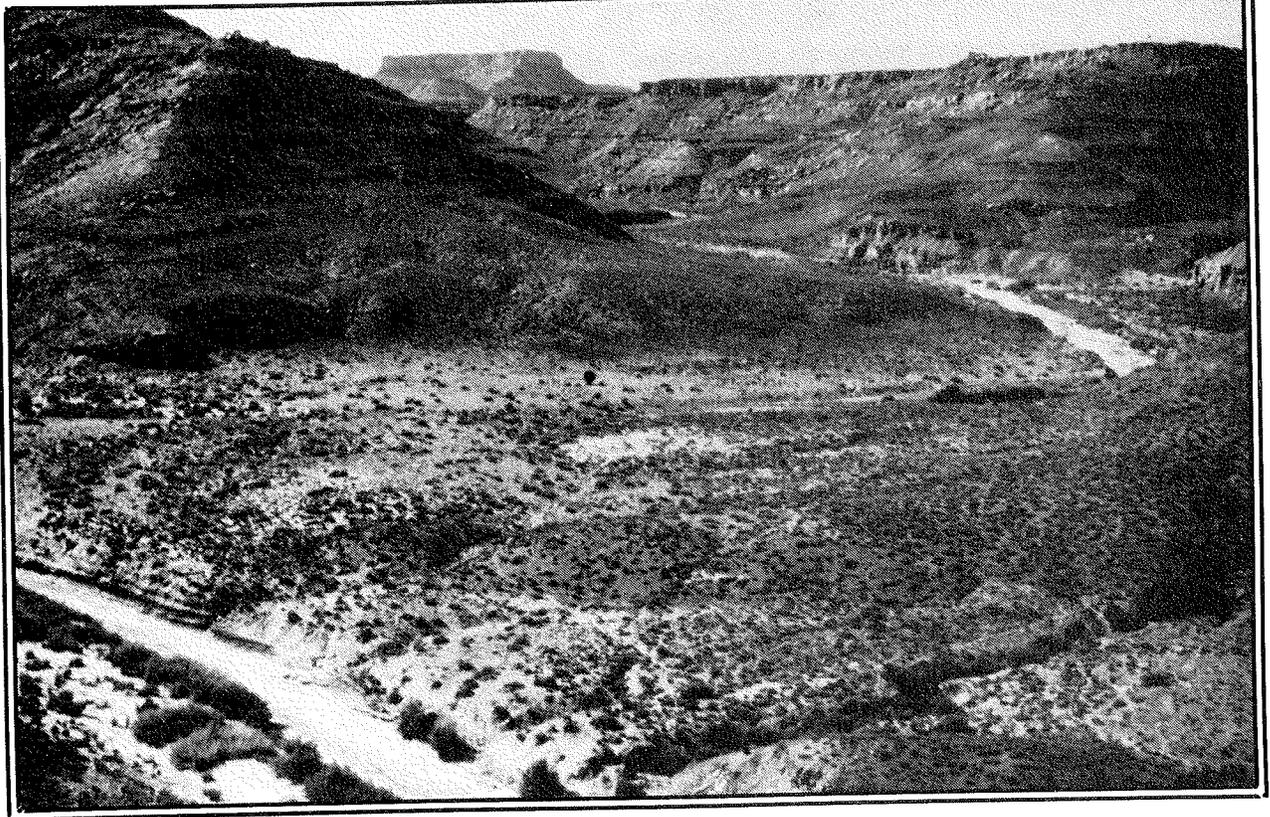


Burning Hills WSA

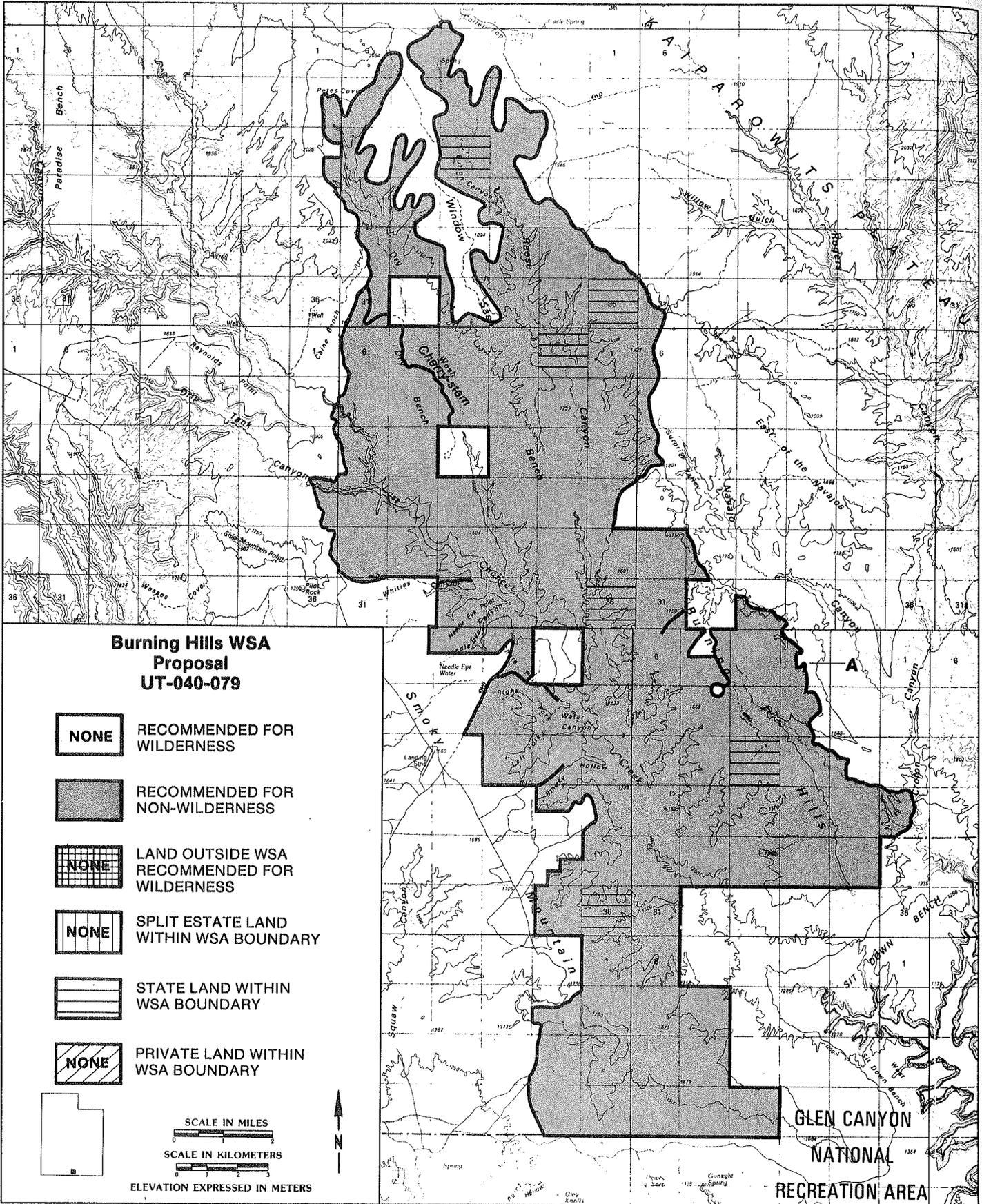


BURNING HILLS WSA

R. 3 E.

R. 4 E.

R. 5 E.



Burning Hills WSA Proposal UT-040-079

- NONE RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS
- NONE LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- NONE SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
- STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
- NONE PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY



SCALE IN MILES
0 1 2

SCALE IN KILOMETERS
0 1 2 3

ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS



GLEN CANYON
NATIONAL
RECREATION AREA

BURNING HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 61,550 acres

The Burning Hills Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-040-079) is in eastern Kane County, about 60 miles east of Kanab, Utah (population 2,148). The study area is an elongated, irregularly shaped unit about 4 miles from north to south and 2.25 miles wide, from east to west (see Map). The WSA is separated by roads from the Wahweap WSA (UT-040-248) on the west and the Fiftymile Mountain WSA (UT-040-080) on the east. The northern boundary of the WSA is also defined by roads (see Map). The Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA) is adjacent to the WSA on the south. There are 61,550 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the WSA. Six sections of State land (3,840 acres) are inheld in the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA is part of the Kaiparowits Plateau in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. The study area is a plateau remnant deeply incised by canyons. The highest areas in the WSA are knolls that have been reddened by natural coal fires. Elevations in the WSA range from less than 4,100 feet to more than 6,300 feet. Desert shrub is the dominant vegetation.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and an all wilderness alternative.

**TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA**

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	61,550
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	3,840
Total	62,390
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	0
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, private)	0
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	61,550
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	61,550
In-holdings (State, Private)	3,840

Source: BLM File Data

BURNING HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 0 acres
(recommended for wilderness)
- 61,550 acres
(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release the entire area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

All of the study area is in a natural state. Less than half of the WSA has outstanding opportunities for solitude and portions have scenic values, but nowhere are the opportunities for primitive recreation considered to be outstanding.

The WSA is within the Kaiparowits Coal Field and about 21 percent of the study area is leased for coal, with pre-existing rights. Extraction of coal in the Kaiparowits Coal Field is not expected in the short-term, but any future development would most likely occur on existing leases, including those in the Burning Hills area. The long-term future potential for coal mining in the WSA is given precedence over the wilderness values.

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Although the WSA is in an essentially natural condition, some imprints of human activity can be found in the unit. These imprints include drill pads and access ways on Dry Bench and in the upper Reese Canyon drainage; a cabin in Drip Tank Canyon, ways in Reese Canyon below Surprise

Valley; an abandoned stock tank and other grazing-related items in Reese Canyon; a trailer and old corral in Last Chance Creek at the mouth of Reese Canyon, and ways in the Burning Hills west of Navajo Canyon. These artifacts and impressions are substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole and total less than 610 acres.

The natural quality of the WSA has not changed since 1980. No additional imprints have occurred in the WSA as a result of impairing uses or activities allowed under the BLM's Interim Management Policy (IMP).

B. Solitude

Overall, about 45 percent (27,700 acres) of the WSA meets the solitude criterion for areas under wilderness review. The size and configuration of the WSA, in combination with topographic and vegetation screening, provide outstanding opportunities for solitude in this area.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude occur in Dry Wash Canyon, Last Chance Creek Canyon, and the extreme upper portion of Reese Canyon because of the combination of terrain and screening by riparian vegetation. Outstanding opportunities for solitude also can be found between the canyons, on Window Sash Bench and Dry Bench, due to the size of the benches and the extensive pinyon-juniper woodland forest which grows on them.

A system of canyons with no intervening benches, south of Smoky Hollow, forms an escarpment which concentrates and enhances the topographic screening and makes the opportunity outstanding for solitude.

Areas within the WSA that lack both vegetation and topographic screening are not considered to have outstanding opportunities for solitude. Such areas are commonly found on outward-facing slopes that have a desert shrub vegetation cover.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are not outstanding within the WSA.

BURNING HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

D. Special Features

The Burning Hills portion of the WSA illustrates the geological changes over the ages that have resulted from naturally occurring coal fires. Approximately 13,000 acres of the Burning Hills are within the WSA. The Burning Hills portion of the WSA is also a scenic area. Red colorations in the landscape are the result of geological changes attributed to coal burning underground. Scenic values are also present in the lower Last Chance Creek Canyon area below Smoky Mountain. The escarpment at the tip of Smoky Mountain exhibits the same colorations as the Burning Hills. This landscape includes badlands areas at the foot of the cliffs on the GCNRA boundary. These scenic features cover a total area of about 27,500 acres. Approximately 15,690 acres (25 percent of the WSA) are rated outstanding for scenic quality. Peregrine falcons and bald eagles, listed as endangered species, may occasionally visit the WSA. The WSA also has a small resident cougar population. Desert bighorn sheep may migrate into the area. Nine other animal species and seven plant species that are considered sensitive may occur, in the WSA. Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely juniper-pinyon woodland (61,550 acres). The PNV in the WSA is represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah and in BLM study areas in Utah and other states. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

**TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION**

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,082,455
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,644,648

Source: BLM File Data.

BURNING HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Burning Hills WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 64 areas comprising 2,834,115 acres in Utah and Arizona.

There are nine designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. In a clockwise direction beginning to the north, are the 26,000-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service [FS]), the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (FS), the 112,000-acre Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness (BLM), the 40,600-acre Saddle Mountain Wilderness (FS), the 70,500-acre Kanab Creek Wilderness (FS and BLM units), the 6,860-acre Cottonwood Point Wilderness (BLM) and, to the northwest, the 7,000-acre Ashdown Gorge Wilderness (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being managed effectively to preserve its wilderness character.)

The Burning Hills WSA could be effectively managed as wilderness in the foreseeable future. Even though there are 12,650 acres of coal lease and 40 acres of oil and gas lease in the WSA, it is expected that these leases would expire and would not be renewed if the area is designated as wilderness. There are 1,300 acres of mining claims in the WSA but development of locatable minerals is not projected in the foreseeable future.

The presence of six in-held sections of State land in the WSA could complicate wilderness management in the long-term future. Of the 3,840 acres of in-held State land, 1,280 acres are leases for oil and gas and 640 are leased for coal. Because of the known coal resources in the WSA, and some potential for oil and gas, it is projected that new access roads to the State land would be required through the area following wilderness designation. Additionally, any coal mining operations on the State lands would reduce wilderness values on the adjacent wilderness lands.

Livestock grazing and maintenance of existing facilities including five spring developments, 1.5 miles of fence, one reservoir, six miles of trail, three corrals and one cabin, would continue, but would not significantly affect the wilderness values of the WSA.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area.

The entire WSA has a high mineral potential for coal. About 928 million tons of coal, of which 1/3 to 1/2 is recoverable, lies beneath the WSA. The entire WSA has a high mineral potential for titanium, and a moderate mineral potential for oil, gas, carbon dioxide, and geothermal sources in the subsurface. The mineral potential is moderate for thin beds of gypsum and for uranium in the surface and subsurface. Uranium could exist at depths of 1,500 feet and 4,000 feet. The surface area has a low mineral resource potential for all other metals other than uranium and titanium.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

With BLM's no wilderness recommendation, no loss of local employment would occur. Federal and State revenues would not be reduced. Economic opportunities could be realized through mineral and energy resource exploration and eventual development in the long term. There would be major beneficial and adverse effects in Kane County.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and

BURNING HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 79 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 121 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 60 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA while 53 commenters were opposed. Eight commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the special features in the WSA. Those commenting in favor of wilderness were almost equally from urban Utah and from other states.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would preclude mineral exploration and development. Those opposed were about equally from rural and urban Utah.

Two Federal agencies, the National Park Service (NPS) and USBM commented on the Draft EIS. The NPS concurred with the proposed action. The USBM did not take a position regarding designation or non-designation but commented that BLM had understated the petroleum potential of the WSA.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are six State sections (3,840 acres) in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State ranks the WSA as low in wilderness quality with a high significance of conflicts in the region. The State commented that further study is needed to determine the best methods

to protect cultural resources and big-horn sheep.

The Kane County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation of the Burning Hills WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. The Kane County Master Plan rejects wilderness as an exclusionary form of recreation that cannot be used by the average visitor. In commenting on the Draft EIS the County supported BLM's no wilderness proposed action alternative.

BURNING HILLS WSA

Table 3
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Recommendation No. Action/No. Wilderness	All Wilderness (61,550 Acres)
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values would not be protected and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the short-term future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost on 660 acres of the WSA because of development of range-land projects, vegetation treatments, and access to State lands for mineral exploration. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be indirectly reduced in quality on up to 3,077 acres. Special features including Class A scenery, special status species, and wildlife associated with wilderness would not be significantly affected. Vehicular use of 11 miles of ways would continue to detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Over the long term, coal development would result in a direct loss of wilderness values on 40 acres and an indirect reduction of wilderness values in the northern 33 percent (20,311 acres) of the WSA.	Wilderness designation would preserve overall the wilderness values in the WSA. In the foreseeable future, naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be directly lost or reduced in quality on 9 acres because of development of access roads to State in-holdings for mineral exploration and because of rangeland improvements. The quality of wilderness values would be indirectly reduced on up to 1,231 acres of the WSA. Special features would be preserved.
Impacts on Vegetation	Special status plant species would not be significantly affected. Only about 1.1 percent (700 acres) of the pinyon-juniper woodland and desert shrub vegetation types in the WSA would be altered as a result of rangeland and wildlife projects and long term coal development. Therefore, there would not be significant changes in the vegetation types in the WSA.	Implementation of the All Wilderness Alternative would not significantly affect the vegetation resource in the WSA. Vegetation types and special status plant species would be protected because potential disturbance would be reduced to 9 acres.
Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Development	Implementation of the No Action/No Wilderness Alternative would not adversely affect mineral exploration or production because minerals could be leased, claimed and developed as at present.	Wilderness designation would preclude or severely constrain potential development of about 464 million tons of recoverable coal. Loss of exploration and development opportunities for other mineral and energy resources would not be significant because the probability of development is low even if the area is not designated as wilderness.

BURNING HILLS WSA

Table 3 (Continued)
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Alternatives	
	Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness	All Wilderness (61,550 Acres)
Impacts on Wildlife Habitat and Populations	Wildlife habitat and populations including special status animal species would not be significantly affected. Implementation of the projected wildlife and rangeland projects would benefit by providing additional water, forage, and ecotones. About 1.1 percent (700 acres) of wildlife habitat in the WSA would be affected.	Wilderness designation would preclude 650 acres of vegetation treatments designed to improve wildlife habitat and livestock forage, but would provide all species with additional opportunities for solitude. Only 9 acres of wildlife habitat would be disturbed in the WSA.
Impacts on Livestock Management	Livestock management and grazing lands would not be adversely affected because access and management practices would continue as at present. Approximately 650 acres of vegetation treatments that would produce 100 AUMs of forage could be done.	Wilderness designation would not significantly affect current livestock management practices. Restricting motorized use of the 11 miles of ways could slightly increase management costs and inconvenience the 23 permittees. The opportunity for an increase of 100 AUMs through 650 acres of vegetation treatments would be foregone.
Impacts on Economic Conditions	No loss of local employment or income would occur. Federal and State revenues would not be reduced. Economic opportunities could be realized through mineral and energy resource exploration and eventual development in the long term. There would be major beneficial and adverse effects in Kane County.	Wilderness designation would not significantly affect present local or regional economic conditions. However, new leasing in the WSA would not be allowed; therefore, potential sales and revenues from the coal would be foregone. Over the long term, coal development and associated beneficial and adverse economic impacts would not occur. This would significantly change future economic conditions in Kane County from what they would be without wilderness designation.