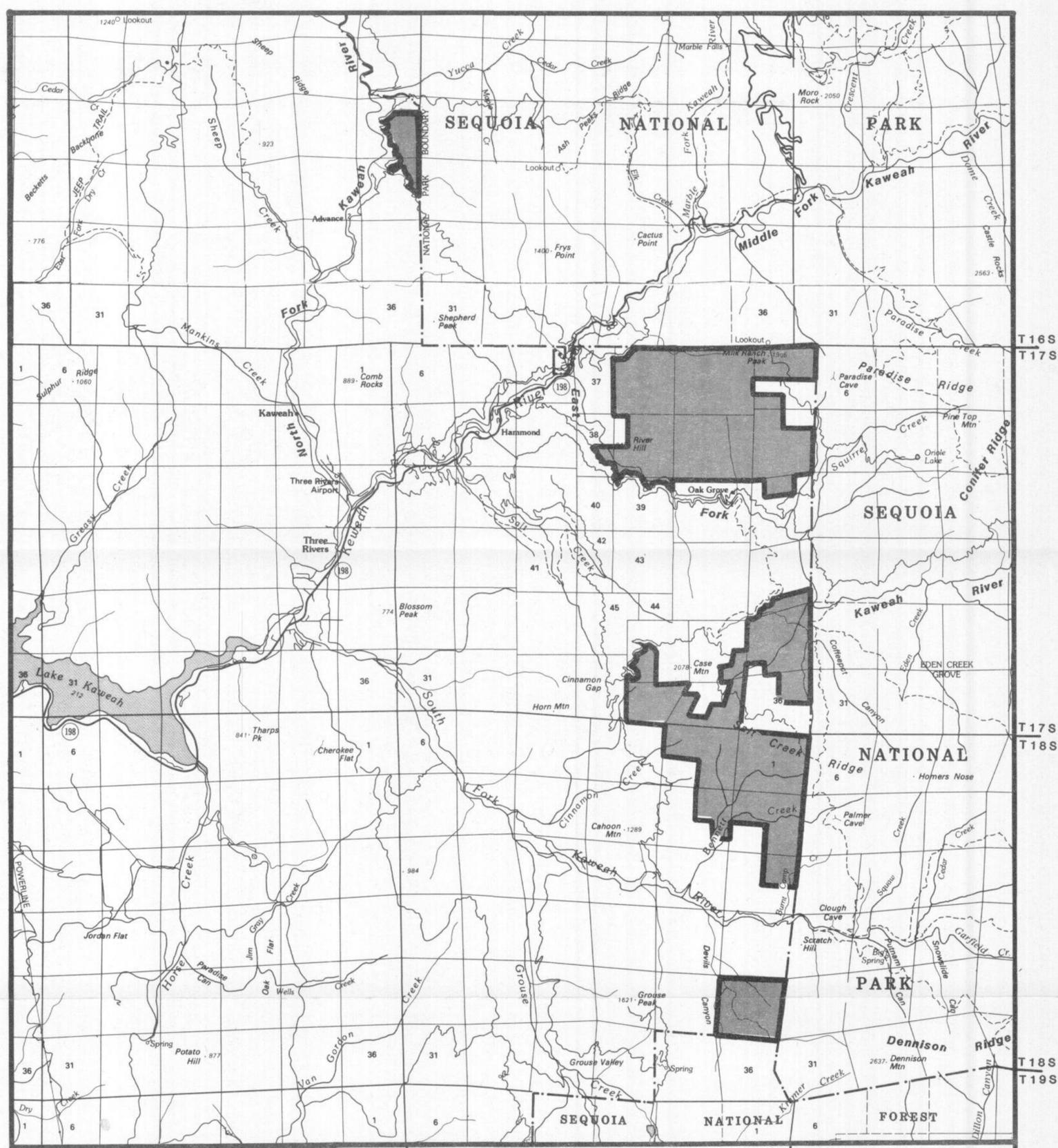


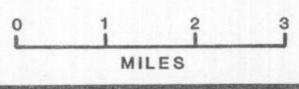
**Milk Ranch
Case Mountain**

CA-010-023



NONE	RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	[Vertical lines]	SPLIT ESTATE
[Solid grey]	RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS	[Horizontal lines]	STATE
[Grid pattern]	LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	[Diagonal lines]	PRIVATE

Milk Ranch/Case Mountain Proposal
MAP-1



010-023
 JUNE, 1988

MILK RANCH/CASE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-023)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 8,970 acres

The Milk Ranch/Case Mountain WSA consists of four separate parcels spanning a distance of 15 miles in Tulare County. The four parcels are: North Fork, Milk Ranch, Case Mountain, and South. The northernmost parcel is approximately six miles north of Three Rivers and the southernmost parcel is about nine miles southeast of Three Rivers (or thirty miles east of Visalia). The WSA includes 8,970 acres of BLM lands. No private holdings are located within the WSA (see Map 1 and Table 1).

All four parcels of the WSA are bounded on the east by Sequoia National Park lands. The North Fork parcel is bounded on the west by the Tulare County-maintained North Fork Road and private land, on the north by private land, and on the southwest by an unpaved California Department of Forestry (CDF)-maintained road. The Milk Ranch Peak parcel is bounded on the north and east by Sequoia National Park and private land, on the west by private land, and on the southwest by the Mineral King Road. The Case Mountain parcel is bounded by Case Mountain Road and private lands on the west, by private lands and part of a jeep trail on the north, and by private lands on the south and partially on the east. Private land bounds the south parcel on the north, south, and west.

Topography and vegetation vary from parcel to parcel within the WSA. The landscape changes from rocky, rounded, steep slopes to low, rounded hills and steep, forested slopes cut by gorges. Numerous intermittent creeks transect the area, supporting riparian growth along the banks. The North Fork parcel is primarily covered by oak woodland with some open grasslands on the western edge; higher elevations are covered with mixed chaparral. Mixed chaparral covers most of the Milk Ranch parcel; some mixed conifer and oak woodlands grow near the National Park Service (NPS) Milk Ranch Peak lookout. The north-facing slopes of the Case Mountain parcel support mixed conifers and an anomalous small grove of Giant Sequoia redwoods; dense chaparral covers the remaining area. The South parcel consists of mostly densely-covered chaparral slopes.

The WSA was studied under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Central California Study Areas and in the Final EIS for the Central California Section 202 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 EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE ---

0 acres recommended
for wilderness
8,970 BLM acres recommended for
non-wilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the 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 non-suitable. The lack of legal public access, fire management plans, continuance of the range management program, high potential for forest products, size, and the discrete blocky nature of the WSA outweigh the area's wilderness values. Only one parcel adjoins wilderness lands of the NPS; the other NPS lands bordering the WSA are not being studied for wilderness suitability. In addition, effective management of the areas as wilderness would be difficult.

Lack of legal public access severely limits recreational opportunities within the WSA. The North Fork, Milk Ranch, and Case Mountain parcels all have access roads to the WSA boundary, but the roads cross private lands and, therefore, are not open for public use. Only the North Fork parcel has legal public access along the Tulare County-maintained North Fork Road, but here the small size and heavy chaparral cover severely limit recreational opportunities. There is no road to the south parcel.

Fire management plans involve the use of mechanized equipment for suppression and suppression activities which are under contract with the CDF. In addition, the removal of ladder fuels around the larger trees in the Giant Sequoia grove on the Case Mountain parcel may require the use of mechanized equipment. As proposed in the South Sierra Foothills Management Framework Plan, the high scenic, human interest, and scientific values of these trees need to be safeguarded against major fires.

All but the South parcel is managed for forage for livestock and deer. All or part of five grazing allotments make up the WSA with season of use varying from year-long to March through June. Livestock use, maintained at the existing level of 424 AUMs, will be increased by an 800-acre prescribed burn (to be repeated every 10 to 15 years in the Case Mountain parcel) to improve forage by about 80 AUMs. This will also benefit the Mineral King deer herd which forages in this area during the critical winter months. In addition, spring developments for wildlife and livestock use will require continued motorized vehicle access. With this recommendation there is 1 1/2 mile of route of travel which will remain available for vehicular use.

Timber management on the Case Mountain parcel requires the use of mechanized equipment, especially for pest management. Wilderness designation would constrain methods of control for the Ips beetle (infecting the Ponderosa pines in the Case Mountain and Milk Ranch parcels) resulting in an increased risk of disease and death of a large number of trees. Logging already occurs on adjacent private lands. Sustained Yield Unit (SYU)-15 recommends some parcels of the WSA for Intensive Timber Management, providing it is economically feasible. Besides local socio-economic value, there is a high potential for forest products.

The split parcel nature of the WSA makes manageability of its wilderness values extremely difficult. The four parcels lack sufficient size and manageable configurations to make practical their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.

Only one parcel, Milk Ranch, borders an area of wilderness. The other three parcels adjoin Sequoia National Park land that has not been recommended for wilderness designation. Local NPS personnel concur that the non-wilderness proposal is compatible with current park management plans.

The irregular shape, combined with a lack of topographical or cultural features to delineate the boundaries, would make managing the area as wilderness difficult. Extensive signing, and in specific cases, fencing of the boundaries would be necessary. Vehicular trespass from adjacent private lands presents management problems. The small size and split parcel nature of the WSA does not lend itself to effective wilderness management.

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

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	8,970
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
	State	0
	Private	0
Total		<u>8,970</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)	8,970
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>8,970</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA has retained a good degree of its natural character. The landscape alternates from rocky, rounded, steep slopes to low, rounded hills and steep, forested slopes cut by gorges. Vegetation varies with topography; the lower hills support oak woodland and scattered chaparral communities, and the higher mountains support coniferous forests with a small grove of Giant Sequoia on the Case Mountain parcel. Numerous intermittent creeks transect the area, supporting riparian growth along the banks.

A few primitive vehicle routes are the only imprints of man's activities. A graded logging road (erroneously omitted from the original wilderness inventory map) runs through the Case Mountain parcel, dividing the parcel into two separate parcels and leading to an intricate network of logging roads and skid trails. There

is also a road in the northeastern corner of the Milk Ranch parcel. Overall, with access limited by private land boundaries and rugged terrain, human encroachment has been minimal. Logging practices on Case Mountain and traffic along the Case Mountain and North Fork boundary roads detract from the naturalness of the WSA.

2. Solitude: Vegetative and terrain diversity within each parcel provide some opportunities for solitude through their screening effect; but the scattered nature and irregular configuration of these four small WSA parcels, as well as the penetrating nature (and closeness) of adjacent private lands, limit opportunities for solitude. Traffic along the North Fork and Case Mountain roads and logging on Case Mountain negatively impact the WSA's 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: As with solitude, the irregular configurations, and small parcel sizes of bordering private lands hamper opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation within the WSA. A lack of legal public access also limits recreation in the WSA. The WSA is used for an estimated 100 visitor days per year, mostly in the form of hunting and some hiking, along the North Fork parcel. The bordering NPS lands are rugged and without trails.
4. Special features: The Giant Sequoia in the Case Mountain parcel are unique. They possess high scenic, human interest, and scientific value. The area also contains critical winter range for the Mineral King deer herd.

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 5,380 acres of the Sierran Forest/Mixed Conifer Forest and 3,590 acres of the Sierran Forest/Chaparral ecosystem. The Milk Ranch/Case Mountain 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 Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Mixed Conifer Forest	26	1,772,907	13	143,531
Chaparral	8	68,312	1	12,959
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Sierran Forest/ Mixed Conifer Forest	26	1,772,907	1	550
Chaparral	8	68,312	1	12,959

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 16 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>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,515
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Salinas-Seaside-Monterey	24	3,676,896	45	644,415
San Francisco-Oakland	39	4,473,002	39	565,614
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria- Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Santa Cruz	27	3,765,512	32	407,890
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Vallejo-Napa-Fairfield	44	4,832,667	74	2,100,862
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The WSA is within 50 air miles of one BLM WSA recommended for wilderness designation, Sacatar Meadows (CA-010-027). The land in the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, just north of the Milk Ranch parcel, is managed as wilderness. Other wilderness areas nearby are: the Monarch-Sequoia and Sierra National Forests, Jennie Lakes-Sequoia National Forest, Dinkey Lakes-Sierra National Forest, and the John Muir-Inyo and Sierra National Forests.

C. Manageability

The Milk Ranch/Case Mountain WSA is manageable as wilderness but only with extreme difficulty. Manageability problems include the overall irregular shape with predominantly sectional (rather than topographic or cultural feature) boundaries, leading to difficult recognition on the ground. Frequent signing, detailed maps, and intensive patrolling along various segments of the border would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. The small individual parcels of the WSA and the adjacent private lands hinder effective management of the area as wilderness. In addition, vehicular trespass from these bordering private lands could be a problem.

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 geology and mineralization of the Milk Ranch/Case Mountain WSA is addressed in the Affected Environment Section of the California Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas Final Environmental Impact Statement, 1987 (EIS). Although no G-E-M report was prepared, a literature search of mineral inventory was made by BLM staff in 1986 (L. Vredenberg, Geology and Mineral Resources of the Milk Ranch/Case Mountain Wilderness Study Area). The EIS states that the potential for minerals is low.

The 1982 mineral inventory states that the WSA is generally within the limits of the Sierra Nevada Batholith, geologic province. The Sierra Nevada Batholith is a Mesozoic granitic rock unit that has intruded into older Paleozoic metamorphosed sedimentary rocks including marble, quartzite, slate and schist. Within the Case Mountain parcel, sections 1, 12 and 13 are metasediments that are in contact with the granite. These granite/metamorphic rock contact zones are possible sources of tungsten mineralization. However, the lack of interest in the area coupled with the extreme localization of contact zones led to the determination of low potential for the occurrence of locatable mineral resources using the BLM mineral classification scheme.

The Bureau's mining claim index of April 8, 1987 listed one placer mining claim (CA MC 161815) in section 11, T. 17 S., R. 19 E., MDM. Due to the apparent lack of assessment work this claim was considered abandoned and void by BLM in January 1988.

The EIS does not address the potential for oil and gas or other leasable minerals. The 1982 mineral investigation states that the geologic environment of this WSA is not favorable for the occurrence of leasable minerals such as oil, gas and evaporates. The EIS does not address salable minerals (sand, gravel, etc.). The 1982 mineral report states that the WSA is remote and access is difficult to nonexistent. Because of poor accessibility, development potential for salable minerals was determined to be low.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: Because the WSA has been or was recommended non-suitable by BLM, no mineral surveys were conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) or U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM). There has been no new data generated since the 1987 EIS was published. No mining claims exist within the boundaries of the WSA according to BLM records dated April 1, 1988. Because the WSA has only a low potential for the occurrence of mineral resources, no mineral potential map was prepared for this document.

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Central California Section 202 Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION NO WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Wilderness Values	The wilderness values of the WSA as a whole will receive minor to negligible impacts. Most of the impacts (such as those from OHV use of the one-quarter mile trail in the North Fork parcel and the spring developments) will be very localized. Prescribed burning will disrupt naturalness on 15 percent of the area for some visitors every 10-15 years, but the impact will be temporary (less than two years).	Impacts on wilderness values would be the same as under the Proposed Action, except that there would be no impact from OHV use and the impacts from prescribed burning would be reduced over 95 percent (less than one percent of the WSA would be affected).
Impacts on Timber Resources	The Giant Sequoia trees in the Case Mountain parcel will face a moderately reduced risk of wildfire.	The impact on timber resources would be the same as under the Proposed Action.

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, the majority of the comments received supported the wilderness study of the area. A few comments addressing wildlife values in the area were considered. One comment indicated the existence of a concrete conduit in the Milk Ranch parcel; a subsequent field check resulted in the exclusion of the conduit from the WSA.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held in Fresno, California. During the public hearing and comment period, a total of 74 comments, both oral and written, were received relative to the total study effort. Five comments specific to this WSA were responded to in the final EIS. The majority of the comments supported the all-wilderness alternative.

The NPS commented that the area met the wilderness study criteria and should be studied for wilderness. Subsequent discussions with personnel of Sequoia National Park indicated that only one BLM parcel is now up against park lands managed as wilderness. The NPS further stated that the Giant Sequoia trees should be protected.

The Sequoia National Forest commented on the location and acreage associated with the unit.

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