

**Nevada Wilderness Coalition**

**Assessment of Wilderness Potential**

**in**

**Pershing County, Nevada**

**June 2004**

## **Introduction**

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition (NWC) is committed to a statewide effort for Wilderness in Nevada and is working toward the goal of protecting all Wilderness quality public land in the state. At this point, the NWC assessment of potential Wilderness in Pershing County is in response to a request by the Nevada Congressional delegation, the Nevada Land and Resource Company and the Pershing County Checkerboard Lands Committee. This assessment is not a formal proposal for Pershing County, but is rather our analysis of current information available to us based on our own existing field inventory work and limited information available from the BLM. The NWC believes in creating Wilderness proposals based on ecological rather than administrative boundaries and will continue to compile a comprehensive Wilderness proposal for Pershing County and the northwestern region of Nevada as part of our statewide effort as resources become available. In doing so, the NWC will continue to conduct field inventories and research on additional areas within the region and advocate for their protection as Wilderness.

As of June 2004, the current assessment of Wilderness potential in Pershing County includes 426,948 acres of BLM managed lands. The NWC assessment for Wilderness corresponds to inventory work completed by the BLM during its Intensive Wilderness Inventory process and Wilderness Study Area review, however, our analysis does not necessarily correspond to the recommendations given by the BLM following their inventory process. The NWC assessment includes all of the Wilderness Study Areas in Pershing County as well as BLM managed lands that have Wilderness qualities but were overlooked by the managing agency based on improperly applied inventory criteria and rationale which the Nevada Wilderness Coalition feels was biased and does not reflect the situation on the ground.

## **The Wilderness Assessment Process**

The proximity of Pershing County to Reno along with its regional recreation attractions has led the Nevada Wilderness Coalition to identify the region as one worth investigating for its potential Wilderness. With this in mind, starting in the fall of 1999, fieldworkers began an initial assessment of the Wilderness quality lands in the western portion of the County. These ongoing field inventories have begun to provide consistent, systematic documentation of the remaining Wilderness quality public lands in the entire Pershing County region.

The Wilderness field inventory procedure used by the NWC is complementary to the inventory protocol used by the BLM during the late 1970s and early 1980s, although the NWC process is more exacting and has the benefit of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to guide it, including advanced mapping software and Global Positioning System (GPS) units. The inventory protocol that the NWC uses is also consistent with methods used in previous NWC Wilderness proposals as well as in Utah and Colorado, where similar citizens' initiatives have been undertaken.

Using criteria set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act, the process of fieldwork is a straightforward use of topographic maps, camera, Global Positioning System (GPS) unit, and pencil. Fieldworkers are responsible for taking photographs of all man-made impacts on the land and documenting the locations on topographic maps. To date, the Pershing County field inventory process has yielded hundreds of photographs taken during field seasons starting in 1999 through 2001. This fieldwork data is then entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS) to further analyze the value of the sites with regard to cultural, biological, recreational uses and other potential impacts using data files from the federal land managers and state and local

agencies. Wilderness proposal area boundaries are then delineated while descriptions and Wilderness rationale are documented based on the field inventory data and additional research. Finally, this information is compiled and disseminated to members of the Nevada Wilderness Coalition for review.

Throughout the process, efforts are made to minimize potential conflicts with other uses of the proposed Wilderness areas and to respond to agency information and rationale that the NWC feels is outdated and/or contradictory. This process also helps the NWC to eliminate inventoried areas which do not qualify for Wilderness. There are several areas in western Pershing County which have been inventoried and assessed, but have been eliminated from this initial Wilderness assessment since the NWC concluded that the lands do not meet the criteria set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act.

## **Proposal Overview**

The NWC's current assessment of Wilderness potential in Pershing County includes eight Wilderness Proposal Areas for a total of 426,948 acres. This encompasses 11% of all acres in the County and approximately 15% of all BLM acres in the County. The eight Wilderness Proposal Areas for the County includes five BLM managed Wilderness Study Areas (WSA), including the Augusta Mountain WSA, which straddles Pershing, Churchill and Lander Counties, and three additional Citizen Proposed Areas.

The NWC advocates for the protection of entire WSAs, whether a recommendation exists by the BLM or not. Based on research and analysis of the BLM recommendations, the NWC asserts that each of these areas qualifies as Wilderness and merits protection as such. In addition to the WSAs, the NWC includes Citizen Proposed Areas or BLM managed lands that were not given WSA status by the agency following its Intensive Wilderness Inventory of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The NWC has conducted updated field inventories of many non-WSA public lands within the last several years and has determined that many do qualify for Wilderness based on the criteria of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Many of these Citizen Proposal Areas were dismissed by the BLM from further Wilderness study based on flawed criteria and rationale, which essentially resulted in the dismissal of significant wild desert landscapes throughout Nevada. The NWC strongly advocates for the protection of all Wilderness quality lands, including those areas which the BLM did not recognize for Wilderness designation and which are now experiencing a variety of threats that could permanently degrade their important natural resources.

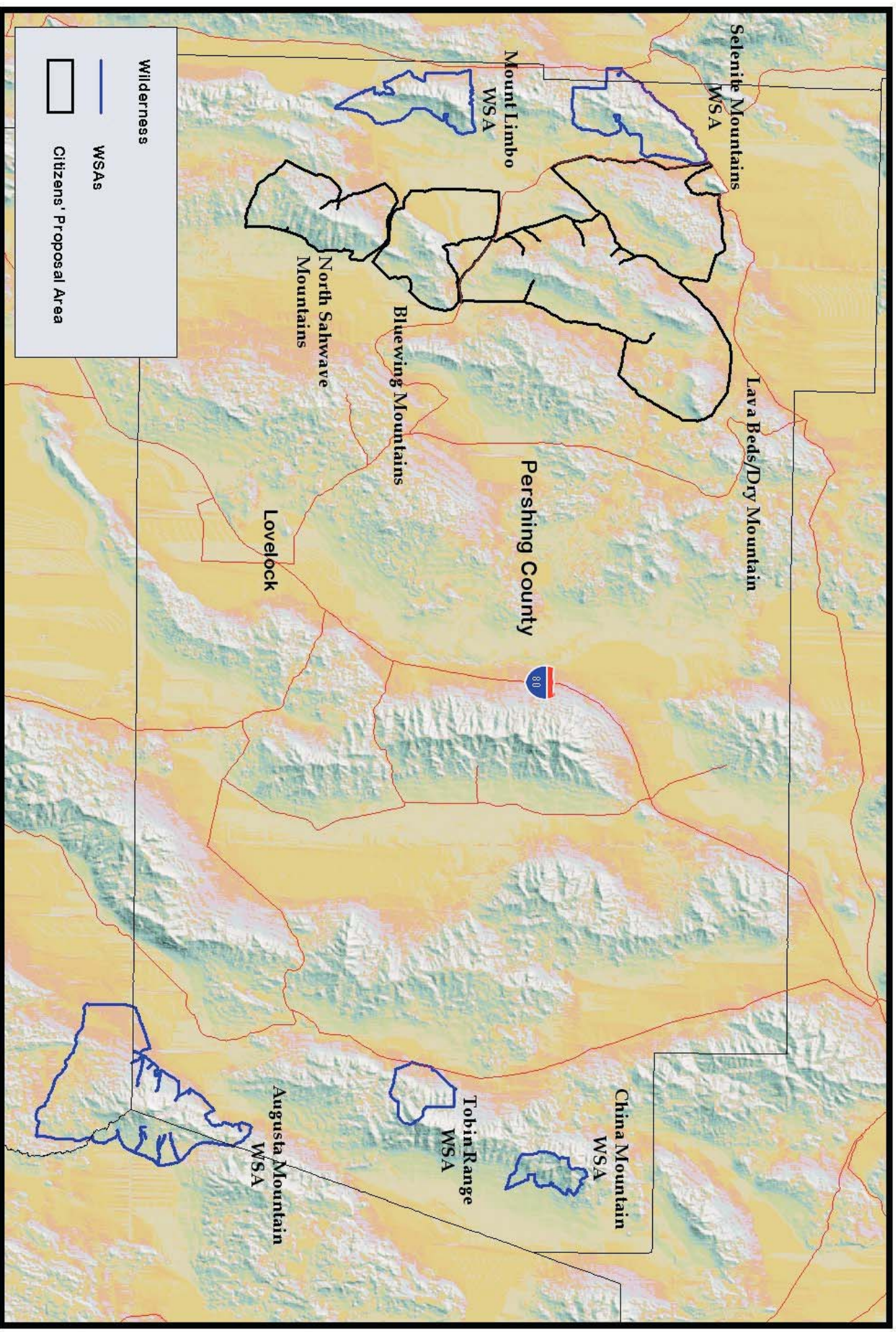
## **Conclusion**

It is important to remember that the Nevada Wilderness Coalition's Assessment of Wilderness Potential in Pershing County is not a static or perfect document. It is based on the most current and up to date information the NWC has been able to gather on a short time-schedule through existing field inventory work, limited information provided by the various agencies and experts, and discussion among the NWC. The assessment will continue to evolve as resources become available, new information is gathered, and more discussions with stakeholders help to identify areas of concern. The NWC welcomes comments and discussion on the proposal and realizes that the process set in place for any public lands legislation requires the valuable exchange of information and communication among all stakeholders involved.

**The Nevada Wilderness Coalition consists of the following organizations:**

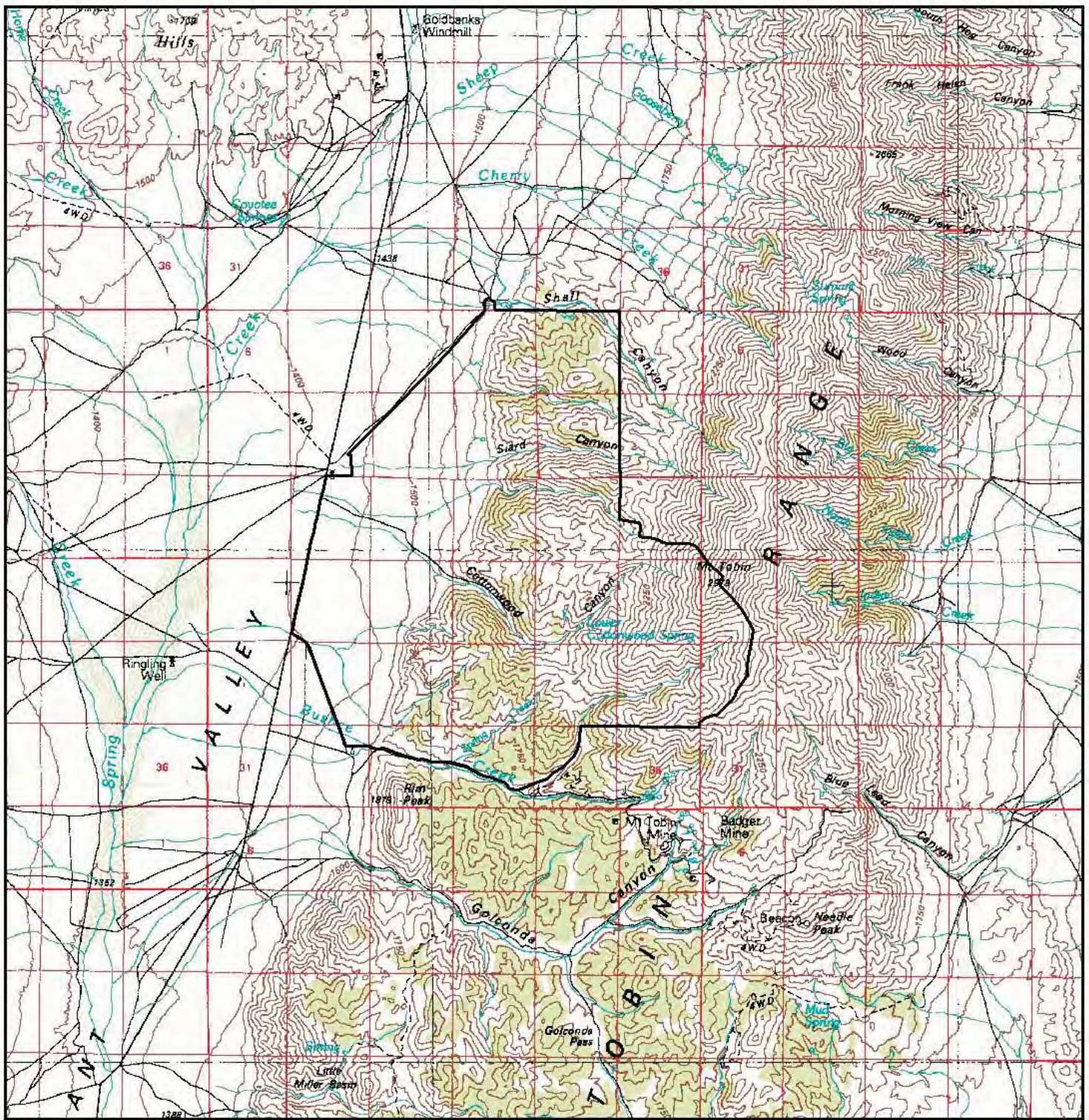
	<p><b>Nevada Wilderness Project</b>  775.746.7850, Reno  <a href="http://www.wildnevada.org">www.wildnevada.org</a></p>		<p><b>Sierra Club  Toiyabe Chapter</b>  775.324.0448, Reno  <a href="http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/nv">www.sierraclub.org/chapters/nv</a></p>
	<p><b>Friends of Nevada Wilderness</b>  775.324.7667, Reno  775.289.6921, Ely  775.650.6542, Las Vegas  <a href="http://www.nevadawilderness.org">www.nevadawilderness.org</a></p>		<p><b>Red Rock Audubon</b>  702.390.9890, Las Vegas  <a href="http://www.audubon.org/chapter/nv">www.audubon.org/chapter/nv</a></p>
	<p><b>The Wilderness Society  Wilderness Support Center</b>  970.247.8788  <a href="http://www.wilderness.org">www.wilderness.org</a></p>		<p><b>Nevada Outdoor Recreation Association</b>  775.883.1169, Carson City  702.733.2021, Las Vegas  <a href="http://www.nora.org">www.nora.org</a></p>
			<p><b>Campaign for America's Wilderness</b>  202.544.3691  <a href="http://www.leaveitwild.org">www.leaveitwild.org</a></p>





Pershing County Wilderness Assessment, 2004





**Tobin Range**  
**Acres: 13,107**  
**Management: BLM WSA**





## Tobin Range Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 13,107 acres

**Current Status:** Tobin Range Wilderness Study Area (NV-020-406Q), managed by the BLM Winnemucca District

**Location:** The proposed Tobin Range Wilderness is located in eastern Pershing County, approximately 40 miles south of Winnemucca, Nevada.

**High Elevation:** 9,775 feet

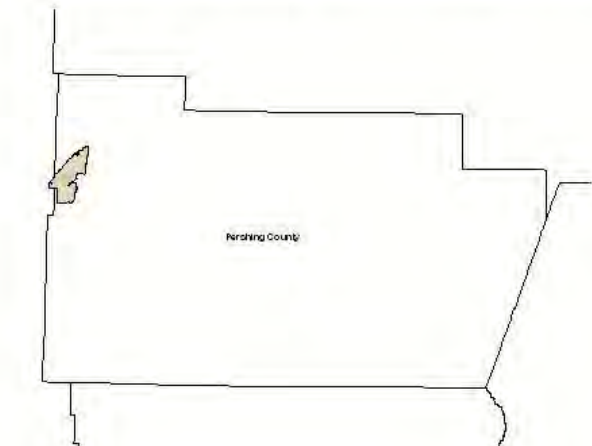
**Low Elevation:** 4,640 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The Tobin Range Wilderness proposal area is located in the central portion of the Tobin Range. It encompasses the 9,775 foot Mount Tobin and the rolling foothills surrounding it, as well as a small portion of the desert piedmont sloping into the adjacent Pleasant Valley. The high elevation portion of the proposal area is dominated by smooth ridges and shallow drainages covered with desert shrubs. The rolling foothill portion of the area has deeply cut drainages, such as Bushee and Cottonwood Creeks and Siard Canyon, flowing out east and west parallel to the mountain range. Juniper trees and several small riparian areas with aspen characterize the vegetation here. This area also has several rock outcrops and is bounded on the west by a ten to twenty foot high fault scarp exposed during an earthquake in 1915. The entire area provides excellent opportunities for hiking, rock scrambling, nature study, hunting, camping and cross-country skiing. Excellent views of the surrounding mountain ranges and valleys are found in the higher elevations near Mount Tobin.

**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM recommended releasing the entire 13,107 acre Tobin Range WSA, based on their assessment of energy and mineral resource potential which would lead to exploration and disturbance. According to the BLM WSA Notebook (2001), "Pre-Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976) mining claims and geothermal leases encompass approximately 43 percent of the area." They conclude that short-term mineral interest within the WSA would result in tungsten, mercury and barite exploration. They also conclude that geothermal exploration could take place, and oil and gas exploration will "continue at the present level." The BLM states that much of the WSA has moderate to high potential for metallic and nonmetallic minerals, however, their map does not indicate where.

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition (NWC) asserts that the entire Tobin Range WSA qualifies for wilderness and should be designated as such. With regard to the mineral potential of the area, the NWC would argue that this 13,107-acre area is a relatively small percentage of the county's total land base and that there are certainly equally valuable and more accessible mineral resources to be extracted elsewhere in the county.







## Selenite Mountains Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 32,041 acres

**Current Status:** Selenite Mountains BLM Wilderness Study Area (NV-020-200)

**Location:** The proposal area is located in western Pershing County, with a small portion in eastern Washoe County. It is approximately two miles southeast of Gerlach, NV and a two-hour drive north of Reno.

**High Elevation:** 7,115 feet

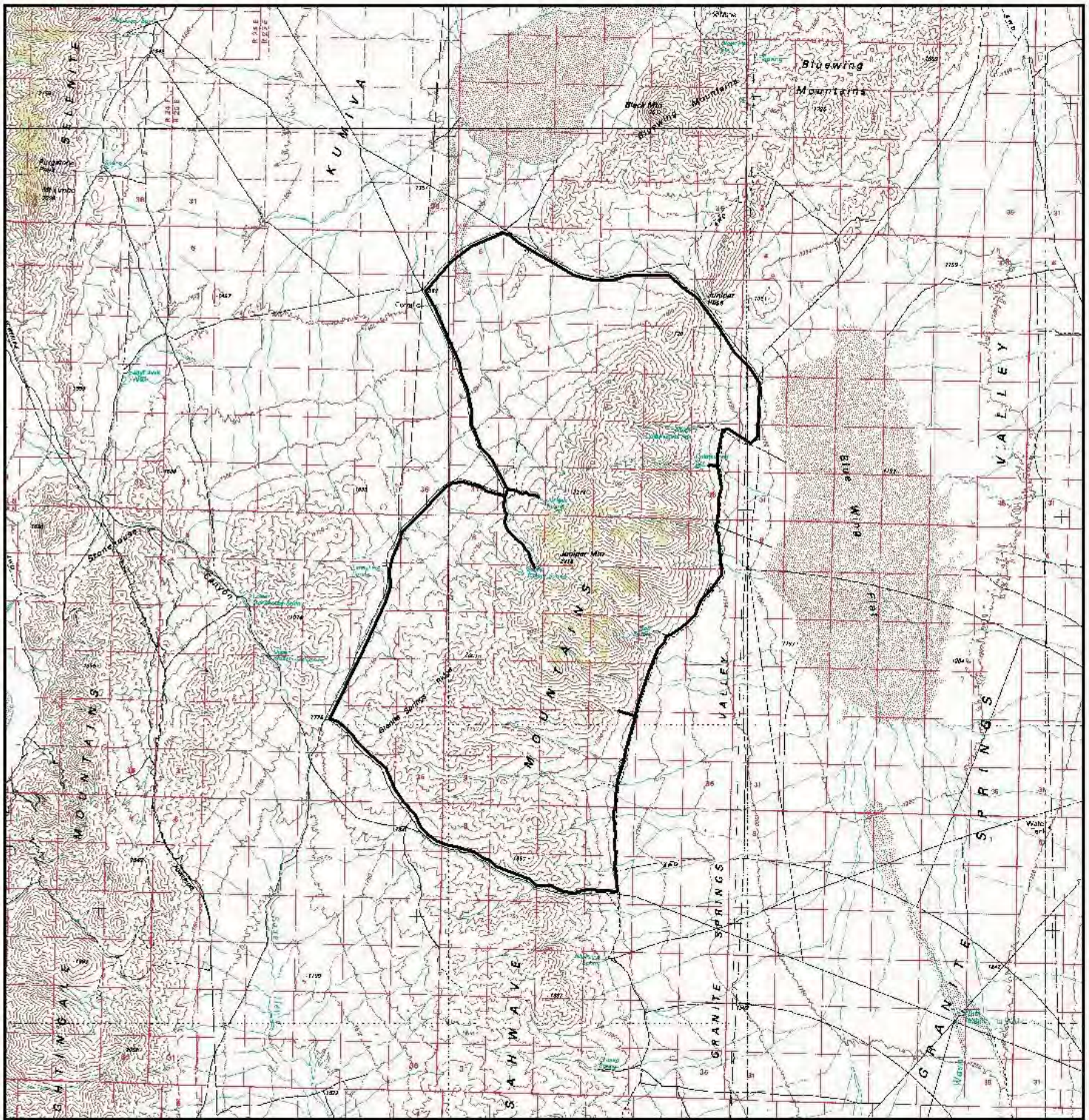
**Low Elevation:** 3,980 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The proposed Selenite Mountains Wilderness is comprised of the north end of the north-south trending Selenite Range. The rolling landform includes the main ridge axis with granitic outcrops and cliffs, as well as long sloping alluvial fans and parallel drainages reaching to the basin floor. The higher, rockier terrain is heavily covered with juniper, while the rolling hills are blanketed with low growing sagebrush. Signs of Pleistocene Lake Lahontan occur on the northwest side of the proposal area with wave-cut terraces marching out to the valley floor.

**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM did not recommend any of the Selenite Mountains WSA for Wilderness designation, based on their assessment of “significant outside sights and sounds” related to a gypsum mine located adjacent to the WSA and the resulting dust and noise associated with the mine. The BLM’s recommendation was also based on their assessment of “moderate mineral potential” (WSA Notebook 2001) and possible exploration for precious metal and tungsten in the northern “Arcturus Mine Zone” and the southwestern “Selenite Peak Zone” (Final EIS, 1987). However, according to the BLM WSA Notebook, “it is conjectured that short term metallic mineral interest within the WSA is likely.” The use of the word “conjectured” would lead one to conclude that their assessment of mineral interest was not made on sufficient evidence. The BLM also cites geothermal potential and possible development on the southwest, north and northeast side of the WSA. According to the Final EIS (1987), “development activities would have to occur on new leases as there are no existing leases. Exploration activities would occur with or without geothermal leases.”

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition advocates for the designation of the entire proposed Selenite Mountains Wilderness, based on updated information responding to the BLM’s 20-year-old recommendation. Since the BLM’s original recommendations, Congress has addressed the issue of outside sights and sounds in relationship to wilderness designation and has concluded that this is irrelevant as to whether or not an area qualifies for wilderness. The existing gypsum mine near the Selenite Mountains Proposed Wilderness would be allowed to continue operating outside of the wilderness and cannot be used as an excuse for not designating the wilderness. In addition, there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to exclude the area from wilderness designation on the basis of mineral or geothermal potential. There are no existing leases or plans for development within the area, and there are many places outside of the proposed wilderness that could be developed in the future.





**North Sahwave Mountains**  
**Acres: 45,694**  
**Management: BLM**





## North Sahwave Mountains Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 45,726 acres

**Current Status:** The area currently has no protection status and is managed by the BLM Winnemucca district.

**Location:** The Sahwave Mountain Range is located approximately 35 miles northeast of the town of Nixon and State Route 447. The area is 40 miles west of Lovelock, and south of the Lava Beds and Blue Wing Mountain proposed Wilderness. Access is via gravel county roads.

**High Elevation:** 7,474 feet (Juniper Mountain)

**Low Elevation:** 4,500 feet

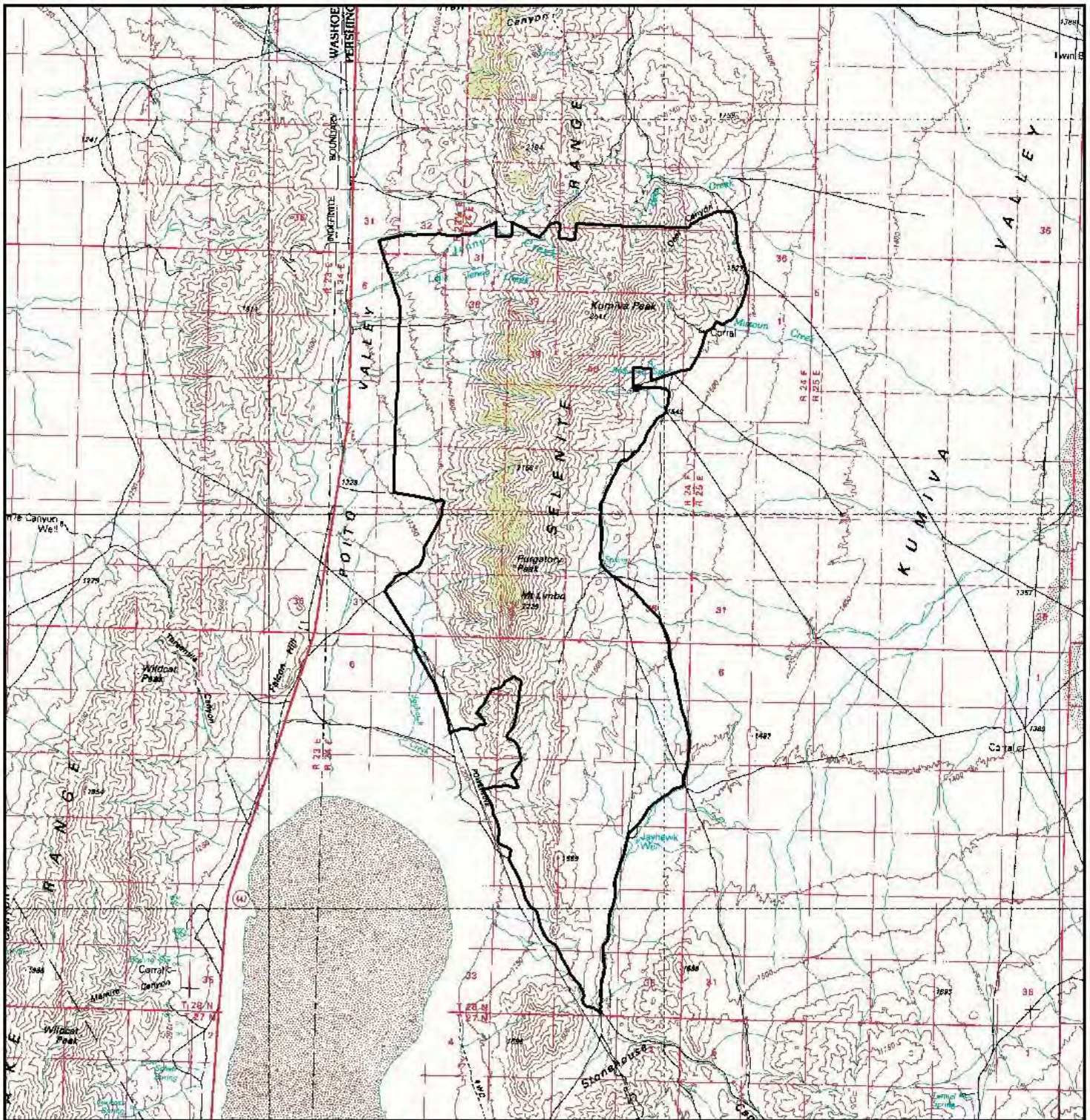
**Wilderness Values:** The Sahwaves, like most Nevada mountain ranges, are a north-south trending range marked by a steep central ridge. The north end of the range is the most pronounced, with a number of steep outcroppings and cliff areas and groves of juniper at the highest elevations. Several springs and a small band of California bighorn sheep can also be found in some of the higher points in the range, and American Kestrels, Gray Flycatchers, coyotes and bobcats live throughout the area.

From the highest points of the Sahwaves, there are spectacular views of several Wilderness Study Areas, the Black Rock National Conservation Area, and down onto the white spectacle of Bluewing Flat, a large dry lakebed. The groves of juniper provide cover not only to the wildlife of the region, but also to the hiker looking to get out of the midday sun or late afternoon zephyr. Protection of the north end of the Sahwave Mountain range will compliment wilderness protections proposed for the Lava Beds and Bluewing Mountain areas, which sit just to the north of the Sahwave Range. This is spectacular Northern Nevada basin and range country, with only dirt county roads and a utility corridor as obvious man-made impacts visible from any of these ranges.

**Inventory History & Analysis:** The BLM inventoried the North Sahwave Mountain Wilderness proposal area during their Intensive Wilderness Inventory as the "Shawavee" Mountains unit (NV-020-217). They did not approve the area for further wilderness study, based on their assessment that the area did not offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. They also concluded that the area did not have supplemental values.

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition has conducted an updated inventory of the proposed North Sahwave Mountains Wilderness and has found that the area does indeed qualify for wilderness under the criteria of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Solitude and primitive recreation opportunities can be found throughout the proposed wilderness, whether one is scrambling along the mountain range's rocky outcroppings, searching for bighorn sheep among the cliff areas, or taking in the seemingly endless vistas of other proposed wilderness areas or protected areas within the Black Rock National Conservation Area. The North Sahwave Wilderness proposal area is part of a larger complex of wilderness quality public lands within a two- to three-hour drive of Reno.





**Mount Limbo**  
**Acres: 23,702**  
**Management: BLM WSA**





## Mount Limbo Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 23,702 acres

**Current Status:** Mount Limbo BLM Wilderness Study Area (NV-020-201)

**Location:** The proposal area is located in western Pershing County, about 50 miles north of Wadsworth, Nevada and a two-hour drive north of Reno.

**High Elevation:** 8,237 feet

**Low Elevation:** 3,880 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The proposed Mount Limbo Wilderness encompasses the southern tip of the Selenite Mountains and includes a central ridgeline sloping out into the adjacent desert piedmont. The ridgeline provides truly spectacular views of the adjacent Black Rock Desert and neighboring mountain ranges. There are three main peaks within the proposal area, Kumiva Peak (8,237 feet), Purgatory Peak (7,417 feet) and Mount Limbo (7,312 feet). The main ridgecrest in the northern portion of the proposal area includes rugged granitic rock outcrops and boulder slopes excellent for rock scrambling and mountaineering. Shallow drainages run perpendicular to the ridgecrest in this section and include several aspen groves and meadows in the vicinity of Kumiva Peak. This area is also known to have several perennial springs.

The ridgeline in the southern portion of the proposal area becomes basaltic with more rounded, dark features to the south of Mount Limbo, and then slopes out into the adjacent desert piedmont in the area's southern tip. The southern portion of the ridgeline is dominated by a steep, west facing escarpment and a nearly flat desert piedmont to the east. Vegetation in the proposal area is dominated by sagebrush, saltbush and winterfat, with pockets of Utah juniper along the main ridgecrest.

The proposed Mount Limbo Wilderness provides habitat for sage grouse, chukar, valley quail, and mule deer. The area is also known to have cultural resources including a rock shelter and lithic scatters. Recreational opportunities in the proposal area include excellent dayhiking, rock climbing and scrambling, hunting, nature study and camping.

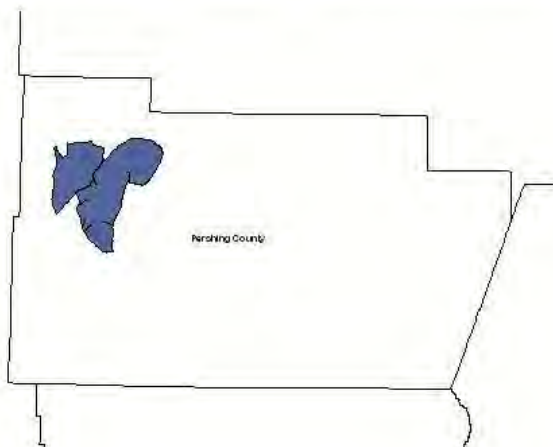
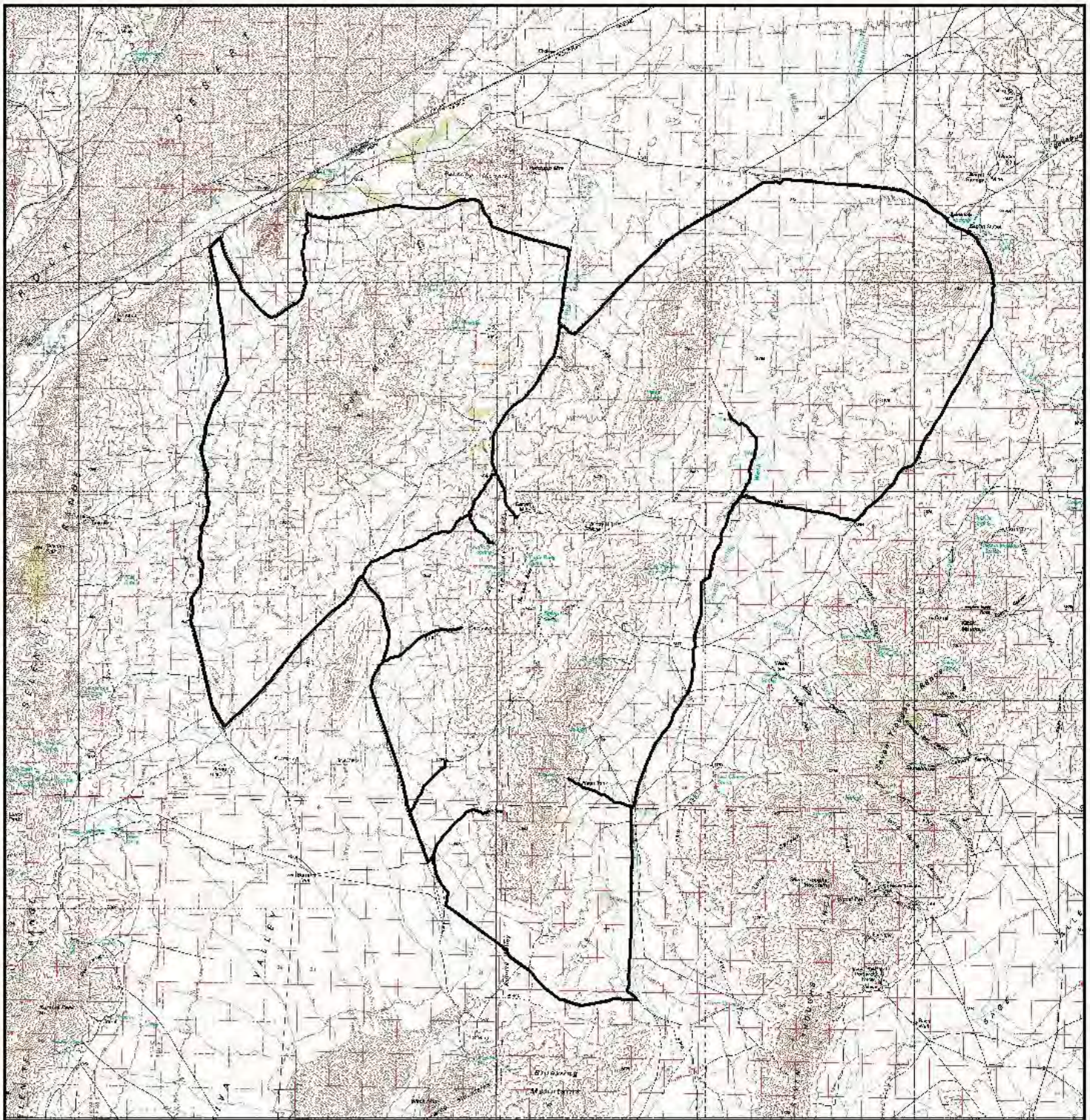
**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM recommended 12,750 acres of the Mount Limbo WSA for wilderness and 11,002 acres for release. The area recommended for wilderness primarily includes the rugged granitic ridgeline in the northern portion of the WSA. The area not recommended for wilderness includes the adjacent flat desert piedmont to the west of the ridgeline and to the southeast. The BLM's recommendation was based on "maintaining access to a portion of the WSA for mineral exploration and extraction and for recreation purposes." They discuss the "potential for the occurrence of a diverse group of mineral resources including hardrock locatable minerals, and saleable mineral and geothermal possibilities." They also discuss the amount of off-road vehicle use this area receives from upland game hunters. According to the BLM WSA Notebook, "by placing the boundary of that portion recommended for Wilderness at the base of the mountain range and eliminating the easily accessible flats, it was felt that access to hunting areas would still be obtainable."

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition advocates for wilderness designation of the entire Mount Limbo WSA. Along with the steep, rugged ridgeline, the low-elevation desert habitat qualifies for and deserves protection as wilderness, and is often much more threatened by human impact than the adjacent rugged, mountainous terrain. It is not logical to conclude that in order to eliminate potential conflicts with motorized use within a potential wilderness, it is easier to not

designate it as wilderness. Aside from the fact that many places outside of the proposed wilderness area will remain open to ORV use, designated wilderness can be managed to prohibit motorized use. In addition, with regard to maintaining access to hunting areas in the Mount Limbo vicinity, vehicle access to the entire proposal area is currently and would continue to be excellent both from the west and from the east. Currently, open vehicle routes define much of the boundary of the proposed Mount Limbo Wilderness. In fact, there is nowhere within the proposal area that is further than two miles from a road. Hunting would be allowed to continue in the wilderness and vehicle routes encircling the area would remain open.

With regard to mineral and geothermal development within the proposal area, the BLM states, “there are no mining claims or geothermal or oil and gas leases within the WSA.” They also state that “geothermal potential is low” and “quantities of various minerals are unknown.” Based on this information, there does not seem to be sufficient reason to conclude that the area should not be protected as wilderness. There are many places outside of the proposed wilderness that would remain open to mineral development.





**Lava Beds/Dry Mountain**  
**Acres: 210,197**  
**Management: BLM**





## Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 210,197 acres

**Current Status:** The area has no current protections and is managed by the BLM Winnemucca district. A very small portion of the northeastern corner of this proposal area falls within the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area.

**Location:** The Lava Beds area is located approximately 35 miles east and north of Empire, Nevada in northwestern Pershing County. Access is via maintained gravel/dirt county roads.

**High Elevation:** 6,526 feet

**Low Elevation:** 4,800 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex encompasses over 200,000 acres of remote, wild country in northwestern Pershing County. The vegetation of the area includes a combination of sagebrush and salt desert plant communities found in broad, open valleys, punctuated by unique granitic outcroppings and gently sloping mountain ranges. Greasewood shrubland along with a population of junipers and blooming forbs and grasses also occur in the area. Although not much is known about the plant life of the area, it supports at least one sensitive Nevada endemic forb species, the winged milkvetch (*Astragalus pterocarpus*). The area also includes portions of two Nature Conservancy portfolio sites, Kumiva Valley (A146) and Lava Beds Creek (A148), selected as such on the basis of their sagebrush semidesert ecosystem conservation values.

The core of the Lava Beds proper is characterized by incredible granite geology speckled with lush springs. The area north and west of this consists of slowly undulating valleys, marked with numerous washes that lead up to gently sloped peaks of over 6,000 feet. Mule deer, bobcats, wild horses, burros and chukar can be found there, along with resident pronghorn, which can be seen dashing through the valley bottoms. Bird species include the Golden Eagle, Spotted Towhee, Say's Phoebe and Loggerhead Shrike.

The size of the proposed wilderness and its many cherrystemmed vehicle routes provide access to many corners of the area. Solitude, however, can easily be found among the lesser known peaks, washes and draws. Those seeking solitude in the Lava Beds proper have no difficulty losing themselves in the myriad rocky outcroppings and strange spires. Hunting and hiking are the major recreational activities enjoyed in the area, and its unique geology and stunning vistas attract weekend visitors from the Reno area. Photography is another pursuit in and among the undulating outcrops, and the setting sun creates an amazing play of shadow and light among some of nature's most spectacular architecture.

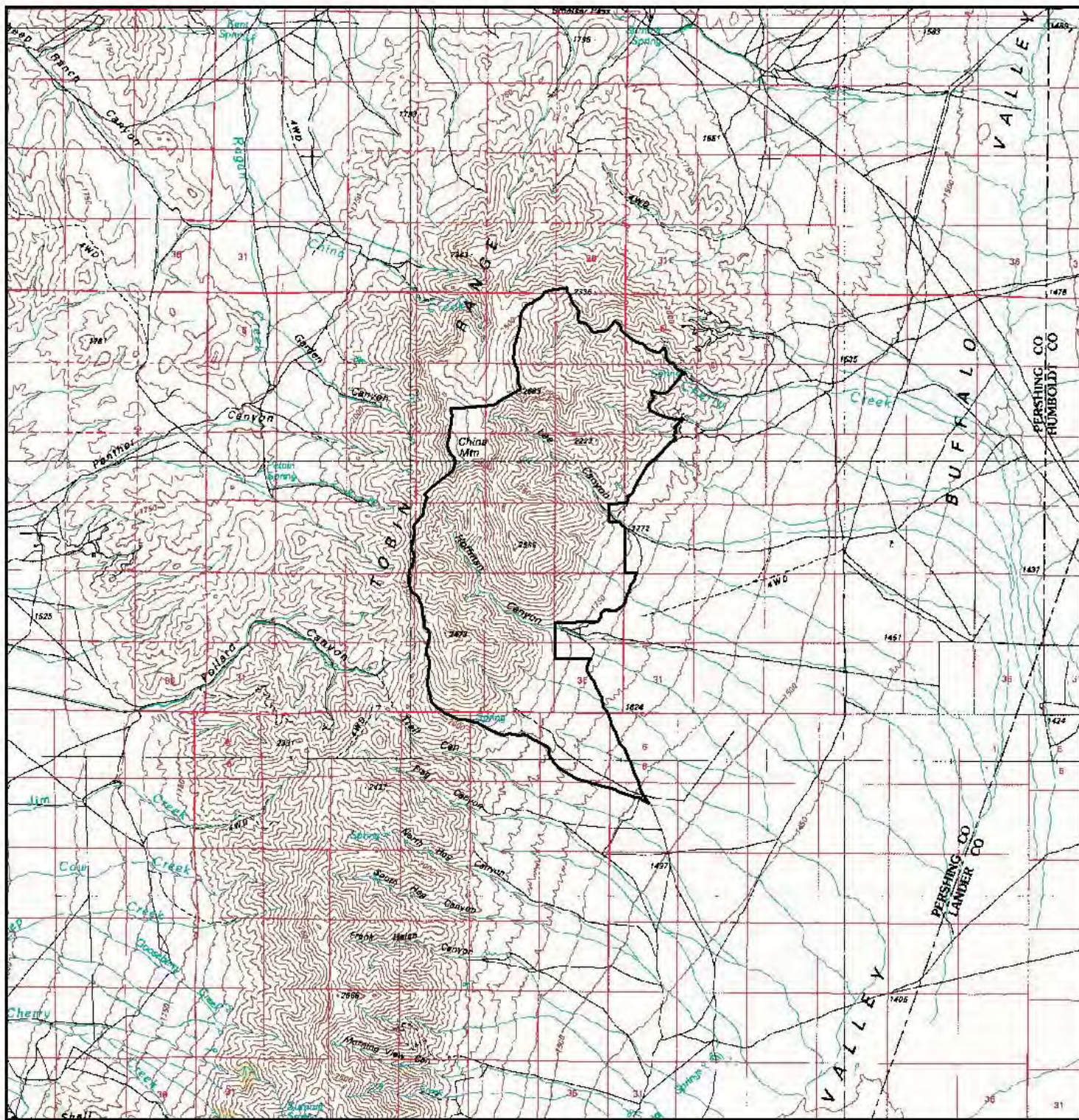
**Inventory History and Analysis:** During its Intensive Wilderness Inventory, the BLM inventoried the proposed Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex as three separate units: Razorback (NV-020-209), Lava Beds (NV-020-212) and North Lava Beds (NV-020-235). The BLM concluded that none of the three units qualified for further study, based on their decision that they did not offer "opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." The BLM also did not believe that the Razorback and Lava Beds units had "supplemental values." It is important to note that the BLM did not keep the original wilderness inventory files for any of these units, so details on their decision are no longer available.

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition has conducted an updated inventory of the proposed Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex and has found that it does indeed qualify for



wilderness under the criteria of the 1964 Wilderness Act. This remote area of northwestern Pershing County offers incredible opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation among its many unique geologic formations. Its abundant wildlife, excellent recreational opportunities including chukar hunting, and eroded arches, tunnels and bubble-like granitic rock formations comprise an incredible wilderness resource within a three-hour drive of Reno.





**China Mountain**  
**Acres: 10,358**  
**Management: BLM WSA**





## China Mountain Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 10,358 acres

**Current Status:** China Mountain BLM Wilderness Study Area (NV-020-406P). The WSA surrounds 80 acres of private lands.

**Location:** The China Mountain Proposed Wilderness is located in far eastern Pershing County, about a five-hour drive east of Reno.

**High Elevation:** 8,842 feet

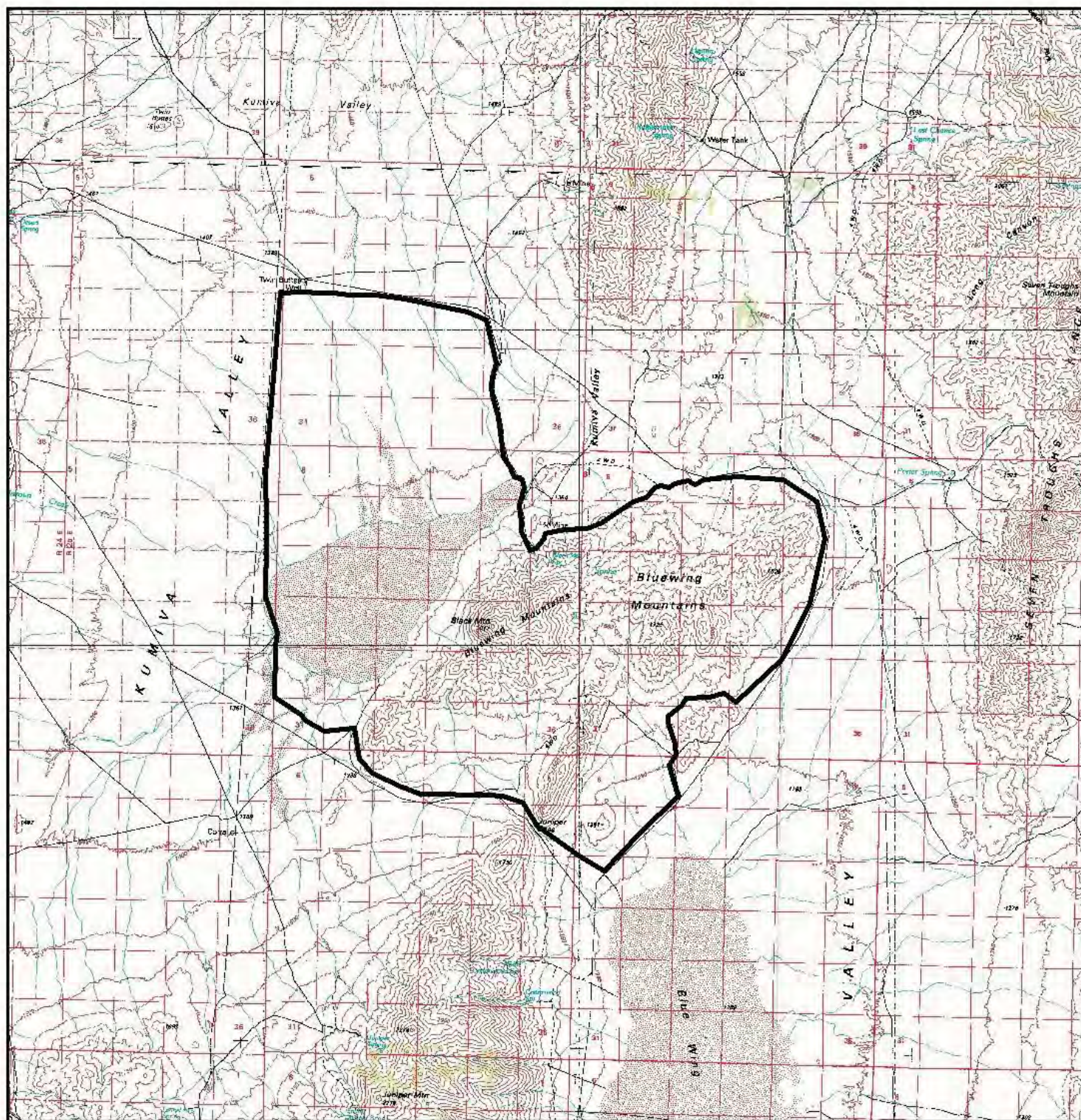
**Low Elevation:** 5,060 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The China Mountain Wilderness proposal area is part of the east slope of the Tobin Range. It includes a high elevation plateau, steep cliffs and rolling hills. There are two main canyons, Hoffman and Lee Canyons, as well as several smaller canyons. Vegetation in the proposal area consists primarily of sagebrush with some stands of pinyon-juniper and riparian vegetation along the canyon bottoms. The area provides excellent recreational opportunities, with China Mountain constituting a challenging hike with exceptional scenery. The entire area including Hoffman and Lee Canyons provides excellent opportunities for camping, hiking, hunting, rock climbing and nature study.

**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM recommended releasing the entire 10,358-acre China Mountain WSA from wilderness consideration. Their recommendation was based on the conclusion that “the mineral and geothermal potential outweigh the wilderness values.” They state that there is high mineral potential for metallic minerals on 5,500 acres, moderate potential for nonmetallic minerals on the entire 10,358 acres and moderate potential for geothermal steam on 2,000 acres. The BLM also projected that short-term mineral interest in the area would result in a 300 acre open pit precious metal mine in the Iron Hat District, with 100 of those acres falling within the proposed wilderness and an additional 15 acres of disturbance and 3 miles of drill roads occurring within the Iron Hat District, Hoffman Canyon and China Canyon. There are 232 acres of existing oil and gas leases and 500 acres of pre-Federal Land Policy and Management Act mining claims.

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition (NWC) asserts that the entire China Mountain WSA qualifies for wilderness and should be designated as such. With regard to the mineral and geothermal potential of the area, the NWC would argue that this 10,358-acre area is a relatively small percentage of the county’s total land base and that there are certainly equally valuable and more accessible mineral resources to be extracted elsewhere in the county.





**Bluewing Mountains**  
**Acres: 43,134**  
**Management: BLM**





## Bluewing Mountain Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 43,134 acres

**Current Status:** The area currently has no protection status and is managed by the BLM Winnemucca district.

**Location:** The Bluewing Mountain Range is located approximately 40 miles northeast of the town of Nixon and State Route 447. The area is also 40 miles west of Lovelock and south of the proposed Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex. Access is via gravel/dirt county roads.

**High Elevation:** 6,617 feet (Black Mountain)

**Low Elevation:** 4,500 feet

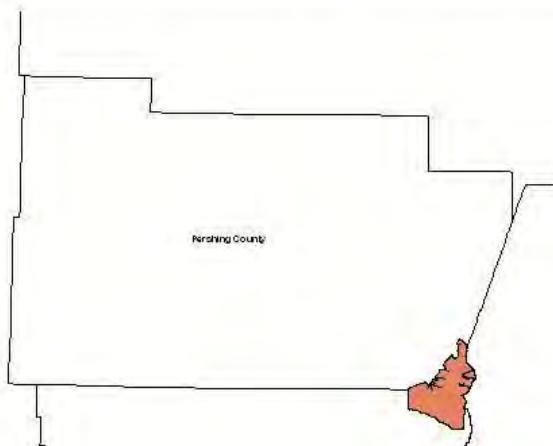
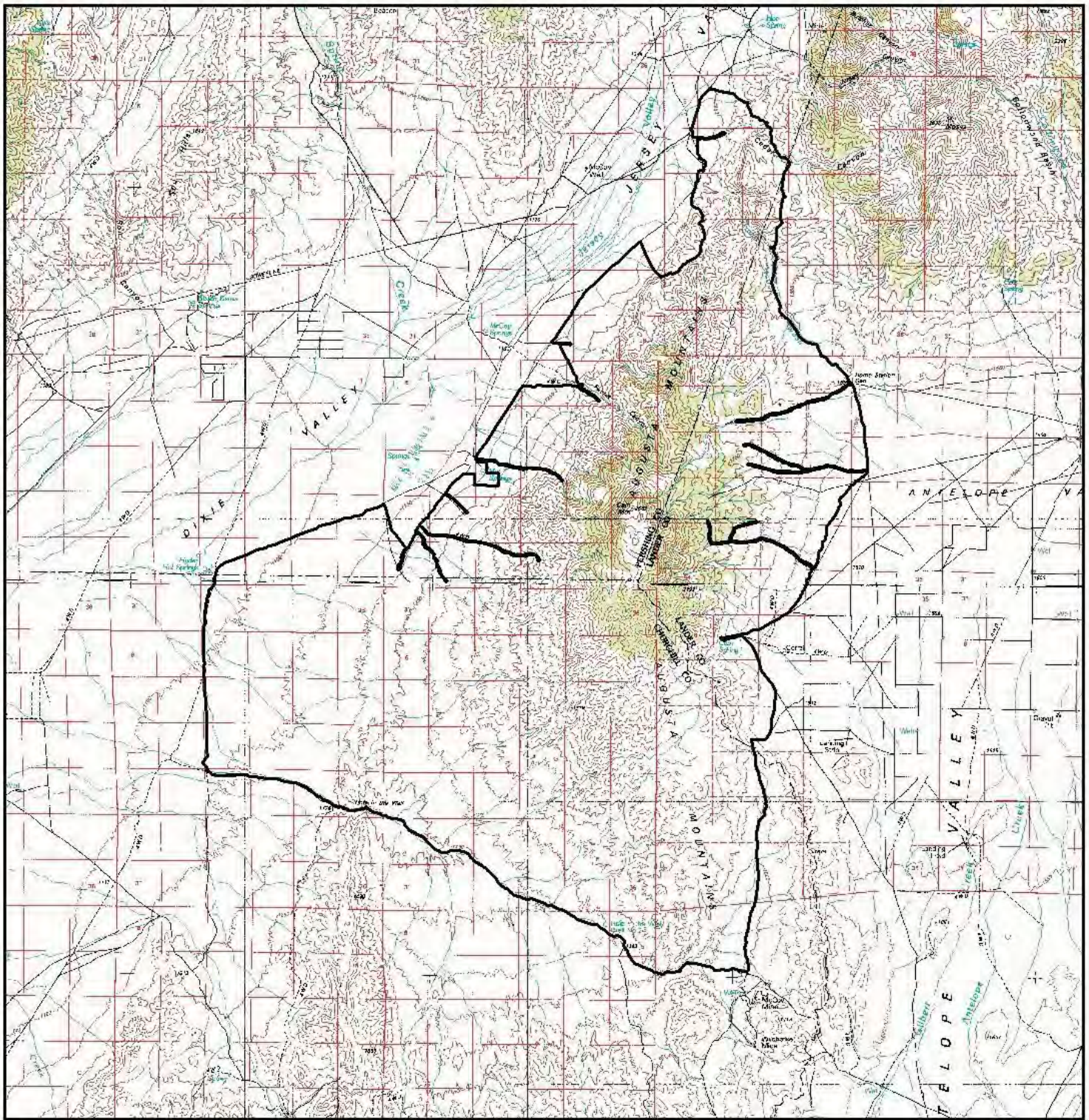
**Wilderness Values:** The Bluewing Mountains, a somewhat circular range, are almost an extension of the Shawave Range to the south. The range is flanked on the east by Granite Springs Valley and on the west by Sagehen Valley, where a small playa sits at the base of the range. Softly rounded hills rise from the valley floor, where pronghorn and jackrabbits can be found and Horned Larks and Black-throated Sparrows can be heard singing in the early morning light. The range is not marked by any steep topography, making hiking easy. Solitude is easy to find in the rounded and folded hills and small mountain forms of this range.

This proposed Bluewing Mountain Wilderness is separated from the proposed North Sahwaves Wilderness and Lava Beds/Dry Mountain Wilderness Complex by single dirt roads. The designation of these three mountain ranges and associated drainages will protect an amazing viewshed across the whole of the region.

**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM inventoried the Bluewing Mountain Wilderness proposal area as two separate Intensive Wilderness Inventory units, Bluewing Mountain Flats (NV-020-214) and Bluewing Mountain (NV-020-222). The BLM dropped both units from further wilderness study based on their assessment that both units lacked “outstanding opportunities for solitude and a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” They also concluded that the Bluewing Mountain unit (NV-020-222) lacked supplemental values.

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition has conducted an updated inventory of the proposed Bluewing Mountain Wilderness and has found that the area does indeed qualify for wilderness under the criteria of the 1964 Wilderness Act. This remote area of northwestern Pershing County offers incredible opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation among the rounded hills and desert playa.





**Augusta Mountain**  
**Acres: 89,372**  
**Management: BLM WSA**





## Augusta Mountains Wilderness - Proposed

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**Citizen Proposed Acreage:** 89,372 acres

**Current Status:** Augusta Mountains BLM Wilderness Study Area (NV-030-108)

**Location:** The proposed Augusta Mountains Wilderness is located at the intersection of southeastern Pershing County, northeastern Churchill County and western Lander County. It is approximately 60 miles southeast of Winnemucca and a five-hour drive from Reno, Nevada.

**High Elevation:** 8,400 feet

**Low Elevation:** 3,400 feet

**Wilderness Values:** The Augusta Mountains Wilderness proposal area encompasses the 8,409 foot Cain Mountain within the Augusta Mountain Range. Deep, rugged drainages flow down all sides of the peak, with Favret Canyon on the northern side being the largest. The canyon slopes are covered with dense pinyon-juniper, while the drainages are lined with willow and cottonwood. Several of the drainages also contain fossils and waterfalls. To the north of Cain Mountain, silicic ashflow tuft canyons and drainages, with clumps of willow and scattered patches of pinyon-juniper dominate the landscape. To the south of Cain Mountain, the landscape transitions to gently sloping foothills, shallow washes and gullies covered with sagebrush and rabbitbrush. Wildlife in the area includes mule deer, chukar, mountain lions, coyotes, and a variety of raptor and bird species. Solitude can be found throughout the Augusta Mountains in the multiple drainages and among the remote southern foothills. Recreational activities in the area include hiking, camping, hunting, and fossil study.

**Inventory History and Analysis:** The BLM recommendation for the Augusta Mountains WSA was to release the entire 89,372 acres for uses other than wilderness. Their decision was based on the assessment that “large portions of the WSA have potential for the occurrence of a diverse group of mineral resources including geothermal, oil and gas, hardrock locatable minerals and saleable minerals...The recommendation encourages exploration and development of these energy resources.” According to the BLM, there are 2,000 acres of valid pre-Federal Land Policy and Management Act mining claims, 18,101 acres of geothermal leases and 44,266 acres of oil and gas leases within the proposal area. In addition, the entire WSA has moderate potential for gold, mercury, manganese, and geothermal. However, the BLM states, “the total acres of projected disturbance from energy/mineral activity would be approximately 195 acres.”

The Nevada Wilderness Coalition (NWC) asserts that the entire Augusta Mountains WSA qualifies for wilderness and should be designated as such. With regard to the mineral and geothermal potential of the area, the NWC would argue that this 89,372-acre area is a relatively small percentage of the county's total land base of the county and that there are certainly equally valuable and more accessible mineral resources to be extracted elsewhere in the county. In addition, it seems rather implausible that 195 acres of disturbance could impact the surrounding 89,177 acres in such a way as to render them unsuitable for wilderness.