

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Sheldon Contiguous WSA is predominately natural with limited human imprint. The imprint of man's work is related to facilities to support livestock grazing and about 23 miles of access roads and ways used for construction and maintenance of the facilities as well as for hunting. Livestock grazing facilities include small stock ponds, one 60 acre herbicide treatment area and six short pieces of fencing totaling about 2.5 miles. With the possible exception of the treated field, projects have low impact to naturalness.

The ways within the WSA receive use only by light vehicles and are two wheel tracks through the sagebrush with low impact on the naturalness. There are two "cherrystem roads", one which penetrates the WSA from the western boundary two-thirds of the width of the Unit and continues as a way to the eastern boundary. The road is of generally low overall impact to naturalness.

The human related imprints are not evenly distributed within the WSA. The eastern portion of the WSA has almost no man related intrusions, while the remainder of the WSA contains all the facilities discussed and an estimated 90% of the access ways. Thus within the WSA, the eastern portion is substantially more natural than the western portion. The recommended wilderness has no unnatural features.

B. Solitude: At low levels of use, visitors to the Sheldon Contiguous WSA would be able to find solitude. The gentle terrain, generally low vegetation, scattered juniper stands and excellent visibility all combine to limit the outstanding opportunities for solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The Sheldon Contiguous WSA does not have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. This is due to the lack of resources normally used by dispersed recreation users. The WSA has no distinctive topography or vegetational features. The WSA has no dependable water, which is important to recreational users and results in relatively low densities and diversity of wildlife. While outstanding opportunities do not exist, the WSA does contain some opportunities for dispersed recreation for hikers and horseback riders for sightseeing and hunting.

D. Special Features: The WSA is contiguous to one Unit of the administratively endorsed Sheldon Refuge Wilderness Study Area (F&WS, 26,000 acres) along the southern boundary and the southern quarter of the eastern boundary. The combination of the two WSA's would be a 50,300 acre unit which would result in increased opportunities for solitude and wilderness type recreation.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The entire WSA could be managed as wilderness. The area contains no private inholdings or valid rights which would impair manageability. Additionally, the boundaries use topographic features which would preclude problems with intentional or unintentional vehicle use.

The portion of the WSA not recommended for wilderness designation could also be managed as wilderness. However, several factors would make management of the area difficult. Most of this portion is open, rolling terrain dominated by sparse stands of low growing sagebrush. It is common practice for hunters to drive cross country in vehicles to avoid long walks. Additionally, the penetration of the non-suitable portion by two "cherrystem" roads would allow vehicles good access to the interior of the area increasing the probability of cross country travel. The nature of the non-wilderness portion of the WSA is such that erection of barriers would not be effective as vehicles could easily drive around the barriers.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The joint U.S. Bureau of Mines-U.S. Geological Survey report for the 748 acres recommended for wilderness designation indicated no mineral potential. There are no existing mineral rights and no mining claims are known to exist.

An analysis of the mineral resource potential and geothermal potential of the adjacent Charles Sheldon Antelope Refuge Wilderness Study Areas was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Bureau of Mines. Evaluation is based on the interpretation of analysis of rock and stream sediment samples, analyses of spring water samples, geologic mapping and geophysical surveys. Results indicate the area has low potential for the discovery of exposed mineral deposits; however, the results suggest that the area may contain concealed deposits. Surface data suggests the area has a low potential for geothermal resources. There are no sand and gravel use sites within the WSA. The WSA is considered to have only very low potential for oil and gas.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 336 comments specifically addressing the WSA were received. Written comments consisted of 324 letters while 12 oral comments were received at three public hearings. Two hundred ninety comments supported the Bureau's recommendation, 41 comments supported more wilderness than the Bureau's recommendation and five comments supported nonwilderness. Those favoring the Bureau's recommendation mentioned the consensus reached by the TRT group and reiterated the wilderness values of the WSA. Those who commented in favor of no wilderness and more wilderness than the Bureau's recommendation, mentioned nonspecific concerns about wilderness values or potential resource conflicts.