

Wilderness

Wilderness

Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) directs the Secretary of the Interior to review areas of 5,000 acres or more of the public lands determined to have wilderness characteristics and to report to the President his recommendations as to the suitability of each such area for preservation as wilderness. The Twin Coulee and Pryor Mountain Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are being studied under this section of FLPMA. The Secretary is required to report his recommendations to the President by October 21, 1991, and the President is required to report his recommendations to Congress by October 21, 1993. Congress ultimately decides whether to designate areas as wilderness.

Section 202 of FLPMA provides authority to study and recommend areas of less than 5,000 acres not covered under Section 603 for wilderness designation through the land use planning process. The Burnt Timber Canyon and Big Horn Tack-On WSAs are being studied under this section of FLPMA. The study and reporting requirements for these areas are the same as for areas studied under Section 603 with the exception of those areas recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation studied under Section 202 of FLPMA.

Completion of this Record of Decision for the Billings final RMP/EIS approves the planning decisions for all resources, including the nonsuitable Section 202 WSAs. Suitable and nonsuitable Section 603 WSAs and suitable Section 202 WSAs covered in the Billings RMP will be addressed further in a separate legislative Preliminary Final EIS and Wilderness Suitability Report (WSR) that will be transmitted to the Secretary. The Secretary signs a Record of Decision when he signs and transmits that WSR to the President.

Resource Objectives and Planned Actions

This plan recommends that the 6,870 acre Twin Coulee Wilderness Study Area (WSA) be recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation. The entire Pryor Mountain WSA consisting of 16,927 acres and a portion of the Burnt Timber Canyon WSA containing 3,430 acres (Area A) will be recommended suitable. A 525 acre parcel (Area B) in the southeastern portion of the Burnt Timber Canyon WSA will be dropped from further study. The southern portion of the Big Horn Tack-On WSA containing 2,550 acres (Area B) will also be recommended suitable, while the northern portion of this area consisting of 2,000 acres (Area A) will be dropped from further study. (See Table 2.4 and Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9.)

TABLE 2.4
WILDERNESS SUITABILITY RECOMMENDATIONS AND DECISIONS

Study Area	Acreage Recommended Preliminarily Suitable	Acres Dropped From Further Study	Acreage Recommended Nonsuitable
Twin Coulee Section 603 WSA MT-067-212			6,870 acres
Pryor Mountain Section 603 WSA MT-067-206	16,927 acres		
Burnt Timber Canyon Section 202 WSA MT-067-205	3,430 acres	525 acres	
Big Horn Tack-On Section 202 WSA MT-067-207	2,550 acres	2,000 acres	

If Congress selects this proposal, multiple use management on 6,870 acres in the Twin Coulee WSA will become the resource objective for this area, as will the 2,525 acres dropped from further study in the Burnt Timber Canyon and Big Horn Tack-On WSAs.

In the Pryor Mountain WSA and remaining portions of the Burnt Timber Canyon and Big Horn Tack-On WSAs, the objective will be to manage the areas to preserve their wilderness values while allowing other resource uses only where such usage will not cause damage to, or loss of wilderness values.

Rationale

The commercial timber values in the Twin Coulee WSA outweigh the marginal wilderness values. In addition, the majority of the area is heavily timbered and the primary recreational use areas are confined to a few open ridge tops and canyon areas. The adjacent National Forest lands are not being recommended for wilderness designation and the relatively small size of the areas likely to be used by recreationists will offer marginal wilderness opportunities.

The Pryor Mountain WSA contains some of the most rugged isolated portions of the Pryor Mountain range. The wide expanses and topographic screening provided in this area offer outstanding wilderness values. This area is in the heart of the PMWHR and the supplemental attributes of free roaming wild horse herds enhance the wilderness characteristics found in the area. There are no overriding resource conflicts in the area such as mineral values or domestic livestock grazing which will compromise a wilderness recommendation.

The Burnt Timber Canyon WSA is a physiographic extension of the U. S. Forest Service Lost Water Canyon wilderness study area which has been recommended for wilderness designation. The deeply incised canyon, limestone caves and overhangs and other natural attributes as described in Chapter 3 of the FEIS provide exceptional wilderness value. The boundary modification eliminating 525 acres from the recommended area is located in Sections 23 and 24 of T. 9 S., R. 27 E. This area has been impacted by uranium prospecting and there are a number of open pits and areas where a dozer or backhoe has been used to access test pits. The northwestern portion of the excluded area also contains a large wild horse trap.

The southern portion of the Big Horn Tack-On Wilderness Study Area (WSA) provides a 9 mile common boundary with the NPS Bighorn Canyon wilderness study area. This contiguity in association with the BLM Pryor Mountain WSA is important to the potential wilderness management of the general area as the total area provides outstanding wilderness opportunities.

The northern portion of the Big Horn Tack-On WSA is somewhat isolated from the other Pryor Mountain proposed wilderness areas by state and private lands. The nonpublic lands are currently experiencing heavy motorized recreational use during the spring, summer and fall months.

This portion of the study area has approximately 1/2 mile of common boundary with the NPS Bighorn Canyon WSA. A large portion of this area consists of a steep mountain face accessible from and within view of the U. S. Forest Service Dryhead Overlook. Because of the boundary configuration and adjacent land uses, this area will not contribute positively to the overall wilderness management of the remainder of the Pryor Mountain wilderness study areas.

Monitoring

Until Congress makes its decision on whether or not to designate an area as wilderness, WSAs will be patrolled periodically to detect and prevent unauthorized actions which may impair the suitability of such areas for preservation as wilderness. Following Congressional action, a wilderness plan would be prepared for any area designated as wilderness and a monitoring plan would be included.

Implementation Priorities

None

Support

Routine checks will be conducted in conjunction with other activities. Mineral surveys by the U. S. Geological Survey and the U. S. Bureau of Mines will be required for WSAs recommended as preliminarily suitable for wilderness designation as requested by the BLM Director. Fire management support will be needed for management of natural fire in meeting the resource objective and for the protection of unique and fragile resources.

Figure 2.6 Proposed Action — No Wilderness

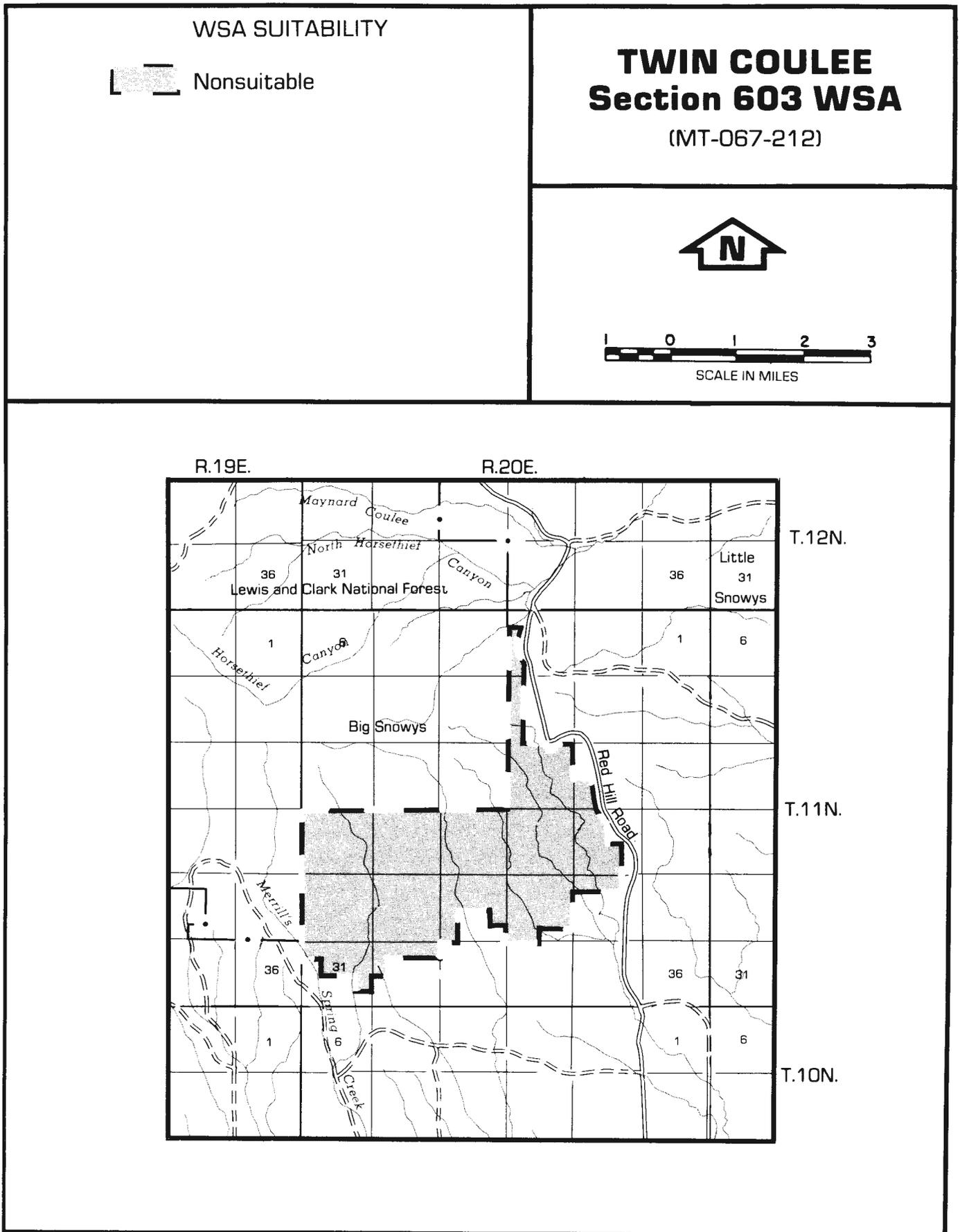


Figure 2.8 Proposed Action — Partial Wilderness

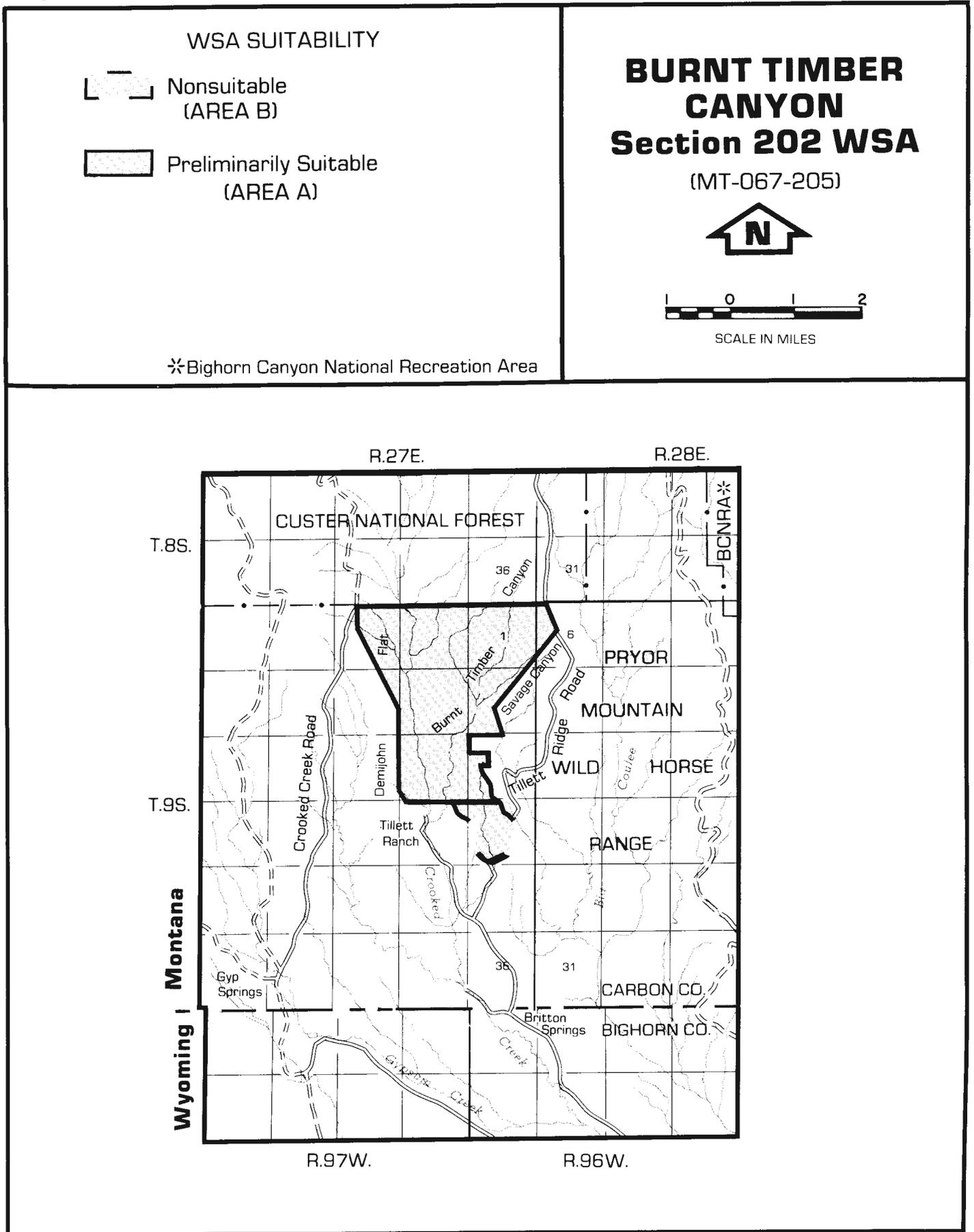


Figure 2.9 Proposed Action — Partial Wilderness

