

Raven's Eye Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 67,110 acres

The Raven's Eye WSA (ID-57-10) is located in Blaine and Lincoln Counties two miles east of Carey, Idaho. The WSA includes 67,110 acres of BLM-administered lands. There are no split estate lands within the area. There are 1,920 acres of state land inholdings within the WSA (see Table 1). The WSA boundaries are formed primarily by the following roads: on the north and east by BLM and County Road 3206, the Carey - Kimama Road and two unnamed, nonsystem dirt roads; and on the south by BLM Road 3209, the North Pagari Road. The boundary also follows state section lines in five separate areas. Most of the western and northern boundary is formed by private property lines.

The Raven's Eye WSA is characterized by two distinct landforms. The southern portion of the WSA is composed of older lava flows covered by wind-blown soils up to five feet deep. These older flows contain three prominent volcanic cones: Spud Butte, Broken Top Butte and an unnamed cone north of Wagon Butte. The topography of the older flows is flat to gently rolling, broken by buttes, depressions and dry lakes.

The remainder of the WSA (approximately 55 percent) is covered by part of the Craters of the Moon Lava Flow. The younger flow has a rough, undulating surface broken by numerous pressure ridges, lava cascades, subsidence craters, lava blisters and other volcanic features. Both pahoehoe (Hawaiian word for "ropey coils") and aa ("hard on the feet") lava exist in this flow. Elevations in the WSA range from 4,600 feet in the southern portion to 5,003 feet at the summit of Spud Butte.

Vegetation varies with the topography. The soil-covered older flows are dominated by brush with interspersed grasses and forbs. The height of the brush canopy averages four feet. A small area (1,140 acres) on the southwest edge has been planted in crested wheatgrass. On the younger Craters of the Moon flow, vegetation is sparse.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and included in the Monument Final Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness, filed in July 1987. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report; and a no wilderness alternative.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

67,110 acres recommended for wilderness

0 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for the Raven's Eye WSA is the all wilderness alternative. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness alternative. It would cause the least change from the natural environment over the long term. All 67,110 acres of federal land within the Raven's Eye are recommended for wilderness designation.

The wilderness recommendation will also apply to any inholding acreage acquired through purchase or exchange with willing landowners. Three state land sections, totaling 1,920 acres, have been identified for acquisition. Federal lands recommended for wilderness designation within the WSA are shown on the Raven's Eye Proposal map.

The WSA has outstanding wilderness values and geological features of special interest. The area recommended for designation could be managed as wilderness. The southern portion of the WSA is composed of older lava flows covered by wind-blown soils up to five feet deep. Although this portion of the WSA is also natural appearing, it is not pristine. Six two-track trails with a total length of 20 miles traverse the soil-covered lava. The trails are used infrequently by sheepherders and hunters, and vegetation is established between the tracks. Some of the trails are rarely used and vegetation is growing in the tracks. One trail is partially covered with wind-blown sand. In addition to these vehicle trails, human imprints include a fence, enclosure, stock water pond and an old canal. These developments are screened by topography and vegetation. Two aerial seedings of crested wheatgrass (a non-native species) are found along the southwest and south-central edge of the WSA. These seedings consist of numerous broken patches of wheatgrass in pockets of less than ten acres, broken by rocky outcrops and native vegetation. Cheatgrass, a non-native species that invades after wildfire, is also present in this part of the WSA.

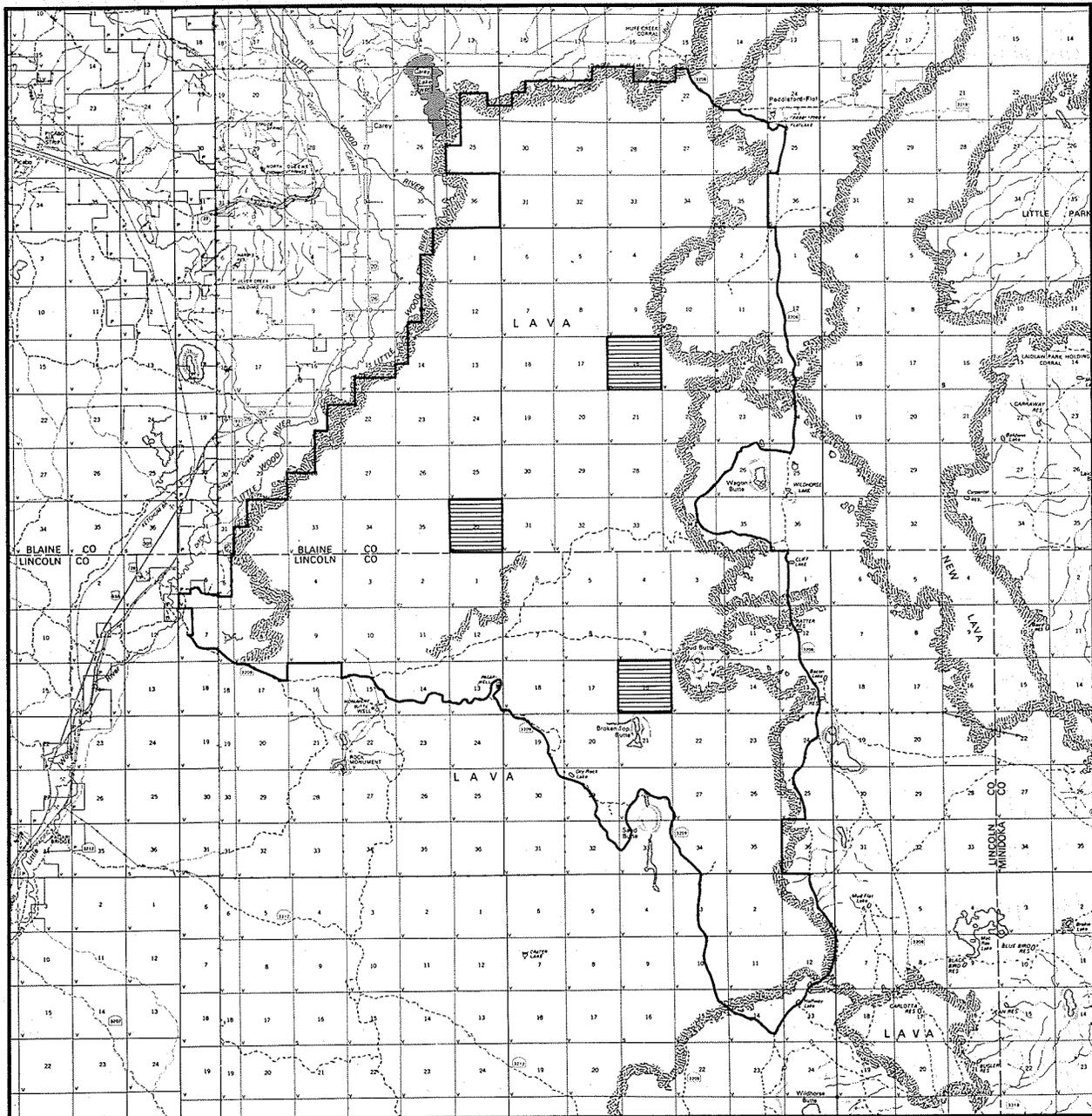
The WSA's large size and remoteness, in combination with the topographic relief provided by pressure ridges, buttes and craters, offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in an arid environment. Recreation opportunities include hiking, camping, hunting and spelunking.

The Raven's Eye WSA contains a tremendous variety of volcanic features including pressure ridges, lava cascades, subsidence craters, lava blisters, buttes and pahoehoe and aa lava flows. This variety is of scientific and educational interest.

The Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem is the ecosystem represented in the WSA. 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).

Conflicts with existing resource uses are limited. Existing grazing management would continue. Sheep camp related vehicle use would impact solitude and primitive recreation. Because only a small percentage of the area would be affected over a limited time period (April through mid-June and mid-October through December), the impact would be negligible.

The all wilderness recommendation would have an adverse impact on the implementation of proposed rangeland development projects. Wilderness management restrictions would preclude a proposed prescribed burning and seeding project.



T. 1 S.

T. 2 S.

T. 2 S.

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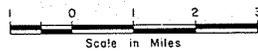
T. 4 S.

R. 20 E. | R. 21 E.

R. 21 E. | R. 22 E.

R. 22 E. | R. 23 E.

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



**ID-57-10
RAVEN'S EYE
PROPOSAL**

APRIL 1988

**Table 1 -- Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area
RAVEN'S EYE WSA**

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	67,110
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	1,920
Total	69,030

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	67,110
BLM (outside WSA)	0
Split Estate (within WSA)	0
Split Estate (outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	67,110
Inholdings (state, private)	1,920
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

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

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Raven's Eye WSA is natural in appearance. The majority of the WSA is unaffected by human impacts. Six vehicle trails totaling 20 miles traverse the area. The vehicle trails are used primarily by sheepherders and hunters and vegetation is growing between the tracks. Some of the trails are used so rarely that vegetation is growing in the ruts as well. One of the trails is partially obscured by wind-blown sand. Two fences and a fenced enclosure (Flat Top Corral) exist within the area. The fence is 5.75 miles long. The fences are noticeable only from a short distance.

Two seedings of crested wheatgrass cover 1,140 acres along the WSA's southwest and south-central edge. Seeded aerially in 1973, crested wheatgrass can now be found in numerous pockets of less than ten acres, broken up by rocky terrain and native vegetation. The seedings' indefinite boundaries and the interspersions of rocky outcrops and native vegetation reduce the visual impacts. Cheatgrass, a non-native species that invades after wildfires, also affects the naturalness of the WSA.

One stock water pond, Halfway Lake, is located just inside the WSA's southeastern boundary. An old canal passes through the WSA's southern edge. It is difficult to find in most locations.

B. Solitude

The Raven's Eye WSA provides outstanding opportunities for solitude. The area's size, topographic variety, remoteness and proximity to the Great Rift and Sand Butte WSAs combine to provide opportunities for solitude that are among the best in BLM's Shoshone District.

Vehicle traffic along the WSA's margin and agricultural activity along the WSA's western edge are visible from a small portion of the WSA. The impact on the WSA's outstanding opportunities for solitude is insignificant.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The Raven's Eye WSA provides outstanding opportunities for a variety of recreation opportunities include hiking, camping, hunting, spelunking, photography and nature study. The combination of rugged terrain, lack of reliable water sources, absence of recreational facilities and the WSA's size add challenge and risk to the recreational opportunities. Recreational use of the WSA is estimated at less than 500 visitor days annually. The majority of this use occurs in the spring and fall.

D. Special Features

The Raven's Eye WSA offers significant scientific and educational values. The tremendous variety of volcanic features including pressure ridges, lava cascades, subsidence craters, lava blisters and pahoehoe and aa lava offer opportunities for geologic studies. The variety of topographic features, from buttes to vistas of grasslands and lava flows, offers high scenic values. In addition, the area provides habitat for burrowing owls, which are on the sensitive list for the State of Idaho.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Raven's Eye WSA would add an ecosystem presently represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) by one area with 30,245 acres. There are 11 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
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 Raven's Eye 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 Raven's Eye 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 landform and ecosystem is ten miles to the east. The Raven's Eye WSA as wilderness would not help balance the geographic distribution of opportunities to attain diverse wilderness experiences. Rather, designation would expand opportunities in the NWPS currently available only within the Craters of the Moon National Monument.

Manageability

The Raven's Eye WSA can reasonably be managed as wilderness to preserve values now present in the area. Conflicts with existing resource uses are limited. Continuation of existing livestock operations is a minor manageability conflict. Sheep camp related vehicle use on vehicle trails in the WSA would impact opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. However, the vehicle use would affect less than 30 percent of the WSA for a limited time during the year (April through mid-June and mid-October through December).

Wilderness management would restrict fire suppression activities. Limitations would result in larger wildfires burning through the southern part of the WSA, increasing the potential for the spread of cheatgrass.

There are three state inholdings totaling 1,920 acres in the WSA. The three sections are presently used solely for grazing. Based on U.S. Geological Survey/Bureau of Mines mineral reports for the area, mineral development of these sections is not anticipated. The sections have been identified for acquisition through an exchange with the state.

The Sand Butte WSA lies adjacent to and south, separated from the Raven's Eye WSA by only a road. This 20,792 acre WSA has similar high quality wilderness values and is also recommended suitable for wilderness designation. The proximity of the Sand Butte WSA enhances the manageability of the Raven's Eye WSA.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The Raven's Eye WSA has zero petroleum potential (Miller 1983), is classified as not prospectively valuable for geothermal resources (BLM 1985) and has low potential for locatable and saleable minerals. The mineral estates in the WSA are in federal ownership and are open to mineral entry. There are no mining claims or mineral leases within 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-57-10 (RAVEN'S EYE)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (ALL WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Resources	<p>All wilderness values would be totally maintained in approximately 65% of the WSA including the Craters of the Moon Lava Flow areas and older lava flows in the southeast and southwest parts of the WSA.</p> <p>Wilderness values in the remainder of the WSA would be seasonally impacted by vehicle use related to sheep camps and fence maintenance. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in approximately 30% of the WSA would be degraded during the period from April through mid-June. Wilderness values in the southern and eastern parts of the WSA would benefit from the elimination of recreational ORV use.</p> <p>Restrictions on fire management could result in larger wildfires, increasing the potential for the spread of cheatgrass in the southern part of the WSA.</p> <p>Acquisition of 1,920 acres of state land in-holdings would enhance natural values and opportunities for solitude and the manageability of the area.</p>	<p>All wilderness values would be maintained in the young, sparsely vegetated Craters of the Moon Lava Flow areas of the WSA (about 55% of the area). Wilderness values in the remainder of the WSA would be reduced by a brush-control project, range management related vehicle use and recreational ORV use.</p> <p>Natural values would be lost on 1,740 acres in the northeast part of the WSA as a result of brush control and drill seeding of crested wheatgrass. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in approximately 30% of the WSA would be seriously degraded from April through mid-June as a result of sheep camp related vehicle use. Vehicle use to inspect seedings and fences and to maintain fences would also degrade opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.</p> <p>The surface disturbance and sights and sounds of vehicles associated with recreational ORV use would degrade all wilderness values.</p> <p>Low-use vehicle trails would be maintained by ORV travel with the possibility of being expanded slightly. However, no increase in visitor use is projected above current levels and impacts would be confined to the existing trails.</p>
Impacts on Recreational ORV Use	<p>Recreational ORV use of less than 500 visitor days annually would be foregone. The impacts of shifting this use to other public lands would be negligible. Vehicle access for hunters would not be allowed.</p>	<p>There would be no impact on recreational ORV and hunting use.</p>
Impacts on Grazing Facility Maintenance and Construction	<p>Existing cattle and sheep grazing practices would continue. Range developments would be inspected on foot or horseback and repaired with vehicle support. This would increase the labor cost by 24%. Prescribed burning and seeding would not occur.</p>	<p>Existing cattle and sheep grazing practices would continue. Existing range development inspections and maintenance would continue. Prescribed burning and seeding would occur on 1,740 acres.</p>
Impacts on Fire Management	<p>Full suppression including use of pumper trucks, helicopters and bulldozers within the WSA would not occur.</p>	<p>There would be no impact on fire management.</p>

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Designation of the area as wilderness would have no or minimal effects on the local social and economic situation.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During public review of the Draft EIS, 14 comments supporting wilderness designation were received, making Raven's Eye WSA the most supported WSA analyzed in the DEIS. Nine of these comments contained no supporting reasons. The five comments with supporting reasons cited the area's resource values, wilderness opportunities and its value as a logical extension of the Sand Butte WSA. One comment cited the WSA's potential for gold associated with paleo hot springs as a reason to oppose wilderness designation of the area.

The U.S. Department of Energy, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Department of Health and Welfare, Department of Lands, Transportation Department, Department of Water Resources and Idaho State Historical Society commented on the Draft EIS. None of these comments specifically addressed the Raven's Eye WSA.