

PARK RANGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 47,268 acres

The Park Range WSA (NV-040-154) is located in Nye County approximately 50 miles southeast of Eureka and 110 miles southwest of Ely. The entire WSA is comprised of public land with no private inholdings. Approximately 1 mile of the southern boundary is formed by private land containing the historic Pritchard's Station, an old stagecoach stop. The remainder of the WSA is bounded by dirt roads of variable quality. The northern boundary is formed by the Big Fault Wash Road which turns into the Hick's Station Road along the west side and then into the Luther Waddles Wash Road to the south. The east side of the WSA is bounded by the road through Pritchard's Canyon and the Summit Station Road.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 47,268 acres recommended for wilderness 0 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The Park Range was recommended for wilderness because of its pristine qualities, unique high meadows and volcanic spires, archaeological and historical values, lack of conflicting resource uses, and nearly unanimous public support. The Park Range is an ideal candidate for designation because it has very high wilderness values and few values would be foregone as a result of designation. It would also be easily managed as wilderness because of the rugged terrain, remoteness, and absence of complicating factors such as private inholdings or mineral reserves.

The remote and fairly unknown Park Range is in a remarkably natural condition. Numerous pristine spring-fed meadows scattered throughout the range seem to hang in basins surrounded by volcanic towers. Inaccessible to livestock and vehicles yet easily climbed by a hiker, these ungrazed meadows are unique in Nevada and offer the naturalist a remarkable living laboratory in diverse ecosystems and natural habitats. Unlimited exploration opportunities and nearly complete escape from signs of man are the hallmark of the Park Range WSA and led to its recommendation.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Park Range is in an extraordinarily natural condition. The high meadows and volcanic cliffs show only the sign of prehistoric man. The few unnatural features in the area are confined to the low-lying, more accessible benchlands, and are not noticeable except in their immediate vicinity. These features include eight infrequently used two-track routes averaging perhaps a mile and a half in length, portion of two fences and one pipeline, two rustic, historic corrals and an old cabin. In addition, there are 40 acres of a crested wheatgrass seeding within several drainages along the WSA's western boundary.

B. Solitude: The Park Range WSA offers outstanding opportunities for solitude. There are few places in Nevada which are more remote and less used than the Park Range; and there are also few places of its size more physically diverse, possessing better or more unusual natural features than the Park Range. This remarkable set of circumstances has resulted in an area where the opportunities to distance oneself from the evidence of man's work and be surrounded instead by the forces of nature are without rival.

The Park Range supports a dense forest of pinyon pine, juniper, and mountain mahogany and both the vegetation and the rugged topography provide excellent screening for users. Interspersed through the range are meadows perched high in the mountains, which although open; are remote and therefore offer solitude giving the visitor the feeling that he or she has discovered a "secluded spot."

Other features of the area contribute to different solitude experiences. The canyon draining Bassit Spring - and

several other canyons like it - are open enough to permit easy hiking yet contain enough vegetative and topographic screening and meander enough so that solitude is well assured even with numerous users.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The abundance of water throughout the area makes all recreation activities more enjoyable, and extends the amount of time that one may enjoy the area. It also makes possible the large number of plant and animal species present. The Park Range is a very important nesting area for many raptors and the area sustains a great number of small mammals, reptiles and birds of prey. Species include the goshawk, prairie falcon, golden eagle, kestrel, and Cooper's hawk. Their presence in so pristine an area offers excellent opportunities for scientific observation, photography, and hunting. They also combine with the area's topographic diversity and naturalness to enhance the total recreational setting. Opportunities for recreation in this setting are incomparable and certainly outstanding.

D. Special Features: Several special features supplement the wilderness values of the Park Range, including high mountain meadows and archaeological values which hold great potential for scientific study. The upland meadows contain evidence of prehistoric occupation dating back to the Late Paleoindian period some 8,000 - 10,000 years ago. Knowledge of this period is scant and derives primarily from lowland settings across the Great Basin; thus the upland setting of the Park Range offers a very unique and scientifically important archaeological record that is uncommon within the Intermountain West. Wilderness Preservation System in Nevada.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The entire Park Range WSA is manageable as wilderness. The ruggedness of the area, continued very low visitation it is likely to receive, apparent lack of conflicting potential uses, and the absence of private inholdings mean that no major impediment to management of the area as wilderness would occur. In addition, the entire WSA's boundaries are easily identified roads.

A manageability concern is access to a small block of mining claims in the north end of the WSA by a mineral company. To date, limited exploration on these mining claims has not revealed the presence of a precious mineral deposit and no mineral production is anticipated .

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The U.S Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment report for the Park Range WSA in 1987, (U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1731-F). With the exception of a small wedge of approximately 1,500 acres in the northwest tip of the WSA, the USGS and BM studies found the WSA to have a low potential for metallic minerals. This was based on the fact that the WSA consists largely of Tertiary volcanic rocks including lavas and ash-flow tufts having no sign of secondary silicification and hydrothermal alteration.

The mineral resource potential for undiscovered gold, silver, mercury and arsenic was identified as moderate for 1,500 acres in the northern tip of the WSA. This portion of the WSA consists of Paleozoic sedimentary rocks that have been faulted and silicified and contain anomalous concentrations of the above mentioned elements. A small claim block staked in 1985 by ASARCO were the only claims ever staked in the WSA.

The resource potential for oil and gas and geothermal energy was found to be low throughout the entire WSA based on lack of geologic evidence.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Certain comments received during the inventory process and early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness values.

During formal public review of the draft EIS and Wilderness Technical Report held between September 23 to December 24, 1984, a total of 53 comments were received specifically addressing the Park Range. Of those, 45 were written comments and 8 were oral testimonies. In general, 50 commentors supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA. One commentor supported no wilderness for the WSA while two commentors took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the area's pristine meadows, scenic ruggedness, and wildlife habitat. The one commentor opposing wilderness designation was concerned about potential mineral and energy resources in the WSA.