

ARROW CANYON RANGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 32,853 acres

Arrow Canyon Range Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-215) is the northern extremity of the narrow, north-south trending Arrow Canyon Range approximately 35 miles north of Las Vegas, Nevada. Roughly triangular in shape, the western side is approximately 12 miles long and 6 miles across, at its widest point. The west boundary of the study area extends along the base of the mountain on a series of contours. The north boundary is generally the centerline of the Pahranaagat Wash and Arrow Canyon drainages. Battleship Wash is the east boundary, where upon near the southern terminus of Battleship Wash, the boundary turns west across a series of low hills to the Side Canyon drainage. At this point the boundary turns south and generally extends along the base of the mountains and through a pass to tie into the west boundary.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

**0 acres recommended for wilderness
32,853 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation for this WSA is to not designate it wilderness but to release all 32,853 acres for uses other than wilderness primarily because of a lack of quality wilderness values throughout a large portion of the WSA. The area generally appears natural but the aggregate affects of gradual incursion of human activity around its perimeter and the demand for unconfined recreation combine to impact naturalness of large portions of the WSA. Solitude opportunities are limited to canyons and ridges of the central core of the WSA. High recreation use in Arrow Canyon and Pahranaagat Wash significantly limit the quality of solitude and primitive recreational experiences in the northern portion of the study area. Opportunities for solitude are limited on the west side due to severe slopes and visibility to a highway (U.S. 93).

The no wilderness recommendation would emphasize maintaining access for motorized recreation. Several off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails and ways are available in the east half of the WSA. Large, broad washes and low, rolling hills provide limited impediments to OHV use. Arrow Canyon and Pahranaagat Wash are easily accessible by OHVs and several ways and cherrystemmed roads extend into the canyons on the east side of the study area. Management of OHV use in the eastern portion of the WSA would be extremely difficult due to a distinct lack of natural barriers or clearly definable boundaries.

Mineral development and exploration in the southwest, east and northeast portions of the study area have affected naturalness. Expansion of mineral operations contiguous to the WSA would significantly degrade wilderness qualities of the Arrow Canyon Range.

Unconfined recreation would be limited to the long, narrow central core of the WSA along the ridgeline and a few short canyons on the slopes of the mountains. Use of this area would be concentrated to a very small portion of the northern end of the WSA. The highest and best use of the area would be for motorized recreation, mineral development, and intensive development of recreation opportunities in Arrow Canyon. Over the long-term, naturalness values and opportunities for solitude would be diminished. Desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizii), a special feature identified in the area, would not receive the added protection afforded from wilderness designation. Development of alternative recreation opportunities would be enhanced.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA is essentially natural. Evidence of human activity within the WSA is limited to a few small areas on the east side and confined to an area adjacent to the Pahranaagat Wash. However, most of the impacts are not visible from the majority of the study area. The west side of the study area includes a ridgeline of limestone peaks and canyons, a central valley cut by numerous washes, and a series of ridges on

the eastern end cut by deep washes, including the very nearly vertical sides of Arrow Canyon. The west side of the study is a spectacular cliff face, several thousand feet high, marked by a distinctive dark grey band, arcing across the length of the range.

Approximately six miles of ways, two small mineral exploration pits, an abandoned mining shack and scattered vehicle tracks occur within the study area. The ridgeline core area contains only the shack and is essentially natural. The intrusions affect mainly the northern end of the central valley, an area easily accessible, but are substantially unnoticeable. There is no activity on the west side of the study area due to the topography. This side is clearly visible from U.S. 93.

B. Solitude: Rugged topographic features of the ridgeline and narrow, deep canyons provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. The central valley and eastern ridges offer some opportunities for solitude because of the numerous, deep washes and other features. However, opportunities for solitude are less than outstanding in these areas. There is no vegetative screening in the WSA.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Recreation activities are good but not outstanding. Dayhiking, backpacking, rock scrambling, nature photography, hunting and horseback riding are all available. Easy access, scenic views, and challenge are the best characteristics. Lack of diversity limits the quality of the experience, however, there are outstanding opportunities for unconfined recreation in Arrow Canyon itself. Arrow Canyon is several miles long and the broad open bottom of the canyon is confined between sheer, high, canyon walls.

D. Special Features: The sheer western face of the Arrow Canyon Range with its dramatic band of quartzite is of scenic interest. The ridgeline offers excellent vistas of the area in all directions and other features of the basin and range country.

Arrow Canyon has geological, archeological, and scenic values. The canyon, which in places is only 20 feet wide and 300-400 feet deep, is an important location of fossils. Extensive, petroglyph panels are found on the canyon walls and upper reaches of the Pahrnagat Wash. Other archeological resources include; agave roasting pits, shelter caves, lithic and ceramic scatters, and rock alignments.

Bighorn sheep inhabit the mountainous portions of the WSA in all but the driest months.

Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) listed by the Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species on April 2, 1990 has been identified within the WSA. Nearly half of the WSA, the lower elevations on the northwest and the eastern half, have been identified as tortoise habitat.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The study area is capable of being managed as wilderness but there will be significant manageability concerns. Boundaries of the study area can easily be identified on the north side of the study area, however, boundaries for the rest of the study area would be difficult to identify and would not be clearly recognized by recreation users of the area. Unauthorized access to the west side of the study area is not anticipated due to the lack of destinations, limited points of ingress, and the sheer cliffs on the west face of the mountains. OHV access to the east and north sides of the study area are unchecked by physical barriers or a clearly defined boundary. These areas have been historically used and changing that pattern of use would be difficult.

Interest in mineral exploration has been concentrated in the north and southeast portions of the study area. Access to pre-FLPMA mining claims in the north portion and post-FLPMA claims in the southern portion of the study area would open more area to OHV activity and create a management burden.

The entire WSA has been leased for oil and gas. Although access could be managed, the impact created and other management concerns are the same as for mining.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

There are 300 acres of pre-FLPMA and 500 acres of post-FLPMA mining claims in the WSA, as of March, 1990, none of which are patented. The entire WSA is covered by 27 post-FLPMA oil and gas leases.

There is no evidence indicating metallic mineral favorability. The area has a moderate to high favorability for nonmetallics including silica, montmorillonite, gypsum, diatomite, limestone, dolomite, and alluvium. Nonmetallic mineral production has included silica sand at the Tiffany Quarry (a patented claim) on the southeastern boundary of the WSA. Large reserves are believed available. Small quantities of bentonite have reportedly been mined from a deposit near the northeastern boundary of the WSA. A quartzite quarry is presently in operation along the southwest side of the WSA.

The favorability for oil and gas resources is moderate. The eastern portion of the WSA has been identified as moderately favorable for geothermal resources.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

In general, 21 commentors, including the Governor, supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. Five commentors supported no wilderness for the Arrow Canyon Range WSA, mostly citing potential mineral resources. Eleven commentors wanted no wilderness at all and five recommended designating the entire area, along with all WSAs wilderness. Most comments supporting wilderness designation and specifically mentioning the WSA noted outstanding scenic values, manageability, limited resource conflicts, high wilderness values (outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation), unspoiled biological and cultural resource values, and wildlife habitat potential. Comments opposing wilderness focused on the potential impacts to speculative mineral resource values, impacts to energy and mineral exploration and development, and limitation on wildlife management options.

Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning in general supported nondesignation of the study area.

The Governor recommended wilderness designation for a portion of the study area, with a strong recommendation to exclude the southwest part of the WSA "in order to allow continued access to mineral resources." The State cited significant recreational and cultural resources in this WSA which outweigh other resource values. Follow up discussions between the state and BLM arrived at a consensus that the area should not be recommended for wilderness. Comments from the State of Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Division of State Lands, State Division of Minerals, and Department of Wildlife supported no wilderness.

The U.S. Air Force stated they support alternatives that do not restrict military overflights. The U.S. Geological Survey stated that geologic conditions were adequately considered and that mineral resource potential of those areas recommended suitable for wilderness would be addressed in their joint report with the Bureau of Mines. The EPA supported the proposed action. They recommended that the final recommendation include a statement that water and air quality would be best protected under wilderness designation.