

# Thatcher Ridge

*CA-050-212*

THATCHER RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-050-212)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 17,107 acres

The Thatcher Ridge WSA is located approximately 160 miles north of San Francisco in northeastern Mendocino County. The WSA includes 16,918 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and 189 acres of private land. There is no split estate or State inholdings. (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded on the east and south by the Mendocino National Forest, USFS, and on the north and northeast by private property. It is bounded on the west by private property, with Elk and Sanhedrin Creeks just outside the southwest boundary.

The WSA is comprised of several long, brush covered ridges (Long Doe, Horse Pasture, Thatcher and Bentley), with the WSA running in a north-south direction. The topography consists of relatively flat ridge tops with westerly-facing, brush-covered slopes. Elevations run from about 1,200 feet to Thatcher Buttes 4600 feet. Vegetation varies from dense chaparral/chanise to a few small open grassland/oak meadows. There are some patches of timber along the higher elevations of Hayshed and Thatcher Creeks. There are two small timber-covered areas, containing approximately five MMbf of timber. The lower elevations, along Elk Creek and Sanhedrin Creek, are winter range for deer.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Statement for the Eden Valley/Thatcher Ridge WSAs. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the final EIS. Two suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS/RATIONALE 0 acres recommended for wilderness  
16,918 BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

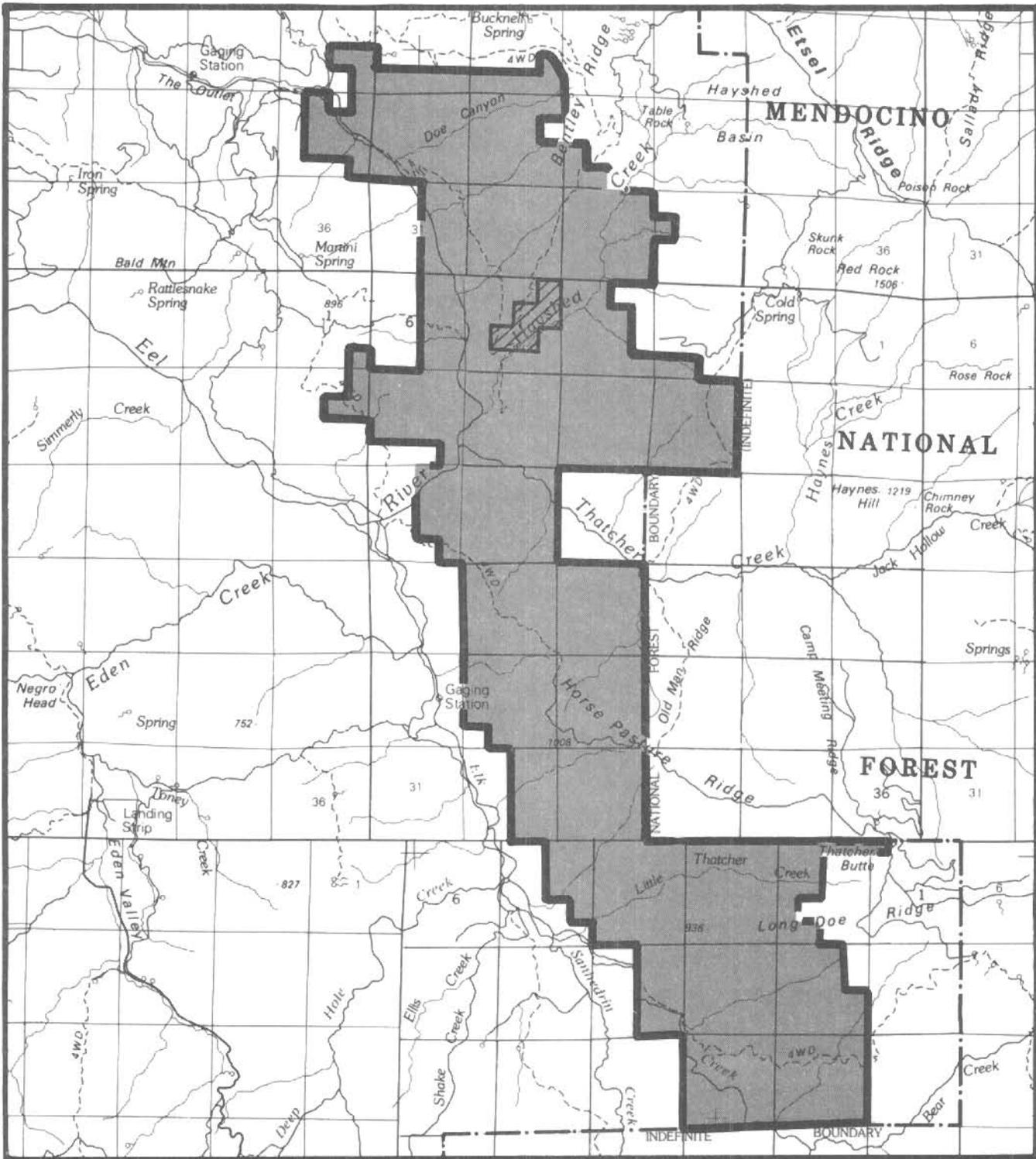
No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all-wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally-preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term.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

The primary rationale for this recommendation is the area's low wilderness values. This WSA consists of two distinct types of topography. The north western portion of the area contains the Eel River and the majority of the area's topographic relief. The southern two-thirds consists of a series of chaparral/chanise covered ridges. Except for the river corridor, the area

does not have outstanding wilderness values. There are no special or distinguishing features within this southern two-thirds which would add to the National Wilderness Preservation System. In addition, this southern portion has been affected by the works of man. Portions of the area have been planted with non-native grasses, and eleven miles of firebreaks extend down most of the ridges. Several of these firebreaks traverse the slopes and are visible from the higher elevations. The net effect of these impacts in combination with limited opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation is an area with low value for designation as wilderness.

The adjacent U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands were dropped from wilderness consideration in the 1984 California Wilderness Act. The USFS agrees with this nonsuitable recommendation for the Thatcher Ridge WSA.

The river's values have been recognized and are protected by the Wild and Scenic River designation.



**NONE**

RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

**RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS**

RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS

**LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS**

LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS

**SPLIT ESTATE**

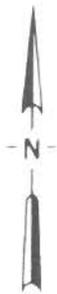
SPLIT ESTATE

**STATE**

STATE

**PRIVATE**

PRIVATE



**Thatcher Ridge Proposal**  
MAP-1



050-212  
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)	16,918
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
<u>Inholdings</u>		
	State	0
	Private	189
	Total	17,107
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Area</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)	16,918
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		16,918

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness

Generally the WSA appears to have been affected by the forces of nature. Human influences are noticeable in the southern portion of the area where the natural condition has been changed by land manipulations such as drilling and planting of non-native grasses. In addition, approximately eleven miles of firebreaks extend down most of the ridges and several traverse the slope. These firebreaks are noticeable when viewed from higher elevations.

The WSA contains two major canyons and a number of smaller ones. The middle fork of the Eel River has formed a canyon that is over

600 feet deep. The river corridor is steep and rugged and is an excellent example of land that has retained its natural character. This portion of the Eel River has been designated as "wild" under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

2. Solitude

Opportunities for solitude are available throughout the WSA but are best along the Middle Fork of the Eel River. Thatcher Creek, Hayshed Creek, and Doe Canyon Creek also offer opportunities for solitude but their proximity to firebreaks and the occasional use of these firebreaks by off-highway vehicles limit these opportunities. It becomes increasingly difficult to find seclusion in the WSA from the midslope of the ridge forming the western boundary of the WSA to the top of the ridge because of the lack of vegetative screening caused by several fires that have occurred in recent years.

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 or Unconfined Recreation

The Middle Fork of the Eel River offers excellent opportunities for primitive recreation such as white water boating; sport fishing for salmon, steelhead, and trout; wildlife observation; and backpacking. The remainder of the WSA offers limited opportunities because of its narrow configuration and very steep, brushy slopes.

4. Special Features

Bald eagles and peregrine falcons, both classified as endangered species, migrate throughout the area. One pair of peregrine falcons is known to nest in the area to the west of the WSA. The Middle Fork of the Eel River flows for five miles through the WSA and has been designated a "wild" river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Eel is a major salmon and steelhead spawning and nursery river.

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 16,918 acres of the Pacific Forest/Chaparral ecosystem. The Thatcher Ridge 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>				
Pacific Forest/Chaparral	2	53,770	2	7,766
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Pacific Forest/Chaparral	1	4,745	2	7,766

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of three major 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>				
Santa/Rosa/Petaluma	10	888,579	12	134,167
Chico	16	1,286,873	13	430,822
Redding	14	1,236,503	11	344,633

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There are two BLM WSAs within 50 air miles that are recommended for wilderness designation - the Chemise Mountain WSA and the King Range WSA in Southern Humboldt County on the Pacific Coast.

C. Manageability

The Thatcher Ridge WSA is manageable as wilderness.

Private property, if developed, could detract from wilderness values, depending on the type and extent of development.

The management of the Wild and Scenic Eel River will not be particularly enhanced by 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 preliminary nonsuitability recommendation: The energy and minerals potential of the Thatcher Ridge WSA is addressed in the East Mendocino Management Framework Plan and in the Eden Valley/ Thatcher Ridge Wilderness Study Areas final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Due to the fact that the area was deemed unsuitable in this EIS, no BLM Geology-Energy-Minerals (G-E-M) report was prepared. In lieu of a G-E-M report, a literature search was made in order to verify the findings of the EIS.

The geology, mineralization and lack of development in the Thatcher Ridge WSA indicate a low potential for mineral resources. The area has potential for the occurrence of copper and manganese and is classified as being prospectively valuable for geothermal resources. Also, a small part of the west side of the WSA is classified as being prospectively valuable for oil and gas. While there is potential for mineral resource occurrence there is no indication that large or extractable deposits are present in the WSA. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines reports indicate no significant mineral deposits in surrounding U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. California Division of Mines and Geology indicate little industry interest in the general area.

The USGS, on February 9, 1967, classified lands in the Thatcher Ridge WSA as being prospectively valuable for geothermal resources. Geothermal indications in the area are scarce. There has been no known geothermal exploration, development or production in the WSA.

The USGS, in November 1982, classified a small part of the west side of the WSA as being prospectively valuable for oil and gas. There has been no known exploration, development or production of oil and gas in the WSA. The WSA has little potential for oil and gas.

In summary, all mineral resource potentials within the Thatcher Ridge WSA are 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: No U.S. Geological Survey or U.S. Bureau of Mines mineral surveys were conducted for the Thatcher Ridge WSA because the area was recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation. Because the mineral resource potential for the entire WSA is considered low, no map depicting mineral potential was prepared. As of January 13, 1988, there were no unpatented mining claims recorded in the WSA. There are no known saleable mineral deposits in the WSA. As of February 11, 1988, there were no oil and gas lease applications in the WSA.

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 Eden Valley/Thatcher Ridge 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	OHV use of less than 75 visitor days/year, timber harvest on 670 acres, and mechanized fire suppression activities would have a minor impact on the area's wilderness values. Prescribed burns would have a short-term impact on the natural scene but would benefit solitude and peregrine falcon foraging habitat. Wilderness values would also be enhanced by 200 acres of commercial tree plantings.	The elimination of 75 visitor days of OHV use, timber harvesting and mechanized fire suppression activities would have a minor positive impact on wilderness values for the most part. The prohibition of 200 acres of planting would have a minor localized negative impact on the opportunities for solitude and primitive or unconfined recreation.
Impact on Riparian Habitat	Full fire suppression with mechanized equipment, continued OHV use, and timber harvest plus the noise and surface disturbance associated with these uses have a minor impact on three miles of riparian habitat. Habitat would benefit from prescribed burning because of the reduction of fuel loads and the incidence of catastrophic wildfires.	Elimination of 75 visitor days of OHV use, recreation development, and prohibition of timber harvesting on 670 acres reduce human influence and have a minor positive impact on riparian habitat.
Impact on Endangered Species	No significant impact. Projected OHV use and the noise associated with this use would have a negligible impact on bald eagles	Designation would eliminate the projected 75 OHV visitor use days and benefit endangered species. Prescribed

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

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
	and the pair of peregrines nesting outside the WSA. Timber harvest would have a minor, short-term impact but would benefit peregrines by increasing their foraging area.	burning activities would especially benefit peregrine falcons, increasing foraging range.
Impact on Anadromous Fish Spawning and Nursery Streams	Prescribed burns and limited timber harvest activities may cause erosion and siltation which would have a minor, short-term negative impact on three miles of anadromous fish spawning and nursery streams. Effects would be minimized by required management actions regulating harvest.	The elimination of 75 visitor days of OHV use on 11 miles of trails and firebreaks and 670 acres of timber harvesting would reduce the possibility of increased erosion from surface disturbance and siltation and having a small positive impact on anadromous fish spawning and nursery streams. These streams may be impacted by prohibiting tree planting in disturbed areas in the drainage.
Impact on Timber Management	670 acres (5 MMbf) of Douglas-fir foregone. Replanting of 200 acres prohibited.	5 MMbf of Douglas-fir foregone. Replanting of 200 acres prohibited.

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

Several comments were received during the wilderness inventory phase. These comments generally supported the Bureau's decision to include the area for further study and recommended all-wilderness.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held in Ukiah, California. During the public hearing and comment period, 20 written comments were received, and nine individuals testified at the hearing. Ninety-five percent of the comments supported all-wilderness.

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors endorsed the preferred alternative (no-wilderness), and the Mendocino County Public Works requested more clarification on possible impacts to county roads if the area were added to the NWPS.

The National Park Service questioned the potential impacts from logging and OHVs on the wild status of the Eel River and on cultural resources.

During informal discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), concerning WSAs where endangered species are present, FWS indicated their belief that prior to any management actions that may affect any potentially eligible threatened or endangered species, Section 7 consultation would be required.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) categorized the DEIS EC-2, environmental concerns - insufficient information, because mitigation measures for potential impacts to water quality and beneficial uses were not fully addressed.