

Gooding City of Rocks West Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 6,287 acres

The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA (ID-54-8B) is located in Gooding County, Idaho. The WSA includes 6,287 acres of BLM-administered lands. There are no split estate lands or inholdings within the area (see Table 1). The WSA's boundary is primarily formed by the following roads: on the west and south by BLM Road 2410, the Clover Creek Road; on the north and east by unnamed, nonsystem jeep trails. Portions of the western boundary follow the East Fork of Clover Creek. Portions of the eastern and southern boundary follow state and private land. The WSA is one of five WSAs within the Mount Bennett Hills, a rolling belt of foothills between the Sawtooth Mountains to the north and the Snake River Plain to the south.

The WSA is a gently sloping prairie on the south face of the Bennett Hills cut by the East Fork of Clover Creek, Catchall Creek and other unnamed drainages. These canyon drainages contain rhyolite columns which rise more than 100 feet. Basalt bluffs, arches, pillars and hoodoos dominate this area. These formations are a continuation of the area known locally as the "City of Rocks." Although the rock types are not the same, the rock formations in the City of Rocks rival those found in Utah's Arches National Park. Elevations in the area range from 4,080 to 5,616 feet.

The dominant vegetation is sagebrush and grasses. Shaded canyons support pockets of willows, aspen, cottonwood, serviceberry and chokecherry. Wildlife species include elk, deer, coyotes, bear, birds of prey and upland game birds.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Shoshone/Sun Valley Final Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness, filed in April 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and a no wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

6,287 acres recommended for wilderness

0 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA is to designate 6,287 acres as wilderness. This recommendation is the environmentally preferred alternative. It will cause the least change from the natural environment in the long term.

The all wilderness alternative will also apply to any adjacent nonfederal lands acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. Approximately 395 acres west of the road dissecting the state land section on the WSA's east boundary have been identified for acquisition. All 6,287 acres of federal land within the WSA are shown as the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA on the Gooding City of Rocks West Proposal map.

The wilderness values of the WSA are exceptional. The area exhibits special ecological, geological and cultural features, all of scientific and educational value. All these values would benefit from wilderness designation. The WSA's deep canyons and benches are virtually untouched by human works. The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA would add landforms currently not represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) in Idaho. The WSA does not contain resource values or uses that would significantly conflict with wilderness management or negatively impact the area's wilderness characteristics. Wilderness designation will add a high quality, diverse area to the wilderness system.

Cultural resources in the WSA include rock art petroglyphs and surface lithic scatters. Vitrophyre, an important raw material for flaked stone tools, is found near some cultural sites.

The WSA is virtually pristine. Minor imprints on the area's apparent naturalness include the Strike Burn Fire Seeding (2,000 acres within the WSA, aerial seeding completed in 1959, most of which was unsuccessful and can no longer be located on the ground), short drift fences, mining claim markers and faint vehicle trails. The fire seeding and vehicle trails are revegetating and returning to a more natural-appearing condition. These minor imprints are diminished further by the screening effects of the area's topography.

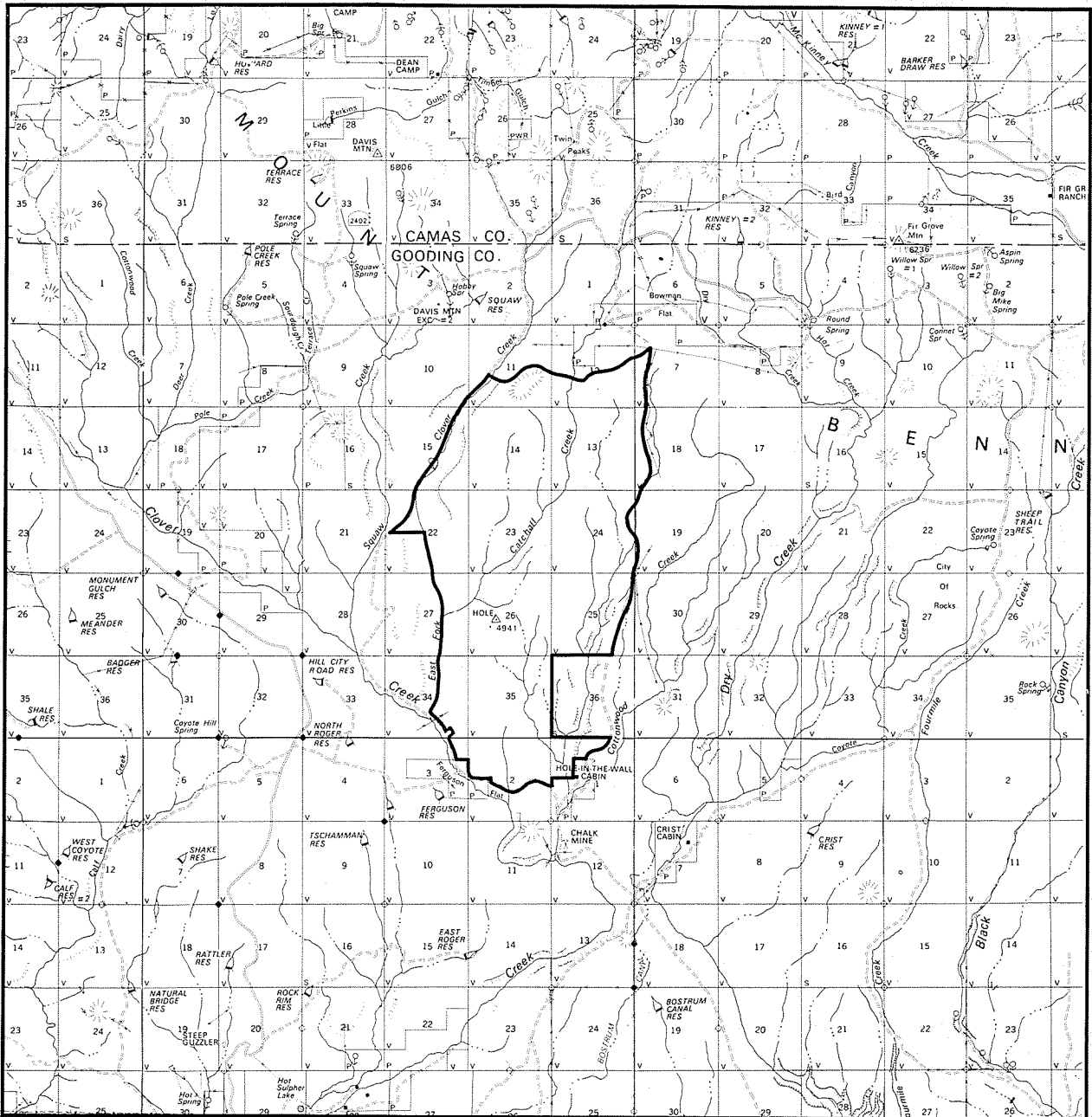
The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The area's "City of Rocks" formations, proximity to the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA and the steep gorges and dense riparian vegetation within most of the canyons provide endless opportunities for visitors to disperse and avoid others. The recreational values of this area are exceptional. Primitive recreation opportunities include hiking, camping, horseback riding, climbing, hunting, nature study and photography.

The Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem is the ecosystem represented in this WSA. In Idaho, this Bailey-Kuchler classification ecosystem is represented in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness administered by the National Park Service (NPS). However, the landforms in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness are vastly different from the landforms represented in the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA. The Craters of the Moon Wilderness is an outstanding example of Snake River Plain desert lava flow ecosystems while the Gooding City of Rocks area consists of thousands of acres of welded volcanic tuff rock formations and basalt plateaus cut by riparian systems.

Conflicts with other resource uses and values in the WSA are limited and the area could be managed as wilderness. The Gooding City of Rocks East WSA, to the east of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA, has similar high-quality wilderness values. Most of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA (13,063 acres) is also recommended suitable for wilderness designation. It is separated from the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA by a rough road. The proximity of these WSAs enhances the manageability of both WSAs.







Grazing use and management activities will be allowed to continue. Grazing management related vehicle use on boundary roads and one cherry-stem road would have a negligible affect on wilderness values.

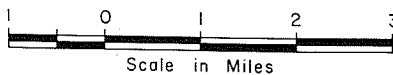
The area has low potential for metals, oil, gas, coal and moderate potential for geothermal energy. The western corner of the WSA has high potential for diatomite. However, extensive minable reserves of diatomite are located outside the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA as well as the adjacent Gooding City of Rocks East WSA which is also recommended suitable for wilderness designation.



R. 12 E. | R. 13 E.

R. 13 E. | R. 14 E.

- | | |
|---|--|
|  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  SPLIT ESTATE |
|  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS |  STATE |
|  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  PRIVATE |



**ID-54-8B
GOODING CITY OF ROCKS WEST
PROPOSAL**

MARCH 1988

T. 2 S.
T. 3 S.

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T. 4 S.

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
GOODING CITY OF ROCKS WEST**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	6,287
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	6,287

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	6,287
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	6,287
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	395

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	0
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Generally, the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA appears natural. The WSA's deep canyons and benches are virtually untouched by human impacts. Minor imprints on the area's apparent naturalness include the Strike Burn Fire Seeding (an aerial seeding on about 2,000 acres within the WSA completed in 1959), short drift fences totaling less than two miles, a few mining claim markers and faint vehicle trails.

B. Solitude

The WSA's topography, boundary configuration and vegetative screening provide outstanding opportunities for visitors to avoid the sights and sounds of others in the WSA. Canyons and rhyolite rock formations in the southern part of the WSA provide excellent topographic screening. Pillars and hoodoos of various heights and shapes allow visitors a high degree of seclusion and solitude. Drainages encourage dispersion of visitor groups. The northern part of the WSA has rolling hills and buttes which also provide solitude though opportunities are not as outstanding as in the southern part.

In many canyon bottoms, scattered riparian zones offer vegetative screening. Elsewhere, grasses and low shrubs provide little screening; however, combined with the area's topography, they add to the sense of seclusion.

The recreationist's solitude is generally not encroached upon by livestock operations in the steep, boulder-strewn, twisting drainages in the southern part of the WSA since these areas are usually dry by early summer and are not favored by operators. Livestock frequents the flatter northern and northeastern parts of the WSA, especially near the springs. The animals and operators are present only periodically during the year and in relatively few numbers.

Human activities outside the WSA are visible near the WSA's boundary and from high points within the area. A patchwork of fields, farms and the community of Gooding can be seen in the distance from ridges and buttes within the WSA. However, these outside sights and sounds do not significantly affect the WSA because of the distances involved.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The WSA offers exceptional scenery and a diversity of landforms. Natural features within the WSA provide outstanding opportunities for photography, hiking, camping, wildlife observation and nature study. Opportunities for horseback riding, fishing and hunting, as well as many other activities are also present within the area. Subjects for photography include the myriad of brilliantly colored lichen-encrusted rhyolite pillars, hoodoos and arches. The diverse vegetation ranges from sagebrush and grasses on the plateaus to

ferns, mosses and wild flowers in shaded, rocky canyons. This diversity offers exceptional opportunities for nature study.

Opportunities are abundant for viewing such species as elk, deer, sage grouse, raptors and coyotes. Black bear, bobcat and mountain quail are occasionally seen.

Several factors contribute to the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA's outstanding opportunities for hiking. The diversity of terrain, the varying degrees of difficulty in maneuvering through the pillars and long, rock-filled drainages, plus the scarcity of water during much of the year combine to provide the recreationist a challenge. The northern part of the WSA provides a sense of wide open space and also contains interesting cultural sites. Aggregations of rhyolite pillars in the southern part of the WSA provide a sense of seclusion along with countless rock climbing opportunities.

Primitive camping opportunities are enhanced by the rugged terrain of the WSA, the many camping spots among the rock pillars in the southern part of the WSA and by open space in the northern part of the WSA. The extreme summer heat and lack of drinking and cooking water add to the primitiveness of the recreation experience.

D. Special Features

Cultural sites with associated petroglyphs are located in the WSA. Vitrophyre, an important raw material for flaked stone tools, is found near some cultural sites.

Spectacular landforms occur within the drainages of the WSA. These include columns, hoodoos, arches and monoliths. These landforms display weathering processes and structural anomalies that are picturesque and unusual.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

A. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA would add an ecosystem presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) by three designated areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
	<u>NEVADA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
	<u>OREGON</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

**B. Expanding the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation
Within a Day's Driving Time (Five Hours) of Major Population Centers**

The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

Table 3

**Wilderness Opportunities for Residents
of Major Population Centers**

Population Centers	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Boise, Idaho	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA would not contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. The NPS-administered Craters of the Moon Wilderness (43,243 acres) representing a similar ecosystem is a two-hour drive to the northeast. The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA, however, would add a landform to the NWPS that is very different from that represented in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness.

Manageability

The 6,287 acre Gooding City of Rocks West WSA can reasonably be managed as wilderness. Conflicts with other resource uses are minimal. Rugged topography restricts vehicle use in all but the northernmost parts of the WSA. The cherry-stem road into that part of the WSA would be closed to all vehicle use except that required for grazing management. Livestock permittees would use the road approximately ten times annually to manage livestock with negligible effects on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Although diatomite deposits occur in the west and southwest parts of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA and mining claims have been located on the deposits, development in the WSA is not anticipated. The three blocks of diatomaceous material wholly or partially within the WSA are predominantly covered by basalt, limiting minability. In addition, the North Clover block, a large deposit containing approximately 35 million tons, lies outside the Gooding City of Rocks West and East WSA boundaries. This deposit is only partially capped by basalt and could be mined by open-pit methods.

The majority of the WSA boundaries are well-defined by roads and the east fork of Catchall Creek. There are no nonfederal inholdings in the WSA. Adjacent state lands proposed for acquisition are used solely for grazing and, based on the mineral resources analysis, no mineral development is anticipated on these parcels.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The U.S. Geologic Survey and Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA in 1984 and 1985. The WSA has low potential for metals, oil, gas, coal and moderate potential for geothermal energy.

The western and southern parts of the WSA have high potential for diatomite. The Clover Creek diatomite deposit overlaps the western and southern parts of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA. Five exposures, or blocks, containing 416 million tons of diatomaceous material make up the Clover Creek deposit. Four of the blocks are wholly or partially within the WSA; the Catchall, Ferguson, South Clover and Chalk Mine blocks. The four blocks are predominantly covered by basalt. The North Clover block, just west of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA, is only partly capped by basalt and could be mined by open-pit methods on the western flank of the exposure. The minable wedge, outside the WSA, contains an inferred marginal reserve of 35 million tons of diatomite potentially suitable for filter and filler insulation and other applications. The reserve is classified as marginal because products from it may be inferior to currently marketed diatomite products.

Several occurrences of platy welded tuff, possibly suitable as decorative stone, occur within the WSA; however, abundant and accessible deposits to the east of the Gooding City of Rocks West and East WSAs could be more easily developed. Deposits of sand and gravel are too distant from markets and there is little chance for development. No mineralized rock was identified in the WSA.

Placer claims for diatomaceous earth are held by two groups of claimants and cover approximately 2,260 acres in the western one-third of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA. There are no mineral leases in the WSA. There is no present production of any energy or mineral resources in the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness.

Table 4
Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative
WSA ID-54-8B (GOODING CITY OF ROCKS WEST)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (ALL WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	All wilderness values would receive long-term Congressional protection. All wilderness values would be maintained. The area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation would improve.	There would be a reduction of the area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.
Impacts on Recreational ORV Use	Recreational ORV use of 50 visitor days would be foregone annually. The impacts resulting from this use shifting to other public lands would be negligible.	There would be no impact on recreational ORV use.
Impacts on Development of Mineral Resources	Development of potential mineral resources would be foregone. This includes an estimated 34 million tons of diatomite (8.5% of the total reserve within 5 miles of the WSA) and moderate potential for geothermal resources.	Potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes an estimated 34 million tons of diatomite (8.5% of the total reserve within 5 miles of the WSA) and moderate potential for geothermal resources.
Impacts on Grazing Facility Maintenance and Construction	There would be no impact on grazing facility maintenance and construction.	There would be no impact on grazing facility maintenance and construction.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered a significant issue on the study.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During public review of the Draft EIS, 47 comments supporting wilderness designation of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA were received. Thirteen of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons addressed the area's wilderness values and quality, the lack of resource conflicts, manageability of specified wilderness resources including recreation, wildlife and cultural resources and the area's preservation value. Ten comments addressed the area's contribution to expanding diversity in the NWPS. Of particular interest was the opportunity to designate a significant wilderness complex in the Mount Bennett Hills.

Ten comments were received opposing wilderness designation of the area. Two of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons stated the area is better suited for other uses, it did not need or deserve wilderness protection, designation is a waste of money, the area looks like the rest of Idaho, it is too large or not large enough, has minimal wilderness quality or has ORV conflicts.

The Board of Camas County Commissioners opposed any more wilderness in Idaho. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Department of Water Quality and Office of the Attorney General, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation and the Environmental Protection Agency letters contained no WSA specific comments.