

SUMMARY

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) mandated the Secretary of Interior to report to the President on the wilderness suitability of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by October 21, 1991.

This report is the result of a comprehensive study of public lands in Idaho by the Bureau of Land Management regarding the suitability of these lands for wilderness designation.

The wilderness review process began with an inventory of all 11.9 million acres of public lands in Idaho. That review identified approximately 1.8 million acres in 67 study areas and resulted in the preparation of 14 Wilderness Environmental Impact Statements. Thousands of public comments were evaluated.

Congress required completion of mineral evaluation by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines on all areas recommended for wilderness. Twenty-seven reports were prepared. Two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), South Fork Owyhee River and Owyhee Canyon, included public lands in Idaho and Nevada. The Owyhee River Canyon WSA includes lands in Idaho and Oregon. While the recommendation and rationale for these WSAs are included in this report, only the acreage in Idaho is included in the Record of Decision. The remaining acreage will be included in the Nevada and Oregon Records of Decision.

The Oregon State Office studied the Lookout Butte WSA which is partially located in Idaho. The analysis for the entire WSA is included in this report, but only the Idaho acreage is included in the Record of Decision.

The recommendation is for Congress to designate 972,239 acres as wilderness and release 825,217 acres for other multiple uses. This recommendation would establish 27 new units of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and expand Idaho wilderness to include a wider variety of landforms, ecosystems, and other natural features. These recommendations will improve the geographic distribution of wilderness areas and complement existing federal wilderness. At the same time, this recommendation will release all or part of 57 areas having potential for motorized recreation, utility corridors, mineral development and other public uses.

The lands not recommended for wilderness also generally have lower quality wilderness values which would not enhance the NWPS. Management of nonwilderness areas will be consistent with multiple use objectives as prescribed in land-use plans.

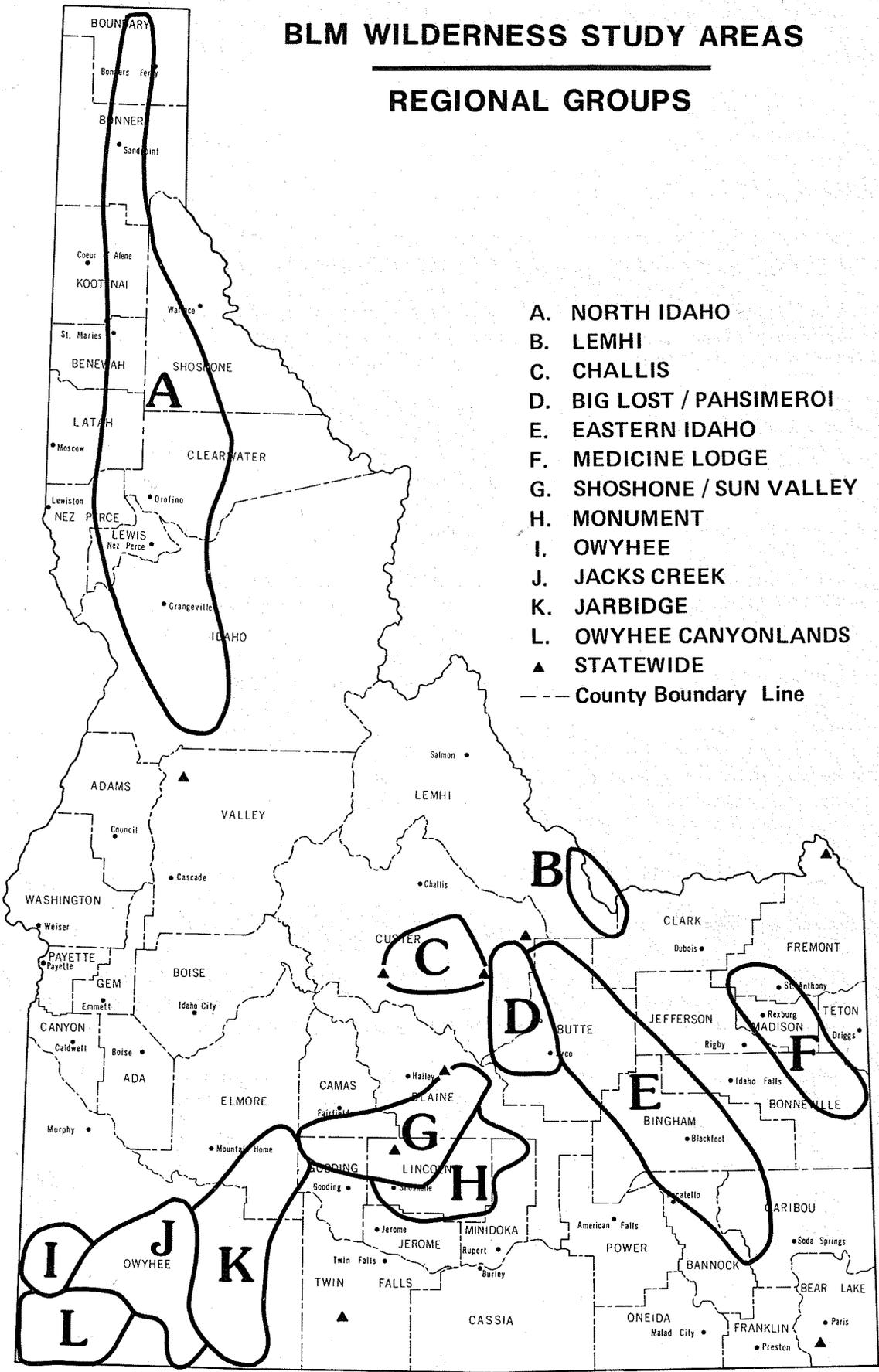
Many reviewers commented on the 14 Wilderness Environmental Impact Statements prepared in Idaho. Comments were received from national and state environmental organizations, state and local governments, Indian Tribes, industry groups, sportsmen, ranchers and a host of other interested parties.

It is not surprising, however, that concerned groups and individuals are sharply divided over how much wilderness is needed in Idaho, which areas are appropriate for designation, and if wilderness is indeed the proper means to protect natural values or open space.

The rationale for the recommendations and specific discussion of wilderness values are found in each area's site-specific analysis.

MAP 1

BLM WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS REGIONAL GROUPS



- A. NORTH IDAHO
- B. LEMHI
- C. CHALLIS
- D. BIG LOST / PAHSIMEROI
- E. EASTERN IDAHO
- F. MEDICINE LODGE
- G. SHOSHONE / SUN VALLEY
- H. MONUMENT
- I. OWYHEE
- J. JACKS CREEK
- K. JARBIDGE
- L. OWYHEE CANYONLANDS
- ▲ STATEWIDE
- County Boundary Line

WILDERNESS STUDY PROCESS

BLM began the wilderness review in accordance with the requirements of Section 603(c) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) dated October 21, 1976. This Act mandated that within 15 years BLM would inventory and study its lands for wilderness suitability, and that based on this review, the Secretary of Interior would forward his wilderness recommendations to the President.

Minimum standards for the evaluation of BLM-administered lands in Idaho were set by Congress in Section 2(c) of The Wilderness Act of 1964. These standards require an area to generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; have outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; have at least 5,000 acres of land or be of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historic value. In addition, each WSA was further evaluated to compare the area's overall wilderness quality with its multiple use value for other purposes, such as mining, grazing or timber harvest. Guidelines were provided by the BLM wilderness study process (Federal Register, February 3, 1982). A summary of the findings for each WSA can be found in the site-specific analysis for each WSA.

Idaho's approach was to recommend wilderness designation for the WSAs where the overall wilderness quality is high and represents the best examples of ecosystems, landforms or land offering special geological or scientific values within the state. These areas warrant permanent protection and inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

BLM did not recommend wilderness for those WSAs which duplicate features common in the NWPS, or were of relatively low wilderness quality when compared to their values for other multiple uses, or where wilderness qualities are better represented by other WSAs in Idaho.

A summary of the major factors evaluated for each WSA follows:

A) Wilderness Qualities

The specific wilderness attributes of each WSA were evaluated to determine that area's overall wilderness qualities. These attributes include:

▣ Naturalness

"Naturalness" refers to the concept that a wilderness area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable.

During the intensive inventory and study phase certain WSAs were identified that contained impacts to naturalness such as old mine scars, fences, wells, pipelines, etc., which reduced the overall wilderness quality of the WSA.

▣ Size

The size of a particular WSA affects the wilderness recommendation. Larger wilderness areas generally provide greater capability to absorb impacts of outside sights and sounds. They often contain more diverse natural features, and offer greater opportunities for

solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. In Idaho, BLM has recommended areas as suitable that are less than 5,000 acres in size but are adjacent to lands in excess of 300,000 acres which are already recommended as suitable by other managing agencies.

☼ Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfirmed recreation.

These attributes are defined as "the state of being alone or remote from habitation or a secluded place" and a primitive and unconfined recreation experience as "activities that provide dispersed, undeveloped recreation which does not require facilities or motorized equipment." In certain Idaho WSAs solitude or primitive recreational values are superior to other WSAs. Those areas with outstanding opportunities were recommended as suitable.

☼ Special Features

While not legally required, wilderness attributes or certain supplemental values enhanced an area's overall wilderness qualities. Examples might include unique geologic structures, important cultural or historic features or habitat of threatened or endangered species of plants or animals.

A WSA possessing special features was more likely to be recommended for wilderness than a WSA without such features.

B) Additional Wilderness Quality Factors

Where wilderness values approximated other multiple use values, it was necessary to consider additional factors in formulating the Bureau's recommendations. These additional factors are:

☼ Multiple Resource Benefits

Some management practices are constrained by wilderness designation including use of mechanical means to bring about needed improvement to resources. In such cases wilderness may not be the best alternative to protecting those areas. Alternatives such as ACEC designation or other administrative controls may be the preferred alternative.

☼ Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The question of how much wilderness is needed is a hotly debated issue in Idaho. The Bureau's recommendations for wilderness provides a balanced approach to that question by complementing existing designated wilderness in Idaho, while providing wilderness acreage of ecotypes not presently found in this region.

Each individual WSR outlines this balance.

☼ Diversity of Natural Systems

The Bureau has been selective in identifying the best examples of landforms and desert ecosystems for inclusion in the NWPS.

Common or ordinary features were not chosen if better examples could be found elsewhere.

Many thousands of acres within WSAs are indistinguishable from public lands outside the boundaries of WSAs except they are roadless. Simple repetition of a landform or an ecosystem already recommended suitable does not add to the diversity of a natural system.

☼ Manageability

Manageability considerations such as private or state inholdings, valid and existing rights, lack of boundary identification and existing access were evaluated in the study process to determine how effectively an area could be managed.

Each individual WSR describes the manageability considerations involved.

The following is a tabular display of the 14 wilderness EISs and study acres in Idaho.

IDAHO WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS BY EIS

EIS NAME	TOTAL ACRES	SUITABLE ACRES	NONSUITABLE ACRES
OWYHEE CANYONLANDS	235,445	214,335	21,110
OWYHEE AMENDMENT	95,645	41,025	54,620
JACKS CREEK	176,657	98,965	77,692
JARBIDGE	208,833	37,540	171,293
EASTERN IDAHO	134,108	66,200	67,908
MEDICINE LODGE	21,870	0	21,870
BIG LOST/PAHSIMEROI	56,830	8,300	48,530
CHALLIS	108,180	26,750	81,430
LEMHI	24,922	14,796	10,126
SHOSHONE/SUN VALLEY	78,216	19,350	58,866
NORTH IDAHO	37,748	0	37,748
MONUMENT	155,766	89,653	66,113
GREAT RIFT	407,073	346,800	60,273
SMALL WSA STATEWIDE	21,763	8,525	13,238
LOOKOUT BUTTE*	34,400	0	34,400
TOTALS	1,797,456	972,239	825,217

* Studied under an Oregon EIS.