

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics Summary for the Battle Mountain District Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

Resource Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is required through the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) to consider all available information in order to determine the appropriate balance of resource use and protection that best serves the multiple-use and sustained-yield mandate. Specific guidance is given in section 201 of FLPMA to the Secretary of the Interior, “The Secretary shall prepare and maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resources and other values (including, but not limited to, outdoor recreation and scenic values), giving priority to areas of critical environmental concern.” While not specifically mentioned in section 201, wilderness characteristics are a value that is inventoried and managed by the BLM. Guidance for how to inventory lands for wilderness characteristics (LWC) and how to incorporate them into the planning process is provided in BLM Manuals 6310 and 6320 respectively.

BLM Manual 6310, *Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on Public Lands*, directs the BLM to consider whether to maintain or undertake a new wilderness characteristics inventory if, “the BLM is undertaking a land use planning process.” In order for an area to contain lands with wilderness characteristics, it must meet the criteria as defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Those criteria are size, naturalness, and the area having outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. While not required, the area may also contain supplemental values that enhance the wilderness experience.

Size:

For an area to qualify as possibly containing LWC it must meet the size requirement or one of the exceptions listed below:

- 1) Roadless BLM land that is 5,000 acres or greater in size.
- 2) Roadless BLM land that is less than 5,000 acres but one of the exceptions apply:
 - a) Contiguous with lands formally determined to have wilderness or potential wilderness values or with any Federal lands managed for the protection of wilderness characteristics. Those lands include:
 1. designated Wilderness
 2. BLM Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)
 3. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service areas Proposed for Wilderness Designation
 4. U.S. Forest Service Wilderness Study Areas of areas or Recommended Wilderness
 5. National Park Service (NPS) areas Recommended or Proposed for Designation

This does not include NPS areas merely considered “Eligible for Wilderness Study” or Forest Service Roadless Areas unless they are also designated as “Recommended Wilderness” through a Forest Plan Revision.

- b) It is demonstrated that the area is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.
- c) Any roadless islands of the public lands.

Naturalness:

Areas must appear to be in a natural state and void of substantial human impacts. Human activity is allowed within the area if it is substantially unnoticeable. Examples of human-made features that may appear substantially unnoticeable after review may include but are not limited to: spring developments, stock ponds, fencing, historic properties, fire rings, pit toilets, and trails. Impacts outside the area are normally not considered during an inventory unless they are major.

Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation:

Opportunities for outstanding solitude and/or primitive types of recreation may be found in areas where the sights, sounds, and evidence of other visitors are non-existent or infrequent, and where the visitor feels isolated due to the size, topography, or vegetative screening of an area. The area may be conducive to activities of a non-motorized and non-mechanized nature.

Supplemental Values:

These include ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

Methods of Analysis

During the Battle Mountain District (BMD) Resource Management Plan (RMP) process, the BLM completed an initial review of its lands within the District to determine which, if any, contain lands with wilderness characteristics. This review included only BLM lands and did not include existing WSAs. Areas evaluated within the BMD included areas greater than 5,000 acres, and areas less than 5,000 acres that are contiguous with WSAs, National Park Service Wilderness, and Forest Service Wilderness.

In November of 2012, the BMD began the process of identifying and inventorying potential lands with wilderness characteristics within its administrative boundary. The first step in this process was a GIS analysis to identify all roadless polygons greater than 5,000 acres, or less than 5,000 acres but met one of the identified criteria as stated above under size 2 a), b), and c). The areas were identified by running a query using all roads within the BMD as polygon boundaries. Areas remaining were 5,000 acres or greater or less than 5,000 acres but met one of the identified criteria. These areas were then further analyzed.

Further analysis consisted of comparing the remaining areas with imagery, and development layers such as rights-of-ways, mineral activity, renewable energy projects, and range

improvements to determine if they still met the minimum criteria for lands with wilderness characteristics. Areas were also evaluated as to whether or not they could be reduced in acreage and still meet the size criteria. Existing BLM inventories were also reviewed to determine if their conclusions were still valid including the BLM Nevada Initial Inventory Decisions of 1979 and the Nevada BLM Intensive Wilderness Inventory of 1980. For most inventory units, these conclusions were still valid and the inventory is considered maintained.

Under BLM Manual 6310, the public is authorized to submit areas for the BLM to consider for further review. Information submitted by the public must meet the minimum standard as outlined in BLM Manual 6310. This consists of: a map of sufficient detail to determine specific boundaries of the area in question; a detailed narrative that describes the wilderness characteristics of the area and documents how that information substantially differs from the information in the BLM inventory of the area’s wilderness characteristics; and photographic documentation. On January 9, 2013 the BLM received a formal submission of areas by the Friends of Nevada Wilderness (FNW).

Proposed Findings

Based on the process outlined above, the BLM conducted a thorough evaluation of the BMD to initially identify areas that met the minimum standard to be considered for further review, which included the FNW submission. This evaluation resulted in 13 individual inventory units that warranted a field inventory to determine naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and to identify any possible supplemental values. Using an interdisciplinary team of up to eight individuals representing various resource specialties, the BLM conducted a follow-up field inventory of each of these areas to determine if BLM found these areas to have wilderness characteristics. The BLM inventory found seven of the thirteen areas, a total of 215,200 acres to possess wilderness characteristics.

The following table summarizes the BLM’s findings and the acreage of areas found to contain lands with wilderness characteristics.

Unit Name	Unit Identifier	Acreage Containing Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
Castle Rock #1 *	NV-060-130	22,200
Castle Rock #2 *	NV-060-120	19,000
Confusion Hills *	NV-060-212,213	0
Emigrant Peak *	NV-050-323	24,700
Goblin Knobs	NV-060-132	0
Grant Range	NV-060-166	0
Heart Hills *	NV-060-192	23,600
Lone Mountain *	NV-050-317	24,200

Unit Name	Unit Identifier	Acreage Containing Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
Magruder Mountain	NV-050-349	0
Monte Cristo North *	NV-050-306	54,400
Monte Cristo South *	NV-050-312	47,100
Stone Cabin Hills	NV-060-078	0
Volcanic Hills *	NV-050-324	0

*Represent citizen-proposed areas submitted by the FNW.

In order to determine the manner in which these lands should be managed to best meet the BLM's multiple-use mandate, these areas will be analyzed in a full range of alternatives during the RMP process. A final determination regarding the management of these areas will be issued through a separate Record of Decision (ROD) for the RMP. The individual unit inventory evaluations forms are available for review at the BMD website:

http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/battle_mountain_field/blm_information/rmp.html