

PARSNIP PEAK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 88,175 ACRES

The Parsnip Peak WSA (NV-040-206) is located in Lincoln County in east-central Nevada within the Wilson Creek Mountain Range. The nearest incorporated town is Pioche, Nevada, located 25 miles to the south. The north boundary of the WSA is formed by Camp Valley Road, Wilson Creek-Camp Valley Road (BLM Road 4045) and an unnamed jeep trail that connects to the Mount Wilson Vortac Station Road. Along the Wilson Creek-Camp Valley Road, the boundary circumvents private land. A one and one-half mile portion of this boundary connects the two parcels on a north-south point to point bearing between unsurveyed parcel corners.

The western boundary is defined by an assortment of connections between jeep trails, county roads and point to point bearings. Beginning at the north end on the ridge of Mount Wilson, the boundary descends the Vortac Station Road and a jeep trail which connects to the Hulse Canyon Road. Here, the boundary circumvents private land in Hulse Canyon and continues to connect with a jeep trail. The boundary then ascends the mountain flank along a series of connecting jeep trails, then goes point to point to Blue Rock Springs to exclude a number of terminal ends of jeep trails. From Blue Rock Springs, the boundary goes point to point to an unnamed jeep trail which descends the mountain flank connecting with County Road 464, but not before cherrystemming a one-mile long jeep trail and old perlite mine workings. The boundary parallels the county road with a dirt road along the alluvial slope and ties back into County Road 464.

The southern boundary of the unit is defined by the Spring Valley Road which crosses the range at Pierson Summit. The eastern boundary of the WSA is defined by two fencelines and the Spring Valley and Camp Valley Roads. The east-central portion of the boundary deviates from the fencelines by following an unnamed jeep road to private land surrounding Parsnip Spring. The boundary then follows the Parsnip Creek Road back to the fenceline.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 53,560 acres recommended for wilderness 34,615 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The area recommended for wilderness possesses unquestionably high wilderness values. The area has a great diversity of vegetation and land form, and provides an outstanding diversity of recreation and solitude opportunities. Resource conflicts and manageability concerns in the portion recommended for wilderness designation are few. The area retains a pristine character, and contains important riparian areas, wildlife populations, and diverse forest types.

A northern portion of the WSA was recommended for nonwilderness to exclude areas accessible to vehicles, several parcels of private land, and an indefinite boundary between private parcels.

A portion on the west side of the WSA was not recommended for wilderness to reduce conflicts with known mineral deposits, allow for mechanical vegetation conversions to benefit wildlife and livestock, alleviate manageability problems around some private land in the Hulse Canyon area, and to provide a better defined, more manageable boundary.

The Patterson Wash area in the southwest portion of the WSA was also recommended for non-wilderness. Although its exclusion would reduce the ecological diversity of the proposed wilderness, it would reduce conflicts (range, wildlife, woodland products, minerals and energy) without significantly effecting opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation. There is also strong local opposition in the local area to inclusion of this area.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: Most of the Parsnip Peak WSA recommended for wilderness is in a nearly pristine condition. The rugged nature of the portion recommended for wilderness prevents much use by livestock, and springs and riparian areas are relatively free of the developments and signs of livestock use.

Forest cover in the WSA varies with elevation and aspect with aspen groves predominating on the north slopes and extensive thickets of mountain mahogany on the south. Deer, elk and other wildlife heavily use these stands. Bald eagles enjoy the pockets of fir which are found in craggy niches in the higher elevations. Native grasses are found throughout the WSA.

Unnatural features within the area are few, but include several cherrystemmed roads, ways, range developments (springs and fences), and a partly developed 40 acre parcel of private land at Buster Spring. On the north end, the large Mount Wilson Burn was seeded with a mixture of grasses, some of which are not indigenous to the area. With the passage of time and the return of native shrub and grass species the area now appears very natural.

B. Solitude: Outstanding opportunities for solitude are available throughout the portion of the Parsnip Peak WSA recommended for wilderness due to its large size, generally dense vegetative cover, and excellent topographic screening. Many "secluded places" exist where a user can disassociate himself from all sights and sounds of man. Opportunities are truly outstanding.

Opportunities for solitude are somewhat less in the area recommended for uses other than wilderness to the north and west where more intensive livestock management occurs and past mining operations are located. To the south where the land is flat and the predominant vegetation is sagebrush, solitude opportunities are considerably diminished.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Good opportunities for many types of recreation exist in the Parsnip Peak WSA, and this diversity is outstanding. Types of recreation include backpacking, hiking, camping, horseback riding, nature study, archaeological and geological sightseeing, rock climbing, hunting and trapping. The primitive backcountry setting of the WSA, along with the outstanding scenery of the area, enhance all of these opportunities.

As with the opportunities for solitude, the quality of recreational opportunities is lessened in the southern, nonwilderness portion of the WSA. The above mentioned recreational opportunities are concentrated more in the upper elevations, off the alluvial fans.

D. Special Features: Complementing the high scenic values, are abundant and varied prehistoric archaeological sites. The Mount Wilson Archaeological District has been delineated in the north end of the WSA and is eligible for nomination for National Register of Historic Places. Sites known to occur within the WSA include campsites, rock rings, rock shelters and rock art. One unique feature is the "Indian Playground", an elaborate maze-like rock alignment which can be clearly seen from the air.

4. MANAGEABILITY The Parsnip Peak WSA would be manageable as wilderness with only a few difficulties. The WSA contains numerous scattered private parcels, some with cherrystemmed access, and some with no access at all. Within the recommended portion, access to Mud and Cole Springs (both in the north end) would create some adverse impacts, but would not affect the integrity of the area. Western portions recommended for nonwilderness would present management difficulties due to the locations of private lands and adjacent, but currently inactive mine lands.

The southwestern portion recommended for nonwilderness is a low, open valley area with no topographic barriers serving as a separation between it and the remainder of the valley. The openness of the portion creates some concerns by virtue of the accessibility it lends to off-road vehicles. Off-road travel would likely continue

even with wilderness designation due to the difficulty of effective patrols.

Some conflicts may occur, however, with the wilderness designation. Surface disturbance as a result of mineral exploration on valid claims may occur although development is not anticipated. In addition, several areas identified for vegetation conversion for both wildlife and livestock purposes are located within the portion recommended for wilderness. These conversions may still occur however they will be restricted to fires, with no mechanical conversions allowed.

In summary, conflicts in the area recommended for wilderness are minimal and wilderness and its compatible resource uses were determined to be the highest and best use of this portion. Additionally, designation would create a high quality addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES VALUES

The majority of the area recommended for wilderness has low potential for mineral resources. Discontinuous zones of moderate potential for perlite deposits are identified along the western and southwestern boundary of the recommended wilderness. On the western edge of the recommended wilderness, a small area is identified as having high potential for the occurrence of mineral resources including arsenic, antimony, mercury and gold.

Perlite deposits are common along the western portion of the WSA. Although considered suitable for plaster and concrete aggregate, most of the reserves and deposits identified within the USGS/BM assessment are considered subeconomic due to costs of exploration and lack of access to the deposits.

Energy resource potential for the Parsnip Peak WSA is low. Mineral potential speculations are low to moderate for the majority of the WSA.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During formal public review of the draft EIS and Wilderness Technical Report held between April 8 to July 8, 1983 a total of 10 comments were received specifically addressing the Parsnip Peak WSA. Of those, six were written comments and four were oral testimonies. Seven commentators supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA and three commentators supported no wilderness for the WSA.

Comments supporting wilderness mention the scenic rock formations and the splendid ponderosa/oak/aspens stands. Also mentioned is the fact that the Wilson Burn area is natural looking. Comments opposing designation state the unit has potential for vegetation improvements, contains private lands and water holdings, and has mining claims and mineral deposits.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Mines, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, and the Department of the Air Force all commented on the draft EIS. None of these agencies had a jurisdictional conflict with any of the alternatives. The Governor of Nevada and the Nevada Department of Wildlife supported a no wilderness recommendation for the Parsnip Peak WSA, because of the existence of mineral deposits and the potential for vegetation conversions. The State Divisions of State Lands, Parks, Forestry, and Historic Preservation and Archeology support wilderness designation. The Lincoln County Conservation District opposes wilderness designation because it could prohibit vegetation conversion.

One letter was received on the final EIS from the Environmental Protection Agency which supported the BLM's wilderness recommendation.