

GOSHUTE PEAK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 69,770 acres

The Goshute Peak WSA (NV-010-033), located approximately 100 miles east of Elko, Nevada and 20 miles southwest of West Wendover, Nevada in the southern portion of the Goshute Mountain Range, is generally oblong in shape - 18 miles long and two to eight miles wide. The Morgan Pass Road defines the northern boundary. Unnamed dirt roads form the eastern and western boundaries. A telephone line right-of-way delineates approximately 2 miles of the southeastern boundary. There are no split estate lands or private inholdings.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

61,004 acres recommended for wilderness
8,766 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation is to designate 61,004 acres as wilderness because of naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation. The remaining 8,766 acres would be released because of mineral potentials and an existing highway right-of-way. The imprints of man are generally confined to the lower elevations and are substantially unnoticeable in the WSA as a whole.

Extremely rugged and densely wooded drainages create outstanding opportunities for solitude. White fir, limber pine, bristlecone pine, and mountain mahogany add variety to the vegetative screening and to the solitude. Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are outstanding. The 18-mile long WSA, with its many drainages, ridges and peaks, provides outstanding opportunities for backpacking, hiking, rock climbing, fossil collecting, and wildlife observation.

Conflicts with other resources are limited. There are no identified mineral or energy resources. The southern half has identified limestone resources, but the occurrence of limestone closer to rail lines and highways makes development unlikely. The area is manageable as wilderness due primarily to the extreme ruggedness and the relative inaccessibility of much of the area. The demand for firewood and Christmas trees from the Wendover and Salt Lake City areas results in unauthorized woodcutting.

A scientific study on migrating raptors has operated in the WSA since 1979. The project includes a temporary camp and several trap stations on the ridge above Christmas Tree Canyon and operates from late August to early November each year. The data collected is considered important for baseline wildlife inventories, future wilderness management planning, and ecological condition monitoring. BLM provides yearly logistical support. Limited support would continue following wilderness designation. Impacts of the operation are localized and are not considered significant enough to preclude continuing the study.

Two parcels, on the northern tip and along the northeastern boundary, are not recommended because of their good potential for metallic minerals. A third parcel along the southern and southeastern boundaries is not recommended for wilderness to allow for future placement of facilities within the highway corridor, to exclude a highway right-of-way inadvertently included in the WSA, and because of the good potential for gold.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The steep, mountainous topography with small stands of mixed conifers and many canyons radiating from the central ridgeline provides outstanding naturalness. Enhancing this naturalness is the absence of man's imprints in the higher elevations. Even the scattered imprints of man in the lower elevations do not detract from the area's naturalness because of the dense pinyon-juniper woodlands. Man's imprints consist of approximately one mile of cherrystem road, 27

miles of vehicle ways, an old deer hunter's cabin, a deer hunter's camp, a corral, one mile of barbed wire fence, and one developed spring. Most of these intrusions penetrate less than one mile into the WSA. Only the raptor research project with its plywood blinds, tents, and maintained access trail affects the higher elevations.

B. Solitude: Outstanding opportunities for solitude exist within the WSA. The densely wooded WSA is extremely rugged with high mountain peaks, rocky cliffs, and many drainages. The west-side drainages are rocky and rugged, while those on the east are densely wooded.

The topographic and vegetative screening is outstanding. About 15 drainages wind through moderately dense stands of pinyon pine, limber pine, Utah juniper, white fir, bristlecone pine, and mountain mahogany. The drainages are generally steeper on the west side than on the east, but all are passable on foot. The ridgeline itself is quite rugged. Elevations range from 6,000 to 9,500 feet.

Military aircraft sometimes disrupt the solitude. While only the very northern portion of the WSA is within a Military Training Route used for low-level, high-speed exercises, aircraft are not confined to the MTR and fly over the entire WSA. The southeastern portion of the WSA lies within restricted airspace. Flight elevations vary, but aircraft fly as low as 100 feet above ground level. Disruption of the silence, which contributes to the feeling of solitude, is still infrequent. At times, aircraft can be seen and/or heard all day. Other times, one can travel for days and not see or hear a military jet.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The Goshute Peak WSA has outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. These include backpacking, hiking, wildlife observation, photography, rock climbing, and fossil collecting. The potential to observe birds-of-prey enhances these opportunities.

D. Special Features: From late August through mid-October each year, thousands of raptors migrate south past the Goshute Mountains. Raptors known to migrate through the area include golden and bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, northern goshawks, peregrine falcons, American kestrels, and Cooper's hawks. The southern end of the WSA contains the only known bald eagle winter roost in Elko County. Bristlecone pine trees, some of the oldest living things known, occur at the higher elevations.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The entire Goshute Peak WSA can be managed as wilderness. The area contains no private inholdings or state lands. Any development of potential minerals in the areas not recommended for wilderness would be peripheral and would not impair wilderness values in the WSA as a whole. The highway right-of-way in the southeastern portion of the WSA would detract from the wilderness setting, but only in a localized area. Unauthorized woodcutting activities are anticipated to continue, requiring increased management.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

According to a USGS report, a small area on the west side has low potentials for gold and oil and gas. The WSA has a high potential for high-purity limestone. Also, three parcels have good potential for metallic minerals. As of October 1989, there were approximately 270 post-FLPMA mining claims in the WSA.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

The BLM received 42 comments on the draft EIS; four supported more wilderness than proposed, seven supported the proposed action, 25 supported less wilderness than proposed, and six had no position. Comments specific to the Goshute Peak WSA addressed the raptor research project (both for and against), the need to protect the raptor migration areas, alternatives for adding and deleting portions of the WSA, mineral potential, and conflicts with utility and highway corridors.

County agencies or officials submitted no comments. The Governor of Nevada's consistency review supported the BLM's preferred alternative except an east-side area with good potential for metallic minerals.

The EPA requested clarification in the final EIS on interim management, off-road vehicle use affecting potential wilderness status, access for mineral exploration or development, and the use of USGS/BOM surveys to modify wilderness recommendation. The U.S. Air Force supported alternatives that would not restrict military overflights.

The BLM received one comment on the final Wells Wilderness EIS; the EPA supported the proposed action.