

# **Big Butte**

*CA-050-211*

BIG BUTTE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-050-211)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 2,558 acres

The Big Butte WSA is located in Mendocino and Trinity Counties, California. The nearest towns are Covelo, ten miles to the south, and Ruth, fifteen miles to the north. The San Francisco Bay Area is approximately 150 air miles to the south. The WSA is comprised of five parcels totalling 2,408 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and 150 acres of private land. The study area is adjacent to BLM lands that form the western and southern boundary of the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness Area (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA boundary is defined by property lines and physiographic features, such as major ridges and streams that delineate the WSA from the existing wilderness area. The southernmost parcel is nearly two air miles northwest of the most prominent landmark in the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness Area, Castle Peak. The central parcels are situated along Lightning Camp Ridge. The northernmost parcel includes a narrow strip of Federal land that straddles the upper reaches of Antone Creek.

The terrain varies from moderately steep canyons to relatively flat, but narrow ridgetops. The WSA is vegetated with mixed evergreen forests in the drainages and chaparral on the upper slopes and ridges. Elevations range from 3,000 feet to 5,500 feet. All parcels are irregularly shaped.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Two suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final EIS (California Section 202 WSA): no wilderness and all wilderness. A partial-wilderness recommendation was considered but dropped from further analysis because adding portions of the WSA, which is already small in size, to the adjacent wilderness area, would not enhance wilderness values nor would it create a more definable and manageable wilderness boundary.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE
- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 0     | acres recommended for wilderness         |
| 2,408 | BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness |

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in this WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term. This alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

This WSA consists of fragmented parcels of public land adjacent to the existing Yolla-Bolly-Middle Eel wilderness. When the California Wilderness Act was developed in 1984 these parcels were considered for wilderness and excluded from the designation by Congress. The current recommendation as nonsuitable for wilderness designation is consistent with this earlier decision. In addition, the USFS agrees with this nonsuitable wilderness recommendation.

The area is recommended nonsuitable for wilderness for the following reasons: 1) the area's wilderness values are low; 2) designation of these parcels would not enhance manageability of the existing adjacent wilderness, and 3) other resource uses outweigh the area's value as wilderness.

The WSA's wilderness values are low. Portions of the WSA have been modified by the works of man. The Big Butte Road passes through the southern parcel and a jeep trail passes through the northern parcel. There are approximately two miles of routes of travel within the area. Opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation are not outstanding. These opportunities are limited by the area's size, shape and the lack of attractive features. There are no special features within this WSA.

Designation of this area as wilderness would not enhance manageability of the adjacent wilderness area. The present boundary of the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel wilderness is either a ridge line or creek. This boundary is easy to identify on the ground and enhances manageability of the area as wilderness. The addition of this WSA would change the boundary to legal subdivisions which are not easily identified on the ground. This new boundary would be more difficult to administer.

The WSA contains an estimated 17 million board feet of commercial timber which may be available for harvest if the area is not designated as wilderness. The timber values outweigh the area's low wilderness values.

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

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	2,408
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
<u>Inholdings</u>		
State		0
Private		150
Total		2,558
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
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
<u>Inholdings</u>		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	2,408
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		2,408

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA's naturalness has been changed to a more man-made appearance. The Big Butte Road, authorized for construction by BLM in 1977 under a temporary right-of-way permit to a private inholder who wanted to harvest timber, passes through the southernmost parcel for nearly one-half mile. Restoring this road so the area again appears natural will be a difficult task. Man's imprint along this corridor will be noticeable for at least twenty years.

R8E HM R12W MDM

SIX RIVERS

NATIONAL

YOLLA-BOLLY

MENDOCINO

FOREST

MIDDLE EEL

NATIONAL

WILDERNESS

FOREST

T4S  
T5S

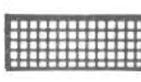
T26N  
T25N

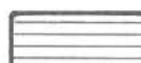
T5S  
HM  
T24N  
MDM

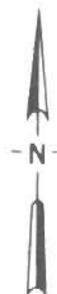
T25N  
T24N

R13W R12W

R12W R11W

-  NONE RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS
-  LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

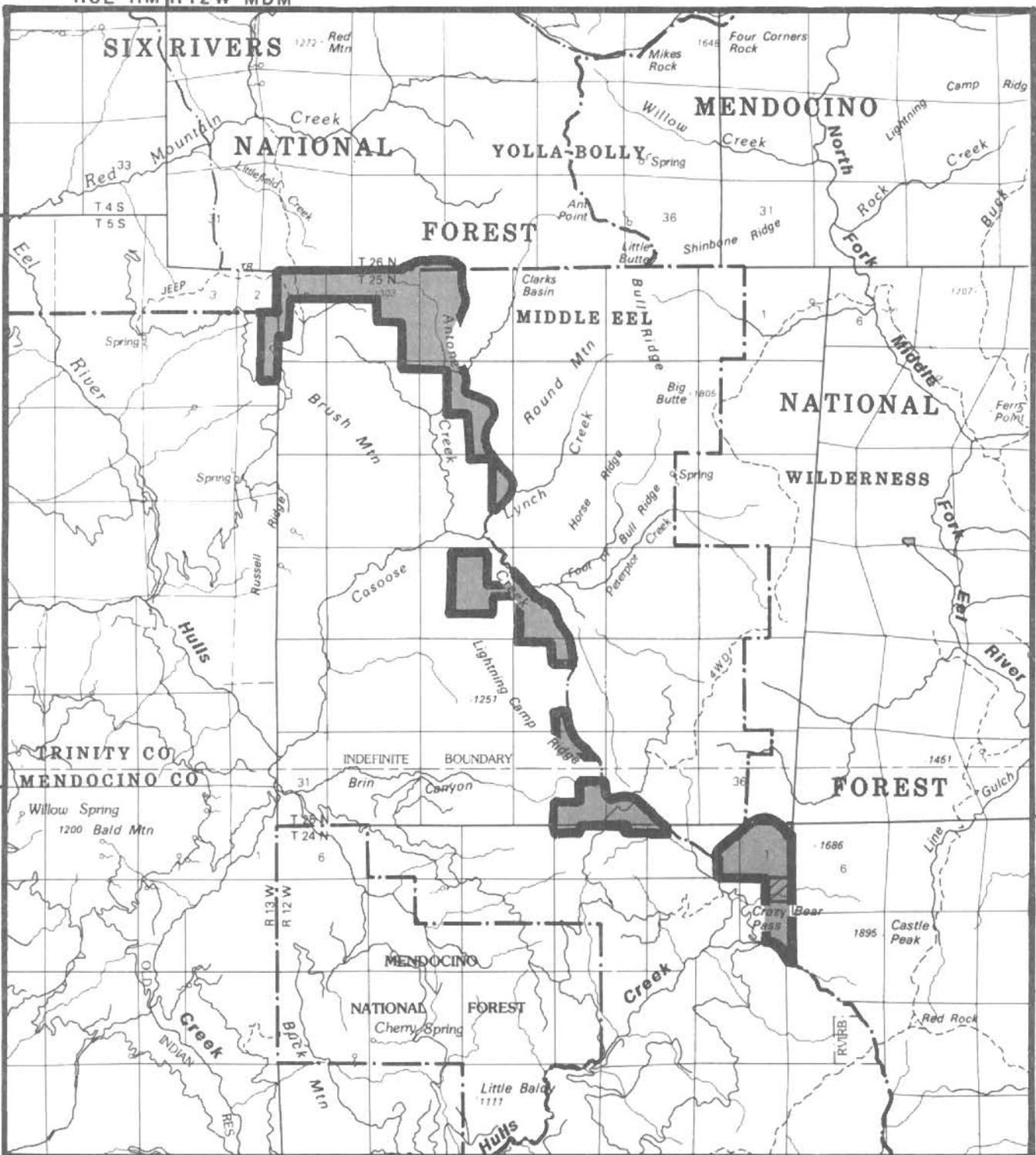
-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**Big Butte  
Proposal  
MAP-1**



050-211  
JUNE, 1988



Approximately 90 percent of the WSA is currently grazed by cattle, producing an average of 300 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) per year. The high percentage of WSA acreage being grazed continues to degrade the area's natural values, and has resulted in a substantially noticeable imprint on the landscape.

2. Solitude: Opportunities for solitude in the Big Butte WSA are not outstanding because the small size and irregular shape of all parcels make it difficult to find secluded places. Outside noises from vehicles on nearby roads and timber harvesting on adjacent private property are frequent and detract from one's ability to feel alone, away from man's activities. Those who visit the area tend to travel in the stream beds where they are screened by vegetation and the sounds of running water.

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: No outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation exist in this WSA because of its small size, limited access, and absence of attractive landscape features or unique wildlife that might draw more recreationists into the area. Estimated use is less than fifty visits per year. No hiking or horseback riding trails exist in the WSA, and none are planned. Any one of the parcels that comprise the Big Butte WSA can be traversed on foot in less than an hour. Antone Creek is the only water feature that could offer limited water-based recreation activities.

4. Special Features: None exist within this WSA.

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 1,600 acres of the Pacific Forest/Chaparral and 808 acres of the Pacific Forest/Mixed Conifer Forest ecosystems. The Big Butte WSA would not increase the diversity of the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS.

TABLE 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	NWPS Area		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Pacific Forest/Chaparral	2	53,770	2	23,084
Pacific Forest/Mixed Conifer Forest	2	141,008	0	0
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Pacific Forest/Chaparral	1	4,745	2	23,084
Pacific Forest/Mixed Conifer Forest	2	141,080	0	0

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a days driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of three major population centers. 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	NWPS areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Santa Rosa-Petaluma	10	888,579	12	134,167
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
Vallejo-Napa-Fairfield	44	4,832,667	74	2,100,862

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: This WSA is within 50 air miles of five designated wilderness areas. In a clockwise direction, beginning to the north is the adjacent Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness, then the Trinity Alps Wilderness, the Chancelulla Wilderness, the Snow Mountain Wilderness and the North Fork Wilderness. All are managed by the Forest Service. Also within 50 air miles is the King Range WSA, recommended for partial-wilderness and the Chemise Mountain WSA, recommended for all-wilderness.

C. Manageability

The WSA is manageable as wilderness, but because of the area's size, configuration and fact that its boundary follows property lines instead of physiographic features, would make it difficult to retain the marginal wilderness values that currently exist. The outside sights and sounds of vehicle use on nearby roads and timber harvest activities on adjoining private property are frequent occurrences. Few places can physically screen visitors from these intrusions.

Motorized vehicles used to maintain grazing developments would be incompatible with wilderness management.

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 time of preliminary suitability recommendation: The geology and mineralization of the Big Butte WSA is described in the Unit Resource Analysis (URA) based on data in Mineral Resource Inventory (MRI) files for the BLM East Mendocino Planning Unit. The MRI data in the Affected Environment section of the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas, Draft EIS of 1987 indicated that the WSA has a low potential for the occurrence of manganese, chromite and asbestos. All of these minerals have been described as critical and strategic by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The area has no known potential for other mineral resources. As of July 16, 1987, there were no mining claims recorded in the WSA. No oil and gas, or geothermal lease applications were received as of February 11, 1988.

While there has been some exploration for chromite within the WSA, there has been no mining within the WSA, with only limited production in the general area outside the WSA.

Manganese deposits in this area occur in discontinuous lenses which rapidly pinch out and normally have low volume. Because of this, individual deposits have a low value in spite of the ore's high grade. Mining of manganese ore in the general area has been sporadic, with no mining in the Big Butte WSA.

Exploration for asbestos has taken place within the WSA, but has not resulted in any actual mining development. As a result of the low volume and discontinuous nature of the deposits, the potential for mineral development is considered to be low.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the nonsuitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: Neither the U.S. Bureau of Mines nor

that U.S. Geological Survey has conducted a mineral survey for the WSA. Because the entire WSA is considered to have low mineral potential, no mineral resource potential map was prepared. According to BLM records dated March 25, 1988, no unpatented mining claims, mineral sales or leases exist within the WSA.

E. Impacts on Resources

The following comparative impact table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all the alternatives considered.

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Wilderness Values	<p>There will be slight impacts to wilderness values from anticipated timber harvest activities, test planting to increase forage production for livestock, and continued low level of motorized recreation use within the WSA. Up to 613 acres of timber land could be harvested for 17 MMbf. The perception of naturalness will be reduced on up to 1,500 acres and solitude will be periodically disrupted as a result of timber harvest activities including road construction. A test planting of native and naturalized species to increase forage production will have a short-term impact on wilderness values with up to 160 acres of the perception of naturalness impaired. There will be only negligible impacts, primarily on solitude, as a result of up to thirty visitor days of motorized recreation use and infrequent landowner use of Big Butte Road for access.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would have a slight positive benefit to wilderness values. As a result of precluding timber harvesting on 613 acres and a test planting to increase forage production as well as eliminating thirty visitor days of motorized recreation use, wilderness values would be retained and slightly enhanced, particularly naturalness and solitude. Additionally, long-term protection from unanticipated future actions that could result in potential adverse impacts would be provided.</p>

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

Impacts on Timber Harvesting	There will be no impact on timber harvesting. All 17 MMbf on approximately 613 acres will be available for harvesting.	Harvesting of up to 17 MMbf of timber on 613 acres would be foregone under wilderness designation. This 17 MMbf represents less than 5% of the Ukiah District's timber base. There would be a minor impact on timber harvesting as a result of wilderness management.
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F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Draft EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Several comments were received during the wilderness inventory phase. These comments addressed the area's naturalness and man's imprint on the landscape from past road building, grazing, timber harvest and presence of man-made structures.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held on December 2, 1987 in Ukiah, California. In response to both oral and written comments, two issues were identified for detailed analysis in the Draft EIS - impacts on wilderness values and impacts on timber harvest.

The five written letters received during the comment period related specifically to the protection of the 613 acres of old-growth Douglas-fir forest as a sanctuary for wildlife species such as spotted owls, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, mountain lions and black bear.

No State and County agency or political jurisdictional entity comments were received specific to this WSA. The U.S. Forest Service concurred with the Bureau's no-wilderness recommendation.