

Black Canyon Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 10,371 acres

The Black Canyon WSA (ID-54-6) is located in Gooding County, Idaho. The WSA includes 10,371 acres of BLM-administered lands. There are no split estate lands within the areas. There is a 640 acre inholding of state land within the WSA (see Table 1). Portions of the WSA's boundaries are formed by the following dirt roads: on the west and the north by BLM and County Road 2401, the Crist Cabin Road; and on the east by BLM Road 2412, the Burnt Willow Road. An old cat line forms the remainder of the western boundary. The southern boundary follows section lines. The WSA is one of five WSAs within the Mount Bennett Hills, a rolling belt of foothills between the Sawtooth Mountains to the north and the Snake River Plains to the south.

Most of the WSA is a flat prairie which rises gently to the north. In the central portion of the WSA, Black Canyon and East Black Canyon come to within one-third mile of each other, leaving a narrow strip of prairie table top between them. The WSA's northern half is composed of rolling hills broken by canyons varying in size. The west edge of the WSA has unusual rock formations of weathered rhyolite. Elevations range from 4,360 to 5,484 feet. The dominant vegetation is sagebrush and grasses. There are some pockets of willow and shrubs along some of the intermittent drainages.

Several species of wildlife including elk, deer, antelope, coyotes, birds of prey, upland game birds and black bears are found in the WSA.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Shoshone/Sun Valley Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Wilderness, filed in April 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

10,371 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Black Canyon WSA is to release all 10,371 acres for nonwilderness 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. All 10,371 acres of federal land within the WSA are recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation and are shown as the Black Canyon WSA on the Black Canyon Proposal map.

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 (NWPS). There are no significant wildlife species or habitats, scientific or educational values in the area that would benefit from wilderness designation. There are geologic features in the area. However, similar geologic-based wilderness values of higher quality are recommended for wilderness designation within the nearby Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs.

Rock formations composed of welded volcanic tuffs are found along the west-central edge of the WSA boundary and in parts of Black Canyon and Burnt Willow Canyon. The formations look like stacks of coins, mushroom caps, arches, fins and pillars called "hoodoos." The formations are similar to those found in the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs but cover a much smaller area. The welded tuff rock formations in the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs cover 12,000 acres, an area larger than the entire Black Canyon WSA.

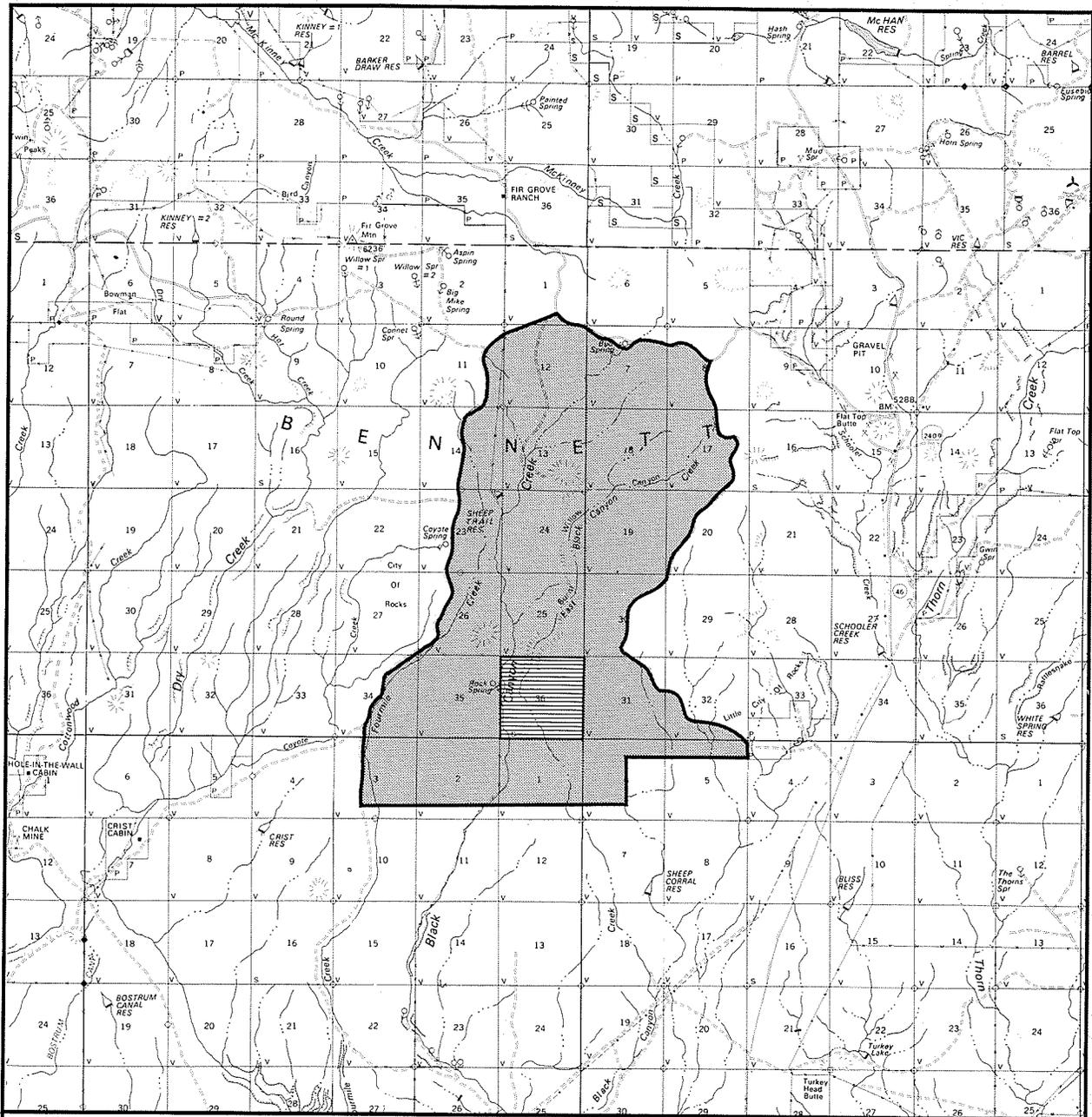
The most unusual and highest quality wilderness values in the Black Canyon WSA center on these welded tuff rock formations. These areas comprise about one-third of the Black Canyon WSA. Opportunities for solitude are found in these parts of the WSA. These areas are also the focal point for recreationists visiting the area because of the scenery of the rock formations and canyons.

The WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man. Existing human imprints in the WSA are low impact range developments. These are scattered throughout the area.

The Black Canyon WSA, Little City of Rocks WSA and the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs are all examples of the Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem (3130-49). In Idaho, this Bailey-Kuchler classification ecosystem is represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness administered by the National Park Service (NPS).

Designation of any one of the four WSAs containing the welded volcanic tuff formations would add diversity in landforms to the NWPS. Through the wilderness study process it was determined the designation of 19,350 acres in the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs represents a more significant opportunity to preserve the types of wilderness values found in the Bennett Hills (landforms, natural values, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation and special features) than would designation of the Black Canyon WSA.

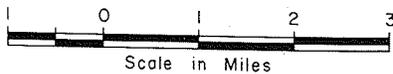
At the present time, there is little threat to the existing naturalness of the area. There are no known or projected activities, no known mineral potential, little geothermal potential and no valid rights of others in the WSA. Therefore, even without wilderness designation, the quality and level of values now found in the WSA are not expected to change significantly.



R. 13 E. | R. 14 E.

R. 14 E. | R. 15 E.

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



**ID-54-6
BLACK CANYON
PROPOSAL**

MARCH 1988

T. 2 S.
T. 3 S.
T. 3 S.
T. 4 S.

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
BLACK CANYON WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	10,371
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
Total	11,011

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	10,371
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	10,371
Inholdings (state, private)	640

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Black Canyon WSA generally appears natural but there are several site-specific signs of man including barbed wire fence, old chemical brush control treatment areas, a developed spring and a dirt reservoir. The developments are scattered throughout the WSA and have little impact on overall naturalness.

B. Solitude

Outstanding opportunities for solitude exist within the two main canyons in the WSA. The rock towers and numerous side canyons provide screening between visitors and allow several visitors to be in the area without encountering one another. The broad sloping plain that occupies the majority of the WSA also provides opportunities for solitude but the quality of solitude would be less if many visitors were in that portion of the WSA because of the scarcity of topographic or vegetative screening. The opportunities are due to the remoteness and lack of human activity in the area and are not due to any intrinsic values unique to the WSA. Overall, these opportunities for solitude are less numerous and of a lower quality than those found in the nearby Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs.

Outside sights of agricultural and community land patterns are visible from many portions of the WSA. These developments are located at a distance and do not detract significantly from a feeling of solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The Black Canyon WSA offers some primitive recreation opportunities, although most visitors to the general area choose to visit the Gooding City of Rocks WSAs. The opportunities include hiking, camping and nature study. The WSA also offers opportunities for hunting big game. Most of the hunters, however, use motorized vehicles.

D. Special Features

The WSA has no significant special features.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Black Canyon WSA would add an ecosystem presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) by three areas with 76,699 acres. There are 35 other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies areas	Other BLM Studies acres
	areas	acres		
Dry Domain/Intermountain Sagebrush Province				
			<u>NATIONWIDE</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	3	76,699	136	4,359,340
			<u>IDAHO</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	12,997	35	949,916
			<u>NEVADA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	1	32,407	29	1,273,919
			<u>CALIFORNIA</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	5	152,431
			<u>OREGON</u>	
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	67	1,983,074

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

The Black Canyon WSA is within a five-hour drive from Boise, Idaho. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population center.

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	16	4,741,570	141	5,374,250

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Black Canyon WSA would not contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS.

Manageability

The Black Canyon WSA is manageable as wilderness. The size of the WSA and proximity to the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA enhances the area's manageability.

Conflicts with other resources and uses are minimal. The state land inholding is used solely for grazing. Based on the mineral resource analysis, no mineral development on this parcel is anticipated.

Vehicle use of the two cherry-stem roads into the WSA could slightly complicate wilderness management. However, use could be limited to livestock operators only. The roads would be closed to all other users. Livestock operators would use the roads approximately ten times per year to maintain a fence. Therefore, impacts on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation would be limited.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

Except for the state land inholding, all surface and mineral estates in the WSA are in federal ownership and are open to mineral entry. The Black Canyon WSA has low potential for oil and gas, coal and moderate potential for geothermal energy. These classifications are based on geology and U.S. Geological Survey studies on the WSAs to the west.

The WSA is classified as having low potential for other leasable minerals based on the unfavorable geologic environment. There are no mineral leases in the WSA. The WSA is classified as having low potential for locatable mineral resources. This classification is based on the geology and absence of mining claims and historic activity. There are no mining claims in the WSA.

Building stone exists in limited quantities within the Black Canyon WSA. This material has produced little interest and no known sales. It is limited in quantity and relatively inaccessible. Adequate sources of similar building stone are available at other locations. There are no other known saleable minerals within the Black Canyon WSA.

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-54-6 (BLACK CANYON)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	In the long term, the addition of a dirt reservoir would reduce naturalness slightly in the western portion of the WSA. The naturalness of the remainder of the WSA would be retained.	All wilderness values would receive long-term Congressional protection. All wilderness values would be maintained. There would be a slight improvement in the area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude. An additional range development (a dirt reservoir) would reduce naturalness slightly in the western portion of the WSA.
Impacts on Recreational ORV Use	There would be no impact on recreational ORV use.	Recreational ORV use of 200 visitor days would be foregone annually. Impacts of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible.
Impacts on Development of Mineral Resources	Potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes moderate potential for geothermal resources. There would be no impact on development of mineral resources.	Development of potential mineral resources would be foregone. This includes moderate potential for geothermal resources.
Impacts on Grazing Facility Maintenance and Construction	There would be no impact on grazing facility maintenance and construction.	There would be no impact on grazing facility maintenance and construction.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered a significant issue in the study.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During public review of the Draft EIS, 48 comments supporting wilderness designation of the Black Canyon WSA were received. Seven of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons addressed the area's wilderness values and quality, the lack of resource conflicts, manageability, specific wilderness resources including recreation, wildlife, geologic and cultural resources and the area's preservation value. Seven comments addressed the area contributing to expanding diversity in the NWPS. Eleven comments addressed the opportunity to designate a significant wilderness complex in the Mount Bennett Hills.

Six comments were received opposing wilderness designation of the area. Three of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons stated the area is better suited for other uses, the area looks like the rest of Idaho or the area is not unique.

The Board of Camas County Commissioners opposed any more wilderness in Idaho. The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Department of Water Quality, Office of the Attorney General, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency commented on the Draft EIS. None of their comments specifically addressed the Black Canyon WSA.