

### 3.12 Recreation and Wilderness

The study area for direct and indirect impacts to recreation resources is defined as the POO boundary expansion areas. The study area for wilderness includes the China Mountain, Tobin Range, and Augusta Mountain WSAs. The CESA for recreation and wilderness is defined as the area within a 25-mile radius of the study area (**Figure 3.12-1**).

#### 3.12.1 Affected Environment

##### 3.12.1.1 Recreation

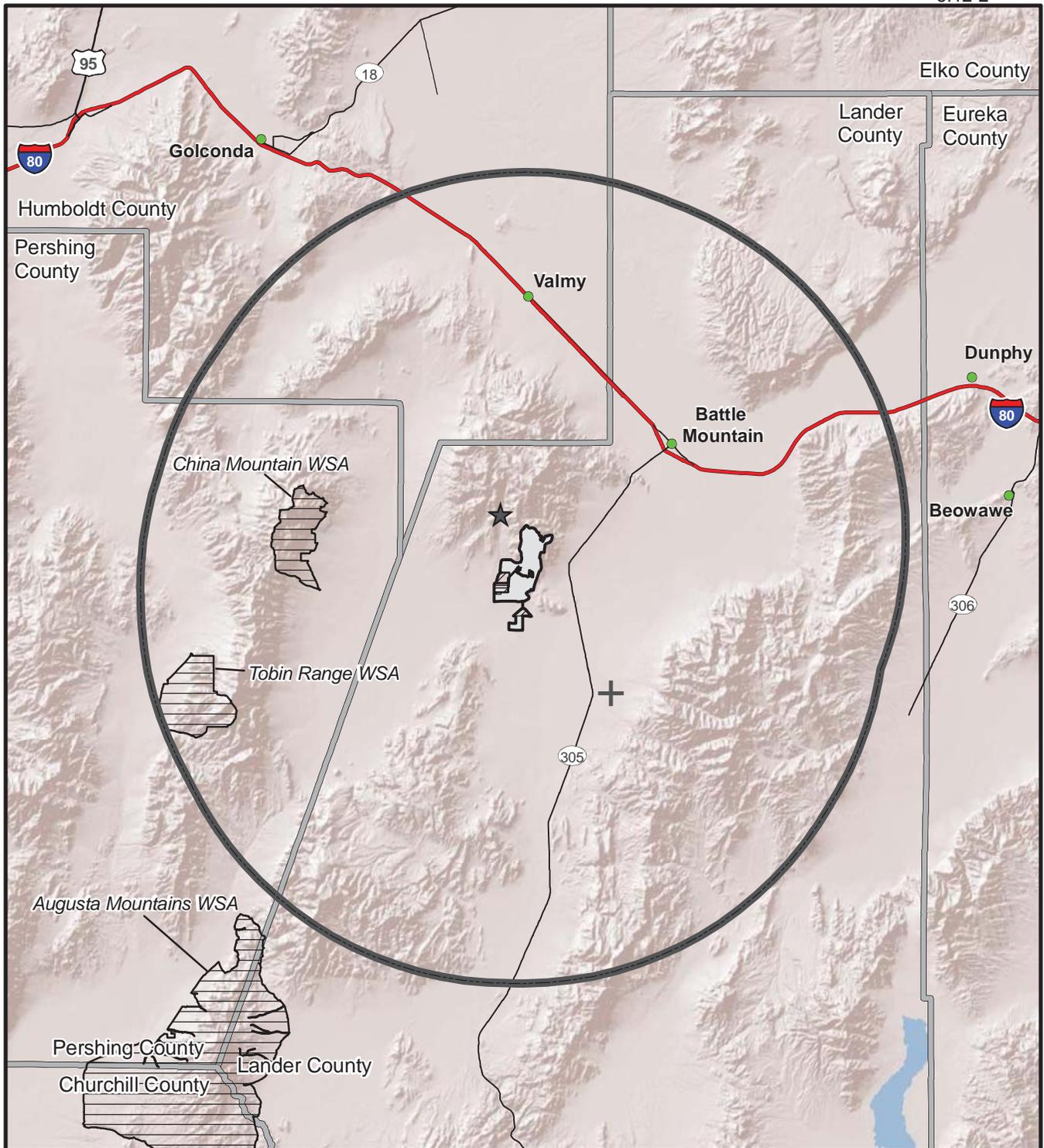
Recreation use in the vicinity of the study area primarily includes deer, sage grouse, and chukar hunting and trout fishing. Non-consumptive uses include rock-hounding, hiking, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, visiting old mining camp sites, photography, and camping.

According to a telephone survey taken in 1986 by the Nevada Division of State Parks (NDSP) (Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 1992), the three main recreational activities of Lander County residents are golfing, hunting, and fishing. The three main activities for Lander County visitors are hunting, fishing, and gambling. For nearby counties, the major recreational activities include hunting, fishing, camping, and water sports, as well as more urban activities, such as golf and softball. Surveys conducted for the 2003 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan produced only data that does not differentiate Lander County activities from activities enjoyed statewide (NDSP 2004; Scanland 2008).

The Town of Battle Mountain provides a variety of recreation facilities ranging from the Mountain View Golf Course to a shooting range. There are four parks with picnic facilities and playgrounds; a community swimming pool; a sports complex with a skate park, tennis courts, ball fields and concession stands; and a rodeo grounds. In addition, there are facilities for ATVs and motocross, remote controlled model airplanes, and auto racing on the Battle Mountain Race Track, an IMCA sanctioned dirt track facility.

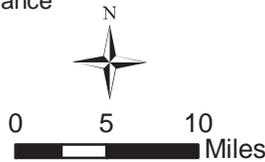
There is one developed outdoor recreation area within a 25-mile radius of the study area: Mill Creek Recreation Area, located approximately 24 miles south of the Town of Battle Mountain (**Figure 3.12-1**). Mill Creek Recreation Area is shaded by tall cottonwoods in a canyon setting. The creek supports brook trout and is a popular fishing area for local anglers. The 10-year average use is 132 angler days, with a high of 348 angler days in 2002 and a low of 7 angler days reported in 2008 (NDOW 2011). Reported angler use is down substantially from earlier years. It is uncertain whether this is primarily a result of a statistical anomaly that underreports actual use due to the sampling methods employed for the angler surveys, or whether other factors, such as a cessation in stocking of trout in the creek by the NDOW in the late 1990s, have resulted in less use of the area. The Mill Creek Recreation Area has 11 tent sites and 3 recreational vehicle (RV) campsites, picnic tables, fire rings, barbecue rings, and 2 restroom facilities. Recreation opportunities include camping, deer and upland bird hunting, fishing, mountain biking, hiking, geologic sightseeing and rock-hounding.

There is a small, undeveloped area on Newmont-owned land known as the Willow Creek Ponds area. This area is made available to the public by Newmont and receives a relatively large amount of local recreational use, including camping, picnicking, and fishing. The Willow Creek reservoirs are two small, man-made ponds originally built as a water supply for local mining and livestock industries. In response to angling demand since the early 1960s, the ponds' primary use is for fishing. The reservoirs have a combined surface area of approximately 1 acre and a maximum depth of approximately 8 feet. Given their physical constraints, the reservoirs have limited potential for sustaining fish populations, and are, therefore, stocked with rainbow trout twice a year to support the popular recreational fishery. In recent years, yellow perch have been introduced to the ponds. As a result, the NDOW is stocking largemouth



**Legend**

-  Recreation and Wilderness CESA
-  Proposed POO Boundary
-  Mill Creek Recreation Area
-  Proposed Action
-  Willow Creek Reservoir
-  Proposed Action Linear Feature
-  Wilderness Study Areas
-  Permitted Disturbance



**Phoenix Copper Leach Project**

Figure 3.12-1  
Recreation and Wilderness CESA

Source: BLM 2008e.

bass into the ponds in order to keep the perch population under control (Lamp 2008b). Willow Creek is managed under the “wild” fishery designation of the Nevada Coldwater Fishery Program Management Concepts (NDOW 1988). Reported angler use data for Willow Creek Ponds shows a 10-year average of just 12 angler days of use. Actual use is believed to be higher; however, the sampling method used to collect the reported data can result in under-reporting, especially for small local resources that do not attract many non-local users. In addition to fishing and camping, Willow Creek is popular with deer and upland bird hunters, as well as rock-hounders and other non-consumptive users.

There is a mountain bike trail looping west off of SH 305 south of the Town of Battle Mountain. The main trail loop is approximately 5 miles long with a number of opportunities for side trips off the loop. Development of the trail was assisted by BMG.

The Humboldt River provides some recreational fishing opportunities in Lander County. The 10-year average for fishing has been 506 angler days per year, ranging from a low of 89 angler days in 2004 to a high of 897 in 1998 (NDOW 2008c).

Hunting is the most popular dispersed recreation activity in the study area. The study area is located in hunt unit 151, which is grouped with units 152, 154, and 155 for hunt management and statistical purposes. Mule deer are the primary big game hunted in this large unit group, which extends from the Buffalo Valley on the west across the Shoshone Range and the Toiyabe Range and southeasterly to include the Simpson Park Mountains. It runs from I-80 on the north to U.S. 50 on the south. In 2009, 213 mule deer tags were sold for the unit group, and hunters harvested 86 mule deer, for a 40 percent success rate (NDOW 2010). Hunt units north of I-80 to the state line (units 051, 061, 062, 064, 066, 067, 068), most of which extend beyond the study area, also are very popular for mule deer hunting, producing a 35 percent success rate on the 1,584 tags sold in 2009 (NDOW 2010).

Pronghorn are the second most popular big game species in the area, with 66 tags sold in 2009 and an overall success rate of 58 percent (NDOW 2010). Most of the pronghorn hunting occurs north and east of the study area. There also are a few elk hunted northeast of the Town of Battle Mountain. In addition to big game, upland game birds and small game species are hunted in the project vicinity.

### 3.12.1.2 Wilderness

In November 1980, the final inventory decision was made for most WSAs in Nevada. A total of 103 WSAs were identified through the wilderness inventory process and subsequently analyzed in more detailed studies. In October 1991, the BLM Nevada State Office released its Statewide Wilderness Report, documenting the rationale and recommendations for each of the WSAs (BLM 1991). The criteria considered in developing the wilderness recommendations included naturalness, solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation, and special features. To date, no action has been taken by Congress on this report (BLM 2002a), although several of the WSAs have been designated as wilderness in recent Nevada land bills (e.g., White Pine and Lincoln counties).

Two WSAs are located within a 25-mile radius of the study area (**Figure 3.12-1**). Neither of the WSAs were recommended for designation as wilderness, although both are managed to retain their wilderness characteristics until a final determination is made regarding their status.

The China Mountain WSA (NV-020-406P) includes 10,358 acres and surrounds 80 acres of private lands. This WSA is located approximately 15 miles due west of the study area in eastern Pershing County on the east slope of the Tobin Range. According to the Statewide Wilderness Report (BLM 1991), the recommendation for the China Mountain WSA is to release all 10,358 acres for uses other than wilderness. The mineral and geothermal potential were considered to outweigh the wilderness values. This WSA could be managed as wilderness, although there would be manageability problems associated with 80 acres of private inholdings, 500 acres of pre-FLPMA mining claims, and 232 acres of oil and gas leases that, if developed under existing legal rights, would seriously impact the wilderness

values. There also would be management problems associated with 1.8 miles of existing ways and the easy accessibility for off-road vehicles on approximately 10 percent of the WSA.

The Tobin Range WSA (NV-020-406Q) includes 13,107 acres of public lands surrounding 120 acres of private lands. This WSA is located approximately 25 miles southwest of the study area in eastern Pershing County. The recommendation for the Tobin Range WSA is to release all 13,107 acres for uses other than wilderness. Management emphasizing access to potential mineral resources was selected over management as designated wilderness because of energy and mineral resource potential. The WSA is not considered capable of being managed as wilderness due to 500 acres of pre-FLPMA mining claims, 5,125 acres of geothermal leases, and one 120-acre private inholding. Development of any of these operations under existing rights would severely reduce the wilderness characteristics of the area. Access to allow the development and operation of the mining claims and leases would have to be granted, which would incorporate new roads into the area. There also would be management problems associated with 7.8 miles of existing ways, easy access for off-road vehicles on 31 percent of the WSA, and frequent military overflights.

Pursuant to the Secretary of the Interior's Order No. 3310, a wilderness characteristics analysis must be conducted on public lands. The project area is located within the Nevada Initial Inventory Unit NV-060-499. During the initial inventory, this unit was found not suitable for intensive inventory because it did not contain 5,000 acres of roadless land, and because it was found to be in an overall unnatural condition. Current analysis of route inventory data collected in 2009, aerial photographs, and Master Title Plats reaffirms this determination of unnatural condition for the project area, due specifically to the abundance of developed roads and extensive, substantial surface disturbance, buildings, fences and signing from current and historic mining operations in the area. This area clearly lacks wilderness characteristics and is not recommended for further inventory at this time.

### 3.12.2 Environmental Consequences

Primary issues related to recreation include displacement of dispersed recreational opportunities primarily related to hunting and off-road vehicle use and changes in recreation demands within the study area. Primary issues related to wilderness include whether the Proposed Action would be in compliance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the BLM Interim Wilderness Management Policy.

Environmental impacts to recreation and wilderness would be significant if the Proposed Action or alternatives to the Proposed Action result in any of the following:

- Permanent changes in recreation resource availability within county, state, or national parks, wildlife refuges, wilderness, or WSAs, or adverse effects to the management thereof;
- Displacement of recreational use from an area for which there are no reasonable substitutes as a result of decreases in game population, aesthetic experience, loss of access, or other reasons related to the proposed project; or
- Increased total recreation demand in the region (as measured by population change) over baseline conditions that exceeds the current capacity of developed recreation facilities.

#### 3.12.2.1 Proposed Action

##### Recreation

Under the Proposed Action, surface disturbance at the Phoenix Mine would increase by approximately 902 acres, 194 acres (21 percent) of which would be on BLM-administered public land and 708 acres (79 percent) would be on Newmont-owned private land (**Table 2.3-1**). Approximately 398 acres of the proposed new disturbance area would be associated with the Section 5 OUA and haul road and utility corridor, which would be surrounded on three sides by currently approved mine facilities or activities (**Figure 2.3-1**). The remaining 254 acres would be in Sections 15 and 16, which lie between the currently approved tailings and the clay borrow areas at the south end of the currently approved mine.

The potentially affected lands do not offer unique recreational opportunities and would not affect developed or high concentration undeveloped recreation facilities or resources. The acreage of public lands affected would be minor in the context of the currently approved mine disturbance. It also would be a small fraction of the acreage available for recreational activities in the project vicinity and region, which has abundant public open space lands available for dispersed recreational opportunities. Although no specific recreational use data are available for the public lands directly affected by the Proposed Action, the number of dispersed recreationists affected is expected to be minimal, and what little displacement may occur would not create overuse of other areas or degradation of the resource. Therefore, significant impacts would not occur from the displacement of dispersed recreationists under the Proposed Action.

Adverse impacts to big and small game populations are not anticipated as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action. Consequently, adverse impacts to hunting opportunities are not expected. Additionally, no adverse impacts to fisheries located at Willow Creek are expected as a result of operations under the Proposed Action (see Section 3.5, Wildlife and Fisheries Resources).

Developed recreational facilities in the region and in the Town of Battle Mountain are not expected to be adversely affected through implementation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would result in a temporary (12 months) increase in population of approximately 73 persons during construction (a 5.3 percent increase from the estimated 2007 county population) and a permanent increase in population of approximately 60 persons during operations (a 0.7 percent increase from the 2009 Lander County population). Facilities at the Mill Creek Recreation Area, located approximately 24 miles south of the Town of Battle Mountain, could experience increased use during project construction and operation. Other regional recreational facilities such as Willow Creek also would likely experience minor increased demand during project construction and operation. Developed recreational facilities in the region would be expected to accommodate increased demand for recreation from this level of growth and are not expected to be adversely impacted by the influx of people.

Recreational facilities located within the Town of Battle Mountain would be able to absorb any extra demand placed on them as a result of the anticipated new residents to the area. Consequently, significant impacts to developed recreation facilities would not occur under the Proposed Action.

#### Wilderness

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have no impact on wilderness or WSAs. The closest WSA is approximately 15 miles to the west (China Mountain WSA), and it is not anticipated that project-related disturbance would be visually or audibly discernible from the WSA.

#### **3.12.2.2 Reona Copper Heap Leach Facility Elimination Alternative**

The Reona Copper Heap Leach Facility Elimination Alternative would be the same as the Proposed Action, except that the proposed Reona Copper HLF and associated infrastructure (i.e., solution pipelines) would not be developed. The Reona HLF (Gold) would continue to operate under current permitted authorizations. The effects on recreation and wilderness would be the same as the Proposed Action because the Reona Copper HLF would have been entirely internal to the project site where there is currently no recreational use.

As with the Proposed Action, this alternative would have no discernible impact on designated wilderness or WSAs.

#### **3.12.2.3 No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed project would not be developed, and related impacts to recreation and wilderness would not occur. Under this alternative, mining activities associated with the existing Phoenix Project would continue under the terms of current permits and approvals as authorized by the BLM and State of Nevada. Potential impacts to recreation and wilderness resources previously were discussed and analyzed in the Phoenix Project Final EIS (BLM 2002a). Under this alternative, no

parks, concentrated recreational use areas, BLM WSAs, designated wilderness, or protected natural areas would be impacted.

The No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing recreation conditions in the project area for the duration of authorized mining activities. It would not remove any public lands currently available for dispersed recreation. Recreational use currently is precluded from approved mine activity areas for safety and security reasons. Recreational activities would continue to be prohibited within the mine site during the life of the currently approved project.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no direct effects or measurable indirect effects (e.g., air quality or visual quality degradation) on WSAs.

### 3.12.3 Cumulative Impacts

The CESA for recreation and wilderness is shown in **Figure 3.12-1**. Past and present actions and RFFAs are identified in **Table 2.8-1**; their locations are shown in **Figure 2.8-1**.

Past and present actions and RFFAs within the recreation and wilderness CESA have resulted, or would result, in the direct disturbance of approximately 48,042 acres of surface disturbance, of which approximately 30,936 acres have been related to mining activities, approximately 1,015 acres have been related to exploratory projects, and approximately 16,074 acres have been related to utilities/community actions (e.g., transmission lines, interstate highways, secondary roads, landfills, Sierra Chemical, Coastal Chemical). The Proposed Action incrementally would increase surface disturbance by an additional 902 acres, resulting in a cumulative disturbance of approximately 48,944 acres. It is assumed that a portion of the cumulative disturbance area has been, or would be, reclaimed, including the 902 acres associated with the proposed project. Although the cumulative surface disturbance would be considerably greater than the direct disturbance from the proposed project, the vast acreage of public lands in the CESA would be more than sufficient to accommodate dispersed recreation activities displaced by past and present actions and RFFAs within the CESA. Cumulative development has adversely impacted both small and big game populations as a result of displacement, some of which has been, or would be, short-term in nature. Cumulative development also has resulted in increased access to public lands from the construction of roads, which could be considered beneficial to hunting opportunities.

The Proposed Action would not directly affect parks, concentrated recreational use areas, designated wilderness or WSAs, or other protected areas within the CESA; therefore, no cumulative impacts to these areas would be anticipated.

The Proposed Action would result in a minor short-term incremental increase in cumulative effects for developed recreational facilities. It is not known at this time whether the RFFAs identified in Section 2.8, Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions, would result in a substantial increase in local population such that demand would exceed the current supply of developed recreation facilities. If the cumulative demand for developed recreational opportunities were to exceed the available supply, additional facilities would need to be developed.

### 3.12.4 Monitoring and Mitigation Measures

No significant impacts to recreation or wilderness resources were identified; therefore, no additional monitoring and mitigation measures are recommended.

**3.12.5 Residual Adverse Effects**

Following the completion of closure and final reclamation, no residual adverse effects on recreational resources would be anticipated as a result of the proposed project. Once reclaimed, the proposed disturbance areas would be returned to pre-mining uses unless otherwise designated. Also, there would be no residual adverse effects on wilderness resources.