

GARRETT BUTTES WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 11,835 acres

The Garrett Buttes Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-235) is located in eastern Clark County, approximately 45 miles due east of Las Vegas, Nevada. The study area contains approximately 11,835 acres of public land.

The boundary begins at the intersection of the Catclaw Road and the Scalon Ferry Road. It proceeds to the west along the Catclaw Road to the boundary of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area (LMNRA) and heads south along this boundary for almost four miles. It then meets land reserved by the Bureau of Reclamation and follows the northern edge of this land in a southeasterly direction until it meets the Lakeside Mine Road. The boundary then follows this road easterly to the Scalon Ferry Road and then to the north until it meets the Catclaw Road, the starting point. The WSA is approximately five miles wide by five miles long.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 11,835 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 11,835 acres for uses other than wilderness. The quality of the wilderness values was the key consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they are not considered to be of a quality to merit the area's inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation system. The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man, primarily rangeland improvements and wildlife developments, which impact naturalness locally. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are similar to those afforded by the thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. These opportunities are due to the remoteness of the area and not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. The WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

In addition, the no wilderness recommendation for the WSA would emphasize maintaining access for motorized recreational activities such as off-highway driving and upland game bird hunting. The WSA provides excellent opportunities for these activities as the area's character and terrain is best suited for these types of uses.

Over the long-term, naturalness values and opportunities for solitude within the WSA would be diminished by the increase in motorized recreational activity. Also, the desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizii), the special feature identified in the area, would not receive the added protection afforded from wilderness designation.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA is primarily natural. The center portion of the study area is the most pristine. This WSA consists of a gently sloping outwash plain on the west, two rounded buttes to the east, and a small ridge running the length of the southern boundary.

There are 4.9 miles of ways present. One extends from the northern boundary into the center of the WSA. Other short intrusions follow washes and one comes into the unit from the eastern boundary. Other man-made features include five developed seeps and springs and seven upland game bird drinkers scattered throughout the WSA.

B. Solitude: The WSA provides outstanding opportunities for solitude in the short, narrow, twisting canyon at the eastern edge of Spring Wash, the best area for natural screening and seclusion. The WSA is of sufficient size that outstanding opportunities for solitude exist within its center. At this point, the WSA's boundaries

would be at equal distance. The sparse, low, desert shrubs provide only marginal screening.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Recreation opportunities in this WSA are limited. Opportunities for hiking, hunting, horseback riding and backpacking are available, however, there are few special features or attractive landscapes to draw a visitor. Hunting for upland game birds (Gambel's quail) is best along the boundary roads as is horseback riding. Spring Wash Canyon offers colorful and interesting rock formations and has the most interesting hiking areas.

D. Special Features: There is a herd of wild burros that migrates through the WSA. They normally frequent the western portion, which is close to water.

The desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizii), listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species on April 2, 1990, may occur within the WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The study area is capable of being managed as wilderness but there will be some manageability concerns regarding the 20 acres under an oil and gas lease. There are no mining claims present.

There would be management concerns regarding unauthorized access for motorized types of recreational activities and access for maintenance of range improvements.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Approximately 6,509 acres of the WSA (55 percent) has moderate potential for nonmetallic minerals (sand and gravel). The entire study area has low potential for metallic minerals and energy resources. There is no known indication of mineralization within the WSA. Exploration of and development for potential minerals is not expected to occur within the WSA due to lack of interest, absence of mining claims and prospecting activity and poor marketable location.

The WSA is rated as having low potential for energy resources. Neither exploration nor development of potential energy resources is projected to occur as the rock strata are not suitable reservoirs for hydrocarbon accumulation. There are no mining claims, and no oil and gas or geothermal leases present.

In summary, quantities of various mineral or energy resources are unknown, the potential for occurrence is from moderate to low in the WSA.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

In 1986, the area was reinstated in the wilderness study process and reinventoried to document its wilderness characteristics as a result of an April 1985 decision in Sierra Club vs Watt concerning certain lands that were deleted from wilderness review in 1982 and 1983.

Public comments received during the reinventory (1986) supported the WSA status because of the following reasons: opportunities for solitude, naturalness, special features and close proximity to National Heritage Sites. Of the seven comments, four recommended that the area be designated wilderness. One comment stated that the area should not be recommended for wilderness designation.

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. Two of the oral comments supported the

preferred alternative (no wilderness) for this WSA. None of the other comments mentioned this WSA.

Of the 36 written comments, five supported the preferred alternative and one proposed all wilderness. The subjects of the comments were mineral potential, race courses and excessively easy accessibility.

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.

No comments were received from Clark County.