

B. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude are outstanding in the WSA. The very large size of the area combines with extensive topographic and vegetative screening to create these. Although the mountains of the unit lie in an elongated configuration, they do have breadth and are highly dissected. Many side canyons and ancillary ridges, outcrops and interconnected peaks serve to provide innumerable secluded places to which a person can retreat from evidences of civilization. Solitude is greatest in the most natural parts of the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation in the WSA are outstanding because of the variety and quality of different types of recreation possible. The area provides a diversity of terrain, ecosystems, and scenic vistas which enhance nearly all opportunities, including those for backpacking, hunting, nature study, horseback riding, and hiking. In many places at the highest elevations, the mountains form a broad, nearly flat table with small scattered stands of timber. Opportunities for camping and hiking are especially good in such areas because of their openness, the level terrain they offer and the coppices of trees that provide shelter and fuelwood. Recreation opportunities in the WSA are generally enhanced by a relative abundance of springs and riparian areas. Hunters find ample opportunities for enjoyment of their sport because of the concentrations of mule deer, sage grouse, blue grouse and mountain lions. The WSA currently sustains comparatively heavy hunting use, with an estimated 455 hunter visits per year. The potential for technical rock climbing is known to be good. Challenging ascents exist for a wide range of skill levels, from the easiest to the very difficult.

D. Special Features: Bristlecone pines, members of the longest-lived species on earth occur in fairly high numbers at the highest elevations. Angel Cave is considered a special feature even though it is not especially large. It is a limestone solution cave that is atypical because of the high elevation at which it occurs. Most such caves occur at lower elevations where groundwater accumulates. The cave is ripe for scientific study that may lead to understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics of its formation.

Another special feature is the area's archaeological richness. Known prehistoric archaeological values are fairly extensive and include several large camp site complexes, quarry sites, and rock art. Potential for discovery of additional cultural resources is very high within the WSA.

The scenic values of the WSA are especially great because of the dramatic rock cliffs on the western side of the range. They are very striking from highway 318, which parallels the range; and are most impressive when beheld at close range, towering high overhead. The wildlife values of the area constitute a special feature due to their great numbers and diversity. The cliffs provide nesting areas for cliff dwelling raptors, in particular prairie falcons, whose nesting density here is the highest in the Ely BLM District. Red-tail hawks, golden eagles, kestrels, turkey vultures, great horned and long eared owls also dwell in the area. Their presence provides good opportunities for scientific and educational study.

4. MANAGEABILITY

Overall, the South Egan Range WSA would be manageable as wilderness. Nearly 25 miles of the boundary are based on unsurveyed and/or unmarked private land. The 400 acres of private land scattered through the WSA could cause some manageability problems should development take place on these parcels in the future and access be needed. In addition, the 80 acres of privately owned mineral rights (split estate) could also present manageability problems should any exploration or development occur.

The mineral potential on the north end of the WSA could pose some manageability dilemmas. Even with wilderness designation, some mineral and energy exploration is likely. In addition, two oil and gas exploration wells are predicted to be drilled along the western bench within the WSA and wilderness values would be lost in their immediate vicinity for a long period of time.

Finally, manageability would be affected by activities which are currently occurring without authorization,

principally greenwood cutting. Patrol costs and regulation of these activities would be costly in terms of both time and funds. Other activities such as off-road travel, would be difficult to control because of an established history of use by local residents.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The South Egan Range WSA was evaluated for energy and mineral potential in the 1983 GEM study. This study led to additional geochemical sampling over the entire WSA to further refine the resource potential evaluations (USGS Preliminary Open-File Report "Reconnaissance Geochemistry of the South Egan Range"; 1983). The 1983 GEM report rates the northern portion of the WSA within the Ellison Mining District as moderate to high favorability for metallic and non-metallic mineral resources with a high confidence level. This evaluation is supported by the fact that mining claims are still held in the area and mineral exploration is continuing on a sporadic basis. Limited amounts of gold, silver, lead, copper, zinc, and fluorite were produced from the area in the 1930's and 1940's (Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology; Bulletin 85, 1976). The GEM study indicates that there are no known occurrences of oil and gas resources within the WSA and the area is rated as having low favorability for these resources. A 328 acre near Emigrant Springs has moderate geothermal potential. The thermal water here is measured at 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The remainder of the WSA has low potential for geothermal resources.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the inventory phase there were no comments received which mentioned other resource values or conflicts. Issues raised during the study phase cited the unit's archaeological, geological, and scenic values as well as diverse wildlife and vegetation.

During public review of the draft wilderness recommendation, a total of 62 comments were received that specifically addressed this area; 52 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA, 9 commentors supported no wilderness for the WSA, and one commentor took no position on designation. Those supporting designation discussed the wildlife, scenic limestone cliffs and forests and bristlecone pine as reasons why the unit should be wilderness. The Division of State Parks in supporting the unit as wilderness, stated "the Egan Range is probably the best example in the Great Basin that shows a complete Paleozoic sequence of geology." Comments opposing wilderness designation mentioned the mineral and energy potential and existing mining to the north, high potential for range development, existing roads and dependence on the area for fuelwood and Christmas tree cutting by local residents.

The Governor of Nevada, in his consensus and consistency letters supported the Preferred Alternative of no wilderness. The White Pine County Commission, White Pine Regional Planning Commission, City of Ely and the Lund Town Council supported the proposed action which was no wilderness. The major concern of these groups was that wilderness designation could adversely affect the local economy.

There were two comment letters received on the final wilderness recommendation. The first, from the Environmental Protection Agency did not specifically mention the South Egan Range WSA, nor did the second letter from the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe.