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# IDAHO WILDERNESS STUDY REPORT



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*Idaho*  
Wilderness Study Report



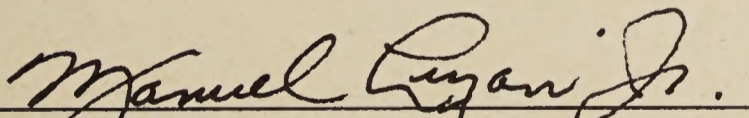


THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON

## RECORD OF DECISION

The following are the wilderness recommendations for 67 wilderness study areas (WSAs) in the State of Idaho. These recommendations were developed from the findings of a 15-year wilderness study process by the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management. The wilderness studies considered each area's resource values, present and projected future uses of the areas, public input, the manageability of the areas as wilderness, the environmental consequences of designating or not designating the areas as wilderness, and mineral surveys prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines.

Based on our review of those studies, I have concluded that 972,239 acres within 27 study areas should be designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System and that 825,217 acres within 57 study areas should be released from wilderness study for uses other than wilderness. The acreage recommendations for each WSA, with which I concur, are listed in the following table. The Wilderness Study Report accompanying this decision includes a detailed discussion of the recommendations and maps showing the boundaries of each area.

  
Secretary of the Interior

AUG 19 1991

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**IDAHO WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS**

WSA NAME	STUDY	WSA NUMBER	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDER- NESS (ACRES)	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWIL- DERNESS (ACRES)
OWYHEE RIVER CANYON	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-48B/ OR-3-195	35,620	0
LITTLE OWYHEE RIVER	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-48C	8,650	16,140
OWYHEE RIVER- DEEP CREEK	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-49A	70,090	4,250
YATAHONEY CREEK	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-49D	9,550	440
BATTLE CREEK	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-49E (ID-111-49E)	32,520	80
JUNIPER CREEK	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-52	12,950	200
SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER	OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	ID-16-53/ NV-010-103A	44,955	0
NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER	OWYHEE AMENDMENT	ID-16-40	41,025	9,840
BIG WILLOW SPRING	OWYHEE AMENDMENT	ID-16-41	0	6,210
SQUAW CREEK CANYON	OWYHEE AMENDMENT	ID-16-42	0	10,780
MIDDLE FORK OWYHEE RIVER	OWYHEE AMENDMENT	ID-16-45	0	14,820
WEST FORK RED CREEK	OWYHEE AMENDMENT	ID-16-47	0	12,970
LITTLE JACKS CREEK	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-6	34,000	25,070
DUNCAN CREEK	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-7B	8,760	1,245
BIG JACKS CREEK	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-7C	44,525	10,308

WSA NAME	STUDY	WSA NUMBER	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDER- NESS (ACRES)	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWIL- DERNESS (ACRES)
POLE CREEK	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-18	0	24,509
SHEEP CREEK WEST	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-36A	11,680	0
SHEEP CREEK EAST	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-36B	0	5,050
UPPER DEEP CREEK	JACKS CREEK	ID-111-44	0	11,510
BRUNEAU RIVER- SHEEP CREEK	JARBIDGE	ID-111-17	20,800	83,606
JARBIDGE RIVER	JARBIDGE	ID-17-11	16,740	58,378
KING HILL	JARBIDGE	ID-19-2	0	29,309
CEDAR BUTTE	EASTERN IDAHO	ID-33-4	0	35,700
BLACK CANYON	EASTERN IDAHO	ID-32-9	0	5,400
HELL'S HALF ACRE	EASTERN IDAHO	ID-33-15	66,200	0
HAWLEY MOUNTAIN	EASTERN IDAHO	ID-32-3	0	15,510
PETTICOAT PEAK	EASTERN IDAHO	ID-28-1	0	11,298
SAND MOUNTAIN	MEDICINE LODGE	ID-35-3	0	21,100
SNAKE RIVER ISLANDS	MEDICINE LODGE	ID-34-2	0	770
BURNT CREEK	BIG LOST/ PAHSIMEROI	ID-45-12	8,300	16,680
APPENDICITIS HILL	BIG LOST/ PAHSIMEROI	ID-31-14	0	21,900
WHITE KNOB HILL	BIG LOST/ PAHSIMEROI	ID-31-17	0	9,950



WSA NAME	STUDY	WSA NUMBER	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS (ACRES)	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS (ACRES)
CORRAL HORSE BASIN	CHALLIS	ID-46-11	0	48,500
JERRY PEAK	CHALLIS	ID-46-14	26,750	19,400
JERRY PEAK WEST	CHALLIS	ID-46-14A	0	13,530
EIGHTEEN MILE	LEMHI	ID-43-3	14,796	10,126
FRIEDMAN CREEK	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-53-5	0	9,773
BLACK CANYON	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-54-6	0	10,371
CITY OF ROCKS EAST	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-54-8A	13,063	1,680
CITY OF ROCKS WEST	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-54-8B	6,287	0
DEER CREEK	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-54-10	0	7,487
LAVA	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-56-2	0	23,680
LITTLE CITY OF ROCKS	SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	ID-54-5	0	5,875
SHALE BUTTE	MONUMENT	ID-57-2	0	15,968
SAND BUTTE	MONUMENT	ID-57-8	22,543	0
RAVEN'S EYE	MONUMENT	ID-57-10	67,110	0
LITTLE DEER	MONUMENT	ID-57-11	0	33,531
BEAR DEN BUTTE	MONUMENT	ID-57-14	0	9,700
SHOSHONE	MONUMENT	ID-59-7	0	6,914
SELKIRK CREST	NORTH IDAHO	ID-61-1	0	720

WSA NAME	STUDY	WSA NUMBER	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS (ACRES)	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS (ACRES)
CRYSTAL LAKE	NORTH IDAHO	ID-61-10	0	9,027
GRANDMOTHER MOUNTAIN	NORTH IDAHO	ID-61-15A	0	17,129
SNOWHOLE RAPIDS	NORTH IDAHO	ID-62-1	0	5,068
MARSHALL MOUNTAIN	NORTH IDAHO	ID-62-10	0	5,804
BOX CREEK	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-110-91A	0	440
LOWER SALMON FALLS	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-17-10	0	3,500
HENRY'S LAKE	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-35-77	340	10
WORM CREEK	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-37-77	40	0
GOLDBURG	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-45-1	0	3,290
BOULDER CREEK	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-46-13	0	1,930
BORAH PEAK	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-47-4	3,880	0
LITTLE WOOD RIVER	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-53-4	4,265	0
BLACK BUTTE	SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	ID-54-2	0	4,068
LOOKOUT BUTTE	OREGON STUDY	ID-16-48A\ OR-3-194	0	34,400

WSA NAME	STUDY	WSA NUMBER	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS (ACRES)	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS (ACRES)
GREAT RIFT	GREAT RIFT	ID-ISA	346,800	33,400
BIRDS OF PREY	GREAT RIFT	ID-ISA	0	26,713
CHINA CUP	GREAT RIFT	ID-ISA	0	160
TOTALS			972,239	825,217

TOTAL IN IDAHO -- 1,797,456







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U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

# IDAHO STATEWIDE WILDERNESS STUDY REPORT OVERVIEW





## SUMMARY

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) mandated the Secretary of Interior to report to the President on the wilderness suitability of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by October 21, 1991.

This report is the result of a comprehensive study of public lands in Idaho by the Bureau of Land Management regarding the suitability of these lands for wilderness designation.

The wilderness review process began with an inventory of all 11.9 million acres of public lands in Idaho. That review identified approximately 1.8 million acres in 67 study areas and resulted in the preparation of 14 Wilderness Environmental Impact Statements. Thousands of public comments were evaluated.

Congress required completion of mineral evaluation by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines on all areas recommended for wilderness. Twenty-seven reports were prepared. Two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), South Fork Owyhee River and Owyhee Canyon, included public lands in Idaho and Nevada. The Owyhee River Canyon WSA includes lands in Idaho and Oregon. While the recommendation and rationale for these WSAs are included in this report, only the acreage in Idaho is included in the Record of Decision. The remaining acreage will be included in the Nevada and Oregon Records of Decision.

The Oregon State Office studied the Lookout Butte WSA which is partially located in Idaho. The analysis for the entire WSA is included in this report, but only the Idaho acreage is included in the Record of Decision.

The recommendation is for Congress to designate 972,239 acres as wilderness and release 825,217 acres for other multiple uses. This recommendation would establish 27 new units of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and expand Idaho wilderness to include a wider variety of landforms, ecosystems, and other natural features. These recommendations will improve the geographic distribution of wilderness areas and complement existing federal wilderness. At the same time, this recommendation will release all or part of 57 areas having potential for motorized recreation, utility corridors, mineral development and other public uses.

The lands not recommended for wilderness also generally have lower quality wilderness values which would not enhance the NWPS. Management of nonwilderness areas will be consistent with multiple use objectives as prescribed in land-use plans.

Many reviewers commented on the 14 Wilderness Environmental Impact Statements prepared in Idaho. Comments were received from national and state environmental organizations, state and local governments, Indian Tribes, industry groups, sportsmen, ranchers and a host of other interested parties.

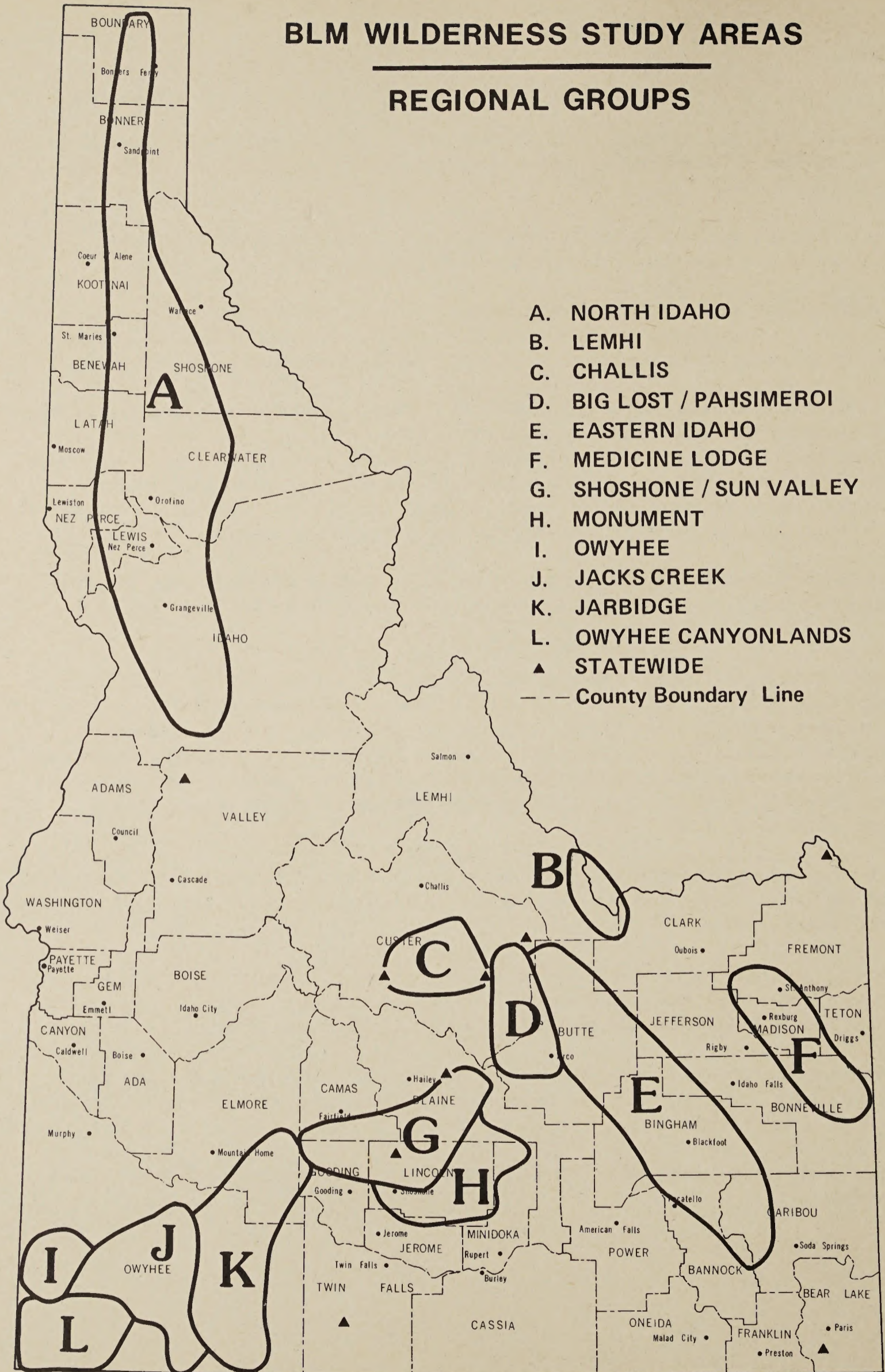
It is not surprising, however, that concerned groups and individuals are sharply divided over how much wilderness is needed in Idaho, which areas are appropriate for designation, and if wilderness is indeed the proper means to protect natural values or open space.

The rationale for the recommendations and specific discussion of wilderness values are found in each area's site-specific analysis.

# MAP 1

## BLM WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

### REGIONAL GROUPS



## WILDERNESS STUDY PROCESS

BLM began the wilderness review in accordance with the requirements of Section 603(c) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) dated October 21, 1976. This Act mandated that within 15 years BLM would inventory and study its lands for wilderness suitability, and that based on this review, the Secretary of Interior would forward his wilderness recommendations to the President.

Minimum standards for the evaluation of BLM-administered lands in Idaho were set by Congress in Section 2(c) of The Wilderness Act of 1964. These standards require an area to generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; have outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; have at least 5,000 acres of land or be of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historic value. In addition, each WSA was further evaluated to compare the area's overall wilderness quality with its multiple use value for other purposes, such as mining, grazing or timber harvest. Guidelines were provided by the BLM wilderness study process (Federal Register, February 3, 1982). A summary of the findings for each WSA can be found in the site-specific analysis for each WSA.

Idaho's approach was to recommend wilderness designation for the WSAs where the overall wilderness quality is high and represents the best examples of ecosystems, landforms or land offering special geological or scientific values within the state. These areas warrant permanent protection and inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

BLM did not recommend wilderness for those WSAs which duplicate features common in the NWPS, or were of relatively low wilderness quality when compared to their values for other multiple uses, or where wilderness qualities are better represented by other WSAs in Idaho.

A summary of the major factors evaluated for each WSA follows:

### A) Wilderness Qualities

The specific wilderness attributes of each WSA were evaluated to determine that area's overall wilderness qualities. These attributes include:

#### • Naturalness

"Naturalness" refers to the concept that a wilderness area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable.

During the intensive inventory and study phase certain WSAs were identified that contained impacts to naturalness such as old mine scars, fences, wells, pipelines, etc., which reduced the overall wilderness quality of the WSA.

#### • Size

The size of a particular WSA affects the wilderness recommendation. Larger wilderness areas generally provide greater capability to absorb impacts of outside sights and sounds. They often contain more diverse natural features, and offer greater opportunities for

solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. In Idaho, BLM has recommended areas as suitable that are less than 5,000 acres in size but are adjacent to lands in excess of 300,000 acres which are already recommended as suitable by other managing agencies.

❖ Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfirmed recreation.

These attributes are defined as "the state of being alone or remote from habitation or a secluded place" and a primitive and unconfined recreation experience as "activities that provide dispersed, undeveloped recreation which does not require facilities or motorized equipment." In certain Idaho WSAs solitude or primitive recreational values are superior to other WSAs. Those areas with outstanding opportunities were recommended as suitable.

❖ Special Features

While not legally required, wilderness attributes or certain supplemental values enhanced an area's overall wilderness qualities. Examples might include unique geologic structures, important cultural or historic features or habitat of threatened or endangered species of plants or animals.

A WSA possessing special features was more likely to be recommended for wilderness than a WSA without such features.

## B) Additional Wilderness Quality Factors

Where wilderness values approximated other multiple use values, it was necessary to consider additional factors in formulating the Bureau's recommendations. These additional factors are:

❖ Multiple Resource Benefits

Some management practices are constrained by wilderness designation including use of mechanical means to bring about needed improvement to resources. In such cases wilderness may not be the best alternative to protecting those areas. Alternatives such as ACEC designation or other administrative controls may be the preferred alternative.

❖ Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The question of how much wilderness is needed is a hotly debated issue in Idaho. The Bureau's recommendations for wilderness provides a balanced approach to that question by complementing existing designated wilderness in Idaho, while providing wilderness acreage of ecotypes not presently found in this region.

Each individual WSR outlines this balance.

❖ Diversity of Natural Systems

The Bureau has been selective in identifying the best examples of landforms and desert ecosystems for inclusion in the NWPS.

Common or ordinary features were not chosen if better examples could be found elsewhere.



Many thousands of acres within WSAs are indistinguishable from public lands outside the boundaries of WSAs except they are roadless. Simple repetition of a landform or an ecosystem already recommended suitable does not add to the diversity of a natural system.

#### ▣ Manageability

Manageability considerations such as private or state inholdings, valid and existing rights, lack of boundary identification and existing access were evaluated in the study process to determine how effectively an area could be managed.

Each individual WSR describes the manageability considerations involved.

The following is a tabular display of the 14 wilderness EISs and study acres in Idaho.

## IDAHO WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS BY EIS

EIS NAME	TOTAL ACRES	SUITABLE ACRES	NONSUITABLE ACRES
OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	235,445	214,335	21,110
OWYHEE AMENDMENT	95,645	41,025	54,620
JACKS CREEK	176,657	98,965	77,692
JARBIDGE	208,833	37,540	171,293
EASTERN IDAHO	134,108	66,200	67,908
MEDICINE LODGE	21,870	0	21,870
BIG LOST/PAHSIMEROI	56,830	8,300	48,530
CHALLIS	108,180	26,750	81,430
LEMHI	24,922	14,796	10,126
SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	78,216	19,350	58,866
NORTH IDAHO	37,748	0	37,748
MONUMENT	155,766	89,653	66,113
GREAT RIFT	407,073	346,800	60,273
SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	21,763	8,525	13,238
LOOKOUT BUTTE*	34,400	0	34,400
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,797,456</b>	<b>972,239</b>	<b>825,217</b>

\* Studied under an Oregon EIS.

## OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION RELATING TO IDAHO'S STUDY

### A) INSTANT STUDY AREAS

There are three Instant Study Areas (ISAs) in Idaho. These areas were designated as natural or primitive areas prior to November 1, 1976, and automatically qualified as wilderness study areas with the passage of FLPMA.

The three ISAs were studied for their suitability in advance of the WSAs in Idaho. Recommendations on these three areas were submitted to Congress in 1985 as part of an omnibus ISA Bill.

The 26,713 acre Birds of Prey ISA and the 160 acre China Cup ISA were not recommended for wilderness designation. The 380,200 acre Great Rift ISA was partially recommended for wilderness designation with 33,400 acres being recommended for other uses. Since 1985, 24,350 acres of state and private inholdings within the portion recommended for wilderness have been acquired by BLM. These lands possess the same high quality wilderness values as the lands previously recommended for wilderness and are recommended for designation. The addition of these acquired lands has resulted in 346,800 acres being recommended for wilderness.

There has been no action in Congress on the omnibus ISA Bill since its introduction in 1985. Therefore, Idaho has included the recommendations for the three ISAs as part of this statewide wilderness package.

The following is a tabular display of Idaho's three ISAs:

ISA NAME	SUITABLE ACRES	NONSUITABLE ACRES	TOTAL ACRES	STATUS
Great Rift	346,800	33,400	380,200	Original submitted to Congress May 1985
Birds of Prey	0	26,713	26,713	Original submitted to Congress May 1985
China Cup	0	160	160	Original submitted to Congress May 1985

### B) SECTION 202 WILDERNESS STUDIES

This report includes a category of wilderness study areas that have wilderness characteristics only when combined with the contiguous lands of another agency. The BLM lands were selected for wilderness study under the authority of Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and are identified in this report as "Section 202 WSAs." Ten Section 202 areas were identified during the Idaho wilderness inventory.

Generally, the Section 202 WSAs are studied using the same criteria as established for Section 603 WSAs. The value of each area as wilderness was compared with other multiple-use values of those areas.

Nine Section 202 areas were studied in Idaho's Small Wilderness Study Area Final Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement. One Section 202 (Selkirk Crest) was addressed in the 1986 North Idaho proposed MFP Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Six of the Section 202 WSAs (including Selkirk Crest) are not recommended for wilderness designation. Four Section 202 WSAs are recommended for wilderness. These WSAs are contiguous to U.S. Forest Service designated or recommended suitable wilderness areas.

#### SECTION 202 WSAs IN IDAHO

<u>WSA NAME</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>	<u>PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE</u>
1. Box Creek	440	All 440 acres nonsuitable
2. Lower Salmon Falls Creek	3,500	All 3,500 acres nonsuitable
3. Henry's Lake	350	340 acres suitable/10 acres nonsuitable
4. Worm Creek	40	All 40 acres suitable
5. Goldburg	3,290	All 3,290 acres nonsuitable
6. Boulder Creek	1,930	All 1,930 acres nonsuitable
7. Borah Peak	3,880	All 3,880 acres suitable
8. Little Wood River	4,265	All 4,265 acres suitable
9. Black Butte	4,068	All 4,068 acres nonsuitable
10. Selkirk Crest	720	All 720 acres nonsuitable

#### C) MILITARY OVERFLIGHTS

Many WSAs in Idaho, particularly those in Southwestern Idaho are regularly overflowed by military aircraft during approved military operations. The Air Force and Idaho Air National Guard have identified the 22 WSAs addressed in the Jacks Creek, Jarbidge, Owyhee Canyonlands and Owyhee MFP and Wilderness EISs as critical to their plans of operations. These 22 WSAs underlie a significant portion of the Owyhee and Paradise Military Operation Area (MOA) and five military training routes (MTR). The MOA and MTR are not only used by the Air Force and Air National Guard in Idaho but are used by numerous Air Force, Navy and Marine Units from Nevada and California.

Last year approximately 365 training missions were scheduled in the MOAs and 3,548 missions were scheduled in the MTRs. The usage of the MTRs and the Paradise and Owyhee MOAs has steadily increased since their creation in 1975.

With the closure of George Air Force Base in California and the subsequent possible relocation of 94 F-4 Aircraft to Idaho, the projected use within Idaho is estimated to double. The Air Force is preparing an EIS for the Saylor Creek bombing range expansion. In the EIS, the impact of the proposed range expansion and associated increased flight activities on wilderness values will be analyzed. Target and ground disturbance areas would not be within WSAs; however, the action would result in increased low-level subsonic and higher level supersonic overflights.

BLM recognizes the importance of these military training operations for the national defense preparedness of this country but did not consider the impacts of the overflights as sufficient to warrant a nonsuitable recommendation for any of the WSAs within the designated flight operation areas.

**D) WATER SITUATION**

An issue of general concern is the effect of wilderness designation on existing and future water rights and uses. Many of the WSAs recommended for wilderness contain water-related values, including springs or impoundments which provide water for wildlife, and possibly human use. A small number of the WSAs recommended for wilderness have stream flows which, in addition to the uses already mentioned, support riparian vegetation, fish populations and may also provide water to downstream users.

A recent Interior Solicitor's opinion review by the Attorney General concludes that The Wilderness Act itself does not create federally reserved water rights. Only specific Congressional language on reserved water rights in the designation legislation can create reserved water rights for a wilderness area. BLM will file for appropriations for beneficial uses under Idaho State law.

**E) BURNT CREEK WSA**

The Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Final Wilderness EIS recommended no wilderness for the Burnt Creek WSA (24,980 acres). This recommendation was based on the preliminary information that the adjacent Rare II study area Borah Peak was going to be recommended nonsuitable and that management of the area for naturalness and solitude would be difficult and costly without a complementary recommendation on adjoining U.S. Forest Service lands. Subsequent to the release of the Big Lost/Pahsimeroi Final EIS, the U.S. Forest Service modified its recommendations to suitable for a 7.5 mile common border with BLM. That area now recommended suitable by the U.S. Forest Service is complementary to portions of adjoining BLM lands and led to BLM recommending 8,300 acres of the Burnt Creek WSA for wilderness designation. The remaining 16,680 acres are not recommended for wilderness due to their lower quality of naturalness and opportunities for solitude.

**F) NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA**

The recommendation for the North Fork Owyhee River WSA is to designate 41,665 acres as wilderness. The EIS identified a need for special legislative language by Congress to allow mechanical removal of individual juniper and the use of prescribed burning to maintain a natural sagebrush-bunchgrass ecosystem. The WSA has been invaded by cheatgrass, a non-native plant which increases fire severity and has limited forage value.

Reestablishment of fire is an important factor in maintaining a western juniper/sagebrush-bunchgrass ecosystem in this WSA. The treatment would occur on approximately ten percent (4,150 acres) of the wilderness area with less than one percent (400 acres) being treated in any given year. The treatment calls for 100 percent removal of young growth (less than 50 years) juniper for a period of 20 years by mechanical means. Thereafter, prescribed burning and natural fire would be used to maintain the desired balance between juniper and sagebrush-bunchgrass species.

## KEY ISSUES AND MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

Eighteen separate issues were identified during the wilderness study process ranging from site-specific concerns, such as the impact on hydroelectric development in the Box Creek and the Snake River Islands WSAs, to broader issues such as the impact of wilderness designation on recreational use of motor vehicles. Issues are analyzed in the 14 wilderness EISs and are discussed in the site-specific analysis for each WSA in Volumes I through IV of this report. The following five (5) key issues are of greatest concern in Idaho and appeared in almost all of the written documents and testimony received.

1. Wilderness Values: Idaho possesses a rich diversity of potential wilderness lands. Permanent preservation of wilderness values was a major issue in all wilderness studies. **CONCLUSION**: The lands with the best wilderness values would be protected through wilderness designation of 27 areas totaling 972,239 acres, meaning that 825,217 acres would be released for other uses. Much of the released lands would retain their existing natural values for the foreseeable future through administrative actions under existing laws and authorities. The site-specific analysis for each WSA identifies the areas where wilderness values could be foregone or lost because of other resource uses.
2. Recreation Motor Vehicle Use: The impact of wilderness designation on motorized recreation activities was addressed in 14 wilderness environmental studies. **CONCLUSION**: Recreational motor vehicle use would not be allowed within wilderness. Due to rough topography, only a very small portion of existing opportunities for recreational motor vehicle use on BLM-administered lands within Idaho occurs within areas recommended for wilderness designation. There is an abundance of public land outside of potential wilderness where such use is allowed. The individual site-specific analyses in this report identify any situation where motorized use would be significantly impacted.
3. Livestock Grazing: Livestock use and the development and maintenance of range projects and improvements was an issue identified in eight wilderness EISs. **CONCLUSION**: By law, grazing is permitted in wilderness and existing authorized levels of grazing would be maintained along with maintenance of existing range improvements. It is recognized, however, that increased grazing, the development of new projects and improvements, and the implementation of some livestock management techniques would be restricted within wilderness.
4. Wildlife Habitat: The protection of wildlife habitat was addressed in ten wilderness studies. **CONCLUSION**: Critical habitats for wildlife would be protected under wilderness designation. On released lands, administrative actions such as Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designations would, in some cases, provide protection of critical wildlife habitat. Vegetative treatments to improve wildlife habitat would be allowed on released lands. Specific impacts to wildlife habitat are addressed in the site-specific analyses included in this report.
5. Energy and Mineral Resources: The impact of wilderness designation on energy and/or mineral resource exploration and development was identified as an issue in nine of the 14 wilderness EISs. **CONCLUSION**: Wilderness designation would not significantly impact any areas known to contain mineral resources or rated as having high potential for mineral occurrence. The U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared mineral assessments of areas recommended for wilderness designation. These assessments are a part of Idaho's Statewide Wilderness Study Report and a summary of the findings of each assessment is found in the site-specific analysis for each WSA recommended in whole or in part for wilderness designation.

## MINERALS

Recognizing that raw materials are vital to our national economy and security, Congress directed that assessments of mineral potential be conducted prior to an area being designated wilderness. The assessments are required by both The Wilderness Act and in Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The assessment of Idaho's suitable recommendations was conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the Bureau of Mines and completed in 1989. The means of assessment were based on surface and underground geologic mapping and sampling, air borne geophysical survey and geochemical study.

The classification standards used by BLM reflect the potential that there may be undiscovered occurrences of mineralized rock in an area. These standards do not reflect whether a mineral commodity or deposit is economical to extract. It is difficult to predict the future demand for minerals. What may be economically feasible today might not be tomorrow, and vice versa. It is impossible to accurately predict future uses or future values of minerals in the wilderness suitability equation.

A detailed explanation of projected mineral occurrence is found in the 14 wilderness EIS statements and the U.S. Geological Survey or Bureau of Mines report which accompany this report and is summarized in the WSA site specific analysis.

## MINERAL REEVALUATION

During a public review period for U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Mineral Survey Reports for Wilderness Study Areas in Owyhee County, comments were submitted indicating that the areas were in a geologic environment similar to areas in southeastern Oregon where discoveries of disseminated precious metals deposits had been made subsequent to the studies conducted by the USGS. BLM managers felt the comments were significant and warranted follow-up consideration by the USGS. The WSAs in Owyhee County for which comments were received during this period included:

<u>WSA</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>GS BULLETIN NO.</u>
North Fork Owyhee River	ID-016-040	1719-A
Owyhee River Canyon	ID-016-048B	1719-D
Little Owyhee River	ID-016-048C	1719-C
Deep Creek-Owyhee River	ID-016-049A	1719-D
Yatahoney Creek	ID-016-049D	1719-B
Battle Creek	ID-016-049E	1719-B
Juniper Creek	ID-016-052	1719-B
South Fork Owyhee River	ID-016-053	1719-F
Jarbidge River	ID-017-011	1720-B
Bruneau River	ID-111-017	1720-B
Upper Deep Creek	ID-111-044	1719-G

The USGS completed a follow-up evaluation of these WSAs and issued Open-File Report 89-0531. Based on the results of its evaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential ratings from low potential to moderate potential for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in these WSAs.

While these changes in potential ratings were noteworthy, BLM did not feel that amendments or changes to the recommendations of the EIS prepared for these WSAs were warranted.



## SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Concerted effort was made by the Bureau to involve the public at each step in the wilderness study process. Workshops, public meetings and open houses were utilized to gain comments from the broadest public spectrum possible.

The Bureau's recommendations have been coordinated with other federal agencies, the state and local governments, and Indian Tribes. A 60-day comment period was provided for the governor.

Public input was received on all sides of the wilderness issue and focused both on site-specific concerns, as well as broader philosophical issues. Concerned individuals and groups were sharply divided over how much wilderness is needed in Idaho, which areas are appropriate for designation, and whether inclusion in the NWPS is the only available means to protect wild lands and open space.

The public was invited to participate throughout the wilderness study process in:

Public meetings on the initial inventory decisions. A total of 506 public responses were received during the comment period.

Open houses and public meetings on the Intensive Inventory Proposed Decision. Responses from individuals and a wide variety of organizations totaled 3,200.

Inventory-phase workshops to consider criteria and review preliminary maps.

Public review of Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statements (See enclosed table on wilderness Draft EIS Public Comment Summary).

A more site-specific/comment-specific analysis of public participation and comments is found in each individual WSA site-specific analysis.

## WILDERNESS DRAFT EIS PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

DEIS COMMENT STUDY NAME	DEIS COMMENT PERIOD	TOTAL DEIS COMMENTS	DATE FEIS RELEASED
Big Lost Pahsimeroi	08/26-10/27/83	17	09/26/1986
Challis	08-08/02/82	37	09/26/1986
Eastern Idaho	03/29-07/01/83	70	10/03/1986
Great Rift	03/15-05/15/79	92	06/06/1980
Jacks Creek	07/27-10/02/84	151	07/14/1989
Jarbidge	11/09-81	189	10/02/1987
Lemhi	10/85-01/13/84	197	12/18/1987
Medicine Lodge	09/84-12/27/84	50	12/18/1987
Monument	05/11-08/09/84	20	07/17/1987
North Idaho	06/18-08/30/82	111	09/26/1986
Owyhee	05/28-08/09/1982	99	11/21/1986
Owyhee Canyonlands	02/24-05/31/84	508	10/20/1989
Shoshone/Sun Valley	10/26-01/11/83	79	04/11/1986
Small Wilderness	01/20-04/28/88	43	09/15/1989

# SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC WSA RECOMMENDATIONS

## OWYHEE WILDERNESS



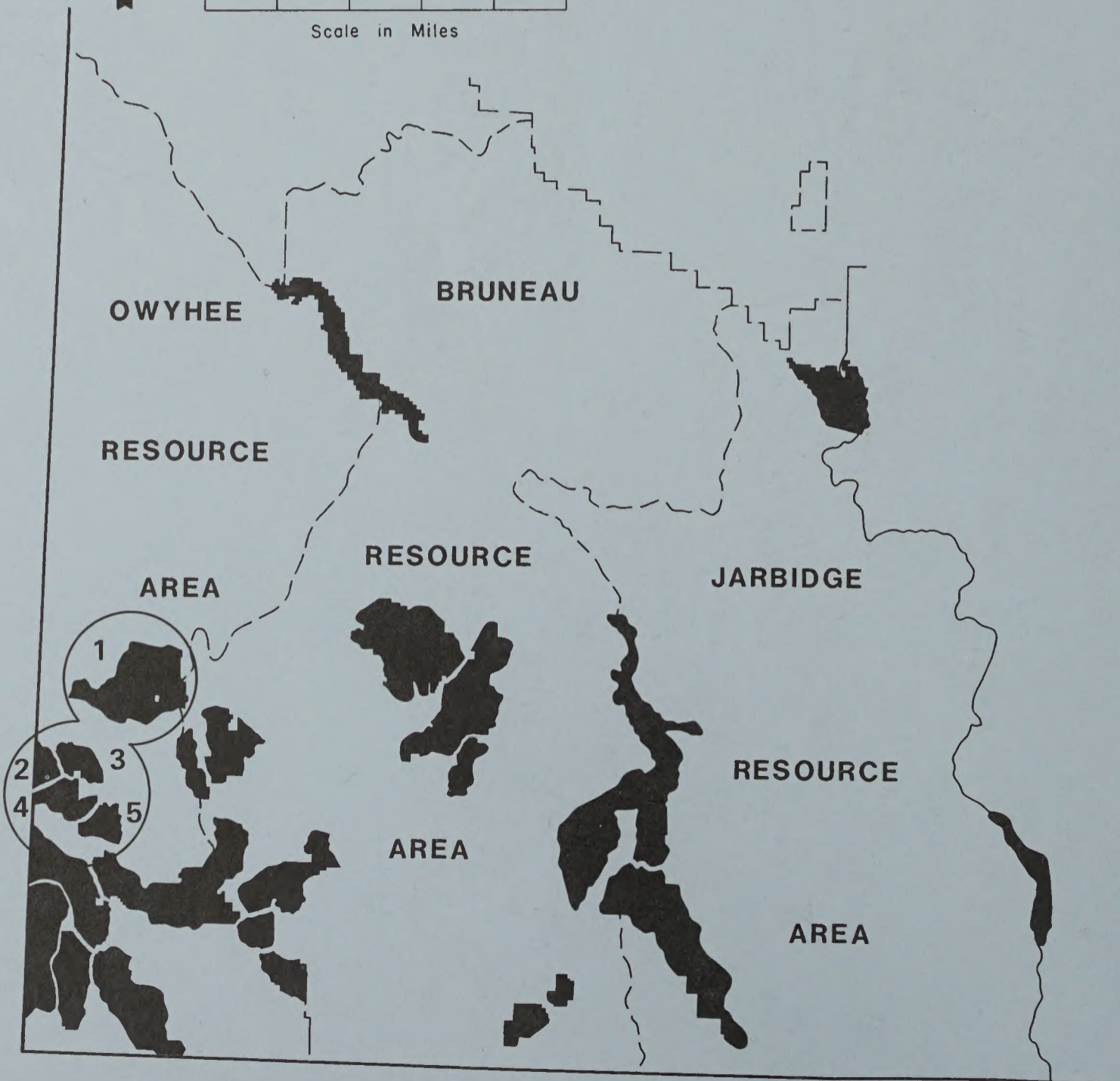
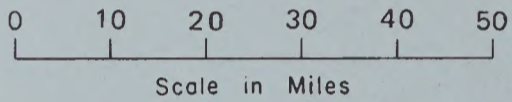
# OWYHEE WILDERNESS

## LEGEND

- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- - - RESOURCE AREA BOUNDARY
- WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

## OWYHEE

1. North Fork Owyhee River
2. Big Willow Spring
3. Squaw Creek Canyon
4. Middle Fork Owyhee River
5. West Fork Red Canyon



# North Fork Owyhee River Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 50,750 acres

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-40) is located in Owyhee County 80 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 50,750 acres of BLM lands and one state-owned 640 acre inholding (see Table 1).

The study acreage includes 1,280 acres acquired from the State of Idaho after the designation of the area as a WSA. Seventy-five percent of the WSA is bounded by primitive dirt roads with the remainder bounded by nonfederal lands. Seven cherry-stem roads totaling 11 miles enter the WSA. The WSA lies in juniper-covered hill and canyon country with elevations ranging from 4,800 to 6,500 feet.

The WSA is divided into three major types of topographic/vegetation areas:

The main and tributary canyons of the North Fork Owyhee River and Current Creek. These canyons are typically narrow, meandering, sheer-walled and have well-vegetated riparian zones.

The very rugged hilly region occupying all of the northern and eastern portions of the WSA, the headwaters for both the North Fork Owyhee River and Current Creek. The region is typified by a mosaic of rugged, barren rock outcrop areas intermixed with light to dense stands of juniper.

The flat to gently rolling plateau region occupying most of the southern portion of the WSA. This plateau region is typified by sparse, low sagebrush and grass vegetation with scattered stands of juniper.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Four alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a partial wilderness alternative where 40,910 acres of BLM land in the WSA would be designated as wilderness and 9,840 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; a partial wilderness alternative where 47,315 acres of BLM land would be designated as wilderness and 3,435 acres released for nonwilderness uses; an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative.

Inholdings of 1,280 acres acquired from the State of Idaho after the completion of the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment EIS were included in the study process under authority granted in Section 202 of FLPMA, as were 115 acres of BLM land adjacent to the WSA.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**41,025 acres recommended for wilderness**

**9,840 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the North Fork Owyhee River WSA is to designate 41,025 acres as wilderness and release 9,840 acres for uses other than wilderness. The recommendation includes actions to control erosion and juniper encroachment into sagebrush-bunchgrass communities. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 41,025 acres of federal land recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the North Fork Owyhee River Proposal map. The 115 acres of federal land adjacent to the southwestern boundary of the WSA are included within the wilderness recommendation to enhance the area's manageability by providing a better wilderness boundary. This recommendation would further apply to additional inholding acreage if acquired through exchange with the state. Appendix I lists all nonfederal lands within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on acquisition of these lands.

The 41,025 acres recommended for wilderness designation include the area with the highest quality wilderness characteristics of the five WSAs addressed in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement. The area is the most scenic and includes the most topographic and vegetative features, including the longest canyon system of the five WSAs. The area would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System by the inclusion of a large climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. Wilderness designation would provide long-term protection to an exceptionally scenic area with outstanding wilderness values. The area is manageable as wilderness. Conflicts with other resources due to wilderness designation are minimal. Special nonconforming actions to control erosion and juniper encroachment would provide the flexibility to benefit all multiple resource values and uses while still designating the area as wilderness.

The management plan developed for the wilderness would include action to restore sagebrush-bunchgrass sites in areas where juniper has encroached and to stop erosion along creeks. Action would include the removal of young growth and intermediate-aged seral juniper on 4,150 acres, seeding of natural vegetation on 1,600 acres, and the implanting of juniper logs with limbs along 9.5 miles of creek. This would require using some mechanical equipment within the wilderness, primarily chain saws. These measures would control or eliminate erosion, improve the condition of riparian areas and provide for the better distribution of cattle.

The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological conditions to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. Continued livestock grazing would not allow natural vegetation patterns to exist. The WSA can receive benefits from vegetation manipulation without impacting the area's wilderness characteristics or interfering with establishing livestock grazing systems also needed to maintain good conditions.

The 9,840 acres not recommended for wilderness designation are identified as the shaded areas on Map 1. These areas are of lower wilderness value and are not recommended because of influences adjacent to the WSA which adversely affect opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The recommended wilderness boundary is along definable natural features.









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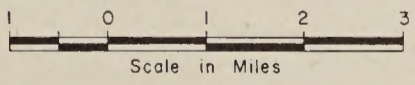
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|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-40  
NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER  
PROPOSAL**

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	50,750
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
 Total	 51,390

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	40,910
BLM (outside WSA)	115
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
 Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	 41,025
 Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	 640
 State land (outside WSA)	 0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	9,840
Split Estate	0
 Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	 9,840
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings and split estate tracts included within the area recommended for designation.



### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA consists of rugged juniper-covered hills and a flatter plateau dissected by numerous canyons. The North Fork Owyhee River WSA is predominantly natural. During the wilderness inventory, 10.5 miles of ways, 11 miles of cherry-stem roads, 24 miles of fence, two abandoned log cabins, ten stock reservoirs, one metal building/corral/spring complex, four developed springs and two abandoned corrals were identified in the WSA. These imprints adversely impact naturalness of five percent of the area. Subsequent to the inventory, six new livestock reservoirs were constructed and stream stabilization structures were installed under the Wilderness Interim Management Policy. Due to their small size, screening and the largeness of the area, the projects are substantially unnoticeable within the WSA. The influence of human imprints on the naturalness of the area perceived by the average visitor is negligible.

##### **B. Solitude**

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA contains outstanding opportunities for solitude due to its size and diversity of vegetation and landforms including deep, meandering canyons, rock outcrops, large tracts of climax juniper and expanses of rocky sagebrush plateaus.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA contains outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. The WSA's large size, exceptional scenic quality and diversity of landforms including 30 miles of deep canyons and large expanses of climax juniper forest and sagebrush plateaus attract recreationists interested in backpacking, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, photography and wildlife viewing.

##### **D. Special Features**

The WSA is of exceptional scenic quality because of its spectacular sheer-walled canyons and rock outcrops highlighted with gnarled juniper. Two sensitive wildlife species, the river otter and the redband trout, and one sensitive plant species, *Gymnosteris parvula*, are found in the WSA.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the North Fork Owyhee River WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The North Fork Owyhee River WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its ruggedness and dense juniper forests prevent easy access. The area is generally inaccessible to motor vehicles except along established cherry-stem roads and ways. These can be closed.

One hundred fifteen acres adjacent to the WSA were included in the wilderness recommendation to improve manageability. The additional public lands adjacent to the southwestern portion of the WSA include vegetation and an existing fence which provide a definable and protectable boundary.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and Bureau of Mines (BM) completed a mineral assessment for the North Fork Owyhee River WSA in 1986. The assessment found that the area has low resource potential for gold, silver, zinc and uranium. The potential for petroleum and natural gas and geothermal energy is unknown.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

There are no known mines, claims or prospects in or near the area. The northeast and southwest corners of the area recommended for wilderness are covered by oil and gas leases or lease applications but no known exploration has been conducted.

In the southern part of the area, thin flows of vesicular, moss-covered basalt occur that are suitable for use as decorative building stone. Suitable material outside the area is closer to potential markets. Sand and gravel deposits in the area could only supply local construction projects.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effect on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-40 (NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL WILDER- NESS ALTERNATIVE WITH SPECIAL STIPULATIONS)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL WILDER- NESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE																
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 5- to 20-year reduction in naturalness, primitive recreation and scenic quality on 4,150 acres of juniper treatment and on 9.5 miles of streambank. Slight improvement or enhancement of naturalness, solitude and primitive recreation opportunities. Primitive recreation use would increase to 140 user days per year by 2005.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> 5- to 20-year reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 6,000 acres of juniper treatment and .5 mile of streambank. Permanent loss of naturalness and opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude along 1 mile of new road. Improvement in overall scenic quality.</p>	Naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality reduced for 10 to 20 years on 10,350 acres of juniper treatment and for 10 years on 10 miles of streambank. Beyond 20 years, wilderness values would recover except in the northeast portion of the WSA where road construction would reduce naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Range projects would substantially reduce naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on the WSA's southern tableland. Primitive recreation use would reach 900 user days per year by 2005.	No significant change in naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation and in scenic quality. Primitive recreation use would increase to 170 user days per year by 2005.	Same as described for the Partial Wilderness Alternative.																
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 4,150 acres within the wilderness area and on 2,050 acres within the nonwilderness area. Juniper would continue to increase in dominance on untreated big sagebrush-grass sites. 20-year ecological condition:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>Poor</td> <td style="text-align: right;">33%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fair</td> <td style="text-align: right;">43%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td style="text-align: right;">20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4%</td> </tr> </table>	Poor	33%	Fair	43%	Good	20%	Excellent	4%	Juniper treatment on 10,150 acres would break up the large homogeneous juniper stands and allow the maintenance of sagebrush-grass communities. 20-year ecological condition:	Ecological condition would decrease on sagebrush-grass sites from juniper encroachment and increases in big sagebrush. 20-year ecological condition:	Same as Partial Wilderness Alternative.								
Poor	33%																			
Fair	43%																			
Good	20%																			
Excellent	4%																			
		<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>Poor</td> <td style="text-align: right;">24%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fair</td> <td style="text-align: right;">47%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td style="text-align: right;">23%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td style="text-align: right;">6%</td> </tr> </table>	Poor	24%	Fair	47%	Good	23%	Excellent	6%	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>Poor</td> <td style="text-align: right;">31%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fair</td> <td style="text-align: right;">45%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td style="text-align: right;">20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4%</td> </tr> </table>	Poor	31%	Fair	45%	Good	20%	Excellent	4%	
Poor	24%																			
Fair	47%																			
Good	23%																			
Excellent	6%																			
Poor	31%																			
Fair	45%																			
Good	20%																			
Excellent	4%																			

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE WITH SPECIAL STIPULATIONS)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities (North Fork Owyhee River WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Mule deer population increased by 70 animals and redband trout numbers increased by 150% on 10 miles of stream. Other wildlife populations unchanged.	Redband trout numbers increased by 150% on 10 miles of stream and distribution improved throughout upper North Fork drainage due to placement of fish ladder. Other wildlife populations unchanged.	Net wildlife populations would be unchanged. Redband trout numbers would be reduced by 10%.	Mule deer populations increased by 5-10 animals. Redband trout numbers decreased by 10%. Other wildlife populations unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Wilderness designation would largely prohibit scientific excavations which would reduce BLM's ability to assess and manage cultural resources.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Road building in non-wilderness areas would increase vandalism and theft while closure of the wilderness area to motorized vehicle access would reduce vandalism and theft. Streambank stabilization would halt or slow site deterioration.	Construction of roads, trails, bridges and campgrounds would increase vandalism and theft. Grazing increases in Indian Meadows Allotment would increase trampling damage. Streambank stabilization would halt or lessen site deterioration. No constraints would be placed on management and scientific excavations.	Closure of 21 miles of roads and ways would reduce vandalism and theft. Reduction in livestock use in Cliffs and Bughardt Allotments would reduce trampling damage. Wilderness designation would largely prohibit scientific excavations which would reduce BLM's ability to assess and manage cultural resources.	Closure of the area to motorized access and reducing livestock use would reduce damage to cultural sites. Scientific excavations would largely be prohibited which would reduce BLM's ability to assess and manage cultural resources.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Closure of 17.1 miles of roads and ways. Impacts not significant. Hunting use would be concentrated along vehicle routes remaining open. Some hunting and fishing transferred to non-wilderness areas.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual use increased to 400 user days by 2005.	No road and way closures. The development of recreation sites and trails and maintenance of existing roads would increase annual use to 900 user days by 2005.	Closure of 20.7 miles of roads and ways. Impacts not significant. Slight decrease in quality of hunting and fishing opportunities. Annual recreation use would increase to 370 user days by 2005.	Closure of 21.5 miles of roads and ways. Impacts not significant. Slight decrease in quality of hunting and fishing opportunities. Annual use would increase to 370 user days by 2005.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL WILDER- NESS ALTERNATIVE WITH SPECIAL STIPULATIONS)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL WILDER- NESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Soil Erosion (North Fork Owyhee River WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts slightly benefi- cial over 20 years. Re- duced soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on non- treated areas and .05-.01 tons/acre/year on treat- ed areas.	Same as Proposed Action.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Re- duction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year.	Same as Partial Wilderness Alternative.
Impacts on Operations and Facilities	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and day-to- day livestock manage- ment activities in wilder- ness area. 1 new spring and 1 mile of fence con- structed. Livestock use maintained at 3,935 AUMs.	Unrestricted use of mo- tor vehicles. 6 new re- servoirs, 6 springs and 4.5 miles of fence con- structed. Livestock use increased to 4,000 AUMs in 20 years.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and live- stock management acti- vities in wilderness area. No new facilities con- structed. Livestock use decreased to 3,545 AUMs in 20 years.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and live- stock management acti- vities. No new facilities constructed. Livestock use decreased to 3,530 AUMs in 20 years.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues (North Fork Owyhee River WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Revenues would be in- creased by approximate- ly \$8,362.	Revenues would be in- creased by approximate- ly \$4,500.	Revenues would be re- duced by approximately \$3,500.	Revenues would be re- duced by approximately \$3,500.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 41,025 acres as wilderness would not have significant local social and economic impacts. The impact on local economic conditions was identified as an issue in the study of the North Fork Owyhee River WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of these, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fifty-six commenters supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA, and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA, and nine were against wilderness designation in general. Six commenters took no position.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the area's exceptional scenery, outstanding wilderness values and important ecological and scientific values. It was stated that wilderness designation would have little conflict with other resource values or uses.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.

There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.

Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.

Wilderness would limit access and would prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training missions. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.



**APPENDIX I -- NORTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA  
 Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings  
 Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 9 S., R. 5 W. Sec. 36	640	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,400

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

# Big Willow Spring Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 6,210 acres

The Big Willow Spring WSA (ID-16-41) is located in Owyhee County about 95 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 6,210 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1).

The five-mile long western boundary is formed by state lands. The remainder of the WSA is bounded by primitive dirt roads. WSAs ID-16-42 and ID-16-47 are to the east and south.

The WSA lies on the juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's western slopes. Elevations range from 5,000 to 5,600 feet. The northern and western portions of the WSA consist of hilly topography typified by a series of shallow, rocky washes defined by numerous rhyolite rock outcrops. The southern and eastern flanks of this hilly topography give way to the sheer-walled, 200 feet in depth, meandering rhyolite canyon system of Pole Creek, located in the WSA's western periphery. The canyon rimrock areas contain many rock columns or spires. The Pole Creek canyon sharply dissects and segments the flat to gently sloping terrain of the southern and eastern portions of the WSA into two broad east-west ridgelines at the WSA's western edge. The entire WSA is covered with thin-to-dense stands of juniper trees. In the northern and western reaches of the WSA and along canyon rimrocks, stunted and gnarled old-growth juniper clings to rock outcrop areas. On the flatter southern and eastern areas of the WSA, juniper woodlands containing intermixed open areas of sagebrush/grass and stands of young-to-intermediate aged juniper occupy the landscape.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; an all wilderness alternative where the WSA would be designated as wilderness with special stipulations for control of juniper encroachment; and an all wilderness alternative without special stipulations.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**0 acres recommended for  
wilderness**

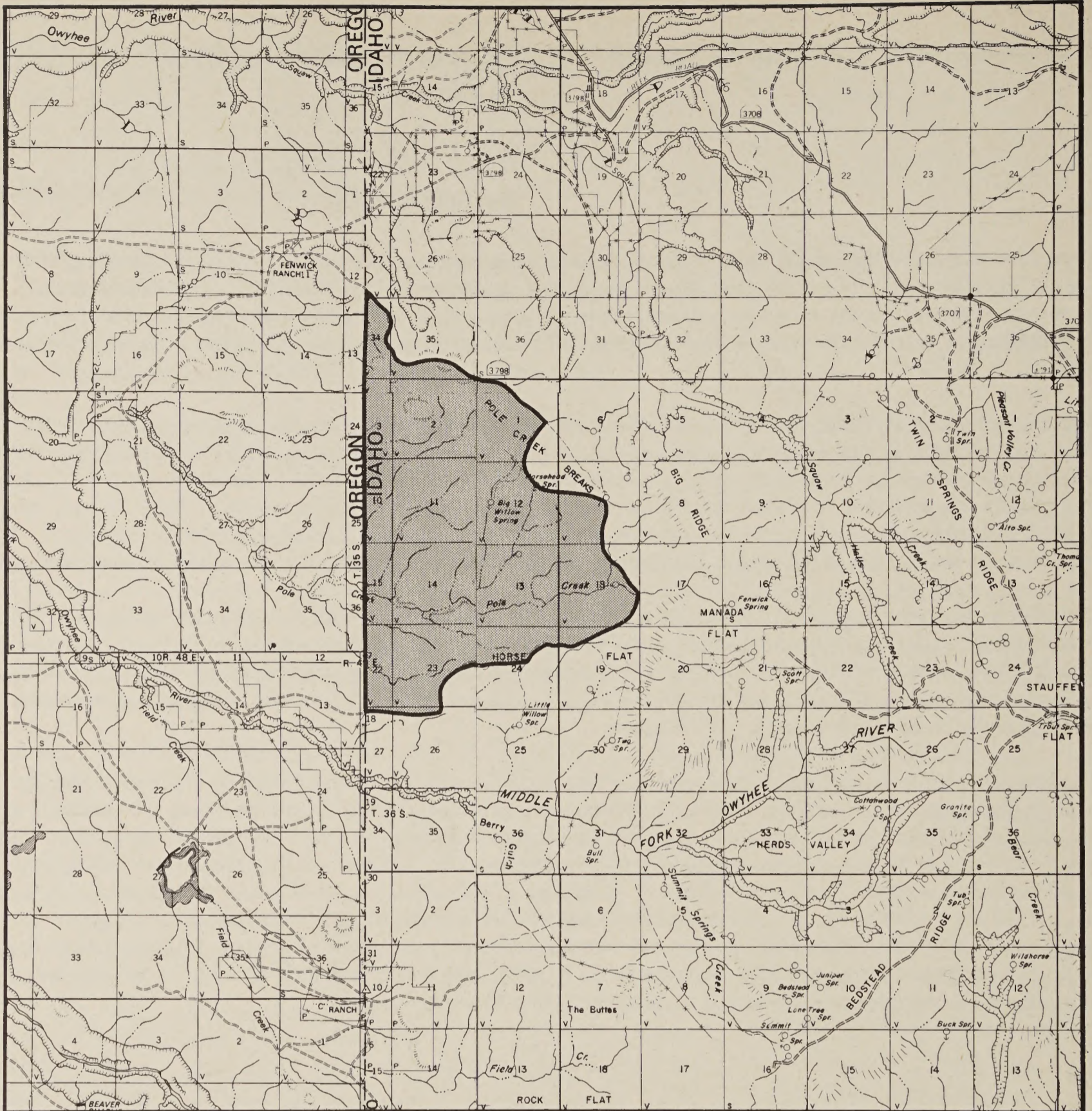
**6,210 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Big Willow Spring WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness (see Big Willow Spring Proposal map). The 6,210 acres would be released for use other than wilderness. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The Big Willow Spring WSA is one of five similar juniper-covered areas dissected by numerous canyons. More than 40 percent of the complex is recommended for wilderness designation. The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation system. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA.

In addition, wilderness designation would reduce flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities through vegetative manipulation. Within the WSA, 1,250 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. Though the amount of treatable land is relatively small, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA and elsewhere on Juniper Mountain is dependent upon restoring good ecological conditions to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. Continued use of the area for livestock grazing would not allow natural vegetation patterns to exist. Though the vegetation treatments would improve the WSA's ecological condition without affecting the wilderness values, the additional forage produced could not be allocated to livestock. Therefore, an imbalance in livestock use could occur on Juniper Mountain and cause difficulty in implementing grazing systems to improve the overall livestock management of the mountain. The management of the Big Willow Spring area can be better integrated into the management program (intensive grazing management systems integrated with land treatments to reduce impacts of livestock grazing) for the Juniper Mountain WSA complex as a whole if it is not designated wilderness.



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T. 11 S.

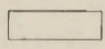
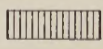

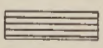
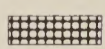
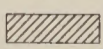
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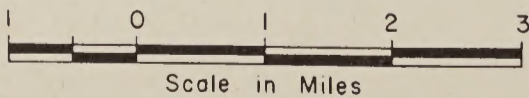
T. 12 S.

R. 6 W.

R. 5 W.

R. 5 W.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-41  
BIG WILLOW SPRING  
PROPOSAL**

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
BIG WILLOW SPRING WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	6,210
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,210</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>0</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	6,210
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>6,210</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Big Willow Spring WSA consists of juniper-covered hills and canyons. The area is extremely rugged. The WSA is predominantly natural; however, there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally including 0.8 miles of ways, 1.5 miles of fence and two developed springs.

##### **B. Solitude**

While the WSA's rugged meandering canyons, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests and other dense vegetation provide outstanding opportunities for solitude, these opportunities are similar to those afforded by thousands of adjacent acres throughout the region. Solitude is due to the remoteness and lack of human activities in the area and is not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The WSA's scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation for people interested in backpacking, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting. However, there are no significant features in the WSA which would serve to attract a large number of visitors to the area.

##### **D. Special Features**

There are no special features in the Big Willow Spring WSA.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Big Willow Spring WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM studies in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Big Willow Spring WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250



## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Big Willow Spring WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because of its topography, rocky soils, trees and barriers to vehicle access except along established ways. These ways can be closed.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

An assessment of the mineral potential of the Big Willow Springs WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral (GEM) contract. There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-41 (BIG WILLOW SPRING)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS (SPECIAL STIPULATIONS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 1,250 acres of juniper treatment with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from rangeland management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently reduced from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 15 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	5-year reduction in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from 450 acres of juniper treatment with recovery of values thereafter. Road closures and range improvements would slightly improve wilderness values. There would be 20 annual use days of primitive recreation use by 2005.	No significant change in naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation and scenic quality in the central and northern portion of the WSA. Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality in the southern and eastern portions from juniper encroachment. Primitive recreation use would increase to 20 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 1,250 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 22% Fair 52% Good 18% Excellent 4%	Big sagebrush-grass community restored on 450 acres treated. Approximately 25% of low sagebrush and climax juniper sites would improve one condition class. Untreated seral juniper communities would show an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs but continued juniper encroachment would eventually cause ecological condition to decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 34% Fair 48% Good 15% Excellent 4%	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 42% Fair 43% Good 14% Excellent 1%
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. There would be a net loss of 5 deer. Other wildlife would remain unchanged.	Juniper treatment, access changes and other actions would not significantly alter wildlife population levels.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer. Displacement of 1-5 deer. Other wildlife populations unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	Road building would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft. Increased livestock use would increase trampling damage.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures would lessen damage to sites.	Same as All Wilderness (Special Stipulations).

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS (SPECIAL STIPULATIONS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use (Big Willow Spring WSA)	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 75 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of .8 miles of way. Impact not significant. Use would increase to 70 user days by 2005.	Closure of .8 miles of way. Impact not significant. Reduced deer numbers would slightly reduce hunting quality. Use would increase to 70 days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 ton/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Same as Proposed Action.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year.
Impacts on Operations and Facilities	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 440 AUMs in 20 years. No new facilities proposed.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facilities constructed. Livestock use would remain at 400 AUMs.	Same as All Wilderness (Special Stipulations).
Impact on Total Annual Revenues	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$4,394.	Revenues would be reduced by approximately \$3,000.	Revenues would be reduced by approximately \$4,000.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire Big Willow Spring WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

## Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate managements of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fifteen commenters supported wilderness designation for the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position regarding the Big Willow Spring WSA.

Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.

# Squaw Creek Canyon Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 10,780 acres

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA (ID-16-42) is located in Owyhee County, 95 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 10,780 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1).

Eighty-eight percent of the WSA's 23-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads separating it from other BLM-administered lands including WSAs ID-16-41 and ID-16-45 to the west and south. The remainder of the WSA's boundaries are formed by three miles of state land on the south and northwest and .75 miles of private land on the northwest. Three short cherry-stem roads, totaling 1.2 miles, enter the WSA.

The WSA lies on the juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's northern slopes. Elevations range from 5,000 to 6,700 feet. The WSA consists predominantly of five broad, north-south ridgelines separated by the canyons of Squaw Creek and Hell's Creek and the smaller drainages of Scott Creek and Peach Creek. The canyons begin at the southern and eastern peripheries of the WSA and merge together in its center and north-central periphery. The drainages are typically steep, V-shaped canyons with numerous rock outcrops or rock formations, except in the lower reaches of Squaw Creek where 200-foot, sheer-walled rhyolite rock escarpments dominate the landscape. The entire WSA is blanketed with a dense juniper woodland. Open areas of sagebrush/grass are few and exist on the ridgeling areas of the WSA's periphery.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**0 acres recommended for  
wilderness**

**10,780 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and to release the 10,780 acres for other uses (see Squaw Creek Canyon Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.

In addition, wilderness designation would reduce the flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities through vegetative manipulation. Within the WSA, 3,800 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. The amount of treatable land is relatively large and spread over much of the area. Therefore, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

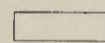


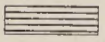
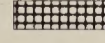
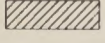
The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological condition to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. In the WSA, wilderness management objectives would not be compatible with the vegetation treatment objectives.

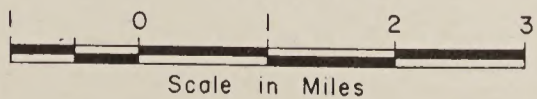


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 T. 11 S.  
 T. 12 S.

R. 6 W. | R. 5 W.

R. 5 W. | R. 4 W.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-42**  
**SQUAW CREEK CANYON**  
**PROPOSAL**

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
SQUAW CREEK CANYON WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	10,780
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
 Total	 10,780

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
 Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	 0
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0
 State land (outside WSA)	 0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	10,780
Split Estate	0
 Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	 10,780
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0



### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Squaw Creek WSA consists of juniper-covered ridges separated by canyons. The area is extremely rugged and contains the 400-foot deep Squaw Creek canyon. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact the area locally including 1.5 miles of ways, 1.2 miles of a cherry-stem road, six miles of fence and five developed springs.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's rugged canyon, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. However, the opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The WSA's highly scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation for people interested in backpacking, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, photography and wildlife viewing. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract large number of visitors to the area.

##### **D. Special Features**

There are no special features in the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Squaw Creek WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
<u>IDAHO</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
<u>NEVADA</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
<u>OREGON</u>				
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Squaw Creek Canyon WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its topography, rocky soils and trees are barriers to vehicle access except along established roads and ways. These roads and ways can be closed.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

An assessment of the mineral potential of the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral contract.

There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA-16-42 (SQUAW CREEK CANYON)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 3,800 acres of juniper treatment and 3 miles of stabilization projects with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from range-land management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently lost from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 25 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from juniper encroachment. Naturalness unaffected. Slight improvement in solitude opportunities from road closures and land acquisition. Primitive recreation use would increase to 30 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 3,800 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 45% Fair 39% Good 15% Excellent 1%	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 56% Fair 35% Good 8% Excellent 1%
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. There would be a net loss of 20-25 deer. Redband trout numbers would increase by 10%. Other wildlife would remain unchanged.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer while closure of roads would benefit deer. Net populations would remain unchanged. Trout numbers could be reduced by 10%. Other populations of wildlife would remain unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	New road building and a campground would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft. Increased livestock use would increase trampling damage.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures and decreases in livestock use would lessen damage to sites.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 245 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of 1.2 miles of road and 1.5 miles of way. Impact not significant. Use would increase to 220 days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .05-.10 tons/acre/year.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Operations and Facilities (Squaw Creek Canyon WSA)	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 885 AUMs in 20 years. 1 new spring would enhance grazing system.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facility construction would limit grazing system effectiveness. Livestock use would decrease to 795 AUMs.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$11,995.	Revenues would be reduced by approximately \$10,000.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire Squaw Creek Canyon WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

## Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fourteen commenters supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position regarding the Squaw Creek Canyon WSA. Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.

# Middle Fork Owyhee River Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 14,820 acres

The Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-45) is located in Owyhee County, 100 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The study acreage includes 14,820 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1). This acreage includes 640 acres acquired from the State of Idaho after the area was designated as a WSA.

Eighty-seven percent of the WSA's 24-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads separating it from other BLM-administered lands including WSAs ID-16-41 and ID-16-42 to the north and ID-16-47 to the east. The remainder of the WSA's boundaries are legal subdivisions along nonfederal lands and along public lands not judged to have wilderness values. Two short cherry-stem roads, totaling one mile, enter the WSA.

The WSA lies in juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's southwest slopes. Elevation ranges from 5,000 to 6,700 feet. The WSA consists largely of the upper drainage of the Middle Fork Owyhee River. The Middle Fork drains in an east-west direction from the WSA's northeast boundary. At the core of the WSA, the water of the Middle Fork is joined by several major north-south drainages including Summit Creek and the South Branch of the Middle Fork Owyhee River, both of which flow in a northerly direction from the WSA's southern boundary. These drainages are surrounded by several broad ridges. Eight smaller paralleling drainages enter the Middle Fork Owyhee River from the north. These drainages sharply dissect Juniper Mountain into narrow, north-south ridgelines. In the western periphery of the WSA, the slopes of Juniper Mountain give way to a flat plateau. It is there that the Middle Fork Owyhee River begins to cut a vertical-walled, meandering canyon into the WSA's rhyolite rock. This canyon reaches a depth of nearly 200 feet at the Oregon-Idaho border. The upper elevations of Juniper Mountain, in the northeast half of the WSA, are blanketed with dense juniper woodlands. As elevations decrease in a westerly and southerly direction, juniper becomes more thinly scattered and sagebrush/grass vegetation dominates the landscape.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative. A 640 acre inholding acquired from the State of Idaho after the completion of the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment EIS was included in the study process under authority granted by Section 202 of FLPMA.



## 2. Recommendation and Rationale

0 acres recommended for wilderness

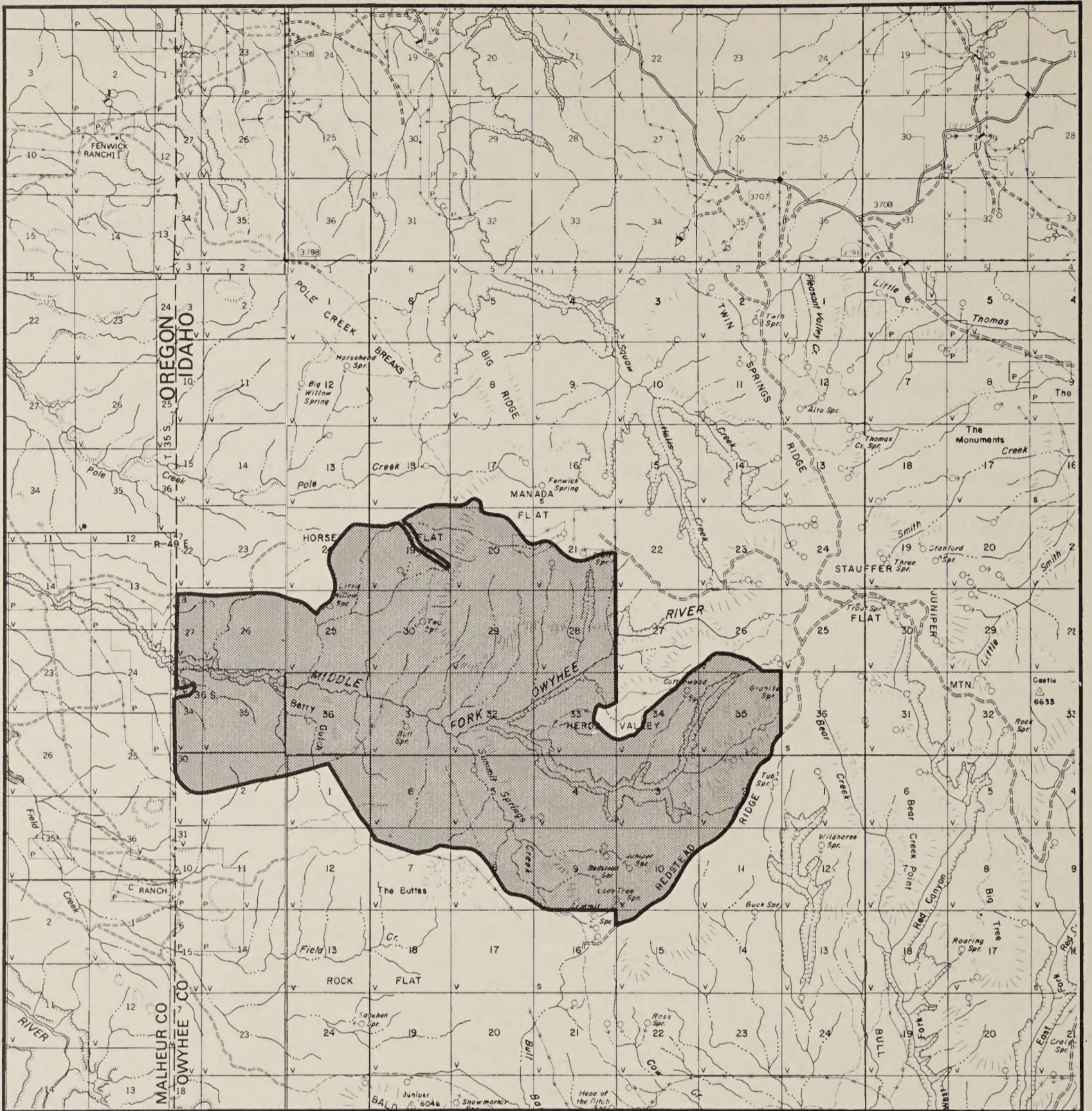
14,820 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness (see Middle Fork Owyhee River Proposal map). The 14,820 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.

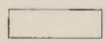
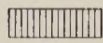

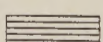
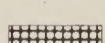
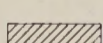
The entire WSA is not recommended for designation because wilderness management would reduce the flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities. Within the WSA, 4,250 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. The amount of treatable land is relatively large and spread over much of the area. Therefore, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

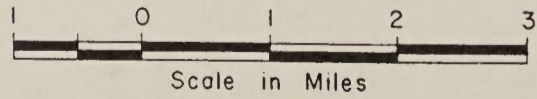
The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological condition to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. In the WSA, wilderness management objectives would not be compatible with the vegetation treatment objectives.



T. 10 S.  
 T. 11 S.  
 T. 11 S.  
 T. 12 S.

R. 6 W. | R. 5 W. | R. 5 W. | R. 4 W.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-45  
 MIDDLE FORK OWYHEE RIVER  
 PROPOSAL**

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
MIDDLE FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	14,820
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	14,820

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	14,820
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	14,820
Inholdings (state, private)	0

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA consists of juniper-covered hills dissected by rugged canyons. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man that impact the area including 4.5 miles of ways, 1.5 miles of cherry-stem roads, 2.5 miles of fence, three developed springs and one abandoned log cabin.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's rugged canyons, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. However, the opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The WSA's highly scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation for people interested in backpacking, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract a large number of visitors to the area.

##### **D. Special Features**

There are no special features in the Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	13	64,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its topography, rocky soils and trees are barriers to vehicle access except along established roads and ways. These roads and ways can be closed.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

An assessment of the mineral potential of the Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral contract.

There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-45 (MIDDLE FORK OWYHEE RIVER)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 4,250 acres of juniper treatment and 1.5 miles of streambank stabilization projects with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from range management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently reduced from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 20 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from juniper encroachment. Naturalness unaffected. Solitude opportunities slightly affected. Solitude opportunities improved from road closures and land acquisition. Primitive recreation use would increase to 30 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 4,250 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 17% Fair 49% Good 34% Excellent 1%	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 38% Fair 36% Good 25% Excellent 1%
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. There would be a net loss of 5 deer. Redband trout numbers would increase by 10%. Other wildlife would remain unchanged.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer while decreased access would increase populations. Net loss of 5 deer. Trout populations reduced by 10%. Other wildlife populations would remain unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	Road building would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft. Increased livestock use would increase trampling damage.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures would lessen damage to sites.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 215 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of 5.5 miles of roads and ways. Impact not significant. Use would increase to 190 user days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .05-.10 tons/acre/year.



ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Operations and Facilities (Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA)	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 1,090 AUMs in 20 years. 5 new springs and .3 miles of fence would improve grazing system efficiency.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facility construction would limit grazing system efficiency. Livestock use would decrease to 955 AUMs.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues (Middle Fork Owyhee River)	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$15,672.	Revenues would be reduced by approximately \$14,500.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fourteen commenters supported wilderness designation for the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position in regard to the Middle Fork Owyhee River WSA. Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.

# West Fork Red Canyon Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 12,970 acres

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA (ID-16-47) is located in Owyhee County about 100 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 12,970 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1).

Seventy-five percent of the WSA's 21-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads. The remainder of the WSA is bounded by legal subdivisions along nonfederal lands. WSA ID-16-45 lies to the west of West Fork Red Canyon WSA.

The WSA lies in juniper-covered rugged canyon country of Juniper Mountain's southern slopes. The WSA is flanked on its western and eastern peripheries by two long north-south ridgelines known as Bedstead Ridge and Big Tree Ridge. Big Tree Ridge is sandwiched between the East Fork Red Canyon Creek flowing south along the WSA's eastern boundary and the West Fork Red Canyon Creek which dissects the center of the WSA. The confluence of the two canyons is at the southern boundary of the WSA. Each of these canyons is 100 feet deep in their southern reaches and 300 feet deep in their northern reaches. Both canyons are V-shaped with steep, rhyolitic rock-rubbed slopes. Bedstead Ridge, along the WSA's western periphery, gives way to seven major parallel north-south ridgelines and drainages, including Petes Creek and Bear Creek. Bear Creek empties into the West Fork Red Canyon Creek while Petes Creek carves its own shallow wash across a broad, bowled basin (Bull Basin) occupying the south-central portion of the WSA, west of the West Fork Red Canyon. The upper elevations of Juniper Mountain on the WSA's western and northern peripheries are blanketed by a dense juniper woodland. As elevations decrease in a southerly direction toward the south-central periphery of the WSA, juniper becomes more thinly scattered and sagebrush/grass vegetation dominates the landscape.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Wilderness Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement filed in November 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**0 acres recommended for wilderness**

**12,970 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the West Fork Red Canyon WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and to release the 12,970 acres for other uses (see West Fork Red Canyon Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.

In addition wilderness designation would reduce the flexibility necessary to improve the ecological condition of plant communities. Within the WSA, 2,600 acres would receive vegetation treatments, including tree cutting and/or prescribed burning, to control the encroachment of juniper into sagebrush-bunchgrass ecological sites. The amount of treatable land is relatively large and spread over much of the area. Therefore, conflicts with wilderness management cannot be mitigated by reasonable boundary adjustments.

The long-term protection of multiple-use objectives in the WSA is dependent upon restoring good ecological condition to plant communities through vegetation manipulation. In the WSA, wilderness management objectives would not be compatible with the vegetation treatment objectives.



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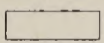


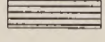
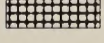
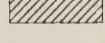
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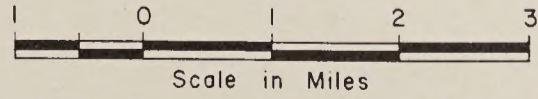
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R. 4 W. | R. 5 W.

R. 5 W. | R. 6 W.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-47  
WEST FORK RED CANYON  
PROPOSAL**

MAY 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
WEST FORK RED CANYON WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	12,970
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
 Total	 12,970

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
 Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	 0
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0
	0
 State land (outside WSA)	 

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	12,970
Split Estate	0
 Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	 12,970
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA consists of juniper-, sagebrush- and grass-covered hills and ridges separated by numerous drainages. The WSA is predominantly natural but there are several site-specific signs of man that impact the area including four miles of ways and 3.25 miles of fence.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's rugged canyons, hills, rock outcrops and juniper forests provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. However, the opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The scenic natural features provide outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation including backpacking, sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract a large number of visitors.

##### **D. Special Features**

There are no special features in the WSA.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the West Fork Red Canyon WSA would add a large expanse of climax juniper forest within the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem not presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074



**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The West Fork Red Canyon WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable as wilderness because its topography, rocky soils and trees are barriers to vehicle access except along established ways. These ways can be closed.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

An assessment of the mineral potential of the West Fork Red Canyon WSA was done under the Geology, Energy and Mineral contract.

There are no mining claims or known energy or mineral resources in the WSA. No leasing for oil and gas exploration has occurred.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation of nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-47 (WEST FORK RED CANYON)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	10- to 20-year loss in naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities, solitude and scenic quality from 2,600 acres of juniper treatment with recovery of values thereafter. Slight improvement in overall naturalness, primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from rangeland management actions. Solitude opportunities permanently reduced from use of recreation access roads and campgrounds. There would be 30 annual user days of primitive recreation use through 2005.	Slight decline in primitive recreation opportunities and scenic quality from juniper encroachment. Naturalness unaffected. Slight improvement in solitude opportunities from road construction and land acquisitions. Primitive recreation use would increase to 45 user days annually by 2005.
Impacts on Ecological Succession in Juniper Woodlands	Big sagebrush-grass communities restored on 2,600 acres treated. An improvement in condition class would occur on 25% of low sagebrush-grass sites and on climax juniper sites. On untreated seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 30% Fair 44% Good 25% Excellent 1%	Ecological condition would improve on climax juniper communities. On interspersed seral juniper communities, there would be an initial improvement in vigor and density of grasses and forbs, but juniper encroachment would continue and ecological condition would eventually decline. 20-year ecological condition: Poor 45% Fair 35% Good 20% Excellent 1%
Impacts on Wildlife Populations Indigenous to Juniper Woodland Communities	Juniper treatment would enhance habitat and increase deer populations while increased access would reduce populations. Net populations would remain unchanged. Other wildlife would also remain unchanged.	Juniper encroachment would reduce habitat and forage availability for mule deer while road closures would increase populations. There would be a net reduction of 5 deer. Other wildlife populations unchanged.
Impacts on Cultural Resources	Road building and campgrounds would increase public use thereby increasing vandalism and theft.	Wilderness designation would place constraints on study and management of cultural resources. Vehicle closures would lessen damage to sites.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	No road or way closures. The quality of hunting opportunities would improve slightly. Use would increase to 200 annual user days by 2005.	Closure of 4 miles of ways. Reduced deer numbers would slightly reduce hunting quality. Use would increase to 275 user days by 2005.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .01-.07 tons/acre/year on nontreated areas and .05-.15 tons/acre/year on treated areas.	Over 20 years, impacts slightly beneficial. Average reduction in soil loss of .05-.10 tons/acre/year.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Operations and Facilities (West Fork Red Canyon WSA)	Unrestricted vehicle use. Livestock use increased to 985 AUMs in 20 years. 3 new springs and .4 miles of fence would improve grazing system efficiency.	Vehicle restrictions would hinder facility maintenance and livestock management activities. No new facility construction would limit grazing system efficiency. Livestock use would decrease to 915 AUMs.
Impact on Total Annual Revenues (West Fork Red Canyon WSA)	Revenues would be increased by approximately \$9,130.	Revenues will be reduced by approximately \$8,000.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Release of the entire West Fork Red Canyon WSA for nonwilderness uses would cause no significant local social and economic impacts.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 98 comments were received. Of those, 72 were written and 26 were oral statements received at public hearings. Fourteen commenters supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and ten were for wilderness designation in general. Seventeen commenters supported no wilderness for the WSA and nine were against wilderness designation in general. The remaining commenters took no position regarding the West Fork Red Canyon WSA.

Those supporting wilderness stated that designation is needed to protect wilderness values and special features.

Those opposing designation were concerned that:

- Federal lands should be managed for multiple uses, not wilderness.
- There is no need to preserve sagebrush steppe wilderness.
- Wilderness would prohibit vegetation control and intensive grazing systems.
- Wilderness would limit access and prevent exploration for minerals.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Agency, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Air National Guard and the Owyhee County Commissioners commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game opposed wilderness designation because the land managers need flexibility to manipulate vegetative composition to improve the habitat base for wildlife and livestock. The Idaho Air National Guard stated that wilderness designation would conflict with its tactical flight training mission. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Aviation Agency expressed no alternative preference.



# SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC WSA RECOMMENDATIONS

## OWYHEE CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS







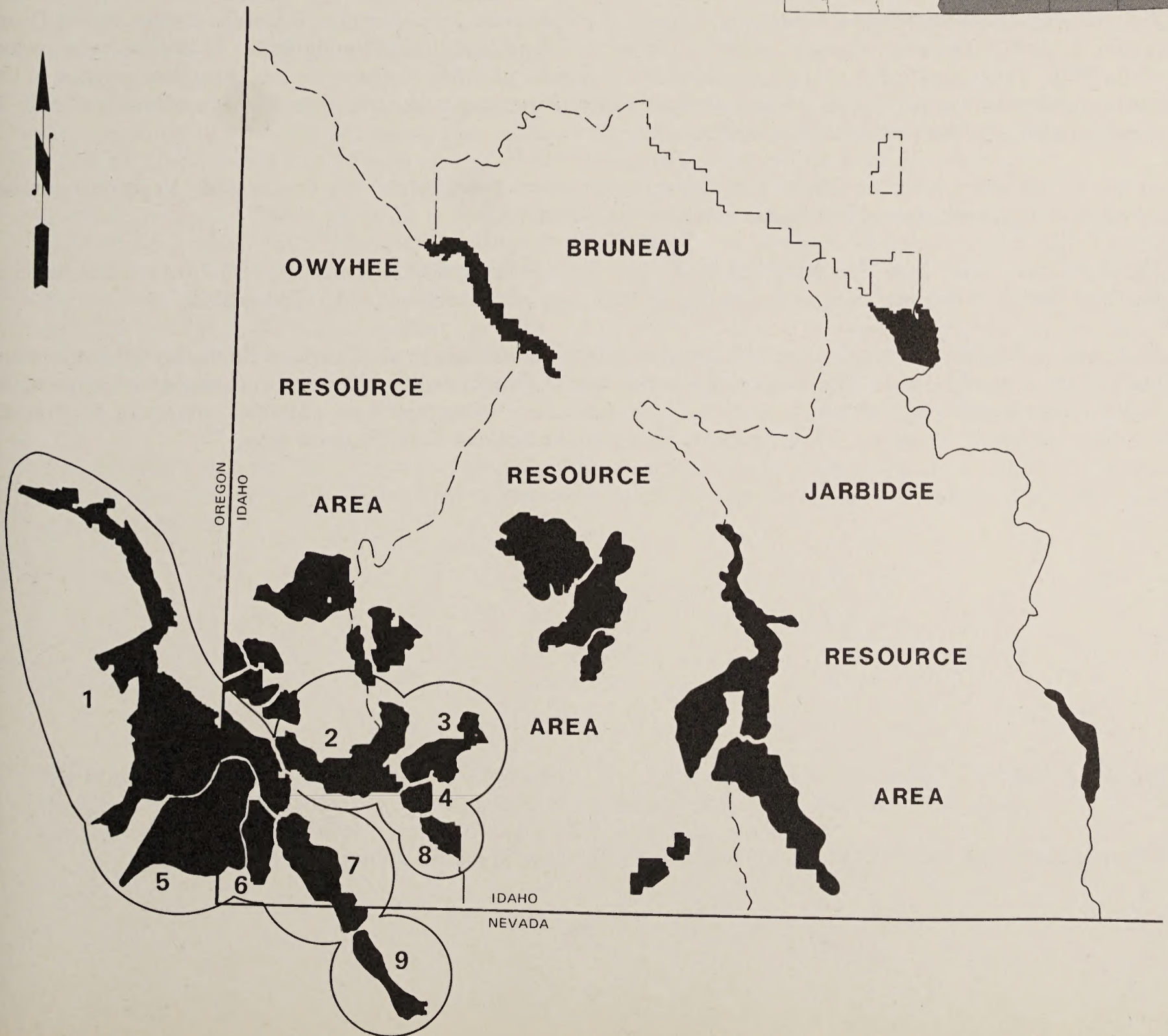
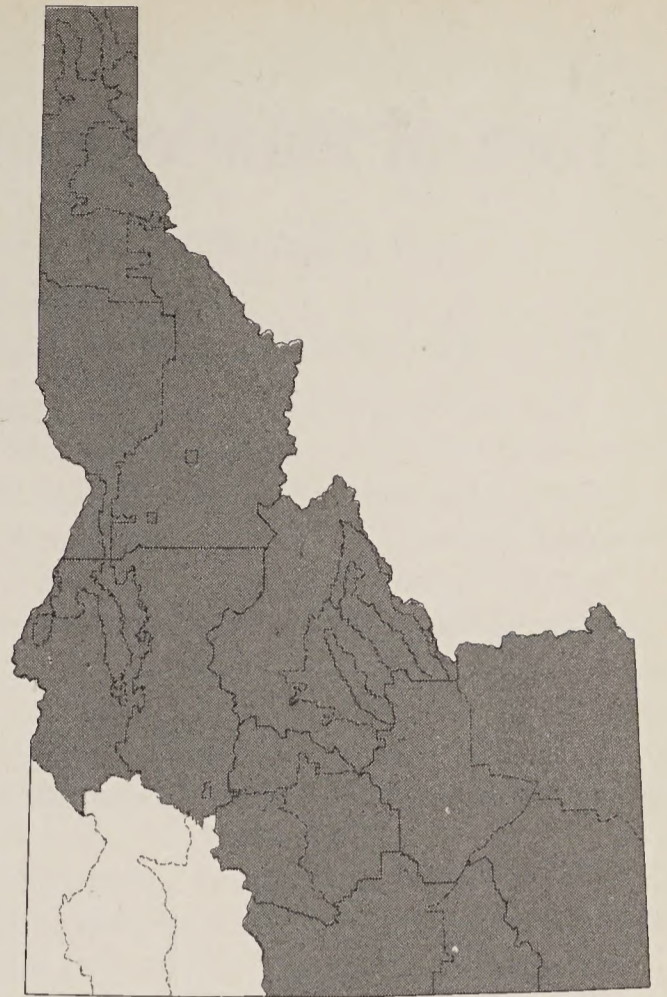
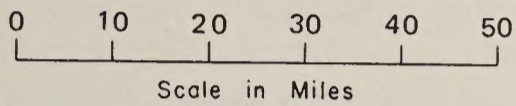
# OWYHEE CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS

## LEGEND

- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- - - RESOURCE AREA BOUNDARY
- ⊕ WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### OWYHEE CANYONLANDS

- |                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Owyhee River Canyon      | 6. Little Owyhee River     |
| 2. Owyhee River- Deep Creek | 7. South Fork Owyhee River |
| 3. Battle Creek             | 8. Juniper Creek           |
| 4. Yatahoney Creek          | 9. Owyhee Canyon           |
| 5. Lookout Butte            |                            |



# Lookout Butte Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 99,600 acres

The Lookout Butte WSA (ID-16-48A/OR-3-194) is located in the southeast corner of Malheur County, Oregon, and the southwest corner of Owyhee County, Idaho. It lies approximately 50 miles south of Jordan Valley, Oregon, and 25 miles east of McDermitt, Nevada (see Table 1). The boundary of the WSA consists of both high and low standard dirt roads, a way in the southeastern portion of the WSA and one adjacent parcel of state land. There are no dead-end roads that enter the WSA.

The study area contains 99,600 acres of public land; this total includes 3,950 acres of split-estate land. In addition, within the boundary of the WSA are two 640 acre parcels of land owned by the State of Idaho.

The WSA is a large, flat to gently rolling area containing several playas and four gently sloping buttes. Defeat Butte (5,710 feet) in Oregon is located near the center of the study area. Lookout Butte (5,640 feet) is two miles west of the WSA which is more than two miles long and one mile wide. An unnamed butte lies one mile southwest of Lookout Butte. Spring Butte (5,515 feet) is located in the northeast corner of the portion of the study area in Idaho. Spring Creek crosses the eastern boundary through a shallow draw about three miles south of Spring Butte. In the southwest corner of the WSA, Tent Creek forms a small canyon which disappears and then reappears in a twisting configuration in the southeast corner of the study area. Midway along the eastern boundary, a low rim extends east from Stoney Corral. It is located along the headwaters of Toppin Creek.

Except for the buttes and a portion of Tent Creek canyon, none of the features are pronounced. Vegetation consists primarily of sagebrush, grasses and scattered herbaceous perennials.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Final Oregon Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) published in December 1989.

Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative; an all wilderness alternative with acquisitions in which the mineral estate of 3,950 acres of split-estate land in Oregon and the 1,280 acres of state inholdings in Idaho would be acquired through purchase or exchange if the owners are willing<sup>1</sup>; and a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report. These lands are shown on the Lookout Butte Proposal map.

<sup>1</sup>This alternative was called the Enhanced Wilderness Alternative in the Final Oregon Wilderness EIS.

## 2. Recommendation and Rationale

0 acres recommended for wilderness

99,600 acres recommended for nonwilderness<sup>2</sup>

The recommendation for the Lookout Butte WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and release the entire 99,600 acres for uses other than wilderness (see Lookout Butte Proposal map). The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative with acquisitions. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The quality of the wilderness values was an additional consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man, primarily rangeland developments, which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. While the WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, there are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.

Wilderness characteristics are limited in this area while opportunities to enhance livestock grazing by construction of new range projects and allocation of additional AUMs exist.

Resource values other than wilderness used in making the recommendation include a potential increase in livestock grazing use and a brush-control project that would allocate additional AUMs, construction of proposed range projects and continued vehicle access on existing ways for the maintenance of numerous livestock facilities.

Currently, all public land in the WSA is leased for livestock grazing. The current livestock use level is approximately 2,626 AUMs within portions of the three allotments in the WSA. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of livestock forage within affected pastures that is currently available, but not allocated, would be realized under no wilderness. Approximately 360 of the AUMs are within the WSA. In a proposed range project, brush on 10,800 acres would be removed by burning; 880 acres are within the WSA. This brush-control project would produce enough livestock forage to support an additional 31 AUMs in the WSA. It also would improve habitat variety for wildlife but sagebrush-dependent species such as the limited populations of sage grouse would be displaced to adjoining habitats with brush cover.

Range projects proposed for construction that would improve livestock distribution and management include one mile of fence and two reservoirs. Two additional reservoirs would be built to replace two windmills in order to reduce maintenance costs.

<sup>2</sup>There are 34,400 acres of the WSA located in Idaho. The recommendation for this portion of the WSA is included in the Idaho Wilderness Study Report. There are 65,200 acres in Oregon. The recommendation for this portion of the WSA is included in the Oregon Wilderness Study Report.

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T. 39 S.

T. 40 S.

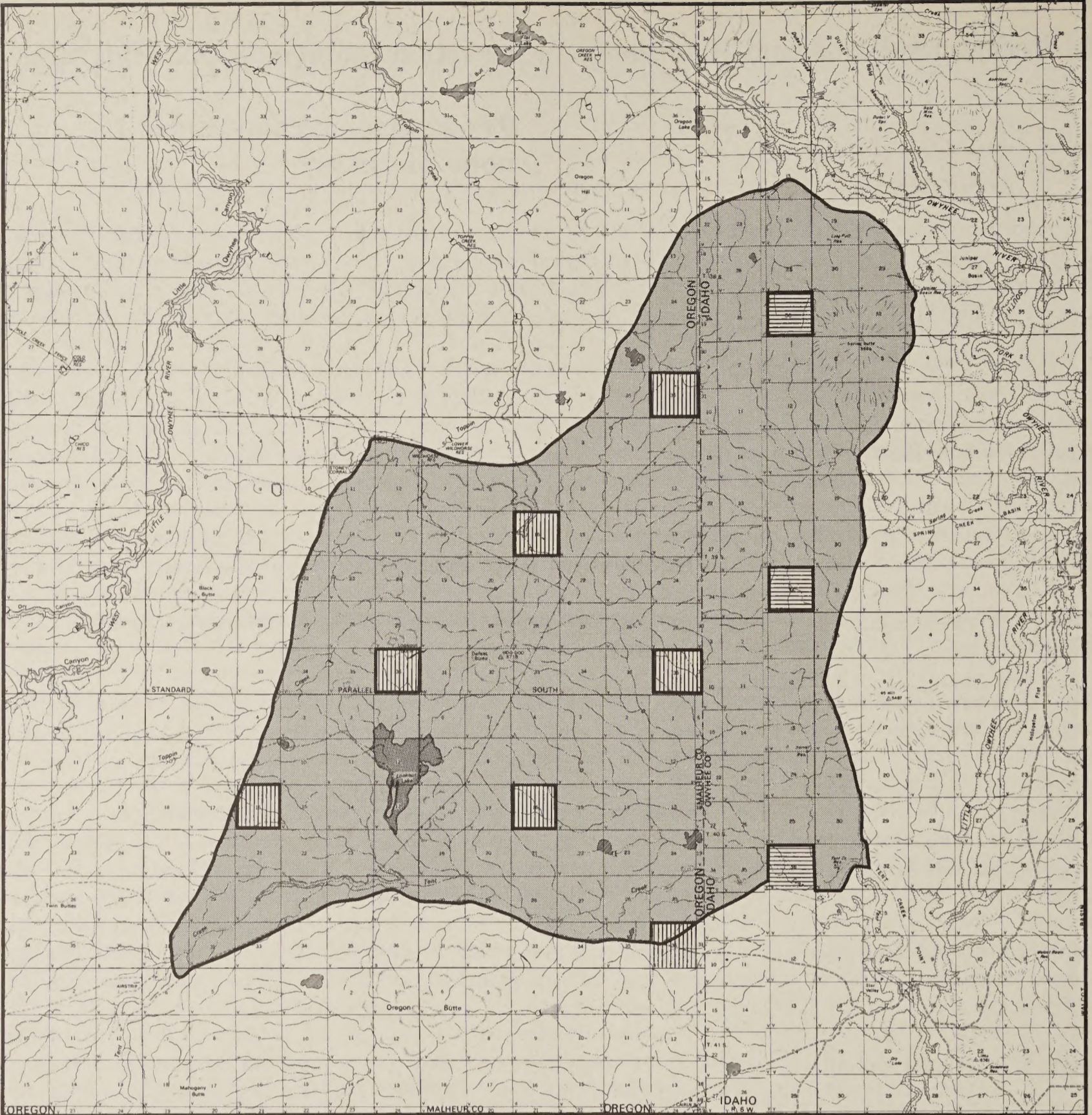
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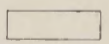
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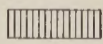
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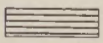
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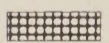
SPLIT ESTATE



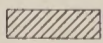
RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS



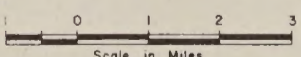
STATE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



PRIVATE



Scale in Miles

ID-16-48A  
LOOKOUT BUTTE  
PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988



**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
LOOKOUT BUTTE WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

	<u>OREGON</u>	<u>IDAHO</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	61,250	34,400	95,650
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	3,950	0	3,950
Inholdings (state, private)	0	1,280	1,280
Total	65,200	35,680	100,880

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0	0	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0	0	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0	0	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0	0	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0	0	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0	0	0
State land (outside WSA)	0	0	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	61,250	34,400	95,650
Split Estate	3,950	0	3,950
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	65,200	34,400	99,600
Inholdings (state, private)	0	1,280	1,280

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The WSA appears to be generally natural. Eighty-six percent of the WSA is pristine, not influenced by unnatural features. However, 50 interior unnatural features influence 14 percent of the WSA. These features consist of 28 reservoirs, three windmills, a dirt airstrip, a bladed state line (15 miles), two fences (17 miles bladed and five miles unbladed) and 14 ways (totaling 48 miles). These features are scattered throughout the study area. Unnatural features outside of the WSA that affect the naturalness of the area consist of boundary roads, a large metal water storage tank and several reservoirs.

Approximately 100 mule deer and 50 pronghorn antelope make limited use of the WSA. Pronghorn use is restricted from the late spring to autumn because of severe winter conditions. Mule deer inhabit many of the canyons in adjacent areas; however, the WSA is not a favorable habitat for either big game species because of a lack of topographic features and the nearly homogeneous stands of Wyoming big sagebrush which are predominant in the WSA. Raptors inhabit the deep canyons to the west, north and east of the WSA. Incidental excursions by raptors searching for prey are made into the study area but very little nesting occurs because of the absence of suitable topography.

##### **B. Solitude**

The vast proportions of the WSA, combined with the slightly rolling terrain and the waist-high vegetation which covers it, provides sufficient screening to result in an outstanding opportunity to experience solitude. The uniform shape and large size of the study area substantially enhances a visitor's ability to experience solitude. Outside sights and sounds affecting the WSA's opportunity for solitude are minor and are associated with grazing management activities, traffic on boundary roads and low-level aircraft flights.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation are available in the WSA. However, opportunities for activities such as hiking, backpacking, camping, hunting, photography and horseback riding are not outstanding because the study area lacks scenic quality, diversity of landforms and challenging terrain. Occasional hunting for deer and antelope occurs in the study area but game populations are small compared with nearby areas and hunting pressure is light. Vehicle use is also light because of a lack of either attractive features or activities. Total recreation use is less than 100 visitor days per year.

##### **D. Special Features**

There are no special features in the WSA.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Lookout Butte WSA would add an ecosystem not presently represented in Oregon but presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented in the NWPS by three designated area with 76,699 acres. There are 102 other BLM areas in the two states under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Lookout Butte WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250



## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Lookout Butte WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. There is one designated wilderness area within the region and 73 study areas recommended for wilderness designation are within 100 miles of the WSA.

### **Manageability**

The WSA could be managed as wilderness. The area is relatively large and is mostly public land and possesses a large degree of naturalness. Manageability would be improved if the two parcels of state land and the mineral estate of the split estate lands were acquired. Potential adverse impacts from access to and incompatible surface-disturbing activities on these parcels could make management of the area difficult if these lands were not acquired. Casual mineral exploration that is not projected to lead to development would cause short-term and localized impacts to the area's naturalness.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The geology, energy and mineral resources of Lookout Butte WSA were evaluated by interpreting existing literature, reviewing mining and mineral leasing records and by a reconnaissance geochemical survey. Technical details of the geochemical evaluation are given in a BLM mineral resource assessment report for the Lookout Butte WSA.

Based upon indirect evidence, the WSA is considered to have a moderate potential for oil and gas. Also based on indirect evidence, the study area is considered to have a moderate potential for geothermal resources. Indirect evidence obtained during a reconnaissance geochemical assessment of the WSA indicates a moderate potential for uranium on approximately 1,780 acres in the northwestern portion of the study area. As of October 16, 1987, there were no geothermal or oil and gas leases in the WSA.

Based upon direct geologic evidence, the WSA is considered to have a high potential for the occurrence of basalt aggregate material. However, because of the lack of demand which reflects the low level of economic development and remoteness of the area, no community pits and/or material sites have been designated.

Based upon indirect evidence (i.e., a reconnaissance geochemical assessment of the WSA), approximately 1,400 acres in the central portion of the study area are considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of beryllium and approximately 1,480 acres, also in the central portion of the WSA, are considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of silver. As of October 16, 1987, there were no mining claims in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-48A/OR-3-194 (LOOKOUT BUTTE)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS WITH ACQUISITIONS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	In the absence of wilderness designation, projected activities would impair wilderness values on approximately 3,680 acres with further declines from other potential uses over the long term.	Wilderness designation of 99,600 acres and the closure of 48 miles of ways would result in protection and enhancement of existing wilderness values.	Wilderness designation of 100,880 acres and the closure of 48 miles of ways would protect and enhance wilderness values.
Impacts on Energy and Mineral Development	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.	No impact to energy or mineral development is expected.
Impacts on Vegetation	Brush would be removed from 880 acres. Utilization of key forage species would increase overall from 35-50%. The bunchgrass component would be reduced on 40-80 acres.	48 miles of ways would revegetate. Little or no change would occur to vegetation on the remainder of the area.	48 miles of ways would revegetate. Little or no change would occur to vegetation on the remainder of the area.
Impacts on Wildlife	Wildlife populations of game and nongame species would sustain minor and temporary levels of harassment. Proposed actions would benefit wildlife by providing new water sources and adding habitat variety.	Wildlife habitat and populations would be maintained on 99,600 acres designated wilderness.	Wildlife habitat and populations would be maintained on 100,800 acres designated wilderness.
Impacts on Livestock Grazing	An additional allocation of 816 AUMs of available forage would be realized. An additional 361 AUMs would be allocated to livestock from projects. Construction of 4 reservoirs and 1 mile of fence would facilitate livestock management.	Closure of 48 miles of ways would cause inconvenience and a slight increase in costs to livestock operators. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of currently available forage and an additional allocation of 361 AUMs from projects would be foregone.	Closure of 48 miles of ways would cause inconvenience and a slight increase in costs to livestock operators. An increased allocation of 816 AUMs of currently available forage and an additional allocation of 361 AUMs from projects would be foregone.
Impacts on Recreation Use	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.	There would be little or no change to the recreation use level of less than 100 visitor days per year.
Impacts on Local Personal Income	Annual local personal income would increase by approximately \$14,000.	Annual local personal income would remain at approximately \$33,000.	Annual local personal income would remain at approximately \$33,000.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Livestock grazing would increase by 1,177 AUMs. Overall recreation use would remain at less than 100 visitor days per year. Annual local personal income generated from resource outputs in the WSA would increase by approximately \$14,000. There were no social factors identified with the study of the Lookout Butte WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal review of the Draft EIS, 16 comments specifically addressing the Lookout Butte WSA were received. Of those, five were written and 11 were oral statements received at public hearings on the Draft and Supplement EIS. All of the commenters supported wilderness designation with two specifically supporting the all wilderness, with acquisitions, alternative.

Three commenters proposed combining the Lookout Butte WSA with adjacent WSAs to make it part of the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness. These commenters also said that the planned range developments, including the increased allocation of AUMs, should not be allowed. Cited, too, was that the low potential for mineral occurrence was not a strong reason to preclude the area from wilderness designation. One commenter mentioned the quality of the grasslands in the WSA and the number of natural communities present on the large vegetated playa adding that the "immensity of the area makes it a high quality wilderness area."

No WSA-specific comments were received from any federal, state or local agencies. There were two comment letters received on the Final EIS specific to this WSA. These supported an expansion of the all wilderness alternative.

Oral comments concerning the analysis addressed in the Final EIS stated that wilderness values of Tent Creek have not been adequately addressed; to protect the natural resources of the WSA, more than the enhanced alternative is needed (i.e., more upland area should be added); this WSA should be added to the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness; and *Downingia insignis* should be addressed in the EIS appendix because it occurs near the WSA boundary and probably also occurs within the WSA.

# Owyhee River Canyon Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 225,680 acres

The Owyhee River Canyon WSA (ID-16-48B/OR-3-195) is located in Owyhee County, Idaho, and Malheur County, Oregon, about 90 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 34,980 acres of BLM land in Idaho and 190,700 acres of BLM land in Oregon (see Table 1). The BLM acreage includes 10,380 acres of split estate lands (federal surface and state subsurface) in Oregon and 1,280 acres acquired from the State of Idaho in 1987 after the area was designated as a WSA. There are 120 acres of private inholdings in Oregon.

Within Idaho, 82 percent of the WSA's 41-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads and fence lines, while the remainder is along nonfederal property lines. Within Oregon, 74 percent of the 178-mile circumference is bounded mostly by primitive dirt roads, gravel roads and water pipelines with service roads while the remainder is along nonfederal property lines. Five cherry-stem roads (20.3 miles) enter the WSA. The southeastern part of the WSA adjoins WSAs ID-16-49A, ID-16-48C and ID-16-53/NV-010-103A. The southern part adjoins WSAs OR-3-173 and OR-3-194.

The WSA consists of a flat to gently rolling sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 126 miles of canyons including 74 miles of the Owyhee River, ten miles of the South Fork Owyhee River and 37 miles of the West Little Owyhee River. The canyons are 500 to 1,000 feet deep, narrow and meandering. Portions of the canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian areas consist of narrow bands of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Two 640 acre inholdings acquired from the State of Idaho and 640 acres of recently acquired BLM land adjacent to the WSA were included in the study process under the authority granted in Section 202 of FLPMA.

Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for the WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 187,660 acres of BLM land (including the 1,920 acres studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA) would be designated as wilderness and 38,660 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 47,540 and 148,990 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 178,140 and 77,330 acres, respectively, would be released for nonwilderness uses; an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative where about 2,880 acres in Idaho would be added to the 20,800 acres of the Owyhee River Canyon in Oregon designated as a national wild river.

## 2. Recommendation and Rationale

**187,660 acres recommended  
for wilderness (Idaho -- 35,620  
acres; Oregon -- 152,040 acres)**

**38,660 acres recommended  
for nonwilderness (Idaho -- 0;  
Oregon -- 38,660 acres)**

The recommendation for the Owyhee River Canyon WSA is to designate 187,660 acres as wilderness and release the 38,660 acres for uses other than wilderness. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment in the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 187,660 acres recommended for wilderness are shown as the nonshaded area on the Owyhee River Canyon Proposal map. This acreage includes 8,440 acres of split estate lands (federal surface and state subsurface) in Oregon. This recommendation would further apply to 2,640 acres of state and 920 acres of private land adjacent to the WSA in Oregon if acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Appendix I lists the nonfederal land within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on the acquisition of these lands.

The 187,660 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 126 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 140,120 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation, and offers significant special features. The area is manageable to protect wilderness characteristics over the long term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 187,660 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 640 acres of BLM land adjacent to the WSA acquired from the State of Idaho in 1987 contain high quality wilderness values and were included within the area recommended for designation to provide a more definable and manageable wilderness boundary.

The 38,660 acres of BLM land in Oregon, in six separate tracts, were not recommended for wilderness designation because of potential conflicts with other resource uses of the area and to exclude land that would detract from the management of the area. The six tracts include:

**AREA A:** Toppin Creek -- 32 acres in the south-central portion of the WSA contains a plateau area lacking in diversity, quantity and quality of wilderness values. It is nearly separated from the rest of the WSA by an interior cherry-stem road important for livestock management. Numerous impacts on natural quality occur in the area include 24 miles of ways, six miles of fence, 12 reservoirs and a cabin. It has proposals for brush-control projects and nine additional miles of fence. Livestock utilization of existing forage is relatively low and increases in use are proposed. The area is judged to be extremely important for livestock grazing and for more intensive livestock management than would be allowed in wilderness.

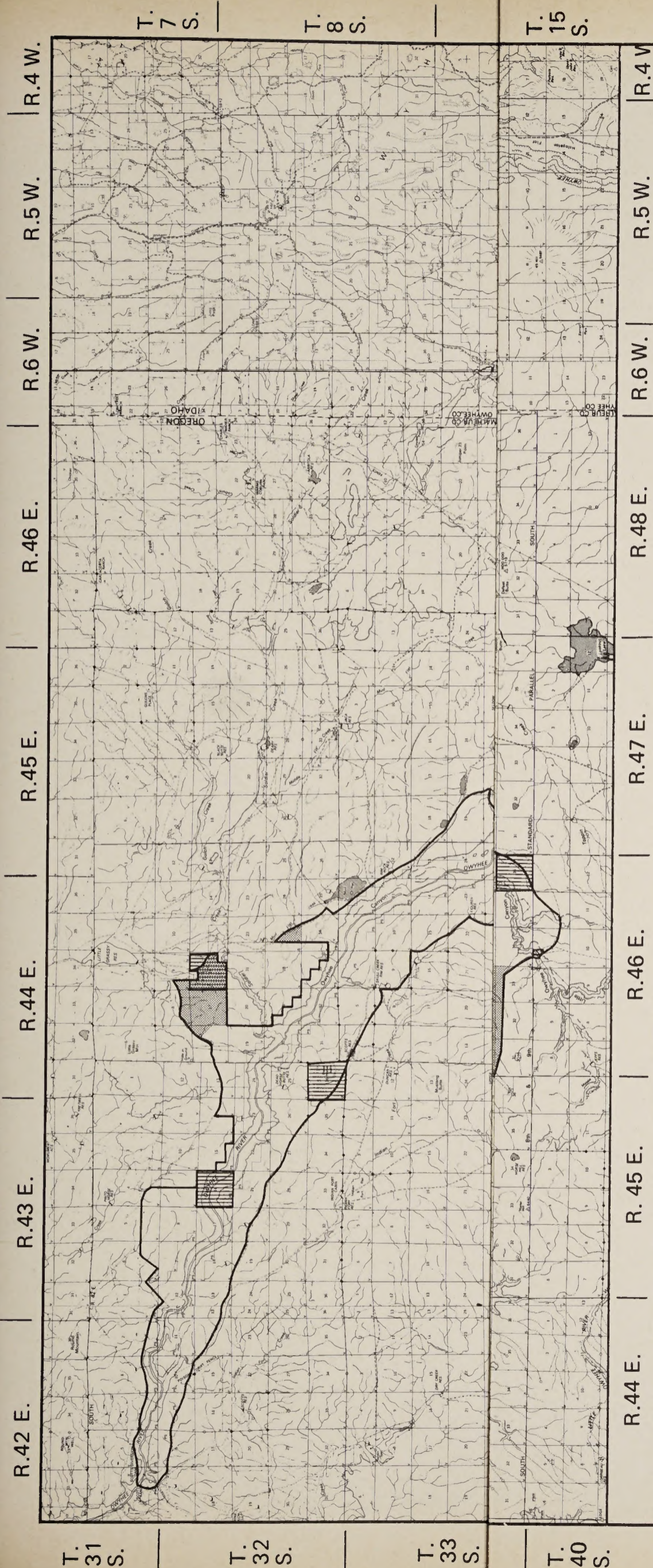
AREA B: Anderson Crossing -- 4,420 acres in the southwest tip of the Owyhee River Canyon WSA contains a plateau with relatively low wilderness values in comparison to its value for livestock forage production. The area contains two miles of water pipeline, two reservoirs and five miles of ways. The pipeline has a road along it and a large water tank which is visible over the entire Area B. There are three 40 acre private inholdings within the area.

AREA C: Antelope Creek -- 1,030 acres of plateau in the west-central portion of the WSA is manageable as wilderness, yet has relatively low wilderness values in a narrow land configuration. Adjusting the boundary would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal by placing the boundary along a regularly used ways which sets the area off from the rest of the WSA.

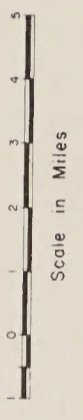
AREA D: Three Forks -- 90 acres of canyon along the east-central boundary of the WSA are contained in a narrow finger of land. Adjusting the boundary would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal by eliminating the narrow finger of land.

AREA E: Mud Flat -- 100 acres of plateau in the northern neck of the WSA are also contained in a narrow finger of land. Eliminating the area would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal.

AREA F: Soldier Creek -- 980 acres of plateau in the northern neck of the WSA are contained in a somewhat square area isolated from the rest of the WSA by a narrow land neck. The area has one mile of fence and one reservoir proposed for livestock management. The area has lower opportunities for solitude and for primitive recreation than the recommended wilderness. Release of the area for nonwilderness uses would allow for more intensive livestock management and would improve the management configuration of the wilderness.



- RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS
- LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- SPLIT ESTATE
- STATE
- PRIVATE



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 PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988

AREA B: Anderson Crossing -- 4,420 acres in the southwest tip of the Owyhee River Canyon WSA contains a plateau with relatively low wilderness values in comparison to its value for livestock forage production. The area contains two miles of water pipeline, two reservoirs and five miles of ways. The pipeline has a road along it and a large water tank which is visible over the entire Area B. There are three 40 acre private inholdings within the area.

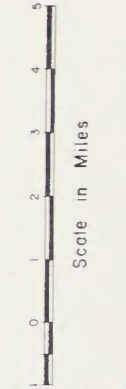
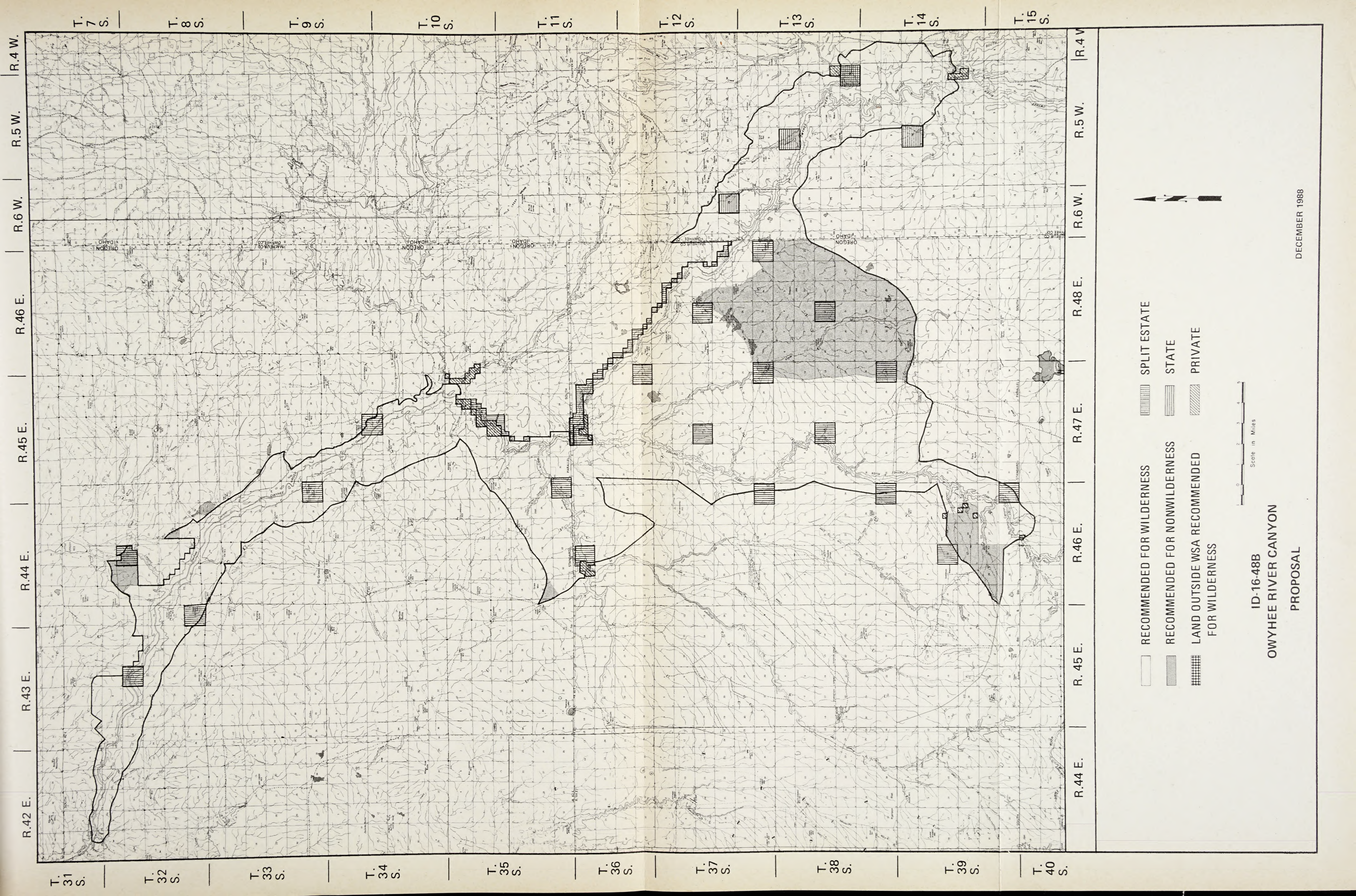
AREA C: Antelope Creek -- 1,030 acres of plateau in the west-central portion of the WSA is manageable as wilderness, yet has relatively low wilderness values in a narrow land configuration. Adjusting the boundary would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal by placing the boundary along a regularly used ways which sets the area off from the rest of the WSA.

AREA D: Three Forks -- 90 acres of canyon along the east-central boundary of the WSA are contained in a narrow finger of land. Adjusting the boundary would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal by eliminating the narrow finger of land.

AREA E: Mud Flat -- 100 acres of plateau in the northern neck of the WSA are also contained in a narrow finger of land. Eliminating the area would improve the management configuration of the wilderness proposal.

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- RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS
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- STATE
- PRIVATE

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**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
OWYHEE RIVER CANYON WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

	<u>IDAHO</u>	<u>OREGON</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	34,980	180,320	215,300
Split Estate (BLM surface only) <sup>1</sup>	0	10,380	10,380
Inholdings (state, private)	0	120	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,980</b>	<b>190,820</b>	<b>225,800</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	34,980	143,600	178,580
BLM (outside WSA)	640	0	640
Split Estate (within WSA) <sup>1</sup>	0	8,440	8,440
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0	0	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>35,620</b>	<b>152,040</b>	<b>187,660</b>
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	0	3,560	3,560
State land (outside WSA)	0	0	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	0	32,720	36,720
Split Estate <sup>1</sup>	0	1,940	1,940
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38,660</b>	<b>38,660</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0	120	120

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings and/or split estate tracts included within the area recommended for designation. For purposes of this report, split estate lands are defined as those lands with federal surface and nonfederal subsurface (minerals). Lands that have federal minerals but nonfederal surface are classified by the owner of the surface estate.

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Owyhee River Canyon WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 126 miles of deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, raptors, waterfowl and chukars. Trout and largemouth bass are found in the Owyhee River. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than eight percent impacted by human imprints. Most imprints are widely dispersed across the plateau and include 82.5 miles of vehicle tracks (ways), 20.3 miles of cherry-stem roads, fences, four developed springs and 65 small livestock water ponds. In the canyons, imprints are lacking except for some historic ruins. WSA boundary roads can be seen from small areas of the canyon.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, intimate seclusion of canyonlands and the vastness of seemingly undisturbed desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyons and water courses provides excellent topographic screening between visitor groups traveling close together. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a tremendous sense of seclusion or separation. The length of canyons allows visitor groups to easily find campsites which are out of sight and sound of other groups and to adjust their rates of travel to avoid other groups while floating or hiking.

From high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight in mostly fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur at elevations as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Daily low elevation flights by B-52 bombers also occur over WSA lands in Oregon. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules over this large area, impacts upon the solitude of visitors vary greatly. At times, jets can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear aircraft.

## C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running and secondary activities of sightseeing, outdoor photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities are of exceptionally high quality and considered nationally significant. Within the portion of the WSA in Oregon, the Owyhee River and the West Little Owyhee River have been included within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids add significantly to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

Talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel both near the river and on the plateau. Recreational use of the plateau would concentrate near the canyon rims. These rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. Hiking on the plateau also provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces.

## D. Special Features

The WSA is rich in special features including scenic, scientific, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute to the overall quality of the wilderness.

The canyons of the Owyhee River system are of exceptionally high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky creates a dramatic stark beauty. In places, reddish brown cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the water. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, lush, clinging, deep green plant communities. The monoliths are frequently topped with a multitude of diversely eroded spires. The sheer rock walls often give way to steep slopes covered with a mosaic of red rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for survival. Sensitive plant species include *Pediocactus simpsonii* var. *robustior*, *Hackelia ophiobia* and *Lupinus uncialis*.

The WSA contains both historic and prehistoric archaeological sites. Prehistoric sites include petroglyphs along the shoreline of the Owyhee River below Three Forks, the Dirty Shame Rockshelter at Antelope Creek Canyon, scattered sites along the rim of the canyons, and caves and rock shelters in the canyons. Historical sites include a stone building along the Owyhee River near the Idaho-Oregon state line, a log cabin in the outer canyon of the South Fork Owyhee River and an old military road near Three Forks. Significant historic resources are also located on adjoining or intermixed private properties.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Owyhee River Canyon WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Owyhee River Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250



## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Owyhee River Canyon WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

Much of the WSA is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. Within the 187,660 acres recommended for designation, there are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. Except for the northern tip of the WSA, which is within five miles of Highway 95, the boundary of the WSA is over 20 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA's boundaries is via some gravel roads but mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat, but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles. The livestock improvements (small water ponds) are widely scattered over the plateau and their maintenance would have little impact.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for 185,740 acres of the WSA in 1987. The assessment found that, in Oregon, two areas have low potential for silver, lead and tin, and one area has low potential for tin. Trace amounts of gold found at Five Bars in Oregon indicate that the Owyhee River gravels have unknown potential for gold. The portion of the WSA in Idaho exhibits no evidence of metallic or nonmetallic mineral resources.

The WSA contains no mines or active mining claims. A prospect for lapidary jasper, chalcedony and common opal is located along the eastern boundary of the WSA. The prospect yields materials mostly of interest to hobbyists.

Oil and gas leasing has occurred on parts of the area but no drilling has taken place. The potential for oil and gas in the Oregon part of the area is unknown. The Idaho portion is considered to have no resource potential for oil and gas.

Warm springs exist in Oregon just south of Three Forks but they were determined to be low potential for geothermal resource development.

Sources of building stone, sand and gravel exist but better supplies are available in more accessible areas.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-48B/OR-3-195 (OWYHEE RIVER CANYON)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (187,660 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 187,530 acres from management actions, slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing management. Additional localized improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation due to higher visual quality standards during rangeland facility maintenance or reconstruction and closure of 62 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. Localized reductions in naturalness due to trampling of river campsite vegetation and the construction of new reservoir/fences (130 acres). Vehicle access for rangeland facility maintenance prevents rehabilitation of all roads closed to recreation use. Recreation use per annum to reach 7,850 user days for boating, 800 user days for backpacking and 660 user days for other activities. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (38,600 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 36,575 acres. Localized reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 185 acres from construction of new reservoir/fences, on 1,900 acres from drill seeding land treatments and oil/gas exploration activities, and on an additional 1,300 acres from oil/gas activities only (short term). Solitude opportunities also reduced by oil/gas exploration activities (short term). Some reduction in naturalness of plateau because</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (225,680 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 212,465 acres from management actions. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation on 2,900 acres from drill seeding land treatments and oil/gas exploration activities. Short-term loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on an additional 1,300 acres from oil/gas exploration activities only. Localized reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 315 acres due to reservoir/fence construction. Mining/geothermal activities cause a loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 10,000 acres. Solitude opportunities also reduced by oil/gas exploration and mining/geothermal activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 7,850 user days for boating, 550 user days for backpacking and 1,230 user days for other activities. This level of use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities except for localized campsite trampling along river. Slight reduction in naturalness of plateau because of increased grazing.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (47,540 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 47,540 acres from management actions. Localized reduction in naturalness due to trampling of river campsites by recreation users. Recreation use per annum to reach 7,850 user days for boating and 550 user days for backpacking. Other uses to reach 515 user days. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities. Localized improvement in naturalness by closure of 4 miles of roads to recreation use.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (178,140 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 167,125 acres. Localized reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation on 315 acres from construction of new reservoirs/fences, on 7,800 acres from mining activity, on 1,300 acres from oil/gas exploration and seeding activities. Recreation use to reach 1,000 user days per annum in 20 years. This use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities. Slight reduction in naturalness of plateau because of increased grazing.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (148,990 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 148,990 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing management. Additional localized improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation due to higher visual quality standards during rangeland facility maintenance or reconstruction and the closure of 40 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. Localized reduction in naturalness due to trampling of river campsite vegetation and the construction of new reservoirs/fences (130 acres). Vehicle access to rangeland facilities for maintenance prevents rehabilitation of all roads closed to recreation use. Recreation use per annum to reach 7,850 user days for boating and 800 user days for backpacking in 20 years. This use not to affect solitude or primitive recreation. Other recreation uses (1,000 user days) also not to affect these opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (77,330 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 72,705 acres. Localized reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 185 acres from construction of new reservoirs/fences, on 2,500 acres from drill seeding land treatments and oil/gas exploration activities, and on an additional 1,300 acres from oil/gas activities only (short term). Solitude opportunities also lost by oil/gas exploration activities (short term). Some reduction in naturalness of plateau because of increased grazing.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (226,320 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 224,210 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing management. Localized improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation due to higher visual quality standards during rangeland facility maintenance or reconstruction and closure of 103 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. Localized reduction in naturalness due to trampling of river campsite vegetation and the construction of new reservoirs/fences (190 acres). Vehicle access for rangeland facilities maintenance prevents rehabilitation of all roads/ways closed to recreation use. In 20 years, recreation use per annum to reach 7,850 user days for boating, 800 user days for backpacking and 1,095 user days for other uses. This use not to affect solitude or primitive recreation opportunities</p>

(Continued next page)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values (continued) (Owyhee River Canyon WSA)	of increased forage utilization (more grazed appearances). Recreation use of 253 user days per annum in 20 years not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.			Recreation use of 425 user days per annum in 20 years not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.	
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 116,022 acres and maintained in good condition on 71,630 acres from grazing practices. Reservoir construction to displace 8 acres of native vegetation.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 33,450 acres and retained in good condition on 4,250 acres. Native plants displaced by seeding on 950 acres. Reservoir construction to displace 10 acres of native vegetation. Temporary loss of vegetation from oil/gas exploration activities on 10 acres.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 148,304 acres and retained in good condition on 75,880 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 1,450 acres by seeding. Reservoir construction to displace 18 acres of native vegetation. Mining and geothermal exploration activities would displace vegetation temporarily on 28 acres. Oil/gas exploration activities to temporarily displace additional 10 acres of vegetation.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 3,960 acres and retained in good condition on 43,580 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 144,350 acres and retained in good condition on 32,300 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 1,450 acres by seeding. Vegetation displaced on 18 acres by reservoir construction and on 14 acres by mining activity.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 77,660 acres and retained in good condition on 71,330 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 71,518 acres and retained in good condition on 4,550 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced by seeding on 1,250 acres. Vegetation displaced on 10 acres by reservoir construction and on 2 acres by mining activity. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activity.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 150,440 acres and retained in good condition on 75,880 acres by grazing practice.</p>
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope and sage grouse)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized, temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir construction/maintenance and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations on nonsuitable lands. Oil/gas exploration would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations on nonsuitable lands.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices. Reservoir construction/maintenance and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Oil/gas and mineral exploration would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices. Reservoir construction/maintenance would increase wildlife populations.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Motorized Semi-Primitive Recreation Use (Owyhee River Canyon WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 62 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 913 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads. Nonsuitable lands left open for vehicle access.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> All roads/ways to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 1,230 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> 4 miles of roads/ways within canyon wilderness closed to semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 1,515 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads/ways.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> 40 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Use to reach 1,425 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonsuitable lands left open for vehicle access.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> 103 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use associated with WSA boundary roads to reach 1,095 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.
Impacts on Livestock Use	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 12,565 AUMs to 12,665 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 9 reservoirs and 9 miles of fence will be built within wilderness and nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 12,565 AUMs to 22,535 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 9 reservoirs and 9 miles of fence will be built to help distribute livestock use.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 12,565 AUMs to 19,955 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> 9 reservoirs and 9 miles of fence will be built within nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 12,565 AUMs to 12,665 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> 9 reservoirs and 9 miles of fence will be built within wilderness and nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 12,565 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands. 4 reservoirs and 9 miles of fence to be built to help distribute livestock use.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 94 tons per year within wilderness.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Seeding on 1,900 nonwilderness acres to reduce soil erosion by 5-15%. Oil/gas exploration to produce short-term erosion problems on 10 acres. Projected small increase in livestock use combined with improved grazing practices to result in no measurable change in soil erosion rates overall.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Seeding on 2,900 acres to reduce erosion rate on affected lands by 5-15%. Oil/gas and mineral/geothermal exploration activities to produce short-term erosion problems on 38 acres. Projected large increase in livestock use to cause 10-20% increase in soil erosion on WSA lands overall despite improved grazing practices.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures within wilderness to reduce associated soil erosion by 76 tons per year. Seeding on 2,500 acres to reduce erosion rate by 5-15%. Oil/gas and mineral exploration activity to produce short-term erosion problems on 12 acres.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Projected large increase in livestock use to cause 10-20% increase in soil erosion on nonsuitable lands.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closure to reduce associated soil erosion by 237 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with no increase in livestock use levels to reduce soil erosion by 5% on plateau overall.
Impacts on Water Quality	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams remain about the same. Owyhee River and West Little Owyhee sediment loads not measurably affected.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams increased by 10-20%. Owyhee River and West Little Owyhee sediment loads not measurably affected. Remote possibility of toxic materials in West Little Owyhee from mining activity.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative except less possibility of toxic materials in West Little Owyhee.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 5%. Owyhee River and West Little Owyhee sediment loads not measurably affected.

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs (Owyhee River Canyon WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 187,660 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee and Malheur Counties. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Owyhee River Canyon WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives. During the wilderness inventory for the Owyhee River Canyon roadless unit, 23 public comments supported the establishment of a WSA and nine opposed it. Supportive comments stated the area possessed the minimum characteristics necessary (size, naturalness, solitude and primitive recreation opportunities) to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Owyhee River Canyon WSA. During public review on the Southern Malheur Management Framework Plan, 94 comments supported wilderness while nine opposed wilderness for WSA OR-3-195. Comments in support of wilderness stressed the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to the wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation in the Owyhee River Canyon and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the river's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments had no position. Those in support of wilderness for the Owyhee River Canyon WSA were mostly in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. The public was particularly concerned with BLM's recommendation to eliminate the Toppin Creek area (Area A), Anderson Crossing area (Area B) and Antelope Creek area (Area C) from wilderness designation. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation and the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources.

Government agency comments on the EIS took the following positions: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported wilderness designation; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness designation in the Owyhee Canyonlands as long as adequate consideration was given to utility corridors; the U.S. Air Force supported wilderness designation if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; the Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness; the Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported the wilderness recommendation; the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife supported wilderness designation of only the canyons; the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness; the Oregon Parks and Recreation Division stated that wilderness designation is

compatible with the Owyhee River State Scenic Waterway; the Oregon Department of Agriculture did not oppose wilderness as long as stockmen were allowed to continue managing livestock in an efficient manner; and the local governments of Owyhee and Malheur Counties opposed wilderness but supported national wild river designation.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Owyhee River Canyon WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a "flyer" sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.

**APPENDIX I -- OWYHEE RIVER CANYON WSA**  
**Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings**  
**Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (in \$)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate				
<b>STATE LANDS</b>								
T. 35 S., R. 45 E., Sec. 9 SE1/4SE1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 10 SE1/4NW1/4, N1/2SW1/4NE1/4, W1/2SW1/4, N1/2NE1/4SW1/4	160	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		1,600
Sec. 16 SE1/4, E1/2NE1/4, S1/2SW1/4	320	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		3,200
Sec. 20 NE1/4NE1/4, SE1/4SE1/4	80	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		800
T. 36 S., R. 47 E. Sec. 9	60	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		600
Sec. 10	20	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		200
Sec. 13 SW1/4SW1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 14 SE1/4, S1/2NE1/4, S1/2NW1/4	320	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		3,200
Sec. 15 NW1/4, S1/2NE1/4	240	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		2,400
Sec. 16 N1/2NE1/4, SE1/4NE1/4	120	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		1,200
Sec. 24 W1/2NW1/4, SE1/4NE1/4, NE1/4SE1/4	160	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		1,600
T. 36 S., R. 48 E. Sec. 19 SW1/4SW1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 29 SW1/4SW1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 30 E1/2NW1/4, W1/2SE1/4, SE1/4SE1/4	200	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		2,000
Sec. 32 NE1/4NW1/4, W1/2NE1/4, NE1/4SE1/4	160	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		1,600
Sec. 33 SW1/4SW1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400



Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
OWYHEE RIVER CANYON WSA (CONTINUED)								
STATE LANDS(cont)								
T. 37 S., R. 48 E. Sec. 3 N1/2SE1/4, SE1/4SE1/4, N1/2SW1/4	200	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		2,000
Sec. 4 SE1/4NE1/4, NW1/4NE1/4	80	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		800
Sec. 11 NW1/4NW1/4, SE1/4NW1/4	80	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		800
Sec. 14 NE1/4SE1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 23 NE1/4NE1/4	40	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		400
Sec. 24 SE1/4NW1/4, NW1/4SW1/4, NW1/4SE1/4, SE1/4SE1/4	160	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange		1,600
SPLIT ESTATE								
T. 32 S., R. 43 E. Sec. 16	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 33 S., R. 44 E. Sec. 36	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 34 S., R. 45 E. Sec. 16	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 35 S., R. 44 E. Sec. 36	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 36 S., R. 46 E. Sec. 16	600(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 36 S., R. 47 E. Sec. 16	280	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		2,800
Sec. 36	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 37 S., R. 47 E. Sec. 16	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 37 S., R. 46 E. Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 37 S., R. 48 E. Sec. 16	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
Sec. 36	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 38 S., R. 47 E. Sec. 16	640	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
OWYHEE RIVER CANYON WSA (CONTINUED)								
SPLIT ESTATE								
(Cont)								
T. 38 S., R. 46 E. Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
T. 39 S., R. 46 E. Sec. 36	640(2)	2	Federal	State	Yes	Exchange		6,400
PRIVATE LAND								
T. 35 S., R. 45 E. Sec. 3 W1/2SE1/4, SE1/4SW1/4	120	1	Private	Private	Yes	?	80,000	1,200
Sec. 9 N1/2SE1/4, SW1/4SE1/4	120	1	Private	Private	Yes	?	80,000	1,200
Sec. 10 NW1/4NE1/4, NE1/4NW1/4, SW1/4NW1/4	120	1	Private	Private	Yes	?	80,000	1,200
Sec. 16 W1/2NE1/4, NW1/4, N1/4SW1/4	320	1	Private	Private	Yes	?	240,000	3,200
T. 36 S., R. 47 E. Sec. 15 N1/2SW1/4	80	1	Private	Private	Yes	?	80,000	800
Sec. 16 SW1/4NE1/4, N1/2SE1/4, SE1/4SW1/4	160	2	Private	Private	Yes	?	160,000	1,600

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

(2)Portion of this acreage within area recommended for designation. Acquisition through exchange would necessitate acquisition of entire parcel.

# Little Owyhee River Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 24,600 acres

The Little Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-48C) is located in Owyhee County about 110 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 24,600 acres of BLM land and a state-owned 640 acre inholding (see Table 1).

Eighty-five percent of the WSA's 28-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads while the remaining 4.25 miles of boundary are along legal subdivisions of nonfederal property and along public lands judged not to have wilderness values. The WSA's northeast boundary adjoins the Owyhee River Canyon WSA (ID-16-48/OR-3-195) and the South Fork Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-53/NV-010-103A). The western part adjoins WSA OR-3-194.

The WSA consists of a flat to gently rolling sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 11 miles of canyons. The East Little Owyhee River canyon is 400 to 800 feet deep, narrow and somewhat meandering. Portions of the canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of a narrow band of grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. There were 2,120 acres of BLM land adjacent to the northern part of the WSA included in the study process under the authority granted in Section 202 of FLPMA.

Four alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for the WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 8,650 acres of BLM land (including the 190 acres studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA) would be designated as wilderness and 16,140 acres released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; two partial wilderness alternatives where 6,000 and 8,460 acres would be designated as wilderness and 18,600 and 16,140 acres, respectively, would be released for nonwilderness uses; a no wilderness alternative; and an all wilderness alternative where the entire WSA plus 2,120 acres of adjacent public land would be designated as wilderness.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**8,650 acres recommended for wilderness**

**16,140 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

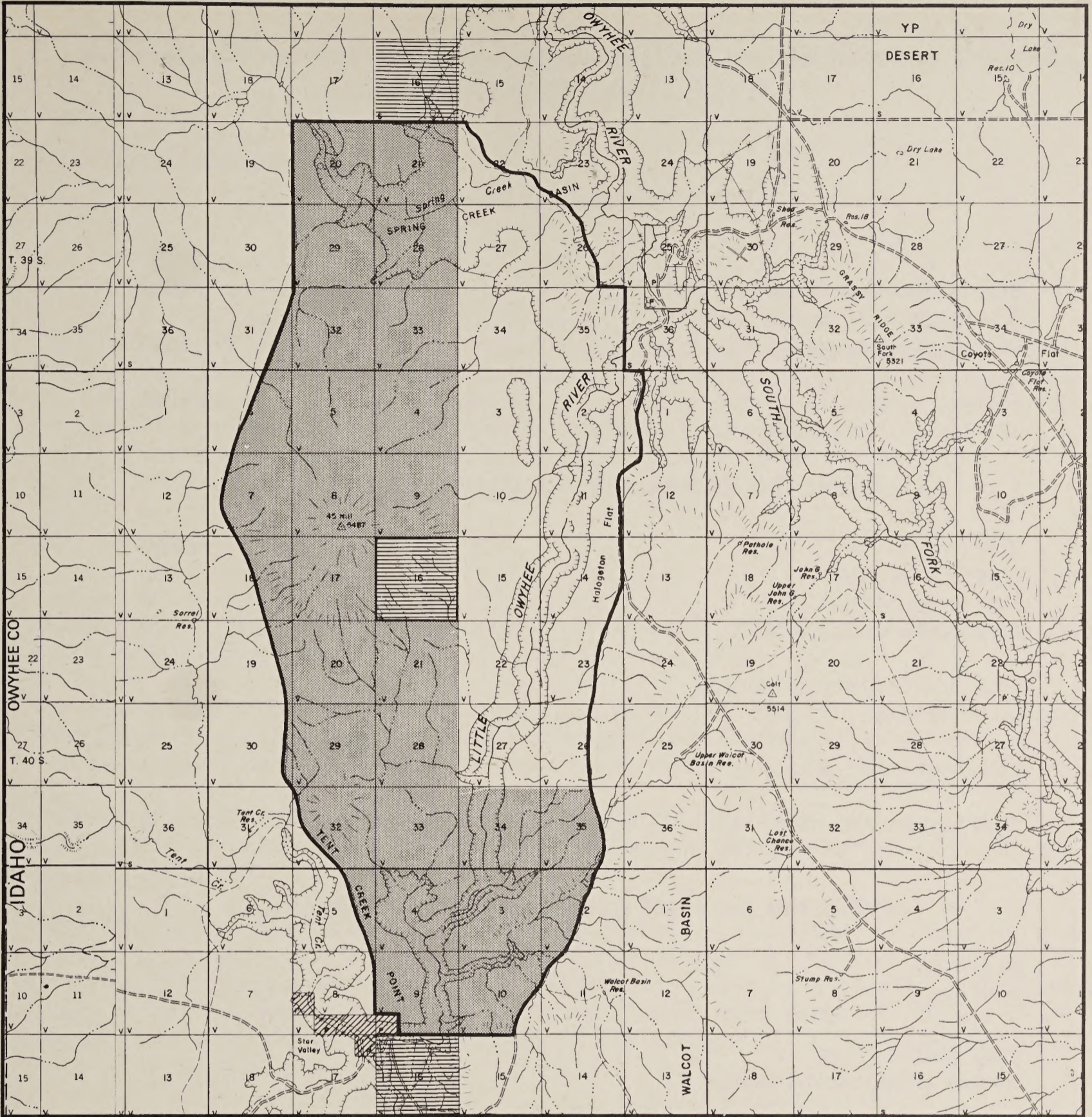
The recommendation for the Little Owyhee River WSA is to designate 8,650 acres as wilderness and release the 16,140 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment in the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 8,650 acres recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the Little Owyhee River Proposal map.

The 8,650 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 6,190 acres of scenic canyon and 2,460 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and offers significant special features. The area can be managed to protect wilderness characteristics over the long term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 8,650 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 190 acres of public land adjacent to the WSA that are recommended for wilderness designation were acquired from the state in 1987 after the designation of the area as a WSA. The area has wilderness values of high quality. Its inclusion in the recommendation provides a more definable wilderness boundary.

The 16,140 acres of BLM land recommended for release for uses other than wilderness include much of the plateau and southern canyon area of the WSA. The area was not recommended for wilderness designation because of a conflict with livestock grazing. Proposed projects include the seeding of 2,175 acres and the construction of livestock reservoirs, resulting in a 655 AUM increase in grazing use. The area is centrally located in the "45" allotment and designation as wilderness could have a negative impact upon livestock distribution and utilization and the proposed rangeland improvement projects for the entire "45" allotment. Restricting increases in livestock use and rangeland treatment projects within a wilderness would negate opportunities for increase in livestock use in much of the surrounding allotment. The area generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man, primarily rangeland developments, which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the area are similar to those afforded by thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. The WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. There are no significant wildlife species or habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation.



T. 14 S.

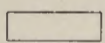
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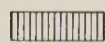
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R. 6 W. | R. 5 W.

R. 5 W. | R. 4 W.



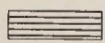
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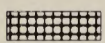
SPLIT ESTATE



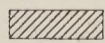
RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS



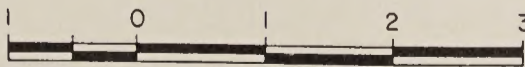
STATE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



PRIVATE



Scale in Miles

ID-16-48C  
LITTLE OWYHEE RIVER  
PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
LITTLE OWYHEE RIVER WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	24,600
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
 Total	 25,240

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	8,460
BLM (outside WSA)	190
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
 Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	 8,650
 Inholdings (state, private)	 0
 State land (outside WSA)	 0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	16,140
Split Estate	0
 Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	 16,140
 Inholdings (state, private)	 640

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Little Owyhee River WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 11 miles of 400 to 800 feet deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes an occasional California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, raptors, chukars and other birds. The WSA is predominantly natural. However, there are several site-specific signs of man that impact the area. These impacts are limited to widely dispersed rangeland developments including fences and two small livestock water reservoirs on the plateau.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolation and seclusion of canyonlands and the vastness of desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The somewhat meandering character of the canyon and streambed provide topographic screening between visitor groups traveling close together. The depth of the canyon combined with limited viewing distances creates a sense of seclusion or separation from the rest of the world.

From high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training pilots in low-elevation, subsonic flight in mostly fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur over different patterns at elevations as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules, impacts upon the solitude of visitors varies greatly. At times, jets can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear aircraft.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The Little Owyhee River WSA lacks outstanding primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities. However, there are no significant wildlife habitats, geologic features or scientific and educational values in the area that would attract a large number of visitors to the area.

#### D. Special Features

Two sensitive wildlife species, bobcat and California bighorn sheep, are found in the Little Owyhee River WSA. Of particular concern is the population of California bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for their survival. California bighorn sheep were successfully reintroduced into the Battle Creek, Deep Creek and Owyhee River canyon complex of WSAs ID-16-49A and ID-111-49E during the 1960s. Since that time, their population has expanded westward into adjoining WSA ID-16-48B/OR-3-195. In 1985, bighorn sheep were reintroduced into the South Fork Owyhee River canyon complex of adjoining WSA ID-16-53/NV-010-103A. Presently, an estimated population of 400 bighorns inhabit the Owyhee Canyonlands the year around. The South Fork transplant could eventually result in a total population of over 600 bighorn sheep within Idaho and Nevada. Some bighorns would inhabit the Little Owyhee River WSA.

Two sensitive plant species, *Eriogonum salicornoides* and *Phacelia lutea* var. *calua*, have been found in the WSA.



# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Little Owyhee River WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). However, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 102 other BLM WSAs in the two states under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Little Owyhee River WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Little Owyhee River WSA would contribute to balancing the geographical distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The edge of the WSA is at least 38 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA is via some gravel roads but mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. The plateau areas close to the canyon are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation in 1986. The assessment found that the area has a low mineral potential for silver, gold and mercury and for the nonmetallic commodities of diatomite and zeolites. The area contains no mines, prospects or mining claims and no identified mineral resources.

Parts of the area are included in oil and natural gas leases or lease applications but no exploration has occurred. The potential for oil and gas is unknown but their occurrence is very unlikely.

A prospect for jasper, chalcedony and common opal exists outside and northeast of the area near the "45" ranch. This material is suitable for lapidary purposes.

Sand and gravel deposits suitable for construction use occur but larger deposits are widely available in more accessible areas.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-48C (LITTLE OWYHEE RIVER)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (8,650 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 8,525 acres from management action. Slight improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Localized short-term loss of naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,990 acres from oil/gas exploration activity on adjacent nonwilderness lands. Localized reduction in naturalness and primitive recreation from new reservoir construction on 25 acres. Only 30 user days of backpacking per annum expected in 20 years. Other use expected to be 95 user days. This use to cause no impact to naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (16,140 acres)</b> Entire 16,140 acres to have naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities reduced by drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 3,500 acres also to have solitude/primitive recreation and naturalness reduced in short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation use of 100 user days not expected to have impact on naturalness or primitive recreation/solitude opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (24,600 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities expected on 8,460 acres from management actions. Remaining 16,140 acres to have naturalness and primitive recreation/solitude opportunities reduced by drill seeding land treatments and rangeland facility development. Of this acreage, 3,500 acres plus another 1,900 acres to have naturalness and primitive/solitude recreation opportunities reduced in the short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years expected to reach 20 user days for backpacking and 195 user days for other uses. Such use to have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (6,000 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities expected on 6,000 acres from management actions. Recreation use (backpacking) to reach 20 user days per annum in 20 years. This use to have no impact on naturalness or solitude primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (18,600 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities expected on 2,460 acres. Reduction in naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation to occur on 16,140 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 3,500 acres plus another 1,900 acres have naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation reduced in the short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation user days per annum in 20 years to reach 195 user days. Such use to have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (8,460 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 8,460 acres from management action or recreation use. Impacts same as those of Proposed Action.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (16,140 acres)</b> Entire 16,140 acres to have naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities impacts as described under Proposed Action except recreation use expected to be 90 user days per annum in 20 years and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (26,720 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 26,720 acres from management actions. Slight improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 30 user days for backpacking and 195 user days for other activities. This use to have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>
Impacts to the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued next page)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 6,170 acres and retained in good condition on 2,480 acres from grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 9,888 acres and retained in good condition on 4,075 acres by grazing practices. Native</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 16,058 acres and retained in good condition on 6,365 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 2,175 acres. Vegetation on additional 2 acres displaced by reservoir construction. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained on 6,000 acres.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 16,058 acres and retained in good condition on 365 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 2,175 acres by seeding. Vegetation on additional 2 acres</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 18,235 acres and retained in good condition on 8,485 acres by grazing practices.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts to the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued) (Little Owyhee River WSA)	plants displaced by seeding on 2,175 acres. Reservoir construction to displace 2 additional acres. Temporary loss of vegetation from oil/gas exploration activities on 10 acres.		by reservoir construction. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activities.		
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope and sage grouse)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized, temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir construction/maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations on non-suitable lands. Oil/gas exploration would cause a temporary displacement of wildlife populations on nonsuitable lands.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir construction, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Oil/gas exploration would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir construction/maintenance and prescribed burning would increase wildlife populations.</p>
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> No roads/ways to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 195 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonwilderness lands left open for vehicle use.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> No roads/ways to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Use to reach 195 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> No roads/ways to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 195 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads/ways.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> No roads/ways to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Use to reach 185 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Lands left open for vehicle use.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described for the Proposed Action.</p>
Impacts on Livestock Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,255 AUMs to 1,910 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 1 reservoir to be built in nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,255 AUMs to 2,100 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 1 reservoir to be built to help distribute livestock use.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,255 AUMs to 2,100 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 1 reservoir to be built in nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,255 AUMs to 1,010 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands. 1 reservoir to be built in nonwilderness to help distribute livestock use.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 1,255 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Soil Erosion (Little Owyhee River WSA)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding to result in reduced soil erosion over the long term by 5-15% on 18,600 acres of plateau.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> A large projected increase in livestock use on non-wilderness lands of 16,140 acres to increase soil erosion by 10-20%. Oil/gas exploration also to produce short-term erosion problems on 10 acres. Overall, soil erosion rate to increase by 5-10% on nonwilderness plateau.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding to result in reduced soil erosion over the long term by 5-15% on 18,600 acres. However, this entire acreage to see 10-20% increase in soil erosion from large projected increase in livestock use. Oil/gas exploration also to produce short-term erosion problems on 10 acres. Overall, soil erosion rate to increase by 5-10% on plateau.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those under the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those under the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and no increase in livestock use to result in 15% reduction in soil erosion on plateau overall.</p>
Impacts on Water Quality	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams increased by as much as 10%. East Little Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 15%. East Little Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.</p>
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.</p>

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 8,650 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Little Owyhee River WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives.

During the wilderness inventory for the Little Owyhee River roadless unit, two public comments supported the establishment of a WSA and two opposed it. Comments in support stated the area possessed the characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Little Owyhee River WSA. Comments in support of wilderness designation were primarily justified on the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to the wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the canyon.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments had no position. Those supporting wilderness for the Little Owyhee River WSA mostly favored designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation and the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources.

Ten government agencies commented on this WSA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation to protect wildlife habitat; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness; the Department of the Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness because of conflicts with its tactical flight training mission. The Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness designation. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation. The Federal Aviation Agency, Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency took no position.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 62 supported designating the entire Little Owyhee River WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a "flyer" sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.



# Owyhee River-Deep Creek Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 72,720 acres

The Owyhee River-Deep Canyon WSA (ID-16-49A) is located in Owyhee County about 100 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 72,720 acres of BLM land and no nonfederal inholdings (see Table 1). It includes 2,560 acres acquired from the state in 1987.

Sixty-two percent of the WSA's 76-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads and fence lines. About 30 miles of boundary are along legal subdivisions of nonfederal land and along public lands judged not to have wilderness values. Eleven cherry-stem roads (8.5 miles) enter the WSA. The WSA's western boundary adjoins the Owyhee River Canyon WSA (ID-16-48B/OR-3-195) while the eastern boundary adjoins both the Battle Creek WSA (ID-111-49E) and Yatahoney Creek WSA (ID-16-49D).

The WSA consists of a flat to gently rolling sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 13 miles of canyons 400 to 500 feet deep, including eight miles of the East Fork Owyhee River. Portions of the narrow, meandering canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of narrow bands of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 70,090 acres of BLM lands (including the 4,180 acres studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA) would be designated as wilderness and 4,250 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 19,240 and 58,090 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 43,480 and 15,310 acres, respectively, would be released for nonwilderness uses; an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative where about 9,300 acres would be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems as a portion of a larger wild river area.

## 2. Recommendation and Rationale

**70,090 acres recommended for wilderness**

**4,250 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA is to designate 70,090 acres as wilderness and release 4,250 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 70,090 acres recommended for wilderness are shown as the nonshaded area on the Owyhee River-Deep Creek Proposal map. This recommendation would further apply to 160 acres of private lands adjacent to the WSA if acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Appendix I lists all nonfederal lands within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on acquisition of these lands.

The 70,090 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System by adding 55 miles of spectacularly scenic canyons and 51,630 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation and offers significant special features. The area is manageable to protect wilderness characteristics with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 70,090 acres recommended for designation are part of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 1,620 acres of BLM land adjacent to the WSA were added to the area recommended for wilderness designation because they have wilderness values and would provide a more definable wilderness boundary. The adjusted boundary would improve the management configuration of the wilderness recommendation. A portion of this acreage, 780 acres, was acquired from the State of Idaho in 1987 after the area was designated as a WSA.

The 4,250 acres of BLM land recommended for other use are shown as Areas A and B on the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA map. This land is not recommended for wilderness designation for the following reasons:

AREA A: Dickshooter - 810 acres of plateau along the northern tip of the WSA contains an improved road and two livestock water reservoirs. The area has lower naturalness and primitive recreation values compared to the area recommended for wilderness designation.

AREA B: "YP" Desert/Paiute Creek - 3,440 acres of plateau along the south central boundary of the WSA has lower wilderness values for naturalness and primitive recreation compared to the area recommended for wilderness designation. The area contains four cherry-stem roads and four livestock water reservoirs.

Releasing Areas A and B for uses other than wilderness would allow for a 125 AUM increase in livestock grazing.



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T. 12 S.

T. 12 S.

T. 13 S.

T. 13 S.

T. 14 S.

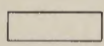

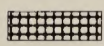
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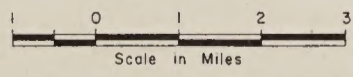
R. 5 W. | R. 4 W.

R. 4 W. | R. 3 W.

R. 3 W. | R. 2 W.

-  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS
-  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**ID-16-49A  
OWYHEE RIVER— DEEP CREEK  
PROPOSAL**

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
OWYHEE RIVER-DEEP CREEK WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	72,720
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
	72,720
Total	

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	68,470
BLM (outside WSA)	2,400
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	70,090
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	160
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	4,250
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	4,250
Inholdings (state, private)	0

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings included within the area recommended for designation.

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 55 miles of deep canyons. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than six percent impacted by human imprints. The widely dispersed imprints include 26 small livestock water reservoirs, a developed spring, 8.5 miles of cherry-stem roads, 11.5 miles of ways (vehicle tracks) and fences.

In the canyons of the WSA, impacts are lacking except for some ruins of historic buildings. Portions of the WSA boundary roads can be seen from small areas of canyon.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, intimate seclusion of canyonlands and the vastness of desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyons and water courses provides excellent topographic screening between visitor groups traveling close together. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a tremendous sense of seclusion. The length of canyons allows visitors to easily find campsites which are away from others and to adjust their rates of travel to avoid interaction with other groups while floating or hiking.

From many high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada. These vast open spaces instill a sense of separation from civilization.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training military pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight in mostly fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur over different patterns at elevations as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules over this large area, impacts upon the solitude vary greatly. At times, jets can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear aircraft.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features also contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA. The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running as well as secondary activities of sightseeing, outdoor photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities are of exceptionally high quality and considered nationally significant.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids as well as several mandatory portages of waterfalls add to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The numerous talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel both near the river and on the plateau. Recreational use of the plateau would concentrate near the canyon rims. These rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. The area of use on the plateau is likely to be fairly wide due to the meandering character of the canyon rimrock and major side drainages. The canyon system can be seen from many plateau areas. Hiking on the plateau also provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces.

#### **D. Special Features**

The Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA is rich in special features including scenic, scientific, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the quality of the wilderness characteristics.

The canyons are of exceptionally high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky create a dramatic beauty. In places, reddish brown cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the water. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, deep green plant communities. The monoliths are frequently topped with a multitude of diversely eroded spires. The sheer rock walls often give way to steep slopes covered with a mosaic of red rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

The Owyhee River is nationally known for its whitewater boating. The East Fork Owyhee River is a portion of a larger segment of river recommended to Congress for inclusion within the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS). The Owyhee River, West Little Owyhee River and North Fork Owyhee River downstream from the WSA in Oregon have been designated as components of the NWSRS.

Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for their survival. California bighorn sheep were successfully reintroduced along the East Fork Owyhee River in the 1960s. An estimated 400 bighorns inhabit the Owyhee Canyonlands WSAs all year around. Sensitive plant species found in the WSA are *Erigeron latus* and *Hackelia upiobia*.

The WSA contains both historic and prehistoric archaeological sites. Historic sites include the ruins of buildings along the East Fork Owyhee River near the confluence of Deep Creek. Prehistoric sites are found within caves and rock shelters in the canyons and are also scattered across the plateau.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). However, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

### TABLE 2

#### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
	<u>NEVADA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
	<u>OREGON</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250



## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The WSA is at least 23 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA boundaries is mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for 67,400 acres of the WSA in 1987. The assessment found that the area has low mineral potential for gold and that a small area in the southwest part of the WSA has low potential for silver. Geochemical analyses indicate anomalous concentrations of tin, cadmium and zinc in areas underlain by rhyolite. Favorable structures for mineralization of tin and associated elements are lacking, however, and the anomalous values most likely reflect the generally higher concentrations of these elements in the rhyolite. Although a diatomite deposit occurs adjacent to the WSA, diatomite occurrences within the area are small and impure; hence, the WSA is considered to have no potential for diatomite. Construction-grade sand and gravel occurrences are small, scattered and poorly accessible. Available geologic and geophysical data give no indication of the occurrence of favorable source of rocks or structural traps for oil and gas. Drilling in geologically more favorable areas 50 miles to the north and south have yielded only dry holes. Oil and natural gas leases cover parts of the area but no exploration has occurred. The WSA is considered to have no potential for oil and gas.

The Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA contains no known mines or mining claims. A prospect for lapidary jasper, chalcedony and common opal adjacent to the area extends into the western portion of the WSA. The prospect yields materials mostly of interest to hobbyists.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-49A (OWYHEE RIVER-DEEP CREEK)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (70,090 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 70,090 acres from management actions. Slight improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Localized enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation from closure of 18 miles of road/ways to recreation use. However, use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance not to allow complete rehabilitation of routes. Localized short-term loss of naturalness and primitive/solitude recreation opportunities on 1,900 acres from oil/gas exploration activity on nonsuitable adjacent lands. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 406 user days for boating, 300 user days for backpacking and 265 user days for other activities. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall for naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (4,250 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 810 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 3,440 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 2,800 acres also to have naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities reduced in short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation use of 500 user days per annum in 20 years not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (72,720 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 69,280 acres from management actions. Slight improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Loss of naturalness on 3,440 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 2,800 acres plus another 1,900 acres to have reduced naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities in short term from oil/gas exploration activities. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum to reach 406 user days for boating, 180 user days for backpacking and 375 user days for other activities. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (19,240 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 19,240 acres from management actions. Localized enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from closure of 2 miles of ways to recreation use. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum to reach 406 user days for boating and 100 user days for backpacking. Other uses to reach 175 user days. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river corridor.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (53,480 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 50,040 acres. Slight enhancement of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 3,440 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 2,800 acres plus another 1,900 acres to have naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities reduced in short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation use of 260 user days per annum (80 user days for backpacking and 180 user days for other activities) in 20 years not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (58,090 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 58,090 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Localized enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from closure of 14 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance not to allow complete rehabilitation of routes. Localized short-term loss of naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,900 acres from oil/gas exploration activities. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 406 user days for boating, 180 user days for backpacking and 200 user days for other activities. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (15,310 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 11,870 acres. Loss of naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 3,440 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Of this acreage, 2,800 acres also to have naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities reduced in short term by oil/gas exploration activities. Recreation use of 80 user days per annum in 20 years not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (73,340 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 73,340 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Localized enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from closure of 20 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance not to allow complete rehabilitation of routes. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 406 user days for boating, 300 user days for backpacking and 280 user days for other uses. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts to the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 57,495 acres and retained in good condition on 12,595 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 3,700 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 550 acres by seeding. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres from oil/gas exploration activities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 59,550 acres and retained in good condition on 12,595 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 575 acres by seeding. Native vegetation temporarily displaced on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,925 acres and retained in good condition on 11,315 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 52,905 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 575 acres by seeding. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 45,495 acres and retained in good condition on 12,595 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 14,735 acres. Native plants displaced on 575 acres by seeding. Temporary displacement of vegetation on 10 acres by oil/gas exploration activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 61,745 acres and retained in good condition on 12,595 acres by grazing practices.</p>
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope and sage grouse)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock number would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations on non-suitable lands. Oil/gas exploration would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations on non-suitable lands.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Oil/gas exploration would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance and prescribed burning would increase wildlife populations.</p>
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 18 miles of roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 315 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonwilderness lands left open to vehicle access.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> All roads/ways to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 375 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 2 miles of interior ways within the canyon wilderness closed to semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 335 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads/ways.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 14 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Use to reach 180 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonwilderness lands left open for vehicle access.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 20 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use associated with WSA boundary roads to reach 280 user days in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Livestock Use (Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 5,320 AUMs to 5,445 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 5,320 AUMs to 6,880 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 5,320 AUMs to 6,800 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 5,320 AUMs to 5,595 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 5,320 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures within wilderness to reduce associated soil erosion by 60 tons per year. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding on 53,480 acres of plateau to reduce soil erosion by 5-15%. This, combined with small projected increase in livestock use to reduce soil erosion on plateau overall by 10%. Oil/gas exploration also to cause short-term soil erosion problem on 10 acres.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding to reduce soil erosion by 5-15%. However, moderate projected increases in livestock use to result in 10% increase in soil erosion on plateau. Oil/gas exploration also to produce short-term erosion problem on 10 acres. Overall, soil erosion to increase by 0-5% on plateau.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Way closure within wilderness to reduce associated soil erosion by 1.3 tons per year. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding on plateau to reduce soil erosion by 5-15%. However, moderate projected increase in livestock use to result in 10% increase in soil erosion on plateau. Oil/gas exploration also to produce short-term erosion problem on 10 acres. Overall soil erosion to increase by 0-5% on plateau.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 57 tons per year. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding on plateau to reduce soil erosion by 5-15%. However, moderate projected increase in livestock use to result in 10% increase in soil erosion on plateau. Oil/gas exploration also to produce short-term erosion problem on 10 acres. Overall soil erosion to increase by 0-5% on plateau.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 78 tons per year. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and no projected increase in livestock use to result in 15% reduction in soil erosion on plateau.
Impacts on Water Quality	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 10%. Owyhee River and Deep Creek sediment loads not measurably affected.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams increased by as much as 5%. Owyhee River and Deep Creek sediment loads not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by as much as 15%. Owyhee River and Deep Creek sediment loads not measurably affected.
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 70,090 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives. During the wilderness inventory for the Owyhee River-Deep Creek roadless unit, two public comments supported establishing a WSA and nine opposed it. Comments in support felt the area possessed the characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA. Comments in support of wilderness designation were on the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to the wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation of the Owyhee River and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the river's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments took no position. Those in support of wilderness for the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA were mostly in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation and the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources.

Eleven government agencies commented on this WSA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation to protect wildlife habitat; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness; the Department of the Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness because of conflicts with its tactical flight training mission. The Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness designation while the Shoshone-Pauite Tribes stated the wilderness would prohibit construction of irrigation dams. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation but supported national wild river designation for the Owyhee River. The Federal Aviation Agency, Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency took no position.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.

**APPENDIX I -- OWYHEE RIVER-DEEP CREEK WSA  
 Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings  
 Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 13 S.R. 5 W. Sec. 25 SE1/4	160	1	Private	Private	Yes	Exchange	N/A	4,500

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

# Yatahoney Creek Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 9,990 acres

The Yatahoney Creek WSA (ID-16-49D) is located in Owyhee County about 100 miles south of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 9,990 acres of BLM land and a 40 acre, private inholding (see Table 1).

Seventy-six percent of the WSA is bounded by primitive dirt roads and a gas pipeline while the remainder is bounded by legal subdivisions along nonfederal land and along public lands judged not to have wilderness values. One cherry-stem road (1.3 miles) enters the southeastern portion of the area. The WSA is bounded on the north by the Battle Creek WSA (ID-111-49E), on the west by the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA (ID-16-49A) and on the south by the Juniper Creek WSA (ID-16-52).

The WSA consists of a flat to hilly sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 55 miles of canyons including 29 miles of the East Fork Owyhee River. The canyons are up to 600 feet deep, narrow and meandering. Portions of the canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of a narrow band of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Four alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 440 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; a partial wilderness alternative where 2,000 acres would be designated as wilderness and 7,990 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses; an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative where about 2,600 acres would be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems as a portion of a larger wild river area.



## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**9,550 acres recommended for wilderness**

**440 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Yatahoney Creek WSA is to designate 9,550 acres as wilderness and release 440 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

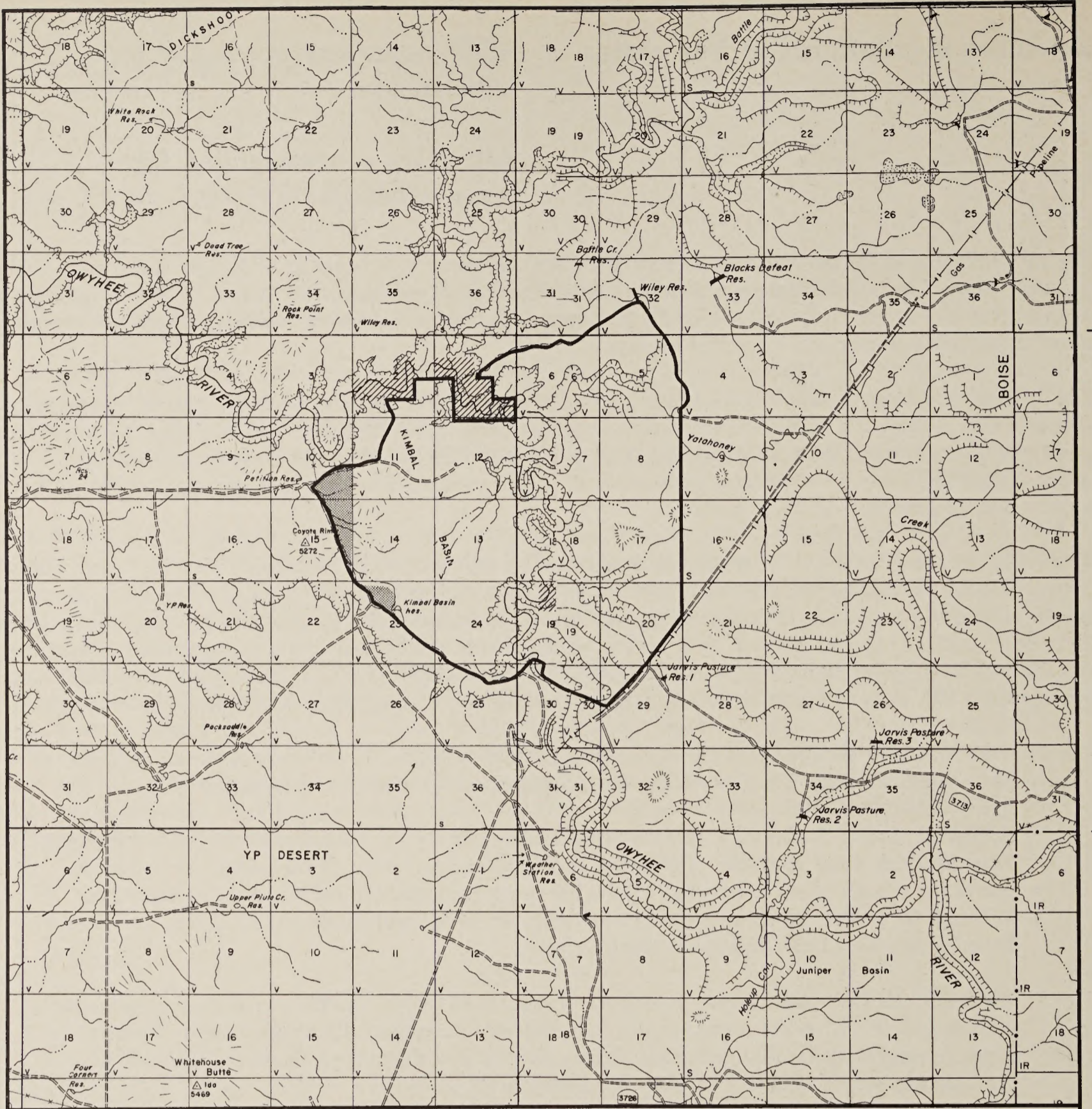
The 9,550 acres recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the Yatahoney Creek Proposal map. This recommendation would further apply to a 40 acre, privately owned inholding and to 160 acres of private land between this WSA and adjoining WSA ID-16-49A if acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Appendix I lists all nonfederal lands within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on acquisition of these lands.

The 9,550 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 13 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 7,550 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation, and offers significant special features. The area is manageable to protect wilderness characteristics. The 9,550 acres recommended for designation are part of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 440 acres of BLM recommended for release for nonwilderness uses are shown as Areas A and B on the Yatahoney Creek WSA map. These areas are not recommended for wilderness designation:

**AREA A:** Paiute Basin -- 320 acres of plateau along the western boundary of the WSA contains a large livestock water reservoir. The area's wilderness characteristics of naturalness and primitive recreation are low when compared to the 9,500 acres recommended for wilderness designation. Locating the wilderness boundary atop a low ridgeline to the east would provide a more protectable boundary allowing better control of motor vehicles.

**AREA B:** El Paso Gas Pipeline boundary -- 120 acres of canyon and plateau along the southeast boundary of the WSA not recommended for wilderness designation to allow for utility corridor (underground facilities only) along the existing El Paso Gas Pipeline right-of-way. The utility corridor was identified through BLM's planning process.









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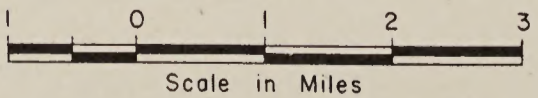
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R.2 W. | R.2 W. | R.1 W. | R.1 W. | R.1 E

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-49D  
YATAHONEY CREEK  
PROPOSAL**

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
YATAHONEY CREEK WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	9,990
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,030</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	9,550
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>9,550</b>
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	200
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	440
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>440</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings included within the area recommended for designation.

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Yatahoney Creek WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 13 miles of 400- to 500-foot deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, raptors, waterfowl, chukars, sage grouse and redband trout. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than three percent impacted by human imprints. These imprints include 1.3 miles of cherry-stem roads, one mile of way and widely dispersed rangeland developments including a fence and three livestock water reservoirs.

In the canyon portion of the WSA, imprints are lacking except for an historic ruin. Two primitive dirt roads can be seen from small parts of the canyon.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, intimate seclusion of canyonlands and the vastness of seemingly undisturbed desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyons and water courses provide excellent topographic screening between visitor groups traveling close together. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a sense of seclusion. The length of canyons allows visitors to easily find campsites which are away from others and to adjust their rates of travel to avoid other groups while floating or hiking.

From many high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada. These vast open spaces instill a sense of separation from civilization.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training military pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight in mostly fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur at elevations as low as 100 feet. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules over this large area, impacts upon the solitude vary greatly. At times, jets can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear a military jet.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features also contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA. The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running as well as secondary activities of sightseeing, outdoor photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities are of exceptionally high quality and considered nationally significant.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature. Floating or hiking along the river and tributary streams gives a sense of participation in the movement of natural forces.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids add significantly to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The numerous talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel both near the river and on the plateau. Recreational use of the plateau would concentrate near the canyon rims. These rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. The area of use on the plateau is likely to be fairly wide due to the meandering character of the canyon rimrock and major side drainages. The canyon system can be seen from many plateau areas. Hiking on the plateau provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces.

#### **D. Special Features**

The Yatahoney Creek WSA is rich in special features including scenic, scientific, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the quality of the wilderness characteristics.

The canyons are of exceptionally high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky creates a dramatic beauty. In places, reddish brown cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the water. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, lush, clinging, deep green plant communities. The monoliths are frequently topped with a multitude of diversely eroded spires. The sheer rock walls often give way to steep slopes covered with a mosaic of red rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

The Owyhee River is nationally known for its whitewater boating. The East Fork Owyhee River within the WSA is a portion of a larger segment of river recommended to Congress for inclusion within the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildland habitat for its survival. California bighorn sheep were successfully reintroduced along the East Fork Owyhee River in the 1960s. An estimated 400 bighorn inhabit the Owyhee Canyonlands WSAs all year around. One sensitive plant species, Packard's sagebrush (*Artemisia packardiae*), is found in the WSA.

The WSA contains both historic and prehistoric archaeological sites. Prehistoric sites are found within the canyons and on the plateau. The historic site is the ruins of a small stone building located on the 40 acre private inholding.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Yatahoney Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

#### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Yatahoney Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Yatahoney Creek WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The area recommended for wilderness designation is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The Yatahoney Creek WSA is at least 20 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA is mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles. Nonfederal inholdings are limited to a 40 acre piece of private property at the bottom of the Owyhee River Canyon. The property is undeveloped except for the ruins of a small stone building. There is no access to the property by road or way.

The portions of the WSA not recommended for wilderness (Areas A and B) are not manageable as wilderness because of problems in restricting motor vehicle use.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for the WSA in 1986. The assessment found that the WSA has a low resource potential for lead, tin and diatomite and an unknown resource potential for oil and gas.

The Yatahoney Creek WSA contains no known mines, claims or prospects. The southern part and the northeast corner of the area are covered by oil and gas leases or lease applications but no exploration has occurred. Just south of the WSA near the gas pipeline, there is a small outcrop of diatomaceous earth but no exploration has occurred. The likelihood of the occurrence of any mineral resource is extremely remote.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.



**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-49D (YATAHONEY CREEK)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (9,550 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 9,475 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning and from the closure of 2 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. Continued rangeland facility maintenance, however, to prevent complete rehabilitation of vehicle routes. Utility corridor construction activities on adjacent nonwilderness lands to cause a loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 75 wilderness acres. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 203 user days for boating, 100 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (440 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation use on 810 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 200 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 28 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use to be at 15 user days and not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (9,990 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 9,350 acres from management actions. Slight improvement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning except on 200 acres. Naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities lost on 200 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 203 user days for boating, 90 user days for backpacking and 145 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall but some localized reduction in naturalness from the trampling of river campsites by recreation use.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts under the Subalternative would be the same as those under the No Action Alternative except an additional 103 acres to have naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities lost by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (2,000 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 2,000 acres from management actions. Some localized reduction in naturalness at river campsites due to vegetation trampling by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 203 user days for boating, 60 user days for backpacking and 45 user days for other activities. This use not to impact solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (7,990 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 7,790 acres. Slight enhancement of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation on 200 acres from drill seeding land treatments and on 103 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum to reach 130 user days (30 user days for backpacking and 100 user days for other activities) in 20 years and would have no affect on naturalness or on solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (9,550 acres)</b> Impacts the same as those described under the Proposed Action.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (440 acres)</b> Impacts the same as those described under the Proposed Action except recreation use to reach 20 user days per annum in 20 years and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (9,990 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 9,900 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 203 user days for boating, 100 user days for backpacking and 120 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall but some localized reduction in naturalness from the trampling of river campsites by recreation use.</p>
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued on next page)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,160 acres and retained in good condition on 2,390 acres by grazing practices.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,525 acres and retained in good condition on 2,390 acres by grazing practices.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained in good condition on 2,000 acres.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,160 acres and retained in good condition on 2,390 acres by grazing practices.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,600 acres and retained in good condition on 2,390 acres by grazing practices.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued) (Yatahoney Creek WSA)	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 362 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced by seeding on 75 acres. Utility corridor construction activities permanently remove additional 3 acres.	Native plants displaced on 75 acres by seeding.  <b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts the same as No Action Alternative except 3 acres of vegetation displaced by utility corridor construction activities.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,522 acres and retained in good condition on 290 acres from grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 75 acres by seeding. Vegetation displaced on additional 3 acres by utility corridor construction activities.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 362 acres. Native plants displaced on 75 acres by seeding. Vegetation also displaced on 3 acres by utility corridor construction activities.	
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Antelope and Sage Grouse)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/ NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased livestock numbers on nonsuitable lands would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance and prescribed burning would increase wildlife populations.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 2 miles of interior roads/ways within wilderness closed to recreational vehicle use. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 115 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/ NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> All interior roads/ways left open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 145 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> There are no road/ways within canyon wilderness to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 145 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads/ways.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 2 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 120 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described for the Wildlife Wilderness Alternative.
Impacts on Livestock Use	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 800 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/ NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 800 AUMs to 970 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 800 AUMs to 970 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 800 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 800 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.
Impacts on Soil Erosion (continued on next page)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures within wilderness to reduce associated soil erosion by 11 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding and a modest projected increase in livestock use to result in a 5%	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding and with a modest projected increase in livestock use to cause a	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described under the Proposed Action.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 11 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and no projected increase in

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Soil Erosion (continued) (Yatahoney Creek WSA)	burning and seeding and no projected increase in livestock use to result in a 5-15% reduction in soil erosion on 7,990 acres of plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.	reduction in soil erosion on plateau.  NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE Impacts the same as No Action Alternative except utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.	5% reduction in soil erosion on wilderness plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.		livestock use to result in 5-15% reduction in soil erosion on plateau.
Impacts on Water Quality	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by as much as 15%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	NONWILDERNESS/ NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 5%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.	WILDERNESS Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	NONWILDERNESS/ NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	WILDERNESS From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 9,550 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Yatahoney Creek WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives. During the wilderness inventory for the Yatahoney Creek roadless unit, three public comments supported the establishment of a WSA and one opposed it. Supporting comments stated the area possessed the characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. The opposing comment said the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Yatahoney Creek WSA. Comments in support of wilderness designation were primarily justified on the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation of the Owyhee River and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the Owyhee River's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments had no position. Those in support of wilderness for the Yatahoney Creek WSA were mostly in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation, the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources and the need to potentially develop utility corridors.

Eleven government agencies commented on this WSA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation to protect wildlife habitat; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness provided there were adequate utility corridor options; the Department of the Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness because of conflicts with its tactical flight training mission. The Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness designation while the Shoshone-Pauite Tribes stated the wilderness would prohibit construction of irrigation dams. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation but supported national wild river designation for the Owyhee River. The Federal Aviation Agency, Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency took no position.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Yatahoney Creek WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club.

**APPENDIX I -- YATAHONEY CREEK WSA**  
**Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings**  
**Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 14 S., R. 1 W. Sec. 19 NE1/4NW1/4	40	1	Private	Private	Yes	Exchange	N/A	2,000
Parcel No. 2 T. 14 S., R. 2 W. Sec. 2 SW1/4NE1/4 NW1/4SE1/4, N1/2SW1/4	160	1	Private	Private	Yes	Exchange	N/A	2,000

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

# Battle Creek Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 32,180 acres

The Battle Creek WSA (ID-16-49E [ID-111-49E]) is located in Owyhee County about 90 air miles south of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 32,180 acres of BLM lands, one state-owned 600 acre inholding and a 40 acre private inholding (see Table 1). The BLM acreage includes 640 acres acquired from the state in 1987.

Seventy percent of the WSA's 43-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads, fence lines and a gas pipeline. The remainder of the boundary is along legal subdivisions including 9.25 miles of nonfederal property. Two cherry-stem roads enter the southern part of the WSA. The WSA's southern boundary adjoins the Owyhee River-Deep Creek WSA (ID-16-49D).

The WSA consists of a flat to gently rolling sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 19 miles of canyons, including 16 miles of Battle Creek. The canyons are up to 400 feet deep, narrow and meandering. Portions of the canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of a narrow band of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. A 420 acre tract of BLM land adjacent to the WSA and a 640 acre tract within the WSA acquired from the state were included in the study process under the authority granted in Section 202 of FLPMA.

Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 32,520 acres of BLM land (including the 1,060 acres studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA) would be designated as wilderness and 80 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 2,680 and 27,020 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 29,500 and 5,580 acres, respectively, would be released for uses other than wilderness; an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative where the one mile of the East Fork Owyhee River within the WSA (320 acres) would be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems as a portion of a larger wild river area.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**32,520 acres recommended for  
wilderness**

**80 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Battle Creek WSA is to designate 32,520 acres as wilderness and release 80 acres for nonwilderness uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

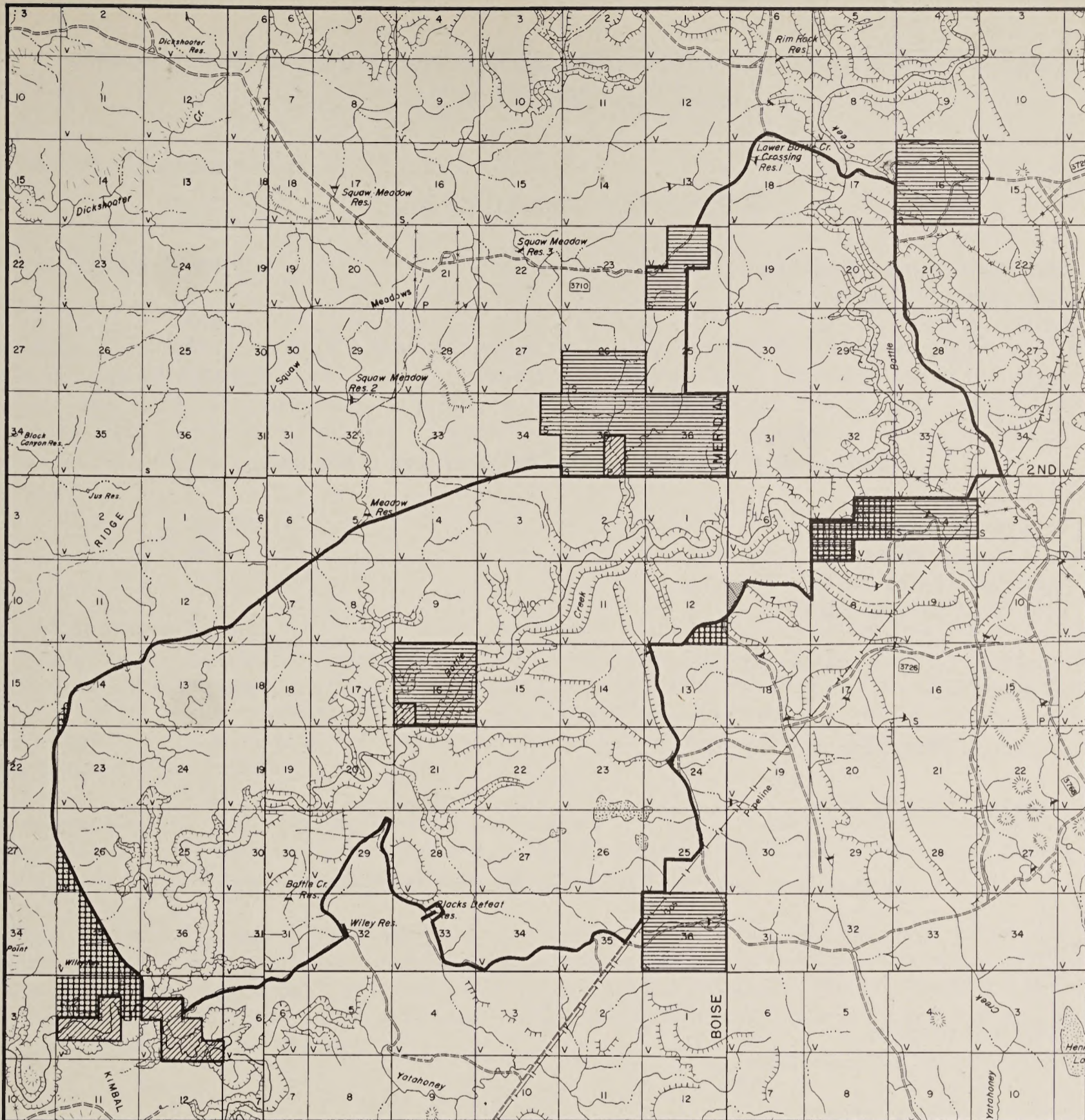
The 32,520 acres recommended for wilderness are shown as the nonshaded area on the Battle Creek Proposal map. This recommendation would further apply to any inholding acreage, to 320 acres of state land adjacent to the WSA and to 240 acres of private land interlocked between this WSA and WSA ID-16-49D if acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Appendix I lists all nonfederal land within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on the acquisition of these lands.

The 32,520 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 19 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 29,760 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation and offers significant special features. The area is manageable to protect wilderness characteristics over the long term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 32,520 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 420 acres of BLM land outside the southeast boundary of the WSA have wilderness values and were included within the area recommended for wilderness designation to align the wilderness boundary along topographic features.

The 80 acres of BLM land in the eastern part of the WSA were recommended for release for nonwilderness uses to allow for the establishment of an utility corridor (underground facilities only) along the existing El Paso Pipeline right-of-way. The utility corridor was identified through the BLM's planning process.





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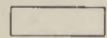
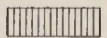

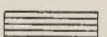
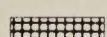
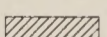
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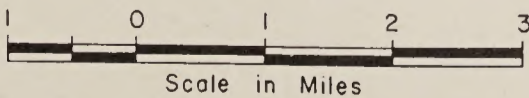
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R.2W. | R.1W.

R.1W. | R.1E.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-111-49E  
BATTLE CREEK  
PROPOSAL**

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
BATTLE CREEK WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	32,180
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,820</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	32,100
BLM (outside WSA)	420
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>32,520</b>
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	640
State land (outside WSA)	

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	80
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>80</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings included within the area recommended for designation.

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Battle Creek WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 19 miles of canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, raptors, waterfowl, chukars, sage grouse and redband trout. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than three percent impacted by human imprints. These imprints include a stone corral, 1.3 miles of cherry-stem road, one mile of way (vehicle tracks), a fence and seven livestock water reservoirs. All imprints are widely dispersed on the plateau.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, intimate seclusion of canyonlands and the vastness of seemingly undisturbed desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges. The meandering character of the canyons and water courses provides excellent topographic screening between visitor groups traveling close together. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a tremendous sense of seclusion. The length of canyons allows visitors to easily find campsites which are out of sight and sound of other groups and to adjust their rates of travel to avoid others.

From many high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada. These vast open spaces instill a sense of separation from civilization.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight in mostly fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur at elevations as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules over this large area, impacts upon the solitude vary greatly. At times, jets can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear a military jet.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features also contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA. The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running, as well as secondary activities of sightseeing, outdoor photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities on the Owyhee River are of exceptionally high quality and considered nationally significant.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel near both the creek and the plateau. Recreational use of the plateau tends to concentrate near the canyon rims. These rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. The area of use on the plateau is likely to be fairly wide due to the meandering character of the canyon rimrock and major side drainages. The canyon system can be seen from many plateau areas. Hiking on the plateau provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces.

#### **D. Special Features**

The Battle Creek WSA is rich in special features including scenic, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the quality of the wilderness characteristics. Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for their survival. California bighorn sheep were successfully reintroduced into the Battle Creek area in the 1960s. An estimated 400 bighorns inhabit the Owyhee Canyonlands WSAs all year around. The WSA contains prehistoric archaeological sites scattered throughout the plateau and in caves within the canyons.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Battle Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

#### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Battle Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Battle Creek WSA would add to the geographical distribution of wilderness areas. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The WSA is over 20 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA is along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for the WSA in 1986. The assessment found that the area has a low potential for gold, silver and tin and an unknown potential for oil and gas. The likelihood of any mineral resource occurring is remote.

The Battle Creek WSA contains no known mines, claims or prospects. Placer samples collected by the Bureau of Mines contained detectable levels of gold but not in concentrations sufficient to indicate a mineral resource. The source of the gold is thought to be 20 miles north of the WSA. About 50 percent of the area is covered by oil and gas leases or lease applications but no exploration has occurred.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-49E (ID-111-49E)(BATTLE CREEK)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (32,520 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 32,520 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices and closure of 2 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, continued use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance to prevent complete rehabilitation of routes. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 200 user days for backpacking and 190 user days for other activities. Such use not to impact naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (80 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 75 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 5 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to be only 10 user days and not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (32,520 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 32,520 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 140 user days for other activities. This use not to impact naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts under the Sub-alternative would be the same as those under the No Action Alternative except 5 acres would have a loss in naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation from utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (2,680 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 2,680 acres from management actions. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 140 user days for other activities. This use not to impact naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (29,500 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 29,495 acres. Slight enhancement of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation on 5 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 70 user days for backpacking and 120 user days for other activities. This use not to impact naturalness or on solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (27,020 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 27,020 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices and closure of 2 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, continued use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance to prevent complete rehabilitation of routes. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 200 user days for backpacking and 150 user days for other activities. This use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (5,580 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 5,575 acres. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from improved grazing practices. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from utility corridor construction activities on 5 acres. Recreation use to reach 70 user days per annum in 20 years and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (32,600 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 32,600 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation from improved grazing practices and closure of 2 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, continued use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance to prevent complete rehabilitation of routes. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 200 user days for backpacking and 200 user days for other activities. Such use not to impact naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation use.</p>
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 29,505 acres and retained in good condition on 3,015 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 77 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 3 acres by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 29,165 acres and retained in good condition on 3,015 acres.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts the same as No Action Alternative except 3 acres of vegetation displaced by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained in good condition on 2,200 acres.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 29,165 acres and retained in good condition on 335 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 3 acres by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 24,005 acres and retained in good condition on 3,015 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 5,577 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 3 acres by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 29,585 acres and retained in good condition on 3,015 acres by grazing practices.</p>



ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Antelope and Sage Grouse)(Battle Creek WSA)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices and reservoir on plateau would increase wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices and reservoir maintenance on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action except increased livestock numbers on nonsuitable lands would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices and reservoir maintenance would increase wildlife populations.</p>
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 2 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use in wilderness displacing the number of visitor days to areas outside the WSA.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> No impact.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> All roads/ways to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 220 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> There are no road/ways within canyon wilderness to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 220 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 2 miles of interior roads closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Use to reach 220 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts to be the same as those described under the Proposed Action.</p>
Impacts on Livestock Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 2,720 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,720 AUMs to 3,250 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,720 AUMs to 3,250 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,720 AUM to 2,770 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 2,720 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.</p>
Impacts on Soil Erosion	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closure to reduce associated soil erosion by 11 tons per year within wilderness. Improved grazing practices combined with no projected increase in livestock use to reduce soil erosion by 5-15% on 29,500 acres of plateau.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Despite improved grazing practices, moderate projected increases in livestock use to result in increased soil erosion of 5-10% overall on plateau.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts the same as No Action Alternative except utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Despite improved grazing practices, moderate projected increases in livestock use to result in increased soil erosion of 5-10% overall on plateau.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 11 tons per year within wilderness. Improved grazing practices combined with small projected increases in livestock use to reduce soil erosion by 5-15% overall on plateau.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 4.4 tons per year.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 11 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with no projected increases in livestock use to reduce soil erosion by 5-15% overall on plateau.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs (Battle Creek WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 32,520 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Battle Creek WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives.

During the wilderness inventory for the Battle Creek roadless unit, two public comments supported the establishment of a WSA and nine opposed it. Comments in support stated the area possessed the characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Battle Creek WSA. Comments supporting wilderness designation were primarily justified on the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation of the Owyhee River and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the Owyhee River's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments took no position. Those in support of wilderness for the Battle Creek WSA were mostly in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation and the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources.

Eleven government agencies commented on this WSA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation to protect wildlife habitat; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness provided there were adequate utility corridor options; the Department of the Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness because of conflicts with its tactical flight training mission. The Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness designation while the Shoshone-Pauite Tribes stated the wilderness would prohibit construction of irrigation dams. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation but supported national wild river designation for the Owyhee River. The Federal Aviation Agency, Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency took no position.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Battle Creek WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.

**APPENDIX I -- BATTLE CREEK WSA**  
**Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings**  
**Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (in \$)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate				
Parcel No. 1 T. 13 S., R. 1 W. Sec. 16	600	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,400
Parcel No. 2 T. 13 S., R. 1 E. Sec. 16 SW1/4SW1/4	40	1	Private	Private	No	Exchange	N/A	2,000
Parcel No. 3 T. 13 S., R. 1 E. Sec. 5 SW1/4, S1/2N31/4, N1/2SE1/4	320	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	2,000
Parcel No. 4 T. 14 S., R. 2 W Sec. 1 S1/2NW1/4, E1/2SW1/4, S1/2SE1/4	240	1	Private	Private	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,000

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

(2)Portion of this acreage within area recommended for designation. Acquisition through exchange would necessitate acquisition of entire parcel.

# Juniper Creek Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 13,150 acres

The Juniper Creek WSA (ID-16-52) is located in Owyhee County about 115 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 13,150 acres of BLM lands with no nonfederal inholdings(see Table 1).

Fifty-one percent of the WSA is bounded by primitive dirt roads and a gas pipeline. Three miles of boundary are along Owyhee Canyon Rimrock, while the remaining 7.5 miles of the 20.5-mile boundary are along nonfederal property lines. One short cherry-stem road enters the northern part of the WSA. The Yatahoney Creek WSA (ID-16-49D) is just northwest of the WSA.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 12,950 acres of BLM land would be designated as wilderness and 200 acres released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; an all wilderness alternative; two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 3,200 and 9,930 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 9,950 and 3,220 acres, respectively, would be released for nonwilderness uses; and a no wilderness alternative where about 4,200 acres would be included within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as a portion of a larger wild river area.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**12,950 acres recommended for  
wilderness**

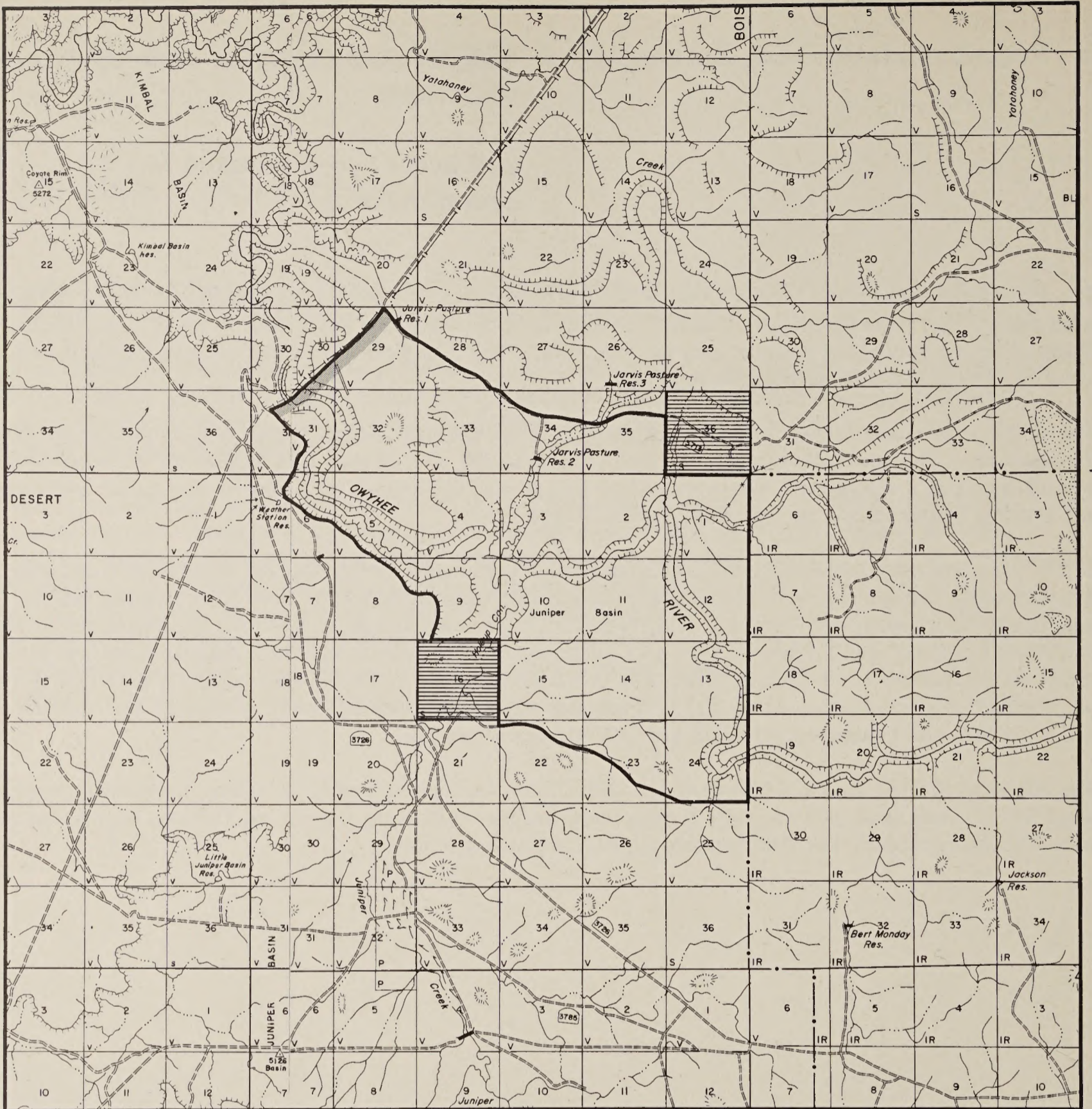
**200 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Juniper Creek WSA is to designate 12,950 acres as wilderness and release 200 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 12,950 acres recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the Juniper Creek Proposal map. This recommendation would further apply to 800 acres of state land adjacent to the WSA if acquired by exchange from a willing land owner. Appendix I lists all nonfederal lands within the recommended wilderness area and provides additional information on acquisition of these lands.

The 12,950 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 16 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 9,750 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation, and offers significant special features. The area can be managed to protect wilderness characteristics over the long term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 12,950 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 200 acres of BLM land in the western part of the WSA were recommended for release for nonwilderness uses to allow for a .25-mile wide utility corridor (underground facilities only) along the existing El Paso Gas Pipeline right-of-way. The utility corridor was identified through BLM's planning process.



T. 14 S.

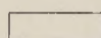
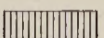

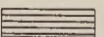
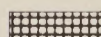
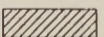
T. 15 S.

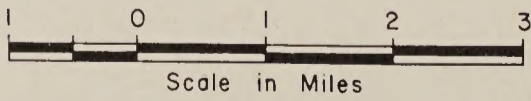
T. 15 S.

T. 16 S.

R.2 W. | R.1 W.

R.1 W. | R.1 E.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-16-52  
JUNIPER CREEK  
PROPOSAL**

DECEMBER 1988



**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
JUNIPER CREEK WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	13,150
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,150</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	12,950
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>12,950</b>
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	800
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	200
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>200</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Juniper Creek WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 16 miles of 300- to 500-foot deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, raptors, waterfowl, chukars, sage grouse and redband trout. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than two percent impacted by human imprints. These imprints are limited to one-half mile of cherry-stem road, a metal building, corral and stock pond site, two livestock water reservoirs and some fencing on the plateau.

Although there are no human imprints within the canyon portion of the WSA, the El Paso Gas Pipeline and a primitive dirt road can be seen from a small canyon portion of the WSA. The road provides access to an important whitewater boating put-in point.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, secluded canyonlands and the vastness of seemingly undisturbed desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyon and water courses provide excellent topographic screening between visitor groups. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a sense of seclusion.

From high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada. These vast open spaces instill a sense of separation from civilization.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight mostly in fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules, impacts upon solitude to visitors vary greatly. At times, aircraft can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear a military jet.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA. The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running and other activities such as sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities are of exceptionally high quality and considered nationally significant.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature. Floating or hiking along the river and tributary streams gives a sense of participation in the movements of a natural force.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids as well as several mandatory portages of rock falls add significantly to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel on both the river and plateau. Recreational use of the plateau concentrates near the canyon rims. Rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons and of vast open spaces stretching into the distant horizon.

#### **D. Special Features**

The Juniper Creek WSA is rich in special features including scenic, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the overall quality of the wilderness characteristics.

The canyons are of exceptionally high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky creates a stark beauty which envelopes the visitor. In places, reddish brown cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the water. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, lush, clinging, deep green plant communities. The monoliths are frequently topped with a multitude of diversely eroded spires. The sheer rock walls often give way to steep slopes covered with a mosaic of red rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

The Owyhee River is nationally known for its whitewater boating. The East Fork Owyhee River within the WSA is a portion of a larger segment of river recommended to Congress for inclusion within the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as a wild river.

Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for its survival. California bighorn sheep were reintroduced into the Battle Creek, Deep Creek and Owyhee River canyon areas in the 1960s. An estimated 40 bighorns inhabit the Owyhee Canyonlands WSAs all year around.

The WSA contains prehistoric archaeological sites of cultural value. These sites are scattered along the rim of the Owyhee River Canyon.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Juniper Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**

#### Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Juniper Creek WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas:**

The Juniper Creek WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA is manageable in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The WSA is nearly 20 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA boundaries is mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) completed a mineral assessment for the WSA in 1986. The assessment found that the WSA has a low mineral potential for lead, tin and diatomite and an unknown potential for oil and gas.

The Juniper Creek WSA contains no mines, claims or prospects. It is entirely covered by oil and gas leases or lease applications but no exploration has occurred. The WSA has a low mineral resource potential for lead, tin and diatomite and an unknown mineral resource potential for oil and gas. The likelihood of any mineral resources occurring is extremely remote.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-52 (JUNIPER CREEK)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (12,950 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 12,950 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning and from the closure of .5 mile of road to recreation use. Continued rangeland facility maintenance, however, to prevent complete rehabilitation of vehicle route. Utility corridor construction activities on adjacent nonwilderness lands to cause a loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 120 wilderness acres. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite by recreation use. Recreation use in 20 years to reach 100 user days for boating, 70 user days for backpacking and 80 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (200 acres)</b> Naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities lost on 200 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use to reach 30 user days per annum in 20 years and not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (13,150 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 11,790 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning except on 1,360 acres. Naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities lost on 1,360 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 100 user days for boating, 40 user days for backpacking and 100 user days for other activities. Such use not to impact naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall but some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use.</p> <p><b>NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Impacts under the Subalternative would be the same as those under the No Action Alternative except an additional 320 acres to have naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities lost by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (3,200 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 3,200 acres from management actions. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 100 user days for boating, 30 user days for backpacking and 10 user days for other activities. This use not to impact naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall but some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (9,950 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 8,270 acres. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning except on 1,360 acres. Naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities lost on 1,360 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Additional loss of naturalness and primitive recreation on 320 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use to reach 100 user days per annum (10 user days for backpacking and 90 user days for other activities) in 20 years and not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (9,930 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 9,810 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 120 acres from utility corridor construction activities on adjacent nonwilderness lands. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 100 user days for boating, 70 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall but some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (3,220 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,660 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 1,360 acres from drill seeding land treatments and on 200 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 30 user days and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (13,150 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 13,150 acres. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 100 user days for boating, 70 user days for backpacking and 100 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities but some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use.</p>
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (Continued next page)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 8,680 acres and retained in good condition on 4,270 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 200 acres by grazing practices.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 8,705 acres and retained in good condition on 4,270 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 175 acres by seeding.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained in good condition on 3,200 acres.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 8,705 acres and retained in good condition on 1,070 acres from grazing practices. Native</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 5,820 acres and retained in good condition on 4,110 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 2,885 acres and retained in good condition on 160 acres.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 8,880 acres and retained in good condition on 4,270 acres by grazing practices.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued) (Juniper Creek WSA)			plants displaced on 175 acres by seeding.	Native plants displaced on 175 acres by seeding.	
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Antelope and Sage Grouse)	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road closure would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance and prescribed burning on plateau would increase wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> There would be increased livestock numbers to compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations in nonsuitable lands.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road closure would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance and prescribed burning would increase wildlife populations.
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> .5 mile of interior road closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 100 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Interior road to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 100 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> There are no roads/ways within canyon wilderness to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 100 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> No roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Use to reach 100 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.  <b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonsuitable lands left open for vehicle access.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described for the Proposed Action.
Impacts on Livestock Use	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 1,635 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,635 AUMs to 1,935 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,635 AUMs to 1,935 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 1,635 AUMs to 1,735 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to remain at 1,635 AUMs over next 20 years on WSA lands.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Road closure to reduce associated soil erosion by 4 tons per year on wilderness lands. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and no projected increase in livestock use to result in 15% reduction in soil erosion on 9,950 acres of plateau.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding to reduce soil erosion on plateau by 5-15%. However, moderate projected increase in livestock use to result in 10% increase in soil erosion. Overall, soil erosion on plateau to increase by 0-5%.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS/NONWILDERNESS</b> Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding on plateau to cause 5-15% reduction in soil erosion. This combined with small projected increase in livestock use to reduce soil erosion on plateau overall by 10%.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 4 tons per year. Grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and no projected increase in livestock use to reduce soil erosion overall on plateau by 15%.



ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts to Water Quality (Juniper Creek WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 15%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by as much as 5%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 10%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as Proposed Action.
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS/NO ACTION SUBALTERNATIVE</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 12,950 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Juniper Creek WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives. During the wilderness inventory for the Juniper Creek roadless unit, two public comments supported the establishment of a WSA and two opposed it. Supporting comments said the area possessed the minimum characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the Juniper Creek WSA. Comments in support of wilderness designation were primarily justified on the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation of the Owyhee River and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the Owyhee River's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments had no position. Those in support of wilderness for the Juniper Creek WSA were mostly in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation, the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources and the need to potentially develop utility corridors.

Eleven government agencies commented on this WSA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation to protect wildlife habitat; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness provided there are adequate utility corridor options; the Department of the Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness because of conflicts with its tactical flight training mission. The Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness designation while the Shoshone-Paite Tribes stated the wilderness would prohibit construction of irrigation dams. The Owyhee County Commissioners opposed wilderness designation but supported national wild river designation for the Owyhee River. The Federal Aviation Agency, Soil Conservation Service and Environmental Protection Agency took no position.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Juniper Creek WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.

**APPENDIX I -- JUNIPER CREEK WSA**  
**Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings**  
**Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 14 S., R. 1 W. Sec. 36	640(2)	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	4,500
Parcel No. 2 T. 15 S., R. 1 W. Sec. 16	640(2)	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	3,400

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

(2)Only portion of this acreage within area recommended for designation but acquisition through exchange would necessitate acquisition of entire section. The two state sections are outside but adjacent to the WSA.

# South Fork Owyhee River Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 51,632 acres

The South Fork Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-53/NV-010-103A) is located in Owyhee County, Idaho, and Elko County, Nevada, about 115 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 43,790 acres of BLM land and one 160 acre privately owned inholding in Idaho and 7,842 acres of BLM land in Nevada, for a total of 51,632 acres of federal land (see Table 1). This acreage includes 1,280 acres acquired from the State of Idaho in 1987 after the area was designated as a WSA.

Within Idaho, 90 percent of the WSA's 40-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads and fence lines while ten percent is bound by legal subdivisions along nonfederal lands. In Nevada, the WSA's nine-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads, fence lines and a gas pipeline. Four cherry-stem roads (6.5 miles) enter the WSA. The northern part of the WSA adjoins the Little Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-48C) and the Owyhee River Canyon WSA (ID-16-48B/OR-3-195) while the southern end of the WSA adjoins the Owyhee Canyon WSA (NV-010-106).

The WSA consists of a flat to hilly sagebrush-, bitterbrush- and bunchgrass-covered plateau dissected by 20 miles of canyons, including 17 miles of the South Fork Owyhee River. The South Fork canyon is 500 to 800 feet deep, narrow and very meandering. Portions of the canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of narrow bands of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Two 640 acre inholdings acquired from the State of Idaho were included in the study process under the authority granted in Section 202 of FLPMA as were 1,165 acres of BLM land adjacent to the WSA in Idaho.

Five alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 50,135 acres of BLM land (including the 2,445 acres studied under the authority of Section 202 of FLPMA) would be designated as wilderness and 2,662 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; two additional partial wilderness alternatives where 9,990 and 36,720 acres would be designated as wilderness, and 41,642 and 15,362 acres, respectively, would be released for nonwilderness uses; a no wilderness alternative; and an all wilderness alternative.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**50,135 acres recommended for wilderness (Idaho - 44,955 acres; Nevada - 5,180 acres)**

**2,662 acres recommended for nonwilderness (Idaho - 0; Nevada - 2,662 acres)**

The recommendation for the South Fork Owyhee River WSA is to designate 50,135 acres as wilderness and release 2,662 acres for uses other than wilderness. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

The 50,135 acres recommended for wilderness designation are shown as the nonshaded area on the South Fork Owyhee River Proposal map. This recommendation would apply to the 160 acre private inholding if acquired by exchange with a willing owner. Appendix I lists the nonfederal land within the area recommended for wilderness and provides additional information on the acquisition of this land.

The 50,135 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 19.5 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 40,145 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation and offers significant special features. The area can be managed to protect wilderness characteristics over the long term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 50,135 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 1,165 acres of BLM land adjacent to the WSA have wilderness values and were included within the area recommended for designation to provide a more definable wilderness boundary. Much of these adjacent lands, 930 acres, was acquired from the state in 1987.

The 2,662 acres of BLM land in the southern part of the WSA were not recommended for wilderness designation to allow for a utility corridor along the El Paso Gas Pipeline to accommodate above and underground transmission facilities. The utility corridor was identified through BLM's planning process.

R.5 W. | R.4 W.

R.4 W. | R.3 W.

R.3 W. | R.2 W.



T. 14 S.

T. 15 S.

T. 15 S.

T. 16 S.

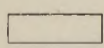
T. 16 S.

T. 47 N.

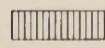
R.45 E. | R.46 E.

R.46 E. | R.47 E.

R.47 E. | R.48 E.



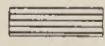
RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



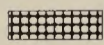
SPLIT ESTATE



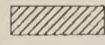
RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS



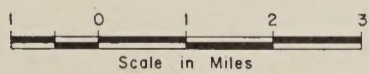
STATE



LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS



PRIVATE



ID-16-53  
 SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER  
 PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA**

<b>Within Wilderness Study Area</b>			
	<b>Idaho</b>	<b>Nevada</b>	<b>Total</b>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	43,790	7,842	51,632
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0	0	0
Inholdings (state, private)	160	0	160
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,950</b>	<b>7,842</b>	<b>51,792</b>

<b>Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary</b>			
BLM (within WSA)	43,790	5,180	48,970
BLM (outside WSA)			
Split Estate (within WSA) <sup>1</sup>	1,165	0	1,165
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0	0	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	0	0	0
Inholdings (state, private) <sup>1</sup>	44,955	5,180	50,135
State land (outside WSA)	160	0	160

<b>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>			
BLM	0	2,662	2,662
Split Estate			
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	0	0	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0	2,662	2,662
	0	0	0

<sup>1</sup>Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings within the area recommended for designation.



### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The South Fork Owyhee WSA consists of a plateau dissected by 20 miles of deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes California bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, raptors, waterfowl, chukars, other birds and redband trout. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than two percent impacted by human imprints. These imprints are limited to widely dispersed rangeland developments including six small stock ponds, 14.3 miles of ways, 6.5 miles of cherry-stem roads and fences on the plateau.

In the canyon, imprints within the WSA are limited to some historic ruins. The El Paso Gas Pipeline and accompanying road can be seen from a small portion of the southern part of the WSA.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated, secluded canyonlands and the vastness of seemingly undisturbed desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyons and water courses provides excellent topographic screening between visitor groups. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a sense of seclusion. The length of canyons allows visitors to easily find campsites which are away from other groups and to adjust their rates of travel to avoid others while floating or hiking.

From high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada. These vast open spaces instill a sense of separation from civilization.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The southwest corner of Idaho is a military operations area (MOA) for training pilots in low elevation, subsonic flight mostly in fighter-bomber type aircraft. Flights occur as low as 100 feet above the plateau. Due to the variation in flight patterns and schedules over this large area, impacts upon solitude to visitors vary greatly. At times, aircraft can be seen and/or heard flying all day. Other times, one can travel for several days and not see or hear a military jet.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA. The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running and other activities such as sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities on the South Fork Owyhee River are of exceptionally high quality.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature. Floating or hiking along the river and tributary streams gives a sense of participation in the movements of a natural force.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids add significantly to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The numerous talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel on both the river and plateau. Recreational use of the plateau concentrates near the canyon rims. Rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyons and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. Hiking on the plateau provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces stretching into the distant horizon.

#### **D. Special Features**

The South Fork Owyhee River WSA is rich in special features including scenic, scientific, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the overall quality of the wilderness characteristics.

The canyons of the South Fork Owyhee River are of exceptionally high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky creates a stark beauty which envelopes the visitor. In places, reddish brown cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the water. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, lush, clinging, deep green plant communities. The monoliths are frequently topped with a multitude of diversely eroded spires. The sheer rock walls often give way to steep slopes covered with a mosaic of red rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

Sensitive wildlife species found in the WSA include California bighorn sheep, bobcat, river otter and redband trout. Of particular concern is the population of bighorn sheep, a species dependent upon wildlands habitat for its survival. In 1985, bighorn sheep were reintroduced into the South Fork Owyhee River WSA canyons.

Sensitive plant species found in the WSA include *Eatonella nives*, *Lupinus uncialis*, *Artemisia packardiae* and *Malacothrix*.

The WSA contains both historic and prehistoric archaeological sites. Prehistoric sites are found both on the plateau and in caves and rock shelters within the canyons. Historic sites include the ruins of several stone buildings and rock walls along the river.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the South Fork Owyhee River WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The South Fork Owyhee River WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The South Fork Owyhee River WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA can be managed in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The WSA is over 27 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA boundaries is via some gravel roads but mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Bureau of Mines (BM) prepared a mineral assessment for 47,610 acres of the WSA in 1987. The assessment found that the area has a low mineral resource potential for all metals and no claims exist.

Oil and gas leases and lease applications cover a part of the area but no resources have been identified. Energy potential for oil, gas and coal is low.

Sand and gravel deposits are present and volcanic rocks that might be used as dimension stone or decorative rock are widespread but larger deposits are widely available in more accessible areas.

Chalcedony and common opal may have been recovered from three prospects in the northern part of the WSA. The lack of bright and interesting colors and patterns in the minerals limits their value and marketability for lapidary purposes.

In 1989, a 60-day public review of the USGS/BM mineral survey report for the WSA was conducted. During the review, comments were submitted which resulted in follow-up consideration by the USGS. Based on this reevaluation, the USGS upgraded the mineral potential rating from low to moderate for undiscovered resources of low-grade, epithermal hot-spring gold and silver deposits in the WSA.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA ID-16-53/NV-010-103A (SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (50,135 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 50,135 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning and from closure of 20 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, continued use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance to prevent complete rehabilitation of routes. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 200 user days for backpacking and 300 user days for other activities. Such use to have no impact on solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (2,662 acres)</b> Entire 2,662 acres to have loss of naturalness and primitive recreation from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use to reach 30 user days per annum in 20 years and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (50,352 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 36,640 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning except on 11,050 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 11,050 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on an additional 2,662 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 150 user days for backpacking and 390 user days for other activities. This use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (9,990 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 9,990 acres from management actions. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 100 user days for backpacking and 100 user days for other activities. Such use to have no impact on solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (41,642 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 27,930 acres. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning except on 11,050 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 11,050 acres from drill seeding land treatments. Loss of naturalness on an additional 2,662 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 50 user days for backpacking and 290 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (36,720 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 36,720 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning and from closure of 17 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 200 user days for backpacking and 175 user days for other activities. This use not to impact solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (15,362 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,650 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 11,050 acres from drill seeding land treatments and on 2,662 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum to reach 175 user days in 20 years and have no impact on naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (51,867 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 51,867 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and prescribed burning and from closure of 21 miles of roads/ways to recreation use. However, continued use of vehicle routes for rangeland facility maintenance to prevent complete rehabilitation of routes. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 200 user days for backpacking and 275 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from the river shoreline.</p>
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (Continued next page)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 32,555 acres and retained in good condition on 17,580 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 2,656 acres. Native plants displaced on</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 32,806 acres and retained in good condition on 17,540 acres by grazing practices. Native vegetation displaced on 6 acres by utility corridor construction activities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained in good condition on 9,990 acres.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 31,686 acres and retained in good condition on 7,550 acres by grazing practices. Native plants displaced on</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 19,530 acres and retained in good condition on 16,740 acres by grazing practices.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 12,162 acres and retained in good condition on 800 acres by</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 34,327 acres and retained in good condition on 17,540 acres by grazing practices.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued) (South Fork Owyhee River WSA)	6 acres by utility corridor construction activities.		2,400 acres by seeding. Vegetation displaced on additional 6 acres by utility corridor construction activities.	grazing practices. Native plants displaced on 2,400 acres by seeding. Vegetation also displaced on 6 acres by utility corridor construction activities.	
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Antelope and Sage Grouse)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closure would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased livestock number would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations on non-suitable lands. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance, prescribed burning and seeding on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Road/way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices, reservoir maintenance and prescribed burning would increase wildlife populations.</p>
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> 20 miles of roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 330 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> All roads to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 390 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> There are no roads/ways within canyon wilderness to be closed to semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 390 user days for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping along plateau roads/ways.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 17 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Use to reach 350 user days per annum in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonsuitable lands left open for vehicle access.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 21 miles of interior roads/ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use associated with WSA boundary roads to reach 275 user days in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>
Impacts on Livestock Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,180 AUMs to 2,228 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,180 AUMs to 3,303 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,180 AUMs to 3,303 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to decrease from 2,180 AUM to 2,111 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to decrease from 2,180 AUMs to 1,666 within 20 years on WSA lands.</p>
Impacts on the Level of Soil Erosion	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 57 tons per year within wilderness. Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and seeding to cause reduced soil erosion over long term by 5-15%. However, 10-20% increase in soil erosion</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described under the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 30 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Road/way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 65 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with prescribed burning and decrease in projected</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Soil Erosion (continued) (South Fork Owyhee River WSA)	burning and seeding and with a small projected increase in livestock use to result in a 5-15% reduction in soil erosion over the long term on 40,362 acres of plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 8.7 tons per year.	from large projected increase in livestock use on plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 8.7 tons per year. Overall, soil erosion rates to increase by 5-10% on nonsuitable plateau.		seeding and with a moderate increase or decrease (depending on location) in livestock use to result in a 5-15% reduction in soil erosion over the long term on plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 8.7 tons per year.	livestock use to result in 15% reduction in soil erosion over the long term on plateau.
Impacts on Water Quality	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by as much as 15%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams increased 5-10%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 5-15%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.



## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 50,135 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Owyhee and Elko Counties. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the South Fork Owyhee River WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives. During the wilderness inventory for the South Fork Owyhee River roadless unit, 13 public comments supported establishing a WSA and four opposed it. Supporting comments said the area possessed the minimum characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA felt that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public review of the Owyhee and Bruneau Management Framework Plans, 51 out of 55 comments supported wilderness designation for the Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex with no specific comments on the South Fork Owyhee River WSA. Comments supporting wilderness designation were primarily aimed at the need for long-term protection of the high quality wilderness characteristics and special features of both the canyons and the plateau. Comments opposed to wilderness designation addressed a perception that "multiple use" would provide greater public benefit, that wilderness was not multiple use, and that public benefits could be optimized more effectively through a wild river designation in the adjoining Owyhee River Canyon WSA and with the further development of livestock and potential mineral/energy resources on the plateau and in the Owyhee River's tributary canyons.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 46 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments took no position. Those supporting wilderness for the South Fork Owyhee River WSA mostly were in favor of designating the entire WSA as wilderness. Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation, the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources and the need to potentially develop utility corridors.

Government agencies took the following positions: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported wilderness designation; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness designation provided there was adequate consideration given to utility corridors; the U.S. Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; the Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness; the Governor of Nevada, the Nevada State Office of Community Services, the Nevada Department of Wildlife, the Nevada Division of State Parks and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game supported wilderness designation; the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology and the Nevada Department of Minerals could not endorse wilderness until more geological data was available; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness as did the local governments of Owyhee and Elko Counties.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire South Fork Owyhee River WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee for Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.

**APPENDIX I --SOUTH FORK OWYHEE RIVER WSA  
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings  
Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)**

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 15 S., R. 1 W.	160	1	Private	Private	Yes	Exchange	N/A	4,500

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

# Owyhee Canyon Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 21,875 acres

The Owyhee Canyon WSA (NV-010-106) is located in Elko County, Nevada, about 125 miles south of Boise, Idaho. The WSA includes 21,875 acres of BLM land and a 280 acre private inholding (see Table 1).

Ninety-four percent of the WSA's 36-mile circumference is bounded by primitive dirt roads and a gas pipeline. The remainder of the boundary is along two miles of private property. The South Fork Owyhee River WSA (ID-16-53/NV-010-103A) is just north of this WSA.

The western two-thirds of the WSA consists of a gently rolling sagebrush, bitterbrush and bunchgrass plateau. The eastern third consists of a 100- to 200-foot deep basin cut by 21 miles of 100- to 300-foot deep canyons. Portions of the narrow, meandering canyons that are not sheer-walled are covered with sagebrush and bunchgrasses while the riparian area consists of narrow bands of lush grasses, rushes and sedges.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement filed in October 1989. Four alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for this WSA: a partial wilderness alternative where 13,525 acres of BLM land would be designated as wilderness and 8,350 acres released for nonwilderness uses, which is the recommendation of this report; a partial wilderness alternative where 1,600 acres would be designated as wilderness and 20,275 acres would be released for nonwilderness uses; an all wilderness alternative; a wildlife wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**13,525 acres recommended for  
wilderness**

**8,350 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Owyhee Canyon WSA is to designate 13,525 acres as wilderness and release 8,350 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts. The 13,525 acres of federal land recommended for wilderness are shown as the nonshaded area on the Owyhee Canyon Proposal map.

The 13,525 acres recommended for wilderness designation would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System through the addition of 14 miles of spectacularly scenic canyon and 11,925 acres of surrounding plateau. The area is natural in appearance, has outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation and offers significant special features. The area can be managed to protect wilderness characteristics over the long-term with a minimum of resource conflicts. The 13,525 acres recommended for designation are a portion of a proposed 385,080 acre Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness which would include about 270 miles of desert canyon, 164 miles of whitewater boating opportunities and 292,640 acres of plateau.

The 8,350 acres of BLM land recommended for release for nonwilderness uses include canyon and plateau lands within the southern one-third of the WSA. Private property and associated access routes separate the area from the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation. A road is needed to the South Fork Owyhee River to provide access for whitewater boating. The existing access route to the private property is the most reasonable location for this road. The southern part of the WSA has been identified through BLM's planning process as a possible utility corridor. Releasing the 8,350 acres for nonwilderness uses would allow future consideration of these activities.



T. 47 N.

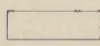
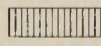

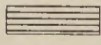
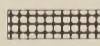
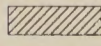
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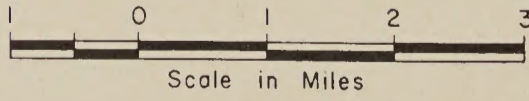
T. 46 N.

T. 45 N.

R.47E. | R.48 E.

R.48 E. | R.49 E.

- |   |   |   |              |
|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



NV-010-106  
 OWYHEE CANYON  
 PROPOSAL

DECEMBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
OWYHEE CANYON WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	21,875
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	280
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,155</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	13,525
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>13,525</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	8,350
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>8,350</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	280

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Owyhee Canyon WSA consists of a plateau and basin cut by 21 miles of 100- to 300-foot deep canyons. Wildlife within the WSA includes mule deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, river otter, beaver, raptors, waterfowl, chukars and redband trout. California bighorn sheep may move into the area from the adjoining South Fork Owyhee River WSA. The WSA is predominantly natural with less than one percent impacted by human imprints. Imprints are limited to one livestock pond and four miles of ways (vehicle tracks).

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude are attributed to the isolated and secluded canyonlands and the vastness of desert plateau lands and distant mountain ranges.

The meandering character of the canyons and riverbed provide excellent topographic screening between visitor groups. The depth of the canyons combined with limited viewing distances creates a sense of seclusion.

From high points on the plateau, hundreds to thousands of square miles of open spaces can be seen stretching from Steens Mountain in Oregon to Juniper Mountain in Idaho and southward to the Bull Run Mountains of Nevada.

Solitude is sometimes disrupted by military aircraft. The WSA is entirely covered by a military operations area (MOA) and two military training areas used for low-level, high-speed exercises. In addition, the military is expanding its operations in the area to include supersonic flights. Flight elevations vary but operations are conducted as low as 100 feet above ground level. Disruption of the silence and separation from civilization, which contribute to the feeling of solitude in the Owyhee Canyon WSA, is still relatively infrequent. While it is difficult to accurately estimate the actual impact of these military operations, at times aircraft can be seen or heard flying all day. Other times one can travel for several days and not see or hear a military jet. It must be assumed that these impacts will continue to increase as the military continues its growth and expansion.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The natural features contribute to outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation found in the WSA.



The scenic natural features and diversity of rugged landforms attract people interested in hunting, backpacking and river running and associated secondary activities such as sightseeing, photography, wildlife viewing, botanical studies and fishing. River running opportunities on the South Fork Owyhee River are of exceptionally high quality.

The miles of canyons, their diversely and severely eroded rock landscapes and their steep slopes create a sense of isolation or solitude, thereby enhancing the primitive recreation experience. Visitors traveling in or near the canyons are constantly aware of the forces of nature. Floating or hiking along the river gives a sense of participation in the movements of a natural force.

The challenge and excitement of whitewater rapids add significantly to the boating experience. Hiking the rugged canyons and plateau without the aid of established trails provides a natural and arduous recreational challenge which heightens the primitive experience.

The numerous talus slopes of the canyons encourage travel on both the river and plateau. Recreational use of the plateau concentrates near the canyon rims. Rimrock areas often offer less arduous hiking conditions than those in the canyon and provide opportunities for spectacular vistas of the canyons below. Hiking on the plateau provides an opportunity to experience vast open spaces.

#### **D. Special Features**

The Owyhee Canyon WSA is rich in special features including scenic, wildlife and cultural values. The special features contribute significantly to the overall quality of the wilderness characteristics.

The canyons are of high scenic quality. The combination of moving water, colorful sheer cliffs, grass-covered talus slopes and blue sky creates a stark beauty. Sheer walls of dark brown to black rock dominate the scenery. These fractured, blocky rock monoliths are tinted with brilliant green, yellow and orange microflora. Near the base of the cliffs, water sometimes seeps from the fractures to nourish small, lush, clinging, deep green plant communities. The sheer rock walls rise above steep slopes covered with a mosaic of blackish rock rubble and subdued green and yellow sagebrush and grasses.

# Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Owyhee Canyon WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); however, it would add a landform not presently represented in the Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. The landform is dominated by rhyolite uplands cut by deep canyons. This ecosystem is represented by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation  
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Owyhee Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

**Table 3**

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents  
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Owyhee Canyon WSA would add to the geographical distribution of wilderness areas. Regionally, the WSA would add a desert canyon system not found in designated wilderness and would help to balance opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences.

### **Manageability**

The WSA can be managed in the long term to protect wilderness characteristics. There are no resource uses which could not be adequately controlled or would affect the manageability of the wilderness. The WSA is more than 27 miles from a paved highway. Vehicle access to the WSA boundaries is via some gravel roads but mostly along dirt roads which have received minimal construction and little or no maintenance. Much of the plateau within the WSA is relatively flat but many areas (particularly those close to the canyons) are strewn with rock rubble and impassable to vehicles.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

The U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation in 1987.

The area has a low mineral resource potential for all metals and no claims exist.

Oil and gas leases and lease applications cover a large part of the area but no resources have been identified. Energy potential for oil, gas and coal is low.

Sand and gravel deposits are present and volcanic rocks that might be used as dimension stone or decorative rock are widespread but larger deposits are widely available in more accessible areas.

### **Impacts on Resources**

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative**  
**WSA NV-010-106 (OWYHEE CANYON)**

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p><b>WILDERNESS (13,525 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 13,305 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and from closure of 1 mile of way to recreation use. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 320 acres from utility corridor construction activities on adjacent non-wilderness lands. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 803 user days for boating, 50 user days for backpacking and 60 user days for other activities. Such use not to impact solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (8,350 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,000 acres. Loss of naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 7,350 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 414 user days for boating, 50 user days for backpacking and 50 user days for other activities. This use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (21,875 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 14,205 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on 7,670 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 100 user days for backpacking and 110 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from the river shoreline.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (1,600 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 1,600 acres from management actions. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 803 user days for boating, 50 user days for backpacking and 20 user days for other activities. This use not to impact solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from the river shoreline.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS (20,275 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 12,605 acres. Slight enhancement in naturalness and solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices. Loss of naturalness on 7,670 acres from utility corridor construction activities. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 414 user days for boating, 50 user days for backpacking and 130 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS (21,875 acres)</b> Impacts the same as those described under the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS (21,875 acres)</b> No significant change in naturalness or solitude/primitive recreation opportunities on 21,875 acres from management actions. Slight enhancement in naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities on plateau from improved grazing practices and closure of 4 miles of ways. Some localized reduction in naturalness from trampling of river campsite vegetation by recreation use. Recreation use per annum in 20 years to reach 1,217 user days for boating, 100 user days for backpacking and 110 user days for other activities. Such use not to affect solitude/primitive recreation opportunities overall nor naturalness away from the river shoreline.</p>
Impacts on the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued next page)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 11,925 acres and retained in good condition on 1,600 acres by grazing practices.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 19,075 acres and retained in good condition on 2,800 acres by grazing practices. Utility corridor construction</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities retained in good condition on 1,600 acres.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those under the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 19,075 acres and retained in good condition on 2,800 acres by grazing practices.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts to the Condition and Amount of Native Vegetation (continued) (Owyhee Canyon WSA)	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Ecological condition of native plant communities improved on 7,150 acres and retained in good condition on 1,200 acres by grazing practices. Utility corridor construction activities to displace vegetation on 1.5 acres.</p>	<p>activities to displace vegetation on 1.5 acres.</p>	<p>native plant communities improved on 19,073 acres and retained in good condition on 1,200 acres by grazing practices. Utility corridor construction activity to displace 1.5 acres of vegetation.</p>		
Impacts on Selected Wildlife Populations (Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, Antelope and Sage Grouse)	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Way closure would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices on plateau would increase wildlife populations.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations on nonwilderness lands. Utility corridor construction would cause no temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices on plateau would increase wildlife populations. However, increased livestock numbers would compete with and reduce potential wildlife populations. Utility corridor construction would cause only temporary displacement of wildlife populations.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the No Action Alternative.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those of the Proposed Action except there would not be increased livestock numbers to compete with wildlife populations. Livestock would be reduced to benefit wildlife.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> Increased recreation use to have minimal impact to wildlife populations. Only localized temporary wildlife displacement expected during periods of recreation activity. Way closures would reduce potential for wildlife disturbance from recreational vehicle use. Increased forage availability and enhanced overall habitat condition resulting from improved grazing practices would increase wildlife populations.</p>
Impacts on Semi-Primitive Motorized Recreation Use	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 1 mile of interior way closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use to reach 110 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping in association with WSA boundary roads. New road construction into Twelve Mile within nonwilderness area to slightly enhance semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities.</p> <p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Nonwilderness lands left open for vehicle access.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> All interior ways to remain open for semi-primitive motorized recreation use. Use to reach 110 user days annually in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping. New road construction into Twelve Mile within nonwilderness area to slightly enhance semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> There are no roads/ways within canyon wilderness to be closed to recreational vehicle use. Annual use in 20 years to reach 150 user days for hunting, sightseeing or camping along plateau roads/ways. New road construction into Twelve Mile within nonwilderness area to slightly enhance semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. New road construction into Twelve Mile within nonwilderness area to slightly enhance semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities.</p>	<p><b>WILDERNESS</b> 4 miles of interior ways closed to recreational vehicle use within wilderness. Semi-primitive motorized recreation use associated with WSA boundary roads to reach 110 user days in 20 years for hunting, sightseeing, rockhounding or camping.</p>

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION	NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	CANYONLANDS WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	WILDLIFE WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Livestock Use (Owyhee Canyon WSA)	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,515 AUMs to 2,866 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,515 AUMs to 2,866 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to increase from 2,515 AUMs to 2,866 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to decrease from 2,515 AUM to 1,207 AUMs within 20 years on WSA lands.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Annual livestock use to decrease from 2,515 AUMs to 1,207 within 20 years on WSA lands.
Impacts on Soil Erosion	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Way closure to reduce associated soil erosion by .8 ton per year within wilderness. Improved grazing practices to slightly reduce soil erosion on 19,075 acres of the plateau. However, a moderate increase in projected livestock use to result in a 10% increase in soil erosion. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 2.4 tons per year.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices to slightly reduce soil erosion on plateau. However, a moderate increase in projected livestock use to result in a 10% increase in soil erosion. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 2.4 tons per year.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the No Action Alternative.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Improved grazing practices combined with a projected decrease in livestock use to result in a 15% reduction in soil erosion on plateau. Utility corridor construction and maintenance to cause soil erosion of 2.4 tons per year.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Way closures to reduce associated soil erosion by 3.2 tons per year. Improved grazing practices combined with a projected reduction in livestock use to result in 15% decrease in soil erosion on plateau.
Impacts on Water Quality	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 10%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Proposed Action.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Suspended sediment loads in WSA tributary streams reduced by 15%. Owyhee River sediment load not measurably affected.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> Impacts the same as the Wildlife Wilderness Alternative.
Impacts on Local Income and Jobs	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Income and employment data by individual WSA is not available. For Owyhee Canyonlands WSA complex as a whole, the Proposed Action would contribute to a .3% increase in income and a .3% increase in employment over the next 20 years from livestock and recreational use of the WSAs in the 3-county area (Owyhee, Malheur and Elko Counties).	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS/ NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .4% in 20 years.	<b>NONWILDERNESS</b> Both income and employment from WSA complex up .3% in 20 years.	<b>WILDERNESS</b> From WSA complex, income up .2% and employment up .3%.

## Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of 13,525 acres as wilderness would have no significant social or economic impacts on the local communities of Elko County. The impact to local income and jobs was an issue analyzed in the study of the Owyhee Canyon WSA.

## Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process were considered in developing issues and various management alternatives.

During the wilderness inventory for the Owyhee Canyon roadless unit, 21 public comments supported establishing a WSA and nine opposed it. Supporting comments said the area possessed the characteristics necessary to be considered for wilderness as well as supplemental values such as wildlife, scenic, vegetation and cultural resources. Those opposed to the WSA said that the area did not have significant wilderness characteristics and that "multiple use" would be better served if the area was released from further wilderness review.

During the public comment period on the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, 448 written or oral comments supported all WSAs or portions of all WSAs in the Owyhee Canyonlands complex as wilderness, 47 comments opposed any wilderness in the WSA complex and 23 comments took no position. Those supporting wilderness for the Owyhee Canyon WSA mostly favored designating the entire WSA as wilderness.

Support for the entire WSA as wilderness was based upon a desire to see wildlife, vegetation and other natural resources protected in the long-term. Opposition to any of the WSA becoming wilderness was based upon a desire for improved livestock management opportunities, the need for continued use of the area for motorized recreation, the need to have further opportunities for the exploration and possible development of mineral and energy resources and the potential need to develop utility corridors.

Government agencies took the following positions: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported wilderness designation; the Bonneville Power Administration did not object to wilderness designation provided there was adequate consideration of utility corridors; the U.S. Air Force supported wilderness if no significant restrictions were placed on military overflights; the Bureau of Reclamation had no objection to wilderness; the Governor of Nevada, the Nevada State Office of Community Services, the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Nevada Division of State Parks supported wilderness designation; the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology and the Nevada Department of Minerals could not endorse wilderness until more geological data was available; and the Idaho Air National Guard opposed wilderness as did the local government of Elko County.

Subsequent to the May 31, 1984, conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness EIS, but prior to the completion of the Final EIS, 78 written comments were received. One of the comments opposed any wilderness designation in the WSA complex, one took no position and 76 supported wilderness designation. Of the wilderness advocates, 61 supported designating the entire Owyhee Canyon WSA as wilderness. Most of this wilderness support was in response to a flyer sent out by the Committee of Idaho's High Desert and to an "alert" in the Sierra Club magazine.





