

Petticoat Peak Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 11,298 acres

The Petticoat Peak WSA (ID-28-1) lies within Fish Creek Mountain Range just one mile northeast of Lava Hot Springs, Idaho, in Bannock and Caribou Counties. All of the WSA's 11,298 acres are on BLM-administered land. Topography is steep and mountainous with Petticoat Peak being the highest point at more than 8,000 feet. Canyons and ridges radiate in all directions from the mountain peak. Dominant vegetation on the western slopes consists of junipers, mountain shrubs and sagebrush. Thick stands of Douglas-fir intermingled with lodgepole and limber pine cover the WSA's east side. A wide variety of shrubs, forbs and grasses is found throughout and aspen groves blanket moist sites on the west slopes.

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 October 1986. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

0 acres recommended for wilderness

11,298 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Petticoat Peak WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and release all 11,298 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. Although the recommendation is not the environmentally preferable alternative, BLM will 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 Petticoat Peak 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 are not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Manageability problems caused by dead-end roads and on-site and off-site land uses are incompatible with the preservation of wilderness values.

The quality of naturalness is diminished in the area by several factors. Five dead-end roads extend into the WSA from one to two miles in length. Two roads between North and Hadley Canyons are joined by a way and nearly bisect the area. Motorized travel on these routes decreases the visitor's perception that the area is natural. Scattered throughout the northern half of the area are livestock reservoirs, corrals, drift fences and other signs of livestock management activities which detract from the natural appearance. On a site-specific basis, the southern half has firewood cutting sites in six of the major canyons. Outside activities that influence the visitor's perception of naturalness include state highways along the WSA's south and west boundaries, Union Pacific railroad line near the west boundary, farming activities adjacent to 80 percent of the WSA's boundary and the nearby towns of Lava Hot Springs and Bancroft, Idaho. The sights and sounds of these adjacent activities lower the quality of solitude around the edge of the WSA. Cumulatively, those factors degrade the natural appearance of the area and the perception that the visitor is in an area affected primarily by the forces of nature.

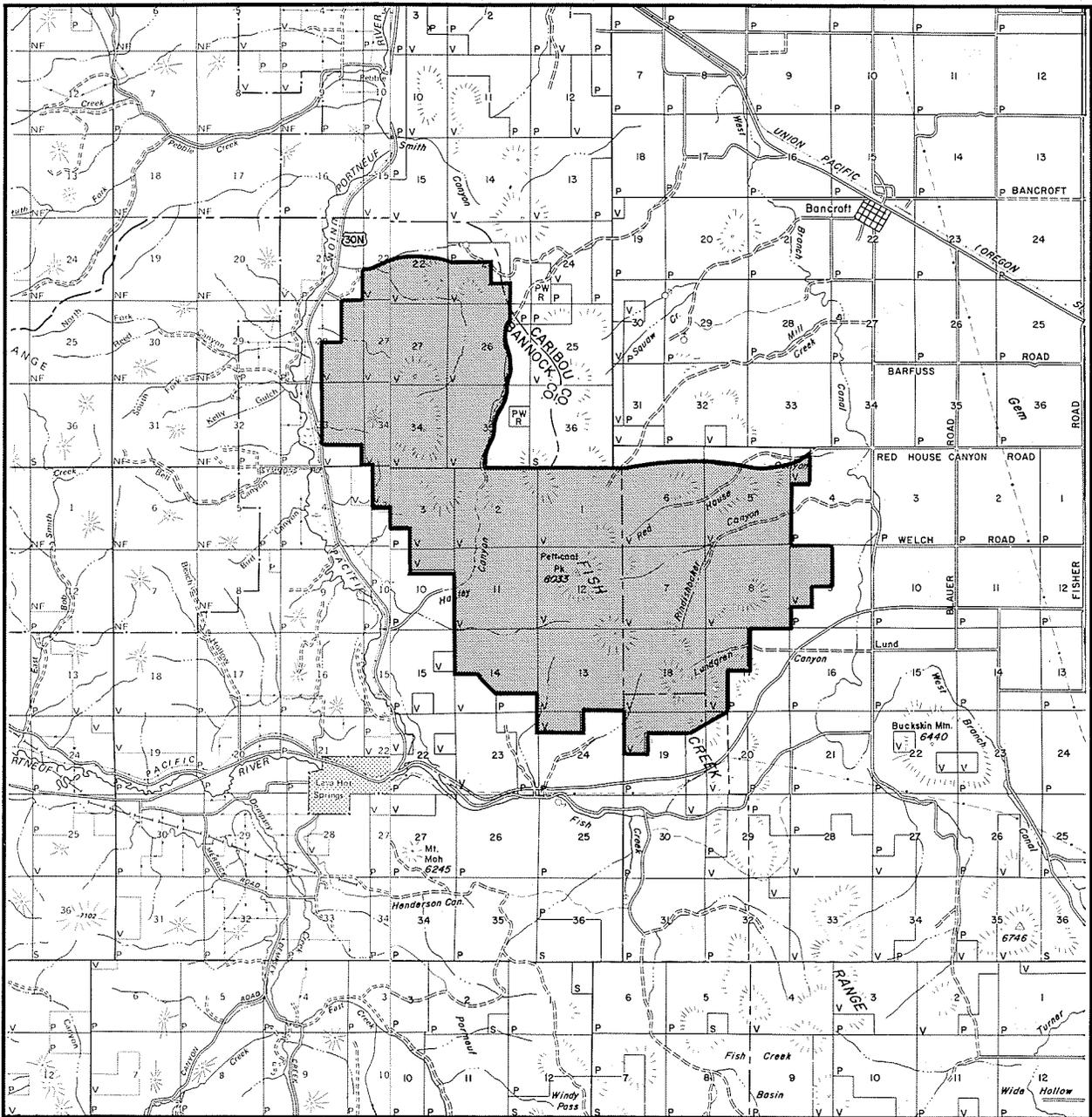
The quality of solitude is also adversely affected by motorized travel on dead-end roads and from nearby human activity. The sights and sounds of highway and railroad traffic, vehicles in the area and adjacent farm machinery diminish the visitor's opportunity for solitude.

The wilderness inventory listed a variety of recreation opportunities for the WSA but none were considered outstanding. These activities included camping, hiking, hunting, horseback riding and photography. The reason the opportunities were not considered outstanding is because they are abundantly available in similar landscapes throughout the nearby national forests. The national forests offer places that are larger, more isolated and contain physical features and recreation attractions that are lacking at Petticoat Peak.

Certain conditions adversely affect BLM's ability to manage this area as wilderness over the long term. Dead-end roads and existing off-site impacts from agricultural activities, highways, railroad line and private home development have the potential to further degrade solitude and visitor perception of naturalness. BLM has no control over these off-site impacts.

The Petticoat Peak WSA is close to Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah, and large cities in southeastern Idaho but would not appreciably expand primitive recreation and solitude opportunities for these population centers. Few visitors are expected to be attracted to the area because it lacks outstanding primitive recreation. Solitude opportunities are present within the WSA's interior but are diminished near the boundaries by on-site and off-site activities.

The no wilderness alternative provides opportunities for both road and roadless forms of recreation. The commercial timber base, located inside the WSA, would be available for sale. The Pocatello RMP decision limits vehicle travel to existing roads and trails within the WSA. About three-fourths of the area will remain roadless and natural in appearance and be available for nonmotorized recreation.



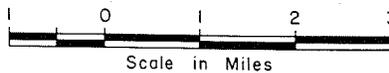
T. 8 S.
T. 9 S.

T. 9 S.
T. 10 S.

R. 37 E. | R. 38 E.

R. 38 E. | R. 39 E.

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



**ID-28-1
PETTICOAT PEAK
PROPOSAL**

OCTOBER 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
PETTICOAT PEAK WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	11,298
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	11,298

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

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

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	11,298
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	11,298
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Impacts on the natural appearance are located along the boundaries and at the ends of roads and vehicle trails in the Petticoat Peak WSA. They include vehicle trails, drift fences, livestock reservoirs, corrals and firewood cutting areas. Five dead-end roads enter the area and vehicle travel on these routes would likely decrease the visitor's perception of the natural appearance. Outside influences include views of agricultural activity and the town of Lava Hot Springs, Idaho.

B. Solitude

At Petticoat Peak there exists outstanding opportunities for solitude. The steep topography, numerous canyons and variety of tall vegetation screens visitors from each other. Outside influences have an affect on the quality of solitude. These influences include vehicle travel on the dead-end roads as well as nearness to a major railroad line, highways and agricultural activities. They have their greatest affect near the WSA's boundaries. Train whistles can be heard frequently throughout the day and night.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The wilderness inventory listed a variety of recreation opportunities for the WSA but none as outstanding.

D. Special Features

There are no special features in the WSA.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

The Petticoat Peak WSA is located in the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Western Spruce Fir Forest Ecosystem (3130-14). This ecosystem is not well represented nationwide in the wilderness system. Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). This ecosystem is represented by one designated area with 13,158 acres. There is one other BLM study area 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 Sagebrush Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Western Spruce Fir Forest Ecosystem	1	13,158	1	11,298
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Western Spruce Fir Forest Ecosystem	0	0	0	11,298

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

The Petticoat Peak 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.

Petticoat Peak would increase the land area available to Boise, Idaho, and Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah, residents for solitude and primitive recreation by less than one percent. However, most wilderness visitors to the WSA are not expected to come from long distances because the area lacks outstanding primitive recreation opportunities and attractions.

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 ¹	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

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

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Petticoat Peak WSA would contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Manageability

The WSA would have extensive administrative problems if designated.

Five dead-end roads extend into the WSA from one-to-two miles in length. Two roads between North and Hadley Canyons are joined by a way and nearly bisect the area. Increased vehicular use of these roads in future years would degrade the nonmotorized visitor's perception of naturalness and solitude opportunities throughout a large portion of the area. Access to range developments, particularly in and around North Canyon, is required for grazing management practices. Vehicles are used for inspections of range improvements. Herds are moved by motorized equipment. These activities would cause adverse impacts to solitude.

Existing off-site impacts from agricultural activities, highways, a railroad line and private home development degrade solitude and the perception of naturalness in west, south and southeast portions of the WSA. Subdivision and homesite development is presently underway near the WSA's west boundary and is expected to increase.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

A Geologic, Energy and Mineral (GEM) assessment report was prepared for the Petticoat Peak WSA in 1985 (Geoexplorers International, Inc., 1985). Conclusions from the report are:

The Petticoat Peak WSA is considered to have low-to-moderate potential for oil and gas. The entire WSA is covered by noncompetitive oil and gas leases and seismic lines have been run through the area. The WSA lies within the northern extension of the Utah-Wyoming-Idaho Overthrust Belt. However, major geologic formations expected to produce hydrocarbon deposits are absent in the area. Continued geophysical exploration can be expected because of the area's proximity to the Overthrust Belt.

Geothermal potential of the WSA is low to moderate for low temperature occurrences. The hot springs at Lava Hot Springs, Idaho, southeast of the area occur at the intersection of faults in the area and similar thermal waters may be present in the highly faulted WSA. However, it is not anticipated that this resource will be developed because of better potential in more accessible locations outside the WSA.

No unpatented mining claims exist within the WSA and no locatable-type mineral deposits are known to occur. Low grade manganese has been mined near the town of Lava Hot Springs, Idaho. The manganese oxide was probably deposited by spring waters rising along fault zones. Although the highly faulted WSA may contain other such deposits, reserves are expected to be small and widely dispersed. Deposits of silica and limestone have been developed around the Lava Hot Springs along the northwestern edge of the WSA. Although sand and gravel occurs along the Portneuf River Valley one mile west, very little occurs within the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table for the Petticoat Peak WSA 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-28-1 (PETTICOAT PEAK)

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	The natural character will be destroyed on 1,524 acres where timber is cut, limbs and other waste are scattered and logs are skidded. Opportunities for solitude during the 2- to 3-year logging operation will be lost. Over the long term, the cut area will be visible from approximately 10-15% of the WSA. The natural character will be destroyed on 4-10 acres where an exploratory oil and gas well is drilled, a pad is cleared and drill cuttings are stored. Opportunities for solitude will be lost for about 1 year while drilling takes place. Over the long term, the abandoned drill pad will be visible from about 2% of the WSA.	Wilderness values and special features of scenic mountain terrain, limber and lodgepole pine forests and important wildlife habitat would be preserved on 11,298 acres. Closing 2 miles of ways to motorized vehicle use would allow tracks to revegetate and eliminate conflicts between solitude and motorized recreation.
Impacts to Energy and Mineral Development	No Impact.	Subject to valid existing rights on 9,946 acres of oil and gas leases, the WSA would be withdrawn from leasing and location. Withdrawal would discourage exploration and development of moderate potential areas for oil and gas.
Impacts to Motorized Recreation Use	No Impact.	Motorized recreation use, amounting to 100 visitor days, would be foregone annually both in the short and long term. Impacts of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible.
Impacts to Timber Harvest and Management	No Impact.	Timber resources totaling 2.5 MMBF on 1,524 acres of the WSA would not be harvested.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

No significant social effects would occur as a result of wilderness designation of the Petticoat Peak WSA.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Wilderness was not an issue in the Pocatello RMP and was not a subject of comments. No comments received during the wilderness inventory were deferred for consideration during the study.

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. Fifty-seven of the comments received during the Draft EIS comment period or at the public hearings specifically mentioned the Petticoat Peak WSA. Objections were based on the unknown status of minerals and that the area should be left open for other uses. Wilderness supporters emphasized the area's wildlife values, closeness to Idaho population centers and wilderness values.

Three 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. The Bureau of Indian Affairs supported wilderness for the WSA and said that the Fort Hall Indian Treaty would not conflict with wilderness management for Petticoat Peak. Changes that reflect this have been made in the Final EIS.