

Boulder Creek Wilderness Study Area

1. The Study Area -- 1,930 acres

The Boulder Creek WSA (ID-46-13) is located in Custer County 27 miles southwest of Challis, Idaho. The WSA includes 1,930 acres of BLM lands (see Table 1). There are no private or state inholdings. The WSA is bounded on the north by state land and the Boulder Creek Road and on the south by public lands. The western boundary is formed by state lands and the Challis National Forest. The WSA consists of moderately steep terrain dropping from 8,100 feet on the west to 6,140 feet of elevation on the east side. Vegetation is primarily sagebrush with pockets of Douglas-fir. Little Boulder Creek flows through the center of the WSA and provides both anadromous and resident fish habitat.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Small Wilderness Study Area Statewide Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in September 1989. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative; and a no wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report.

2. Recommendation and Rationale

**0 acres recommended for
wilderness**

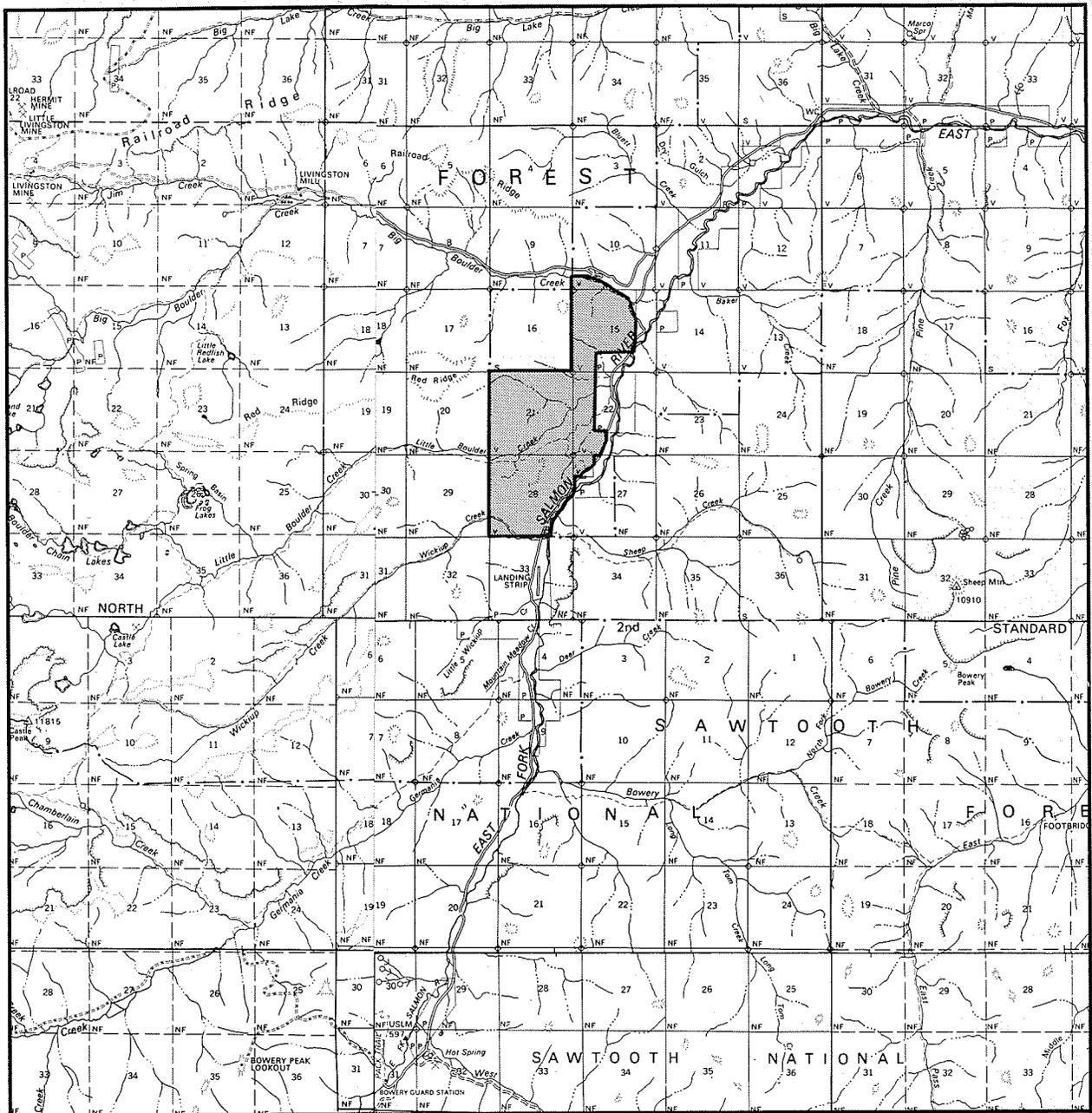
**1,930 acres recommended for
nonwilderness**

The recommendation for the Boulder Creek WSA is to not designate the area as wilderness and release the WSA 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 entire 1,930 acres of federal land are shown on the Boulder Creek Proposal map.

The WSA was studied for wilderness with the contiguous 433,000 acre U.S. Forest Service RARE II Area Boulder-White Clouds. The U.S. Forest Service determined that the RARE II Area was not suitable for wilderness designation. Since the RARE II Area is not recommended suitable, BLM has determined that the Boulder Creek WSA cannot stand on its own merits and lacks the necessary characteristics to qualify for designation.

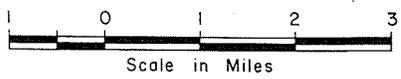
The quality of the wilderness values was the key consideration in the recommendation. These values were considered outstanding when combined with the adjacent RARE II Area. On their own, however, they were not considered to merit inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The WSA generally appears natural but there are two short water pipeline developments which impact naturalness locally. Opportunities for solitude are similar to those afforded by the thousands of acres of land adjacent to the WSA. The perception of these values is lessened by the area's small size and lack of vegetative screening which allow the outside sites and sounds of national forest, farm, ranch and recreational activities (primarily motorcycles) to be present throughout the WSA.

The WSA does offer outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation when combined with the adjacent RARE II Area. However, these qualities are diminished by the area's small size and lack of vegetative screening. The values that are present are similar to thousands of acres of adjacent lands.



R.16 E. | R.17 E. | R.17 E. | R.18 E.

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



ID-46-13
BOULDER CREEK
PROPOSAL

JANUARY 1989

T. 10 N.
 T. 9 N.
 T. 9 N.
 T. 8 N.

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

Within Wilderness Study Area

BLM (surface and subsurface)	1,930
Split Estate (BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings (state, private)	0
Total	1,930

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	1,930
Split Estate	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness	1,930
Inholdings (state, private)	0

3. Criteria Considered in Developing the Wilderness Recommendations

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

The Boulder Creek WSA is essentially natural with few human imprints. The WSA is moderately steep, rising from 6,140 feet on the east side to more than 8,100 feet in elevation on the west side. However, the proximity to the Boulder Creek and East Fork Roads coupled with the WSA's small size (1,930 acres), lack of vegetative screening and narrow width, cause the sights and sounds of adjacent traffic and farm/ranch activity to be apparent to the visitor throughout the WSA. Vehicles travel this road on a regular basis, especially local farm, ranch and recreation traffic. These roads are the only vehicular access into tens of thousands of acres of U.S. Forest Service lands.

B. Solitude

Opportunities for solitude do exist on the WSA, primarily provided through its hilly nature. However, due to the WSA's small size and lack of vegetation, the outside influences of the Boulder Creek and East Ford Roads are noticeable to the visitor throughout the WSA. These roads provide access to large U.S. Forest Service acreage including the popular Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The East Fork of the Salmon River Canyon narrows into a bottleneck and, when combined with the WSA's narrow width, the visitor is kept within a 1.25 mile wide corridor adjacent and above the East Fork Road.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

Boulder Creek WSA does offer opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Possible activities include hiking, backpacking, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, photography, bird watching or sightseeing. However, the area's small size, narrow width and proximity to the Boulder Creek and East Fork Road lessens these opportunities by keeping the visitor within a narrow corridor just above these roads, within earshot.

D. Special Features

The WSA lacks any special features which could be called a focal or destination point for visitors.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System

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

Wilderness designation of the Boulder Creek WSA would not add a new ecosystem or landform to the NWPS. The Boulder Creek WSA represents the Rocky Mountain Forest Province/Western Spruce-Fir Forest ecosystem. This ecosystem is represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) by 41 designated areas with 4,756,981 acres. There are seven other BLM areas in the state under study with this ecosystem. This information is summarized on Table 2.

TABLE 2

Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
Rocky Mountain Forest Province	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
Western Spruce Fir Forest Ecosystem	41	4,756,981	9	64,171
	<u>IDAHO</u>			
Western Spruce Fir Forest Ecosystem	2	26,910	7	37,261

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

The Boulder 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

Wilderness designation of the Boulder Creek WSA would not contribute to balancing the geographic distribution of areas within the NWPS but would further concentrate wilderness areas in Idaho.

Manageability

The WSA could be managed as a wilderness area in terms of access and existing imprints. However, its small size (less than 2,000 acres) and its long, extremely narrow shape (.25 mile at one point) could significantly restrict the ability to retain wilderness values in this area. The private lands and the public road on the east side degrade the solitude and opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation by bringing in the sights and sounds of farm/ranch activities and motorized use of the road.

Energy and Minerals Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines prepared a mineral assessment for the WSA in 1983. Evidence of metallic mineralization is lacking in the WSA. The WSA has low to no potential for geothermal energy resources.

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-46-13 (BOULDER CREEK)

ISSUE TOPICS	PROPOSED ACTION (NO WILDERNESS)	ALL WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on USFS Boulder-White Cloud Roadless Areas	No impact.	No impact.
Impacts on Wilderness Values	No impact.	Values preserved.
Impacts on Water Quality	No impact.	No impact.
Impacts on Motorized Recreation	No impact.	20 visitor days displaced annually.
Impacts on Energy and Mineral Development	No impact.	No significant impact.
Impacts on Livestock Grazing and Range Management	No impact.	No impact.

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 15 specifically addressed the Boulder Creek WSA. Public hearings were held at Idaho Falls, Boise and Challis, Idaho. Of the 15 specific written comments received, 12 comments favored wilderness for the WSA. Three commenters opposed wilderness designation for the WSA. Seventeen persons testified. Of the 17 persons who testified, five supported wilderness designation of the Boulder Creek WSA, one person opposed and one individual had no opinion.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the beauty of the area, its enhancement of the adjacent RARE II Boulder-White Clouds Area which has not been recommended for wilderness and its enhancement of wilderness opportunities.

Those opposed to wilderness designation were concerned with a general "lock-up" of the land including the regulations that would eliminate motorized uses. One individual specifically stated wilderness designation would preclude responsible fire suppression in the WSA.

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 Bureau of Indian Affairs commented on the impact of nondesignation on anadromous fisheries. The Idaho State Historical Society voiced its concern that archaeological and historical inventories have not been completed. The other agencies did not identify a specific conflict with any of the alternatives.