

POODLE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 142,050 acres

The Poodle Mountain WSA (NV-020-012) is located in central Washoe County, approximately 15 miles northwest of Gerlach, Nevada. Reno, Nevada is about a 2-hour drive away. The WSA includes 142,050 acres of public lands and surrounds 3,226 acres of private land and 480 acres of split estate (private surface-public minerals) (Table 1).

The WSA boundary is bordered by roads (57.1 miles), private land (22.7 miles) and topographic features (2.5 miles). The study area is bordered on the southeast and south by the Sand Pass Road, on the southwest by the Smoke Creek Road leading into private land on the west, on the northwest by the North Fork Creek Road and portions of private land, on the north by the Buffalo Hills Reservoirs Road and a portion of private land and on the northeast by the road identified as State Highway 81 intermixed with parcels of private land and on the east by private land.

The Poodle Mountain WSA is generally circular, measuring between 4 and 21 miles north-south and between 3 and 18 miles east-west. It encompasses most of the Buffalo Hills, a circular shaped basaltic plateau dominated by large canyons generally radiating from the center. The elevations for the WSA range between 3,850 feet to 6,832 feet. There are three distinct landforms to be found: basalt plateau highlands, basalt plateau canyon country, and fringing desert piedmont.

The basalt plateau highlands are in the north-central and northwest part and are flat to rolling with a small area of alluvium. This area includes Poodle Mountain, the volcanic vent from which the Buffalo Hills basalt issued. The plateau highlands are only moderately eroded compared to the canyon country around them.

The basalt plateau canyon country has numerous deeply-cut canyons and gorges. This section of the WSA includes finger-like, flat-topped ridges and remnant plateaus between the canyons. The landscape is extremely rugged, rocky and has high-relief as compared to the low-relief highland plateau from which it radiates.

The fringing desert piedmont is along the south and southwestern boundary and is the transition between the Buffalo Hills and the Smoke Creek Desert to the south. The landscape is low-relief alluvium with low parallel ridges and drainages lying perpendicular to the basalt plateau.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Final Winnemucca Wilderness Recommendations Environmental Impact Statement released in September, 1987. There were three alternatives analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, a partial wilderness alternative in which 87,900 acres would be recommended for wilderness designation and 54,150 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness and a no wilderness alternative which is the recommendation in this report.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 142,050 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 142,050 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, the recommendation for this WSA would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

This WSA is recommended for uses other than wilderness due to a compilation of factors which, individually might not cause the study area to be unsuitable for wilderness designation, but collectively, create a situation where the recommendation is for no wilderness. There is an extensive and expansive amount of private land. Three thousand seven hundred and six acres of private land are spread throughout the WSA. This acreage would be of minimal significance if it were clustered together but it is spread out through 38 different parcels. These pieces of private land control the available water. The owner has the right of reasonable access to these parcels at any time. It would be impossible to manage for wilderness values.

There are a large number of widely scattered range improvements in the WSA. Each of these improvements would be allowed under the wilderness management policy. This would require that vehicle access be allowed for the maintenance. Maintenance vehicle usage would keep cherrystem roads and ways in existence. This would be a permanent impact on the natural quality of the area.

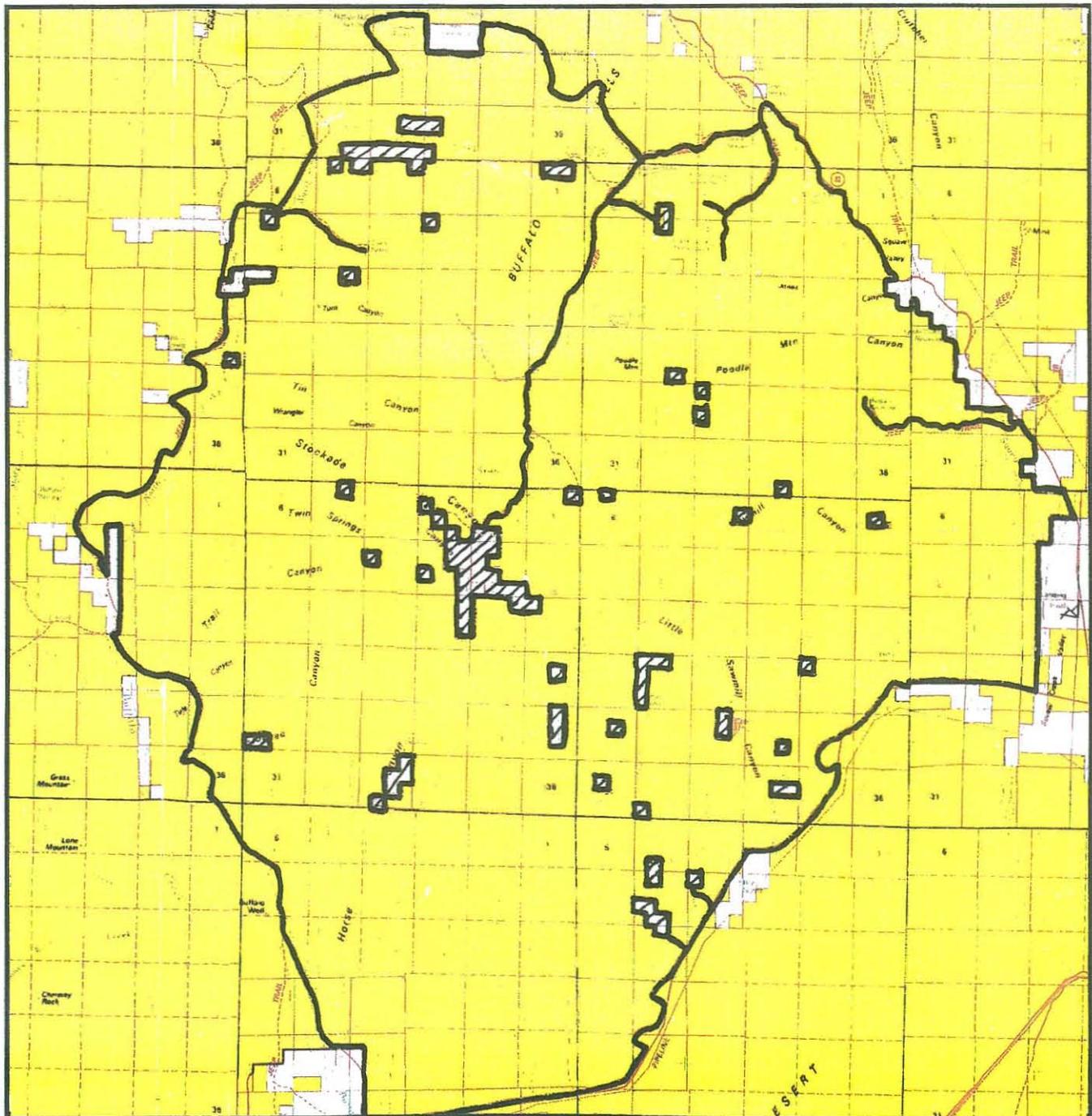
Another manageability problem concerns the 1,400 acres of mining claims present. It is projected that 65 acres of them will be developed. The audio and visual intrusions caused by the development of any of these acres would reduce the wilderness characteristics of the immediate area. These developments would include, but not be limited to, noise caused by engines and the normal day to day operation of a mining enterprise. Dust, buildings, vehicles and diggings would lessen the wilderness experience. Since the BLM is required to provide reasonable access to individuals with valid, preFLPMA mining claims, construction of access roads through the area would be an additional erosion of wilderness values.

There are also 28,300 acres with moderate metallic mineral potential (mercury, uranium, tungsten and silver). In addition to these, there are 24,000 acres of moderate geothermal potential.

In summary, while the individual manageability concerns of each of these issues would not be of sufficient cause to recommend this WSA for nonwilderness, the aggregate of all of these concerns does. Therefore, this WSA is not recommended for wilderness.

Table 1
Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>	
BLM (surface and subsurface)	142,050
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (State, Private)	<u>3,706</u>
Total	145,756
 <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	142,050
Split Estate	<u>0</u>
Total BLM Lands Not Recommended For Wilderness	142,050
 Inholdings (State, Private)	 3,706



T35N
T34N

T34N
T33N

T33N
T32N

R19E R20E

R20E R21E

R21E R22E



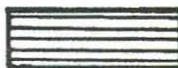
RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS - NONE



SPLIT ESTATE - NONE



RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS -



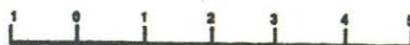
STATE - NONE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA
RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS - NONE



PRIVATE -



MILES

**Poodle Mtn.
Proposal**

NV-020-012
January 1990

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness: The WSA is considered to be primarily natural. The Poodle Mountain WSA encompasses most of the Buffalo Hills, a circular shaped basaltic plateau dominated by large canyons generally radiating from the center. There are three distinct landforms to be found: basalt plateau highlands, basalt plateau canyon country, and fringing desert piedmont.

The basalt plateau highlands include Poodle Mountain, the volcanic vent from which the Buffalo Hills basalt issued. This area is only moderately eroded compared to the canyon country around them. The basalt plateau canyon country has numerous deeply-cut canyons and gorges. This section of the WSA includes finger-like, flat-topped ridges and remnant plateaus between the canyons.

The fringing desert piedmont is low-relief alluvium with low parallel ridges and drainages lying perpendicular to the basalt plateau.

There are a number of range improvements present. They include 14 developed springs, 23 reservoirs, six fences for a total of 27.15 miles, a pipeline 0.5 mile long, one water trough, two corrals and one study plot. There are 63 ways totaling 76.9 miles. Five stream channels along the southern boundary road were contoured to reduce the impacts of floods. The contouring extends up to 0.25 mile within the WSAs. This road also has three borrow pits just outside the study area boundary.

Abandoned and active ranches are near the WSA boundaries and are visible from portions of the unit. A highway and a major county road, usually sustaining light traffic, are the east and southeast boundaries.

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude are considered outstanding. The basalt plateau highlands offer fair to good local vegetative screening from scattered stands of juniper and fair topographic screening because of the rolling landform. The basalt plateau canyons also offer fair to good vegetative screening due to the juniper, but the deep canyons, many of them meandering, offer excellent topographic screening. In the fringing desert piedmont, the low shrubs provide poor vegetative screening and the low relief provides fair to poor topographic screening.

The WSA is the proper size and shape to provide outstanding solitude, even though the road from the north boundary to the center of the unit detracts from the solitude. Two military training routes over the WSA have flights at 500 feet and below.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The WSA's size and topography create outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation such as day-hiking, camping, backpacking, horse-packing, rock climbing and scrambling and nature study. Attractions that might bring people to this area include Nobles wagon route (a California emigrant trail used during the mid-1800s), the Poodle Mountain volcanic center and many impressive canyons. Mountain lions, antelope, deer and sage grouse offer opportunities for hunters. The WSA is also part of the Buffalo Hills Herd Use Area for wild horses.

D. Special Features: There are no special features in the WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: Wilderness designation of this WSA would add 142,050 acres of the Sagebrush Steppe ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Presently, four wilderness areas in the NWPS are within this ecosystem in the Intermountain Sagebrush Province and two of them are within Nevada. Since the Sagebrush Steppe ecosystem is represented in a limited extent, adding more areas to the national system with this ecosystem is desirable. Table 2 summarizes the ecosystem information.

Table 2
Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	Areas	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 within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five hour's driving time of four major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within five hours drive of the population center.

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>				
Redding	15	1,264,503	11	344,633
Sacramento	48	5,039,817	87	2,479,541
<u>Oregon</u>				
Medford	31	2,440,081	21	730,038

C. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The Poodle Mountain WSA would contribute to the geographic distribution of areas in the NWPS in Nevada. Designation of this WSA would provide the public with wilderness opportunities in an area of the state presently limited in its offering of wilderness areas.

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

The study area is considered to be unmanageable because of the 3,706 acres of private lands spread through out it. This acreage would not be as significant if it were concentrated in one parcel. However, it is spread through out 38 different parcels. These areas control the available water. The owner has the right to develop any of these parcels at any time he desires and reasonable access across public lands has to be granted to him. If all the private parcels were to be developed, a network of roads would spread through the WSA. Access to the 1,400 acres of mining claims would have to be guaranteed. For these reasons, this study area is considered to be unmanageable.

There are also management concerns regarding the 76.9 miles of ways and the easy accessibility for ORVs (44,000 acres or 31 percent of WSA).

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The energy and mineral potential of the WSA has been rated by using the following pieces of information: (1) a literature search, (2) the 1982 Barringer Report (a federally contracted mineral survey of the WSAs to identify mineral resources and incorporating extensive sampling), (3) evaluation of the geologic setting, (4) consultation with energy and mining companies as well as local prospectors, (5) minor field verification by BLM geologists and (6) present mining activities.

As a result of this information, the following conclusions were reached (Asterisks denote materials listed in the Strategic and Critical Materials Stockpiling Act of 1946, with changes in subsequent Acts): 28,300 acres with moderate metallic mineral potential (mercury*, uranium, tungsten* and silver); 20,000 acres with high nonmetallic mineral potential (sand and gravel); 122,000 acres with moderate nonmetallic mineral potential (decorative stone, red cinder aggregate) and 24,000 acres with moderate geothermal potential.

There are approximately 1,400 acres of mining claims in the WSA. There is no present production of any mineral or geothermal resources in the study area.

In summary, quantities of various mineral and energy resources are unknown, but the potential for occurrence is from moderate to high in portions of the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4), on the next page, summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

<u>Issue Topics</u>	<u>Proposed Action (No Wilderness)</u>	<u>All Wilderness</u>	<u>Wilderness Emphasis Partial Wilderness</u>
Wilderness Values	None of the 142,050 acres would receive long-term protection. Due to increased ORV use and energy and mineral activity - Naturalness would be impaired on approximately 6% or 8,065 acres, Solitude would be adversely impacted on approximately 1,105 acres or less than 1% and Opportunities for primitive recreation would be decreased.	The values of naturalness, solitude and primitive recreation would be preserved throughout the designated wilderness area.	Wilderness area - values would be preserved on 87,900 acres. There are no special features in this area. Nonwilderness area - Due to increased ORV use and energy and mineral activity - Naturalness would be impaired on approximately 2% or 1,015 acres, Solitude would be adversely impacted on approximately 255 acres or less than 1% and Opportunities for primitive recreation would be decreased.
Exploration for and Development of Non-Energy Mineral Resources	Projected base/precious metal exploration and development of 2 small gravel pits, 1 small cinder pit and decorative stone sales would occur.	Projected base/precious metal exploration and development of 2 small gravel pits, 1 small cinder pit and decorative stone sales would be foregone.	Base/precious metal exploration and development of 2 small gravel pits within the 87,900 acres designated as wilderness would be foregone. The development of 1 small cinder pit and decorative stone sales would be possible in the area not designated as wilderness.
Exploration for Geothermal Resources	Geothermal exploration could occur.	Geothermal exploration opportunities would be foregone due to closure of the wilderness area to leasing.	Geothermal exploration would be foregone in the 87,900 acres designated as wilderness and closed to leasing. Projected geothermal exploration would be possible in the area not designated as wilderness.
M o t o r i z e d Recreational Vehicle Use	ORV use would grow from the current 750 visitor hours to 1,700 hours annually.	750 visitor hours of current ORV use and 1,700 hours of foreseeable future use would be displaced annually. This use would be absorbed on adjacent lands.	50 visitor hours of current ORV use and 110 hours of foreseeable future use would be displaced annually from the area recommended for wilderness. This use would be absorbed on adjacent lands. In the area not recommended for wilderness, ORV use would grow from the current 700 visitor hours to 1,550 hours annually.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic considerations were decided not to be significant issues for analysis.

Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

During the initial and intensive inventory stages (1978-1980), many of the sixteen comments discussed characteristics of the area (e.g., intrusions, resources, wilderness qualities) or suggested boundary changes. Reasons given for supporting WSA status included opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation and naturalness. Reasons given for opposing WSA status included other resource values, roads, intrusions and lack of opportunities for solitude or recreation. These comments addressed the entire 162,560 acres of the original study area. About 20,000 acres have since been removed from wilderness consideration.

During the 90-day comment period for the Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement, three formal public hearings were held in Nevada (Gerlach on November 1, Winnemucca on November 3 and Reno on November 8, 1983). Only one oral comment was received that named this WSA and that person agreed with the Proposed Action in the draft EIS (No Wilderness). Of the 74 written comments, 64 of them supported more wilderness than the Proposed Action and 10 of them supported the Proposed Action. Comments discussed roads and other human imprints and the private property inside the WSA as well as the need for hunter access into the area and the lack of solitude. Other people wrote about the need to preserve the wildlife, the traces of the 19th century Nobles Trail, the desirability of the scenery and wild horse viewing opportunities. The WSA's proximity to Reno was also discussed.

No comments about wilderness were received from Washoe County agencies or officials.

In a letter to the Winnemucca District, dated December 30, 1983, the Governor of the State of Nevada said, "We agree with the BLM that this area lacks significant wilderness characteristics to outweigh the resource conflicts, especially due to private land inholdings and a number of roads and ways extending into the area. We urge that this area be dropped from further consideration." This letter was written in response to the Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement.

The U.S. Air Force supports wilderness designation provided no restrictions are placed on military flights. It has said that it will work with the BLM if military flights create problems in some areas.

No comments were received on the final EIS.

