

## QUAIL SPRINGS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 12,145 acres**

The Quail Springs Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-411) is located in northwestern Clark County, approximately 10 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada. The study area includes 12,145 acres of public land.

The boundary is a combination of roads, a shared boundary with the Desert National Wildlife Range (DNWR), corporate boundary for the City of Las Vegas, a common border with the Moapa Indian Reservation, and an old abandoned railroad grade. Approximately thirteen and three-quarter miles of section lines on the entire north and eastern boundary of Quail Springs WSA are the common boundary with the DNWR, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The western boundary begins near the Corn Creek Station and continues in a southerly direction, a little over three miles, along the Corn Creek Springs Road until it intersects with the abandoned Tonopah-Tidewater Railroad grade. From this point the boundary extends southeast approximately four miles, along the abandoned railroad grade, to the Las Vegas Corporate Boundary. Near the center of the boundary on the southwest side, the boundary jogs around the Moapa Indian Reservation and shares a common boundary. The southern boundary is approximately four and three-quarters of a mile long, along section lines, and is the Las Vegas Corporate Boundary. Irregular in configuration, the WSA is slightly more than ten miles in length (northwest to southeast), slightly more than three miles wide at it's widest point, and a little over one mile wide at it's narrowest point. The northern and eastern boundary is contiguous with the DNWR.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -                      **0 acres recommended for wilderness** **12,145 acres recommended for nonwilderness****

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 12,145 acres for uses other than wilderness. The recommendation for the Quail Springs WSA emphasizes maintaining access to the entire area for uses other than wilderness. The quality of the wilderness values and the reduction of conflicts with utility and rail line development were the key considerations in the recommendation. While the WSA contained 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. Solitude opportunities available in the WSA are limited to a small area and are similar to other lands adjacent to the study area. Opportunities for solitude are due to the remoteness of certain portions of the WSA and not due to any intrinsic values unique to the area. Quail Springs WSA does not offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

The no wilderness recommendation would also emphasize making the area available for utility and rail line development. Expansion and growth of Las Vegas Valley has sparked the need for utility expansion. In addition, the Department of Energy has identified a route through the WSA for development of a rail line to the Yucca Mountain repository site. Values of these potential developments outweigh the WSA's wilderness values.

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

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The WSA is primarily in a natural condition. It is moderately flat with gentle sloping bajadas on the southern end. A major wash runs through the southern part of the study area. The north-central portion of the WSA, north of the wash, is the most natural. There are 9.3 miles of ways which pass through the WSA,

the longest of which is 3.8 miles, and crosses the north half of the study area. A large sand wash in the southeastern portion of the WSA provides an ideal area for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. This area is crisscrossed with tracks from motorcycles and other OHVs. There are no range or wildlife developments in the study area.

**B. Solitude:** Vegetation and topography provide only minimal screening, however, the study area's size provides limited outstanding opportunities for solitude. These opportunities occur in the central portion of the WSA, away from the boundaries and ways, near the DNWR, which cross the unit in the south and north.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Recreational opportunities are best for horseback riding. Gently sloping terrain provides for easy access. A lack of diversity in the landscape and lack of points of interest does not offer a high quality experience. It is more likely that the study area is used as access to the DNWR which is located contiguous and north of the WSA.

**D. Special Features:** 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 12,145 acres of the study area have been identified as tortoise habitat.

Two paleontological sites have been recorded near the WSA's southern boundary. These are not potentially eligible for the National Register.

#### **4. MANAGEABILITY**

The study area can reasonably be managed as wilderness but, there would be manageability concerns associated with the 13 pre-FLPMA mining claims (260 acres). These claims have valid existing rights and development would create intrusions from mining or drilling operations which would seriously and adversely impact wilderness values present. Noise, dust and visual intrusions are a few of the impacts. Access to these parcels would also have to be granted. Development of these claims is not projected to occur.

There will also be management concerns associated with unauthorized motorized vehicle use. The area's terrain is readily accessible to motorized vehicles as few natural barriers exist. The possibility of frequent unauthorized use is magnified by close proximity to a large residential population near the study area's southern boundary.

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

A total of 12,145 acres (100% of WSA) rates as having moderate nonmetallic mineral potential for sand and gravel (GEM 1983). Geologic formations are not considered to be favorable for the location of metallic minerals or energy resources.

There are 13 placer claims located in the southwestern portion of the WSA. There has been no development of these claims in the past and none is expected in the future. There are no oil and gas leases in the study area. Favorability for energy resources within the WSA is unknown.

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

In 1986, the area was reinstated in the wilderness study process 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. As a result of the court case, the area was reinventoried to document wilderness characteristics.

Public comments received during the reinventory (1986) supported the WSA status because of the opportunities

for solitude and naturalness. Of the seven comments received three specifically stated that the WSA should not be recommended for wilderness designation. One specific comment supported the area 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. None of the oral comments supported the all or partial wilderness alternatives and 1 supported the preferred alternative (no wilderness).

Of the 36 written comments, one supported the all wilderness recommendation and six supported no wilderness. Subjects of the comments were race courses, lack of outstanding opportunities for solitude and potential rail rights-of-way. This last issue was a concern of the U.S. Department of Energy.

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, or the cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas.