

Walford Springs

CA-010-092

WALFORD SPRINGS WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-092)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 13,006 acres

The Walford Springs WSA is located in east-central Mono County, approximately 21 miles northeast of Lee Vining, California. The WSA includes 12,840 acres of BLM lands, 166 acres of private land, and no State lands. (See Map 1 and Table 1)

The northern boundary of the WSA follows a 60-kV powerline right-of-way northeast along State Highway 167, then a private land boundary east to the Dobie Meadows Road. The boundary proceeds southeast along this road on the eastern boundary to a maintained road which delineates the southern boundary along with an irregular private land boundary. The boundary then heads northwest along the Mono Basin Scenic Area boundary until it hits a parcel of private land and the 60-kV powerline right-of-way along State Highway 167.

The WSA is located along the western edge of the Basin and Range geomorphic province just east and north of Mono Lake, within a gentle southwest sloping valley consisting of lacustrine and sand dune deposits of ancient Lake Russell. The terrain within the WSA is rather uniform providing little scenic variety. Elevation ranges from 6,440 to 6,800 feet. The vegetation consists of Great Basin shrubs with scattered Juniper trees in the northwestern corner.

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 EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE — 0 acres recommended
for wilderness
12,840 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 its potential for mineral exploration and development outweighs the area's marginal wilderness values. Within this WSA, wilderness values are considered low due to the lack of significant wilderness features or characteristics unique to the region. In addition, manageability was a consideration in the non-suitable recommendation.

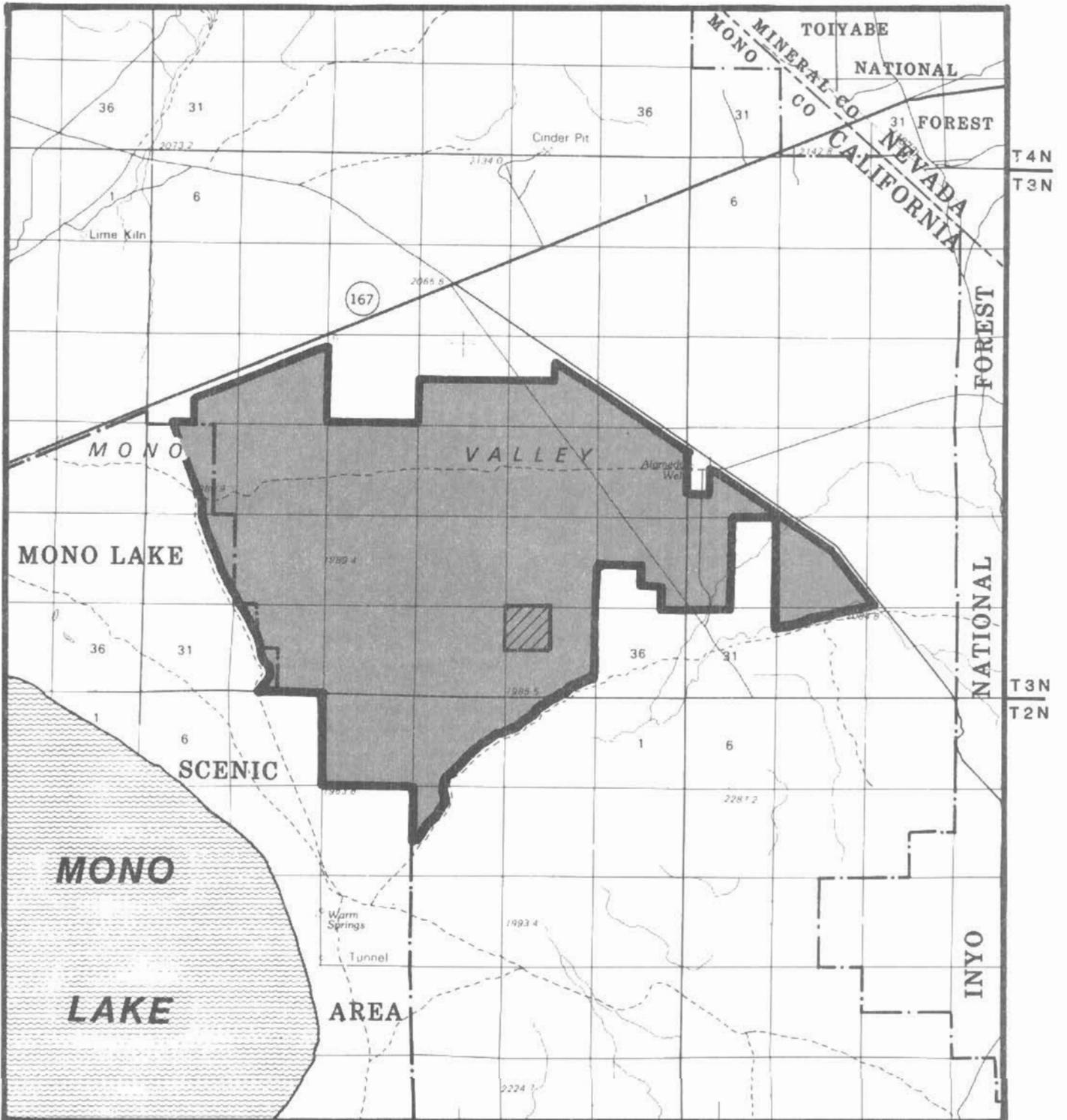
Solitude is somewhat affected visually by vehicle use occurring on State Highway 167 which lies along the WSA's north boundary. Vehicle use occurs on this highway on an intermittent to regular basis.

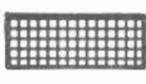
Resource conflicts in the WSA include moderate to high potential for geothermal resources. Some geothermal exploration has occurred within three miles of the WSA in the Mono-Long Valley Known Geothermal Resource Area.

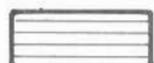
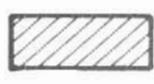
The WSA reflects an environment that is bleak and visually bland. The topography and vegetation is common throughout most of Mono Basin. The WSA's vegetative patterns, forms, and textures blend together into a monotonous landform cover. The juniper trees in the northwest and some localized dune formations provide some visual variety. The lack of significant or unique wilderness values contributes to this wilderness quality. As a result, this WSA would provide little or no significant enhancement to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

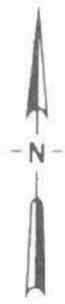
The WSA's relatively flat, broad topography renders it vulnerable to vehicle encroachment. The lack of natural barriers along the unit's boundaries would make it difficult to manage as wilderness.

There are approximately nine miles of primitive ways which will remain available for vehicular use.



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

-  SPLIT ESTATE
-  STATE
-  PRIVATE



**Walford Springs
Proposal
MAP-1**



010-092
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)	12,840
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		166
Total		<u>13,006</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)	12,840
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		<u>12,840</u>

3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The natural character of the WSA has been relatively untouched by man. The WSA consists of gently southwest-sloping valley and fill deposits of ancient Lake Russell, a remnant of the Quaternary age. A few man-made imprints are generally unnoticeable in the WSA as a whole; two fence lines are effectively screened by dense vegetation, and nine miles of primitive vehicle routes are being revegetated, giving the routes a "two-track" appearance.

The terrain is generally uniform. Some dune formations are located along the western end of the unit. Great Basin shrubs dominate the WSA and include big sagebrush, greasewood and cottonthorn. A juniper grove with a sagebrush understory occurs in the northwestern corner of the unit.

2. Solitude: The spaciousness and vegetative screening of the WSA to provide area visitors with outstanding opportunities for solitude. State Highway 167 lowers these opportunities along the north boundary.

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: Opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation include activities such as camping, hiking, hunting, and horseback riding. Scenic views of the eastern Sierra, Mono Lake, and the Bodie Hills are common from within the unit. No permanent water sources exist in the unit.
4. Special features: The WSA contains spring, summer, and fall habitat for pronghorn antelope. This is a good ecological representation of Great Basin pronghorn antelope habitat.

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 12,840 acres of the Intermountain Sagebrush/Great Basin Sagebrush ecosystem. The Walford Springs 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	1,192,435
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
Intermountain Sagebrush/ Great Basin Sagebrush	0	0	19	207,969

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 six 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>				
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Sacramento	46	5,001,817	87	2,479,541
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
<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 1 BLM WSA recommended for wilderness designation. Yosemite National Park, administered by the National Park Service and the Hoover Wilderness, administered by the Toiyabe and the Inyo National Forests are located approximately 27 miles west of the WSA. These are the nearest designated wilderness areas. Other nearby designated wilderness areas include the Ansel Adams Wilderness which is managed by the Inyo National Forest.

C. Manageability

The Walford Springs WSA is manageable as wilderness, but with some difficulty. A lack of natural barriers along the WSA's boundary makes it vulnerable to indiscriminate off-highway vehicle use. The gentle terrain and low vegetation are susceptible to four-wheel drive use and other types of off-road vehicles. Frequent signing, fencing most of the border, and intensive patrolling would be required to insure the integrity of the unit.

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 suitability recommendation: The Walford Springs WSA is located within the Mono Geology-Energy-Minerals (G-E-M) Resource Area (GRA). The geology and mineral resources of the Walford Springs WSA was described in the Mono G-E-M Resources Area Technical Report (GRA No. CA-03) prepared in 1983 by Great Basin G-E-M Joint Venture. The mineral resources in the Affected Environment section of the 1987 BLM Wilderness Recommendations, Benton-Owens Valley/Bodie-Coleville Study Area's EIS was taken primarily from the G-E-M report mentioned above. The EIS states that the WSA has a low potential for metallic minerals, uranium and thorium. There is no potential for non-metallic minerals or oil and gas. The western portion of the WSA was identified as having a high potential for geothermal resources, with the remainder determined to have moderate potential.

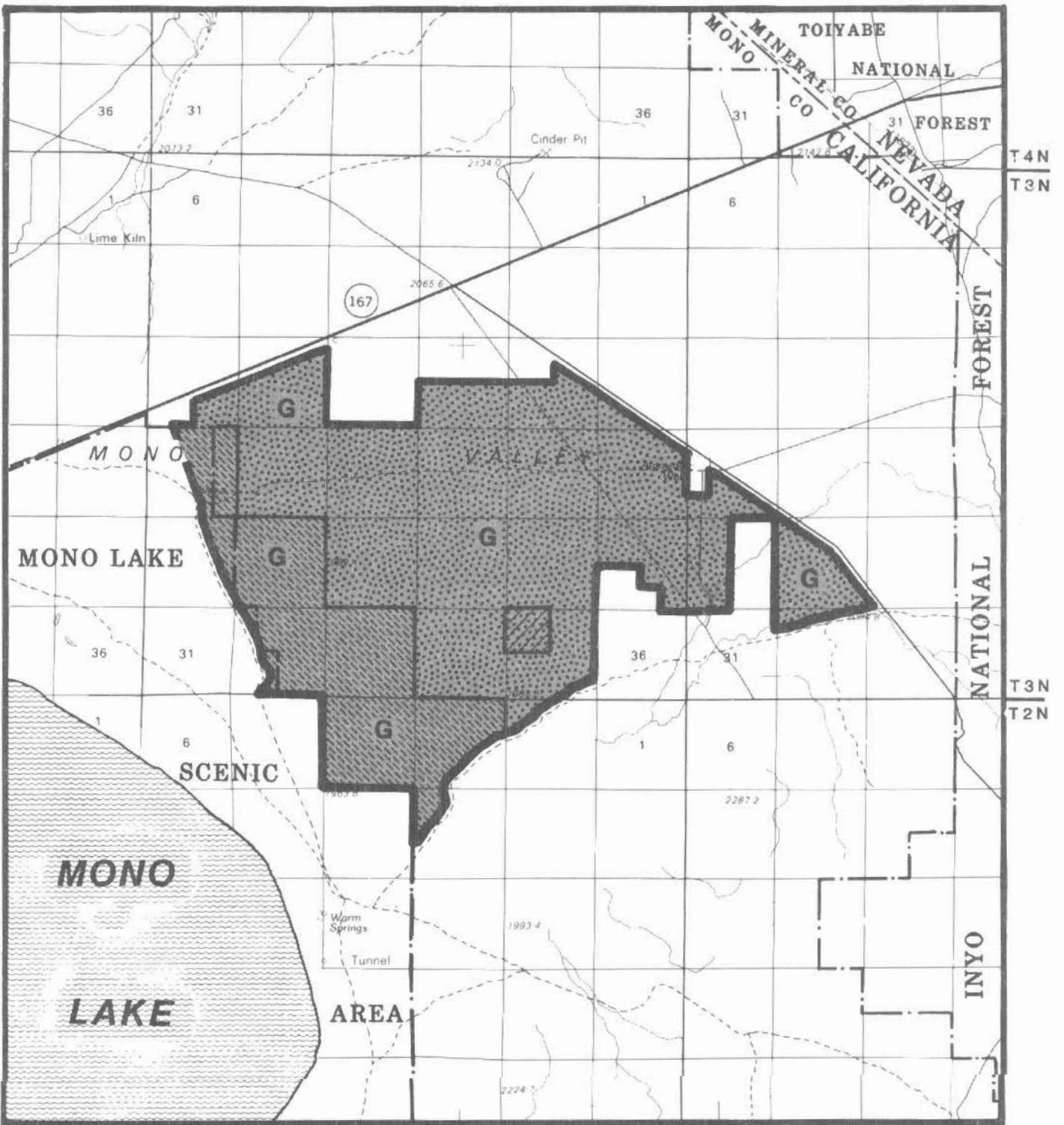
According to the G-E-M report, the entire WSA is covered with lacustrine sediments deposited by the predecessor of Mono Lake. Although covered, a study of the surrounding geologic environment indicated that the lake sediments are underlain by mafic volcanics which were deposited over rhyolite flows. These Pliocene volcanics lie unconformably upon granitic intrusives of the Sierra Nevada Batholith. The western margin of the WSA is in the Mono-Long Valley Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA) (U.S. Geological Survey unpublished map, "Lands Available for Geothermal Resources", Revised July 1985.). Portions of this area had lease applications pending. The presence of hot springs in and around the WSA together with evidence for recent episodes of volcanic activity and faulting at shallow depths support the determination of moderate geothermal resource potential for this WSA. No leases, mines or mining claims were located in the WSA.

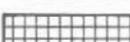
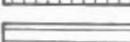
2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation which should be considered in the final recommendation: No U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) or U.S. Bureau of Mines (BOM) mineral surveys were conducted in this WSA.

Since the original EIS, the pending geothermal leases applications have been withdrawn. No other information about mineral potential has been received since 1987. As of March 25, 1988, BLM records indicated no mines, mining claims or leases within the boundaries of 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 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



**Walford Springs
Mineral Resource Potential**



**Map-2
010-092**

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Wilderness Values	<p>Naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation would be moderately impaired by the development of a 50-Mw geothermal facility. Naturalness would be lost on 70 acres, and the perception of naturalness and sense of solitude would be impaired within an area of 3,000 acres. Proposed wildlife and range improvement projects would have low impacts to localized naturalness and solitude. Continued 550 visitor-days of motorized recreation use including the Sierra Safari motorcycle poker run would result in only slight impacts to wilderness values. Loss of 70 acres of pronghorn antelope habitat due to geothermal development would result in minor impacts.</p>	<p>The elimination of 550 visitor days of motorized recreation including the Sierra Safari and the foregone 50-Mw geothermal development would result in slight enhancement of the wilderness values. Proposed wildlife and range improvement projects would have negligible adverse impacts to localized naturalness and solitude. There would be a slight benefit to the area's pronghorn antelope habitat.</p>
Motorized Recreation Use	<p>Motorized recreation use is not anticipated to increase beyond the current level of 550 visitor-days per year. The Sierra Safari motorcycle poker run would continue to utilize portions of the vehicle routes in the WSA. There would be no impacts on motorized recreation use.</p>	<p>Motorized recreation use would be eliminated resulting in a loss of 550 visitor-days per year. The Sierra Safari motorcycle poker run would not be permitted to use existing primitive vehicle routes within the WSA resulting in moderate impacts to the event. Opportunities to shift motorized use to other nearby public lands are limited and may result in a slight loss of use within the general area. Overall there would be a moderate adverse impact on motorized recreation use.</p>

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

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Geothermal Resource Development	Geothermal exploration and development could occur within the WSA. Development of a 50-Mw resource is projected. There would be no impacts on geothermal resource development.	Exploration and development of geothermal resources within the Mono-Long Valley KGRA including a projected 50-Mw resource would be foregone. Over the long term this would result in a minor 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 WSA's geothermal potential, and future needs for powerline corridor expansion.

After the inventory, comments were received up through the wilderness study process. One comment noted the influence of outside sights and sounds on the WSA's wilderness values.

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. Forty comments supported the Bureau's no-wilderness recommendation. Forty-three comments supported the all-wilderness alternative.

During the inventory, Mono County provided a comment noting the area's need for multiple use. No Federal or State agency comments were received specific to this WSA.