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November 1994



Caliente Management Framework Plan and Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan

PROPOSED

White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment
and
Environmental Assessment

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P.O. Box 12000
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

N-57922 1610 (WS)
(NV-930.1)

November 2, 1994

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is the Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment to the Caliente Management Framework Plan and the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan for a 30 day public review period. This Proposed Amendment analyzes the impacts of withdrawing, from all forms of public entry, other than livestock grazing, approximately 1,607 hectares (3,972 acres) of public lands in Lincoln County, Nevada. The purpose of this withdrawal is to provide a security and safety buffer to prevent a compromise of national security interests and to protect assets of the adjacent withdrawn Nellis Air Force Range.

This Proposed Amendment may be protested by any person who participated in the planning process and who has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the approval of the Proposed Amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process (see 43 Code of Federal Regulations Section 1610.5-2). Protests must be filed with: Director (760), Bureau of Land Management, Division of Planning and Environmental Coordination (406 LS), 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

All protests must be written and must be postmarked on or before December 9, 1994, and must contain the following information:

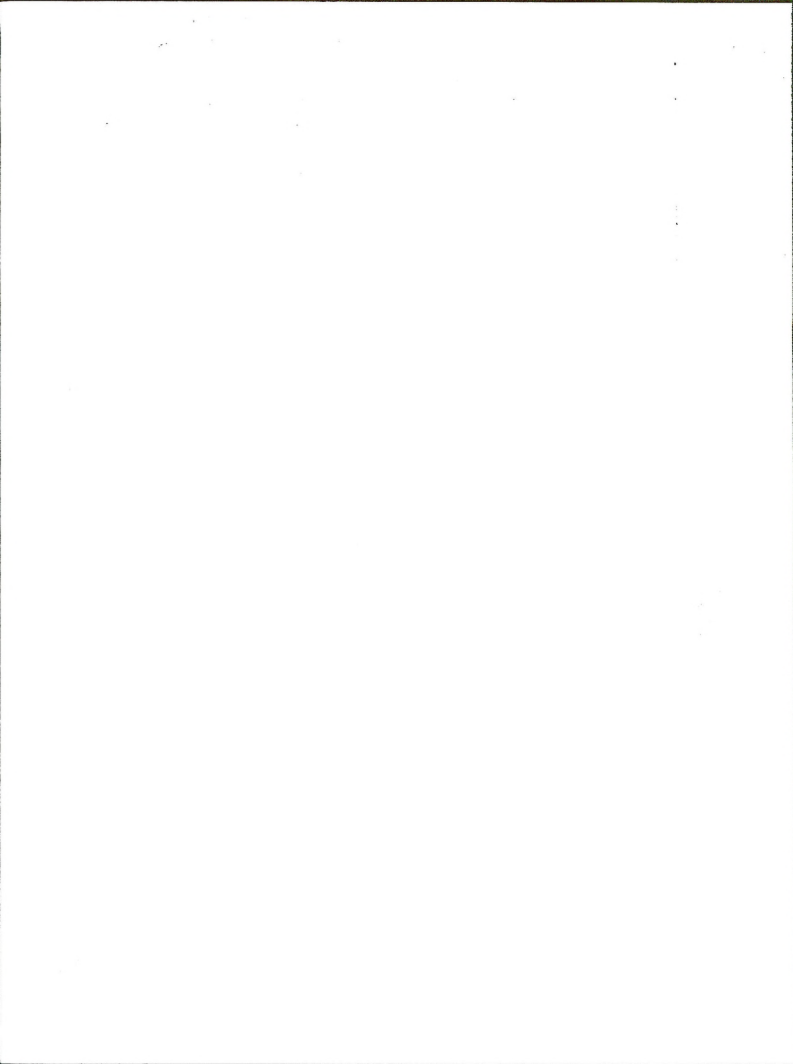
- The name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest.
- A statement of the issue or issues being protested.
- A statement of the part or parts of the document being protested.
- A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues previously submitted during the planning process by the protesting party, or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and
- A concise statement explaining precisely why the Bureau of Land Management Nevada State Director's decision is wrong.

Upon resolution of any protests, an Approved Plan Amendment and Decision Record will be issued. The Proposed Plan Amendment/Decision Record will be mailed to all individuals who participated in this planning process and to all other interested individuals upon their request.

Sincerely,

Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada

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**CALIENTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN AND
NELLIS AIR FORCE RANGE RESOURCE PLAN
PROPOSED
WHITE SIDES LAND WITHDRAWAL AMENDMENT
AND
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment Number: EA-LV-CRA-95-001

Case File Number: N-57922

Applicant: U.S. Department of Defense
Nellis Air Force Base

Project Location: Lincoln County, Nevada

For Further Information Contact: Acting District Manager
Las Vegas District
Telephone: (702) 647-5000

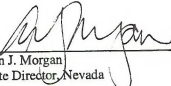
Abstract: The Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment to the Caliente Management Framework Plan and the Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan analyzes the impacts of withdrawing, from all forms of public entry, other than livestock grazing, approximately 1,607 hectares (3,972 acres) of public lands. The purpose of this withdrawal is to provide a security and safety buffer to prevent a compromise of national security interests and to protect assets of the adjacent withdrawn Nellis Air Force Range. The preparation of this document was coordinated with numerous individuals, interest groups, Federal Agencies, and state and county governments.

Date Proposed Amendment Issued: November 9, 1994

Protests, if any, are to be filed with: Director (760)
Bureau of Land Management
Division of Planning and
Environmental Coordination
(406 LS)
1849 C Street NW
Washington D.C. 20240

Date Protests must be Postmarked: December 9, 1994

Responsible Official for Amendment and Environmental Assessment:



Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada

November 2, 1994
Date

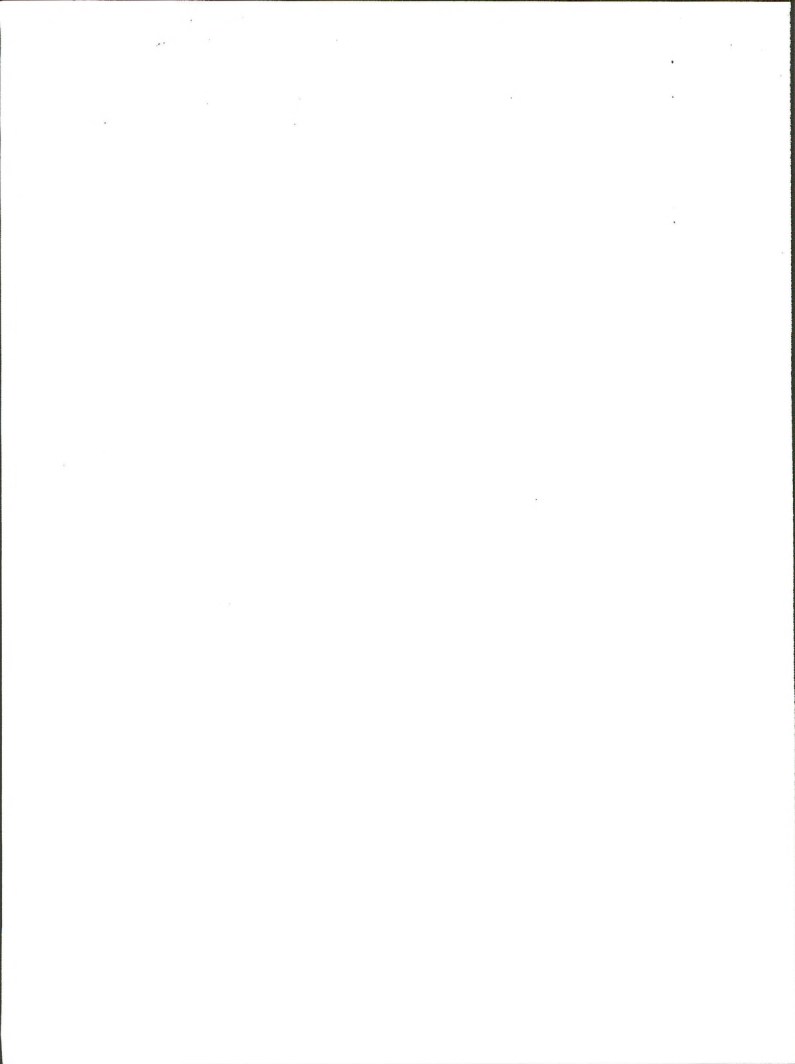


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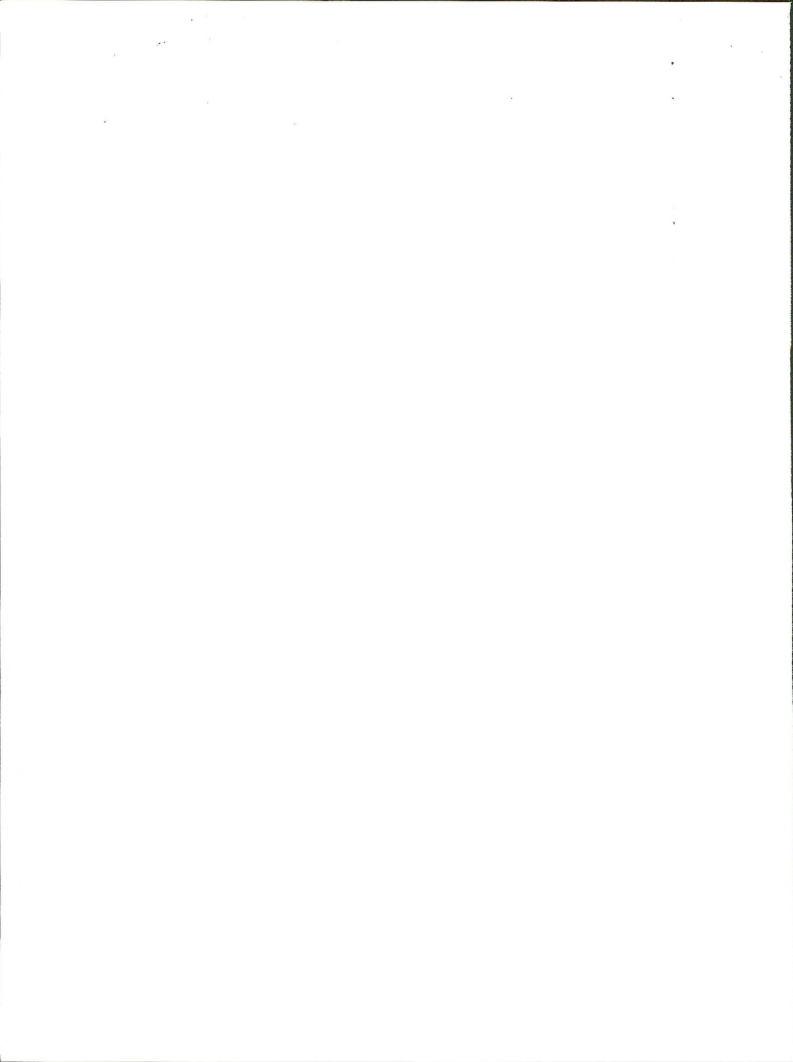
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CALIENTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN AND NELLIS AIR FORCE RANGE RESOURCE PLAN PROPOSED WHITE SIDES LAND WITHDRAWAL AMENDMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The US Air Force (USAF) has applied to withdraw from all forms of public entry, approximately 1,607 hectares (ha) (3,972 acres) of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Caliente Resource Area, under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of October 21, 1976 (90 Stat. 2751), subject to all valid existing rights. The proposed withdrawal would expand a safety and security buffer zone for the Nellis Air Force Range (NAFR). The Caliente Management Framework Plan (MFP), approved in 1982, provides management direction for the approximately 1.42 million ha (3.5 million acre) Caliente Resource Area, including the proposed withdrawal land. Since the proposed withdrawal does not conform with land use decisions contained in the Caliente MFP, the MFP must be amended if the proposed withdrawal is to be allowed. The Nellis Air Force Range Resource Plan (RP), approved in 1992, was prepared by BLM in response to the Military Lands Withdrawal Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-606). This land use plan provides long-term management direction for natural and cultural resources on the military-withdrawn lands of the Nellis Air Force Range. If the proposed withdrawal is allowed, the Nellis RP would be amended to include the additional acreage.

This document describes the proposed action and alternatives, and analyzes impacts associated with the alternatives. It would also amend both the Caliente MFP and Nellis Air Force Range RP, should the proposed withdrawal be allowed.

The Nellis Air Force Range is a unique combination of withdrawn land, overlain by restricted airspace and bounded by public lands and military operating areas (MOAs) and other flight route restraints. The military considers the NAFR value to national defense unparalleled in that it permits air combat training and testing in an environment where the risk to the public is low and the benefits to the military are high. The NAFR's size, climate, and isolation are ideal for the complex airborne systems and integrated air attack packages used in the national defense strategy. The NAFR is one of the most sophisticated ranges possessed by the military and no other range in the United States offers the multiple benefits to national defense. With the nationwide decline in active military reservations, the range is essential to the Air Force and the national defense.

In 1988 the U.S. Congress withdrew the Groom Range Addition to the Nellis Air Force Range as a security and safety buffer zone between public lands administered by the BLM and the NAFR complex. The USAF subsequently discovered that two areas adjacent to this buffer zone provide viewing of military activities on this portion of the NAFR. Public viewing of military activities (which has often included illegal photography of range activities) has increased during the past few years, necessitating the diversion, postponement, or cancellation of missions to prevent a compromise of national security.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

Public land withdrawn under the proposed action would provide a safety and security buffer between public lands administered by the BLM and withdrawn land under the jurisdiction of the NAFR complex. The withdrawn lands would be used as a safety and security buffer for operations on the NAFR complex to: 1) conduct military training, evaluation, and testing activities, and 2) other defense-related purposes that involve no greater adverse impact on the withdrawn lands than overflights pursuant to military tactical training. The military has determined that the additional land is necessary to prevent a compromise of national defense interests and assets.

1.3 PLANNING PROCESS - CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY WITH LAND USE PLANS; OTHER LEGAL AND REGULATORY MANDATES

Withdrawal of additional public land for exclusive use by the Air Force does not conform with land use allocations contained in the Caliente MFP for locatable and leasable mineral exploration and development, as well as recreational uses. The MFP requires amendment to exclude the 1,607 ha (3,972 acres) of the proposed withdrawal from the management direction of the MFP, should the withdrawal be allowed. The Nellis RP, which applies to the contiguous NAFR lands west of the proposed withdrawal, would be amended to include the additional acreage under the management direction of the RP. The proposed action would conform to management decisions contained in the Nellis RP. Copies of both management plans are available for public review at BLM offices in Caliente and Las Vegas, NV.

The proposed withdrawal complies with FLPMA, and Department of Interior and Department of Air Force Regulations. BLM regulations implementing FLPMA (43 CFR 2300) require an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement, plus other documentation, as needed, to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 USC 4332) and the regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500).

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

The Secretary of the Air Force has applied to the Secretary of Interior, through the Bureau of Land Management, to withdraw approximately 1,607 ha (3,972 acres) in two separate parcels near and around the landform named White Sides from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the public land laws, including the mining laws, of the United States subject to valid existing rights.

The White Sides area is located west of Alamo, Nevada, on the west side of Tikaboo Valley, in Lincoln County (Figure 1). Appendix A provides the legal description of the land proposed for withdrawal. The proposed withdrawal (see Figure 2), consists of two parcels. The northern parcel encompasses approximately 1,413 ha (3,492 acres), and occurs north of the Groom Lake Road and south of the Rock Springs access road; this parcel surrounds White Sides. The southern parcel encompasses approximately 194 ha (480 acres) and is a narrow, unnamed, north-south ridge that is located south of the Groom Lake Road.

The proposed withdrawal would be for a period of eight years, with the opportunity for review and renewal. All forms of public access, recreation, mineral exploration, oil and gas leasing, and mineral development would be prohibited. The proposed withdrawal underlies restricted airspace used exclusively by military aircraft. However, no air-to-ground and targeting activities would be authorized on the proposed land withdrawal. The proposed action would not include the construction of any facilities; therefore, no new surface disturbance would occur. The proposed action would include the maintenance of existing roads and placing security devices (e.g. posting, warning signs, sensors) along or near the new proposed boundary between the NAFR and public land administered by the BLM. The USAF has not identified needs for water supplies within the proposed withdrawal areas; no wells would be proposed for drilling. No future activities are proposed on the withdrawn land that would have environmentally adverse effects greater than the effects of the current military overflights. Any unanticipated future actions would comply with all applicable environmental requirements, including NEPA, as well as the Clean Air, Clean Water, Endangered Species, and Historic Preservation Acts.

The Caliente Resource Area MFP would be amended to exclude the withdrawn area; the Nellis Resource Plan would be amended to include the additional acreage. Management of the withdrawn land would conform to decisions in the Nellis RP. The BLM would implement all applicable management direction from the Nellis RP for military withdrawn lands on the NAFR. The BLM would continue to administer livestock grazing on the Bald Mountain Allotment, (currently held by D4 Enterprises). The Caliente MFP would provide direction for the non-withdrawn portions of the allotment and the Nellis RP direction for those portions within the military withdrawal.

2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under this alternative, no land withdrawal would be allowed. The White Side lands would remain under BLM administration and open to public access. Multiple uses of the public lands, such as mineral exploration and development, recreation, and other land use allocations provided in the Caliente MFP, would continue.

In order to meet national defense and security needs, the USAF would continue to use security patrols to monitor public viewing of military activities from the vantage points provided by the White Sides landforms. Lincoln County Sheriff's Office personnel would continue to enforce laws pertaining to illegal photography of the NAFR and military equipment. Flights, including low-level supersonic flights, would continue to pose a safety problem and require diversion. The mission of the USAF and national security would continue to be compromised by mission delays, cancellations, and diversions. Additional costs to the military (and the taxpayers) would continue to be incurred, as a result of the mission delays and cancellations, as well as the requirements for intensive security patrols and law enforcement actions.

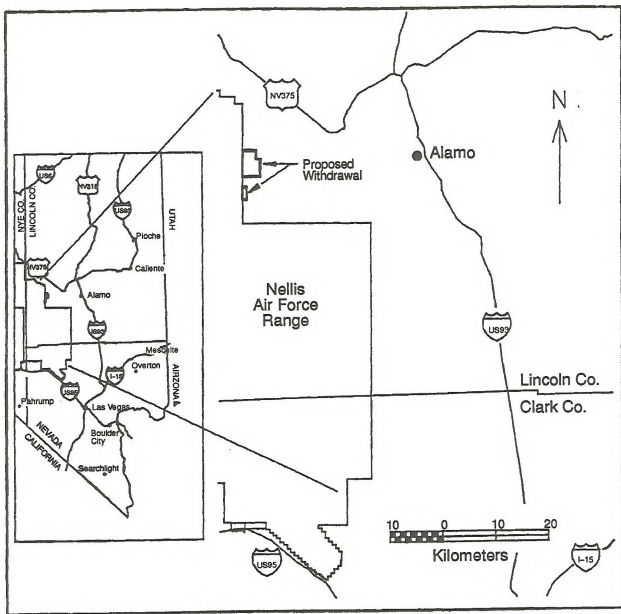


Figure 1. General location of the White Sides withdrawal area.

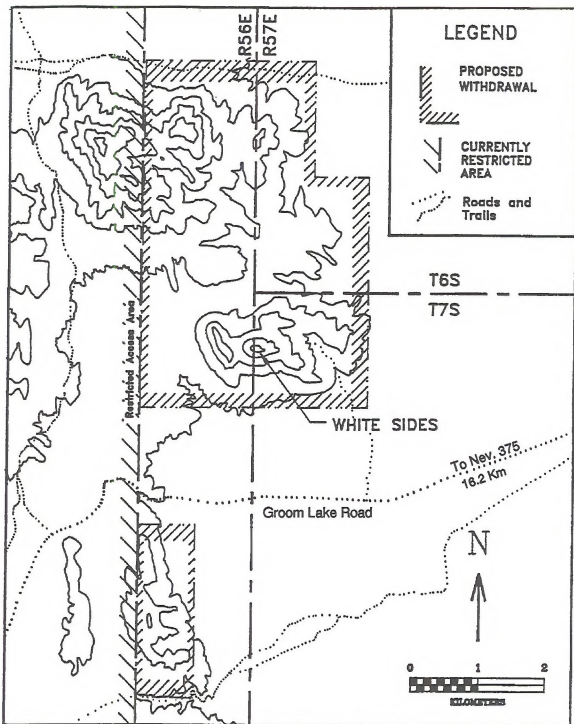


Figure 2. Specific location of the proposed land withdrawal parcels in the White Sides area. This map was developed from the USGS 7.5 minute series quadrangles (Nevada-Lincoln Co.): Groom Range, Groom Range NE, Groom Range SE, and Groom Range SW.

2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

2.3.1 Withdrawal of a Reduced Area or an Area Differently Configured

Alternatives for a reduced amount of withdrawal acreage or a differently configured proposal were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis since they would not meet the mission requirements of the USAF or national security needs. Smaller or differently configured areas would not include all of the close-in high ground which affords viewing opportunities of military activities.

2.3.2 Relocating Air Force Activities

An alternative was proposed that the USAF relocate or divert its missions to other areas within the NAFR. This alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed analysis since it would not adequately meet the needs of the USAF for full use of the Nellis Air Force Range. While mission realignments within the Department of Defense (DOD) are an ongoing process, those missions that occur on the Groom Range portion of the NAFR cannot feasibly be diverted to other locations.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following resources are not present in the proposed White Sides withdrawal area and will not be discussed further in this document:

1. Wetlands, and riparian areas;
2. Wilderness areas or wilderness study areas;
3. Areas of critical environmental concern;
4. Wild and scenic rivers;
5. Prime or unique farmlands;
6. Wild horses and burros;
7. Wastes, including hazardous and solid;
8. Significant paleontological values

The following is a brief discussion of the various resource values pertaining to the subject lands for this proposed withdrawal. Additional information pertaining to the affected environment is contained in the Caliente MFP located in the BLM's Caliente Resource Area Office, Caliente, Nevada.

3.1 PHYSIOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The northern parcel of the White Sides withdrawal consists of several small mountains, adjacent foothills, and alluvial fans. The southern portion of the withdrawal is a 2.4 km (1.5 mi) long ridge that rises about 183 m (600 ft) above the western edge of Tikaboo Valley. Elevation in the withdrawal area ranges from 1,542 m (5,060 ft) to 1,878 m (6,162 ft).

3.1.1 Geology

Relatively young Tertiary volcanic rocks are exposed almost entirely throughout the northern parcel. These rocks are extensively faulted and generally dip to the north and east at fairly low angles. The oldest of these relatively young rocks is a reddish tuff visible on the lower south-facing slope of White Sides. Overlying the reddish tuff is an almost white tuff, which gives White Sides its name. The white tuffs are poorly cemented and appear to have been extensively reworked. Capping the white tuff is a Tertiary andesite: a dark-colored extrusive rock that may be among the youngest rocks in the region. Andesite is the only visible rock component in the hills that cover the northern half of this parcel.

The southern parcel, while located less than 1.6 km (1 mi) from the southwest corner of the northern White Sides parcel, has an entirely different geologic nature. This north-south ridgeline consists of a relatively thin bed of resistant quartzite, which dips to the east at a moderately steep angle. The quartzite bed is both underlain and overlain by less resistant limestone and dolomite beds which have eroded to form the slopes of the ridge. Geologic maps (Tschanz and Pampeyan, 1970) show these units as Devonian-age Sevy Dolomite, Simonson Dolomite and Guilmette Formation. Along the eastern slope of the ridge, normal basin and range faulting has down-dropped the Paleozoic rocks beneath the surface of Tikaboo Valley.

In 1985, an extensive mineral investigation in the Groom Mountain Range included nearly 200 geochemical sediment and rock outcrop samples. Only 17 of the sediment samples and 4 of the rock outcrop samples were collected from watersheds above the affected lands. Values for selected indicator elements indicated no potential for mineral development on the eastern slopes of the Groom Range. The only mineral potentials noted by the survey were restricted to historically active areas, west of the two White Sides parcels proposed for withdrawal.

The area of the proposed White Sides withdrawal is considered prospectively valuable for oil and gas. Although there has been some limited oil and gas exploration in Tikaboo Valley, no information regarding an actual

discovery has been located. There are no oil/gas leases on or adjacent to the subject parcels. This is expected because both parcels lie along the Groom Range/Jumbled Hills range front where one would expect to find extensive normal faulting, which would impede the accumulation of oil and gas reservoirs. The nearest producing oil field is 160 km (99 mi) north, in the northern portion of Railroad Valley. See 3.6.3 "Mineral and Energy Resources" for additional information.

Potential for geothermal resource is low. No known hot or warm springs occur in Tikaboo Valley, nor have any been reported around the Groom Range. There are no known water wells in Tikaboo Valley available for analysis. There are not, nor have there ever been any geothermal leases in the area proposed for land withdrawal.

No other non-metallic mineral resources such as perlite, fluor spar, alunite, clay, diatomite, volcanic ash, vermiculite, gypsum, barite and stone products have been identified on either of the parcels. While potential sand and gravel resources are common in most of the basins of the region as a result of erosion of the highlands, that potential is very low for these parcels. The proposed withdrawal is comprised of higher elevations where very little alluvium has collected.

3.1.2 Paleontology

Occasional fossils occur in the limestone deposits. The fossils are small invertebrates and are similar to fossil deposits found throughout the calcareous region of eastern Nevada. No vertebrate fossils were found.

3.2 CLIMATE AND AIR QUALITY

Average annual precipitation ranges from 200 mm (8 in) on the alluvial fans to approximately 300 mm (12 in) on the tallest peaks (French, 1983). Most of the precipitation probably occurs as snowfall during the winter months; however, summer thunderstorms are common during some years. Snowfall accumulations may range from 50 to over 300 mm (1 ft). The greatest accumulations occur on the north facing slopes.

Daily and seasonal temperatures vary greatly in the proposed withdrawal area, and are influenced by both general air movement and topography. The coldest temperatures occur in January and the warmest in July and August. Temperature records at Yucca Flat on the NTS, approximately 56 km (35 mi) southwest of the proposed withdrawal, show temperature extremes from below -32°C (0°F) in January, to well over 38°C (100°F) in July.

Air quality in the area is good, with only limited amounts of airborne particulate from the playas and nearby dirt/gravel roads. The area is within the Nevada Intrastate Air Quality Control Region (AQCR) which comprises most of the state of Nevada, with the exception of Clark and Washoe Counties. While a number of areas within the Nevada Intrastate AQCR have been classified as non-attainment areas, none are in the immediate vicinity of the White Sides area.

3.3 SOIL AND WATER RESOURCES

The proposed White Sides withdrawal is not in a flood plain, although minor ephemeral floodplains occur adjacent to the lands. No springs or perennial streams exist in the parcels proposed for withdrawal. Numerous ephemeral washes occur, but overland flow only happens during periods of intense thunderstorms or rapid snowmelt on top of a saturated soil. Runoff from ephemeral flows is not used directly, and eventually infiltrates into the soil and is evapotranspired or evaporates. Neither parcel of the proposed withdrawal is believed to have any potential for economical groundwater development. Depth to groundwater saturation is believed to be at least 300 to 500 m (1,000 to 1,500 ft) below land surface and effective permeability of the rocks is believed to be very low. These conditions would give rise to very expensive supply wells with poor performance characteristics.

Soils in both parcels are shallow and gravelly and thus are of limited hydrologic interest.

3.4 VEGETATION

3.4.1 Plant Communities

Biogeographically, White Sides occurs in a vegetation transition zone between the southern Great Basin and the northern Mojave Desert. Southern Great Basin plant communities dominated by big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) and cliffrose (*Cowania mexicana*) occur on the higher mountain slopes, most north facing slopes at all elevations, and on the deep alluvial soil present in wash bottoms. Blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramosissima*), a transition species between the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin, dominates the lower south facing slopes and alluvial fans. The historic use of the area is rangeland livestock grazing and wildlife habitat. Both the undulating topography and shallow gravelly soil, that is frequently underlain by a cemented hardpan, prohibit the production of agricultural crops.

Blackbrush Community

The blackbrush community is a transition community between the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin Desert. Blackbrush often occurs in almost pure stands on the alluvial fans, lower hills, and mountain sideslopes below about 1,707 m (5,600 ft), except where light-colored volcanic tuff outcrops occur. The soil is gravelly to rocky, shallow, and often underlain by a thick caliche layer. On the higher south facing slopes blackbrush often intermingles with big sagebrush. Subordinate shrubs include desert bitterbrush (*Purshia glandulosa*), big sagebrush, black sagebrush (*Artemisia nova*), Nevada jointfir (*Ephedra nevadensis*), and green rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus*). Grass species present include squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*) and galleta (*Hilaria jamesii*); however, their abundance and cover are low. Two common cactus species are Mojave prickly pear (*Opuntia erinacea*) and Silver Cholla (*Opuntia echinocarpa*). The less dominant species, budsage (*Artemisia spinescens*) is found.

Sagebrush Community

The sagebrush community occurs on mountain sideslopes above 1,707 m (5,600 ft), except where light-colored volcanic tuff outcrops occur. This community also occurs in ephemeral washes that have bottoms of deep sandy soil. Other shrubs present are blacksage, desert bitterbrush, Nevada jointfir, green ephedra, and cliffrose. Cliffrose is usually restricted to the wash bottoms. Grasses present are Sandberg's bluegrass (*Poa sandbergii*), squirreltail, galleta, Indian ricegrass, and desert needlegrass (*Stipa speciosa*). Mojave prickly pear and silver cholla are the major cacti present. Green ephedra (*Ephedra viridis*) and apache plume (*Fallugia paradoxa*) are also found, but at a lower abundance.

3.4.2 Forest Products

No forest products occur in the withdrawal area. The low annual precipitation (200–300 mm) (8–12 in) eliminates the potential for woodlands.

3.4.3 Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plant Species

The biological survey of the White Sides area (conducted in late summer 1993) found only one sensitive species, evening primrose (*Camissonia megalantha*). This species of evening primrose (there are several species) is a category 2 (C2) species. Category 2 status implies that the species shows vulnerability (mortality) to either natural phenomena or human activity, but that insufficient information exists to list the species as threatened or endangered. Other threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species occur in southern and central Nevada, at varying distances from the proposed White Sides withdrawal (Table 1).

Evening primrose only occurred on the numerous outcrops of light colored volcanic tuff in the northern land parcel. These tuff outcrops are a major component of the sideslopes of White Sides, and occur only sporadically in the rest of the northern parcel. Neither the tuff outcrops or evening primrose were found in the southern land parcel.

Table 1. Threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species that occur in the vicinity of the proposed White Sides withdrawal.

Species	Federal Status ¹	NNNPS ² Status	Nearest Known Location not in Withdrawal Area
<i>Asclepias eastwoodiana</i>	C2	Watch ³	Emigrant Valley, Nevada
<i>Astragalus gilmanii</i>	C2	Watch	Groom Range, Nevada
<i>Astragalus beatleyae</i>	C1	Threatened	Pahute Mesa, Nevada
<i>Astragalus funereus</i>	C2	Watch	French Peak, Nevada Test Site
<i>Astragalus amphioxys</i> var. <i>musimomum</i>	C2	Watch	Sheep Mountain, Nevada
<i>Camissonia megalantha</i> ⁴	C2	Watch	French Peak area, NV Test Site
<i>Cymopterus ripleyi</i> var. <i>saniculooides</i>	C2	Watch	Emigrant Valley, Nevada
<i>Erigeron ovinus</i>	C2	Watch	Groom Range, Nevada
<i>Frasera pahutensis</i>	C2	Watch	Pahute Mesa, Nevada
<i>Galium hilendiae</i> ssp. <i>kingstonense</i>	C2	Threatened	Belted Range, Nevada
<i>Lewisia maguirei</i>	C2	Watch	Quinn Canyon Range, Nevada
<i>Penstemon arenarius</i>	C2	Watch	Nye County, Nevada
<i>Penstemon fruticiformis</i> ssp. <i>arargosae</i>	C2	Threatened	Amargosa Valley, Nevada
<i>Penstemon pahutensis</i>	C2	Threatened	Belted Range, Nevada
<i>Penstemon pudicus</i>	C2	Threatened	Kawich Range, Nevada
<i>Phacelia beatleyae</i>	C2	Watch	Emigrant Valley, Nevada
<i>Townsendia jonesii</i> var. <i>tumulosa</i>	C2	Watch	Spring Mountain Range, Nevada

¹C1 status implies the USFWS has enough information on file to support listing as Threatened or Endangered. C2 status implies the species exhibits some evidence of vulnerability, but without enough data to support listing as Threatened or Endangered. More research necessary.

²Northern Nevada Native Plant Society

³Potentially vulnerable taxa in need of monitoring or further data to determine status.

⁴Biological survey conducted in late summer, 1993, found this species on the northern parcel.

No obvious threats to evening primrose exist in the proposed withdrawal area. Trampling by livestock, wildlife, or humans is unlikely for several reasons. First, little if any livestock or wildlife forage grows on the volcanic tuff; therefore, there is no attractant for these animals. Second, livestock, wildlife, and humans generally avoid areas that have steep and or unstable sideslopes. Finally, this species of evening primrose germinates in the late spring or early summer, when livestock and deer are less likely to use the White Sides portion of the Bald Mountain Allotment.

3.5 WILDLIFE

3.5.1 Non-Sensitive Species

No mule deer were seen in the White Sides area during any of the survey activities. The only deer sign were pellet groups, which were only found in the northern land parcel, in ephemeral washes dominated by cliffrose. Cliffrose utilization was very light, which indicates that relatively few deer inhabit the area. Summer temperatures at White Sides are warm and free standing water is unavailable; therefore, deer use probably occurs only in the winter/spring months, when water (from snowfall) might be available.

Jackrabbits were the only small game observed during the biological survey (Brad Schultz, personal observation); however, numerous small mammals are undoubtedly present. Upland game birds (e.g., chukar, doves,

and quail) were not seen during the biological survey, but are known to inhabit the adjacent Groom Range (US Air Force, 1985). The long distance between the withdrawal area and a permanent water supply (6 km (3.7 mi)) probably limits use of the withdrawal area by upland game birds to those months when free standing water is available (typically November through March).

An adult mountain lion (*Felis concolor*) was observed on White Sides during the cultural resources survey of a proposed communications facility in 1992 (Pippin and Wills, 1992).

3.5.2 Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Species

Eight sensitive animal species (Table 2) occur in the vicinity of White Sides, but no sign of these species were observed in the proposed withdrawal area.

The desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is the only listed, or proposed threatened or endangered vertebrate species that occurs year-round in the region. The biological survey did not find any tortoises or tortoise sign in the White Sides area and none would be expected. The White Sides, area occurs above 1,542 m (5,000 ft.), and tortoises located near the species northern-most distribution usually live below this elevation (EG&G/EM, 1991). The nearest known populations of desert tortoises occurs in the Pahranaagat Valley, approximately 50 km (31 mi) east of the proposed withdrawal, area and on the Nevada Test Site, at Massachusetts Mountain (EG&G/EM, 1991), approximately 56 km (35 mi) southwest of White Sides.

Two federally endangered species, the American bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), may occur rarely in the White Sides area (Table 2). Bald eagles sightings in Nevada normally occur in or near wetland, lake, and riverine habitat. None of these habitats occur in the White Sides area; however, infrequent bald eagles sightings on both the Nevada Test Site (NTS) and the Desert National Wildlife Range (DNWR) have occurred during the spring and fall migration. The nearest known over-wintering site is Pahranaagat Valley. The peregrine falcon is a rare year-round resident on both the DNWR and the NTS. This species, therefore, may occur rarely in the White Sides area, most likely during flights between the NTS and the DNWR. The white-faced ibis (*Plegadis chihi*), long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*), snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*), and the Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) are five C2 bird species that may occur rarely in the White Sides area. The preferred habitat of each species (Table 2) is either absent from, or a minor component of the White Sides area. Each species is migratory, and uses the White Sides area only during the spring and fall migration periods, if at all.

3.6 LAND USE

3.6.1 Existing Facilities

There are no existing facilities such as fences or range improvements in the proposed withdrawal area. The Bald Mountain Pipeline Complex, under BLM authorization to the livestock permittee, is scheduled for construction across the proposed withdrawal area in 1996.

3.6.2 Livestock Grazing

Water availability and steep topography limit the amount of livestock grazing that can occur on the proposed withdrawal area. One livestock operator (D4 Enterprises) currently grazes within and adjacent to the White Sides area, which the BLM has managed since 1944 as part of the Bald Mountain Allotment. The Bald Mountain Allotment contains 109,157 ha (269,727 ac) of which 15,037 ha (37,156 ac) or 13.8 percent, was withdrawn as part of the Groom Mountain Range withdrawal in 1984. The proposed withdrawal of 1,607 ha (3,972 ac) would increase the area of the Bald Mountain Allotment having access restrictions to 16,664 ha (41,175 ac), or 15.3 percent of the allotment.

Table 2. Threatened, endangered, and sensitive animal species that may occur in the White Sides area.

Species	Federal Status	Nearest Known Location	Season of Use	Preferred Habitat
Desert tortoise <i>Gopherus agassizii</i>	Threatened	NTS Massachusetts Mt	Yearlong;	Creosote bush (<i>Larrea tridentata</i>) communities on bajadas and foothills below 1524 m.
American bald eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Endangered	NTS and DNWR	Fall and spring migration	Shorelines, lakes, wetlands, rivers
Peregrine falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Endangered	NTS and DNWR	Year-long	Coasts, mountains, and woods
White-faced ibis <i>Plegadis chihi</i>	C2	NTS, DNWR, Emigrant Valley	Fall and spring migration	Shorelines around lakes, marshes, etc.
Long-billed curlew <i>Numenius americanus</i>	C2	NTS and DNWR	Fall and spring migration	Marshes, mudflats, meadows, and pastures
Mountain plover <i>Charadrius montanus</i>	C2	NTS	Fall and spring migration	Short grass prairie or sagebrush
Snowy plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i>	C2	NTS	Fall and spring migration	Sand flats and alkali ponds
Ferruginous hawk <i>Buteo regalis</i>	C2	NTS	Fall and spring migration	Sagebrush plains and juniper savannahs

The vegetation resource includes numerous species that provide palatable forage for livestock. Forage shrubs include: budsage, four-wing saltbush, green ephedra, Nevada jointfir, black sagebrush, desert bitterbrush, apache plume and cliffrose. Important forage grasses are: galleta, desert needlegrass, Indian ricegrass, squirreltail, and Sandberg's bluegrass.

Livestock forage utilization ranges from none on the steeper mountain slopes, to moderate and heavy on the alluvial fans, and in the drainages (Brad Schultz, personal observation). The biological survey found heavy grazing on only a small portion of the northern proposed withdrawal parcel, and no evidence of livestock grazing on the southern parcel. The absence of perennial water sources, combined with steep topography, limit livestock utilization in the withdrawal area. The heaviest livestock utilization observed was at a water haul site just outside the southeast corner of the northern proposed withdrawal parcel.

The Bald Mountain Allotment has 6,298 animal unit months (AUMs) of forage available, of which 5,811 AUMs are active (BLM 1992). An AUM is the amount of forage required for one cow and her calf for one month. There are approximately 95 AUMs of forage available annually on the proposed withdrawal area. Features, such as the absence of perennial water sources and steep topography, concentrate livestock distribution onto the bajadas and drainages, which are dominated by the blackbrush community. The blackbrush community has sparse grass production, the primary forage selected by cattle.

3.6.3 Mineral and Energy Resources

Records examined at the Lincoln County Recorder's office and at the BLM, Nevada State Office, show that no mineral claims had ever been filed on either of the two land parcels proposed for withdrawal. The BLM, Nevada State Office confirmed that there are no active oil/gas leases in either of the parcels proposed for withdrawal, or in the entire Tikaboo Valley. Two former leases (N-26566 and N-26577) located on the northeast edge of the proposed White Sides withdrawal area, expired on March 31, 1991 (BLM, 1992). There has been no evidence of interest in oil/gas leasing of the proposed withdrawal area. There is no evidence of any prior mining or mineral exploration activity on either parcel slated for withdrawal.

An extensive mineral investigation of the Groom Range in 1985 indicated no potential for mineral development on the eastern slope of the Groom Range (see discussion at "Affected Environment" 3.1 for additional data). The only mineral potential noted by the survey was restricted to historically active areas, about 12.9 km (8 mi) west of the proposed withdrawal.

3.6.4 Recreation Resources

Prior to the publicized use of the proposed withdrawal area as a location for observing military activities (Campbell, 1993), only widely dispersed recreation occurred in the proposed withdrawal area. No evidence of recreational use (e.g., hunting camps, OHV roads, etc.) was observed during a cultural resources survey in 1992 (Pippin and Wills, 1992) or during the biological survey of the area in the late summer of 1993. BLM data indicate that casual use (less than 5 visitor days per month) occurred before 1992. The first evidence of recent human activity in the area was observed in late summer of 1993 and consisted of an offroad 4-wheel drive trail at the northern parcel's southeast corner, and a marked trail that leads to the top of White Sides. Another trail was established in the southern parcel in early 1994. The apparent purpose of both the road and the two trails is to provide visual access to the NAFR. By January, 1994, use along the trails had increased significantly.

Since 1993, visitation to the White Sides area has increased, primarily as a result of media attention (Campbell, 1993; Brown, 1994; Campbell, 1994a; Sion, 1994b; Webster, 1994) and networking among Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) and military viewing groups (Campbell, 1993; Campbell, 1994a). Individuals and others currently use the area for hiking, camping, viewing military aircraft, and searching for UFOs (Campbell, 1993). Current estimates of use are 15 or more visitor days per month (BLM, 1994). There has been mapping and marking of trails on White Sides and placement of lawn chairs on the top of the butte (Campbell, 1993). Graffiti has been written across dozens of exposed rock faces; Joshua trees have been smashed; spray paint used to paint rings around at least one Joshua tree; and trash deposited within the southern parcel (BLM, 1994).

Hunting opportunities for most game animal species are minimal, since most hunting seasons end before wildlife species are likely to move into the White Sides area. The absence of a perennial water supply in the withdrawal area limits both wildlife diversity and numbers. Jackrabbits were the only upland species observed during the biological survey. Deer use occurs, but is probably restricted to the period of December through March or April, when freestanding water, from snowmelt or rain, is occasionally available. Chukar, quail, and doves inhabit the nearby Groom Range, but none were seen or heard in the White Sides area during the biological survey.

3.7 VISUAL RESOURCES

The proposed withdrawal area is managed as a Class IV visual resource management (VRM) area. The classifications are determined to establish standards, guidelines and objectives to obtain the goals and activities in support of management objectives for the area. The management objective of VRM Class IV is to provide for activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the landscape can be significant. Management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention.

Other than several roads in and around the proposed withdrawal no human developed structures exist. There are no unique biotic or geological features present.

3.8 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Humans have occupied the Great Basin for at least 10,000 years. Cultural resources from the past 10,000 years can be classified into two general eras: the period before Euro-Americans arrived, approximately 150 years ago; and the 150 year period since Euro-American arrival and settlement (i.e. historic events)

White Sides occurs in the region used by the Western Shoshone (Steward, 1938). The Western Shoshone occupied a relatively large area, from Death Valley, California to northwestern Utah, including much of central Nevada. Their lifestyle consisted of small family groups that moved seasonally between available resources, of which the piñon crop was the most important. Hunting provided a significant amount of the Western Shoshones' food supply but plant resources were their primary staple. Large game animals hunted were deer, antelope, and big horn sheep. The rabbit was probably the most important small game species hunted, and provided both food and clothing. Rodents, lizards, birds, and insects supplemented the food supply.

The earliest occurrence of Euro-Americans in the general region around the White Sides area was 1849 when emigrants to California passed through Emigrant Valley approximately 25 km (15 mi) west of the area. By the 1860s, regular travel had been established along the Indian Springs to Pahrnatag Mining District road and it was this route, situated about 2 km (1.2 mi) east of the proposed withdrawal, which was followed by Governor Henry G. Blasdel during his 1866 sojourn to the area (Stretch, 1867). The most significant early event was the organization of the Groom Mine District in 1869 (Reno and Pippin, 1986). The Groom Mine was the most important mine, but others (e.g., Black Metal Mine) were present. The road that currently connects the Groom Mine and the Pahrnatag Valley runs between the two land parcels proposed for withdrawal. The historic road that connected Groom Mine and Pahrnatag Valley is immediately adjacent to the southern edge of the southern land parcel. Small mines and prospects occur across much of the Groom Mountain Range, but the greatest concentration occurs in the southwest portion of the mountain range. Transportation, logging, and ranching activities occurred in support of the mining operations.

Prior to surveys in support of this EA, only one previous cultural resources survey had been conducted in the proposed withdrawal (Pippin and Wills, 1992). That survey, encompassing 16 ha (40 ac) for a then-proposed (but never constructed) Air Force communications facility atop White Sides (the Air Force withdrew the proposal), recorded a historic age survey marker (26Ln3761) that was probably associated with the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey of the area in 1944. That resource was determined not to be eligible for listing to the *National Register of Historic Places* through section 106 consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer.

Numerous cultural resource investigations have occurred in the regional vicinity of the White Sides area (Jacobs, 1975; Hatoff, 1976; Wirtz, 1976a, 1976b, 1976c, 1976d; Hougland, 1977; Brooks, 1978; Clerico, 1978; Jenkins, 1978; Rolf, 1978; Bergin et al., 1979; Steinberg, 1980; Bunch, 1984; Peterson, 1984; Polk, 1984; and Reno and Pippin, 1985 and Pippin, 1992). Reno and Pippin (1986) conducted the most extensive investigation in the area during the withdrawal of the Groom Range by the US Air Force. Their work provides the best information available on the types of cultural resources present in the area.

Reno and Pippin (1986) surveyed 85 500 x 500-m (1640 x 1640 ft) sample units randomly distributed across the Groom Range withdrawal area. The 85 sample units represented 6 percent of the geographic area. The survey identified 265 cultural resources that ranged in age from 10,000 years ago to Historic. Prehistoric sites, and probably the ethno-historic sites as well, consist of isolated artifacts, knapping stations, opportunistic toolstone quarries, major toolstone quarries, small and large lithic scatters, milling stations, rock caches, *tinajas*, rockshelters, hunting blinds, and rock art. Historic sites focus around mining activities, particularly the Groom Mine, and include adits, dumps, a mill, and housing for the workers and owners. Historic cultural resources located away from the mines are claim markers, roads, pipelines from springs, corrals, houses or cabins, roof cellars, metal tanks, and water troughs.

The cultural resources survey of the White Sides area followed the survey design used during the Groom Range withdrawal (Reno and Pippin, 1986; Pippin, 1993). Two archaeologists surveyed four 500 x 500-m (1640 x 1640 ft) randomly located sample units (6% of the area) by walking parallel transects, spaced 30 m (100 ft) apart. In addition, the principal investigator and an historic archaeologist conducted intuitive surveys to establish the existence

of historic routes through the area, and held oral interviews with two local residents concerning their knowledge of cultural resources. Nine archaeological sites and 11 isolated artifacts were discovered within the sample units and one site was discovered outside of the sample unit in the southern land parcel. These include three lithic scatters (26Ln3978, 26Ln3979 and 26Ln3980), a small knapping station (26Ln3977), and four isolated artifacts in Sample Unit No. 4; two rock cairns/alignments (26Ln3975 and 26Ln3976) in Sample Unit No. 23; two isolated artifacts in Sample Unit No. 39; two toolstone quarries (26Ln3981 and 26Ln3983), a small knapping station (26Ln3982) and five isolated artifacts in Sample Unit No. 64; and a historic age site of unknown purpose (possibly a point where rock assay samples were collected) (26Ln3984) found outside of the sample units in the southern land parcel. Five of the archaeological sites (26Ln3978, 26Ln3979, 26Ln3980, 26Ln3981, and 26Ln3983) are determined to be eligible for nomination to the *National Register of Historic Places* under criterion d of 36 CFR 60.4, through Section 106 consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Three of those resources (26Ln3978, 26Ln3979, 26Ln3980) are considered eligible because of their potential to yield information concerning past changes in settlement and subsistence patterns; whereas the other two (26Ln3981 and 26Ln3983) are considered eligible for their potential to characterize the quarrying of toolstone in the Jumbled Hills. One previously recorded historic property (26Ln3218), the historic road (not currently used) between the Groom Mine and Pahranaagat Valley, runs immediately adjacent to the south edge of the southern land parcel.

In addition to the above surveys, another survey was conducted outside of the proposed withdrawal along portions of a segment of the historic route (26Ln3985) taken by Governor Blasdel between Indian Springs and the Hadfield Ranch in the Pahranaagat Mining District. This survey was conducted in order to establish the relationship between this route and the proposed withdrawal. During Section 106 consultation with the Nevada SHPO, the inventoried segment of this resource was determined to be eligible for nomination to the *National Register of Historic Places* as a historic property under criteria a, b, and d of 36 CFR 60.4.

Campbell has stated that an anthropologist in the White Sides Defense Committee found evidence of an ancient city ("...reminiscent of Machu Picchu...") built by a northern branch of the Inca, on top of White Sides (Campbell, 1993). No evidence of this city was observed during the above-mentioned cultural resources surveys. It was noted that several of the stones belonging to the rock cairn at 26Ln3761 (see Pippin and Wills, 1992) had been recently moved to construct several stone wind breaks that were not present during the 1992 survey. Campbell suggests that UFO and aircraft viewers built the wind breaks (Campbell, 1993).

No Native American sacred, ceremonial, or Traditional Lifeways Use areas have been identified within the proposed White Sides withdrawal areas.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following resources are not present in the proposed White Sides withdrawal area and will not be discussed further in this document:

1. Wetlands, and riparian areas;
2. Wilderness areas or wilderness study areas;
3. Areas of critical environmental concern;
4. Wild and scenic rivers;
5. Prime or unique farmlands;
6. Wild horses and burros;
7. Wastes, including hazardous and solid;
8. Significant paleontological values

4.1 IMPACT ANALYSIS

To properly assess the effects of implementation of the Proposed Action, the following assumptions were made:

1. for the duration of the withdrawal, if allowed, no unauthorized (i.e. public) access would occur;
2. normal maintenance of the existing roads (i.e. the Rock Springs road) will be the only surface disturbing activity that occurs;
3. any operational changes that may require a use not assessed under the proposed withdrawal would not be authorized until appropriate environmental and cultural resource analysis have been conducted and mitigation, as needed, completed.

4.1.1 Physiography and Geology

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative should effect the areas' physiography and geology because no surface-disturbing activities would occur.

4.1.2 Climate and Air Quality

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative should impact the climate and air quality, since no quantitative or qualitative changes in land use would occur.

4.1.3 Soil and Water Resources

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would not affect soil or water resources in the withdrawal area because: 1) no perennial surface water supplies occur in the withdrawal area; 2) no construction activity that may alter natural drainage patterns would occur, therefore, ephemeral runoff and/or infiltration would continue un-impeded; and 3) no discharges into possible groundwater supplies should occur. The Air Force would not drill nor draw water from any new wells in the proposed withdrawal area.

The Proposed Action would prohibit the private exploration and development of groundwater resources in the proposed withdrawn area; however, hydrogeologic conditions are not favorable for the occurrence of economical groundwater supplies. The proposed land withdrawal would not interfere with water rights for the appropriation of surface or groundwater outside the proposed withdrawal area.

The proposed White Sides withdrawal would not affect the BLM-approved construction, development, and operation of the Bald Mountain Pipeline Complex by the livestock permittee (BLM, 1993). This authorized pipeline, being constructed in phases, will begin at Quail Spring in the Groom Range, bisect the proposed withdrawal area, and continue eastward into Tikaboo Valley. Construction in the proposed withdrawal area is scheduled for 1996.

No Action Alternative

Neither soil nor water resources would be impacted by the implementation of the No Action Alternative.

4.1.4 Vegetation

Proposed Action

The proposed White Sides withdrawal would not negatively impact the vegetation of the area since no surface-disturbing activities are proposed for the area. Minimal vegetative disturbance could occur as a result of the installation of boundary marker posts along the the withdrawal boundary. Livestock grazing would continue at or near current levels.

Evening primrose was the only sensitive species found in the withdrawal area. The Proposed Action should not adversely impact this species. Evening primrose occurred on both light colored tuffaceous outcrops and the steep tuffaceous sideslopes of White Sides. Water and palatable (desired) forage species for both livestock and wildlife were absent from these tuffaceous areas; therefore, utilization of primrose by both domestic and wild ungulates is unlikely, because no natural attractant occurs. The steep slopes and unstable footing where the tuff material occurs also deter ungulate use.

Unlike the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action could marginally benefit evening primrose by excluding public access from the White Sides area. Because White Sides has steep unstable slopes, few humans are likely to hike in and around the tuffaceous areas of the mountain. The Proposed Action would further reduce human use of White Sides; therefore, human induced mortality of evening primrose, if present, should decline.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative could result in impacts to vegetation as a result of increased recreational use of the White Sides area and the continuation of livestock grazing at current levels. Vegetation could be damaged, reduced, or lost along trails which would provide access to higher elevation viewing locations in the two land parcels. These impacts would be lessened by BLM enforcement of public land regulations which prevent resource damage or degradation and public land user education efforts.

Mineral exploration activities could potentially impact vegetation in the short- and long term. Since the mineral potential of the area is evaluated as being very low, only minimal impacts relating to mineral activities would be anticipated to occur.

4.1.5 Wildlife

Proposed Action

The proposed withdrawal would not adversely impact large game, small mammals and upland birds (i.e. doves) since no public access for mining, mineral leasing, recreation, or general public access would be present. Human utilization of the area would decrease if the proposed withdrawal is allowed. Populations of small game and/or game birds would receive a marginal benefit, due to increased solitude.

Sensitive animal would not be affected by the proposed withdrawal. All bird species, except the Peregrine falcon, are migratory and only occur in the White Sides area (if at all) during the spring and fall migration

periods. These species generally use the Pahrnatag Valley migration corridor (approximately 30km east of the proposed withdrawal), where food, water, and cover are more abundant.

The Peregrine falcon occurs rarely on both the NTS and the DNWR, and has not been observed in the White Sides area. If a Peregrine falcon does use habitat on both the NTS and DNWR, the animal may fly through the White Sides area during travel between the two locations. The amount of actual time spent in or near the withdrawal area, however, would be very short. There are no activities proposed to be conducted during the period of the proposed withdrawal would be anticipated to affect this species.

No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, recreational use (i.e. hunting, off-highway vehicle driving) of these areas would continue and could constitute a slight impact if wildlife population size were reduced. Those species which benefit from solitude, would be disturbed by increased human utilization of the area. None of these impacts would be significant, since recreational use of the area is currently low and not anticipated to dramatically increase in the short or long term.

4.1.6 Land Use

Livestock Grazing

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative would affect livestock grazing, because the permittee would continue to graze livestock on the proposed withdrawal area. If the proposed withdrawal were to be allowed, the permittee could incur scheduling inconveniences and minor costs when coordinating his livestock management activities during USAF operations and maneuvers. No concerns were provided to the BLM from the grazing permittee.

Recreation

Proposed Action

Withdrawal of the White Sides parcels would eliminate all potential recreation activity from 1,607 ha (3,972 ac), for the duration of the withdrawal. The impacts on the recreation resource in Lincoln County should be minimal. Hunting opportunities in the withdrawal area are constrained by habitat limitations. The biological survey of both land parcels found deer sign (pellet groups), but only in the northern parcel. The absence of a permanent water source probably eliminates deer use during the drier months (May through November or December). Deer use most likely occurs during the winter and early spring months, when free standing water from rain or snow melt may be available. Since the hunting season normally occurs before deer move from the Groom Range into the White Sides area deer numbers are probably insufficient to attract many hunters. No chukar, doves, or quail (upland game birds) were seen or heard during the biological survey. Few, if any, upland game birds probably inhabit the area because the nearest permanent water is approximately 6 km (3.7 mi) from the withdrawal area. Upland game birds, except for migratory species, are more likely to use the area during the winter and spring months, which are outside of the hunting seasons. Chukar, the most common upland game bird in the nearby Groom Range, were rarely hunted before the Groom Range Withdrawal (U.S. Air Force, 1985). Very few hunters are likely to hunt the White Sides area, which is substantially smaller, and has lower quality habitat.

Evidence suggests that little recreational use of the area occurred prior to 1992. Visitor days are estimated to have recently increased to 15 or more visitor days per month. No BLM-permitted off-highway vehicle events have occurred in the area. Several roads are present around the perimeter of each land parcel, but no roads fully penetrate either land parcel. Limited vehicle access, the small size of each parcel, and the distance of the withdrawal area from major population centers (about 217 km (135 miles) from Las Vegas) greatly reduces use of the area for hiking, sightseeing, and camping.

Implementation of the proposed withdrawal would eliminate the use of the White Sides parcels as locations from which to view alleged UFOs and military activities. Several groups that search for UFOs have held

events at White Sides. That recreational use could continue on public lands in other portions of Tikaboo Valley, but participants would not have the opportunity to view activities within NAFR.

The Proposed Action would eliminate public access to the proposed withdrawal area, which could reduce recreational use by 180 visitor days per year. Adjacent public lands, totaling millions of hectares can easily accommodate this amount of usage without suffering adverse effects. Activities that occur on the proposed withdrawal area may still occur on other public lands, however, the quality of the experience may be different.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the full range of recreational uses on public lands would be managed by BLM, in accordance with directions contained in the Caliente MFP and the mandates of applicable federal laws and regulations. Recreational activities in the White Sides parcels could contribute to: 1) continued violation of federal photography laws, 2) adverse impacts on the military mission and national defense activities (i.e. mission delays or cancellations), and 3) continued defacement as to graffiti, spray paint, and trash (BLM, 1994).

Mineral and Energy Development

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would prohibit future mineral exploration on the 1,607 ha (3,972 ac) of withdrawn land for the duration of the withdrawal. Withdrawal of both subject parcels, however, would not adversely affect the mining and mineral industry in either Lincoln County or the State of Nevada, because the geologic structure(s) that normally contain economically viable mineral deposits are absent. The oil, gas, and geothermal resources would not be affected. Limited exploration in Tikaboo Valley has not found any of these resources.

While no definitive assessment of the potential discovery of a viable mineral deposit can be made without extensive investigations involving geochemical and geophysical testing, followed by exploratory drilling, the available data suggest that the probability is very slight. The total area of the proposed withdrawal is relatively small and the probability of locating a significant mineral deposit in such a confined area is remote. No significant quartz veins were observed on either of the parcels, which would eliminate the potential for discovery of the most common types of mineral deposits likely to be found in this region. None of the prerequisites for the emplacement of a Tem Piute-like tacite deposit exist on either property. The available geochemical sampling provides no indicators to suggest that additional sampling would be justified. Based on the data, there is no reason to anticipate any mineral or energy potential would be located or developed on either of the proposed White Sides withdrawal parcels.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would continue to allow exploration and development of mineral and energy resources, within the constraints imposed applicable federal laws and BLM regulations (43 CFR 3809). The geological features and a prolonged history of no minerals exploration or development would support the conclusion that mineral potential is low to absent in these parcels.

4.1.7 Visual Resources

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action alternative would affect visual resources since no surface-disturbing activities would occur.

4.1.8 Cultural and Historical Resources

Proposed Action

Restriction of public access under the Proposed Action could benefit cultural resources in each land parcel since the potential for destruction or disturbance would be lessened. Recent recreational activities on White Sides have adversely affected the cultural resource at 26Ln3761 by removing rocks to construct wind breaks. The proposed land withdrawal should benefit the historic Blasdel Road (26Ln3985) and the Groom Mine to Pahrangat

Valley Road (26Ln3218), both recommended as being eligible for nomination to the *National Register of Historic Places*. Segments of both roads have been heavily used to gain ingress and egress to the southern land parcel and this use could adversely impact the integrity of these historic properties. Through Section 106 consultation, the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred with the BLM's determination of no effect for the proposed land withdrawal (Baldrice, 1994).

No Native American sacred, ceremonial, or Traditional Lifeways areas are known to be located within the proposed withdrawal parcels.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative could result in continued adverse effects on the cultural and historical resources at White Sides from casual recreational use of the area. These could include the removal, displacement, or destruction of artifacts by visitors or off-highway vehicle travel.

4.1.9 Access for Scientific Research and Other Purposes

Proposed Action

Implementation of the proposed action would preclude general public access to the withdrawn lands. Access for scientific research (i.e. biological, geological, or cultural) or other purposes could be permitted, as provided by management direction contained in the Nellis RP. Applications for research permits would be granted by BLM to qualified researchers, with concurrence from the USAF. Such permits would be subject to scheduling and security constraints imposed by military uses of the lands. The impact of the withdrawal on the scientific community would not be significant because no unique species or habitats occur in the White Sides area. Evening primrose is the only sensitive species present and it occurs on similar habitat on both the NAFR and on the NTS.

Five of the recorded archaeological sites discovered in the White Sides area were recommended as being eligible for nomination to the *National Register of Historic Places* because of their research values. None of these sites, however, are unique or unusual for the geographic area, and their research value could be addressed by similar sites outside of the proposed withdrawal.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, public access for scientific research and other purposes would continue under the authorities contained in applicable federal laws (i.e. FLPMA) and by implementing federal regulations. Any authorization would be issued subject to stipulations specific to each request.

4.1.10 Socioeconomic Impacts

Proposed Action

The full socioeconomic impacts of the Proposed Action are unknown and cannot be quantified. All indications are that such impacts would be minimal. Implementation of the proposed withdrawal would not cause a local or regional loss of employment, and would not change the economic status of the local people, their local communities, their state and local government interests, the regional economy, or the Nation as a whole. D4 Enterprises, the livestock permittee, is the only known commercial operation in the proposed withdrawal area; their operation would continue at current levels.

Several individuals who market UFO merchandise may suffer a loss of income because fewer tourists might visit the area. The principal source of UFO merchandise, the Little A'le Inn, was an established business in Rachel, NV (the closest community to the proposed withdrawal) well before UFO and military aviation enthusiasts increased their visits to the general area in the late 1980's. No concerns were provided to the BLM from the established business in Rachel. No recreation permits to conduct commercial tours or other activities have been issued by BLM for the lands proposed for withdrawal.

The Proposed Action should eliminate illegal photography from both subject parcels. Articles by Brown (1994), Sion (1994b), and Webster (1994) each contained illegal photographs of the NAFR. Photographic equipment

was confiscated from the proposed withdrawal parcels on other occasions (Greene, 1994; Rodgers, 1994), and was aimed towards the NAFR at least one other time (Sion, 1994a). Signs on the access road to the proposed withdrawal area state that:

"It is unlawful to make any photograph, film, sketch, picture, drawing, graphic representation, of this area or equipment at or flying over this installation"; and

"It is unlawful to reproduce, publish, sell or give away any photograph, film, map, sketch, picture, drawing, graphic representation of this area or equipment at or flying over this installation".

No Action Alternative

Implementation of the No Action alternative would continue to cause delays or losses of military missions and subsequent economic losses to the U. S. Department of Defense and the taxpayer. The USAF, like all businesses and industries, incurs increased costs when projects or missions are delayed or canceled. The nature of the USAF mission on the NAFR prevents the Air Force from stating a precise dollar value for the number of missions canceled or delayed. Since 1992, mission cancellations have increased due to more frequent visitor use of the proposed withdrawal area.

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would require continued local and federal responses to prevent or investigate illegal activity in the proposed withdrawal area. Each trip to the withdrawal area consumes several hours or more of the Lincoln County Sheriff's time, potentially detracting the sheriff and/or his deputies from other law enforcement activities.

4.2 RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

Because the Proposed Action would not have any adverse impacts on the natural and cultural resources present in the proposed withdrawal areas, no mitigation is necessary or proposed. One standard operating procedure implemented by the Air Force will be the restriction of Air Force personnel (military and civilian) from off-road travel, except for mission essential requirements (i.e. maintenance of security boundaries).

4.3 UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

There are no unavoidable adverse impacts. Two primary uses occur on land in the White Sides area: forage production for livestock and wildlife, and the looking for UFOs and military aircraft on NAFR. Livestock and wildlife would continue to use the White Sides area under the Proposed Action. Mineral exploration and development, as well as recreational uses on the withdrawn lands would be foregone during the period of the withdrawal; this would not constitute a significant impact to local recreation or to the local, state, or regional economy.

5.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Under FLPMA and the implementing regulations, public comment was solicited on the proposed withdrawal action which began by the publishing of the proposal in the Federal Register on October 18, 1993. After publication of the proposal in the Federal Register, BLM sent out approximately 400 notices. The Air Force and BLM met with local and state government officials and BLM NSO personnel to discuss the proposal, and held two public meetings: one in Caliente, Nevada on January 31, 1994; the second meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada on March 2, 1994. The public was notified of these public meetings by the publication of notices in the Federal Register on December 29, 1993 and on January 26, 1994. During these meetings, 47 citizens provided comments or made statements. In addition, a public comment period was provided for submission of written comments. The public sent 44 letters to the BLM, of which 30 percent comprised an identical form letter, originally distributed via electronic mail. A review of all comments indicated that most addressed activities conducted on the Groom Lake portion of the NAFR, rather than issues relating to the proposed withdrawal (see Appendix C).

Since the proposed action did not comply with the current land use plan, the Caliente MFP, a determination was made by BLM that a land use plan amendment was required. A Federal Register Notice was published concerning the Proposed Action and amendment to the Caliente MFP and the Nellis RP. The "Notice of Intent and Scoping Period" was initially published in the Federal Register on June 22, 1994 and was extended by Federal Register notice on July 21, 1994 through August 26, 1994. A 30-day public scoping period for the plan amendment was provided. Comments from the public scoping period either requested additional information, or reiterated comments raised during the public meetings and/or letters received prior to the scoping period.

The Air Force and the BLM have also met with state and local officials at several hearings to discuss the proposed action and have corresponded on specific topics. Specific organizations that the BLM and the Air Force have consulted with include the Nevada Congressional Delegation; the Nevada Legislative Committee on Public Lands; the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; the Lincoln County Commissioners; the Mayor of Caliente; recognized Native American tribal groups and Native American interest organizations. Members of recognized Native American tribal groups were invited to participate in a tour of the proposed White Sides withdrawal area on March 12, 1994 and provide comments and concerns relating to the proposal. No concerns were provided to the BLM from the recognized Native American tribal groups.

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7.0 LIST OF PREPARERS/REVIEWERS

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Gilbert F. Cochran, a Research Professor with the Desert Research Institute (DRI) has B.S. and M.S. degrees in Civil Engineering and a Ph.D. in Hydrology. He has over 25 years experience in studies and management related to environmental concerns ranging from strictly hydrological investigations to preparation of major Environmental Impact Statements. Dr. Cochran was responsible for hydrologic and water resource aspects of this EA, overall coordination of the EA effort, and final editing and assembly of this EA. DRI is a Division of the University and Community College System of Nevada.

Harold Drollinger, an Archeological Research Assistant with DRI's Quaternary Sciences Center, holds an M.A. in anthropology and has over 12 years experience in archaeological and environmental studies. Mr. Drollinger worked on the cultural/historical resources survey and relevant portions of the EA.

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8.0 FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed the Proposed White Sides Land Withdrawal Amendment and Environmental Assessment. Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in this document, I have determined that the impacts are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.



Ann J. Morgan
State Director, Nevada

November 2, 1994
Date

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APPENDIX A.

**Legal description of land in the White Sides
area proposed for withdrawal.**

Legal description of land in the White Sides area proposed for withdrawal.

1. Township 6 S., Range 56 E., unsurveyed
Sections 25 and 36.
2. Township 7 S., Range 56 E., unsurveyed
Section 1
Section 13, W1/2
Section 24, NW1/4.
3. Township 6 S., Range 57 E.,
Section 30, lots 1 through 4, E1/2 W1/2
Section 31, lots 1 through 4, E1/2 W1/2 E1/2.
4. Township 7 S., Range 57 E.,
Section 6, lots 1 through 7, S1/2 NE1/4, SE1/2 NW1/4, E1/2 SW1/4, SE1/4

APPENDIX B.

Laws and Regulatory Issues Relevant to Land Withdrawal

Engle Act Considerations--

Passage of the Engle Act of 1958 (PL 85-337) clarified the responsibility for defense related land withdrawals between the Federal Government's Executive Branch and Congress. The Engle Act requires Congressional action for Department of Defense (DOD) withdrawals, or aggregation of withdrawals, that exceed 2,024 ha (5,000 acres). The Executive Branch can withdraw land parcels that are less than 2,024 ha (5,000 acres) by issuing Public Land Orders. This is the first withdrawal action for the NAFR since Congressional action in 1988. Since it is less than 2024 ha (5000 acres), Executive Branch withdrawal action by Public Land Order is the appropriate method.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 Considerations--

The FLPMA established procedures for public land withdrawals executed by the Secretary of the Interior. This act also established a segregative period of up to two years, to allow the Secretary of the Interior time to evaluate and process applications for land withdrawal. Land withdrawals of 2024 ha (5,000 acres) or more can occur for a period of 20 years, and require the notification of both Houses of Congress on or before the withdrawals effective date. Each House has up to 90 days to terminate and render ineffective the withdrawal if such House does not approve the withdrawal. No Congressional action is required for withdrawals of less than 2,024 ha (5,000 acres). The time limits for the withdrawal is up to 20 years for the type of withdrawal proposed here. The proposed withdrawal is for eight (8) years.

National Environmental Policy Act Considerations--

BLM regulations implementing FLPMA require an environmental assessment, an environmental impact statement or any other documents as are needed to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 USC 4332) and the regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500).

NEPA (PL 91-190), as amended, only requires an environmental impact statement if the Proposed Action is a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. An environmental assessment is used when it is clear no EIS is required or when it is unclear if an EIS may be required.

An environmental impact statement was prepared for the withdrawal of the Groom Range Addition to the NAFR. That withdrawal was to provide a safety and security buffer for activities on the Nellis Range. The proposed withdrawal is adjacent to the Groom Range Addition and will be used for the same purposes, a safety and security buffer for activities on the NAFR. An environmental assessment is the appropriate mechanism to address this much smaller withdrawal, as the same purposes and issues raised in the EIS process are present here.

The documentation must contain a clear explanation of the proposed use(s) of the land; an evaluation of the natural resources present in the proposed withdrawal area; a description of possible alternative actions; and consultation with other Federal, State, and local agencies and the public concerning the proposed withdrawal.

APPENDIX C

Classification of Public Comments and Agency Responses

Classification of comments received during the two public meetings, and in letters following publication of the White Sides withdrawal in the Federal Register^a.

	Comment Category	Number
1.	The Air Force's stated reason for the withdrawal, the "safe and secure operation of the Nellis Air Force Range" is vague and or not the truth.	47 ^b
2.	The proposed withdrawal should not occur because the two public vantage points provide the American public their only means for public oversight against alleged environmental violations, and or the wasteful use of taxpayers' money.	39 ^b
3.	Requests for a second public meeting in a convenient large city.	33 ^b
4.	This group questions Federal ownership and title to the land covered by the proposed withdrawal. They believe the State of Nevada or the Shoshone Nation own the land, and that the Federal government and the BLM have no jurisdiction.	10
5.	The BLM should or must consider the proposed withdrawal as a supplement to the original Groom Range Withdrawal. The BLM should require the Air Force to prepare an EIS and/or follow guidelines in the National Environmental Policy Act.	9
6.	Comments that support the withdrawal:	9
	a. but, prefer attached conditions;	
	1. believe the Air Force should state they will withdraw no more land near Groom Lake.	
	2. off-site mitigation for wildlife.	(1)
	3. other DOD lands should be returned(to the BLM or the State of Nevada).	(4)
	b. unconditionally	(1)
		(3)
7.	The Air Force should not expand its land acquisitions during a peaceful period; when budgets are declining, and the Cold War is over.	8
8.	The proposed withdrawal is less than 5,000 acres because: the Air Force wants to stay under the 5,000 acre limit that invokes the Engle Act, and requires Congressional involvement; and 2) the Air Force will return with additional requests for land withdrawals under 5,000 acres and will piecemeal a "large land withdrawal", while avoiding Congressional involvement.	8
9.	The BLM should deny the withdrawal because: 1) other more distant viewpoints (on public land) look into that portion of the NAFR; 2) satellite imagery or aerial photography can be purchased from foreign governments; or 3) the Open Skies Treaty will permit foreign nations to photograph the area.	6
10.	Statements that explicitly oppose the proposed withdrawal, but do not address reasons specific to the withdrawal itself.	6
11.	Concerned that not all of the agreed upon mitigation for the original Groom Range withdrawal was implemented.	6

12.	The Air Force should prove that activities scheduled for the Groom Range portion of the NAFR cannot occur on other land controlled by the Air Force.	5
13.	The Air Force must consider the proposed withdrawal in the context of past withdrawals, and/or develop mitigation measures. Such measures should include jobs and procurement programs, public information and involvement programs, cooperating with the local governments, and purchase of power from Lincoln County Power District.	6
14.	Requests for confirmation that UFO's or other extra-terrestrial equipment are, or are not housed near Groom Lake.	3
15.	Question the right of the Air Force to place motion sensors on public land, and or the methods used to patrol the perimeter of the NAFR.	3
16.	Request for a site visit by the Shoshone Nation.	1
17.	Concern that cattlemen and miners will be denied access to the withdrawn lands.	1
18.	Oppose the second meeting in Las Vegas because any and all impacts will occur in Lincoln County; therefore, all meetings should occur in Lincoln County.	1

^aDuring the two public hearings and in response to publication of the proposed withdrawal in the Federal Register the BLM received comments from slightly fewer than 90 individuals. Total comments are more than 90 because some individuals had multiple concerns.

^bIncludes 25 identical responses from a form letter circulated via electronic mail.

Air Force and BLM responses to public comments at two meetings, and from letters following publication of the White Sides withdrawal in the Federal Register.

1. The Air Force has stated the reason for the proposed withdrawal is "... to enhance the public safety and the safe and secure operation of activities in the Nellis Range Complex." Further explanation was provided at the public meetings and is provided in this proposed plan amendment/environmental assessment document.

2. This is not within the scope of the withdrawal. Visual access will not accomplish public oversight. Government oversight is available through numerous mechanisms, including checks and balances within the executive branch, elected congressional officials, and the courts.

3. The request for a second public meeting was granted. The meeting occurred in Las Vegas on March 2, 1994.

4. The courts have ruled that public lands belong to the Federal Government, not the counties, states, or Indian Nations.

5. The BLM and the Air Force have followed Federal law and NEPA guidelines and prepared an environmental assessment for the land withdrawal. The size of the project and its potential impacts on the human environment dictate that preparation of an EA rather than an Environmental Impact Statement is the appropriate NEPA documentation. Congressional action is not required for withdrawals less than 2,024 ha (5,000 acres). (See Appendix B)

6. There are no plans to withdraw additional land adjacent to or near the Groom Range.

Off-site mitigation for wildlife is inappropriate because the land withdrawal will not adversely effect wildlife populations. Use of the proposed withdrawal area for hunting has been minimal because the area is low quality habitat for game species. Off-site compensation equal to the habitat value lost because of the withdrawal would not increase any population sufficient to permit additional hunting or non-consumptive opportunities.

Department of Defense lands are returned to the public when they are not necessary for defense purposes. The base realignment and closure actions (BRAC) during the last several years has identified vast amounts of DOD land for return to the public, or other government use. Another BRAC study is just beginning. The NAFR has not been identified for reduction or closure.

7. Department-wide the Air Force is not increasing its land holdings. Numerous installations are closing and will be returned to other governmental use, or use by the U. S. public, or the communities in which they occur. The addition of 1,607 ha (3,972 ac) to the NAFR will be more than offset by ongoing facility closures.

8. The Air Force proposed a withdrawal of less than 2,024 ha (5,000 acres) because that is all the land the Air Force requires to meet safety and security objectives.

Piecemealing is not a practical solution for the Air Force. (See Appendix B)

9. This is not within the scope of the proposed withdrawal action. The Air Force has determined the extent of their security needs.

Although satellite imagery and/or aerial photography exist of the NAFR, it is illegal to acquire or use for other than official governmental purposes.

The open-skies treaty like all Federal laws will be complied with.

10. Objections that do not state a reason cannot be addressed.

11. The Air Force completed all promised mitigation actions for the 1988 Groom Range withdrawal. The county road from Rachel to the Test Site has been improved to Type II status. Mitigation for wildlife occurred. Money was provided to the Nevada Department of Wildlife for the development of about one half-dozen waterers for big horn sheep, and thirty to forty guzzlers for chukar and quail. Areas on Stonewall Mountain have been opened to hunting for

big horn sheep. The BLM and the Air Force developed a resource management plan for the NAFR, including the Groom Range.

12. Mission realignment within the DOD is a continuous process. To date, use of this area of the NAFR is still required.

13. The Air Force has followed all environmental requirements according to the National Environmental Policy Act. The EA looked at the environmental impacts of the withdrawal and determined that withdrawal of an additional 1,607 ha (3,972 acres) of public land would not have a significant impact. Because the Proposed Action will not have a significant impact on any natural resource, or the human environment, mitigation is not necessary.

The Air Force completed all agreed to mitigation measures related to the Groom Range withdrawal. Further, the Air Force has a public information program that is managed by the Public Affairs Office. Procurement and jobs are handled in accordance with federal laws and DoD and Air Force regulations. Power is acquired through procurement laws and regulations and through local generation. The Air Force does work cooperatively with local governments and has met on several occasions with community leaders. It is not expected that this withdrawal will increase jobs, procurement, or power needs.

14. This is beyond the scope of the proposed withdrawal.

15. This is beyond the scope of the proposed withdrawal. Sensors and patrols are in compliance with laws and regulations.

16. The Western Shoshone were offered the opportunity for a site visit in January 1994. No representatives from the Western Shoshone Nation showed for the visit. Several efforts were made to consult with the Western Shoshone.

17. D-4 Enterprises grazes livestock on the proposed withdrawal and will continue to have access to the area if the withdrawal is granted. The permittee has not stated any objections to the proposed withdrawal. Mining will be denied.

18. The Las Vegas meeting was held on March 2, 1994. Use of Public lands is not limited to county residents. Public meetings were held within both the county affected, and outside the county to provide the entire public an opportunity to comment.

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