

FANDANGO WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 40,940 acres

The Fandango WSA (NV-060-190) is located in northeastern Nye County, Nevada, approximately 70 miles east of Tonopah. This WSA encompasses 40,940 acres in the Hot Creek Range and a small portion of Little Fish Lake Valley. The WSA is irregular in shape, measuring approximately 18 miles north to south and from three to eight miles east to west. The northwestern boundary is land net lines south to upper Fish Lake. Pott Hole Valley road, Four Mile Canyon road and short sections of unnamed roads form the southeastern boundary. The eastern boundary is North and South Sixmile Canyon roads with an unnamed road connecting Fourmile Canyon and South Sixmile Canyon. The northern boundary is Cow Canyon road and the unnamed road that connects the Cow Canyon road to the Luther Waddles Wash road and North Sixmile road.

The National Forest and Public Lands of Nevada Enhancement Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-550) transferred administrative jurisdiction of 40,410 acres in the WSA to the Toiyabe National Forest leaving 530 acres under BLM management. The wilderness recommendation for this WSA will be developed by the BLM and submitted to the Secretary of Interior, President and Congress for their consideration.

There were four alternatives analyzed in the EIS; an all wilderness alternative, a no wilderness alternative, a partial wilderness alternative which is the recommendation of this report where 31,740 acres would be designated as wilderness and 9,200 acres would be released for uses other than wilderness and a second partial wilderness alternative which would involve combining the Fandango and Morey WSAs and designating 46,300 acres as wilderness and releasing 14,760 acres for uses other than wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 31,740 acres recommended for wilderness 9,200 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate 31,740 acres as wilderness and release 9,200 acres for uses other than wilderness. The partial wilderness alternative, the recommendation of this report, would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The rugged, mountainous core along the Fandango ridge comprises the recommended portion of the Fandango WSA. A dense blanket of pinyon pine and juniper trees blankets the whole of the area leading up to little fandango ridge where alpine vegetation of grasses and low shrubs break from the timber to present the entire WSA in a sweeping vista. Views from the top of the WSA are indeed spectacular. Morey Peak rises precipitously to the east, while to the west lies the Forest Service administered Table Mountain Wilderness Area with it's high snow covered plateau. To the north lies what appears to be an endless expanse of dense pine and juniper forests, which contrasts to the stark, sparsely vegetated Hot Creek Valley to the south. Lush riparian vegetation fills the numerous canyons and draws. Brilliant fall colors fill the canyons creating veins of gold contrasting with the dark green foliage of the evergreen canopy.

South Sixmile canyon provides host to a self-propagating population of eastern brook trout. The perennial waters which flow through the riparian area, supports wild flowers in spring and summer not usually seen in the dry valleys of central Nevada. The Fandango WSA provides critical winter habitat for mule deer which number in the thousands during the peak of winter. Populations of mountain lion, elk, and wild horses also find shelter in the dense pine forests. Hot desert winds rising from the hot creek valley provides thermal lifting for the many species of raptors.

The Fandango WSA provides a multitude of recreational activities. Opportunities for hiking, backpacking, nature study, photography, and fishing are available in a picturesque setting. The large populations of deer, mountain

lion, and upland game birds attracts hunters to the area. There are numerous prehistoric sites throughout the area displaying pictographs and petroglyphs, while more recent historic sites also provide education into the area's mining heritage. Charcoal kilns located in wood canyon provide physical evidence of man's search for mineral wealth in the mining districts adjoining the WSA. The area has proven to be extremely popular with both local and non-local recreationists.

The USGS/BM reported that much of the northern reaches of the recommended wilderness area contained regions of high and moderate mineral potential. The area encompassing the Fandango Ridge was felt to have high potential for precious minerals. Despite these potentials, it is felt that the inherent wilderness values described above outweigh the possibility of mineral development. The northern benches and southern alluvial fan were excluded from the recommended wilderness due to high and moderate mineral and oil and gas potentials.

In summary, the portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation has the highest wilderness values, the greatest public support, and can be managed to preserve the wilderness character. The portions not recommended for wilderness has lower wilderness values, manageability concerns, and conflicts with other resources uses.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: While much of the area still retains its natural beauty and scenic splendor, the imprints of man are common throughout the WSA. There are approximately 15 miles of ways, five miles of pipeline, and five spring developments within the Fandango WSA. There is also a fence line about two miles long. Several cherrystem roads carve into the heart of the WSA with ways branching from the boundary roads dissecting the numerous canyons. The pipelines are located in the northern and western parts of the WSA. The spring developments and water troughs are located inside the northern corner and adjacent to the western boundary of the WSA. The fence is located in Big Cow Canyon, within the center of the WSA. There are a total of 20 acres involved in these developments.

The benches along the northwest border are adjacent to and contain small areas of crested wheatgrass seedings. Although only about 100 acres of seedings are within the WSA boundary.

B. Solitude: Despite all of the intrusions which man has made into the area, opportunities still remain good. The dense forest of pinyon pine and juniper trees blanketing virtually all of the recommended wilderness. The numerous canyons with dense thickets of willow, aspen, and cottonwood trees secludes activities and buffers sound. The high ridges are not easily accessible and provide seclusion from the frequently visited areas at the lower elevations. Vehicle access around the WSA is good. Points of interest primarily in the south Sixmile canyon will result in higher concentrations of visitors, relieving pressure from the more remote areas. The northwest benches and southern alluvial fans provide little solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation are provided for hiking, backpacking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, mountain or rock climbing, photography and bird watching. The WSA is one of ample size to accommodate an extended backpacking trip. Objectives include Big and Little Fandango Peaks, Mahogany Peak, and any of a number of lesser peaks and wooded drainages.

Hunters are attracted to the WSA by the wide variety and large numbers of huntable species within the WSA. A self-propagating population of eastern brook trout exists in the South Sixmile Creek. Sightseers and bird watchers take advantage of the outstanding opportunities for viewing raptors and other nongame birds. Riparian vegetation in the numerous canyons provides habitat for a wide variety of wild flowers and unique riparian vegetation provides for colorful and educational nature study. The unique contrast in colors, especially in the

fall, provide harmonious compositions of color and form - making the Fandango WSA one of the more popular areas in the Tonopah Resource Area for photography.

D. Special Features: Two sets of charcoal kilns lie within the WSA, one along the South Sixmile Canyon Road and the other in Wood Tick Canyon. The kilns were built in the 1870s. The beehive shaped kilns, built entirely of red brick, are 25 feet wide at the base and reach a height of approximately 30 feet. South Sixmile Creek is the only perennial stream in the Hot Creek Mountains.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The recommended portion of the Fandango WSA is manageable as wilderness. Should mineral development increase along the adjacent areas, more management would be necessary. The core of the recommended area is rugged and relatively inaccessible to off-road vehicles. There are no private lands that occur within the WSA. Control of off-road traffic along the canyons and the cherry stem road will necessitate frequent patrolling. The 9,200 acres of the WSA not recommended for wilderness would require extensive patrolling to restrict off-road travel.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

Originally the Fandango WSA was reported to have low potential for all minerals and energy resources.

The U.S. Bureau of Mines and the U.S. Geological Survey prepared a mineral report on the Fandango WSA. This study indicates that there are small identified resources of zinc, lead, and silver at the Lead Pipe property and several areas of high potential for the occurrence of gold. This area has a low resource potential for petroleum, natural gas, uranium and geothermal energy.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

During the inventory phase, four comments were received which stated the area should not be designated a WSA because of roads and the lack of naturalness, opportunities for solitude, and primitive recreation opportunities. Eight other comments were received which favored the area being designated a WSA because of the lack of roads, the outstanding opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation, and naturalness.

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the draft environmental impact statement, Tonopah, Nevada, June 9, 1982, and Reno, Nevada, June 7, 1982. A total of 15 comments were received, seven comments favored wilderness designation and eight comments favored a nonsuitable recommendation for the Fandango WSA. Opposition to the designation stated the areas favorable geology, presence of over 90 mining claims, and return to multiple-use management due to enormous mineral and energy potential. Support for wilderness designation cited an outstanding area, following the manageability alternative as the larger area has greater benefit, pristine area with very high wilderness values.

Two State agencies commented in favor of wilderness designation for this WSA. The Nevada Division of State Parks confirmed the BLM analysis. The Nevada Division of Mineral Resources stated that the central core of the WSA be recommended as wilderness due to the low mineral potential. In the consistency letter, the State feels that wilderness will adversely affect wildlife management. Wilderness designation would prevent vegetative manipulation necessary for deer herd health. Hunter use would be adversely affected. Mineral values are high and wilderness values are not high enough to outweigh these conflicts.