

# Rockhouse

*CA-010-029*

ROCKHOUSE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-029)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 130 acres

The Rockhouse WSA is located south of Kennedy Meadows in eastern Tulare County, approximately 80 miles northeast of Bakersfield. It consists of a 130-acre parcel of BLM land (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded to the north and south by private land, to the east by a maintained access road, and to the west by the United States Forest Service (USFS) Domeland Wilderness.

Pinyon pine, western juniper and an understory of big sage, Douglas rabbit-brush, and needlegrass are the predominant vegetation in the WSA. No special features are found within this WSA. This parcel is within a portion of the Monache-Walker Pass National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area.

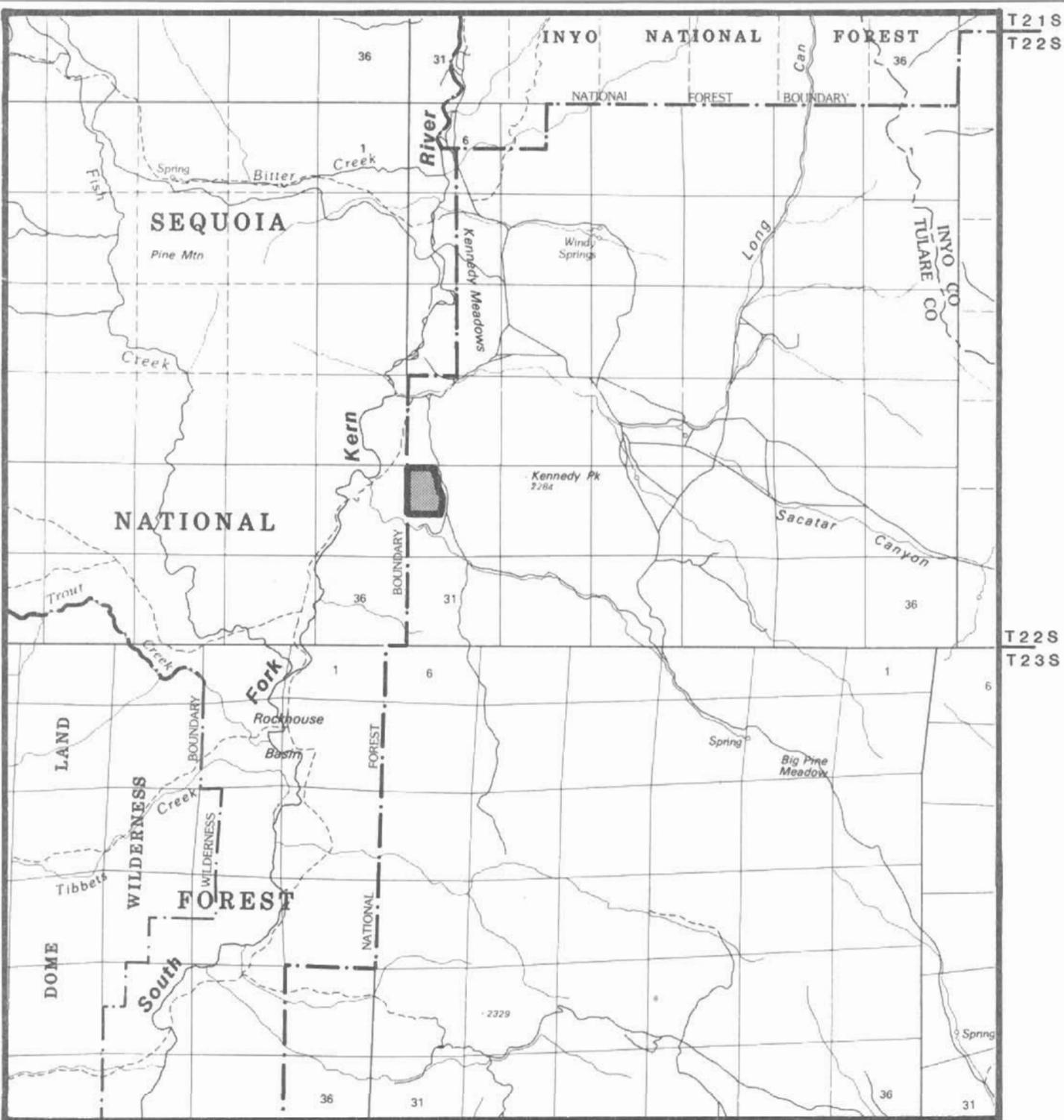
The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the final EIS. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE --- 0 acres recommended for wilderness  
130 BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

No-wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the 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.

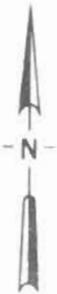
The WSA is recommended non-suitable for the following reasons: the wilderness values are low and current management has proven effective in maintaining the area's existing resources. The Sequoia National Forest (USFS) has indicated the Rockhouse WSA does not possess values that will enhance the USFS Domeland Wilderness Area. The addition of this WSA to the USFS designated wilderness area will create a potentially unmanageable boundary with the WSA protruding like a finger, with no specific topographic delineation. Signing of the area's boundary and frequent patrols would be necessary to manage the area as wilderness.

There are no known vehicle routes of travel contained within the existing WSA boundary.



-  NONE
-  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS
-  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**Rockhouse  
Proposal  
MAP-1**



010-029  
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)	130
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
Total		130
<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		0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	130
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		130

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The small 130-acre parcel that makes up this WSA generally retains its natural character and influence, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable. No roads exist within the unit, although the entire eastern boundary of the WSA is a major dirt road connecting residences to the south with Kennedy Meadows. No structures or fences are known to exist in this unit, although a livestock fence is located along the western boundary of the WSA.
2. Solitude: This unit is too small to provide adequate opportunity for solitude considering that a major road makes up the eastern boundary and private land borders the unit on the north and south. 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: This unit is very small and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are extremely limited. Very little non-motorized use, if any, is known to currently exist.
4. Special features: The WSA contains no ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

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 130 acres of the Sierran Forest/Juniper-Pinyon Woodland ecosystem. Although the WSA would add diversity in the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS the Bureau has recommended two WSA's with similar ecosystems (Owen's Peak WSA and Sacatar Meadows WSA) as suitable for wilderness designation.

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>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	5	54,870
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	5	54,870

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 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>				
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 following is a list of seven BLM WSAs within 50 air miles recommended for wilderness designation or partial designation: Rockhouse (603 area) (CA-010-029), Sacatar Meadows (CA-010-027), Owens Peak (CA-010-026), Little Lake Canyon (CDCA-157), Owens Peak (CDCA-158), El Paso Mountains (CDCA-164), and Golden Valley (CDCA-170). The Domeland Wilderness is immediately adjacent to the west; the South Sierra and Golden Trout Wilderness Areas are four miles and 15 miles, respectively, to the north. All areas are managed by the Sequoia National Forest.

C. Manageability

The Rockhouse WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with extreme difficulty. Manageability problems include the area's small size, the existence of a major dirt road along the east boundary, and the fact that the addition of this parcel would increase the irregularity of the already existing Domeland Wilderness Area boundary. Frequent signing and patrol of the borders would be required to insure the integrity of the unit.

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 recommendations: The geology and mineral resources of the Rockhouse Basin (202) WSA is described in a special State report by the California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG)

(i.e., Taylor and others, 1984, Mineral Resource Potential of the Rockhouse Basin Wilderness Study Area, Kern and Tulare Counties, California; CDMG, Special Report 157, 87 pp). The mineral resource data in the Affected Environment Section of the 1987 BLM Wilderness Recommendations, California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was taken largely from this State report. The EIS indicates that the WSA is considered to have a low potential for the occurrence of mineral resources. The WSA encompasses a portion of the Sierra Nevada batholith and is composed primarily of granitic rocks (granodiorite and quartz diorite). A roof pendant of quartzite (normally associated with mineralization in the area) crops out in the northwest corner of the WSA. The EIS indicated that historical development has occurred outside the WSA for tungsten and barite. No unpatented mining claims, mineral leases, or mineral material sales contracts/permits were on record with BLM as of April 4, 1987.

The low mineral resource occurrence potential described in the BLM 1988 EIS is supported by the CDMG 1984 Special Report. The CDMG conducted an extensive mineral survey of the area in late 1983, including a literature search, geological field mapping, rock and stream sediment sampling, and geochemical and geophysical studies. This mineral survey was conducted under contract for the BLM. The CDMG report showed no old mines or prospects in the WSA, and the area was considered to have no potential for oil and gas and low to no potential for geothermal resources.

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 indicate that there are no mining claims in this WSA as of March 25, 1988. Because of the WSA's low mineral resource potential, no mineral resource potential map was prepared for this document.

#### 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 California Section 202 Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>Non-designation of the WSA as wilderness will not result in any anticipated impacts to the wilderness values. There are no surface disturbances in the WSA. Recreational vehicle use and mineral/energy exploration and development are not projected within the WSA. Continued limited livestock grazing will not impact the area's wilderness values and inspection and maintenance will only negligibly impact solitude. Potential fire suppression activities as a result of wildfires could lead to short-term impacts to the perception of naturalness.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation of the Rockhouse WSA would result in a slight positive benefit. Long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts would be provided by legislation.</p>

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 wilderness inventory phase comments were received pertaining to the larger Rockhouse Sec. 603 unit to the south. No comments specific to the Rockhouse 202 area were received.

During the study phase a public hearing was held in Bakersfield, California, and written comments were accepted until February 15, 1988. The majority of the comments received supported the all-wilderness alternative for this unit.

No Federal, State or County agency comments were received specific to the WSA.