

# **Casa Diablo**

*CA-010-082*

CASA DIABLO WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-082)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 8,959 acres

The Casa Diablo WSA is located in southern Mono County, approximately 12 miles north of Bishop, California. The WSA includes 5,325 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, 3,634 acres of United States Forest Service (USFS) land, and no State land or private inholdings (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The northern boundary follows a maintained road to the east, then travels south along a 750-kV electric transmission line right-of-way skirting around a small portion of nonpublic land. The boundary intersects Casa Diablo County Road and follows this road in a northwesterly direction. As the boundary nears Casa Diablo Mountain it jogs around nonpublic land where it connects with the improved northern boundary road.

The WSA is located along the western edge of the Basin and Range geomorphic province. Elevation ranges from 5,400 feet to 7,912 feet. The landscape is dominated by Casa Diablo Mountain (7,912 feet). Casa Diablo (Spanish for "House of the Devil") is an island of older granitic rock rising through lithified volcanic ash. The mountain lies in the western portion of the WSA while the remainder of the unit is typified by volcanic terraces in the south, and rocky and rugged hills in the north-central section. Numerous canyons and sandy washes are located in the unit. Vegetation in the WSA consists of Great Basin shrubs with pinyon trees occupying the upland slopes.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Various suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Wilderness Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EISs: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE --- 0 acres recommended  
for wilderness  
8,959 BLM and USFS acres  
recommended for  
nonwilderness

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 preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no-wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The WSA is recommended nonsuitable because of its potential for mineral and geothermal occurrence, and future transmission line expansion needs outweigh the area's wilderness values. Naturalness has been adversely affected in a portion of the unit. In addition, manageability was an important consideration in the nonsuitable recommendation.

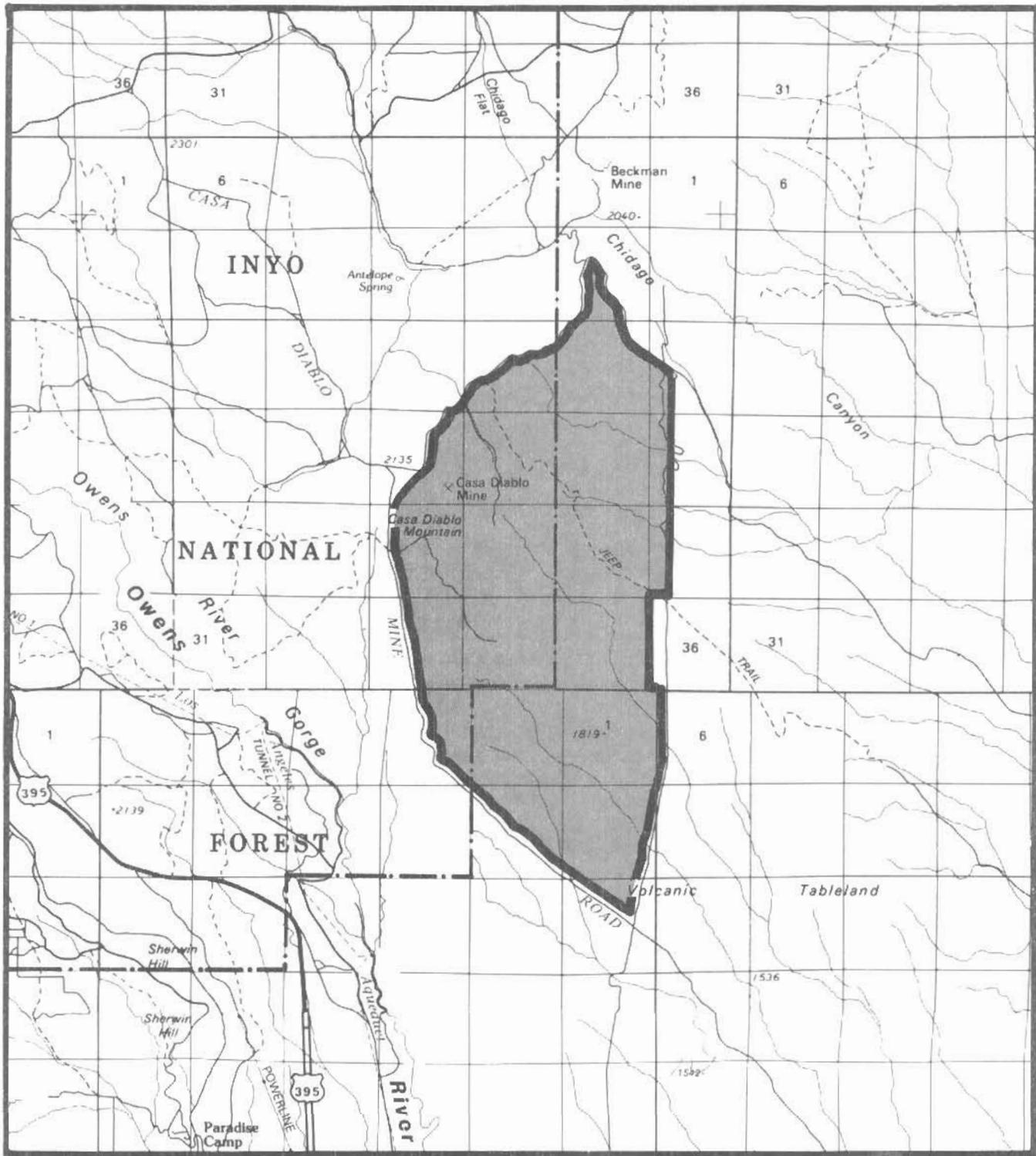
Man-made visual influences outside the WSA such as a 750-kV electric transmission line along the eastern boundary and periodic vehicle use on the boundary roads surrounding the WSA may affect solitude. Some portions of the WSA allow unobstructed views of the transmission line up to a distance of 1-1/2 miles. In addition, the USFS portion of the unit contains mining scars around Casa Diablo Mountain. These mining imprints severely impair the area's naturalness and opportunities for solitude.

Resource conflicts in the WSA include moderate potential for metallic minerals in the BLM portion of the unit, high potential for metallic minerals in the USFS portion, and moderate potential for geothermal. Mineral potential for silver and gold is high on Casa Diablo Mountain. There are numerous silver and gold mining claims in the USFS portion of the unit.

The Benton-Owens Valley Management Framework Plan prescribes a half-mile wide utility line corridor along five miles of the eastern boundary. This corridor lies in the WSA one-quarter mile west of the present transmission-line boundary. There is a high current demand to use this corridor. Most recently, Oxbow Geothermal Corporation demonstrated a need to utilize this corridor for construction of an electric transmission line. Additionally, several utility/energy organizations have expressed support to accommodate future use in this corridor.

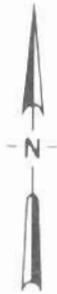
The WSA sustains and provides suitable opportunities for motorized recreational use. Approximately eight miles of primitive vehicle routes are located in the unit. These routes are used by off-highway vehicle recreationists, horseback riders, hunters, sightseers, etc. It is expected that demand and use of this area for motorized recreational activities will remain stable.

The potential determination of valid existing rights related to mining claims in areas of moderate to high mineral value would make affected portions of the WSA impossible to manage as wilderness. Development of mining claims which are found to have valid existing rights could impair the area's wilderness values with or without wilderness designation. The WSA's lack of natural barriers along the eastern boundary presents some additional limitations to effective wilderness management.



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

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**Casa Diablo Mountain  
Proposal  
MAP-1**



010-082  
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)	5,325
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
USFS	(surface and subsurface)	3,634
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		<u>8,959</u>
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study 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		<u>0</u>
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	5,325
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
USFS	(surface and subsurface) <sup>1</sup>	3,634
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>5,325</u>
Total USFS Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>3,634</u>

<sup>1</sup>The USFS has agreed to allow these lands, located in the Inyo National Forest, to be reported as part of BLM's WSR. When Congress acts, the lands will be managed in accordance with the current appraisal management plan.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The eastern half of the WSA has generally retained its natural character and influence. The western portion of the WSA contains numerous mining prospects and surface disturbances which impair the area's naturalness. The WSA is a variable landscape with a series of volcanic terraces in the south, to rocky hills in the western and northern portions. Casa Diablo Mountain is a major feature in the northern section of the area. Vegetation is evenly distributed throughout this transition area.

The eastern side is dominated by shadscale scrub and dalea, while the western upland areas are a big sagebrush-bitterbrush type with pinyon pine trees on the higher slopes.

2. Solitude: The WSA's highly variable topography, vegetation and size combine together to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude. The unit's physical character and spaciousness impart a sense of isolation and unconfined freedom of movement to area visitors.

An electric transmission line parallels the eastern boundary just outside the WSA and visually affects opportunities for solitude on a limited and localized basis. Visually, solitude in the western half is severely impaired by mining scars such as tailings, waste rock sites, and mine shafts.

Additionally, the outside sights and sounds of periodic vehicle use on the boundary roads would slightly diminish opportunities for solitude along the WSA's borders.

This WSA may be overflowed in the future by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission during approved military operations. The visual intrusions and associated noise create temporary effects on solitude which are deemed acceptable and necessary as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation abound within the WSA. Area visitors can participate in backpacking, camping, nature appreciation, historical sightseeing, scenic photography, hunting, horseback riding and other activities.
4. Special features: The major special feature of this WSA is crucial winter habitat for mule deer. The mule deer rely on the unit's topographical relief for protective cover during winter months.

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 8,959 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Great Basin Sagebrush ecosystem. The Casa Diablo 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	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	1	32,407	55	1,199,950
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	0	0	19	215,484

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of four 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	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Los Angeles/Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Riverside/San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
<u>Nevada</u>				
Reno	39	4,647,230	170	6,904,809

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of one BLM WSA recommended for wilderness designation. The John Muir and the Ansel Adams Wilderness, 12 and 26 miles to the west, respectively, are the nearest designated wilderness areas. These wilderness areas are administered by the Inyo National Forest. Other nearby designated wilderness areas include Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks which are managed by the National Park Service and the Hoover Wilderness which is managed by the Toiyabe and Inyo National Forests.

C. Manageability

The Casa Diablo WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with difficulty. Effective management as wilderness may be altogether impossible due to the potential for development of valid existing rights on mining claims in areas with moderate to high potential for metallic minerals. The probability for determination of valid existing rights is moderate to high. In addition, the area's lack of natural barriers along the eastern boundary to prevent off-highway vehicle use hinders management of this unit as wilderness.

Some signing, some fencing and occasional patrolling would be required to insure the integrity of the area's wilderness values.

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 the preliminary suitability recommendation: The Casa Diablo WSA is in the BLM Casa Diablo Geology-Energy-Minerals (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). BLM G-E-M data in the Affected Environment section of the Benton-Owens Valley/ Bodie-Coleville Study Areas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 1987 indicated that the Casa Diablo WSA had moderate metallic mineral occurrence potential, no occurrence potential for oil and gas and very low occurrence potential for uranium and thorium. There is low occurrence potential for non-metallic minerals and moderate occurrence potential for geothermal resources. Mineral occurrence potential for silver and gold is high on Casa Diablo Mountain (adjacent USFS land).

Information contained in the 1983 G-E-M report indicates that the area around Casa Diablo Mountain has high potential for silver and gold. The G-E-M report indicates that the Casa Diablo mine (Sec. 21, T. 4 S., R. 31 E.) has produced over \$100,000 in gold, silver, and base metals production. This mineralization was from granitic rocks with quartz veins. The intrusive rocks and metasediments of the WSA are identified in the G-E-M report as suitable host rocks for metallic minerals. Casa Diablo Mountain has surface disturbances related to mining activities totaling 350

acres. The disturbed areas include tailings, waste rock sites, and mine shafts. Approximately thirty mining claims existed on Casa Diablo Mountain. Two unpatented mining claims also occurred in the center of the WSA on the USFS and BLM boundary.

All areas of the WSA were classified as being prospectively valuable for geothermal resources by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in 1985 ("Lands Valuable for Geothermal Resources," unpublished map, July 1985 revision). The entire WSA is on the eastern edge of the Long Valley Caldera. This nearby heat source together with the presence of numerous faults for migration of hot water provide a moderately favorable environment for geothermal resources. There were no oil and gas, geothermal, or sodium or potassium leases in the WSA.

The Casa Diablo WSA has low non-metallic resource potential.

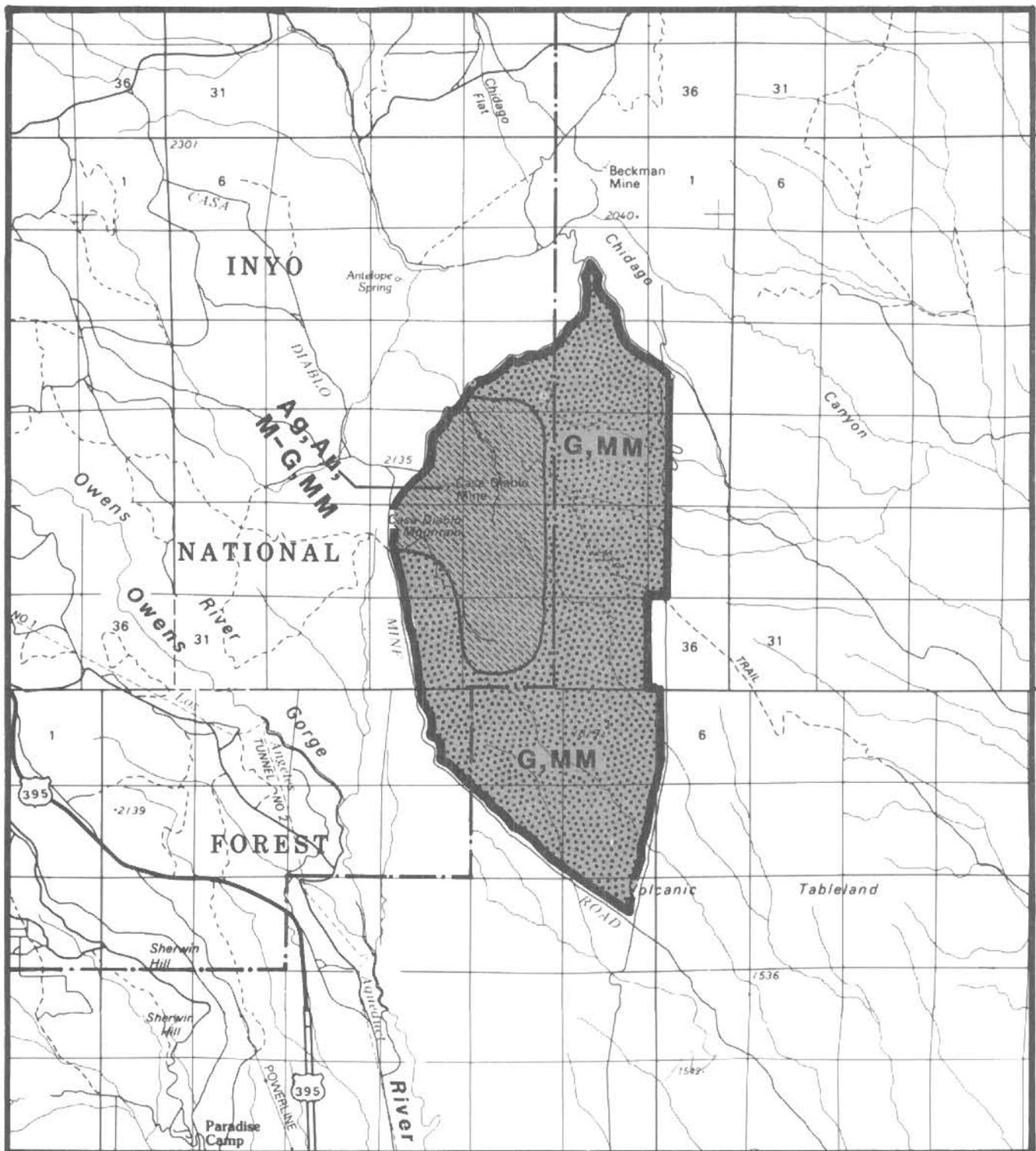
2. Summary of significant new mineral data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: No USGS or BOM mineral surveys were conducted in this WSA. A check of the January 13, 1988 BLM mining claim microfiche indicates that there are 36 lode mining claims in the WSA west of the USFS boundary (Table 4). This is an increase of five claims since the EIS was done in 1987. These claims occupy 720 acres of the WSA.

Table 4 - Mining Claims

TYPE	NO.			ACRES		
	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL	SUITABLE	NONSUIT.	TOTAL
Mining Claims						
Lode	0	36	36	0	720	720
Placer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mill Sites	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>720</b>

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or nondesignation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Wilderness - Final Environmental Impact Statement.)



T3S  
T4S  
T4S  
T5S

R30E R31E R31E R32E

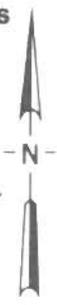
- NONE** Recommended for Wilderness
- Recommended for Non Wilderness
- Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness
- Split Estate
- State
- Private

**Explanation**

- High Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
- Moderate Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
- M** Moderate Mineral Potential Location in a High Mineral Potential Area
- H** High Mineral Potential Location in a Moderate Mineral Potential Area

**Commodity Symbols**

- Ag** Silver
- Au** Gold
- G** Geothermal
- MM** Metallic Minerals other than Ag & Au



**Casa Diablo Mountain Mineral Resource Potential**



**Map-2  
010-082**

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	<p>The primary impacts on wilderness values would originate from mining activities near Casa Diablo Mountain resulting in a loss of naturalness on 120 acres. The perception of naturalness would be impaired over 2,400 acres as a result of the mining activities and development of the utility corridor for high voltage transmission lines along the eastern border. Solitude would be diminished within a 700-acre area surrounding the mining activity. Construction of transmission lines would result in short-term impacts to solitude along the 5-mile utility corridor. Continued motorized recreation use (300 visitor-days) on 8 miles of primitive vehicle routes would maintain slight impacts to naturalness and solitude. Crucial mule deer winter habitat would be lost on 120 acres as a result of mining activity.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would retain and slightly enhance wilderness values by precluding development of the transmission-line corridor within the WSA along the eastern boundary and eliminating 300 visitor-days of motorized recreation use. The high probability of valid existing rights determination for existing mining claims near Casa Diablo Mountain would lead to development of an underground silver mine. Mining activity would result in a loss of naturalness on 120 acres and an impairment of the perception of naturalness as well as the sense of solitude within a 700-acre viewshed. Crucial mule deer winter habitat would be lost on 120 acres as a result of mining activity.</p>
Motorized Recreation Use	<p>There would be no impact on motorized recreation use which is projected to remain stable at the current 300 visitor days.</p>	<p>Motorized recreation use would be prohibited and 300 visitor-days would be foregone within the WSA. There would be a minor impact on motorized recreation use due to the low level of use displaced from the WSA and the availability of opportunities on public lands outside the WSA.</p>

Table 5 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Transmission-Line Corridor Development	There would be no impact on development of the one-half-mile-wide transmission line corridor. The one-quarter-mile width within the WSA would be available for use along 5 miles of the eastern boundary.	There would be a minor impact on development of the transmission line corridor. Wilderness designation would preclude use of one-quarter mile of the one-half-mile-wide corridor. The remaining one-quarter mile width is outside the WSA and would be available for use. Should the Fish Slough WSA also be designated wilderness, there would be a potential moderate impact to the future development of the transmission line corridor, since 2 1/2 miles of the corridor would be entirely within areas designated as wilderness.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

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

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

During the inventory phase, a few comments were received addressing expansion of the utility line corridor and the existence of unique wildlife values.

After the inventory, comments were received during the wilderness study process. One comment noted the possibility of metallic minerals in the WSA and requested the area be dropped from wilderness consideration. One comment noted the groundwater aquifer capabilities for the Fish Slough area while another indicated that the eastern boundary transmission-line is a visual intrusion.

During the study phase, a public meeting and public hearing were held in association with the draft environmental impact statement for the WSAs within the EIS area. The public meeting was held in Markleeville, California, and the public hearing in Bishop, California. Comments were received both orally through the hearing, and in writing during the 90-day public review period. A total of 82 written and oral comments were

received. Thirty-two comments supported the Bureau's no-wilderness recommendation. Forty-two comments supported the all-wilderness alternative, and eight comments supported a partial-wilderness alternative.

Although no Federal agency comments were received specific to this WSA, the Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration, submitted a general written comment requesting the Bureau to provide transmission-line corridor space for future construction of transmission lines on public lands.

No State or County agency comments were received specific to this WSA.