

GOSHUTE CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 35,594 acres

The Goshute Canyon WSA (NV-040-015) is located in the Cherry Creek Mountains in east-central Nevada within White Pine and Elko Counties. The entire WSA is comprised of 35,594 acres of public land with one 15-acre patented mining claim inholding near the southern boundary. The Goshute Canyon Natural Area/Instant Study Area is partially (5,009 acres) located within the WSA. The remaining 2,641 acres of the Natural Area are contiguous with the WSA to the east and west, separated by roads or jeep trails.

The southern boundary of the WSA is defined by a series of patented mining claims and connecting jeep trails. The western edge of the WSA is formed by roads along the eastern side of Butte Valley and the Paris Canyon Road. Two parcels of private land and connecting jeep trails form the northern boundary of the WSA and a series of roads, jeeps trails and fencelines define the eastern boundary.

The 13-mile long Goshute Canyon WSA is a rugged, uplifted range, with massive white limestone cliffs jutting from its slopes. The lower elevations are thickly forested by pinyon pine and juniper, while bristlecone and limber pine blanket the higher elevations. Aspens and cottonwoods in the moist drainages provide for a verdant, cool retreat. Large high elevation basins rimmed by naked peaks contain pockets of aspen and white fir and are filled with wild flowers in spring and summer. Snowmelt and numerous springs provide riparian settings and water sources for a great number of wildlife species that include Bonneville cutthroat trout in Goshute Creek, mule deer, mountain lions, bobcats, owls, falcons, eagles, hawks, kestrels and marmots.

The WSA is a natural, harmonious composition of contrasts. Brilliant yellow fall color and light-colored rock are juxtaposed with the dark green foliage of the evergreen canopy. Distance becomes distorted, difficult to judge because of the immense scale of topographic features, while the detail of weathered rock, of small grassland riparian areas, and of stark white aspen trees complete a nearly perfect tableau. No one who visits the area leaves without a strong impression of the area's beauty.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 22,225 acres recommended for wilderness 13,369 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Goshute Canyon WSA is to designate 22,225 acres as wilderness and release 13,369 acres for uses other than wilderness. Exceptionally high wilderness values, strong public interest, and a limited amount of competing resource uses were the reasons for recommending a portion of the WSA as wilderness.

The rugged, mountainous core of the Cherry Creek Range comprises the recommended portion of the Goshute Canyon WSA. With elevations rising above 10,000 feet, expansive meadows rimmed by craggy peaks create a vision of untouched natural beauty. Numerous aspen stands, large jutting limestone outcrops, conifer forests and open areas intermix to form visually pleasing mosaics throughout the unit. Bristlecone pine, one of the area's special features, can be found in their classic, gnarled configuration along the windswept ridgelines. On more protected slopes large, vigorous stands of bristlecone pine grow tall and straight.

Further enhancing the high wilderness values are Goshute and Carry Basins. These huge, scenic basins provide crucial watershed for several perennial streams and riparian areas which are an integral part of the unit. Goshute Creek hosts a viable population of Bonneville cutthroat trout, a State sensitive species. Goshute Cave, another of the area's special features provides superb caving opportunities. This gentle, yet highly decorated cave provides visitors with an unusual glimpse into the subterranean wilderness. The nature of the limestone within the WSA almost ensures the presence of an undiscovered cave resource for the persistent explorer. The

potential for undiscovered caverns is one of the compelling reasons caverns highly regard the area.

The southern portion of the WSA, while most of it is highly scenic, was not included in the area recommended for wilderness because of past mineral interest in the area. Further contributing to the nonwilderness recommendation for the southern portion of the WSA are the unnatural features associated with the old mining operations. There is some potential for disseminated gold deposits associated with jasperoid outcrops. Development of lode deposits is anticipated to occur in the portion of the WSA recommended for uses other than wilderness.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The core of the Goshute Canyon WSA is in a pristine condition. When in the center of the WSA, the forces of nature dominate the senses. Only a few imprints of man's work lie within the WSA, and these are unnoticeable within the area as a whole and do not detract from the enjoyment of the area's wilderness character. These include two rock gabions in Goshute Canyon, numerous two-track routes (most only a few hundred feet in length) established on the periphery of the area, a buried pipeline, and several historic structures. The foregoing description of these several unnatural features tends to focus attention on them and thereby exaggerate their significance. Put back in the context of the 35,594 acre area where they occur, these impacts are substantially unnoticeable, being dwarfed and absorbed by the largeness of the landform. Vegetative and topographic screening conceal most of them whenever the visitor is more than a few feet distant from them. The overwhelming impression of the area is that it retains its primeval character, unaltered by man's activities.

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude in the Goshute Canyon WSA are outstanding. While the size and configuration of the unit certainly contribute to these; it is the topographic and vegetative screening which are primarily responsible. The rugged and very precipitous 13-mile length of the Cherry Creek Mountains runs along an approximately north-south axis and is highly broken by ancillary east-west ridges and associated canyons. The screening effect of this variegated terrain is complemented by extensive forestation which cloaks most of the area.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Primitive recreation opportunities are outstanding in the Goshute Canyon WSA because of their quality and diversity. Presently, hunting is one of the major recreational pursuits. Much of the WSA provides key habitat for mule deer, and every year heavy hunter use occurs all around the area's periphery. Mountain lions, blue grouse, and sage grouse are also unusually prolific and provide abundant hunting opportunities. The area around Goshute Canyon offers especially noteworthy opportunities for recreation. Fishing opportunities of moderate quality occur in Goshute Creek, which hosts a population of Bonneville Cutthroat Trout. Easy walk-in camping can be done along the banks of both Goshute and Carry Creeks beneath cottonwoods and willows. About 1-mile to the north of the mouth of Goshute Canyon is Goshute Cave, an extensive limestone solution cave that offers excellent opportunities for caving and geological study. Less utilized but similarly excellent recreation opportunities in the WSA include day hiking, backpacking, nature study, photography, rock climbing, and cross-country skiing.

D. Special Features: Many special features, including Goshute Cave, bristlecone pines and a diversity of numerous wildlife species contribute to the attractiveness of the Goshute Canyon WSA. The WSA, with its well watered basins, abundant resources, and topographic diversity, proved to be an attractive area for primitive man in eastern Nevada. Historic resources within the WSA are mostly located on the lower reaches of the more accessible drainages and provide a unique glimpse into eastern Nevada's early history of settlement.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The portion of the Goshute Canyon WSA recommended for wilderness would be easily managed as wilderness

for the long term. There are no private lands nor mining claims, and it appears highly unlikely that the oil and gas leases on the north end will ever be developed. Control of off-road vehicle use on the approaches to the mountains necessitate some patrol, especially during the high-use months of deer season and trapping season. There is a possibility that stream stabilization work may be necessary in Goshute Creek. Past efforts to improve the fishery have exacerbated erosion problems and further destabilized conditions. Severe flooding in past years has caused deep headcutting on portions of the creek resulting in the lowering of the creek bed by 30 feet in some places.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the Goshute Canyon WSA in 1988 (U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1725-E). The USGS/BM study rates the Goshute Canyon WSA as having low potential for oil and gas, and geothermal resources. The report indicates that the majority of the recommended portion has low potential for the occurrence of mineralization which would host gold, silver, antimony, copper, lead, zinc and tungsten. Small jasperoid-silica zones along the fringes of the suitable portion were identified by the report as having a moderate mineral potential for gold, silver, antimony, and tungsten.

The Goshute Canyon WSA encompasses the central portion of the Cherry Creek Range. Mineral interest in the Cherry Creek Range dates back to the 1870's with the formation of the Cherry Creek Mining District. A portion of the mining district extends into the southern portion of the WSA. Past production from the district is reported at \$4.8 million since reporting was instituted (1902), and before that \$6 million to \$20 million in production is estimated. Minerals produced include gold, silver, lead, and copper.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During public review of the draft EIS and Wilderness Technical Report a total of 59 comments were received specifically addressing the Goshute Canyon WSA. In general, 52 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and six commentors supported no wilderness for the WSA. Comments supporting wilderness designation cited the high scenic qualities, outstanding recreation opportunities, botanical, archaeological and speleological values and the presence of the Goshute Canyon Natural Area. Comments opposing wilderness mentioned mineral and energy potential and the existing mining along the southern boundary. Two commentors took no position on designation.

Throughout the wilderness process, concern was expressed that should the Goshute Canyon WSA be designated as wilderness, the designation could somehow negatively effect the proposed White Pine Power Project. The White Pine Regional Planning Commission, the City of Ely, and the White Pine County Commission opposed wilderness designation for this area for that reason. Since completion of the wilderness study, the White Pine Power Project has been dropped from consideration as a viable energy development due to decreased regional demand for electricity.