

MORMON MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 162,887 acres

The Mormon Mountains wilderness study area (WSA), NV-050-161, is located approximately 75 miles northeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. The WSA contains the entire Mormon Mountains Range and is located in southeastern Lincoln County, Nevada, with a small portion of the WSA in northern Clark County. The WSA contains 162,887 acres of public land with no private inholdings (Table 1). The Mormon Mountains WSA is a large contiguous block of public land, surrounded on all sides by public land.

The study area configuration is generally rounded in shape, approximately 18 miles across on the east-west axis and approximately 30 miles across the north-south axis. The study unit is bound by the Carp-Elgin Road on the north and east; Meadow Valley Wash Road and Union Pacific Railroad on the west; and, a hunting access road/seismic "thumper" trail on the south. Several short roads on the east side of the WSA are cherrystemmed and two cherrystemmed roads extend into the heart of the WSA. One six mile cherrystemmed road leads to an area of fairly recent mineral interest on the west side of the study area. One way, in the bottom of an active wash, extends nearly 9 miles into the heart of the study area to a large wildlife water development. Another way, on the east side, extends several miles to a spring development for livestock use.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 123,130 acres recommended for wilderness 39,757 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate approximately 123,130 acres as wilderness and release 39,757 acres for uses other than wilderness. BLM has carefully weighed existing and potential resources present in the WSA to develop the recommendation for the Mormon Mountain WSA. The configuration arrived at preserves areas of high wilderness and primitive recreation values while excluding large areas of bajadas which, although possessing wilderness and primitive recreation values, are not exceptional. At the same time, it also preserves substantial bajada areas which can be managed readily over the long term. The Bureau has been criticized for failing to recommend bajadas as suitable. These recommendations have occurred because bajadas are usually readily accessible to motor vehicles and have been impacted or are difficult to manage over the long term. The chief potential conflict within the area recommended for wilderness is between possible mineralization on one hand, and wilderness, wildlife, primitive recreation, scenic values and speleological resources on the other hand. A large population of bighorn sheep, mule deer and raptors provide wildlife observation opportunities. Caves and significant cultural resources comprise some of the more important special features present.

Visually, the WSA is spectacular. Taken alone, the ragged-topped dome flanked by Moapa Peak and the East Mormon Mountains, is extremely rewarding. Added to these beautiful crags are massive cliffs, some overhung, which accentuate the peaks. Colors range from cliffs slashed by purple-brown and gray bands to brownish-orange peaks and reddish outcrops. Spires, fins and egg-shaped peaks attract both eye and camera. Yuccas, agaves, Joshua trees, pinyon pine and a relic stand of ponderosa pine provide contrast and variety.

Removal of the southwestern bajada from the lands preliminarily recommended for wilderness designation resolves potential manageability problems with regard to the large block of mining claims located on a portion of it and with ORV access from two long ways which traverse it. Boundaries, for the portion of the study area recommended for wilderness designation, are easily identifiable and will preclude the majority of management concerns for the area recommended for wilderness.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: Approximately fifty to sixty percent of the WSA is unaffected by manmade features. Most roads, ways, water developments, mines and mining disturbances around the WSA have been technically excluded by cherrystemming. Deep canyons and broken terrain limit the influence of these intrusions to the area adjacent to them. Numerous small quail guzzlers dot the lower elevations and three large big game guzzlers have been installed on the north side towards the higher elevations.

B. Solitude: The Mormon Mountains WSA contains outstanding opportunities for solitude. Much of the WSA consists of extremely rugged mountain peaks, rising 5,300 feet above the desert, large cliffs, deep canyons, numerous drainages, caves and difficult to reach bajadas. Majestic vistas of surrounding deserts, mountains and valleys enhance the feeling of solitude. Broken terrain isolates ridges and valleys from each other thus making activity nearly undetectable in the next one. Good vegetative screening above 5,000 feet also aids in obtaining solitude.

Most of the WSA is far removed from outside influences, however, military aircraft flights do destroy the stillness of the experience needed for solitude. Secluded spots are easily locatable in all areas of the WSA due to the sheer size of the WSA. The best areas are found in the core area.

C. Primitive and Undefined Recreation: The Mormon Mountains WSA with its large size, diverse terrain, wildlife and vegetation offers outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Various dayhikes are available in conjunction with the cherrystem access routes, and others could be undertaken off the numerous peripheral roads adjacent to the WSA. The majority of the study area offers challenging and scenic hiking opportunities.

Destination hiking and backpacking opportunities, as well as rockclimbing and mountain climbing are available throughout a large portion of the WSA. Hunting for bighorn sheep and small game are popular in the WSA. The main mountain area offers beautiful big country vistas, fossils and bighorn sheep, providing exceptional opportunities for wildlife and nature photography. Lower areas offer abundant cultural resources, particularly in the vicinity of springs. The central escarpment of the WSA is well known as a scrambling, hiking, and climbing area. Mormon Peak, Moapa Peak and other unnamed peaks within the range are all well known desert climbs with 500 foot to 1,000 foot cliffs and offer an outstanding desert climbing experience. There are outstanding caving opportunities within the limestone peaks, walls, and canyons of the Mormon Mountains. Spectacular caves abound in the area and offer challenging opportunities to the user.

4. MANAGEABILITY: The area could be managed as wilderness. The biggest management challenge would be controlling motorized vehicle usage. There are several major washes aside from the cherrystem roads, which allow access into the area. The terrain along the periphery makes it accessible to vehicles. There are numerous tracks throughout the southwestern and southern areas, and control would be very difficult at best. The majority of the area does not have any problems from vehicles due to its very precipitous terrain. The entire WSA is composed of public land, with no encumbrances of record. The WSA is bordered on the west side by Union Pacific Railroad (200 foot wide, CC-06192) and WSA 0156 Meadow Valley.

Approximately 11,500 acres (or 7.1 percent of the WSA) are covered by post-FLPMA mining claims. Only two pre-FLPMA lode mining claims exist (41.3 acres, part of which is a cherrystem). Other claims have been located but are presently abandoned. Historic mining or production is unknown.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Occurrences of commercial grade limestone of undetermined extent and minor deposits of sand were found. Portions of the area studied have high mineral resource potential for copper, lead, zinc, silver, gold, arsenic and antimony. Part has moderate potential for antimony. Two areas have moderate potential for tungsten, molybdenum and/or tin. The remainder has low resource potential for all metals. The area studied has moderate resource potential for oil and gas, except for areas which have had significant hydrothermal activity. It has low resource potential for manganese, barite, vermiculite, coal and geothermal.

The following minerals appear on the National Defense Stockpile List of Strategic and Critical Materials and have been found in anomalous amount in the Mormon Mountains: antimony, copper, lead, silver, tin, zinc, tungsten and molybdenum.

Economic or subeconomic locatable resource values are not known to exist within this WSA. Hypothetical undiscovered resources of gypsum in unknown amounts are located in an identified area east of Carp. The inferred hypothetical gypsum prospect is less significant than several other gypsum prospects in the Caliente planning Unit. Undiscovered manganese, zinc, and tungsten (strategic listed minerals) may occur within this WSA, since these minerals occur in similar areas in the range immediately to the east.

No known leasable mineral values exist in the Mormon Mountain wilderness study area. No documented occurrences of oil, gas, or geothermal resources are known, although, the entire WSA is under oil and gas lease.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public interest in the WSA is high due to relative ease of access to the Las Vegas metropolitan area from Interstate 15 and to its abundant resources. During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 162 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Of those, 158 were written and 4 were oral statements received at the public hearing on the draft EIS. In the Draft EIS only 23,690 acres of the study area was preliminarily recommended suitable for wilderness designation. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 160 (98.8%) of the 162 comments received supported wilderness designation for part or all of the study area. Of those, 156 recommended more wilderness than the DEIS Preferred Alternative. Only two commentators recommended no wilderness for this study area.

County: Lincoln County did not respond. The Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning concurred with the recommended wilderness designation contained within the preferred alternative in the Clark Draft EIS.

State: The Governor of Nevada in his consistency letter, dated December 28, 1984, did not address the Mormon Mountain WSA. During the State's review of the Preliminary Draft EIS the Governor recommended 23,690 acres for wilderness designation. The state clearinghouse has indicated it opposes the larger wilderness recommendation contained in the Final EIS and this report due to mineral potentials.

Federal: The U.S. Bureau of Mines recommended against wilderness designation for any portion of the Mormon Mountains WSA. The U.S. Air Force identified potential conflicts with continued use of the airspace over the Mormon Mountains WSA for military training and installation of electronic monitoring and tracking devices within the WSA. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency observed that the criteria for selecting suitable versus unsuitable wilderness areas was unclear in the DEIS. Finally EPA stated the FEIS should discuss the recovery of the area's mineral resources in greater detail.