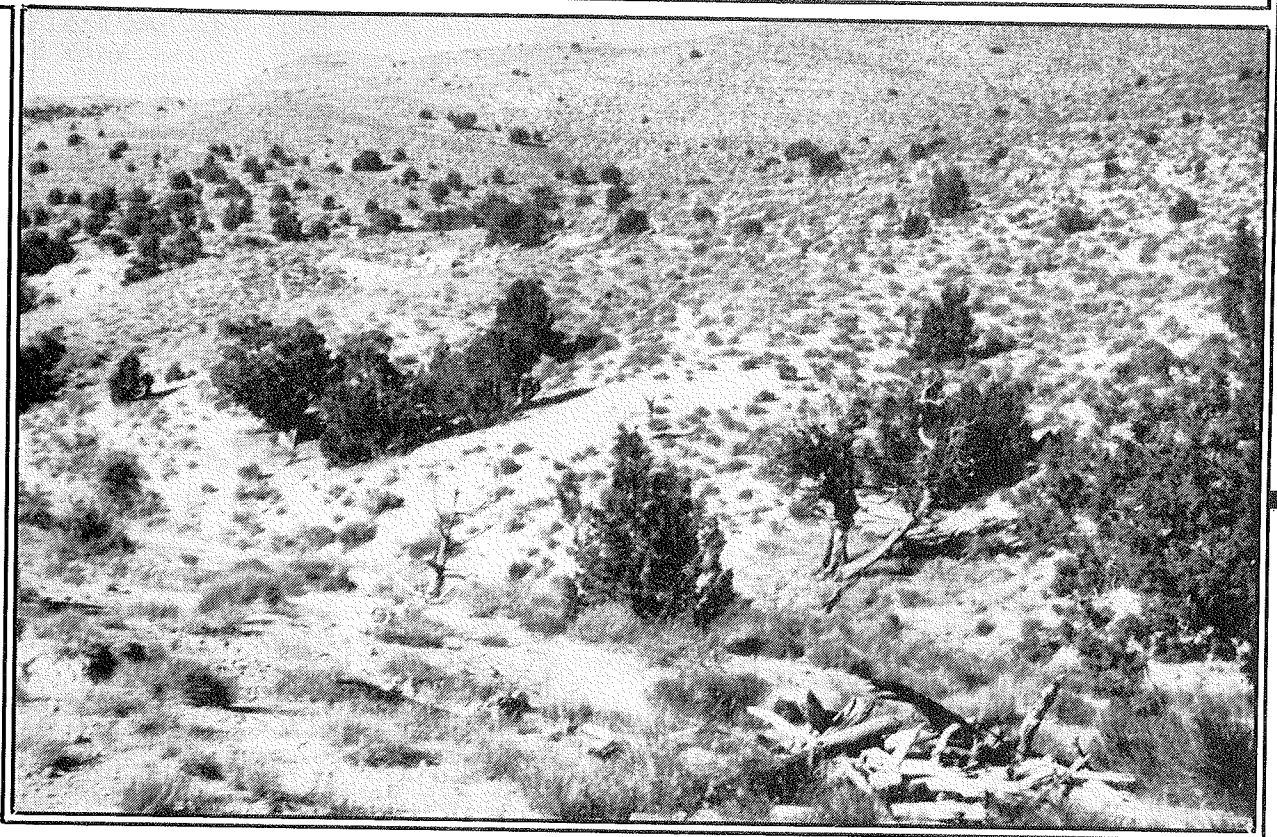


Conger Mountain
WSA



CONGER MOUNTAIN WSA

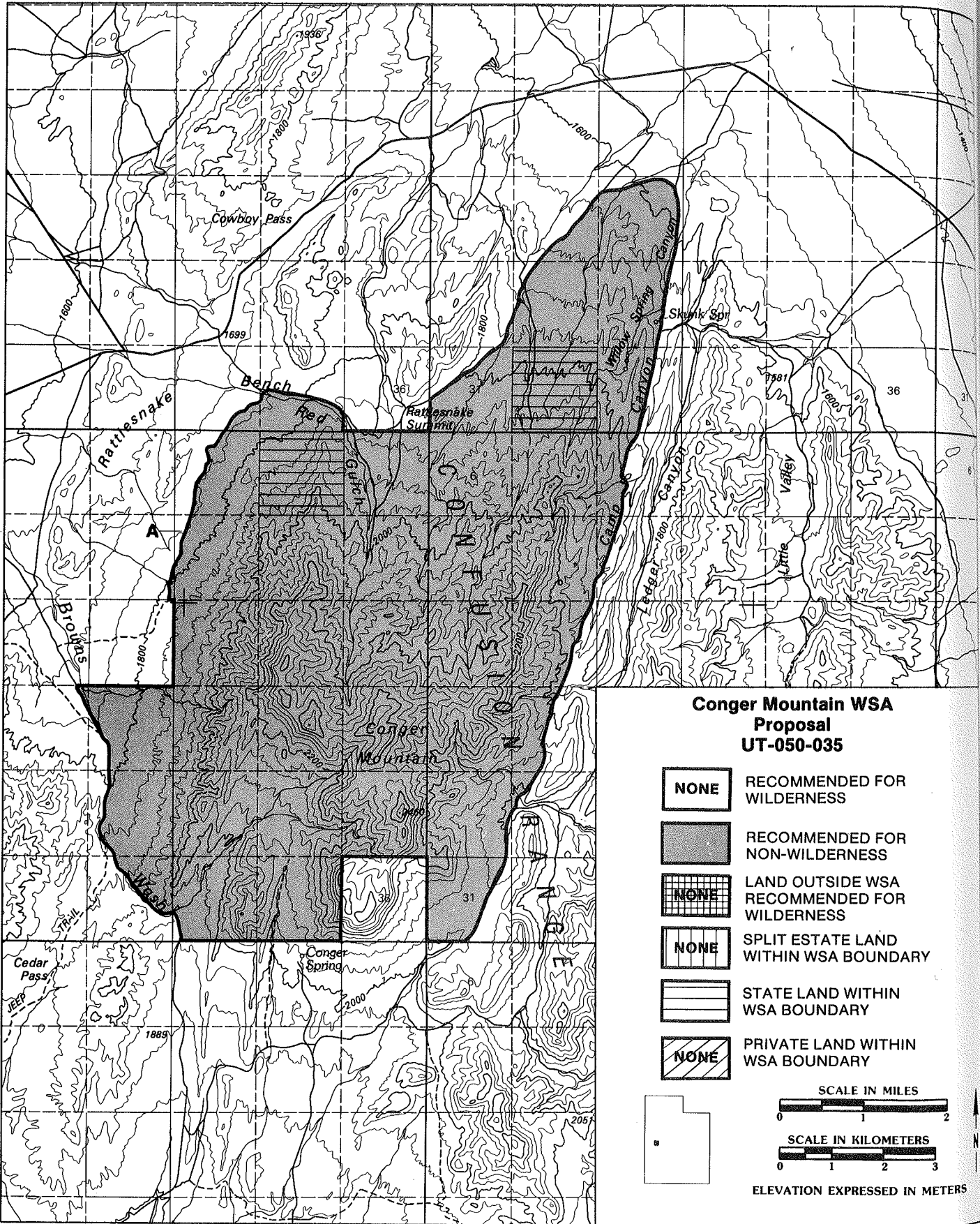
R. 17 W.

R. 16 W.

T. 17 S.

T. 18 S.

T. 19 S.



Conger Mountain WSA Proposal UT-050-035

- NONE** RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS
- NONE** LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
- NONE** SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
- STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
- NONE** PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY



ELEVATION EXPRESSED IN METERS

CONGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA: 20,400 acres

The Conger Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-050-035) is in western Millard County, about 50 miles west of Delta, Utah (population 1,930). The WSA is about 9 miles long from north to south and 6 miles wide from east to west (see Map). It includes 20,400 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and two sections (1,280 acres) of State lands (see Table 1). Improved and unimproved roads partly delimit the WSA on the west, north, and east. Section lines bound the WSA on the south end. The Conger Mountain WSA is surrounded mostly by public lands.

The study area is in the western portion of the north-south trending Confusion Range. The study area consists of low peaks and ledges. Foothills are relatively absent. Elevations range from about 5,200 feet at the edges of the WSA to Conger Mountain (8,070 feet). Pinyon-juniper woodland is the dominant vegetation type.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990.

**TABLE 1
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA**

| WITHIN THE WSA | ACRES |
|---|---------------|
| BLM (surface and subsurface) | 20,400 |
| Split-Estate (BLM surface only) | 0 |
| In-holdings (State, Private) | 1,280 |
| Total | 21,680 |
| WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY | |
| BLM (within the WSA) | 0 |
| BLM (outside the WSA) | 0 |
| Split-Estate (within the WSA) | 0 |
| Split-Estate (outside the WSA) | 0 |
| Total BLM land recommended for wilderness | 0 |
| In-holdings (State, private) | 0 |
| WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS | |
| BLM | 20,400 |
| Split-Estate | 0 |
| Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness | 20,400 |
| In-holdings (State, Private) | 1,280 |

Source: BLM File Data

CONGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: a no wilderness (no action) alternative, which is the recommendation in this report; and an all wilderness alternative.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

- 0 acres
(recommended for wilderness)
- 20,400 acres
(recommended for nonwilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all of the area for uses other than wilderness. Designation of the entire area as wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The alternative selected, however, would be implemented in a manner in which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts.

All of the WSA is natural and about 70 percent provides outstanding opportunities for solitude, but opportunities for primitive recreation are not outstanding and the area is not particularly scenic. The Conger Mountain WSA does not include unusual wilderness characteristics or qualities of high enough value to outweigh other uses or warrant special protection. The special features in the WSA are not unique in this part of Utah. About 60 wild horses are in the WSA, but these animals can be managed and protected without wilderness designation. Although nonwilderness resources in the WSA are not particularly significant, they at least equal or surpass in importance the limited wilderness values. Recreational use is minor, but about 130 annual visitor days of recreational use in the WSA are attributable to vehicular use, whereas only 33 visitor days are for primitive recreation.

3. CRITERIA USED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

Wilderness Characteristics

A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man ex-

hibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Essentially all of the WSA meets the naturalness criteria of the Wilderness Act. Approximately 5 miles of ways within the WSA are substantially unnoticeable. The WSA appears as unaltered limestone outcrops and rolling hills with dark green patches of juniper and scattered pinyon trees.

B. Solitude

About 14,280 acres (70 percent of the WSA) meet the Wilderness Act standards for solitude, or seclusion from other people.

Variations in terrain provide opportunities for solitude; more than a dozen small canyons shield hikers from sights and sounds of other visitors. Vegetation is generally too sparse to provide screening from distracting outside sights and sounds. About 6,120 acres (30 percent of the WSA) lack outstanding opportunities for solitude because of relatively flat topography and sparse vegetation.

The Conger Mountain WSA is in the South Range of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) Utah Test and Training Range (UTTR), one of the country's busiest military air spaces. From 100 to 150 daily flights, 6 days a week, are made in the UTTR. Some flights are as low as 100 feet about ground level. The WSA is within the area of heaviest use, and aircraft occasionally fly directly over the WSA. Most of these overflights are subsonic and are not directly over the WSA, but they can be an annoyance that detracts from but does not eliminate overall opportunities for solitude.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The quality of recreational opportunities overall and for primitive recreation in particular are ordinary and do not meet the Wilderness Act standards.

D. Special Features

A herd of 60 wild horses roam the WSA. While wild horses are not unique in the western United States, they are of considerable interest to the average visitor. BLM management plans are to maintain the herd at or near 60 head.

CONGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Candidate threatened or endangered species, which may inhabit the WSA include the ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, long-billed curlew, western snowy plover, white-faced ibis, and Swasey Spring pocket gopher. These birds frequent areas throughout the Great Basin and western United States. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons, both of which are listed as endangered species, and golden eagles, a BLM sensitive species, inhabit the WSA. Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add a combination of potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in the NWPS, but it would add an ecosystem (saltbush-greasewood) not represented in the NWPS in Utah. PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Intermountain Sagebrush Province/Ecoregion. The PNV ecosystems in the WSA are juniper-pinyon woodland (14,688 acres) and saltbush-greasewood (5,712 acres). Both ecosystems are represented in the NWPS outside of Utah and in BLM study areas in Utah and other states. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of the Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah; Provo-Orem, Utah; and Las Vegas, Nevada standard metropolitan statistical areas. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of these population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

A Conger Mountain Wilderness would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of areas in the western central United States within the NWPS. Inclusion of the Conger Mountain WSA could, however, contribute to balancing the NWPS in the Great Basin.

**TABLE 2
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION**

| BAILEY-KUHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV) | NWPS AREAS | | OTHER BLM STUDIES | |
|--|------------|--------|-------------------|-----------|
| | AREAS | ACRES | AREAS | ACRES |
| NATIONWIDE (INTERMOUNTAIN SAGEBRUSH PROVINCE) | | | | |
| Juniper-Pinyon Woodland | 6 | 93,656 | 75 | 2,139,219 |
| Saltbush-Greasewood | 3 | 45,553 | 37 | 1,025,895 |
| UTAH (INTERMOUNTAIN SAGEBRUSH PROVINCE) | | | | |
| Juniper-Pinyon Woodland | 2 | 14,955 | 13 | 244,745 |
| Saltbush-Greasewood | 0 | 0 | 7 | 141,133 |

Source: BLM File Data.

CONGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

TABLE 3
WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS

| POPULATION CENTERS | NWPS AREAS | | OTHER BLM STUDIES | |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| | AREAS | ACRES | AREAS | ACRES |
| Salt Lake City-Ogden, Utah | 10 | 1,079,807 | 78 | 2,239,275 |
| Provo-Orem, Utah | 11 | 708,638 | 90 | 2,766,468 |
| Las Vegas, Nevada | 38 | 3,132,130 | 54 | 2,134,358 |

Source: BLM File Data.

Within 100 miles of the WSA in a clockwise direction beginning to the northeast, are the 25,500-acre Deseret Peak Wilderness, the 28,000-acre Mt. Nebo Wilderness, and, to the northwest, the 64,677-acre Jarbridge Wilderness. All are in National Forests. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 23 areas comprising 4,868,316 acres in Utah and Nevada and Idaho, the adjacent states nearest the WSA. No wilderness areas have been designated to the north, west, or south in the vicinity of the WSA. Only six wilderness areas totalling 272,994 acres, are in the Great Basin. Only three wilderness areas in the NWPS have the same combination of PNV types as the Conger Mountain WSA would have (see "Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems . . ."). All three are in California.

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The area could be managed as wilderness. There are no oil and gas leases or mining claims in the WSA. There are two State-owned sections (1,280 acres) located along the northern boundary of the WSA. Major developments on these sections and related access and activity would probably not reduce the overall quality of wilderness values in the wilderness. Additionally, the potential for development is low in the foreseeable future. There are two USAF High Accuracy Multiple Object Tracking Stations (HAMOTS) in the WSA. These are portable units determined to be non-impairing to wilderness values. They were allowed in the WSA with the stipulation that they be removed if the area

were designated as wilderness. Therefore, they are not a manageability problem.

Eighty percent of the relatively light recreational use is, or is based on, off-road vehicle (ORV) use. Although the potential for mineral exploration and development is low and ORV use could be constrained by closure of existing ways, the lack of outstanding wilderness and scenic values in the WSA does not warrant the management actions that would have to be taken to preserve the area as wilderness. Wild horses and threatened or endangered species in the WSA can be protected through implementation of existing laws and management prescriptions.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

Because the WSA is not recommended for wilderness designation, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) did not prepare a mineral assessment report for the area. According to BLM geologists, the geology is favorable for small deposits of beryllium, tungsten, lead, and zinc, and for small reservoirs of oil and natural gas. The degree of certainty that such mineral resources exist in the WSA is low, however, no exploration for mineral or energy resources has been conducted in the WSA.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for alternatives including designation of the entire area as wilderness.

CONGER MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors concerning this WSA were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

Summary of WSA-Specific Public Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 33 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 40 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 20 commenters supported the wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 14 commenters were opposed. Six commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS, but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness did not provide a consensus regarding features in the WSA that should be preserved or any special concerns. The majority of those commenting in favor of wilderness were from outside of Utah.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness designation would preclude mineral exploration and development. The majority of these commenters (9) were from rural Utah, and were local to the area. Four were from outside of Utah.

Two Federal agencies, the USAF and the USBM, commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. The Federal agencies did not take a position regarding designation or nondesignation of the WSA. The USAF noted that low altitude flights will continue over the WSA with or without

wilderness designation and that they will not negotiate nor sign any agreement to avoid the proposed wilderness area. This conflict can be resolved only on the Congressional level. The USAF also commented on the presence of and need for HAMOTS and other communication facilities in the WSA and on other public lands in the UTTR. It is the USAF's position that these facilities in their current location and other locations in the future are critical to the success of advanced defense testing at the UTTR and that BLM must allow these communication facilities to remain in place following wilderness designation. This would not be possible under BLM's current Wilderness Management Policy.

The USBM commented that BLM's Draft EIS had understated the petroleum potential of the WSA.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are two State sections (1,280 acres) in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation of the WSA. The State commented that the Conger Mountain WSA appears to lack outstanding wilderness qualities, although it could contribute to diversity of wilderness areas. The State also noted that there are apparent conflicts with livestock operations. Specific State comments on the Draft EIS dealt with errors in the wording regarding exchange of State lands adjacent to the WSA, the proper name of the antelope herd unit in and around the WSA, the presence of historic ranches in the vicinity of the WSA, and potential installation of a USAF communication facility on State land near the WSA.

The Millard County Master Plan does not specifically address wilderness. The Millard County Commission favors protection of natural and esthetic resources on public lands as well as multiple use and believes that these objectives can be met without wilderness designation. The Commission has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation for BLM lands in Utah.

CONGER MOUNTAIN WSA

Table 4
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative

| Issue Topics | Recommendation No Action/No Wilderness | Alternatives All Wilderness (20,400 Acres) |
|---|--|---|
| Impacts on Wilderness Values | Wilderness values would not be protected by the proposed action and loss would occur as intrusions increase. In the foreseeable future, wilderness values would be directly lost on 20 acres and indirectly reduced in quality on up to 3,060 acres of the WSA due to mineral exploration. Continued vehicular use would detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Special features would not be significantly affected. | Wilderness values of naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and special features would be preserved. |
| Impacts on Mineral and Energy Exploration and Development | Mineral and energy exploration or development would not be adversely affected because they would be available for exploration and development as at present. | Exploration opportunities for potential oil and gas would be lost or severely constrained. The potential for production in the foreseeable future is low, however, and wilderness designation would not result in a significant loss. |
| Impacts on Livestock Management | Livestock grazing would not be affected because management and access would continue as at present. | Restrictions on vehicular use and predator control would inconvenience livestock permittees. Management costs would increase. |
| Impacts on Air Force Operations | Air Force operations would not be affected. | Removal of two HAMOTS stations would require alternate sites and redesigning of the Air Force tracking system grid. |