ROUGH HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 6,685 acres

The Rough Hills WSA (NV-010-151), located approximately 65 miles north of Elko, Nevada, includes 6,685 acres of public lands and 200 acres of private inholdings. The WSA is approximately six miles west of the Jarbidge Wilderness. Fenced private properties form the east and west boundaries and approximately half the southern boundary. Dirt roads form the northeast and extreme southwest and southeast boundaries. Unmarked public and private land boundaries form the northwestern edge. The Humboldt National Forest adjoins the northern boundary.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE-

6,685 acres recommended for wilderness

0 acres recommended for nonwilderness

All of the 6,685-acre Rough Hills WSA is recommended for wilderness because of its naturalness and outstanding opportunities for both solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. The rugged diversity of cliffs, peaks, canyons, ridges, domes, creeks, springs, and the Bruneau River supports varied vegetative communities of mountain mahogany, chokecherry, aspen, bitterbrush, serviceberry, meadow, and sagebrush, all free of the evidence of man and offering outstanding scenic quality.

Topographic screening is outstanding with high ridgelines, peaks, and many winding drainages and canyons. The aspen groves and mountain mahogany stands provide vegetative screening and combine with the topography to offer outstanding solitude.

Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation exist in the WSA. Opportunities include backpacking, camping, hiking, horseback riding, upland game bird and mule deer hunting, wildlife observation, sightseeing, photography, and fishing. Many springs provide outstanding opportunities to view wildlife.

Conflicts with other resource uses are essentially nonexistent. Mineral and energy resource potentials are low. The WSA contains two mining claims and no mineral leases. Man's imprints are limited to a developed spring just inside the southern boundary and a short vehicle way in the southwestern corner. Two private inholdings are used for livestock management.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. <u>Naturalness</u>: The WSA appears natural overall. The rectangular-shaped WSA is an island of rhyolite flows, domes, plugs and volcanic tuffs between Cornwall and Charleston Basins. While the WSA is not forested, the east-side drainages contain aspen groves and the higher elevations contain isolated aspen pockets and dense mountain mahogany stands. Sagebrush areas dominate, but the area also contains many meadow, bitterbrush, serviceberry, and other shrub communities. The WSA contains over two miles of the Bruneau River, creeks, and many springs. Abundant and diverse wildlife is present. Man's imprints are limited to a developed spring just inside the southern boundary and a short vehicle way in the southwestern corner.

B. <u>Solitude</u>: The Rough Hills WSA contains outstanding opportunities for solitude. Topographic screening is outstanding with high ridgelines, peaks, and many winding drainages and canyons. The many aspen groves and mountain mahogany stands provide good vegetative screening and combine with the topography offer outstanding solitude.

Military aircraft sometimes disrupt the solitude. A Military Training Route crosses directly over the WSA. Disruption of the silence, which contributes to the feeling of solitude, is still infrequent. Aircraft fly as low as 100 feet above the ground. At times, aircraft can be seen and/or heard all day. Other times, military planes are not seen or head.

C. <u>Primitive and Unconfined Recreation</u>: The Rough Hills WSA, in spite of its small size, offers an outstanding array of quality primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities. These opportunities are discussed under Recommendation and Rationale.

Panoramic views from the WSA combine with the internal scenic qualities to enhance the recreational setting and provide opportunities for exceptional primitive and unconfined recreation.

D. <u>Special Features</u>: The Rough Hills WSA contains the head of the Bruneau River Canyon that becomes a wild and scenic river 20 miles downstream. While not a special feature, it is important to protect the river's headwaters.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The compact regular shape, lack of cherrystem roads, and lack of conflicting uses contribute to the long-term manageability of the WSA. The Rough Hills WSA is a block of public land with two private inholdings. The 160-acre parcel is considered undevelopable, while the 40-acre inholding could potentially be developed. Both parcels are used in conjunction with livestock operations; this use is anticipated to be long-term. Should a change in use occur and access to the 40-acre parcel be developed, the impacts would not affect wilderness values in the WSA as a whole.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Although the WSA is close to three mining districts, there is no mining history other than the unrecorded production of two ounces of placer gold near the northeast corner. The WSA has low potential for metallic minerals, barite, energy resources, and sand and gravel.

As of January 1990, there were two post-FLPMA mining claims. A Plan of Operations under 43 CFR 3802 was filed, but has been inactive since 1992. Other than placer gold, no mineral deposits similar to those in nearby mining districts are known within the WSA. A depression-era placer deposit is limited to a perched gravel deposit of non-commercial value.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

The BLM received 31 comments on the draft EIS; 16 mentioned wilderness. Eight of these comments were specific to the Rough Hills WSA. Seven supported a wilderness recommendation. One opposed wilderness designation.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, USGS, Fish and Wildlife Service, and EPA commented on the draft EIS, but had no specific comments on this WSA. The Governor of Nevada's consistency review concurred with BLM's recommendation, but expressed concerns about inholdings and mineral potential.

The BLM received one comment on the Elko Final Wilderness EIS; the EPA endorsed the BLM's wilderness recommendation.