

## La MADRE MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 61,630 acres<sup>1</sup>**

The La Madre Mountains Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-412) encompasses approximately 61,630 acres of public land on the east side of the Spring Mountains, approximately 12 miles west of Las Vegas, Nevada. A large part of the south central portion of the WSA is contained within the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (RRCNCA).

The northern boundary of the WSA is identified by a dirt road and the Toiyabe National Forest boundary as it existed prior to 1990. The eastern boundary extends generally along section lines for approximately six and one-half miles to where it intersects private lands and then borders private lands adjacent to Brownstone Basin. The southern boundary is the Red Rock scenic loop drive, Willow Spring road and Red Rock Summit road between the Pine Creek and La Madre Mountains WSAs. The southwest boundary is generally identified by the Lovell Canyon road and utility line extending to private property in Lovell Canyon, the private property boundary around the Sky Mountain Preserve, and the Lovell Summit road between Lovell Canyon and Trout Canyon. The west boundary is the quarter section line in sections 15, 22, and 27, T. 20 S., R. 58 E., slightly east of the private property in Trout Canyon.

The National Forest and Public Lands of Nevada Enhancement Act of 1988, adjusted administrative boundaries, placing approximately 20,324 acres, 33 percent, of the WSA within the Toiyabe National Forest. Approximately 18,955 acres (45 percent) of the area recommended for wilderness designation will be under Forest Service administration, the remainder of the area is recommended for uses other than wilderness.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -                      **42,005 acres recommended for wilderness** **19,625 acres recommended for nonwilderness****

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate approximately 42,005 acres of public land as wilderness because of its high quality values, its outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, the lack of conflicts with uses of the area, and the overwhelming public support for designation of this area. Approximately 19,625 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness.

The recommendation differs from the proposed action in the Final EIS due to changed land status. The western end (west of Lovell Canyon) is now contiguous with designated wilderness (Mt. Charleston) and is a natural link between the existing wilderness and the area proposed for wilderness. Alternative A (with revised acreage figures) was then selected to replace the original proposed action and now is the recommendation.

The area is manageable as wilderness, due primarily to the extreme rugged terrain, dense vegetation and its relative inaccessibility to motorized vehicles. Much of the area recommended for wilderness designation is within the RRCNCA where off-highway vehicle (OHV) use is limited to existing roads and trails.

Areas of the WSA not recommended for wilderness designation includes the northern portion where there are conflicts with mining claim development, increased pressures from urban development, and increased OHV activity on an existing way. The western portion surrounds private lands within Lovell Canyon, where management of the area as wilderness would be difficult due to the sights and sounds of resort activity. The

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<sup>1</sup>Errors were discovered when WSA acres were recalculated due to enactment of the Nevada Public Lands and National Forests Enhancement Act of 1989. Total acreage of WSA increased from 56,967 to 61,630. Boundary of WSA did not change.

recommendation emphasizes maintaining access to the northern portion, for mineral exploration and development, and to the western portion for recreation development.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The entire WSA is predominately natural. La Madre Mountain and the other mountains, hills and valleys which comprise the area recommended for designation, are essentially untouched by man. Most OHV activity is concentrated outside this area on the northern and southeastern portion with the majority occurring outside of the WSA.

The area recommended for uses other than wilderness is primarily in a natural condition, however, the influence of external activities decreases the quality of the experience. Mining claims, OHV activity, and future proposed development of private lands combine to reduce the natural qualities of the area.

**B. Solitude:** Within the area recommended for wilderness designation outstanding opportunities for solitude exist. The rugged complex of deep canyons, draws, summits, ridges and the pinyon-juniper cover provides excellent screening and secluded areas. In the portions recommended for uses other than wilderness the influence of urban development, mineral activity, and sounds of OHV activity significantly diminish the quality of solitude.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities are outstanding in the area recommended for wilderness because of the variety, quality, and accessibility of the activities. Dayhiking, backpacking, rockclimbing and scrambling, nature study and photography are all outstanding due to the unique special features of the area and the variety of destinations and levels of challenge. Access to the area is outstanding from all directions, primarily from locations within the RRCNCA.

Primitive recreational opportunities exist in the portions of the WSA recommended for uses other than wilderness, however, the quality and diversity of that opportunity is significantly less than in the area recommended for wilderness.

**D. Special Features:** Red and buff colored sandstone formations in the Calico Hills, White Rock Hills, Brownstone Basin, and Little Red Rock area are of geological, ecological and scenic interest. The cross-bedded sandstone demonstrates their origin as former sand dunes. The brightly colored sandstone contrasts sharply with the rugged, spectacular limestone cliffs that backdrop them. La Madre Mountain and it's sheer cliffs on the southeast side are the single most dominant feature within the area recommended for wilderness. The Keystone Thrust of the older limestone of the La Madre Range, that have been pushed over the younger sandstone, is dramatically evident above Brownstone Basin. This particular site is internationally regarded as the single finest example of a thrust fault and is of significant geologic and scientific interest.

The large variation in elevation (6,000 feet) allows for a variety of plant communities from Southern Mohave desert shrub to sub-alpine environments of white fir and ponderosa pine. Natural water impoundments in the sandstone provide near perennial water sources that support a variety of wildlife. The area provides crucial summer habitat for a sizeable herd of bighorn sheep and a small herd of elk.

Prehistoric sites occur throughout the area recommended for wilderness. Site types include rock art panels (both pictographs and petroglyphs), agave roasting pits, rock shelters, camp sites, milling sites, and lithic and ceramic scatters. Brownstone Canyon has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of the concentration and diversity of cultural site types, the occurrence of rare polychrome pictographs.

### **4. MANAGEABILITY**

The area recommended for wilderness can reasonably be managed as wilderness. The area is a solid block of public land with no private inholdings, State lands, split estate lands or rights-of-way. No valid rights currently exist. Most of the area is in the RRCNCA and closed to mineral entry. Mineral resource potential has been identified as low and development of minerals is not expected.

Within the area not recommended for wilderness, a lack of natural and physical impediments to OHV access, and known sand and gravel and nonmetallic mineral resources make this area unsuitable for wilderness management.

## **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

Assessment of the mineral potential for that portion of the La Madre Mountains WSA recommended for wilderness found that stream sediments delineated a zone of slight silver, lead and zinc anomalies. However, the report judged the area to have low mineral resource potential for silver, lead, and zinc. No known deposits of nonmetallic minerals occur within the area, and discovery of significant near-surface deposits is unlikely. Sand and gravel and limestone suitable for construction materials are abundant within the area, but, because similar materials are available closer to major markets, occurrences were not classified as resources. The potential for petroleum resources is rated as low.

## **6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Of the 35 comments received, 33 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA, including two who wanted more area in the recommended wilderness area, and two that wanted less. Two commentors supported no wilderness for the La Madre Mountains WSA. Most comments which specifically mentioned the WSA and supported wilderness designation, touched on high wilderness values (outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation), unspoiled biological and cultural resource values, and wildlife habitat. Comments opposing wilderness noted speculative mineral resource potential and potential impacts to energy and mineral exploration and development.

Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning supported the emphasis on recreation management for the Spring Mountains and agreed that designating portions of the Spring Mountains would enhance the range of recreation opportunities for the citizens of Clark county.

The Governor of Nevada, supported the Bureau's Preferred Alternative recommending only that a small portion of the WSA be dropped for minerals development. The Governor's comments stated "this WSA will provide an excellent compliment to the recreational opportunities of the Red Rock and Mount Charleston areas, offering outstanding solitude and wilderness experience within a short distance of the Las Vegas metropolitan area". Previous comment letters from Division of State Lands also supported the Preferred Alternative. The State Divisions of Minerals, Department of Wildlife and Agriculture did not support the Bureau's Preferred Alternative.

The U.S. Forest Service supported the preferred alternative, recommending only a minor boundary adjustment to better define the boundary in the Lovell Canyon area. 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 in the Draft EIS 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 and recommended that the final recommendation include a statement that water and air quality will be best protected under wilderness designation.