

Deer Creek Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 7,487 acres

The Deer Creek WSA (ID-54-10) is located in Gooding and Camas Counties, Idaho. The WSA includes 7,487 acres of BLM-administered lands. There are no split estate lands within the area. There is a 640 acre inholding of state land within the WSA (see Table 1).

The WSA's boundaries are primarily formed by the following roads: on the west by County Road 2002, the Bliss-Hill City Road; on the west, north and east by BLM Road 2402, the Davis Mountain Road; and also on the east by an unnamed road. Portions of the eastern boundary follow Terrace Creek. The southern boundary follows private land.

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. The WSA is southwest of Davis Mountain, one of the highest points in the Bennett Hills.

The WSA is dominated by a series of steep hills with Cottonwood Creek, Deer Creek and unnamed drainages cutting between them. Rhyolite and basalt outcrops dominate the tops of many of the hills. Elevations range from 4,920 to 6,560 feet.

The WSA's dominant vegetation is sagebrush and grasses. The higher elevations have scattered stands of aspen, tobacco brush, Indian paintbrush and lupine.

Several species of wildlife including elk, deer, bear, coyotes, birds of prey and upland game birds 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

7,487 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Deer Creek WSA is to release all 7,487 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 7,487 acres of federal land within the WSA are recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation and are shown as the Deer Creek WSA on the Deer Creek Proposal map.

The quality of 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 outstanding 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.

The Deer Creek WSA is one of five WSAs in the Bennett Hills located on the northern edge of the Snake River Plain. Rock bluffs occur throughout the WSA, especially along the major drainages. In some drainages, rock formations composed of welded volcanic tuffs are present. These formations look like arches and pillars called "hoodoos." Most of the Deer Creek WSA is similar to the northern parts of the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs; high plateaus cut by steep, narrow stream channels.

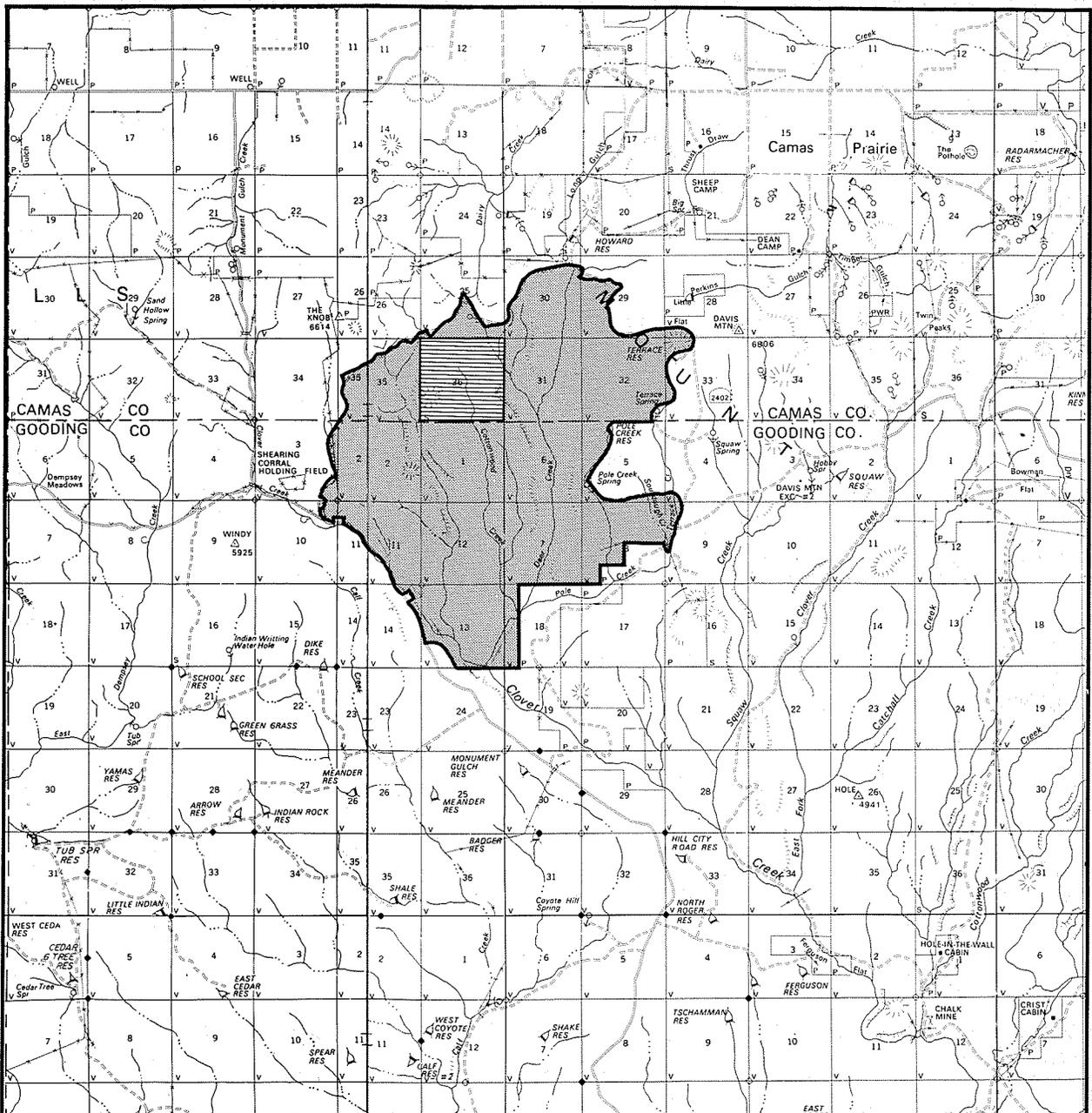
The area generally appears natural. Existing human imprints in the WSA are low-impact range developments. They are scattered throughout the area and have a negligible impact on the WSA's overall natural values. The Deer Creek WSA also offers opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Extensive areas exhibiting the same types of wilderness values as those found in the Deer Creek WSA are also found in the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSAs. However, the wilderness values of the Gooding City of Rocks East and West are of a much higher quality.

The Deer Creek WSA, like the other Bennett Hills WSAs (Black Canyon, Little City of Rocks and Gooding City of Rocks East and West), is an example of the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem. 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 of the Bennett Hills WSAs would add diversity in landforms to the NWPS. Through the wilderness study process, it was determined that the designation of 19,310 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 Deer Creek WSA.

At the present time, there is little threat to the existing naturalness of the area. There are no known or projected activities, little known mineral 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 significantly change.



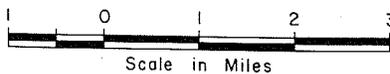
T. 2 S.
T. 3 S.

T. 3 S.
T. 4 S.

R. 12 E. | R. 13 E.

R. 13 E. | R. 14 E.

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



Scale in Miles

**ID-54-10
DEER CREEK
PROPOSAL**

MARCH 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
DEER CREEK WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	7,487
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
Total	8,127

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	7,487
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	7,487
Inholdings (state, private)	640

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Deer Creek WSA appears natural. Short sections of drift fences, a spring development and two short vehicle trails, totaling one-half mile, are the only human imprints in the WSA. The drift fences and spring development are localized imprints and have no significant effect on the WSA's naturalness. The vehicle trails would eventually return to a natural condition if use was eliminated.

B. Solitude

The WSA offers outstanding opportunities for solitude. The quality of solitude in the WSA would depend largely on the number of users in the WSA at one time. If use increased from present levels, it would be hard to avoid the sights and sounds of other visitors. Although the canyons within the WSA provide topographic screening, a large number of visitors could exceed the capability of these canyons to screen visitors from one another. Aspen groves in the WSA's northern portion provide screening but most of the WSA has little vegetative screening.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The outstanding primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities in this WSA are based on the diversity of activities available including hiking, nature study, photography and hunting. The variety of environments provides visual interest for both the hiker and those involved in nature study.

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 Deer Creek WSA would add an ecosystem presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) by three designated 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	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	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 Deer Creek 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 Deer Creek WSA would not contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS.

Manageability

The Deer Creek WSA is manageable as wilderness. Conflicts with other resources and uses are minimal. Livestock permittees would require access into the area occasionally to maintain rangeland developments, primarily fences. Continuation of grazing management activities in the same manner and degree would have little effect on wilderness values or wilderness management. The state land inholding is used solely for grazing. Based on the mineral resource analysis, no mineral development on this parcel is anticipated.

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 Deer Creek WSA has low potential for oil and gas, coal, and moderate potential for geothermal energy. This classification is based on geology and U.S. Geological Survey studies on the WSAs to the southeast.

The WSA is classified as having low potential for other leasable minerals based on an unfavorable geologic environment (Fernette 1983). There are no mineral leases within the WSA. The entire area is classified as having low potential for metallic mineral resources based on an unfavorable geologic environment. It is classified as having moderate potential for diatomite deposits based on the presence of the Banbury sediments underlying the WSA (Fernette 1983). There are no mining claims in the WSA. Based on field observations, the area is classified as having low potential for saleable materials.

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-54-10 (DEER CREEK)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	The area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude would be reduced slightly.	All wilderness values would receive long-term Congressional protection. Naturalness and opportunities for solitude would improve slightly because of the elimination of ORV use and the acquisition of the state land inholding. Naturalness and opportunities for solitude would be reduced slightly by range management actions.
Impacts on Recreational ORV Use	There would be no impact on recreational ORV use.	Recreational ORV use of 100 visitor days would be forgone annually. The impact of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible.
Impacts on Development Mineral Resources	Potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes moderate potential for geothermal resources and diatomite. There would be no impact on development of mineral resources.	Development of potential mineral resources would be forgone. This includes moderate potential for geothermal resources and diatomite.
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, 32 comments supporting wilderness designation of the Deer Creek WSA were received. Eight of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons addressed the area's wilderness values and resources including solitude, wildlife, recreation opportunities, scenery and the area's preservation value. Nine comments addressed the opportunity to designate a wilderness complex in the Mount Bennett Hills.

Six comments were received opposing wilderness designation of the area. Four of those contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons stated the area looks like the rest of Idaho and it is better suited for other uses.

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 Environmental Protection Agency commented on the Draft EIS. None of their comments specifically addressed the Deer Creek WSA.