

Carrizo Gorge

CA-060-025A

CARRIZO GORGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-060-025A)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 15,408 acres

The Carrizo Gorge WSA is located in southeastern San Diego County, California, about 60 miles east of San Diego and 52 miles west of El Centro. This 15,408 acre study area consists entirely of public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA boundaries are formed on the north and east by designated wilderness within Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and on the south by private lands bordering on Interstate Highway 8. The west boundary is irregular and has been drawn to avoid scattered parcels of private property and public lands lacking wilderness characteristics. The west boundary follows a combination of property lines and fence lines at the north and south ends, but through much of its length runs cross-country, not aligned with physical or legal features.

Several other designations overlie portions of the WSA. The 720-acre Bow Willow Palms Research Natural Area is contained within the WSA, established in 1963 to recognize the ecological significance of a California fan palm oasis. The entire WSA except the southernmost two miles is part of the 21,500 acre In-Ko-Pah Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), established in 1981 to protect important peninsular bighorn sheep habitat and archeological resources.

Elevations within the WSA vary from 1,000 feet in Carrizo Gorge to 4,647 feet at Mount Tule. The northwestern portion of the area consists of the boulder strewn, chaparral covered rolling upland of the In-Ko-Pah Mountains. While the In-Ko-Pahs rise gradually from McCain Valley to the west, the east slope drops dramatically into the depths of Carrizo Canyon. The southern and eastern portions of the study area are composed of steep canyons and mountainsides which form the western side of Carrizo Gorge (the gorge bottom and east wall are located in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Wilderness).

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The WSA is within BLM's Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit, for which a management framework plan was completed in 1981. Various suitability recommendations were analyzed in the draft and final Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) on the Wilderness Recommendations for the Eastern San Diego

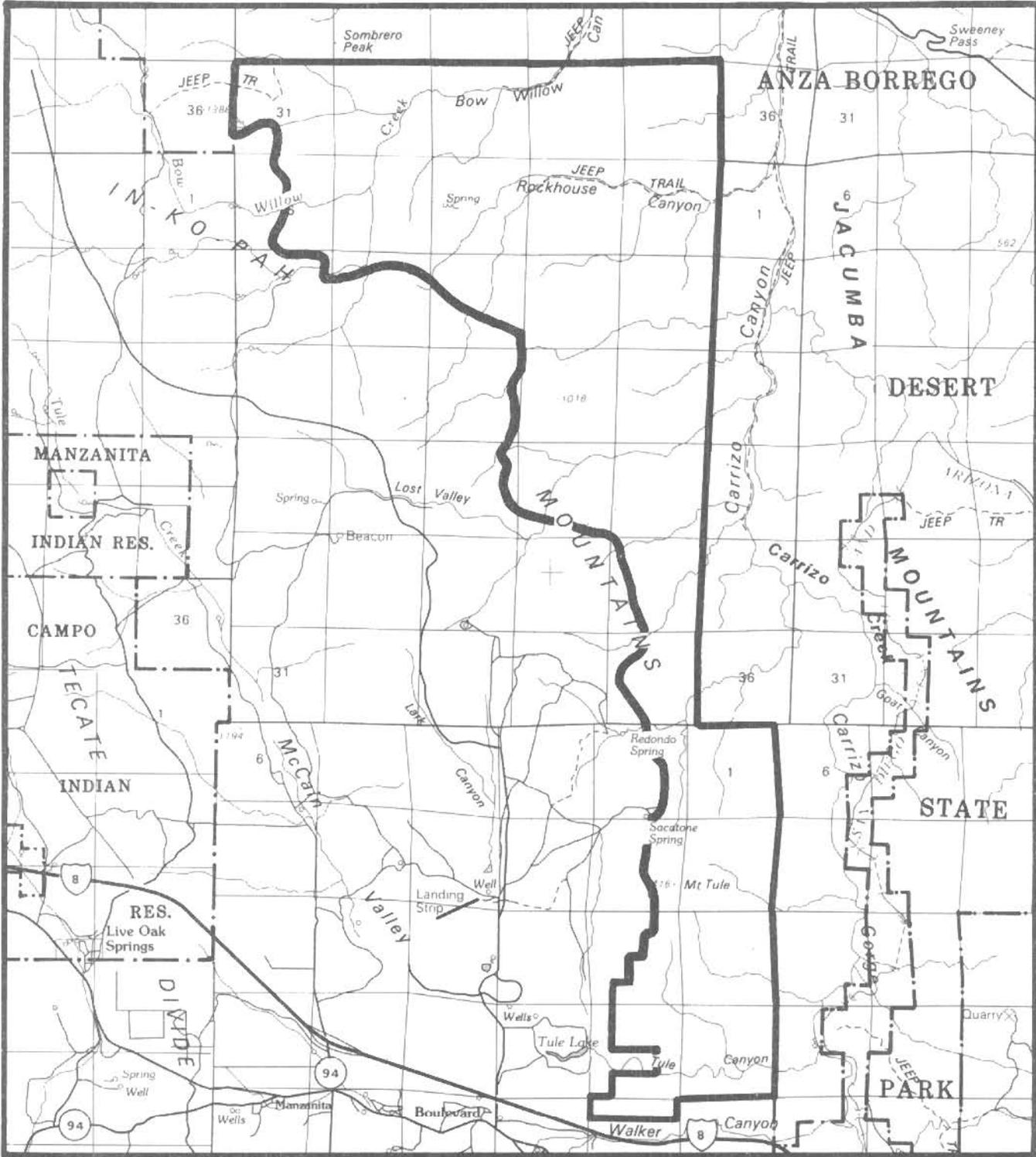
County Planning Unit, completed in 1986. Four different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the draft EIS: all wilderness, no wilderness, and two partial wilderness options in which approximately two acres and eight acres, respectively, were recommended for nonwilderness, to accommodate scenic overlooks and accompanying access roads. The partial wilderness recommendations were both dropped from consideration in the final EIS, because more accurate mapping determined that one overlook is actually outside the WSA boundaries, and that the other is located only 100 yards inside the WSA. BLM decided that it would be more manageable to have visitors walk the short distance to the second overlook, rather than to construct an access road.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE --- 15408 acres recommended for wilderness
0 acres recommended for nonwilderness

All wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. All wilderness is the environmentally preferable alternative. This is because it will result in the least change from the existing natural environment over the long term. The all wilderness recommendation is based on the following rationale: (1) the WSA has outstanding wilderness and ecological values; and (2) wilderness designation would have minimal conflicts with other resource uses.

Wilderness designation will preserve the outstanding natural wilderness characteristics and scenic vistas, and protect optimal habitat for the peninsular bighorn sheep, listed as threatened by the State of California and a candidate for Federal listing as threatened or endangered. The Carrizo Gorge WSA is an ecological transition zone between the Colorado Desert and the peninsular mountain ranges which is not represented in any existing units of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Designation will also provide wilderness recreation opportunities within an hour's drive of the San Diego metropolitan area. The suitability recommendation will preclude any further vehicular use of approximately three miles of primitive routes of travel.

Wilderness designation will have minimal adverse effects on other resource uses. Energy and mineral resource development would not be significantly affected, as the area has no history of mining, no mining claims, no mineral or energy leases, and generally low potential for mineral or energy resources, except gem minerals. There is moderate potential for manganese in the south central part of the WSA. Most grazing which occurs in the WSA is grandfathered, pre-FLPMA, and could therefore continue under wilderness designation. The entire WSA was closed to motorized vehicle use in 1979. Motorized recreation opportunities which existed in Bow Willow and Rockhouse Canyons prior to 1979 will be permanently eliminated and considered an acceptable compromise to protect wilderness characteristics, the bighorn sheep population, and the significant archeological resources in the two canyons.

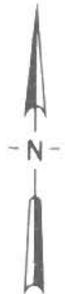


T15S
T16S

T16S
T17S

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

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**Carrizo Gorge
Proposal
MAP-1**



060-025A
JUNE, 1988

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

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	15408
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		<u>15,408</u>
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	15,408
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		<u>15,408</u>
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	0
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>0</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The area appears natural and generally unaffected by man; most of the WSA is in pristine condition. The few human imprints within the study area are located primarily along its western edge, and are substantially unnoticeable within the area as a whole. These human alternations consist of a few miles of primitive ways, fences, and grazing improvements, including four developed springs, one reservoir, two troughs, and approximately one mile of water pipeline. A wildlife guzzler is also within the WSA. Rockhouse Canyon contains the remains of an abandoned "line" shack which inspired the canyon's name.

2. Solitude: The WSA offers many opportunities for solitude because of the high topographic relief, winding canyons, and low level of visitation. The presence of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Wilderness to the east enhances and extends these opportunities for solitude.

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 offers many opportunities for primitive and unconfined forms of recreation. Movement within the study area is confined only by the steepness of the terrain and the ability of the recreationist. Currently the major activities are hiking, backpacking, rockhounding, nature study, sightseeing, and photography. The WSA receives an estimated 3,000 visitor use days of nonmotorized recreation annually. The adjacent State park wilderness enhances primitive recreation opportunities. Together, the Federal and State units provide approximately 50,000 acres for wilderness recreation.

4. Special Features: The WSA, along with the remainder of the In-Ko-Pah Mountains ACEC and adjacent portions of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, supports one of two isolated populations of peninsular bighorn sheep (Ovis canadensis cremnobates) which occur wholly within the United States. A third isolated population is international, ranging in the Jacumba Mountains south into Baja California. The subspecies is listed as threatened by the State of California and is a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS). Critical summer water sources for the In-Ko-Pah mountains population are located primarily within the WSA. The population appears to be declining, for reasons not yet fully determined. Although it has been estimated at 80 to 100 animals since the early 1970's, recent surveys indicate the population may be as low as 40 to 60.

The San Diego coast horned lizard, Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillei, has been observed on granitic substrates and outcrops. The lizard is a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered by the USF&WS. The WSA provides nesting habitat for golden eagles and other birds of prey. Swainson's Hawk, Buteo swainsoni, has been observed in the area. This species is a USF&WS candidate species and is listed as threatened by the State of California.

Three other animal species under status review by USF&WS may occur within the WSA, although their presence has not been confirmed. These are: the magic gecko, Coleonyx switaki, (listed by the State as threatened); the orange-throated whiptail, Cnemidophorus hyperythrus; and ferruginous hawk, Buteo regalis.

Seven plant species of special concern occur within the WSA. Four are candidates for listing by USF&WS as threatened or endangered: Jacumba milkvetch (Astragalus douglasii var. perstrictus), low-bush monkeyflower (Diplacus aridus), California barrel cactus (Ferocactus acanthodes var. acanthodes), and mountain springs lupine (Lupinus excubitus var. medius). The lupine and cactus are common within the WSA, whereas the other two plants are common just outside the WSA, and extend into the study area in small numbers. Two additional species are listed by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS): desert beauty (Linanthus bellus), and Parish's larkspur (Delphinium parishii spp. subglobosum). CNPS considers the desert beauty rare or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere, while the larkspur is listed as a plant of limited distribution.

The WSA also contains California fan palm (Washingtonia filifera) oases, most commonly found along the edge of dry washes or in narrow canyons. The fan palm is a relict species, dependent upon permanent water sources. The Bow Willow Palms Research Natural Area was designated to protect and to recognize the outstanding scenic and natural values of the fan palm oases.

The Carrizo Gorge WSA offers some of the most expansive scenic vistas in the California Desert; views across distances of 100 miles or more are common. The panorama includes the Salton Sea, Chocolate Mountains, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Carrizo Badlands, Coyote Mountains, and Mount Signal on the Mexican border. Scenic viewing is one of the major visitor attractions. The presence of perennial streams and streamside trees including the fan palms in Bow Willow and other side canyons adds scenic interest. Granitic rock formations and occasional views of bighorn sheep perched on the crags round out the area's visual appeal.

Archeological resources within the WSA are concentrated in Bow Willow and Rockhouse Canyons, with site density estimated at 22 sites per square mile. Most of these are isolated agave roasting pits, although several spectacular temporary camps containing ceramics and stone tools are also present, and are undoubtedly eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Additional undiscovered archeological resources very likely exist,

because of the presence of both surface water and plants of nutritional importance to prehistoric populations. Aboriginal rock art sites are reported in Bow Willow Canyon, although the existence of these pictographs has not been verified recently.

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 15,408 acres of the California Chaparral/Chaparral ecosystem. Wilderness designation of the Carrizo Gorge WSA would not add any individual new ecosystem to the National Wilderness Preservation System. However, the WSA is an ecological transition zone between the Colorado Desert and the peninsular mountain ranges which is not represented in any existing units of the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
California/Chaparral Chaparral	17	462,256	10	71,802
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
California/Chaparral Chaparral	17	462,256	10	71,802

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 five major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of wilderness areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of these 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>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,616
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Riverside-San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
San Diego	15	1,043,680	100	3,378,814

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas:
The closest designated area is Anza-Borrego Desert State Wilderness, bordering the Carrizo Gorge WSA on the east. Three other designated wilderness areas are within 50 air miles: Hauser and Pine Creek, administered by the Cleveland National Forest, and Cuyamaca Mountains State Wilderness. In addition, six BLM study areas recommended for wilderness are within 50 air miles of Carrizo Gorge WSA.

C. Manageability

The Carrizo Gorge WSA is manageable as wilderness. Factors which enhance manageability include the area's remoteness, limited access, rugged desert topography, and the compatible management of adjacent State wilderness. The entire WSA has been closed to off-highway vehicles since 1979.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of Information Known at the Time of the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation: The Carrizo Gorge WSA is in the Vallecito Mountain Geology-Energy-Minerals (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). The GRA file data showed no evidence to support any mineral potential within the WSA.

In 1983 and 1984 mineral surveys were conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM). In 1987 a joint report was published by the two agencies as USGS Bulletin 1711-B. The only area classified for mineral potential was the Mount Tule area in the southern portion of the WSA, identified as having a moderate potential for the occurrence of gem minerals (see Map 2).

The 1963 California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) County Report 3 reports feldspar was mined in the northeastern part of the WSA in 1939 and identifies three prospects in the northeastern portion of the WSA in pegmatite dikes that have a high potential for gem quality minerals. This area is considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of gem and feldspar minerals under the BLM classification system, based on favorable geologic environment and reported mineral occurrence. The CDMG report also identified two prospects for manganese in the south-central portion of the WSA. Under the BLM classification system, this area is considered to have a moderate potential for the occurrence of manganese minerals based on favorable geologic environment and reported occurrence of minerals.

2. Summary of Significant New Mineral Resource Data Collected Since the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation Which Should be Considered in the Final Decision: According to BLM records there were no unpatented mining claims within the Carrizo Gorge WSA as of December 31, 1987.

E. Impacts on Resources

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Proposed Action (All Wilderness)	No Wilderness/No Action Alternative
Impact on Wilderness Values	Wilderness values will be retained as a result of the continued closure of the WSA to OHV use. In addition, these values will be enhanced by the rehabilitation of seven and one-half miles of existing routes.	Except for minor impacts to the perception of naturalness on 300 acres, impacts would be the same as for the Proposed Action.
Impact on Management of Peninsular Bighorn Sheep	No significant impact. Management efforts will be enhanced with the continued closure of the area to recreational OHV use, mechanized fire suppression, and mineral development.	Impacts would be the same as for the Proposed Action.

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

Issue Topic	Proposed Action (All Wilderness)	No Wilderness/No Action Alternative
Impact on the McCain Valley Grazing Allotment	Nearly 2,240 acres grazed on a temporary nonrenewable basis will be eliminated, and will have a moderate negative impact on livestock grazing on the McCain Valley Grazing Allotment. However, designation will have no impact on livestock operations on 2,910 acres.	No impacts; 2,240 acres currently grazed on a temporary nonrenewable basis would be grazed on a regular basis.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the EIS for the Wilderness Recommendations, Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public comments were solicited throughout all phases in the development of the Eastern San Diego County MFP. The following is a summary of all comments received.

1. Inventory Phase: Public comments covered a variety of items. Many agreed with findings and wanted further consideration of this area as wilderness. Other respondents noted that the unit is criss-crossed with roads and also contains water troughs, apiaries, and fences - all of which disqualify certain areas for wilderness. Many expressed the belief that protection of the Peninsular Bighorn Sheep is an important reason for considering this unit for wilderness.
2. Study Phase: A few comments received during the inventory phase concerned study phase considerations. One stated that wilderness classification would protect the habitat of bighorn sheep. Another said that under wilderness, multiple use would be eliminated in Rock House Canyon.
3. Proposed Livestock Grazing and Wilderness Management for the Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit - Draft EIS: The proposed action recommended that all of this unit's 15,408 acres be designated suitable for wilderness, except for approximately two acres to be used for developing

unique overlooks of the area.

During the review of the Draft EIS, 23 letters were received from Federal, State and local agencies, organizations and individuals. Only seven of these responses addressed the WSA. Four favored a wilderness designation; two opposed wilderness, and an oil company stated that the region geothermal has potential.

Wilderness proponents supported the BLM's recommendation. Opponents to wilderness gave two reasons: first, wilderness status would interfere with sound management of the Peninsular Bighorn Sheep; second, access was need for rockhounds. An oil company urged that geothermal potential be carefully evaluated throughout the WSA and that areas found to have potential be exempted from wilderness designation.

4. Management Framework Plan (MFP) for Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit - Wilderness Recommendations: The recommendation of the MFP for the Carrizo Gorge WSA was the same as that described above for the Draft EIS on wilderness management.

Approximately 54 out of 60 comments gave an opinion on the Carrizo Gorge WSA. Eleven were non-specific, in that they requested wilderness status for all of the WSAs within the planning unit. Included in this group was the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. The remaining 43 comments approved the recommendation on this unit. No substantiating reasons were given.

Three respondents whose particular interest was four-wheel drive recreation, opposed all wilderness in this region. One individual wanted this land to be used for homesteading rather than wilderness.

5. 1986 Amendments to the Eastern San Diego County Management Framework Plan: A proposal was made El Centro Resource Area of the BLM to change the recommendation on two acres of the WSA from unsuitable to suitable. These small areas were designed to provide vehicle access to scenic overlooks within the WSA. Field evaluation showed that the overlooks were incorrectly mapped; one was outside the WSA and the other was just 100 yards inside the boundary. Therefore, ORV access was not needed. In addition, prohibiting vehicle access would be protective of the rare peninsular bighorn sheep. Twenty seven letters were received in response to the 1986 amendments. All but one favored the amendments, agreeing with the rationale of the staff. One respondent opposed the change in suitability, stating that disabled people would not be able to walk to the overlook.