

Gooding City of Rocks East Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 14,743 acres

The Gooding City of Rocks East WSA (ID-54-8A) is located in Gooding County 14 miles northwest of Gooding, Idaho. The WSA includes 14,743 acres of BLM-administered lands. There are no split estate lands or inholdings within the area (see Table 1). The WSA's boundary is primarily formed by the following roads: on the west by an unnamed, nonsystem jeep trail; on the north by County Road 2402, the Davis Mountain Road; on the east and south by BLM and County Road 2401, the Crist Cabin Road. Portions of the western, northern and southern boundaries are formed by state and private lands. The WSA is one of five WSAs within the Mount Bennett Hills.

The Mount Bennett Hills are a rolling belt of foothills between the Sawtooth Mountains to the north and the Snake River Plain to the south. The southeastern portion of the WSA is composed of a series of deep canyons carved into rhyolite. Throughout these canyons are rhyolite columns which rise more than 100 feet. This area is known as the City of Rocks. Streams dissecting alternating bands of hard and soft tuff and the weathering processes of freezing and thawing helped create unusual rock formations that resemble stacks of coins, mushroom caps, arches, fins and pillars called "hoodoos." Although the rock types are not the same, the rock formations in the City of Rocks rival those found in Utah's Arches National Park.

Dry Creek Canyon, on the western side of the City of Rocks, has a perennial stream with large sections of pristine riparian vegetation. The northern portion of the WSA is a rolling prairie dissected by several intermittent stream drainages. Several basalt bluffs dominate portions of the prairie landscape.

The WSA's dominant vegetation is sagebrush and annual and perennial grasses. More shaded sections of the canyons support pockets of willows, aspen, cottonwood, serviceberry and chokecherry.

Wildlife species within the WSA include elk, deer, coyotes, bears, birds of prey and upland game birds. A population of cutthroat trout lives in Dry Creek.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Shoshone/Sun Valley Final Environment Impact Statement (EIS) Wilderness, filed in April 1986. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a partial wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; an all wilderness alternative; and a nonwilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

13,063 acres recommended for wilderness

1,680 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA is to designate 13,063 acres as wilderness to release 1,680 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.

The recommendation for wilderness will also apply to any additional adjacent nonfederal lands acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. A 640 acre state land parcel cherry-stem in the northern half of the WSA, 245 acres east of the road dissecting the state land section on the WSA's west boundary and the 146 acre private land parcel adjacent to the south boundary of the WSA have been identified for acquisition. All 14,743 acres of federal land within the WSA are shown as the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA on the Gooding City of Rocks East Proposal map.

Wilderness designation will add a high-quality, diverse area to the wilderness system. The wilderness values are exceptional. The recommended part of the WSA exhibits special ecological, geological and cultural features of scientific and educational values which would benefit from wilderness designation. The Gooding City of Rocks East WSA would add landforms currently not represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) in Idaho. The area recommended as suitable does not include resource values or uses that would significantly conflict with wilderness management or negatively impact the area's wilderness characteristics.

Dry Creek, a spring-fed perennial stream, cuts through the center of the 13,063 acres recommended as suitable. Dry Creek has been identified as a potential Research Natural Area (RNA) and Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to represent riparian, aquatic and terrestrial habitats of the southern slope of the Bennett Hills. Dry Creek has a very high diversity of invertebrates as well as a reported rainbow/cutthroat trout hybrid. Beaver ponds are found near the mouth of the canyon. Dry Creek is a sage grouse winter use area and parts of it lie within sage grouse strutting grounds. The southern part of Dry Creek is a deer winter range. Well-developed riparian vegetation includes black cottonwood, red-osier dogwood and willow species. In addition to the aquatic and riparian habitats, a number of range habitat types are also present. Dominant shrubs in these types include basin big sagebrush, Wyoming big sagebrush, low sagebrush and antelope bitterbrush. The dominant grass is bluebunch wheatgrass. Slanderbush buckwheat and Sandberg's bluegrass are also present. Although grazed in the past, the lower portion of Dry Creek was fenced to protect the aquatic habitat and the vegetation is recovering. Other wildlife species found in the 13,063 acres recommended suitable include elk, sage grouse, chukars, raptors, coyotes, black bear, bobcat and mountain quail.

Cultural values in the area recommended suitable include rock art petroglyphs and surface lithic scatters. The lithic scatters consist of obsidian waste flakes and projectile points. Obsidian is a volcanic glass prized by early man for making arrow and spear points as well as tools and ceremonial devices. Some layers of the welded tuff formations are composed solely of obsidian.

The area recommended suitable for wilderness designation is essentially pristine. Several sections of fence and three developed springs are located on the periphery of the area. The four vehicles trails, totaling approximately 3.5 miles, entering the area from the north, east and west would revegetate and return to a more natural condition if vehicle use were restricted or eliminated. Within the area recommended suitable, the imprints of humans are minimal and their impact on naturalness diminished by the screening effects of the area's topography.

The 13,063 acres of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA recommended suitable for wilderness offer outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. The area's large size, the "City of Rocks" formations and the steep gorges and dense riparian vegetation within most of the canyons provide endless opportunities for visitors to disperse and avoid the sights and sounds of others. The recreational values of this area are exceptional. Primitive recreation opportunities include hiking, camping, horseback riding, climbing, fishing, hunting, nature study and photography.

The Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem (3130-49) is the ecosystem represented in this part of the WSA. In Idaho, this Bailey-Kuchler classification ecosystem is represented in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness administered by the National Park Service (NPS). However, the landforms in the Craters of the Moon Wilderness are vastly different from the landforms represented in the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA. The Craters of the Moon Wilderness is an outstanding example of Snake River Plain desert lava flow ecosystems while the Gooding City of Rocks area consists of thousands of acres of welded volcanic tuff rock formations and basalt plateaus cut by riparian systems.

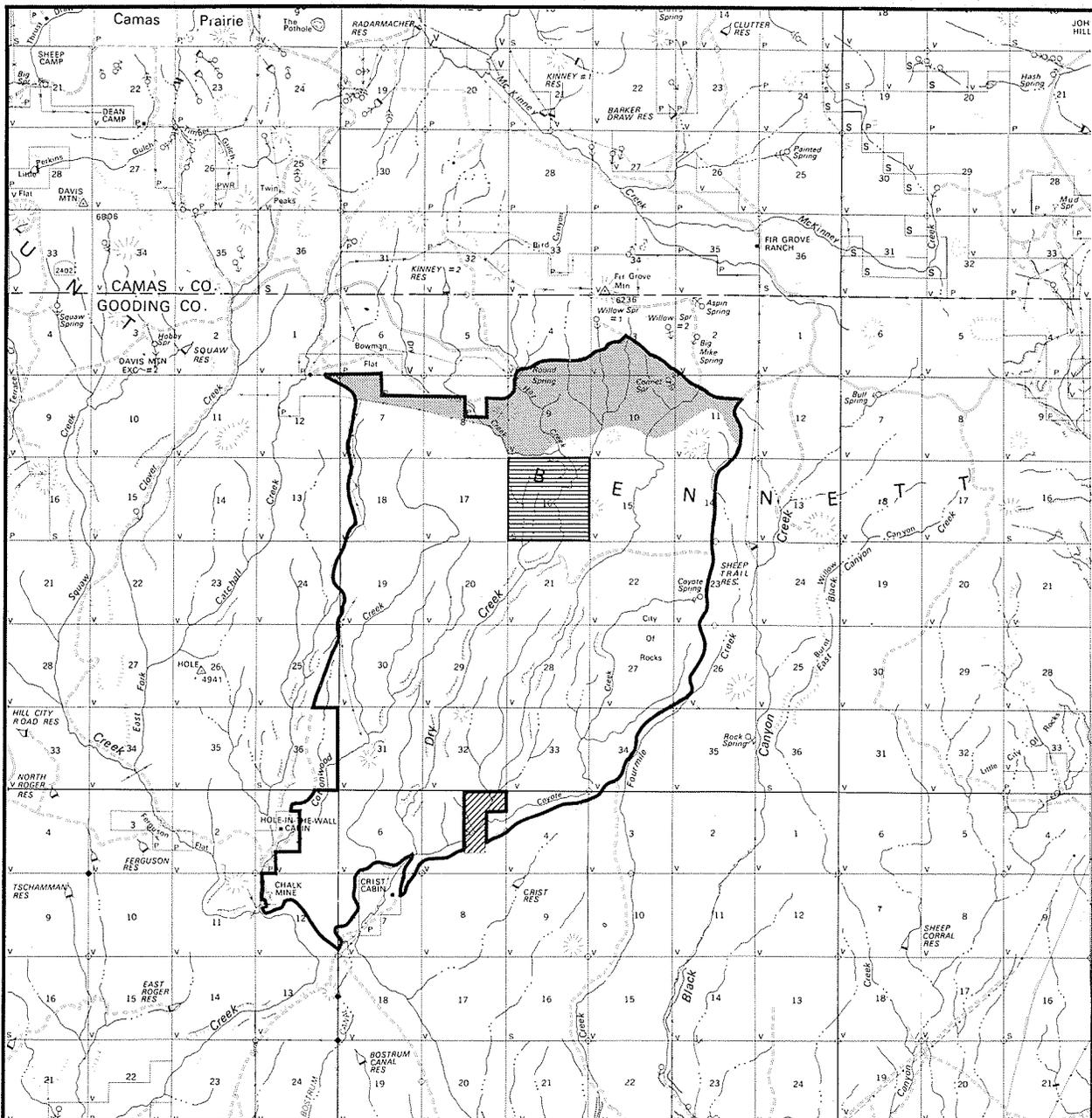
Conflicts with other resource uses and values in this part of the WSA are limited and the area could be managed as wilderness. The Gooding City of Rocks West WSA lies to the west of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA. This 6,287 acre WSA has similar high quality wilderness values and is also recommended suitable for wilderness designation. It is separated from the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA by a road. The proximity of this WSA enhances the manageability of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA.

Grazing use and management activities will be allowed to continue. Grazing management related vehicle use on boundary roads and two cherry-stem roads would have a negligible effect on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

The area has low potential for metals, oil and gas, coal and moderate potential for geothermal energy. The southwest corner of the WSA has high potential for diatomite. However, extensive minable reserves of diatomite are located outside the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA as well as the adjacent Gooding City of Rocks West WSA, which is also recommended suitable for wilderness designation.

The 1,680 acres recommended for nonwilderness uses are sagebrush-covered plateau areas on the northern end of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA. The two developed springs, an erosion-control dam, fences, an old brush-control project area and vehicle routes in this area diminish natural values.

The nonsuitable part of the WSA lacks the geologic and vegetative diversity exhibited in the area recommended suitable, so opportunities for solitude are more limited than in the City of Rocks formations and riparian drainages of the southern, suitable part of the WSA.

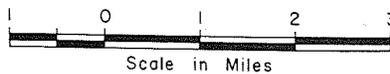


T. 2 S.
T. 3 S.
T. 3 S.
T. 4 S.

R. 13 E. | R. 14 E.

R. 14 E. | R. 15 E.

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



**ID-54-8A
GOODING CITY OF ROCKS EAST
PROPOSAL**

MARCH 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
GOODING CITY OF ROCKS EAST WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	14,743
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	14,743

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	13,063
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	13,063
Inholdings (state, private)	0
State land (outside WSA)	885
Private Land (outside WSA)	147

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

BLM	1,680
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	1,680
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Gooding City of Rocks East WSA generally appears natural. The WSA's deep canyons and benches in the portion recommended suitable for wilderness designations are virtually untouched by human works.

The portion of the WSA recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation contains the following range developments: Round Spring, Connet Spring, Connet Erosion Control Dam, Connet Protective Fence, portions of the Strike Burn Fence and portions of historic brush treatment. The cumulative impact of these developments reduces naturalness in that portion of the WSA recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

B. Solitude

The WSA's topography, boundary configuration and vegetative screening provide an outstanding opportunity for visitors to avoid others in the area. Numerous canyons and rock formations in the southern part of the WSA provide excellent topographic screening. Pillars and hoodoos of various heights and shapes allow visitors a high degree of seclusion and opportunity for solitude. Drainages encourage dispersion of visitor groups. The northern part of the WSA has rolling hills and buttes which also provide opportunity for solitude, though not as outstanding as the southern part.

In many canyon bottoms, trees in scattered riparian zones offer vegetative screening. Elsewhere, grasses and low shrubs combine with the topography to add to the sense of seclusion.

Human activities outside the WSA are visible near the boundary and from the high points in the WSA. Agricultural and community land patterns can be seen in the distance from ridges and buttes within the WSA. However, the sight of these fields and communities does not detract significantly from the solitude of the WSA due to the distances involved.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The WSA offers exceptional scenery and a diversity of landforms. Natural features within the WSA provide outstanding opportunities for photography, hiking, camping, wildlife observation and nature study. Opportunities for horseback riding, fishing and hunting, as well as many other activities, are also present within the area. Excellent subjects for photography include the myriad of brilliantly colored lichen-encrusted rhyolite pillars, hoodoos and arches. The diverse vegetation ranges from sagebrush and grasses on the plateaus to ferns, mosses and wildflowers in shaded, rocky canyons. This diversity offers exceptional opportunities for nature study. Opportunities are abundant for viewing elk, deer, sage grouse, raptors and coyotes. Black bear, bobcat and mountain quail are occasionally seen.

Several factors contribute to the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA's outstanding opportunities for hiking. The diversity of terrain, the varying degrees of difficulty in maneuvering through the pillars and long rock-filled drainages and the scarcity of water during much of the year combine to provide the recreationist challenges. The plateaus provide a sense of wide open space and also contain archaeological sites of interest to hikers. Aggregations of rhyolite pillars in the southern portion of the WSA provide an intimate sense of seclusion along with countless rock climbing opportunities.

Primitive camping opportunities are enhanced by the rugged terrain, by the availability of many camping sites among the rock pillars in the southern part of the WSA and by open space in the plateaus. The summer heat and lack of drinking water add to the primitiveness of the recreation experience.

The portion of the WSA recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation does not provide the above-mentioned opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The nonsuitable area does provide access to the high quality primitive recreation opportunities located to the south. For example, both the Connet Spring and Round Spring range developments are easily accessible to vehicles and are used by recreationists as trailheads.

D. Special Features

Spectacular landforms occur within the drainages of the WSA. These include columns, hoodoos, arches and monoliths. These landforms display weathering processes and structural anomalies that are picturesque and unusual.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Gooding City of Rocks 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	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	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 Gooding City of Rocks East 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 Gooding City of Rocks East WSA would not contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS. The NPS-administered Craters of the Moon Wilderness (43,243 acres) representing a similar ecosystem is a two-hour drive to the northeast. The Gooding City of Rocks East WSA, however, would add a vastly different landform to the NWPS than that contained within the Craters of the Moon Wilderness.

Manageability

The 13,063 acre portion of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA recommended for wilderness designation can reasonably be managed as wilderness. Conflicts with other resource uses are minimal. Rugged topography restricts vehicle use in all but the northernmost parts of the WSA. The two cherry-stem roads into that part of the WSA recommended suitable would be closed to all vehicle use except that required for grazing management. Livestock permittees would use the roads approximately ten times annually to maintain developments and manage livestock with negligible effects on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

Although diatomite deposits occur in the southwest part of the WSA and mining claims have been located on the deposits, development is not anticipated. The Chalk Mine block of diatomaceous earth in the WSA is covered by basalt, limiting its minability. In addition, a large deposit containing approximately 35 million tons lies outside the Gooding City of Rocks East and West WSA boundaries. This deposit is only partially capped by basalt and could be mined by open-pit methods.

The east, west and south boundaries of the area recommended suitable are well-defined by roads. There are no nonfederal inholdings in the WSA. Adjacent state and private lands proposed for acquisition are used solely for grazing and, based on the minerals resources analysis, no mineral development anticipated on these parcels.

The 1,680 acres of the WSA not recommended suitable for wilderness designation could also be managed as wilderness. However, in the less rugged topography in this part of the WSA, it would be more difficult to restrict off-road vehicle use.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA in 1984 and 1985. The WSA has low potential for metals, oil and gas, coal, and moderate potential for geothermal energy.

Parts of the Clover Creek diatomite deposit occur in the southwest part of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA and the southern tip and western half of the Gooding City of Rocks West WSA. Five exposures, or blocks, containing 416 million tons of diatomaceous material make up the Clover Creek deposit. The Chalk Mine block in the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA is predominantly covered by basalt, limiting its minability. The North Clover Creek block west of and outside the boundaries of both WSAs is only partly capped by basalt and could be mined by open-pit methods on the western flank of the exposure.

The minable wedge contains an inferred marginal reserve of 35 million tons of diatomite possibly suitable for filter, filler, insulation and other applications. The resource is classified as marginal because products from it may be inferior to currently marketed diatomite products. Placer claims cover approximately 440 acres of the diatomite deposits in the southwest part of the WSA.

Several occurrences of platy welded tuff, possibly suitable as decorative stone, are within the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA; however, abundant deposits to the east of the WSA could be more easily developed. Deposits of sand and gravel are too distant from markets and there is little chance of development.

No mineralized rock was identified in the WSA. There is no present production of any energy or mineral resources in the WSA. There are no mineral leases in the 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-54-8A (GOODING CITY OF ROCKS EAST)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	The 13,063 acres designated as wilderness would receive long-term Congressional protection. All wilderness values in this area would be maintained. The area's naturalness and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude would improve slightly. The area's most spectacular scenery, naturalness and opportunities for primitive recreation and solitude would be retained. On the 1,680 acres not designated as wilderness, there would be a slight reduction of naturalness and opportunities for solitude.	All wilderness values would receive long-term Congressional protection. There would be a slight improvement in the area's naturalness and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation and solitude on 13,063 acres. On 1,680 acres, there would be a slight decrease in naturalness and opportunities for solitude.	There would be a slight reduction in naturalness on 13,063 acres. On 1,680 acres, there would be a moderate reduction of the area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude.
Impacts on Recreational ORV Use	Recreational ORV use of 140 visitor days would be foregone on 13,063 acres annually. Impacts of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible. On the 1,680 acres of the WSA not designated as wilderness, recreational ORV use would continue to increase but would not exceed 100 visitor days annually.	Recreational ORV use of 150 visitor days would be foregone annually. The impacts of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible.	There would be no impact on recreational ORV use.
Impacts on Development of Mineral Resources	Development of potential mineral resources would be foregone on 13,043 acres. This includes an estimated 6 million tons of diatomite (1.5% of the total reserve within 5 miles of the WSA) and moderate potential for geothermal resources. Potential mineral resources on 1,680 acres would be available for development.	Development of potential mineral resources would be foregone. This includes an estimated 6 million tons of diatomite (1.5% of the total reserve within 5 miles of the WSA) and moderate potential for geothermal resources.	Potential mineral resources would be available for development. This includes moderate potential for geothermal resources and an estimated 6 million tons of diatomite (1.5% of the total reserve within 5 miles of the WSA). There would be no impact on development of mineral 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.	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, 47 comments supporting wilderness designation of the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA were received including 11 specifically supporting the alternative boundary. Thirteen of these contained no supporting reason for their position. Comments with supporting reasons addressed the area's wilderness values and quality, the lack of resource conflicts, manageability and specific wilderness resources including recreation, wildlife and cultural resources and the area's preservation value. Ten comments addressed the area contributing to expanding diversity in the NWPS. Of particular interest was the opportunity to designate a significant wilderness complex in the Mount Bennett Hills.

Ten comments were received opposing wilderness designation of the area. Two of these contained no supporting reasons for their position. Comments with supporting reasons stated the area is better suited for other uses, it did not need or deserve wilderness protection, designation is a waste of money, the area looks like the rest of Idaho, it is too large or not large enough, has minimal wilderness quality or has ORV conflicts.

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. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation and the Environmental Protection Agency comments did not specifically address the Gooding City of Rocks East WSA.