

# **Volcanic Tablelands**

*CA-010-081*

VOLCANIC TABLELAND WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-081)

1. THE STUDY AREA --- 12,499 acres

The Volcanic Tableland WSA is located in southern Mono County and northern Inyo County, approximately five miles north of Bishop, California. The WSA includes 12,499 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, no State lands and no private inholdings (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The northern boundary of the WSA follows Casa Diablo Mine Road to the southeast, then heads south and west along an improved road and private lands. The boundary then proceeds north along a 750 kV powerline right-of-way. As the western boundary moves north it jogs around a section of non-public land then continues along the powerline right-of-way until it meets Casa Diablo Mine Road on the north.

The WSA is located along the western edge of the Basin and Range geomorphic province. The unit occupies the southern portion of the Volcanic Tableland, a geological result of cinder and hot gas eruptions from vents in Long Valley which occurred 700,000 years ago. This unique and vast landscape comprises a series of successive layers of rhyolitic ash deposits which formed a broad tableland expanse gently sloping from northwest to southeast. Elevation ranges from 4,480 feet to 5,200 feet. Generally unaffected by erosion, the unit contains a few low rolling hills and numerous uplifted volcanic terraces and ridges in the southern half of the WSA. Several small bouldery canyons are located along the WSA's southern boundary. The pinkish and reddish volcanic landscape colors provide striking visual hues during the morning and evening hours. Vegetation consists mostly of Great Basin shrubs. No permanent water source exists in the WSA.

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. Three different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EISs: all wilderness, partial wilderness recommending approximately 87% of the area suitable, and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE --- 0 acres recommended  
for wilderness  
12,499 BLM acres recommended  
for non-wilderness

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 non-suitable because of its potential for geothermal and mineral occurrence, transmission-line corridor needs, and motorized/mechanized recreation outweigh the area's wilderness values. In addition, manageability was a strong consideration in the non-suitable recommendation.

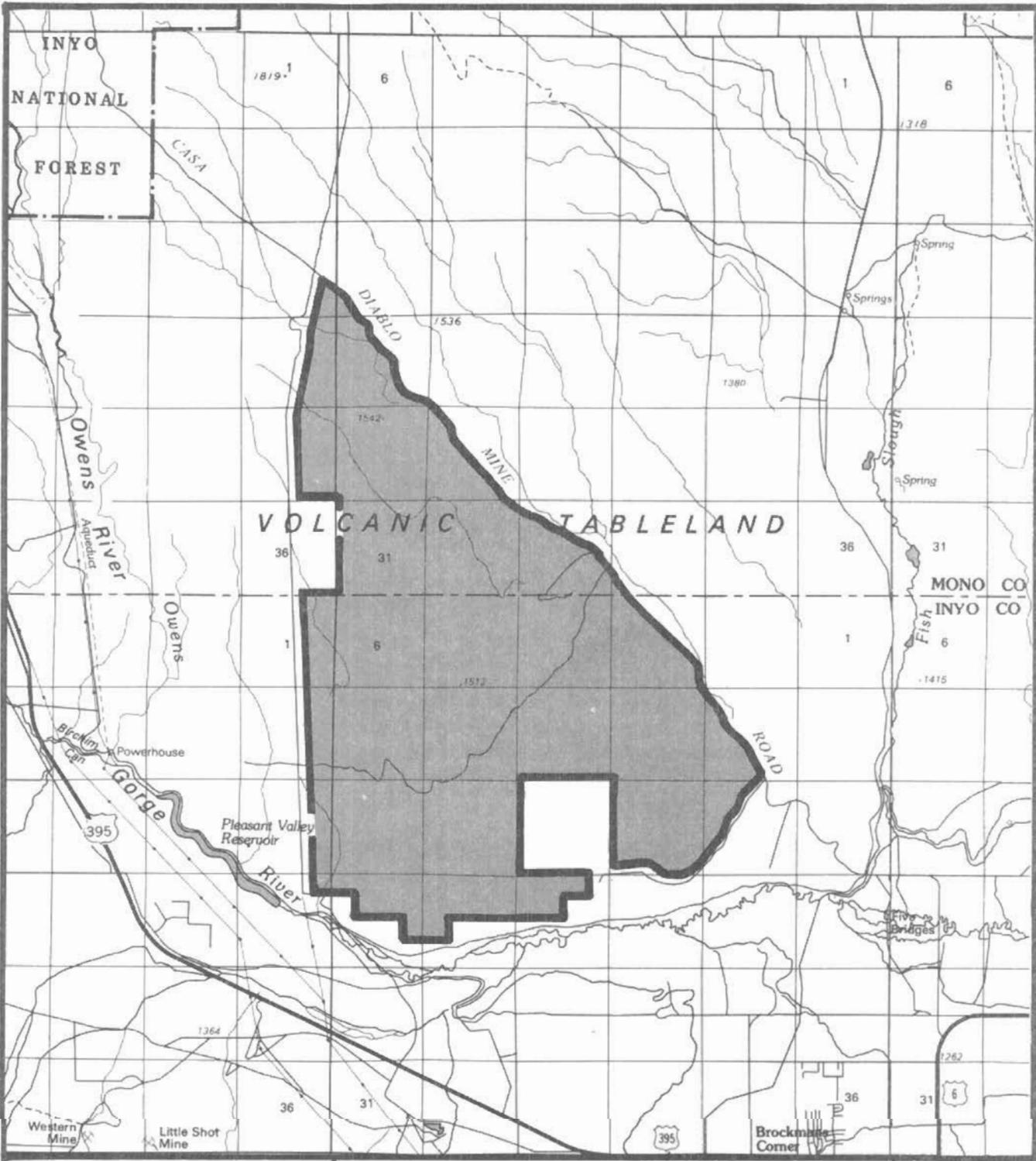
Solitude can be disrupted visually and from noise of local motorized recreation use primarily during winter months. This use occurs primarily on weekends on existing routes. Man-made visual influences outside the WSA such as a 750 kV electric transmission line along the western boundary and the community of Bishop may affect solitude along the WSA's southern and western borders. Some portions of the WSA allow unobstructed views of the transmission line up to a distance of one mile. Periodic vehicle use on the eastern and western boundary roads may also affect solitude visually and aurally.

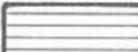
Resource conflicts include moderate potential for geothermal resources and high potential for nonmetallic minerals. There is current demand in the area to quarry decorative building stone known as Bishop tuff.

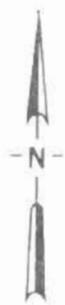
The Benton-Owens Valley Management Framework Plan prescribes a half-mile wide utility line corridor along six miles of the western boundary. This corridor lies in the WSA one-quarter mile east of the present transmission line boundary. There is a high demand to use this corridor. Most recently, Oxbow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

The WSA sustains and provides suitable opportunities for motorized and mechanized recreational use, including motorcycle and mountain bike activities. Approximately 15 miles of primitive vehicle routes are located in the WSA. Use of these routes usually occurs from November to April. It is expected that demand and use of this area for motorized and mechanized recreational activities will increase.

The WSA's relatively flat, broad topography renders it vulnerable to vehicle encroachment. The area is popular with off-highway vehicle users and mountain bikers. Vehicles such as four-wheel drive, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and mountain bikes can easily drive off the boundary roads into this sparsely vegetated WSA. The lack of natural barriers would make it extremely difficult to manage as wilderness. Also, the outside sights of the Bishop community limits opportunities for solitude.



- |                                                                                     |                                             |                            |                                                                                     |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  | NONE                                        | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |                            |  | STATE        |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |                            |  | PRIVATE      |



**Volcanic Tableland Proposal**  
MAP-1



010-081  
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)	12,499
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
Total		<u>12,499</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)	12,499
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>12,499</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The Volcanic Tableland has generally retained its natural character. The WSA is a relatively flat landscape. Some low, rolling hills and occasional volcanic cliffs exist within the unit, but the general character is one of subdued relief with broad, tableland expanses gently sloping from northwest to southeast. The extensive tableland form of volcanic flats and drainages is relatively unique and unusual to the area.

The WSA supports mostly low shrubs such as spiny hopsage, shadscale, ephedra, and dalea as well as intermixed annual plants.

Only a few very minor influences of man are within the unit. This includes a reservoir and approximately 15 miles of primitive vehicle routes. The scale of these influences makes them substantially unnoticeable in the broad spaciousness of the WSA.

The nature of the landscape makes the WSA vulnerable to physical impacts from activities such as indiscriminate off-highway vehicle use.

2. Solitude: The WSA's uncluttered expanse is the major feature that provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and freedom of movement. The small canyons and volcanic bluffs in the WSA enhance these opportunities. However, the outside sights and sounds of the western-boundary transmission line and the Bishop community visually degrade opportunities from solitude on a limited and localized basis.

Additionally, the outside visual and noise influences of periodic vehicle use on the eastern and western boundary roads would slightly diminish 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. No permanent water sources exist in the unit so backpacking is limited by carried or cached water. Most primitive recreation activities occur in the cooler winter and spring months.
4. Special features: This WSA contains habitat for reintroduced pronghorn antelope in the northern tip of unit.

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 12,499 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Great Basin Sagebrush ecosystem. The Volcanic Tableland 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>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	1	32,407	55	1,192,776
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	0	0	19	208,310

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	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	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 three BLM WSAs recommended for wilderness designation. The John Muir and the Ansel Adams Wilderness, 15 and 30 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 Volcanic Tableland WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with difficulty. The gentle nature of the rolling landscape and its sparse vegetation make the WSA very susceptible to physical scarring from activities related to indiscriminate off-highway vehicle use. Frequent signing, fencing most of the border, providing detailed maps, and intensive patrolling would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. The broad, flat nature of the WSA is easily penetrated by vehicles of all types. The WSA contains few natural barriers to prevent vehicles from entering the area. Constant surveillance would be required to protect 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

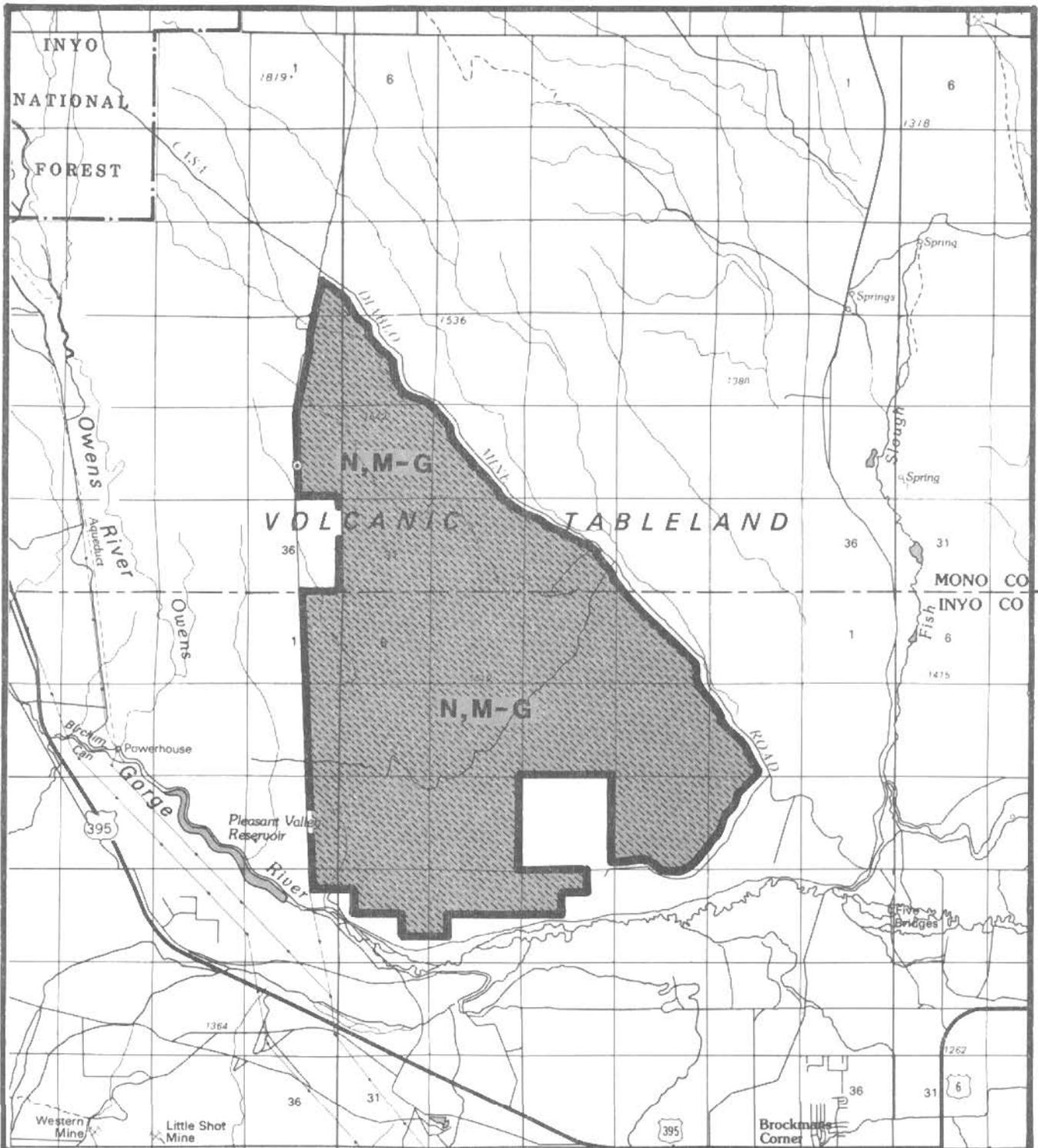
1. Summary of information known at the time of the preliminary suitability recommendation: The northern half of the Volcanic Tableland WSA lies within the BLM Casa Diablo Geology-Energy-Minerals (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). This G-E-M report does not specifically analyze the southern half of the Volcanic Tableland WSA, however, the G-E-M report discusses the area in general terms. 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 Volcanic Tableland WSA has low potential for metallic minerals, no potential for oil and gas, and very low potential for uranium and thorium. There is moderate potential for geothermal resources and this area was classified as being prospectively valuable for geothermal resources by the U.S. Geological Survey in 1985 ("Lands Valuable for Geothermal Resources", unpublished USGS map, revised July, 1985).

The WSA has a high potential for non-metallic minerals due to the presence of the Bishop Tuff. Bishop tuff is a common variety decorative stone currently in demand. The adjacent Fish Slough WSA has a moderate potential for non-metallics. This difference is due to the fact that more historical production of Bishop tuff has occurred in the Volcanic Tableland WSA. There are existing active mining pits in the Bishop tuff approximately one-quarter mile southeast of the WSA boundary (T. 6 S., R. 32 E., NE1/4 of section 14 and NW1/4 section 13). There were no mining claims in the WSA in 1987.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: No U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) or U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) mineral surveys were conducted in this WSA. No new data has been generated since the EIS of 1987. BLM records indicate that there are no mining claims in the WSA as of March 25, 1988.

E. Impacts on Resources

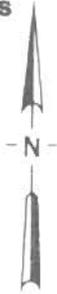
The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resource alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Wilderness - Final Environmental Impact Statement.)



- 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**
- G** Geothermal
  - N** Non-metallic



**Volcanic Tableland  
Mineral Resource Potential**



**Map-2  
010-081**

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	<p>The primary impacts on wilderness values would originate from mining activities in the southeast portion of the WSA and development of the 6 miles of transmission-line corridor along the western boundary. The perception of naturalness would be impaired over 2,960 acres with a direct loss of naturalness on 5 acres. Solitude within the WSA would be diminished within an area of 600 acres as a result of mining activities with additional short-term disruptions within a 2,500-acre area along the transmission-line corridor during powerline construction activities. Projected motorized recreation use and livestock grazing activities would result in slight to minor impacts to wilderness values. Habitat for pronghorn antelope would not be noticeably impacted. Primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities would be slightly impacted on a localized basis as a result of continued motorized recreation use, development of the 6 miles of transmission-line corridor, and the 5-acre quarry for decorative building stone. There would be no adverse impacts on the pronghorn antelope habitat.</p>	<p>Wilderness designation would retain and slightly enhance wilderness values by eliminating motorized vehicle use (300 visitor-days) as well as precluding mining for decorative building stone and development of the transmission line corridor within the WSA along the western boundary. Proposed livestock projects would result in slight to minor, localized impacts to wilderness values. Habitat for reintroduced pronghorn antelope would be slightly enhanced.</p>	<p>Wilderness values would be retained and slightly enhanced within the 10,920 acres of the WSA designated wilderness. Motorized recreation use and mining activities for decorative building stone would be eliminated, benefiting wilderness values. Proposed livestock projects would result in slight to minor localized impacts to wilderness values.</p> <p>Within the 1,579 acres not designated as wilderness, development of the transmission line corridor along the western boundary of the WSA would impair the perception of naturalness over a 2,500-acre area with additional short-term disruptions to solitude as a result of construction activities.</p> <p>Habitat for reintroduced pronghorn antelope would be slightly enhanced except for minor disruptions of use as a result of construction activities within the transmission line corridor.</p>

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (cont.)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Motorized Recreation Use*	There would be no impacts on motorized recreation use which is anticipated to increase slowly from the existing 300 visitor-days to a total of 500 visitor-days.	Motorized recreation use would be prohibited and 300 visitor-days would be foregone within the WSA. Due to the projected low level of use within the WSA and the availability of opportunities on public lands outside the WSA, there would be a minor impact on motorized recreation use.*	Motorized recreation use would be prohibited and 300 visitor-days would be foregone within the designated portion of the WSA which amounts to over 87% of the WSA. No motorized recreation use is anticipated on the one-quarter mile of existing primitive vehicle route within the remainder of the WSA not designated wilderness. Overall there would be a minor impact on motorized recreation use.*
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 6 miles of the western 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. However, the available corridor width outside the WSA would limit the opportunity for multiple transmission-line development which could lead to moderate adverse impacts on the development of the transmission line corridor.	There would be no impact on development of the one-half-mile-wide transmission-line corridor. The one-quarter-mile width of the corridor within the WSA along 6 miles of the west boundary would be in the portion not designated as wilderness.

\*Since this impact was identified in the Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Final EIS, it has been determined that prohibition of motorized vehicle use as well as mechanized vehicles such as mountain bikes under this alternative would have greater (moderate) impacts than originally anticipated. The lack of snow-free areas during the winter use months as well as the potential for other local vehicle use restrictions outside the unit contribute to this reassessment of adverse impacts.

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (cont.)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE	PARTIAL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Mining of Decorative Building Stone	There would be no impact on the mining of decorative building stone. Mineral sales would be permitted. A 5-acre quarry for Bishop tuff is projected for the WSA.	Mining of decorative building stone, including a projected 5-acre quarry for Bishop tuff would be prohibited. There would be only a minor impact as Bishop tuff is available in areas outside the WSA.	There would be a minor impact on mining of decorative building stone within the 10,920 acres of the WSA designated wilderness. Wilderness designation would prohibit mineral sales including a projected 5-acre quarry for Bishop tuff.  Within the 1,579 acres not designated wilderness mineral sales would be permitted. However, no mining of decorative building stone is anticipated. There would be no impact.

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 the negative influences of the boundary transmission line on the WSA's opportunities for solitude and the potential need for expansion of the utility line corridor.

After the inventory, comments were received during the wilderness study process. One comment noted the WSA's opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined types of recreation while another noted that the boundary transmission line is a visual intrusion. One respondent noted the possibility of metallic minerals in the WSA, and thus, requested the area be dropped from wilderness consideration.

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 83 written and oral comments were received. Thirty-three comments supported the Bureau's no-wilderness recommendation. Forty-two comments supported the all-wilderness alternative, and eight comments supported the 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 provide transmission-line corridor space for future construction of transmission lines on public lands.

No State agency comments were received specific to this WSA.

The Inyo County Board of Supervisors has passed a resolution opposing any additional wilderness areas in Inyo County. No comments specific to the Mono County portion of the Volcanic Tableland WSA were received from Mono County.