

San Felipe Hills

CA-060-023

SAN FELIPE HILLS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-060-023)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 5,325 acres

The San Felipe Hills WSA is located in northeastern San Diego County, about 18 miles west of Borrego Springs and 85 miles northeast of San Diego. The study area is two miles west of the unincorporated community of Ranchita, and its southeast corner borders Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. This 5,325-acre WSA consists entirely of public lands administered by the BLM (see Map 1 and Table 1).

Sandwiched between County Highways S22 and S2, the San Felipe Hills WSA is an isolated parcel of public land entirely surrounded by other ownerships, which accounts for the WSA's irregular shape. From the northwest corner of the WSA near Barrel Spring and County Highway S22, the study area boundary follows section lines, that form the legal boundary between public and private lands, east for one and one-quarter miles. Then trending south and east, the boundary continues to conform to the public-private property line for two and one-half miles until it meets a powerline at the head of Grapevine Canyon. Following the powerline approximately one and one-half miles southeast down the canyon, the study area excludes about 60 acres of public land located north of the powerline. Then once again conforming to the irregular public-private property line, the WSA boundary winds for four and one-quarter miles to the edge of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, following the state park boundary due south for one and three-quarter miles. At the WSA's southeast corner, the boundary again meets private property fronting on County Highway S2. The WSA boundary then runs west and north along the property lines, generally paralleling the highway for six and three-quarter miles, until it heads due north for one and three-quarter miles back to the northwest corner.

The WSA is a northwest- to southeast-trending ridge, six and one-half miles long and one-half to one and one-half miles wide. The terrain consists of rolling hills that rise steeply from the surrounding valleys. Elevations range from 2,800 to 4,660 feet. The hills are covered with dense, scrubby chaparral, with small clusters of live oak and scrub oak on the lower slopes. A portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through the study area.

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 (MFP) 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. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EISs: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE ---

0 acres recommended for
wilderness
5,325 BLM acres recommended for
nonwilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for the San Felipe Hills WSA. The entire acreage in this WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. This recommendation will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The all-wilderness recommendation is environmentally preferable, because it would result in the least change to the existing natural environment over the long term. It is not the recommendation for this WSA, however, for the reasons described below.

The WSA will continue to be managed in accordance with the 1981 Eastern San Diego County MFP, as amended. Since this is a broad-based, general plan, not all future management actions can be predicted with certainty. Projections have been made to allow analysis of the effects of the recommendation. Although the BLM is not necessarily committed to all of these actions, the following is an outline of reasonably feasible activities which could be expected to occur. Recreation management actions will be directed toward enhancing nonmotorized recreation opportunities on the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, which runs the length of the WSA. With the exception of one-quarter mile of jeep trail, all vehicle routes have been and will remain closed to motorized use. Existing levels of grazing in the San Felipe Allotment will continue. There are approximately four miles of routes of travel including primitive ways, washes and other unmaintained routes of access which will remain available for vehicular use.

The addition of the San Felipe Hills to the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) would not add to the diversity or uniqueness of the system, nor would it add significantly to the wilderness recreation opportunities available in the region. These factors, combined with the fact that this WSA has only marginal wilderness values, led to the nonwilderness recommendation.

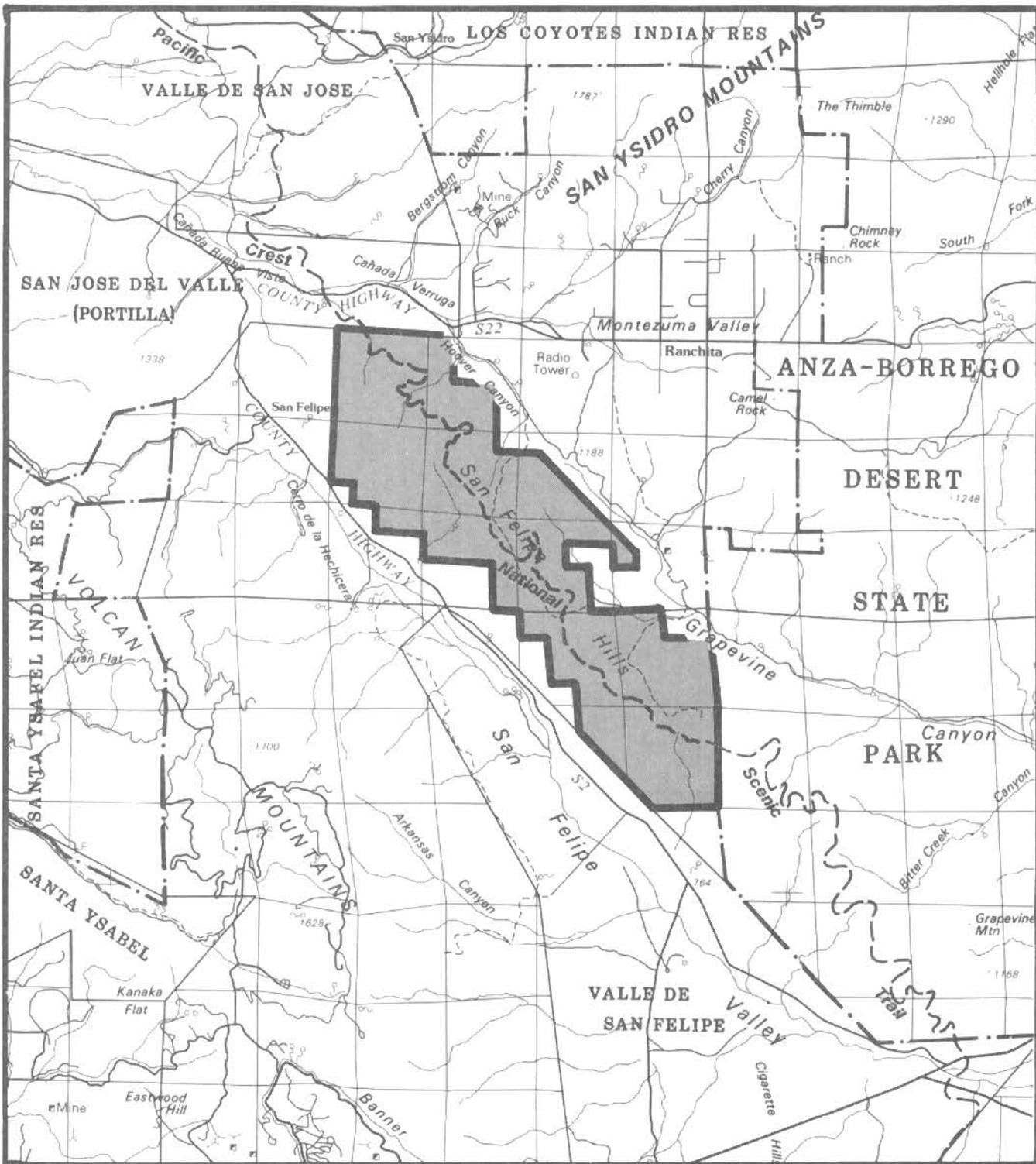
The landform and ecosystem exhibited by the San Felipe Hills are already well represented in other areas identified for wilderness preservation. Three nearby WSAs, Sawtooth Mountains B, 20 air miles southeast; Carrizo Gorge, 30 air miles southeast; and Santa Rosa Mountains, 25 air miles northeast, contain a combined total of over 97,000 acres which BLM is recommending for wilderness designation. All are mountainous, and all contain examples of the same type of chaparral ecosystem found in the San Felipe Hills. In addition, there is similar State-designated wilderness in the adjacent Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

The naturalness and opportunities for solitude within this WSA only minimally meet the criteria defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Because the study area is narrow, and exists as an isolated ridge of public land nearly surrounded by private property containing developments, it is difficult to escape the sights and sounds of civilization. These outside sights and sounds detract from the sense of solitude and remoteness to be

experienced within the area. Considering the small size of the area, human alterations to naturalness are relatively concentrated. Although the San Felipe Hills WSA is still predominantly natural, it could hardly be called pristine.

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
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		<u>5,325</u>
 <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		<u>0</u>
 <u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		 <u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	5,325
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>5,325</u>

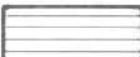


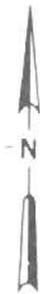
T 10 S
 T 11 S
 T 11 S
 T 12 S

R3E R4E

R4E R5E

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

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**San Felipe Hills
 Proposal
 MAP-1**



060-023
 JUNE, 1988

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The San Felipe Hills WSA generally appears to have been affected by the forces of nature, with human influences unnoticeable for the most part. Human imprints in the area consist of about ten miles of fire breaks and primitive ways, three miles of maintained range fencing, two miles of abandoned range fencing, a livestock water tank and trough, and two abandoned spring developments, each consisting of a battered trough and several hundred feet of broken pipe. In addition, the WSA contains 11.8 miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail winding along the ridgetop. Human alterations to the natural environment are visible from many parts of the WSA. These intrusions, the elongated shape of the unit, and the presence of a powerline forming the northeastern boundary, combine to create a diminished sense of naturalness to the observer.
2. Solitude: The area's topographic variation, low visitation, and the dense vegetation combine to allow ample opportunities for solitude, despite the area's small size. However, because of the area's small size it is difficult to escape outside sights and sounds, which reduce the feeling of remoteness.

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 area offers good opportunities for primitive or unconfined types of recreation. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail enhances primitive and unconfined recreation along the crest of the San Felipe Hills, although these opportunities are limited by the lack of potable water sources. This portion of the trail, completed in 1985, currently receives an estimated 250 visitor-use days per year. Use is expected to increase to approximately 1,500 visitor-use days per year by 1988 when connecting trail segments outside the WSA are completed and through-traffic is routed via the San Felipe Hills. Currently, trail use is centered primarily around day hiking and riding, sightseeing, and rockhounding. Backpacking and horse packing will account for a major portion of the increase in use expected following completion of the connection with the rest of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. At present, the San Felipe Hills form part of a trail segment nearly 30 miles long which is without a potable water source.

4. Special Features: An 11.8-mile, fully constructed segment of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail is within the San Felipe Hills WSA. Open to non-motorized use only, this Congressionally-designated national scenic trail follows the crests of the west coast mountains from Canada to Mexico.

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 5,325 acres of the California Chaparral/California Oakwoods ecosystem. Wilderness designation of the San Felipe Hills WSA would not increase the ecological diversity of the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

<u>Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV</u>	<u>NWPS Areas</u>		<u>Other BLM Studies</u>	
	<u>areas</u>	<u>acres</u>	<u>areas</u>	<u>acres</u>
	<u>NATIONWIDE</u>			
California Chaparral/ California Oakwoods	4	105,301	6	34,401
	<u>CALIFORNIA</u>			
California Chaparral/ California Oakwoods	4	105,301	6	34,401

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 seven 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	NWPS areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,616
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
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
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
San Diego	15	1,043,680	100	3,378,814

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: The San Felipe Hills WSA is within 50 air miles of 10 BLM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation. The closest designated wilderness is in the adjacent Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Less than 50 air miles away are six other wilderness areas: Agua Tibia, Santa Rosa, Pine Creek, and Hauser, administered by the U.S. Forest Service; and Mt. San Jacinto and Cuyamaca Mountains State Wilderness Areas.

C. Manageability

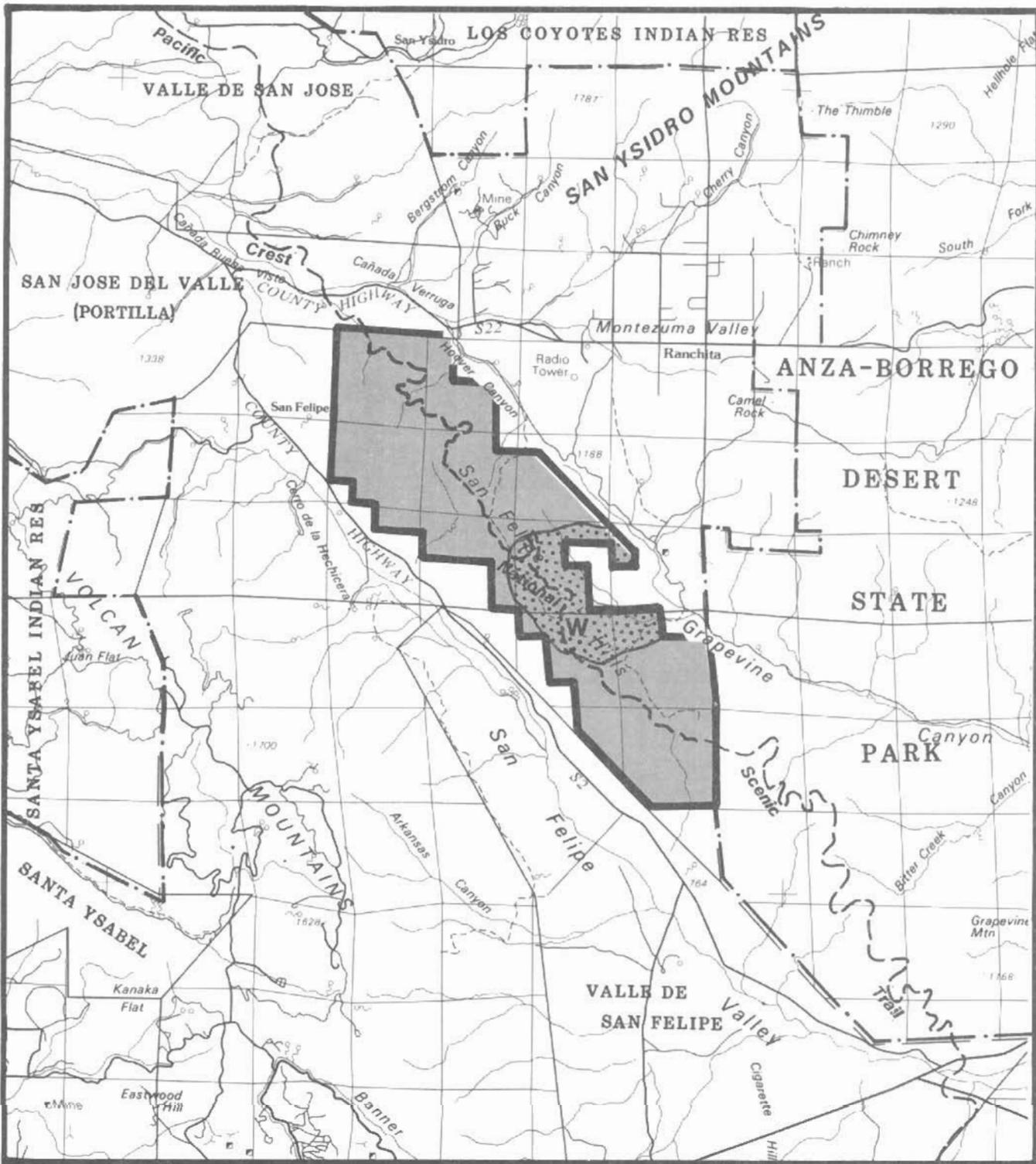
The WSA is manageable as wilderness. Almost all of its primitive ways are already closed to vehicles, and the rough terrain precludes indiscriminate vehicular trespass.

The established grazing use which occurs in the WSA could continue under wilderness designation.

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 San Felipe Hills WSA is located in the McCain Valley Geology-Energy-Mineral (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). BLM prepared a McCain Valley GRA Report in 1980; however, that report was for the entire area and was not specific to this WSA. The report indicates a moderate potential for the occurrence of tungsten in the east-central portion of the WSA (See Map 2). Prospects for tungsten were found in replacement deposits within schist rock and near contacts with quartz diorite. These deposits were developed in the early 1950s. Although moderate potential for the occurrence of tungsten was acknowledged, the potential for development was considered very low at the time of the wilderness recommendation process. No other mineral resources potentials were known. (The McCain Valley GRA Report is a BLM administrative report available in the California Desert District G-E-M resource files).



- 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**
- W** Tungsten



**San Felipe Hills
Mineral Resource Potential**



**MAP-2
060-023**

2. Summary of Significant New Mineral Resource Data Collected Since the Preliminary Suitability Recommendation Which Should be Considered in the Final Decision: No U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Bureau of Mines mineral surveys were conducted for the WSA since it is recommended nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

The 1963 California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) County Report 3 shows mining prospects for tungsten in the eastern part of the WSA, which supports BLM's determination of moderate tungsten potential. In addition, the report shows two gold prospects associated with the tungsten prospects, and one occurrence of phosphates in an apatite dike in crystalline limestone. South of the WSA, over \$1 million in gold was mined from underground mines during the period 1857 through 1937 in the Montezuma gold mining district. Similar geology to this mining district extends into the WSA. However, the WSA cannot be classified for the occurrence of gold due to lack of sufficient data.

According to BLM records, as of December 1987, there were no unpatented mining claims, mineral sales or mineral leases within the San Felipe Hills WSA.

E. Impacts on Resources

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

Issue Topic	Proposed Action (No-Wilderness/No Action)	All-Wilderness Alternative
<u>Impact on Wilderness Values</u>	Development of two water sources and completion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail outside the WSA will increase visitor-use from 250 visitor-use days annually to 1,500 visitor-use days, moderately benefiting primitive and unconfined recreation, but slightly impairing the area's naturalness and solitude.	Impacts on wilderness values are the same as those described in the Proposed Action; however, mechanized fire fighting equipment will be restricted, thereby reducing any surface disturbance associated with this activity and resultant adverse impacts to the area's wilderness values.
	Fire suppression will have a moderate, short-term negative impact on wilderness values if mechanized equipment is used, but impacts will be reduced by post-suppression reclamation (harrowing and hand-seeding).	

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. Known inaccuracies are noted in parentheses.

1. Inventory Phase: Most comments were in agreement with the BIM's findings. Respondents noted the values of the unit and its opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation such as hiking. Others mentioned roads, radio towers, ranches and homes just outside the WSA which they thought interfered with wilderness. Other comments addressed study phase considerations.
2. Study Phase: Several comments received during the inventory phase concerned study phase considerations. They mentioned the valuable minerals and rare earths believed to be located within the unit. Rockhounds wanted vehicle access to their favorite collecting sites.
3. Proposed Livestock Grazing and Wilderness Management for the Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit - Draft EIS: The proposed action recommended that this WSA be designated non-suitable for wilderness. The rationale was that it is bisected by old firebreaks, and rehabilitation may not be effective. In addition, the WSA's visual resources are poor.

During the review of the Draft EIS, 23 letters were received from Federal, State and local agencies, organizations and individuals. Only three of these responses addressed the San Felipe Hills WSA. Two favored a wilderness designation for the unit. The Sierra Club, San Diego Chapter, wanted the decision on wilderness status deferred until about 2001 and the area managed in as close to wilderness conditions as possible. This would allow healing of the old firebreak scars and perhaps, changes in other factors, such as available manpower, so that effective wilderness management would be possible.

The third respondent, an oil company, stated that the region has potential for geothermal resources. They urged that the potential be carefully evaluated throughout the WSA and any promising areas be exempted from wilderness designation.

4. Management Framework Plan (MFP) for Eastern San Diego County Planning Unit - Wilderness Recommendations: The suitability recommendation for the San Felipe Hills WSA was the same as that described above for the Draft EIS on wilderness management. The entire unit was recommended nonsuitable.

Out of approximately 60 responses to the MFP, none specifically mentioned the San Felipe Hills WSA. However, eleven respondents, including the Board of Supervisors of San Diego County, stated that they wanted wilderness for all of the WSAs in the planning unit.

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.