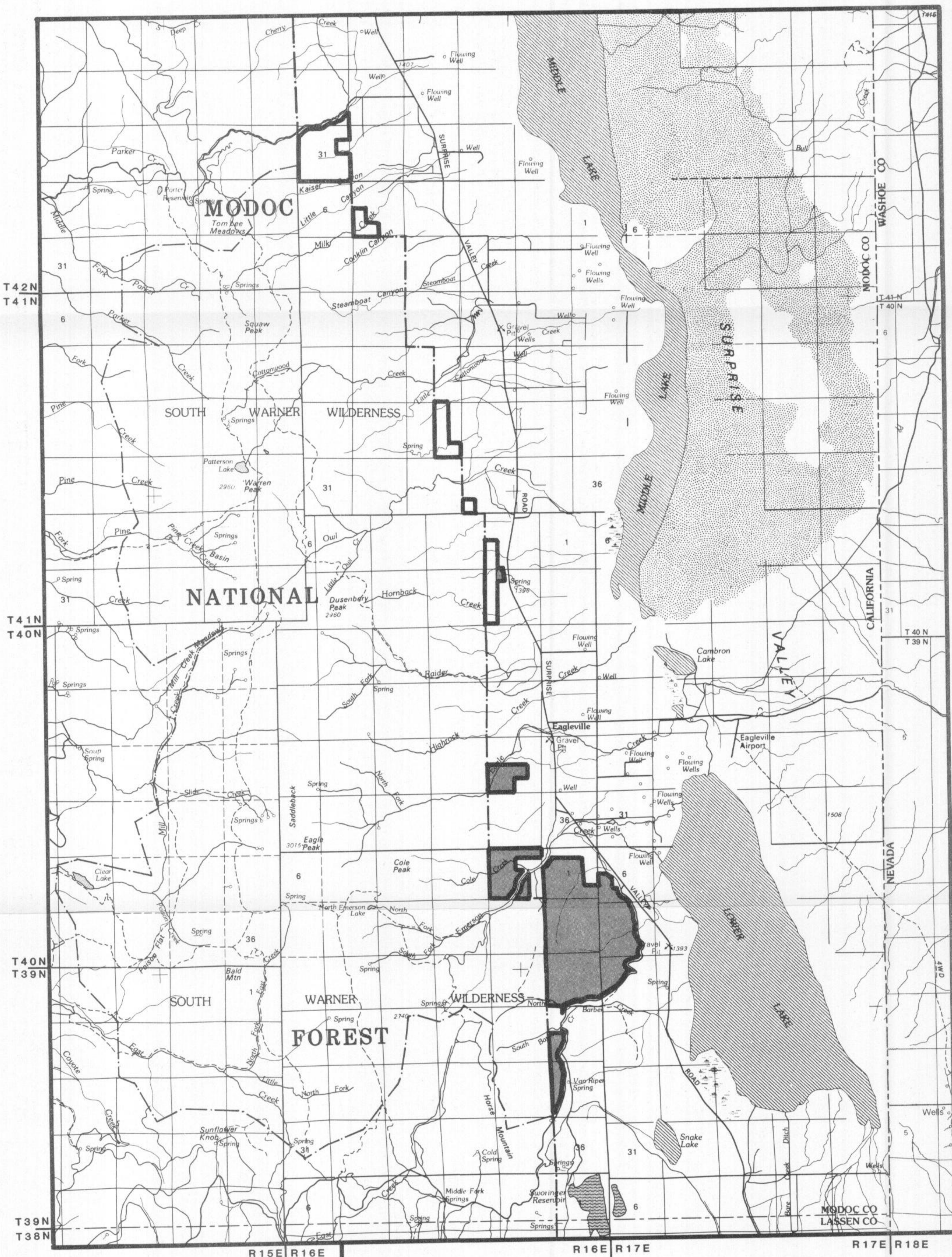
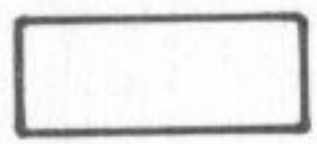



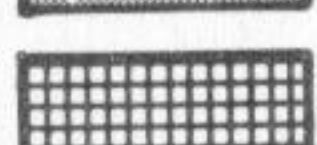



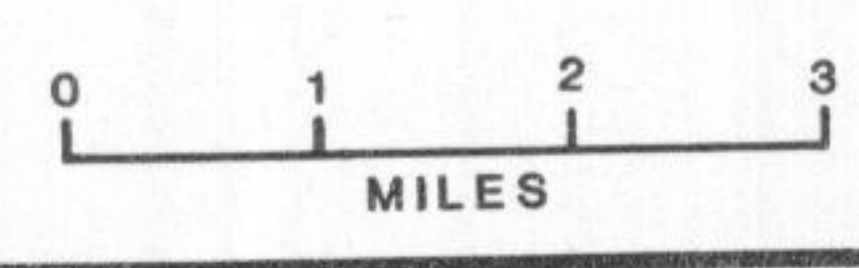
South Warner Contiguous

CA-020-708



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

**South Warner
Proposal
MAP-1**



020-708
JUNE, 1988

SOUTH WARNER CONTIGUOUS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-020-708)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 4,330 acres

The South Warner Contiguous WSA is located in Modoc County, California, approximately 15 miles south of Cedarville. The WSA consists of nine separate parcels located along 18 miles of the east boundary of the South Warner Wilderness Area, which is a part of the Modoc National Forest (USFS). The nine parcels range in size from 40 acres to 2,229 acres. The adjacent South Warner Wilderness Area is 70,385 acres in size. There are no private or State lands within the WSA (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA parcels form portions of the lower and middle slopes of the east side of the Warner Mountains. This side of the range is dominated by large-scale faulting which results in steep slopes and exposed rock faces. The exposed rocks are mostly sedimentary and deep canyons have eroded into the face. The crest of the Warners effectively block precipitation, resulting in barren slopes with scattered brush and tree cover. The combination of eroded topography and sparse vegetation creates a scenic "badlands" type of landscape. Many of the canyons contains live streams with associated riparian zones of aspen, conifers and dense shrubs, which provide contrast to the adjacent barren hillsides.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). It is included in the California Section 603 Wilderness Study Report package, as it contains a suitable recommendation which was felt should be included for congressional consideration. The WSA was studied as a part of the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas' Environmental Impact Statement finalized in September 1988. There were three alternatives analyzed in the EIS: an all-wilderness alternative, a partial-wilderness alternative designating 27% of the WSA as wilderness, and a no-wilderness alternative.

2. <u>RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE</u> -	1,161	acres recommended for wilderness
	3,169	BLM acres recommended for nonwilderness

Twenty-seven percent partial wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. 3,169 acres in this WSA are released for uses other than wilderness.

The all-wilderness alternative is the environmentally-preferred alternative because it would result in the least change from the existing natural environment over time. The selected alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The part of the WSA recommended for wilderness is recommended primarily because it is land that comprises part of a bighorn sheep management area that fits into the existing USFS South Warner Wilderness Area. The areas not recommended for wilderness do not add any values not already present in the existing adjacent South Warner Wilderness.

The area recommended suitable for wilderness is in a natural setting with almost a complete lack of evidence of the impacts of man. It is steep, rugged and scenic, with opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. Recreational use is projected to stay at present low levels due to both the steepness of terrain and the lack of access from the east and the distance from the main trail system in the South Warner Wilderness to the west. This lack of access is a positive benefit for the management of bighorn sheep.

There are no significant resource conflicts that would be lost to wilderness management. Mineral values are projected as low. No other forms of development are proposed or projected to be proposed in the area.

The main reason that the northern area is recommended as suitable is that it is part of the habitat for bighorn sheep. The USFS lands adjacent to these recommended lands is a bighorn sheep management area. A herd had been reintroduced into the area and was increasing in size until a recent outbreak of viral pneumonia exterminated them. Further study is needed to insure that future reintroductions can be protected from a recurrence of this disaster. The habitat itself was supporting the sheep and the initial herd was increasing in size, showing that this habitat would support a good-sized herd of bighorn sheep. The BLM parcels recommended-suitable were being used by the sheep and make a logical extension of the adjacent USFS South Warner Wilderness lands. The recommended-suitable wilderness parcels could easily be managed to preserve wilderness values. The steep, rugged terrain naturally precludes any use of motorized vehicles. There are no resource conflicts now or projected in the future that would cause any management problems. No vehicular access ways would need to be closed.

The parcels that were not recommended as suitable are outside the bighorn sheep management area and would not add any new values to the existing South Warner Wilderness Area. They repeat terrain features and vegetative types that are already represented by thousands of acres within the South Warner Wilderness. They would be manageable as wilderness with only minor manageability concerns. The three southernmost parcels either have a road through them (the Emerson Campground road) or have a boundary road that could allow vehicles to pull off the existing road onto lands within the WSA. There is one mile of existing vehicle way that would remain available for vehicular use.

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(Surface and subsurface)	4,330
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		4,330
<u>Within Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>		
BLM	(Within WSA)	1,161
BLM	(Outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(Within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(Outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		1,161
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		
BLM	(Surface and subsurface)	3,169
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		3,169

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

1. Naturalness

The rugged, steep topography has contributed to keeping this area in a natural condition with only a few minor impacts from man's activity. These are found in the three most southerly parcels. All the remaining parcels are entirely natural in character. The most southerly parcel is crossed by a quarter-mile of fence with an adjacent vehicle-way that continues for an additional quarter-mile. Both are minimal disturbances. The next parcels north, which are the largest of the parcels, have two developed springs, one of which is fenced, and two vehicle-ways totalling 1-1/2 miles. This parcel also has two miles of bladed fire line constructed in 1984 to prevent a fire from burning into the South Warner Wilderness. The fire lines were water-barred and vehicle

access was closed after the fire. The fire scar itself covers approximately 910 acres and is naturally revegetating with grasses, forbs and shrubs found on-site before the fire. These impacts are minimal and do not significantly impact the overall naturalness of the area. The third parcel north is bisected by the Emerson Road, which is a cherrystemmed road to the USFS Emerson Campground, a small enclave of nonwilderness projecting into the southeastern corner of the South Warner Wilderness Area. All the remaining parcels have no identified impacts to naturalness. The overall landscape of the WSA has retained its natural character.

2. Solitude

The WSA does contain outstanding opportunities for solitude. Although the individual parcels are small, the eroded topography, deep canyons and ravines provide numerous opportunities for the visitors to find solitude. There are some impacts on solitude as these parcels are close to agricultural fields in the Surprise Valley. When people are on the ridgelines, they would be aware of farming activity and traffic on Modoc County Road #1, which is sometimes less than one mile away.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The WSA contains opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation associated with hunting, hiking, wildlife observation, rock climbing and cross-country skiing. The opportunities in the middle parcels are somewhat limited by a lack of legal access across farmers' fields on the east and a lack of physical access from the west due to steep, rugged terrain and distance from the USFS trail system in the adjacent South Warner Wilderness. At the north and south ends, access is provided by the Granger Creek, Emerson and Patterson guard station roads.

4. Special Features

The WSA contains a small portion of the year-long habitat of the Warner Mountain bighorn sheep herd. The herd was recently wiped out by a pneumonia epidemic. At this time it has not been determined if a reintroduction will be attempted.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems: This WSA contains 4,330 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Sagebrush Steppe ecosystem. Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a new ecosystem or landform to the NWPS.

The WSA is in the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem and is contiguous to one of the two existing wilderness areas representing this ecosystem. They are the adjacent South Warner and the Jarbridge Wilderness, which is in Nevada.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Sagebrush Steppe	3	76,699	136	4,366,010
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Sagebrush Steppe	1	31,295	4	148,101

2. Expanding the Opportunity for Solitude or Primitive Recreation Within a Day's Driving Time (5 hours) of Major Population Centers
The South Warner Contiguous WSA is within a five-hour drive of five major metropolitan areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

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
<u>California</u>				
Redding	14	1,236,503	11	344,633
Chico	16	1,286,873	13	430,822
Yuba City	44	4,951,805	85	2,459,500
<u>Oregon</u>				
Medford	31	2,440,081	21	730,038
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	175	6,940,809

3. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

There is one existing unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System within 50 air miles. It is the adjacent South Warner Wilderness, managed by the Modoc National Forest. There are eight other recommended-suitable BLM WSAs within 50 air miles of the South Warner Contiguous WSA; Massacre Rim, East Fork High Rock Canyon, High Rock Canyon, Little High Rock Canyon, High Rock Lake, Twin Peaks, Tunnison Mountain and Sheldon Contiguous.

C. Manageability

The South Warner Contiguous WSA is manageable as wilderness. The lack of existing or projected resource conflicts and the lack of physical access to most of the parcels creates a manageable wilderness. The three most southerly parcels would require more management action as they contain the two miles of ways and have either boundary roads or cherrystemmed roads that could be driven off of by hunters or others.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of Information Known at the Time of Preliminary Suitability Recommendation: At the time of the recommendation process for the South Warner Contiguous WSA, BLM Unit Resource Analysis (URA) for the

Tulead Planning Unit URA (1976) identified areas of high potential for the occurrence of geothermal and saleable resources which included portions of the WSA. A U.S. Geological Survey memorandum (October 17, 1975) also identified areas within the WSA as being prospectively valuable for oil and gas, sodium, potassium, and geothermal resources. The area encompassing the WSA was not considered valuable for locatable minerals although prospecting has occurred in the past. At the time of the WSA recommendation, there were no mining claims recorded, nor was any known mining activity taking place within the boundaries of the study area.

BLM data and information in the Affected Environment section of the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas EIS (1987) indicated the WSA has a low geologic favorability for the occurrence of mineral resources. In a mineral resource survey conducted for the Forest Service, South Warner Wilderness (Duffield and Weldin, 1976), the area was characterized as having low potential for development of economic quantities of any mineral commodity. There is a history, including visible evidence, of locatable mineral activity. An estimated 10 to 20 mining claims have been located in the WSA prior to 1955, but none are currently recorded with BLM. With the exception of limited production of optical grade calcite, little or no production had been recorded for prospects within the WSA. The potential for the occurrence of oil and gas resources was considered low based on prior volcanic activity that would have destroyed any oil and gas trapped in the rocks (Sandberg, 1983). Geothermal potential is limited by the Surprise Valley fault zone which lies to the east of the WSA and is considered low. Exploration drilling has indicated potential may be higher on the east side of the fault. At the time of the EIS, there were no mineral leases encumbering the subject lands.

The 1987 EIS (Affected Environment section) indicated no saleable mineral sites (sand and gravel) occurred within the WSA. Nearly all production in the area comes from private sources.

2. Summary of Significant New Mineral Resource Data Collected Since the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation Which Should Be Considered in the Final Decision: A mineral survey of the WSA was conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Mines during 1986 and 1987. Their final open-file report was published in 1988. The report was based on a literature search, examination of BLM and County mining records, field examination and sampling. A total of 134 rock and 31 alluvial samples were taken. No visible mineralization was observed. Sampling also failed to show economic occurrences of locatable minerals, although additional mapping and sampling was recommended for a portion of the WSA where there are indications of an epigenetic gold deposit. No oil or gas resources were identified during the study. Scott (1983, D-11) considered the region, including the WSA, to have low to zero potential. The WSA is near the Lake City-Surprise Valley KGRA. No geothermal leases exist in the WSA, nor is there any evidence of the area having been explored for geothermal resources and the potential for occurrence is considered low.

Sand and gravel resources occur within and adjacent to the WSA. Some of these occur along narrow drainages extending into the WSA, but are generally small. Larger terrace deposits similar to those occurring outside the WSA are found inside and adjacent to the area. Poor access and abundant other sources along Modoc Highway 1 would make development of the deposits within WSA highly unlikely.

The occurrence of zeolites was noted during the field exam and through sampling. The deposits were considered small, low-grade, and have low potential for future development. No sodium or potassium resources were identified.

Interest in mineral exploration is indicated by a BLM mining claim records search conducted March 25, 1988, which showed that no unpatented mining claims or mineral leases exist within the South Warner Contiguous WSA. Due to the low mineral potential of the WSA no mineral resource potential map was prepared.

E. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (PARTIAL-WILDERNESS)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	NOWILDERNESS/NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>Wilderness designation of 1,161 acres of the South Warner Contiguous WSA will result in a slight positive benefit to wilderness values. Long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts will be provided. Wilderness values within the 1,161 acres will be retained with 15 AUMs of continued livestock grazing not anticipated to affect existing wilderness values.</p> <p>Wilderness values within the 3,169 acres of the WSA not designated wilderness will generally be retained. Continued recreational OHV use on a total of 2 miles of vehicle ways will have a negligible impact on the perception of naturalness and will periodically result in minor disruptions of solitude. Continued livestock grazing at 135 AUMs is not anticipated to affect existing wilderness values with negligible impacts to solitude resulting from three vehicle trips annually to maintain the existing two spring developments and one-quarter mile of fencing. No other activities are planned within the nowilderness portion of the WSA.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation of the entire 4,330-acre South Warner Contiguous WSA would have a slight positive benefit on wilderness values. The closure of two miles of vehicle ways and elimination of 50 visitor-days of recreational OHV use would locally improve the perception of naturalness and sense of solitude. Livestock grazing use would continue at the existing level of 150 AUMs. Maintenance activities for existing livestock facilities would require three vehicle trips annually resulting in negligible impacts to solitude. No other management actions are projected for the WSA. Long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts would be provided.</p>	<p>Wilderness values within the 4,330-acre WSA would generally be retained. Continued recreational OHV use on a total of 2 miles of vehicle ways would have a negligible impact on the perception of naturalness and periodically result in minor disruptions of solitude. Continued livestock grazing at 150 AUMs is not anticipated to affect existing wilderness values with negligible impacts to solitude resulting from three vehicle trips annually to maintain the existing two spring developments and one-quarter mile of fencing. No other activities are planned within the WSA.</p>

F. LOCAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

No local social or economic impacts of any significance were identified in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

G. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives.

In preparation of the final EIS, all comments, including those from the hearing transcripts, were reviewed and considered. Comments that presented new data, questioned findings and analysis, or raised questions or issues relating to the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action or alternatives were responded to. General comments favoring a specific alternative have been noted and considered, but required no specific response. Comments addressing items outside of the scope of this EIS were not responded to.

During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 106 interested citizens, Federal, State, local agencies and private organizations submitted comments on the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas Draft EIS. Of the 106 letters, there were 70 letters which expressed either a general comment favoring a specific alternative, or were nonspecific. There were 19 letters which specifically addressed the South Warner WSA. Several that supported the proposed action of partial designation. The majority favored the designation of the entire WSAs as wilderness. There were no responses supporting no-wilderness. Those supporting the BLM recommendation thought it was balanced and left some areas for existing vehicle use. Those supporting all-wilderness mentioned the scenic nature of the WSA, its wildlife values, with bighorn sheep, in particular, receiving numerous mentions, and the lack of resource conflicts as reasons to make the area wilderness. Several people mentioned that they thought wilderness designation would eliminate domestic livestock grazing and give more area to the bighorn sheep. We replied in the Final EIS that domestic grazing is a use sanctioned by congress and is not eliminated by wilderness designation.

The Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California State Clearinghouse sent responses to the draft EIS. The Park Service said they had no comment. The Forest Service pointed out several small map changes that were corrected. The EPA supported the BLM's proposed action and appreciated the discussion on water quality. The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board said there appeared to be little difference in potential water quality impacts and asked to be informed of any future proposed changes in management of the nonwilderness areas which could affect water quality. The State of California Clearinghouse commented on fire protection and the need for wilderness closer to urban areas that were generic to all wilderness and not specific to the South Warner WSA.

No comments were received from local governments.