

Borah Peak Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 3,100 acres

The Borah Peak WSA (ID-47-4) is located in Custer County 15 miles northwest of Mackay, Idaho. The WSA includes 3,100 acres of BLM lands and surrounds 640 acres of state lands. The WSA is bounded on the north and east by the Challis National Forest, on the south by Sawmill Gulch and west by power lines. The WSA consists of steep, west-sloping terrain. Vegetation is sagebrush-grass with scattered mountain mahogany.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Statewide Small Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) filed in September 1989. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative; a no wilderness alternative; and an all wilderness plus additional acreage alternative, which was the proposed action in the EIS.

A 780 acre tract adjacent to the WSA was included in the study process under authority granted in Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and is recommended for wilderness designation. The entire 3,880 acres of federal lands are shown as the Borah Peak Proposal map.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

**3,880 acres recommended for
wilderness**

**0 acres recommended for
nonwilderness**

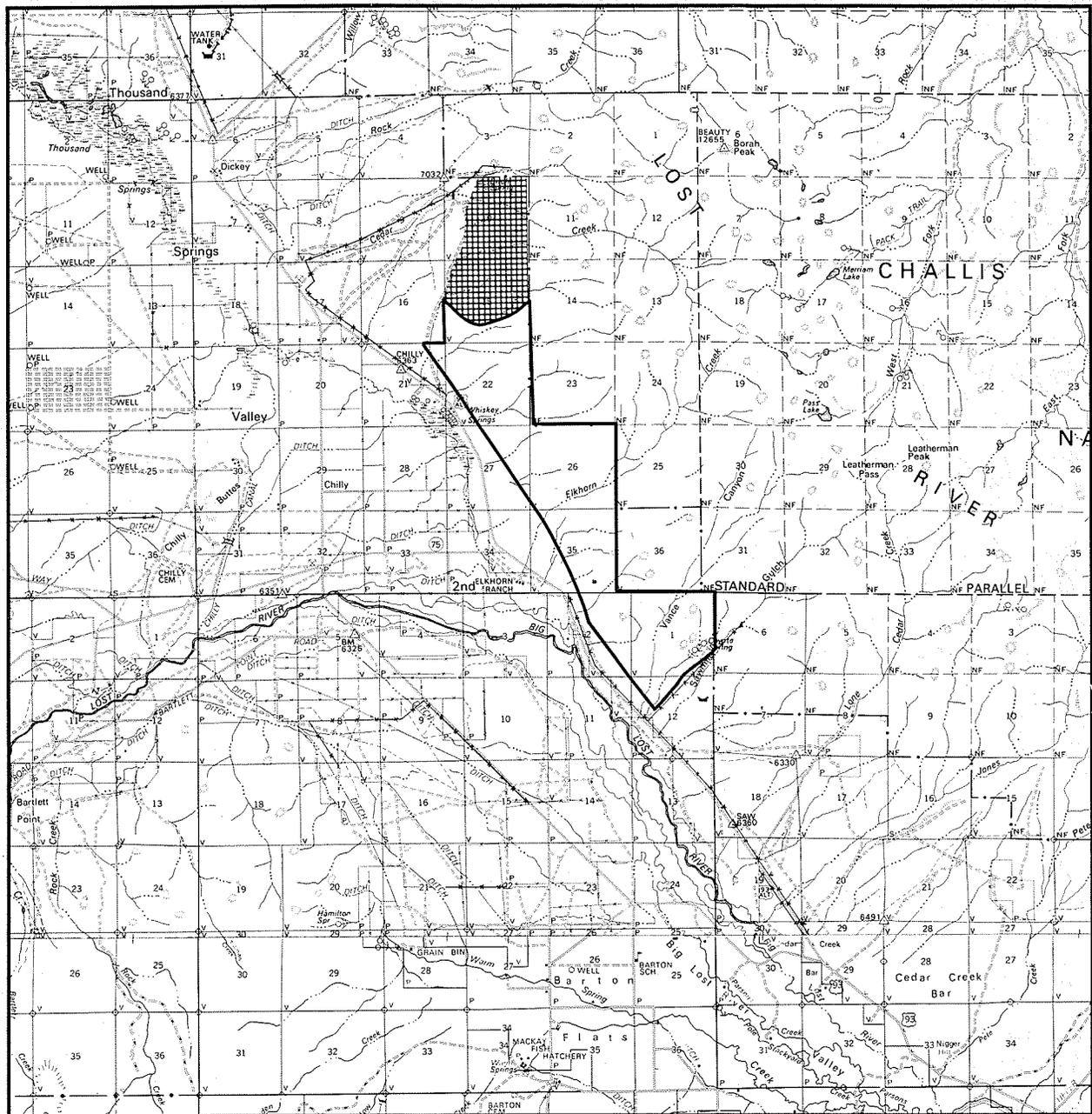
The recommendation is to designate the entire Borah Peak WSA (3,100 acres) as wilderness. Also, 780 acres outside the WSA are recommended as wilderness. The additional acreage offers outstanding naturalness and presents a more logical boundary. The environmentally preferable alternative is the all wilderness 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 WSA lies west of the U.S. Forest Service RARE II Unit Borah Peak which has been recommended for wilderness and shares a six mile common border. The WSA, when combined with the U.S. Forest Service's, would provide a clear and logical western boundary, a powerline corridor that is very easily identified.

The western slope is extremely steep on its eastern edge and drops into gentle terrain on its western boundary. When combined with the adjacent U.S. Forest Service RARE II Unit, the area offers an outstanding opportunity for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation. By itself, the WSA does not offer these outstanding opportunities.

The area, when combined with the RARE II lands, offers two special features that attract visitors. The first is Borah Peak itself which, at 12,655 feet, is the highest point in Idaho. This spectacular mountain gives the visitor the feeling of approaching the "top of the world" and seems to spread out as far as the eye can see. The second feature is the outstanding geologic evidence of the powerful Challis Earthquake that occurred in 1983. Currently, the USGS is studying the area and wilderness designation would help preserve its characteristics.

The recommendation for wilderness will further apply to the state land inholdings acquired through exchange or purchase. Appendix I lists all inholdings and provides additional information on acquisition of inholdings and split estate minerals.



R.21 E.

R.22 E.

R.22 E.

R.23 E.

RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS

LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

SPLIT ESTATE

STATE

PRIVATE



Scale in Miles

**ID-47-4
BORAH PEAK
PROPOSAL**

JANUARY 1989

T. 9 N.

T. 9 N.

T. 8 N.

T. 8 N.

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

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	3,100
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	640
Total	3,740

Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary

BLM (within WSA)	3,100
BLM (outside WSA)	780
Split Estate (within WSA) ¹	0
Split Estate (outside WSA) ¹	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness	3,880
Inholdings (state, private) ¹	640
State land (outside WSA)	0

Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness

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

¹Appendix I is a detailed description of inholdings and split estate tracts included within the study. For purposes of this report, split estate lands are defined only as those lands with federal surface and nonfederal subsurface (minerals). Lands that have federal minerals but non-federal surface should be classified in this report by the owner of the surface estate.

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Borah Peak WSA is predominantly natural with few human imprints. The area is a fairly steep shoulder of Borah Peak, the tallest mountain in Idaho. The adjacent RARE II Area enhances the naturalness and dominates the WSA. The majority of human imprints consists of vehicle ways and spring improvements located along the northern boundary and around Birch Springs.

The predominant vegetation is sagebrush-grasslands with scattered stands of mountain mahogany which gives way to scattered pine and fir. When combined with the adjacent RARE II lands, the WSA provides an excellent example of transition zones in an outstanding natural environment.

B. Solitude

The Borah Peak WSA offers outstanding opportunities for solitude, especially when the unit is considered a portion of the adjacent larger RARE II Area which shares a six-mile long border. The WSA features rapidly changing vegetation zones and gives the visitor a sense of solitude that steep, opening mountain canyons can provide. However, due to the WSA's lack of vegetative screening and general openness of the lower terrain, outside sights and sounds are present. These are not significantly imposing but they do lessen the feeling of solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The Borah Peak WSA, in combination with the adjacent 116,000 acre RARE II Area, is relatively large, diverse and rugged and contains outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

The high mountain peaks of the RARE II Area and the lower elevation Borah Peak WSA provide outstanding hiking and backpacking opportunities. Opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, sightseeing and photography are excellent.

D. Special Features

The WSA is contiguous with RARE II Unit 4-120 Borah Peak which, at 12,655 feet in elevation, is the highest point in Idaho and the focal and destination point for the area. Also, the WSA includes evidence of faulting that occurred in the Challis Earthquake of 1983. The faulting offers an outstanding characteristic of earthquakes in a natural environment. Preservation would offer the visitor an outstanding opportunity to view faulting.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Borah Peak WSA would add an ecosystem not presently represented in Idaho. However, this ecosystem is represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System by four designated areas with 76,129 acres. There are eight other BLM study areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Rocky Mountain Forest Province				
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	4	76,129	23	247,843
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem	0	0	8	162,710

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

The Borah Peak WSA is within a five-hour drive of one major population center, 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

Idaho has the largest wilderness area in the contiguous 48 states, the 2.2 million acre Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness. Wilderness designation would not help distribute wilderness areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System but would further concentrate wilderness area in Idaho.

Manageability

The Borah Peak WSA and the recommended portion outside the WSA can reasonably be managed as wilderness to preserve values now present in the area. The recommendation provides logical and identifiable boundaries when combined with the adjacent RARE II Area. One section (640 acres) of state land inside the boundary would be acquired.

Fences would probably be built along the west side of the WSA in order to control ORV access and regular patrolling would be necessary. The inclusion of the WSA as wilderness would make a more manageable boundary for the adjacent RARE II Area which would better protect the area's wilderness values.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

WGM, Inc., Mining and Geological Consultants, prepared a GEM assessment for the Borah Peak WSA in 1983. The Borah Peak WSA is classified as having low favorability for the accumulation of metallic minerals, uranium and thorium deposits and nonmetallic minerals based on limited direct evidence. No metallic or nonmetallic occurrences are reported in the units underlying the WSA.

All of the Borah Peak WSA is classified as moderately favorable for the accumulation of oil and gas based on limited direct evidence. The regional geological environment is favorable and both potential source and reservoir rocks occur in the subsurface of the WSA.

The southwestern edge of the Borah Peak WSA is classified as having low favorability for low-to-high temperature (40°C to over 150°C) geothermal resources based on indirect evidence. This area encompasses the lower elevations along major lineaments or along possible faults. The remainder of the WSA is classified as unfavorable for low to high temperature (40°C to over 150°C) geothermal resources based on indirect evidence.

The Borah Peak WSA is classified as unfavorable for sodium and potassium deposits and other leaseable commodities based on limited direct evidence. No rocks known to contain these commodities or other leaseable commodities underlie the WSA.

The southwestern edge of the Borah Peak WSA is classified as moderately favorable for sand and gravel deposits based on limited direct evidence. Geological mapping shows this area to be underlain by alluvial fan deposits. The remainder of the WSA is classified as unfavorable for saleable resources based on limited direct evidence. Geological mapping indicates the presence of unfavorable host rocks for any saleable commodities.

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-47-4 (BORAH PEAK)

ISSUE TOPICS	NO WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PROPOSED ACTION (ALL WILDERNESS PLUS ADDI- TIONAL WILDERNESS ACREAGE)
Impacts on USFS Borah Peak Proposed Wilderness	No Impact.	Proposed wilderness area's values slightly enhanced.	Proposed wilderness area's values slightly enhanced.
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Values lost on 97 acres due to timber harvest.	Values preserved on 3,880 acres.	Values preserved on 3,880 acres.
Impacts on Deer and Antelope Winter Range	No Impact.	No Impact.	No Impact.
Impacts on Motorized Recreation	No Impact.	10 visitor days of ORV use displaced annually.	10 visitor days of ORV use displaced annually.
Impacts on Energy and Mineral Resource Management	No Impact.	Opportunity to explore for and develop resource would be lost on 3,880 acres.	Opportunity to explore for and develop resource would be lost on 3,100 acres.
Impacts on Livestock and Grazing Resource Management	No Impact.	No Impact.	No Impact.
Impacts on Timber Harvest	No Impact.	Opportunity to harvest 14 MBF annually would be lost.	Opportunity to harvest 14 MBF annually would be lost.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

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

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, 27 written comments were received of which 14 specifically addressed the Borah Peak WSA. Eleven comments favored wilderness for the WSA. Three commenters opposed wilderness designation for the WSA.

Public hearings were held at Idaho Falls, Boise and Challis, Idaho. Seventeen persons testified. Seven supported wilderness designation specifically for the EIS and one opposed wilderness designation of any kind. However, no comments were received specifically for the Borah Peak WSA.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the beauty of the area, its value as a logical extension of the Borah Peak RARE II Area and the fact that the area has a portion of the faulting left behind by the Challis earthquake of 1983.

Those opposed to wilderness designation were concerned with a general "lock-up" of the land, effects on grazing costs, that ORV use was higher than stated in the EIS and that the area did not have any special qualities making it deserving of wilderness protection.

The Bureau of Reclamation, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, the Idaho State Historical Society, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service all commented on the Draft EIS. The Idaho State Historical Society voiced its concern that archaeological and historical inventories had not been completed. The other agencies did not identify a specific conflict with any of the alternatives.

APPENDIX I --BORAH PEAK WSA
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Nonfederal Holdings
Within Areas Recommended for Designation(1)

Legal Description	Total Acreage	Number of Owners	Type of Ownership by Estate	Type of Ownership by Estate	Presently Proposed for Acquisition	Preferred Method of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition	Estimated Cost of Acquisition
			Surface Estate	Subsurface Estate			Land Costs (in \$)	Processing Costs (in \$)
Parcel No. 1 T. 9 N., R. 22 E. Sec. 36	640	1	State	State	Yes	Exchange	N/A	5,000

(1)The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a formal appraised value of the land or mineral estate but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring nonfederal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.