

# Cedar Butte Wilderness Study Area

## 1. The Study Area -- 35,700 acres

The Cedar Butte WSA (ID-33-4) is located in Bingham County 42 miles west of Idaho Falls, Idaho. The WSA includes 35,700 acres of public land. Inholdings consist of 640 acres of state land (see Table 1). Boundaries are generally the outside edges of the lava flow near the Union Pacific railroad to the northeast and adjacent to state, BLM and private lands on the east, south and west.

The WSA contains a series of overlying lava flows with the most recent flows dating back 10,800 years. The terrain is characterized as generally flat with undulating topography. Vegetation varies throughout the lava flow. Where soils have accumulated, high desert sagebrush, grasses and forbs are abundant. Juniper trees are found scattered throughout where soil and moisture conditions allow them to survive. Several species of mammals live in the WSA, including rodents. The larger animals more frequently seen are mule deer, antelope, coyotes and rabbits. Over 100 species of birds have been identified on the lava plains. Sage grouse and mourning doves are of particular interest and are hunted to a limited extent near the lava's edge.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Eastern Idaho Management Framework Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) filed in October 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS for the Cedar Butte WSA: the proposed action (no wilderness) alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

## **2. Recommendation and Rationale**

**0 acres recommended for wilderness**

**35,700 acres recommended for  
nonwilderness**

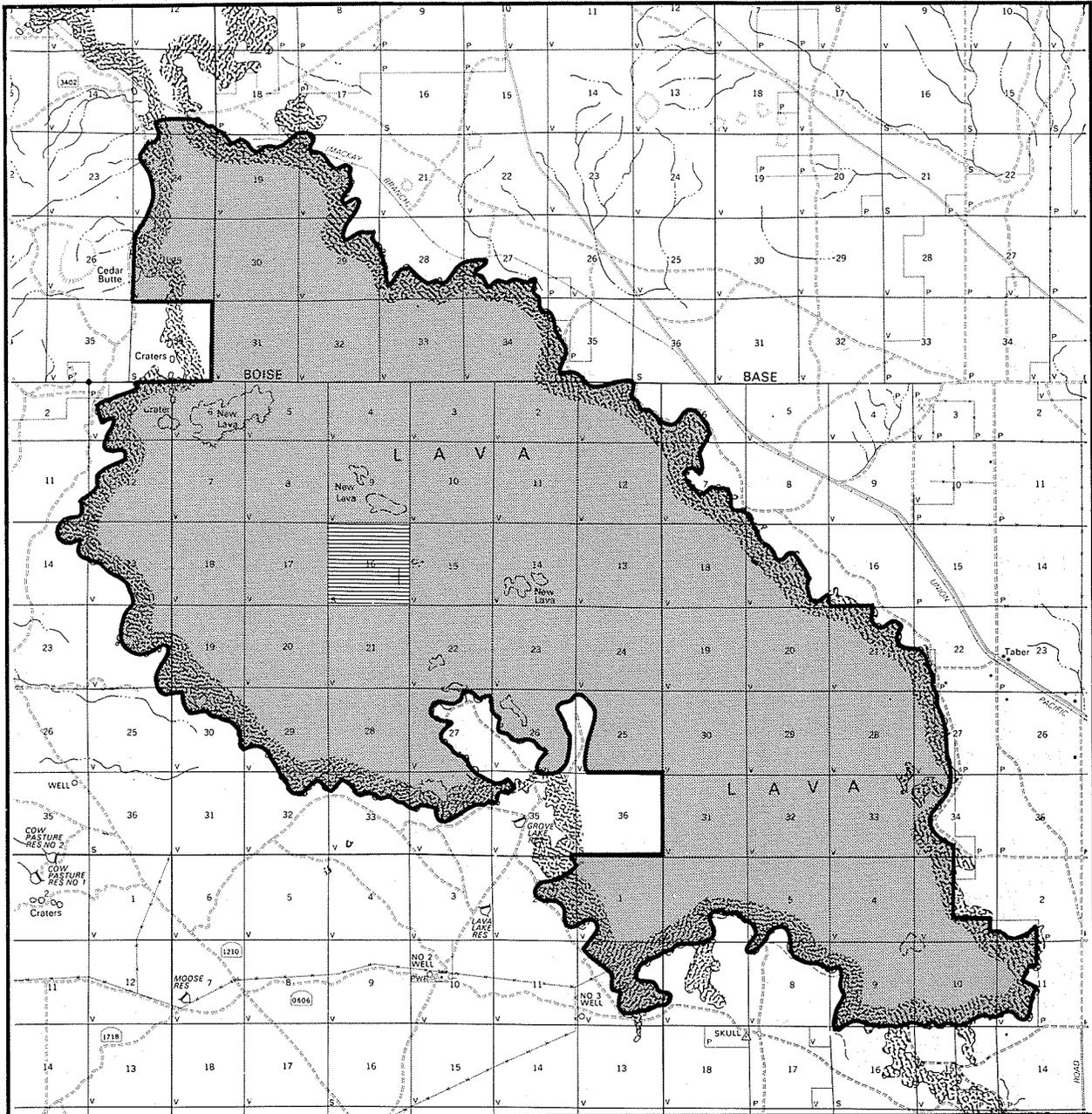
The recommendation for the Cedar Butte WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and release all 35,700 acres for other uses. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation would use all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts. Existing regulations, BLM policy and the Big Desert Management Framework Plan will guide the use of the land to mitigate impacts. The Cedar Butte Proposal map shows the lands recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

The quality of the wilderness values was the key consideration in the recommendation. While the WSA contained the wilderness values necessary for study, they were not considered to merit the area's inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The area is predominantly natural in appearance but lacks topographic and physical features that attract primitive recreation use. The land surface across the lava is relatively flat but without destination attractions such as lava tube caves, fissures, buttes and other geologic or lava formations of interest to recreationists. Other Wilderness Study Areas within 20 to 40 miles of Cedar Butte that possess these attributes include Craters of the Moon National Monument and Wilderness Area, the proposed Great Rift Wilderness and the recommended Hell's Half Acre WSA. Even though these areas contain features attractive to recreationists, visitation is low. As an example, the Craters of the Moon Monument has over 200,000 visitors a year to the information center and only 125 visits to the wilderness area annually. In summary, primitive recreation use of the Cedar Butte WSA is currently low and it is anticipated that those wishing to visit a lava flow landscape would choose others in the vicinity because the area lacks attractive recreation features.

Wilderness management for an estimated 100 acres of an existing lava building stone mining claim area would be impossible. Building stone excavation activities and a .5-mile access route will cause impacts to naturalness that could not be adequately reclaimed.

The remaining 35,600 acres of the WSA are not likely to change over the long term. The lava landscape has little commodity uses and generally prevents activities that will cause noticeable surface disturbance. Both motorized and nonmotorized recreation use will remain low and impacts to the area will be insignificant.



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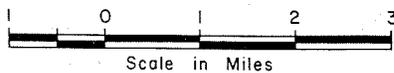
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|---|---|---|--------------|
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS                  |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | PRIVATE      |



**ID-33-4  
CEDAR BUTTE  
PROPOSAL**

OCTOBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area  
CEDAR BUTTE WSA**

**Within Wilderness Study Area**

BLM (surface and subsurface)	35,700
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,340</b>

**Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary**

BLM (within WSA)	0
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>0</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	0

**Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness**

BLM	35,700
Split Estate	0
<b>Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness</b>	<b>35,700</b>
Inholdings (state, private)	0

### **3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations**

#### **Wilderness Characteristics**

##### **A. Naturalness**

The Cedar Butte WSA is predominantly natural with negligible human imprints. Impacts on the natural appearance consist of four vehicle trails totaling four miles, two small rock dumps, an 80 acre building stone collection site and a 6,100 acre crested wheatgrass seeding. The seeding was broadcast from the air and now grows in the scattered soil pockets of the flow. Although this grass species is exotic, the average visitor would not consider it unnatural. Outside influences include some views of traffic on nearby rural roads, agricultural activities and an infrequently traveled railroad line. All impacts to the natural character of the WSA area minor.

##### **B. Solitude**

The WSA offers outstanding opportunities for solitude because of its large size. The area's open and generally flat landscape with little vegetative cover does not provide screening that would separate visitors. However, the large size, numerous depressions and swells in the lava beds and expected low use would offer solitude. The opportunity for solitude is due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. Other than the occasional passing of a train to the northeast, external influences are limited to infrequent vehicles traveling adjacent desert roads.

##### **C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

The rugged and expansive nature of the WSA offers outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation activities on a lava flow landscape. Hiking and camping opportunities are present for those willing to pack water. Similarly, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing could provide risk and challenge for the winter recreationist. However, the WSA does lack significant physical features that would attract recreationists to the area and offer destinations for hiking and camping. Examples of volcanic features lacking in the Cedar Butte WSA that do attract recreationists include lava tube and fissure caves, buttes, vents and cinder and spatter cones. Other areas that possess these attributes include Craters of the Moon National Monument and Wilderness Area, the proposed Great Rift Wilderness and the recommended Hell's Half Acre WSA. Even though these areas contain features attractive to recreationists, visitation is low. In summary, primitive recreation use of the Cedar Butte WSA is currently low and it is anticipated that those wishing to visit a lava flow landscape would choose others in the vicinity because the area lacks attractive recreational features.

#### **D. Special Features**

The lava landscape has scientific and educational significance. It is one of the older exposed lava flows, dating back about 10,800 years. The lava beds are an example of pahoehoe lava features of geologic importance. Ecological relationships are illustrated by the pioneering plants and other characteristics of developing plant communities. While these features would be of interest to the educational community, they are not of interest to the general public because of more spectacular volcanic areas to the east and west of the Cedar Butte WSA.

## Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

The Cedar Butte WSA is located in the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Desert Ecosystem (3130-39) where vegetation is largely absent. This ecosystem is not well represented nationwide in the wilderness system. If designated, Cedar Butte could increase the total area represented by this ecosystem and add vegetation and landform characteristics associated with a lava flow that is generally five times the age of the Craters of the Moon Wilderness. This ecosystem is represented by one designated area with 30,245 acres. There are 11 other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Ecosystem Representation**

Bailey-Kuchler Classification		<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
		areas	acres	areas	acres
Intermountain Province	Sagebrush				
				<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Desert-Vegetation Absent Ecosystem	Largely	1	30,245	12	870,403
				<u>IDAHO</u>	
Desert-Vegetation Absent Ecosystem	Largely	1	30,245	11	646,687
				<u>NEVADA</u>	
Desert-Vegetation Absent Ecosystem	Largely	0	0	1	223,716

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

The Cedar Butte WSA is within a five-hour drive from two major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Cedar Butte would increase the land area available to Boise, Idaho and Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah, residents for solitude and primitive recreation by about one percent. However, most wilderness visitors to the WSA are not expected to come from long distances because the area lacks physical features that would attract recreation use.

**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/Salt Lake City, Utah <sup>1</sup>	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

<sup>1</sup>Salt Lake City, Utah, and vicinity includes other cities of Provo, Orem and Ogden, Utah.

## **C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas**

The Cedar Butte WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System. No wilderness areas have been designated in southeastern Idaho where the WSA is located. The nearest designated area is the 43,243 acre Craters of the Moon Wilderness in south-central Idaho. Adjacent to the Craters is the proposed 346,800 acre Great Rift Wilderness which has been recommended for designation to Congress by the President.

### **Manageability**

The Cedar Butte WSA could be managed over the long term to preserve its wilderness character because of the inaccessible terrain and well-defined wilderness boundary along the margins of the lava flow.

There is one potential manageability concern in the area that relates to a 454 acre mining claim for lava building stone. If the claim or part of it is classified as valid, then the stone may be mined and an estimated 100 acres could be patented. Access over .5 mile of existing vehicle trail to the claim area would likely be improved. Wilderness management of this claim area and access route would be impossible. Development of the claim would not affect wilderness management for the remainder of the WSA.

Acquisition of the state lands in one section (640 acres) would eliminate possible conflicts with providing access and maintaining the area's wilderness character. Idaho Department of Lands said it favors an exchange if the WSA becomes wilderness.

BLM has concluded that this WSA is manageable as wilderness even with the potential surface impacts that could result from development of the claims. Mining impacts would not be visible from almost all of the WSA since less than one percent of the area would be affected. It is also possible that no mineral development will ever take place because sources for the stone are abundant in southeastern Idaho.

### **Energy and Minerals Resource Values**

A Geologic, Energy and Mineral (GEM) assessment report was prepared for the Cedar Butte WSA in 1983 (Geoexplorers International, Inc., 1983). Conclusions from the report and information from BLM sources on locatable and salable minerals are:

The WSA is considered to have low potential for oil and gas. Although the majority of the WSA is covered with noncompetitive oil and gas leases, no exploration activities have been conducted. The thick sequence of Snake River Basalt masks the underlying sedimentary rock units making the area of low interest for oil and gas exploration. The presence of volcanic vents throughout the area gives further evidence of the lack of oil- and gas-bearing sedimentary rock formations.

Geothermal potential in the WSA is also considered low. Geothermal data from holes drilled surrounding the WSA show that typical heat gradients were very low. The low heat gradients are probably due to the fact that water moves quickly through the subsurface, removing the earth's heat.

Lava building stone is the only known locatable or salable mineral that occurs in the Cedar Butte WSA. Six unpatented mining claims have been filed on 454 acres in the WSA for building stone. Twenty-five acres of the claim group contain stone that is considered an uncommon variety and, therefore, subject to location under the mining laws. The mining claimant could apply for patent on up to 100 acres within the WSA for the locatable building stone deposits found on three of the six claims.

### **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-33-4 (CEDAR BUTTE)**

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>Naturalness, solitude, primitive recreation and special features would be lost on up to 100 acres of lava building stone sale area. Views of the stone removal activities could be seen from only about a .5-mile radius of the mine because the lava terrain would screen most views. This would be a short-term impact (3-5 years) because mining activity would cease after the stone supply is depleted. Over the long term, views of the material area would have an insignificant impact because only a thin layer of surface rock would have been removed.</p>	<p>Wilderness values and special features of pristine pahoehoe formations and pioneering plant communities would be preserved on 35,600 acres and degraded on lava building stone mining claims involving up to 100 acres. Four miles of peripheral vehicle trails would rehabilitate by eliminating 50 visitor days of motorized recreation use.</p>
Impacts to Energy and Mineral Development	<p>No Impact.</p>	<p>Subject to valid existing rights on 17,026 acres of oil and gas leases, the WSA would be withdrawn from leasing and location. Withdrawal will not impact exploration because of low potential. Wilderness designation would require validity exam on building stone claims.</p>

## **Local Social and Economic Consideration**

No significant social effects would occur as a result of wilderness designation.

## **Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments**

BLM's wilderness inventory and study were conducted with extensive public participation and public involvement was an important consideration in making wilderness recommendations. BLM solicited public involvement in the study phase through scoping meetings, mailings on issue identification and alternative formulation, a 90-day public comment period and two formal hearings on the Eastern Idaho Draft Wilderness EIS. Comments received during the inventory period and EIS scoping efforts were used to develop significant study issues and various alternatives for the ultimate management of those lands found to have wilderness value.

Wilderness was not an issue in the original Big Desert MFP and was not a subject of comments. Few comments were received during the wilderness inventory and either supported or opposed wilderness for the area. None were deferred for consideration during the study.

Sixty of the comments received during the Draft EIS comment period or at the public hearings specifically mentioned the Cedar Butte WSA. All but two supported wilderness for the area. One objected to wilderness because of the unknown status of minerals and because industry had not yet had a chance to explore the WSA. The other supported the no wilderness recommendation because the commenter wanted to see one lava flow left open for changes in recreation and scientific needs. Wilderness supporters emphasized the WSA's special features and wilderness values as reasons for designation. Some felt that, since the WSA was similar to Hell's Half Acre, Cedar Butte should deserve the same wilderness recommendation.

Two government agencies commented on the WSA. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stated that they had no objection to the Draft EIS proposal.