

WEEP AH SPRING WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 61,137 acres

The Weepah Spring WSA (NV-040-246) is located in east-central Nevada within Lincoln County. The entire WSA is comprised of 61,137 acres of public land with no private or State inholdings. This WSA is located in the Seaman Range, about 120 miles north of Las Vegas, and 90 miles south of Ely, Nevada. Alamo, Nevada the nearest incorporated town, is located approximately 35 miles to the south.

The western boundary of the WSA is mostly formed by a dirt road that traverses north-south along the eastern alluvial benches of Coal Valley. Portions of this boundary are also based on jeep trails, unnatural features, and geographic features. The southwest boundary is formed by a road which follows an unnamed arroyo draining into the White River Narrows. The southeast boundary parallels about 7 miles of Nevada State Highway 318. The eastern boundary is delineated by the 5600 foot contour line which connects the terminal ends of several jeep trails. Additional roads and jeep trails form the remaining portion of the eastern and northeastern boundary. Two jeep trails intersecting the Timber Mountain Pass Road and connected by the 6200 foot contour line form the northern boundary of the WSA.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 50,499 acres recommended for wilderness 10,638 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Weepah Spring WSA is to designate 50,499 acres as wilderness and 10,638 acres for uses other than wilderness. A portion of the WSA was recommended for wilderness due to its high wilderness values including high scenic qualities and an abundance of special features, and a limited amount of competing resource uses. The area recommended for wilderness is an excellent, unspoiled example of mountain ranges representative of the Great Basin. A great variety of topographic relief, combined with diverse and sometimes unusual flora in a large, seemingly unconfined setting, provides outstanding opportunities for solitude, as well as excellent recreational opportunities. These are enhanced by the high scenic value of the area and its wealth of special features. In addition, the portion recommended for wilderness is easily managed as wilderness.

Portions of the WSA that have high mineral potential or consist of alluvial slopes and lower foothills with scant vegetation relatively lower wilderness values. Eliminating these areas from the proposed wilderness improves the configuration of the WSA as a whole, making it more compact without odd shaped stringers. The proposed wilderness boundary was drawn to eliminate as much of the area with high mineral potential and existing mining claims as possible, while still keeping a manageable and identifiable boundary.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: Nearly all of the Weepah Spring WSA is in a pristine condition. Access is restricted for the most part to the fringes of the area and the ruggedness of the WSA has served to keep man's intrusions to a minimum. On the west side of the WSA, a small, unnatural area has been cherrystemmed out of the unit but remains encircled by it. A small spring facility lies within the WSA at Weepah Spring. Cherrystemmed routes, primitive in nature, penetrate the boundary of the WSA on the southeast. All these unnatural features are minor, peripheral, and do not affect in any way the outstanding naturalness of the area as a whole.

B. Solitude: Outstanding opportunities for solitude exist in abundance within the portion of the Weepah Spring WSA recommended for wilderness. The large size of the area and the breadth of the Seaman Range and Timber Mountain which make up the WSA, are primarily responsible for the outstanding solitude. These mountains consist of individual peaks and a myriad of canyons, creating a maze-like character that could host

a large number of users and still provide outstanding solitude. Its remoteness from populations, and its excellent topographic and vegetative screening all contribute to an environment where visitors can totally remove themselves from the sights and sounds of man.

Opportunities for solitude in the recommended nonwilderness portions of the WSA, are of lower quality due to the open, unscreened nature of much of the acreage.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The wilderness inventory determined that opportunities for recreation are very good in the WSA but are less than outstanding. Specific opportunities for recreation include backpacking, hiking, and camping. Nature study in this undisturbed, unusual area is excellent. Horseback riding in the more open southern part of the WSA is very good. Hunting and trapping opportunities occur in various portions of the area. Recreation opportunities are excellent throughout the core of the WSA from the forested areas to the eroded volcanic cliffs. Recreational opportunities diminish in quality along the bench and valley areas within the recommended nonwilderness portions.

D. Special Features: The scenic values of the Seaman Range are high due to the great diversity of geologic features present, and these serve as a special feature of the WSA. Although most stands of ponderosa in eastern Nevada are relict stands, this one is unique in that active regeneration is obvious where young saplings grow next to trees over 3 feet in diameter. As perhaps the largest stand of ponderosa pine in eastern Nevada, the area serves as an important source of genetic diversity and contributes as a special feature with scientific, scenic, and educational value that enhances the area's wilderness value.

The White River Narrows Archaeological District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, lies within the southern portion of the WSA and represents one of the largest and most well-known petroglyph concentrations in eastern Nevada. Other prehistoric sites exist within the WSA including shelter caves, hunting blinds and open camp sites. The Seaman Range wild horse herd range into the WSA along its western flank and southern foothills. For many persons, especially those who would use the area for wilderness recreation, wild horses are part of and enhance the diversity of wilderness experience.

4. MANAGEABILITY

All but the northwest portion of the WSA is manageable as wilderness in the long term. The lack of private or State inholdings, the relatively self protecting rugged nature of the WSA, and the lack of competing resource values throughout most of the WSA ensure manageability of the area. Several slight manageability concerns have, however, affected the configuration of the recommended wilderness area.

The northwest portion of the WSA has been identified by as having a high potential for disseminated gold. Wilderness values would be lost in this portion of the WSA for the long term if mineral deposits are located and developed.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment report for the Weepah Spring WSA in 1987, (U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1728-E). The report indicated that the majority of the WSA has low potential for metallic mineral resources. An area of high potential for undiscovered deposits of disseminated gold and associated mercury is located on the western fringe of the unit. Past mining activity has occurred at the FNB and Red Head claim groups within this area.

Two very small localized areas on the eastern boundary are considered to possess moderate potential for mineral resources (gold, silver, copper, lead and zinc) associated with epithermal vein deposits. These areas have not been subject to prior mining activity or exploration.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the inventory phase two comments were received that mentioned other resource conflicts. One mentioned a conflict with livestock grazing, and the other mentioned mineral potential.

During public review of the draft wilderness recommendation, a total of 16 comments were received specifically addressing the Weepah Spring WSA. In general, 13 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA, two commentors supported no wilderness for the WSA while one commentor mentioned the Weepah Spring WSA but took no formal position on wilderness designation. The main points mentioned in support of this area as wilderness were the large stand of virgin ponderosa pine, wilderness values far outweigh the mineral potential, and that boundaries should be increased to include more land. The main points mentioned in favor of reducing the suitable portion were: the area's mineral potential, its limited access would protect it without wilderness designation, the northern boundaries should be reduced because of mineralization, and the boundaries should be pulled a half mile from US Highway 318.

The Governor of Nevada as well as the State Divisions of State Lands, Parks, Forestry, and Historic Preservation and Archeology, supported the area for wilderness but recommended the northwest corner be pulled back "to avoid what appears to be a substantial resource conflict." The Nevada Department of Wildlife supported the area as wilderness as well. The Lincoln County Conservation District opposed wilderness because of the area's mineralization and the limited access which will keep the southern portion of the unit wilderness.

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