

FISH & WILDLIFE NO. 1, 2 and 3 WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

1. THE STUDY AREA - 50,334 acres

Fish & Wildlife #1, #2 and #3 WSAs (NV-050-201, 216, and 217) are located in northern Clark and southern Lincoln Counties, approximately 35 miles north of Las Vegas, Nevada. The WSAs are of a long, narrow configuration running north-south, approximately 45 miles long and about three miles wide at their broadest point. The study area is divided into three individual WSAs by two heavily traveled, well defined roads. For the purpose of this report, they are being considered as one unit. Fish and Wildlife #1 contains 11,090 acres, #2 contains 17,242 acres and #3 contains 22,002 acres, totalling 50,334 acres of public land. The WSAs are sandwiched between the Desert National Wildlife Range (DNWR) on the west and U.S. Highway 93 to the east.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

**0 acres recommended for wilderness
50,334 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

The recommendation is to not designate these WSAs as wilderness, but to release them for uses other than wilderness because of conflicts with other potential resource uses and manageability concerns.

Quality of wilderness values was a key consideration in the recommendation. Although the WSAs have wilderness values, these values are not considered to be of high enough quality, in comparison to similar WSAs in the Las Vegas area, to merit the area's inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. All three WSAs generally appear natural but there are several signs of man, primarily vehicle trails due to off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel and a Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) materials pit right-of-way, located in the northern WSA. Most of the WSAs are easily accessible to vehicles from Highway 93 and the two roads that separate the three WSAs. Scattered vehicle tracks occur a short distance into the WSAs from Highway 93. Approximately 13 miles of ways are in the three WSAs. Topography in the WSAs primarily consists of an open bajada that is readily accessible to vehicles.

Solitude opportunities available in the WSAs are similar to those afforded by thousands of other acres of BLM administered land in Clark County. These opportunities are due to topography, remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the area. Opportunities to find solitude are extremely limited due to minimal topographic screening and the proximity and influence of outside sights and sounds associated with utility corridors, abandoned sand and gravel operations, and Highway 93.

Desert tortoise is a special feature within all three WSAs. Desert tortoise habitat occurs in approximately 41,909 acres (83 percent) of the 50,334 acres encompassed by the WSAs.

Fish and Wildlife #1, #2, and #3 WSAs have minimal potential for mineral development. However, the edge of the WSAs along Highway 93 has high favorability for salable quantities of sand and gravel. Several rights-of way, within the WSAs, have been issued to NDOT for sand and gravel material sites. These rights-of way have been issued in perpetuity and the total physical impacts would be 300 acres.

At present, there is little threat to existing naturalness of the area. A utility corridor route extending the entire length of the three WSAs, has been identified by potential users. It is projected that five 500 KV transmission lines and one access road could be built within the designated utility corridor. Industry has recommended a one mile wide utility corridor that would extend west of Highway 93 across all three WSAs.

Construction of projected utilities and removal of sand and gravel would physically disturb an estimated 1,919 acres within the WSAs. Western portions of the WSAs are protected due to topography and other physical

and administrative constraints. Therefore, even without wilderness designation, the quality and level of values now found in the WSA are not expected to significantly change.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: All three WSAs are primarily natural with few man-made intrusions. Topography consists mainly of flat, gently sloping bajadas extending from the west to the eastern boundary. The only mountain range, the Las Vegas Range, occurs in the central portion of Fish and Wildlife No.2.

Nine ways extend into the area from the eastern and southern boundaries. The majority of these ways (12.9 miles) occur in the Fish and Wildlife #3 WSA. Two wells, which have been abandoned, are in Fish and Wildlife #1 and Fish and Wildlife #3 WSAs. They are substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole. In Fish and Wildlife #1, there are two existing material site rights-of-way and one material site right-of-way within Fish and Wildlife #3, issued to NDOT for sand and gravel.

B. Solitude: Individually each WSA provides limited opportunities for solitude. Combined, the three units provide areas of outstanding opportunities for solitude. Opportunities are somewhat limited due to the configuration of the units, and are primarily found in the central core area, in the low mountains of the Las Vegas Range, away from Highway 93 and the ways found in the southern end. Throughout most of the WSA topography and vegetation provide for minimal screening.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Recreational opportunities in the study areas are fair for such activities as horseback riding, hiking, camping, nature study and sightseeing. All areas provide easy access for these activities, however, there are limited areas of interest or destination points within the WSAs. The Las Vegas Range in Fish and Wildlife #2 would provide the greatest opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation. Other visits would most likely be transitory in nature, passing through the area to reach the DNWR. Areas of interest to visitors for hiking and sightseeing would be the shelter caves found in Fish and Wildlife #2 and #3 and the bighorn sheep habitat in the Hidden Valley area. Primitive recreational use of the combined study areas is estimated to be 60 visits annually.

D. Special Features: Fish and Wildlife #2 and #3 support a small herd of bighorn sheep in the Las Vegas Range and Hidden Valley. Approximately 80-90 sheep inhabit these locations.

The desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species on April 2, 1990, has been identified within the WSA. A total of 41,909 acres within the three study areas have been identified as tortoise habitat.

A sensitive plant species, penstemon (*Penstemon bicolor ssp. roseus*), currently on the "Federal Register of Threatened and Endangered Species" has been identified within the WSAs.

Cultural resources, include several sites consisting of lithic scatters, a rock alignment, some points and flakes and midden, are located in the WSAs. The most important of the sites, Flaherty Shelter Cave in Fish and Wildlife #3, has been dated back to 10 B.C. None of these areas are currently listed on the National Register and there are no plans to list them in the near future.

4. MANAGEABILITY

Fish and Wildlife #1, #2, and #3 WSAs are capable of being managed as wilderness however, there would be manageability concerns associated with the material sites and associated rights-of-way. There would also be management concerns with regard to the narrowness of the study areas and the unfettered accessibility for OHVs.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Fish and Wildlife Nos. #1 and #2 have moderate nonmetallic mineral potential through the entire WSAs for sand and gravel. The remainder of this area has low potential for nonmetallic minerals. Favorable locations of sand and gravel closer to the Las Vegas market has not created sufficient demand, for materials within the WSAs, to make these deposits economic value for commercial exploitation. All three WSAs have low potential for metallic minerals, even though there are four post FLPMA mining claims in the southern portion of Fish and Wildlife #1. The claims have never been developed.

All of Fish and Wildlife #1 and #2 have moderate potential for oil and gas. There are no leases present.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the Draft EIS. The first was in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 3, 1988. Oral statements were presented by 22 people. Six oral statements were presented at the second hearing at Reno, Nevada on August 4, 1988. One of the oral comments supported the preferred alternative (no wilderness) for the study area. The other comments did not mention these WSAs.

Of 36 written comments, four supported the preferred alternative and five proposed all wilderness. The subjects of the comments were mineral potential, race courses and excessively easy accessibility, the use of a buffer area between the DNWR and the highway, potential wilderness in the DNWR, an endangered plant, solitude and the placing of a transitional zone between the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin Desert into the National Wilderness Preservation System.

No comments were received from Clark or Lincoln Counties.

In a letter from the Clearinghouse of the State of Nevada, dated September 7, 1988, the Director of the Clearinghouse said, "...the State concurs with the recommendation presented in the document." The document referred to is the Draft Nevada Contiguous Lands Wilderness EIS.