



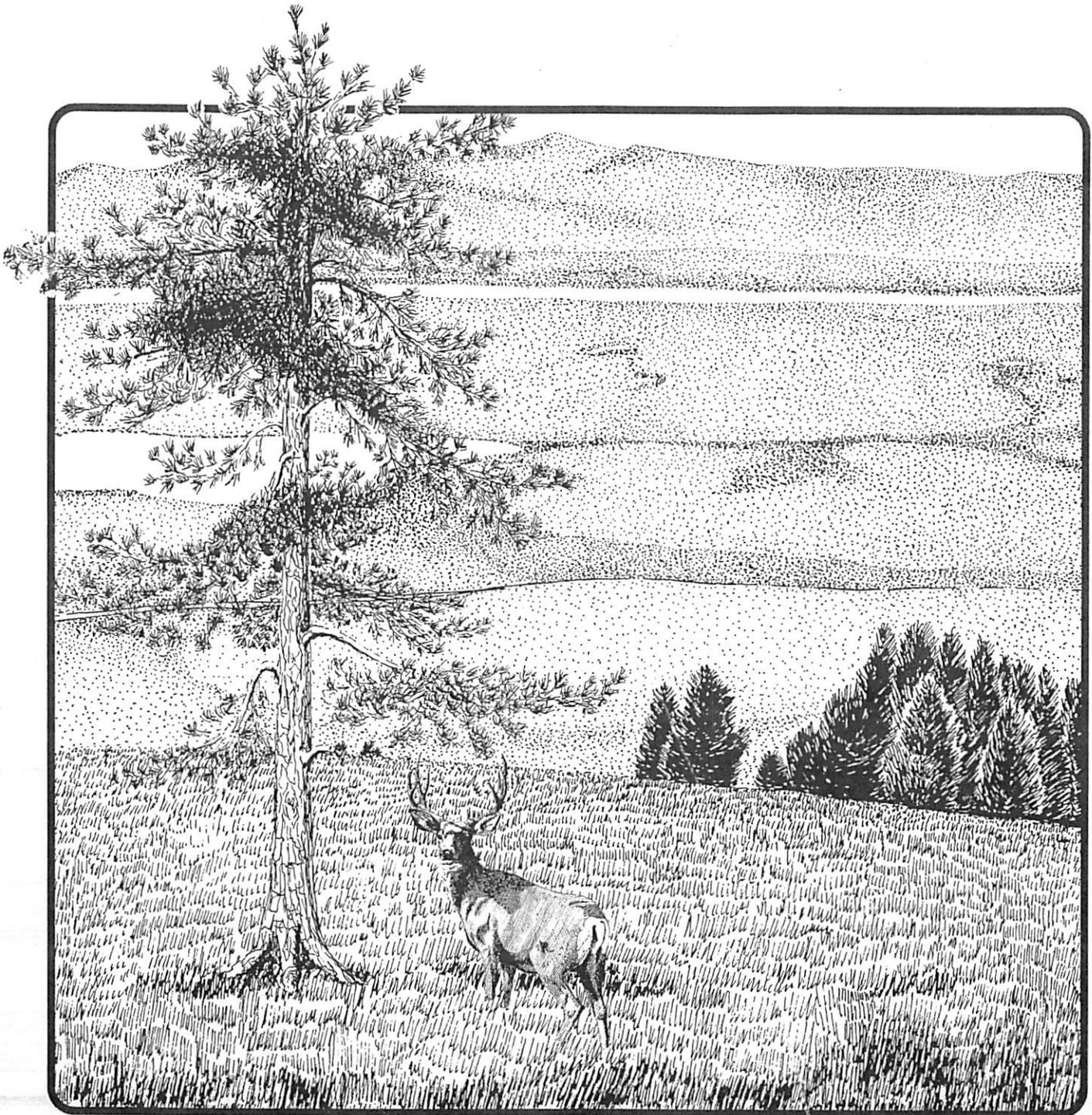
United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

Montana State Office

September 1991



# MONTANA STATEWIDE WILDERNESS STUDY REPORT Volume I — Statewide Overview



The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the stewardship of our public lands. It is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people for all times. Management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our nation's resources within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources recreation; rangelands; timber; minerals; watershed; fish and wildlife; wilderness; air; and scenic, scientific, and cultural values.

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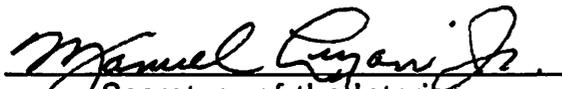


THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

**RECORD OF DECISION**

The following are the wilderness recommendations for 36 wilderness study areas (WSAs) in the State of Montana. These recommendations were developed from the findings of a 15-year wilderness study process by the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management. The wilderness studies considered each area's resource values, present and projected future uses of the areas, public input, the manageability of the areas as wilderness, the environmental consequences of designating or not designating the areas as wilderness, and mineral surveys prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines.

Based on our review of those studies, I have concluded that 173,499 acres within 15 study areas should be designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System and that 273,828 acres within 30 study areas should be released from wilderness study for uses other than wilderness. The acreage recommendations for each WSA, with which I concur, are listed in the following table. The Wilderness Study Report accompanying this decision includes, a detailed discussion of the recommendations and maps showing the boundaries of each area.

  
Secretary of the Interior

AUG 19 1991

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# MONTANA WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

WSA Name	Study	WSA Number	Acres Recommended for Wilderness	Acres Recommended for Non-Wilderness
Billy Creek	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-024-633		3,450
Seven Blackfoot	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-024-657	5,790	14,540
Bridge Coulee	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-024-675		5,900
Musselshell Breaks	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-024-677		8,650
Terry Badlands	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-024-684	33,024	11,886
Antelope Creek	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-065-266	9,600	2,750
Burnt Lodge	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-065-278	13,730	
Stafford	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-068-250		4,800
Ervin Ridge	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-068-253		10,200
Cow Creek	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-066-256	21,590	12,460
Dog Creek South	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-068-244		5,150
Woodhawk	Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	MT-068-246		8,100
Bitter Creek	Bitter Creek Wilderness EIS	MT-064-356		59,660
Zook Creek	Powder River Wilderness EIS	MT-027-701		8,438
Buffalo Creek	Powder River Wilderness EIS	MT-027-702		5,650
Burnt Timber Canyon	Billings Wilderness EIS	MT-067-205	3,430	
Pryor Mountain	Billings Wilderness EIS	MT-067-206	13,397	
Big Horn Tack On	Billings Wilderness EIS	MT-067-207	3,308	

WSA Name	Study	WSA Number	Acres Recommended for Wilderness	Acres Recommended for Non-Wilderness
Twin Coulee	Billings Wilderness EIS	MT-067-212		6,870
Wales Creek	Garnet Wilderness EIS	MT-074-150		11,580
Hoodoo Mountain	Garnet EIS Wilderness	MT-074-151A		11,380
Quigg West	Garnet EIS Wilderness	MT-074-155	520	
Sleeping Giant/ Sheep Creek	Sleeping Giant/ Sheep Creek Wilderness EIS	MT-075-111	10,454	
Black Sage	Headwaters Wilderness EIS	MT-075-115		5,926
Yellowstone River Island	Headwaters Wilderness EIS	MT-075-133		53
Ruby Mountains	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-001	15,615	10,996
Blacktail Mountains	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-002	10,586	6,893
East Fork, Blacktail Deer Creek	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-007		6,230
Hidden Pasture Creek	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-022		15,509
Bell/Limekiln Canyons	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-026		9,650
Henneberry Ridge	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-028		9,806
Farlin Creek	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-034	610	529
Axolotl Lakes	Dillon Wilderness EIS	MT-076-069		7,804
Centennial Mountains	Centennial Mountains Wilderness EIS	MT-ISA-002	23,054	4,637
Humbug Spire	Humbug Spiress Wilderness Suitability Report	MT-ISA-003	8,791	2,384
Square Butte	Square Butte Wilderness Suitability Report	MT-ISA-004		1,947
Statewide Totals			173,499	273,828

# Montana Statewide Wilderness Study Report

## Volume I Statewide Overview

September 1991

Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

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# WILDERNESS STUDY OVERVIEW

## WILDERNESS STUDY PROCESS

The BLM began the wilderness review in accordance with the requirements of Section 603(c) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) dated October 21, 1976. This Act mandated that within 15 years the BLM would inventory and study its lands for their wilderness suitability, and that based on this review, the Secretary of Interior would forward his wilderness recommendations to the President.

Minimum standards for the evaluation of BLM-administered lands in Montana were set by Congress in Section 2(c) of The Wilderness Act of 1964. These standards require an area to generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; have outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; have at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and may also contain ecological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historic value. In addition, each WSA was further evaluated to compare the area's overall wilderness quality with their multiple use value for other purposes, such as mining, grazing, or timber harvest. Guidelines were provided by the BLM wilderness

study process (Federal Register, February 3, 1982). A summary of the findings for each WSA can be found in the site-specific analysis for each WSA.

## The Studies

This wilderness study report includes the recommendations and rationale for those recommendations for 33 WSAs and 3 ISAs in Montana. These are all study areas identified through the wilderness inventory process and analyzed through 9 separate Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) and 2 ISA wilderness suitability reports. Table I is a listing of the 11 wilderness studies conducted in Montana.

## "Instant" Study Area (ISA) Wilderness Review Process

Section 603.(a) of FLPMA required the Secretary of Interior to prepare wilderness suitability recommendations for all formally identified natural or primitive areas existing prior to November 1, 1975. This specific requirement was in addition to the direction to inventory, review, and prepare suitability recommendations on all roadless areas on the public lands greater than 5,000 acres. These natural and

TABLE I  
List of Wilderness Studies

Name of Study	Draft EIS Filed	Final EIS Filed	Study Acreage
Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	05/82	12/87	169,580
Bitter Creek Wilderness EIS	03/84	10/89	59,660
Powder River Wilderness EIS	02/84	11/89	14,088
Billings Wilderness EIS	04/83	06/88	30,050
Garnet Wilderness EIS	12/84	01/91	23,480
Sleeping Giant/Sheep Creek Wilderness EIS	01/90	02/91	10,454
Headwaters Wilderness EIS	05/83	11/83	5,979
Dillon Wilderness EIS	05/82	03/87	94,228
Centennial Mountains ISA Wilderness EIS	03/87	05/90	27,691
Humbug Spires ISA Report	04/80	04/84	11,175
Square Butte ISA Report	02/80	09/83	1,947

\*There are 4,352 acres of the Pryor Mountain WSA and 353 acres of the Big Horn Tack On WSA which are in Wyoming, included in the Billings study figure. This acreage will be reported by Wyoming.

primitive areas became known as "Instant" (Wilderness) Study Areas (ISAs).

There were four natural/primitive areas in Montana which became ISAs.

One ISA, Bear Trap Canyon, was designated in 1983 as one of four units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness. Two ISAs, Humbug Spires and Square Butte, were studied for their wilderness suitability in advance of the other WSAs.

Recommendations on these areas were submitted to Congress in 1985 as part of an omnibus ISA Bill. The President recommended that 8,791 acres of the 11,175-acre Humbug Spires ISA be designated a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System and that the 1,947-acre Square Butte ISA not be designated wilderness.

There has been no action in Congress on the omnibus ISA Bill since its introduction in 1985. Therefore, Montana has included the recommendations for these two ISAs as part of this statewide wilderness package.

The fourth ISA, Centennial Mountains, was a complex area containing both BLM and Forest Service lands in Montana, as well as additional Forest Service and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service sheep experimental lands in Idaho. A joint study and EIS was completed in 1989 and the recommendation for this ISA is included in this report.

### Section 202 Wilderness Studies

This report includes a category of WSAs that have wilderness characteristics only when combined with the contiguous lands of another agency. The BLM lands were studied under the authority of Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and are identified in this report as "Section 202 WSAs." State Directors have authority through the BLM land use planning process to drop Section 202 areas from further wilderness considerations which are found to be unsuitable.

The Montana State Director has dropped all or parts of six Section 202 WSAs through final decisions in the Montana land use planning process. These areas are as follows:

Gallagher Creek MT-074-151B	4,257 acres
Blind Horse Creek MT-075-102	4,927 acres
Chute Mountain MT-075-105	3,085 acres
Deep Creek/Battle Creek MT-075-106	3,086 acres
Burnt Timber Canyon MT-067-205	525
	(Part of WSA)
Big Horn Tack On MT-067-207	2,000
	(Part of WSA)

There are four small Section 202 areas which will be studied as Montana's BLM land use plans are updated. They are as follows:

#### Lewistown District

Beaver Meadows MT-075-110	595 acres
North Fork of Sun River MT-075-107	196 acres

#### Butte District

Elk Horn MT-075-114	3,585 acres
Tobacco Root Tack On MT-076-063	860 acres

The remaining Section 202 WSAs have been included in this statewide reporting package.

### Montana Study Considerations

Montana's approach through the study process was to recommend wilderness designation for the WSAs where the overall wilderness quality is high and represents the best examples of ecosystems, landforms, or land offering special geological or scientific values within the state. These areas warrant permanent protection and inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This recommendation will:

- Establish 15 new wilderness units spanning a wide variety of Montana landforms, ecosystems, and other natural features.
- Improve the geographic distribution of wilderness areas and complement existing areas of Federal wilderness.
- Increase nationwide ecosystem diversity.

At the same time, this recommendation will release all or parts of 30 WSAs having potential for mineral and energy resources, nonwilderness recreation, timber harvest, and other land uses. The lands not recommended for wilderness also generally have lower wilderness values which would not enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) or were determined by BLM to be unmanageable as wilderness, due to land status or existing private rights in the area.

### Key Study Issues - Major Conclusions

#### Wilderness Values

The WSAs all have the minimum characteristics necessary to qualify for wilderness consideration. These areas are roadless, natural in condition, and possess either outstand-



# BLM WILDERNESS (EIS) STUDY AREAS

Map 1

ing opportunities for solitude or primitive unconfined recreation. Wilderness designation will insure the protection of wilderness values in these areas. Non-designation of the WSAs would, over the long-term, allow uses such as mineral exploration and development, woodland product sales, vegetative manipulation, rangeland project development, and recreational off-road vehicle use to degrade existing wilderness characteristics to a point where the areas would no longer qualify for wilderness consideration. Each of the 11 studies considered the impact of designation and non-designation on the wilderness values of each WSA.

### **Grazing Use Facility Maintenance and Construction**

Continued grazing use was a concern raised for the Garnet, Centennial Mountains, Missouri Breaks, Dillon, Headwaters, Billings, Powder River, and Bitter Creek studies. Local residents were concerned that existing levels of grazing use be allowed to continue should lands become designated wilderness.

The ability of BLM and its permittees to maintain existing and construct new grazing management facilities was an issue in nine studies. Both Congressional direction and BLM policy allow the continuation of existing grazing use in designated wilderness. Therefore, facilities required for the management of this use will remain in designated wilderness and new improvements may be allowed for improved livestock management or to aid in the management of wilderness values. The studies concluded that existing facilities would not be impacted (although controls on access and the scheduling and type of maintenance will be determined in conjunction with wilderness management requirements). New facilities may, in some cases, be appropriate and approved on a case-by-case basis, but the studies did identify some proposed projects that could not be approved within the area if designated as wilderness.

### **Commercial Timber Management**

The availability of commercial timber lands for potential harvest was a concern in the Garnet, Billings, and Centennial Mountain studies. Several areas with commercial timber stands were not recommended for wilderness designation, based upon timber resource and other values.

### **Mineral Development**

Lands designated as wilderness are withdrawn from mineral entry and leasing, subject to rights associated with valid

claims and leases existing at the time of designation. How wilderness designation would impact exploration for and development of mineral resources was an issue in all the studies, with the exception of Square Butte. Many of the WSAs have the potential for undiscovered mineral resources. For some, this potential is low, while for others, a higher rating was assigned. The U.S. Geological Service and U.S. Bureau of Mines studied the mineral potential of all WSAs recommended all or partially suitable for wilderness. The WSA site-specific reports discuss these mineral values in detail.

### **Impacts on Recreational Off-Road Vehicle Use**

Lands designated as wilderness would be closed to all motorized vehicle use. During the inventory process, WSA boundaries were drawn to exclude constructed and maintained roads. This issue, therefore, concerns vehicle use on jeep or four-wheel drive trails and cross-country. The impact of wilderness designation on ORV use was an issue in all studies. In general, all studies concluded that while some ORV use would be displaced, this use could easily be absorbed by and accommodated on other public lands in Montana with negligible impacts.

### **Ecological Diversity/Wilderness Availability**

On a statewide basis, Montana WSAs represent 11 separate ecosystems as mapped by Bailey-Kuchler. The Black Sage, Square Butte, Buffalo Creek and Zook Creek WSAs represent ecosystems not presently included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Ecosystems which are currently under-represented in the national system are present in the Yellowstone Island, Burnt Timber Canyon, and Twin Coulee WSAs.

An issue frequently commented upon was that Montana has enough acreage designated within the state. Montana currently contains 3,442,048 acres in 16 designated wilderness areas.

### **Recreation Uses**

Availability of current or proposed recreational uses, including motorized access and increased accessibility for the elderly or handicapped, was a study issue in 9 of Montana's 11 wilderness studies.

Lands designated as wilderness would be closed to all motorized vehicle use. During the inventory process, WSA boundaries were drawn to exclude constructed and main-

tained roads. This issue, therefore, concerns vehicle use on jeep or four-wheel drive trails and cross-country. In general, the studies concluded that while some ORV use would be displaced, this use could easily be absorbed by and accommodated on other public lands in Montana with negligible impacts.

## **Other Pertinent Information Relating to the Montana Statewide Recommendation**

### **Congressional Action on Montana WSAs**

Congressional action has removed three study areas from inclusion in the Montana statewide package. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness Bill, which was signed by the President on October 31, 1983, transferred 640 acres of the Madison Tack On (MT-076-079) to the U.S. Forest Service for wilderness management purposes and released an additional 829 acres from wilderness consideration. There were also 1,484 acres of the Tongue River Breaks Contiguity (MT-027-736) which were released from wilderness consideration. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness Bill also designated Bear Trap Canyon ISA as one of four units of the Lee Metcalf wilderness. The Bear Trap unit consists of 6,000 acres, which includes 1,985 acres of adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands which were transferred to the BLM for management purposes.

### **Pryor Mountain Study Areas**

Two of the three BLM WSAs in the Pryor Mountains contain contiguous public lands located in Wyoming which were included in Montana wilderness studies. There is 4,352 acres of the Pryor Mountain WSA and 353 acres of the Big Horn Tack On WSA in Wyoming which are recommended for wilderness designation. This acreage will be reported by the Wyoming BLM.

Concern regarding the continued motorized access use on existing roads in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range for purposes of managing wild horses was raised during the wilderness study. The concern centers on the possibility of roads currently being used for management purposes being closed to motorized access if the area should be designated wilderness. Wilderness study areas affected are Burnt Timber Canyon, Pryor Mountain, and Big Horn Tack On.

## **Centennial Mountains Study**

The Centennial Mountains ISA included BLM and Forest Service lands in Montana, as well as Forest Service lands in Idaho. The ISA was jointly studied by both agencies with the BLM having the lead on preparation of the EIS.

There is 4,474 acres of Beaverhead National Forest lands in Montana which is recommended for wilderness designation which is not included in Montana's legislative proposal. An additional 42,040 acres of Targhee National Forest lands in Idaho are not recommended for wilderness designation. The Beaverhead and Targhee National Forest lands will be addressed in future Forest Service legislation.

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS), U.S. Department of Agriculture, manages 16,650 acres in two areas of the Centennial Mountains. These areas are managed for experimental sheep grazing purposes. The potential inclusion of these lands in a wilderness study has been controversial. An alternative in the Centennial Mountains EIS did include these lands. The two areas are strategically located between BLM and U.S. Forest Service-administered lands and would enhance wilderness management under the proposed alternative or any expanded wilderness designation proposals. A number of individuals who commented on the draft wilderness EIS recommended that these lands be included in a wilderness recommendation.

Public concerns were raised during the Centennial Mountains wilderness study to provide for a snowmobile loop trail from Island Park, Idaho, to Yellowstone National Park. The corridor passes through 3/4 miles of land recommended for wilderness designation. The seasonal use of the corridor is approximately 1,600 snowmobiler visitor days. The option allowing for continued snowmobile use within the corridor is not addressed in the Montana legislative proposal.

### **Consistency with Other Plans**

The 11 Montana wilderness studies considered other federal, state, and local plans, and where appropriate, Indian land use plans, policies, and controls in order to identify potential conflicts with proposed EIS actions. No conflicts were identified.

## **Summary of Public Comments on the Studies**

A total of 1,495 comments were submitted, both oral and written, on the 11 Montana wilderness studies during the

formal comment periods which followed release of each draft.

Approximately 52 percent of the comments received state-wide generally favored wilderness preservation for some or all of the WSAs. Approximately 43 percent of the comments were opposed to designation of any wilderness. Eight percent of the comments did not appear to favor either wilderness or nonwilderness.

Other federal, state, and local agencies with an interest or jurisdiction within the study areas were asked to comment on each of the studies.

The most controversial areas included in Montana wilderness studies were Bitter Creek and the Centennial Moun-

tains. The vast majority of individuals commenting on the Bitter Creek study favored a nonwilderness recommendation. Concerns centered on potential negative social and economic impacts to the local economy and area ranchers, the practicality and expense of wilderness management, and access problems to inholdings. The Centennial Mountains generated significant public response favoring designation of the entire WSA.

Table 2 is a summary of the total number of comments received on each of the 11 study efforts. Public comments on specific WSAs will be summarized in the following section of this report in the summary analysis of specific WSA recommendations.

TABLE 2

Study Name	Draft Comment Period	Total Comments on Wilderness Issues	Final EIS Released
Missouri Breaks Wilderness EIS	May-July 1982	145	12/87
Bitter Creek Wilderness EIS	March-June 1984	406	08/89
Powder River Wilderness EIS	March-June 1984	33	09/89
Billings Wilderness EIS	April-July 1983	25	06/88
Garnet Wilderness EIS	Dec./84-March/1985	21	01/91
Sleeping Giant/ Sheep Creek Wilderness EIS	Jan.-May 1990	124	02/91
Headwaters Wilderness EIS	May-Aug. 1983	16	10/86
Dillon Wilderness EIS	May-July 1982	85	02/87
Centennial Mountains Wilderness EIS	Feb.-June 1987	516	04/90
Humbug Spires ISA Report	April-June 1980	119	04/84
Square Butte ISA Report	March-May 1979	5	09/83