

Sacatar Meadows

CA-010-027

SACATAR MEADOWS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-027)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 17,612 acres

The Sacatar Meadows WSA is located in eastern Tulare County and a small portion of Inyo County. The WSA occupies the western edge of the Sierra Crest, approximately 45 miles northwest of Ridgecrest. The WSA includes 17,460 acres of BLM lands, and 1 private inholding totaling 152 acres (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the south and west by Kennedy Meadows Road and private lands in the Scodie and Big Pine Meadows, on the north by the Sequoia National Forest, and on the east by Little Lake Canyon WSA (CDCA-157), which has been recommended suitable for wilderness.

The WSA consists of the western slopes and the lateral ridges extending west from the Sierra Nevada Crest. The rocky ridges rise sharply from Sacatar and Scodie Meadows to elevations over 8,000 feet. The vegetative cover is primarily pinyon pine with western juniper scattered throughout. Higher elevations of the WSA support small isolated stands of ponderosa pine and red fir. Meadows at lower elevations within the WSA are being invaded by big sagebrush species. The WSA contains an ecotone formed by the convergence of desert and Sierran vegetative communities. The WSA contains one known population, as well as potential habitat, for Phacelia novemmillensis, an annual plant which is identified as a candidate species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The known population exists above the upper reaches of Nine Mile Canyon at approximately the 6,800-foot elevation. The potential habitat is located in the southern portion of the WSA at the higher elevations on the south-facing slopes.

The WSA lies within the Monache-Walker Pass National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area (NCLWMA) established on January 26, 1962 by Public Land Order No. 2594. The NCLWMA was established to promote cooperative management of wildlife resources between the California Department of Fish and Game (CDF&G) and BLM. The agreement is intended to ensure the mule deer habitat within the area remains in Federal ownership. A portion of a migration corridor used by the Monache deer herd passes through the northern and western appendages of the WSA.

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 Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie Coleville 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 61% of the area as suitable, and no wilderness.

2. <u>RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE</u> —	10,721	acres recommended for wilderness
	6,739	BLM acres recommended for nonwilderness

Sixty-one percent partial wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA; 6,739 acres in this WSA are released for uses other than wilderness. This recommendation is in accordance with the South Sierra Foothills Management Framework Plan/South Sierra Foothills Grazing Management EIS dated 1983. 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 61% partial-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Partial wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA based on the following rationale: to provide a wilderness experience through designation of areas with moderate to high wilderness values with few significant competing resource conflicts, to allow livestock grazing and wildlife improvement projects while maintaining wilderness values, to improve consistency of management with the adjacent California Desert District (CDD) suitable wilderness recommendation, to give long-term protection to wildlife habitat and one candidate plant species, and to provide some wilderness opportunities for users seeking more solitude than is currently available in the highly used Sierran Wilderness Areas and those displaced through quota systems. When considered in conjunction with the bordering Little Lake Canyon WSA recommended suitable for wilderness, the wilderness characteristics for the area are outstanding. The deletion of two parcels on the western edge of the WSA from the area recommended for wilderness would reduce manageability problems and resource conflicts.

The primary impacts under this alternative relate to the protection of the wilderness values through wilderness designation and the resulting increases in naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation when considered in conjunction with the bordering Little Lake Canyon WSA. None of the existing uses or the projected management actions anticipated for the WSA would result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. Mineral potential of the area is low. The primary uses occurring within the WSA are livestock grazing and motorized recreational vehicle use.

The majority of the unit is recommended as suitable for wilderness. Boundary adjustments in the western portion of the WSA, south of Sacatar Canyon, provide some enhancement of manageability in the unit by eliminating the private land in section 2, T. 23 S., R. 36 E., MDM., portions of the narrow, isolated WSA lands at the western end of the unit, and three miles of primitive vehicle routes. By adjusting the western boundary to the ridgeline, manageability is enhanced both through easier identification of the boundary and the elimination of outside influences beyond the ridgeline (i.e., Kennedy Meadows Road and other roads and developments around Kennedy Meadows and in the intervening private lands). The remainder of the western boundary follows less identifiable section lines. Since the unit possesses

wilderness character only in association with the adjacent CDD wilderness proposal, the suitable recommendation is contingent upon wilderness designation of the adjacent lands.

The area recommended for wilderness is located in an ecotone formed by the convergence of desert and Sierran vegetative communities. Special features include one known population, as well as potential habitat, for Phacelia novemmillensis, an annual plant which is a candidate species. A migration route for the Monache deer herd crosses through the northern and western portions of the WSA. No activities are present or projected within the areas that these special features occupy; they would not be affected by the low level of existing uses or proposed management actions.

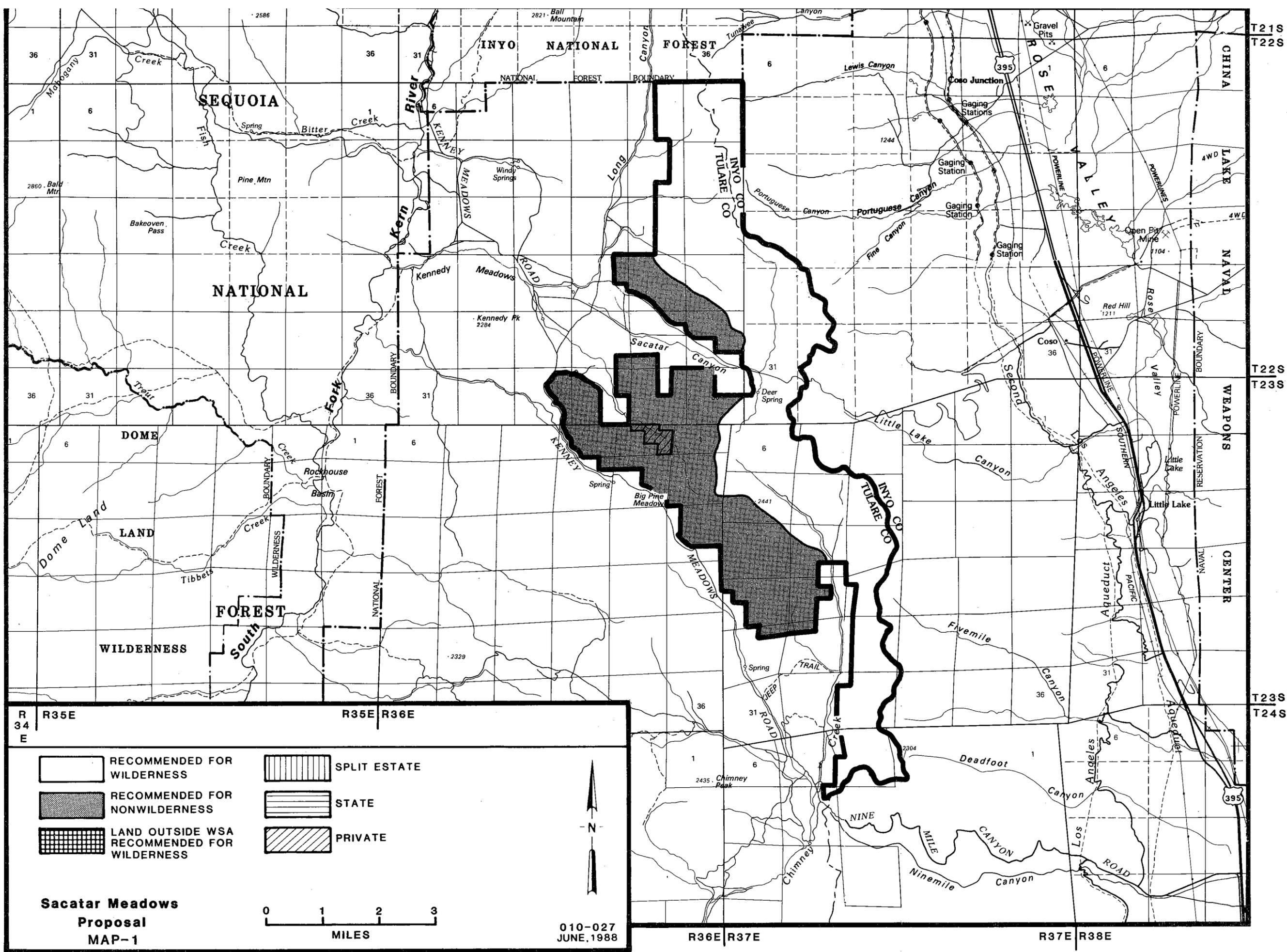
Within the 10,721 acres of the WSA recommended for wilderness, closure of ten miles of primitive vehicle routes and elimination of 300 visitor days of motorized recreation use would have a slight positive benefit on naturalness, solitude, and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Natural revegetation in this area would occur slowly over time. Construction of two spring developments for wildlife and livestock use would result in negligible local impacts to naturalness. Surface disturbance for each project would be 25 square feet with the perception of naturalness impaired over an area of less than one acre each.

This area lies within the ethnographic territory of the Tubatulabal Indian Tribe. The eastern periphery of the WSA was also utilized by the Panamint Shoshone. No current use of the area by Native Americans is known. The primary prehistoric use is projected to have been pinyon nut collecting. Additionally, a major trade route crosses the WSA from Sacatar Canyon over the crest of the Sierra Nevada to Little Lake Canyon east of the WSA. Cultural sensitivity for the unit ranges from moderate to high.

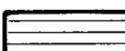
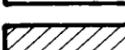
Some imprints of man's activity are apparent but are not dominant. Vehicle ways lead into the WSA from the south and west. Sacatar Trail (T. 22 S., R. 37 E., MDM) completely crosses the WSA, continuing into the Little Lake Canyon WSA. Most trails are faint; they are mostly used for hunter access. Approximately 14 miles of vehicle ways are within the WSA area. Most serious impairments to the solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation values of the WSA are the private land fingers extending into the unit. Also, due to the unit's long, narrow character, outstanding opportunities exist only when considered with the adjoining Little Lake Canyon WSA.

The non-suitable portion of the WSA (6,891 acres west of Deer Spring) will continue to be managed for uses other than wilderness.





R 34 E
R35E R36E

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

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R36E R37E

R37E R38E

T21S
T22S
T23S
T24S

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

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	17,460
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	152
Total		<u>17,612</u>
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	10,721
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		<u>10,721</u>
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	6,739
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>6,739</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The Sacatar Meadows WSA generally appears to have been affected by the forces of nature with human influences only apparent in the valley floors and along the boundaries of private lands. These include 14 miles of unobtrusive primitive vehicle routes and two spring developments for livestock use. Outside the WSA to the northwest, a residential subdivision extends like fingers adjacent to the WSA, greatly affecting the naturalness of the area.

The vegetative cover is primarily pinyon pine with western juniper scattered throughout. Higher elevations of the WSA support small isolated stands of ponderosa pine and red fir. Meadows within the unit are being invaded by big sagebrush species. The WSA contains an ecotone formed by the convergence of desert and Sierran vegetative communities.

Several springs have been identified in this area, including Deer Spring which supports four acres of riparian meadow vegetation. The springs provide access to water that can be treated for drinking and are cool and moist environments for recreation. Intermittent streams in the area provide important riparian habitat for wildlife, and are aesthetically attractive environments.

2. Solitude: The irregular configuration, narrow shape, and the penetrating nature of the private land pattern greatly limit opportunities for solitude. The expanding residential development and private land demands in the Kennedy Meadows area along the northwest boundary are apparent from the WSA's ridgelines and influence the opportunities for solitude. However, when considered with the adjoining Little Lake Canyon WSA recommended suitable for wilderness, the additional size and physiographic diversity enhance the limited opportunities to outstanding levels.

This WSA is periodically overflowed 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: As with solitude, the irregular configuration and narrow shape hamper opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation within the WSA. When considered in conjunction with the Little Lake Canyon WSA, the many deep canyons contribute to primitive and unconfined opportunities.

The Sacatar Meadows WSA, in conjunction with the adjoining Little Lake Canyon WSA, offers outstanding opportunities for hiking, hunting, rockhounding, and primitive camping.

4. Special features: The WSA contains one known population as well as potential habitat for Phacelia novermillensis, an annual plant which is a candidate species listed by the USFWS. A migration route for the Monache deer herd also crosses through the northern and western portions of the WSA.

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 17,460 acres of the Sierran Forest/Juniper-Pinyon Woodland ecosystem. Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a new ecosystem to the NWPS. The Sierran Forest province - Juniper-Pinyon Woodland community is not currently represented in the NWPS.

TABLE 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	NWPS Areas		Other BIM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	5	37,540
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	5	37,540

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 ten major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BIM 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 BIM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,515
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
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
Riverside-San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria- Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of five BIM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation: Rockhouse (CA-010-029), Little Lake Canyon (CDCA-157), Owens Peak (CDCA-158), El Paso Mountains (CDCA-164), and Golden Valley (CDCA-170). Four miles to the west

of the WSA is the Domeland Wilderness Area and five miles to the northwest lies the South Sierra Wilderness Area. Both of these units are managed by the Sequoia National Forest.

C. Manageability

The area recommended is manageable as wilderness. No major conflicting uses occur within this area. There have been no conflicts over water rights for the area's streams and springs, and none are anticipated in the future. The springs are protected as Public Water Reserve 107's and have been notified to the State of California, Division of Water Rights. The streams form the headwaters of their watersheds and have not been diverted within the WSA. With the boundary adjustments recommended, resource conflicts would be reduced to a minimum, thus allowing for the effective management of this area as wilderness. Management is additionally enhanced by the adjacent suitable recommendation for Little Lake Canyon WSA to the east.

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 Sacatar Meadows WSA is in the BLM Sacatar Meadows Geology-Energy-Mineral (G-E-M) Resource Area. This report was prepared for BLM by Great Basin G-E-M Joint Venture in 1983. The mineral resources in the Affected Environment section of the Wilderness Recommendations Benton-Owens Valley, Bodie-Coleville Study Areas, Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 1987 was taken primarily from the G-E-M report. Additional minerals information used in the EIS was obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) Mineral Lands Assessment Open File Report, MLA-53-85. This report was published in 1985 and is titled "Mineral Resources of the Sacatar Meadows South Wilderness Study Area, Tulare and Inyo Counties, California". The EIS indicates the majority of the WSA has a low potential for mineral occurrence. In the southerly portion of the WSA, a moderate potential for uranium was mentioned. In addition, the EIS states the potential for common varieties of salable minerals is low and that there is no potential for oil, gas or geothermal resources.

The WSA is primarily composed of granitic rocks of the Cretaceous Age Isabella Grandiorite Formation. The intrusion of this formation into the Kernville Series (phyllites, quartzite, marble, slate and metavolcanics) believed to be Permo Carboniferous in age, resulted in a number of zones of contact metamorphism. These zones occurred where isolated roof pendants were intruded by calcareous igneous rock bodies and are indicative of tungsten occurrence. Although this geologic environment is recognized, the G-E-M report states the potential for tungsten is low within the

WSA. The EIS states that there is a moderate potential for uranium and that there are two types of occurrence. The first is in isolated pegmatites intruded into the Isabella Formation where it is found in association with magnetite, ilmenite and molybdenite. Uranium occurrences were also identified in stream sediment sample information (Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant, 1981, "Hydrogeochemical and stream sediment reconnaissance basic data for Bakersfield Quadrangle" U.S. Department Energy Report GJBX-419(81)). When the information was field-checked by BOM in 1985, altered shear zones were shown to be the probable source of the uranium.

Although there are two known uranium deposits in the immediate vicinity, only one is believed to be within the boundaries of the WSA. The location of the other deposit is uncertain. Although no production date is available, records show that limited production has occurred. BLM records in 1984 showed that no mining claims, mineral leases or mineral material sales contracts/permits existed.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: New information obtained from a joint USGS/BOM publication titled "Mineral Resources of the Sacatar Meadows Wilderness Study Areas, Tulare and Inyo Counties, California, 1988" (USGS Bulletin 1705-D) supports the EIS conclusions that there is a low potential for metallic mineral resources. This information has resulted in a reassessment of the potential for uranium. The uranium potential has been reclassified as low according to the BLM classification scheme. This is based on evidence supporting the rationale that any uranium resources that exist in the WSA are isolated and suggest insufficient continuity of resources to justify moderate potential classification.

The lack of mineral interest is indicated by the fact that no mines, mining claims or mineral leases were recorded on BLM's mining claim record index dated March 25, 1988. Since all mineral values for this WSA are considered to be low, no mineral potential map was prepared for this 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 Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

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

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL-WILDERNESS)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	<p>There would be a slight benefit to wilderness values within the 10,721 acres of the WSA designated wilderness. Elimination of 300 visitor-days of motorized recreation use and prohibiting a 300-acre prescribed burn would help retain and maintain the perception of naturalness and the sense of solitude.</p> <p>On the 6,891 acres not designated wilderness, solitude and naturalness would be impaired as a result of continued motorized vehicle use and a 700-acre prescribed burn. Overall, there would be only a slight impact to wilderness values throughout the WSA.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation of the entire 17,612 acres within the Sacatar Meadows WSA would result in slight positive benefits to the wilderness values. Naturalness and solitude would be retained locally as a result of two prescribed burns totaling 1,000 acres. Closure of the WSA to motorized recreation use would result in a slight positive benefit to wilderness values, primarily solitude. Special features including sensitive plant habitat and deer migration corridors would be retained and slightly enhanced.</p>	<p>The overall impacts on wilderness values would be minor throughout the 17,612-acre WSA. Locally, the perception of naturalness and sense of solitude would be diminished within an area of approximately 2,200 acres as a result of prescribed burning. Continued low levels of existing uses and the lack of proposed activities would not significantly affect wilderness.</p>
Motorized Recreation Use	<p>Overall, there would be only a minor impact to motorized recreation use as a result of designating a 10,721-acre portion of the WSA as wilderness with 300 visitor-days foregone. Opportunities outside the WSA and within the 6,891 acres of the WSA not designated wilderness would accommodate displaced users. Use within the non-wilderness portion would continue and is projected to increase by 200 visitor-days.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would close the entire 17,612 acres within the WSA to motorized recreation use eliminating 500 visitor-days per year. This would result in a minor adverse impact as use would be displaced to other public lands outside the WSA.</p>	<p>There would be no impacts on motorized recreation use which is projected to remain stable at 500 visitor-days per year.</p>

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

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL-WILDERNESS)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	No-wilderness/NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Livestock Grazing and Range Improvements	There would be only a minor impact to livestock grazing as a result of prohibiting a 300-acre prescribed burn in the wilderness portion of the WSA foregoing an increase of 50 AUMs. Overall livestock use would increase in the non-designated portion by 117 AUMs as a result of a 700-acre burn. No other proposed projects would be eliminated.	There would be a minor impact to livestock grazing. Precluding 1,000 acres of prescribed burns would forego the opportunity to increase forage production by 167 AUMs. Current livestock use would continue to be allotted at 462 AUMs.	There would be no impacts on livestock grazing and range improvements. All planned projects would be implemented, including two prescribed burns on a total of 1,000 acres resulting in an increase of 167 AUMs.

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

Several comments were received during the wilderness inventory phase. These comments addressed potential mineral and utility site values in the unit. Two comments also addressed the existence of roads and hydroelectric generation plant sites within the WSA. A concern was further expressed regarding the unit's proximity to the outside influences of Highway 395.

During the study phase, a public meeting was held in Markleeville, California on October 26, 1983; no members of the public attended the session. A public hearing was held the following day, October 27, 1983, in Bishop, California, in a split afternoon/evening session. Thirty-one individuals attended, and fourteen testified.

One comment noted that the portion recommended suitable for wilderness does not contain a road and, thus, questioned how people would get into the area. The individual mentioned that the Deer Springs Road in the suitable area is not considered a road because of its deteriorating and poor condition; at the ridgeline it becomes unusable. Access to and around the area is available via the Nine Mile Canyon Road, however. One other individual stated that since grazing is established in the recommended suitable area, it would be allowed to continue in the future.

The Inyo County Board of Supervisors expressed opposition to the BLM wilderness recommendation due to its inconsistency with the adopted conservation and open space elements of the Inyo County General Plan. Only the no-wilderness alternative would be compatible with current Inyo County management plans. The Board also felt they were not adequately consulted in the BLM wilderness planning process for WSAs in Inyo County.

No Federal or State agency comments were received specific to this WSA.