographic features.

The area recommended as suitable is manageable as wilderness. Management would be coordinated with management of the adjacent Pinnacles National Monument.

There have been no conflicts over water rights to the area's streams and springs in the past, and none are anticipated in the future.

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 the preliminary suitability recommendation: The energy and minerals potential of the Pinnacles Wilderness contiguous WSA is addressed in the Affected Environment section, Wilderness Recommendations, Central California Study Areas, Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), dated February 20, 1987.

The EIS states that mineral development interest is low, since there were no mining claims, mineral leases or mineral material sales on record with BLM in the WSA. However, the EIS does indicate that there was historic exploration within the Pinnacles National Monument. This exploration centered around a swarm of rhyolite dikes in the central part of the Monument. A similar geologic setting was recognized in the southeastern and northwestern parts of the WSA. The geologic environment was recognized as a possible source for copper, molybdenum, gold, silver, and uranium deposits. The EIS stated that there was low potential for all these minerals.

In March, 1982 a literature search was conducted by a BLM mineral specialist (L. Vredenburg, "Geology and Mineral Resources in the Pinnacles Contiguous Wilderness Study Area"). A gold and molybdenum occurrence was recognized but the potential was considered to be low.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: In 1984 and 1985 the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mine (BOM) conducted mineral surveys for the Pinnacles Wilderness Contiguous WSA. Subsequent to this study, a published report, USGS Bulletin 1705-C was issued in 1987.

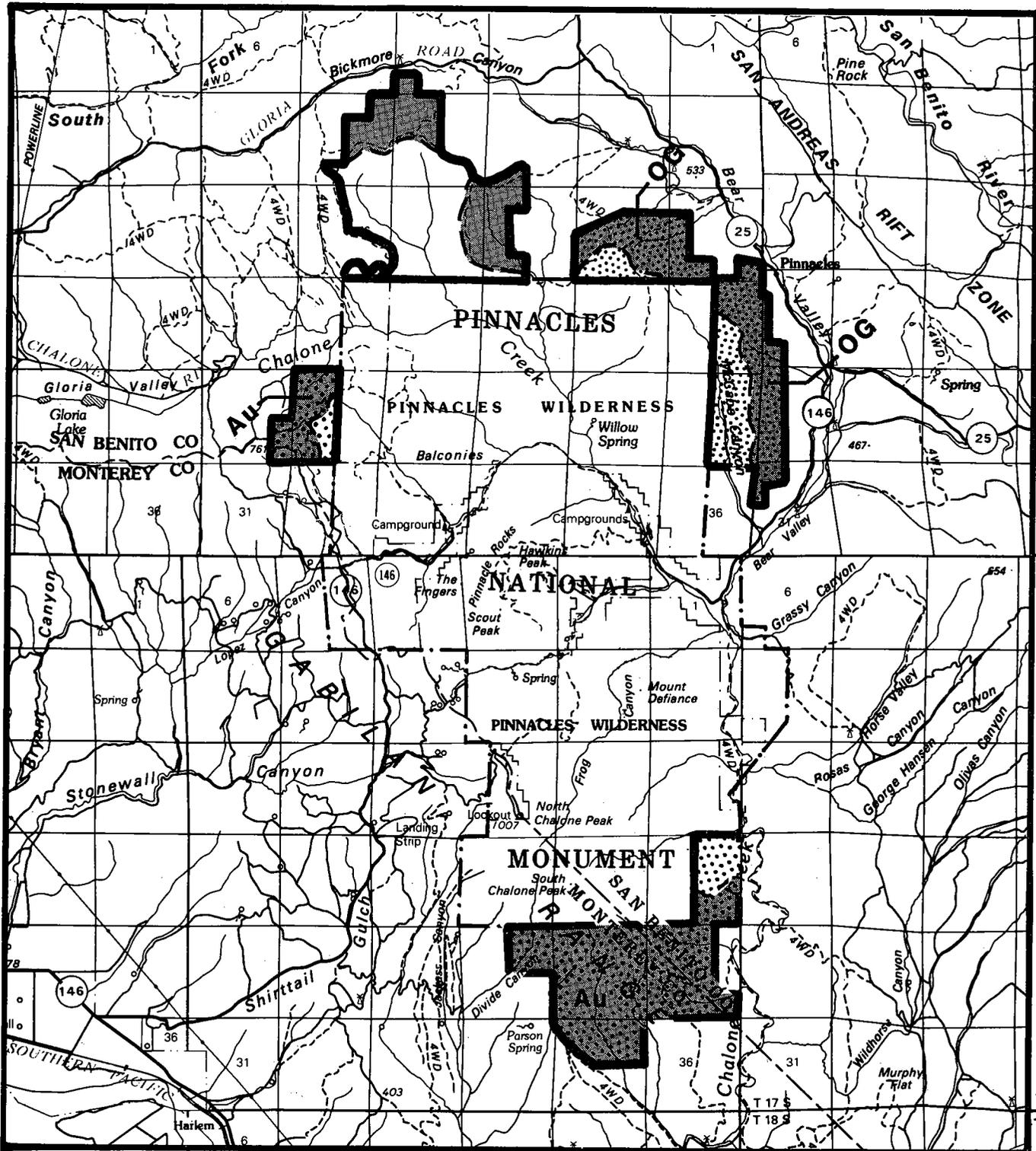
Based upon this USGS report, the WSA had low potential for all minerals, including oil and gas. However, a re-assessment of the USGS data by BLM (April 1988), differs with the previous interpretations.

The northwestern and southeastern portions of the WSA were identified by USGS as having low development potential for gold. This identification was made despite the fact that adjacent deposits of gold within the Pinnacles Monument boundary yielded assay values of 0.03 ounce/ton. This data indicates that occurrences of gold may be found within the northwestern and southeastern portions of the WSA. These parts of the WSA have a moderate potential for the occurrence of gold based on the BIM mineral classification scheme. In April 1988, BLM made a new interpretation of existing oil and gas data from abandoned wells drilled adjacent to the WSA, (i.e., data from the "Bacon #1" well located in sec. 13, T. 16 S., R. 7 E, MDM). This well was drilled in 1963 and encountered numerous oil occurrences from the same geologic formations that are productive in the Monroe Swell oil field 15 miles south of the WSA. This data indicates that the northeastern part of the WSA had moderate potential for the occurrence of oil and gas.

According to BLM records dated March 23, 1988, no unpatented mining claims, or oil and gas or geothermal leases exist in the WSA.

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Central California Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

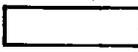
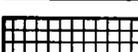
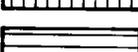


T 16 S
T 17 S

T 17 S
T 18 S

R 6 E R 7 E

R 7 E R 8 E

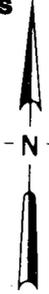
-  Recommended for Wilderness
-  Recommended for Non Wilderness
-  Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness
-  Split Estate
-  State
-  Private

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

- Au** Gold
- OG** Oil & Gas



Pinnacles Mineral Resource Potential



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Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL-WILDERNESS)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Wilderness Values	Overall, wilderness values will be negligibly impacted on less than 1 percent of the WSA. Prescribed burns conducted on 3,500 to 5,000 acres over the next 30 to 35 years and pre-treatments on 500 acres of the unsuitable portion of the WSA every 10 to 15 years will have a minor impact on these values but these impacts will be short-term and highly localized.	Impacts on wilderness values, overall, would basically be the same as those described under the Proposed Action. However, there would be a negligible positive impact to these values as a result of eliminating motorized vehicle use and precluding mechanized pre-treatments and fire-break construction.	Impacts would be the same as for the Proposed Action. Motorized vehicle use would be limited to 4 1/2 miles of designated primitive ways and precluded in the remainder of the area. Fire engines and other motorized vehicles would be allowed for fire suppression but would be restricted to existing routes as much as possible.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local 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

Several comments were received in the inventory phase dealing with wildlife values, fire management concerns and the amount of wilderness already in the region.

A public hearing was held in Fresno, California. During the public hearing and comment period, a total of 82 comments were received, both oral and written, related specifically to this unit. Twenty-nine comments supported the Bureau's Partial-Wilderness Alternative. Forty-Four comments supported the All-Wilderness Alternative, and nine comments supported the No-Wilderness Alternative.

The National Park Service and the California Department of Water Resources supported partial-wilderness designation with administration by the Pinnacles National Monument. The California Department of Fish and Game was opposed to wilderness designation due to perceived restrictions on hunting. No comments specific to this WSA were received from either San Benito or Monterey Counties.