

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The Kawich WSA is generally in a natural state. The Kawich WSA consists of mountainous country with a high central plateau and several peaks. There are two small one-half acre lakes, the Bellehelen Lakes, located on the top of the plateau at the northern end of the WSA. Vegetation consists mainly of a dense pinyon pine and juniper woodland with a northern desert shrub understory. Mountain mahogany trees occur in the mountains above 8,000 feet. Within the boundaries of the WSA are approximately twenty-five miles of vehicle ways, three miles of pipeline used for transmitting water outside the WSA, two spring developments, and approximately four miles of fence.

The majority of these vehicle ways are in the valley portion of the WSA. The pipelines are located on the northern and western edges of the WSA. The spring developments and water troughs are located in the southeast corner adjacent to the western boundary of the WSA. The fence is located in Haws Canyon on the western side of the WSA. Total acreage involved is approximately twenty acres. While these imprints are within the WSA, the area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man substantially unnoticeable.

B. Solitude: The Kawich WSA provides an outstanding opportunity for solitude. The majority of the WSA is mountainous with sharp elevation changes throughout. Topography is rugged and access is often restricted due to excessive slope. A wide flat plateau in the center of the WSA contains two small lakes. Deep, rocky canyons which penetrate the mountains often continue for miles and provide topographic variation. Rock outcroppings occur throughout the WSA. Dense forests blanket virtually all of the mountainous core of the WSA to the point that a secluded place can be found almost anywhere. Because of this more than adequate screening, the lack of any single destination point with strong appeal, and the large number of hiking routes into the core of the WSA, this high level of opportunity could be sustained even with fairly heavy use.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: Many forms of recreation can be pursued in the Kawich WSA including hiking, backpacking, hunting, horseback riding, mountain or rock climbing, and sightseeing. While there good opportunities for all of these activities, neither their quality or diversity are outstanding.

The quality of recreation activities varies with topography. In the mountainous areas, opportunities are quite good, made so by the variety of landforms, wildlife populations, and opportunities for solitude. Visual satisfaction is provided by the unique plateau and associated lakes, the rugged mountains covered with a thick blanket of timber, and the emerald green meadows snaking their way throughout every canyon. Although difficult to access, the plateau region offers spectacular views of the WSA and all surrounding valleys.

The visual and ecologic diversity of the setting becomes more subtle as one descends from the high mountains to the foothills and benches. Opportunities for recreation are lower here than in the mountains.

D. Special Features: The large population of mule deer wintering in the WSA are a special attraction as is the large wild and free roaming horses present yearlong along the foothills and benches within the Kawich WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The central mountainous core of the Kawich WSA is considered to be manageable over the long term. However, the presence of 560 acres of private inholdings and the potential off-road use of motorized vehicles in the valleys and canyons of the WSA are the factors which would require additional management commitment. The private lands and associated access roads run through the majority of the canyons penetrating into the interior of the WSA. Additional monitoring and patrolling may be necessary along these areas to prevent off-road vehicle travel and to evaluate what effects that travel would have on the delicate riparian

vegetation associated with the canyons. The easily accessible alluvial benches and rolling hills bordering the mountains would require additional patrolling for off-road vehicle travel, especially during the hunting season.

Mining activity along the eastern border of the WSA is expected to increase with the high probability of a mining operation and additional minerals exploration occurring. Additional management would be required to ensure that the wilderness qualities inherent in the immediate vicinity of the mining operations would not be lost. The proximity of the active mining area in the mountains adjacent to the WSA would make mitigation of impacts from the mine difficult.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The Kawich WSA contains 11 oil and gas leases covering approximately 9,760 acres. The WSA has 2,880 acres with high and 37,840 acres with good potential for mineral resources. Leasable mineral potential is good for oil and gas and for geothermal resources. The Kawich WSA is literally surrounded by mining districts with Bellehelen on the north, Eden on the east, Silverbow on the south, and Golden Arrow on the west.

A high level of exploration and development activity is expected in the first few years if this area is not designated wilderness. It is projected there would be five plans of operation per year for the first few years. Three developments of the 393 existing mining claims are expected due to the high potential for precious metals. In the foreseeable future, wilderness values would be lost as a result of mineral development in the area between Tobe Spring and the Craig Canyon drainage, Eden Creek, and Breen Ranch areas.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. During formal public review of the draft EIS, a total of 29 comments specifically addressing this WSA were received. Twenty-one individuals and three environmental organizations favored the Kawich designation and two individuals, one mining organization and two mining companies opposed this designation.

Reasons supporting designation were: outstanding area, provides challenging terrain, good scenic values.

Reasons supporting nondesignation were: enormous mineral and energy potential, mining districts located on all sides, accurate mapping not done to properly assess mineral potential.

The State, during the consistency review, concurred with the Preferred Alternative.