

3.13 NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA, WILDERNESS, AND WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

3.13.1 Affected Environment

The assessment area consists of PVAs, KGRAs, and pending lease applications on public lands managed by the WFO and lands in the Dixie Valley KGRA (managed by the CCFO). The area also encompasses four Nevada counties: Humboldt, Pershing, Washoe, and Churchill Counties. Geothermal leasing has been withdrawn from NCAs, wilderness, and WSAs.

3.13.1.1 Management Prescriptions

Nation Conservation Areas (NCAs). NCAs are designated by Congress to preserve and protect historical and environmentally sensitive areas. There are no NCAs within the assessment areas; the nearest NCA is the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA. The Black Rock Desert Act was signed into law on December 21, 2000 and amended November 2, 2001. BLM manages the NCA. PVA 8 borders this NCA. The NCA is located in Hydrologic Basins 1 and 2, and outside of the assessment area.

Wilderness. There are no wilderness areas within the geothermal assessment area. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964.¹⁷ The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System that includes all wilderness-designated lands. Wilderness is defined as "...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Furthermore, wilderness is distinguished as "...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value." PVAs 3 and 4 border wilderness. Wilderness is found in Hydrologic Region 2.

Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). WSA is a designation given to lands under investigation to determine if the lands are suitable as wilderness areas. The BLM manages WSAs. PVAs 1, 8, 13, and the Dixie Valley KGRA border or encompass parts of WSAs. All the hydrologic basins contain WSAs except Basin 6.

3.13.1.2 National Conservation Area

On December 21, 2000, the President signed Public Law 106-554 establishing the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA. This act set aside approximately 1.2 million

¹⁷ Wilderness Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-577 (16 USC §§1131-1133))

acres of land in northwestern Nevada. The Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA consists of the Black Rock Desert (315,700 acres), High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails NCA (815,000 acres), and additional wilderness areas in the vicinity (80,800 acres).

This NCA is one of the last significant sections of the historic California emigrant trails. The special aspects of the NCA are the reminders of the journey to the west coast in the early 1800s. Wagon ruts, inscriptions and an unchanged landscape since the time of the pioneers are a few of the special aspects. The area covered by the NCA stretches from Rye Patch Reservoir, north to the Black Rock Desert and Mud Meadows, west to Fly Canyon and High Rock Canyon and to around Vya, Nevada.

3.13.1.3 Wilderness

The wilderness in the assessment area is encompassed within the NCA. The 10 wilderness areas are as follows:

**TABLE 1.13-1
WILDERNESS AREAS
(Designated on December 21, 2000)**

Wilderness	Acres
Black Rock Desert Wilderness	315,700
North Jackson Mountains Wilderness	65,400
South Jackson Mountains Wilderness	52,800
Pahute Peak Wilderness	46,600
North Black Rock Range Wilderness	59,300
East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness	48,700
High Rock Lake Wilderness	30,800
Little High Rock Canyon Wilderness	24,000
High Rock Canyon Wilderness	57,400
Calico Mountains Wilderness	56,800

These 10 wilderness areas are depicted on Figure 3.13-2. These wilderness areas were protected by WSA designations for more than 20 years prior to wilderness designation. Grazing is still allowable, as the wilderness areas cover 22 allotments managed by the Winnemucca and Surprise BLM Field Offices. Motorized vehicles, and mechanical transport and equipment are not allowed in wilderness areas. The only motorized items allowed are wheelchairs. New mining claims or mineral leases would not be granted and Special Recreation Permits may be restricted.

Black Rock Desert Wilderness Area. The Black Rock Desert Wilderness Area is the largest wilderness area in Nevada. The wilderness stretches 40 miles from north to south and 20 miles

from east to west. It is also unique to the National Wilderness Preservation System, a desert playa. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

North Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area. The North Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area is close to 7 miles long and wide. Jackson Creek Ranch Road runs along the western side north to south and provides access to the wilderness. North Jackson is separated from the South Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area by a road that follows Trout and Jackson Creeks. The North Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area has riparian areas including Mary Sloan, New Years, and Deer Creeks. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

South Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area. The South Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area is 15 miles long and between 2 and 11 miles wide. King Lear Peak is a 9,000-foot mountain peak located in the South Jackson Mountains Wilderness Area. The peak is known for rock climbing and is considered the best in northwestern Nevada. A cherry stemmed road leads to McGill Canyon and is used as a starting point for hikes. The area has cottonwood stands and running water, which makes it a popular recreation area. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

Pahute Peak Wilderness Area. The Pahute Peak Wilderness Area borders the Black Rock Desert Wilderness Area. The climb to the top of Pahute Peak (also called Big Mountain) provides a view of the Applegate-Lassen Historical Trail and all the other wilderness areas in the NCA. Stands of aspen and mountain mahogany create scenic views. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

North Black Rock Range Wilderness Area. The North Black Rock Range Wilderness Area is a refuge to many animals due to the presence of water at Coleman and Soldier Creeks. Deer, antelope, and valet quail are often found at the creeks. The headwaters are a frequent destination for hikers. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area. The East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area's distinctive features are the variety of color and landforms, including bright greens, yellows, reds, browns, and orange; and high cliffs, steep slopes, and short rimrocks. The Lassen-Applegate Trail passes through this wilderness area as it makes its way into Oregon and California. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

High Rock Lake Wilderness Area. The High Rock Lake Wilderness Area is named for the lake found in the northwest corner of the wilderness. The Applegate-Lassen Trail passes through the northern part of the wilderness. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

**FIGURE 3.13-1
BLACK ROCK DESERT-HIGH ROCK CANYON EMIGRANT TRAILS NCA
AND ASSOCIATED WILDERNESS AREAS**

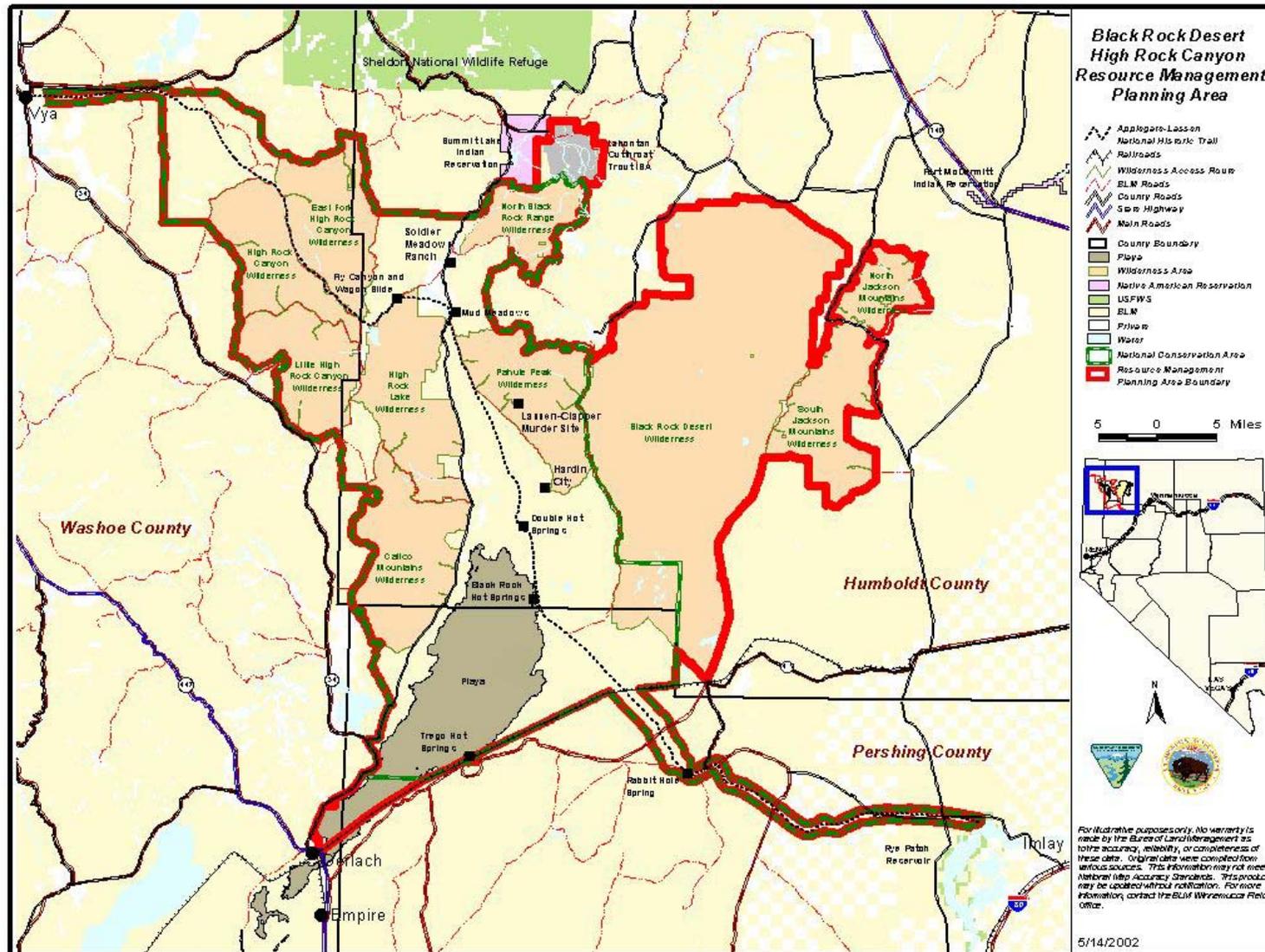
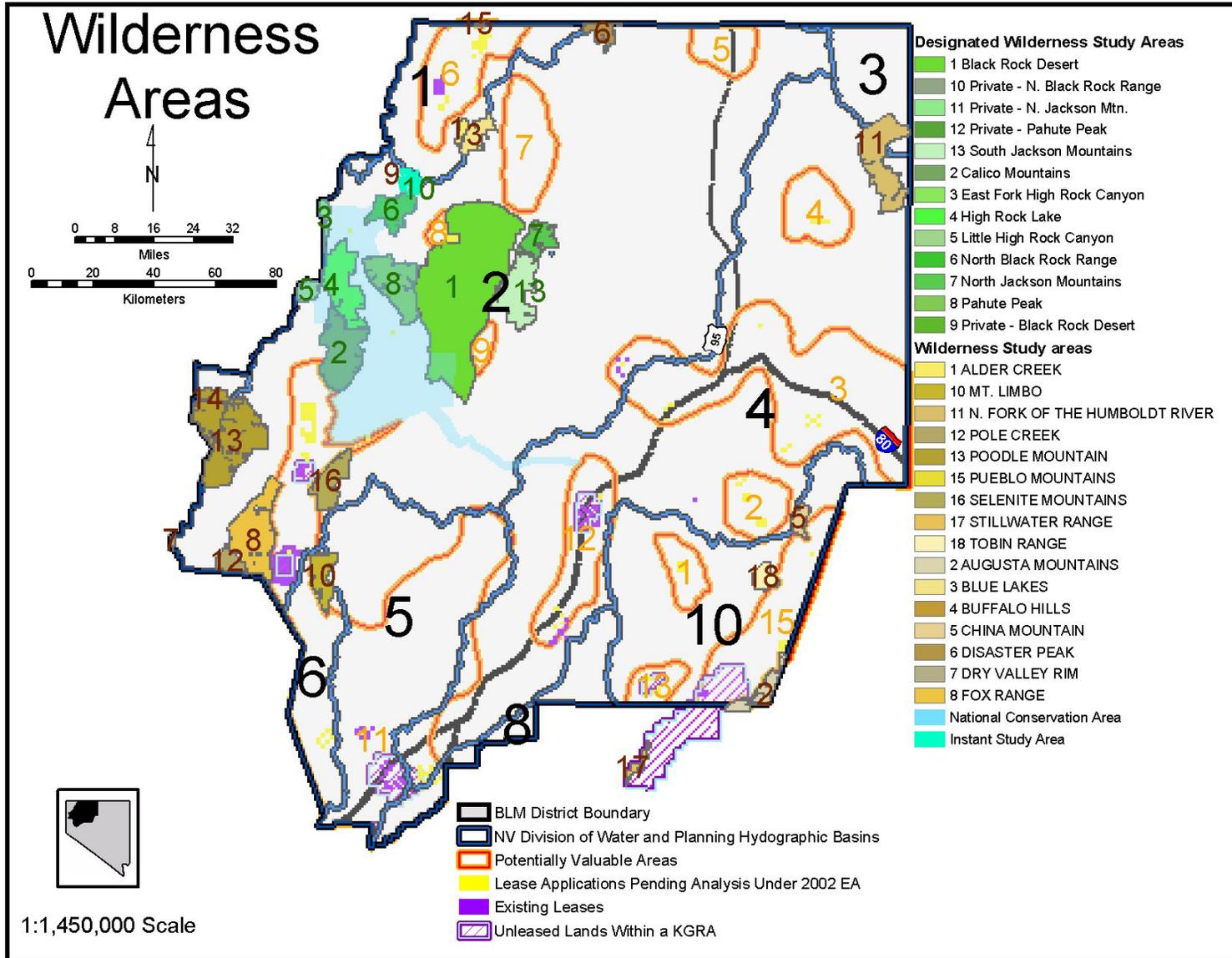


FIGURE 3.13-2
 ASSESSMENT AREA WILDERNESS AREAS



Little High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area. The Little High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area is a meadow full of grasses and tules wetlands, named for the tule plant. The wetlands attract migrating birds and small mammals. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area. The High Rock Canyon Wilderness Area contains Mahogany Creek—considered one of the best features in the surrounding wilderness. Wildlife includes nesting birds, birds of prey, endemic desert fish, and antelope. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

Calico Mountains Wilderness Area. The Calico Mountains Wilderness Area was named for the many colors the mountain range exhibits. The Calico Mountain Wilderness Area is 17 miles north to south and 7 miles east to west. Access to a portion of the wilderness is available via Soldier Meadows Road. Rock hounding and sightseeing are popular activities in this wilderness. A management plan is scheduled for release for public comment in late summer 2002.

3.13.1.4 Wilderness Study Areas

The WSAs are spread throughout the assessment area. There are seven WSAs that are either bordered or intersected by the assessment area.¹⁸ The seven WSAs are as follows:

**TABLE 3.13-2
WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS**

Wilderness Study Areas	Acres	WSA Number
Fox Range	75,404	NV-020-014
Selenite Mountains	32,041	NV-020-200
Mount Limbo	23,702	NV-020-201
China Mountain	10,358	NV-020-406P
Tobin Range	13,107	NV-020-406Q
Pueblo Mountains	72,690	OR-2-81/NV-020-642
Augusta Mountain	89,372	NV-030-108

Fox Range WSA. The Fox Range WSA is 20 miles north to south and 2-9 miles east to west. There are three types of landforms represented in Fox Range WSA: steep canyons, smooth rolling hills, and desert piedmont. Riparian vegetation, barren ridges, and sand dunes can also be found in the Fox Range WSA. In 1983 BLM recommended release of the entire 75,404 acres to uses other than wilderness.

¹⁸ Detailed WSA information is from the *Nevada BLM Statewide Wilderness Report*, October 1991.

Selenite Mountains WSA. The Selenite Mountains WSA is 13 miles north to south and 3-5 miles east to west. There are some small juniper stands but there are no riparian areas. The main landforms are the ridge axis, the desert piedmont, and the footslope. In 1983 BLM recommended release of the entire 32,041 acres to uses other than wilderness.

Mount Limbo WSA. The BLM has recommended a portion of the Mount Limbo WSA be designated as wilderness. The 12,750 acres recommended for wilderness is free of human impacts. Some of the area that is recommended wilderness is rugged while other areas provide shade and solitude especially in stands of aspen.

China Mountain WSA. The China Mountain WSA is 7 miles north to south and 7-9 miles east to west. There are two main canyons, steep cliffs, and rolling hills. The vegetation is sagebrush and pinion-juniper. There are riparian areas along the canyon bottoms. In 1983 BLM recommended release of the entire 10,358 acres to uses other than wilderness.

Tobin Range WSA. The Tobin Range WSA is 6 miles north to south and 2-5 miles east to west. There are high elevations in Mt. Tobin, lower foothills, and a fringing piedmont desert. An earthquake in 1915 exposed a fault running along the foothill section. In 1983 BLM recommended release of the entire 13,107 acres to uses other than wilderness.

Pueblo WSA. The Pueblo WSA is located in Nevada and southern Oregon. The Nevada portion is 600 acres. In 1983 BLM recommended release of all the 600 acres in Nevada to uses other than wilderness.

Augusta Mountain WSA. The Augusta Mountain WSA is 17 mile north to south and 13 miles east to west. The area is composed of silicic ashflow tuff canyons, isolated patches of pinion-juniper stands, and the limestone peak of Cain Mountain. In 1983 BLM recommended release of the 89,372 acres in Nevada to uses other than wilderness.

3.13.2 Environmental Impacts

Wilderness and WSAs are withdrawn from geothermal resource leasing. No buffer zones are created around wilderness areas to protect them from the influence of activities on adjacent land. The fact that non-wilderness activities on uses can be seen or heard from areas within the wilderness does not, of itself, preclude such activities or uses up to the boundary of the wilderness area. When activities on adjacent lands are proposed, the specific impacts of those activities upon the wilderness resources and upon public use of the wilderness area must be addressed and assessed.¹⁹

3.13.2.1 Proposed Action

Direct Impacts – There are no direct impacts to issuing leases for future geothermal exploration, development, and production activities.

¹⁹ BLM Manual 8560, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas, dated April 27, 1983

Indirect Impacts – When considering the “reasonably foreseeable development scenario,” there would be no impacts to the NCA under the Proposed Action Alternative. Site-specific EAs would be required before any action is undertaken when leases are granted under this plan. There could be potential setting impacts to the wilderness areas—two PVAs border the Black Rock Desert Wilderness Area and two lease applications are pending. PVA 3 borders the wilderness and is adjacent to two pending applications in the northwest of the wilderness. PVA 4 is to the southeast of the wilderness and surrounds McFarlin’s Bathhouse Spring. Development outside of wilderness boundaries would have minimal impacts to wilderness values set forth in the Wilderness Act.

3.13.2.2 No Action Alternative

Direct Impacts – There are no direct impacts to issuing leases for future geothermal exploration, development, and production activities.

Indirect Impacts – Indirect impacts from the No Action Alternative would be similar to those described in the Proposed Action; however, updated mitigation measures and stipulations would not apply using the 1982 Geothermal EA.