

Sand Mountain WSA

Henry's Fork Watershed Council

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Wilderness Study Areas

- On Bureau of Land Management lands, a WSA is a roadless area that has been inventoried (but not designated by Congress) and found to have wilderness characteristics as described in Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Wilderness Study Area characteristics:
 - Size – roadless areas of at least 5,000 acres of public lands or of a manageable size;
 - Naturalness – generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature rather than human activity;
 - Opportunities – provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation.



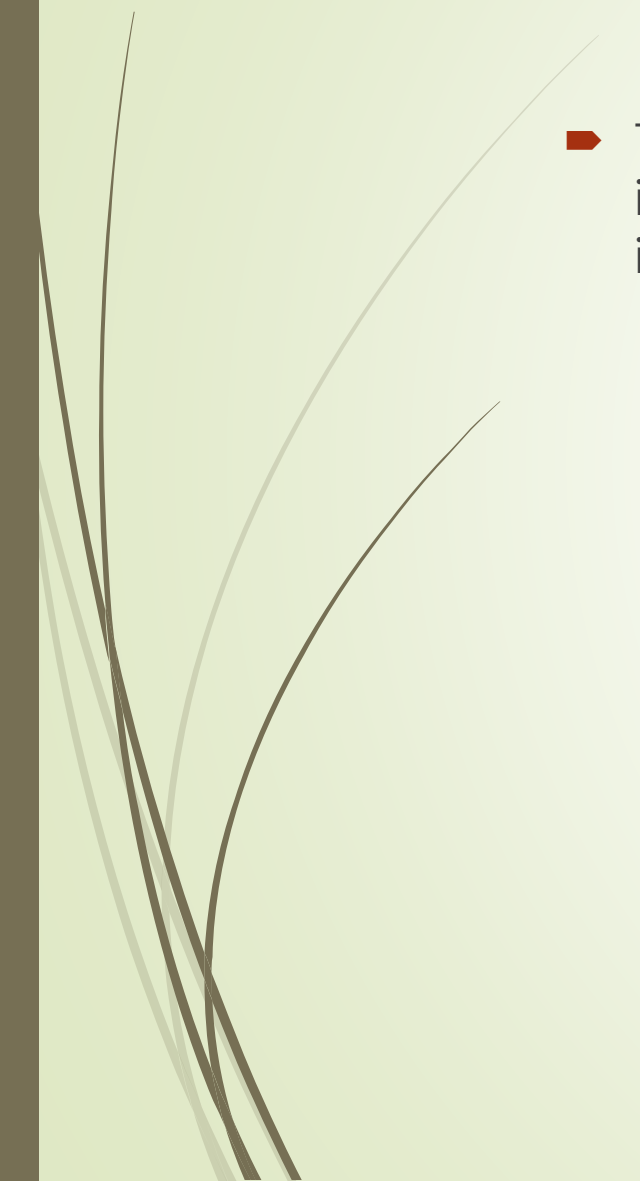
Wilderness Study Areas

Study Phase

- ▶ FLPMA, Section 603(a): “the Secretary shall... report... his recommendation as to the suitability or nonsuitability of each such area or island for preservation as wilderness.”
- ▶ The study phase examines all resource values of the areas containing wilderness characteristics and identifies the resources that will be enhanced or lost should the area's wilderness characteristics be protected or not.
- ▶ The study phase is completed through the BLM's land use planning process including a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document (usually an Environmental Impact Statement) which includes public participation.



Wilderness Study Areas

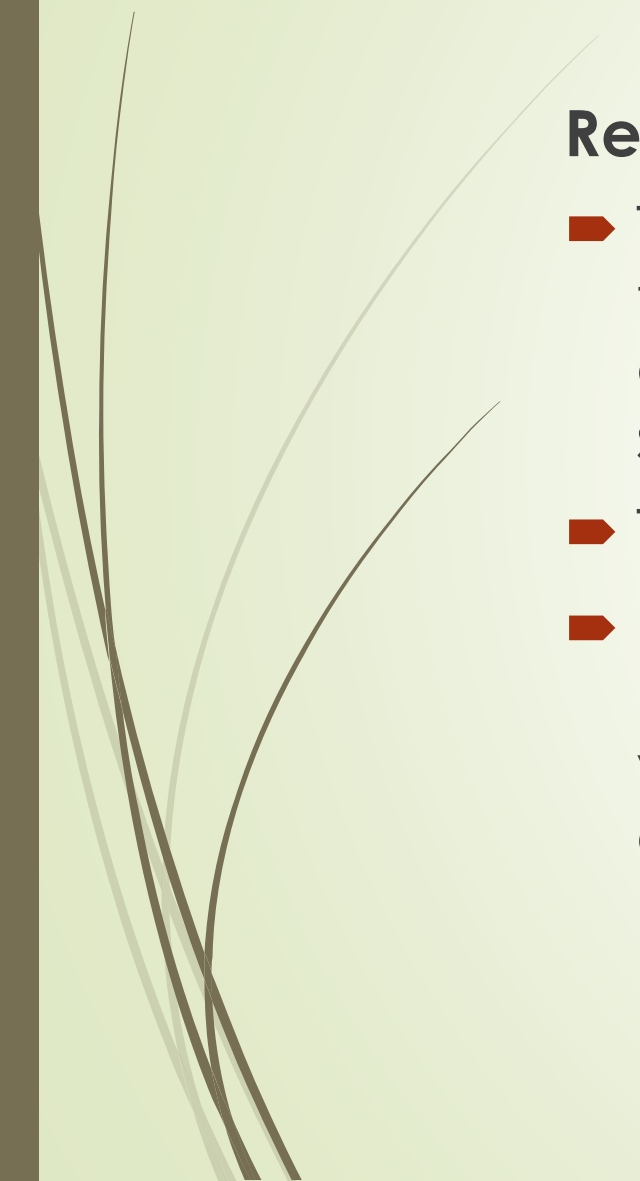


- The Study phase evaluates resource information and use factors in an interdisciplinary process to decide the most appropriate public land uses, including:
 - Wilderness characteristics
 - Other resource values of the area
 - Current uses and management of the area
 - Potential uses of the area
 - The ability to protect and manage the area to preserve wilderness character should it be designated
 - Scarcity of all values, and long-term and short-term benefits to the public
 - The ability to coordinate with the planning programs of other governmental entities



Wilderness Study Areas

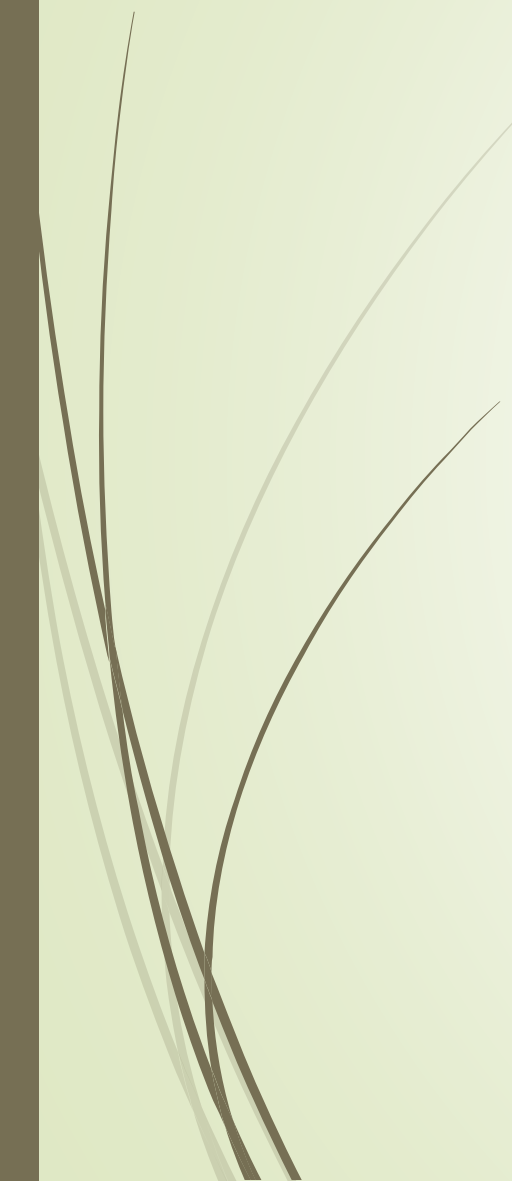
Reporting Phase

- The reporting phase recommends an area, or portions thereof, as suitable or non-suitable for wilderness designation based on the values identified from the study.
 - This completes BLM's obligation in FLPMA.
 - Remember, whether recommended to be suitable or not, BLM is under the same obligation to protect their value as wilderness until Congress decides whether to designate them as wilderness.
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Wilderness Study Areas

Management

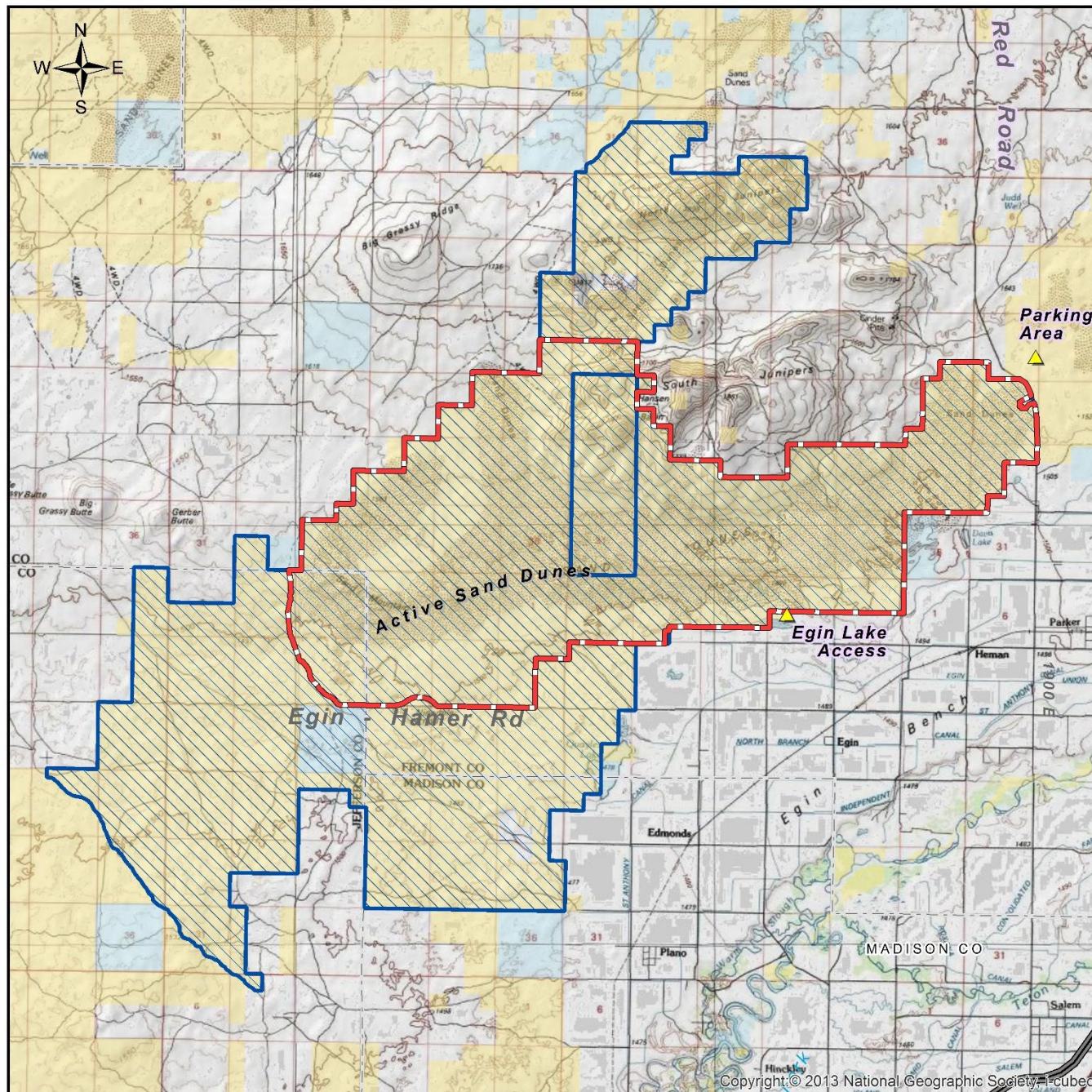
- BLM manages wilderness study areas under the National Landscape Conservation System to protect their value as wilderness until Congress decides whether to designate them as wilderness.
 - There are 545 BLM wilderness study areas with a total area of 12,790,291 acres.
 - In 2012, the BLM released Manual 6330 provides direction on how to manage WSAs.
 - Managing to prevent impairment: BLM will manage WSAs in the same or better condition at the time they were designated and will not allow them to be regress beyond a better state if conditions do improve.
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Wilderness Study Areas

Management

- The BLM reviews all proposals for uses and/or facilities within WSAs to figure out whether the development or activity would hard the suitability of the WSA for preservation as wilderness.
- This includes:
 - Determining whether the use or facility is temporary;
 - Whether the use or facility would create new surface disturbance.
 - Certain activities allowed in wilderness areas, such as recreational hiking, use of pack stock, or domestic livestock grazing, are recognized as acceptable within a WSA.



Sand Mountain WSA

Legend

- Sand Mountain WSA
- Nine Mile Knoll ACEC
- Surface Management Agency**
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State of Idaho
- Other

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Miles



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Sand Mountain WSA

Chronology and documents

- In 1979, the BLM State Director published a final decision on the Initial Wilderness Inventory. This decision identified what units would be intensively inventoried for wilderness characteristics. The Sand Mountain Unit was not identified as an area to further study through the intensive inventory process.
- The Wilderness Society Appealed that decision to Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) in August 1979, arguing that the Sand Mountain unit was not properly analyzed by BLM and that it should be intensively inventoried (see 1979 Wilderness Society Appeal of Initial Inventory Decision). We began inventory in 1980.
- A citizen appealed through IBLA (Case IBLA 80-882) on April 29, 1981 BLM's decision to intensively inventory the Sand Mountain unit. The private citizen's appeal was dismissed and the BLM continued with the intensive inventory (see attached IBLA 80-882).



Sand Mountain WSA

Chronology and documents

- ▶ BLM released the Intensive Wilderness Inventory Final Decision in October 1981 indicating that the Sand Mountain unit should be identified as a Wilderness Study Area (see Memorandum to Explain Decision to identify as WSA_1981 and BLM Sand Mountain Intensive Inventory Report).
- ▶ The Idaho Trail Machine Association appealed to IBLA (Case 82-548) the BLM decision to designate the Sand Mountain unit as a Wilderness Study Area. The BLM decision was upheld by IBLA (see IBLA 82-548).



Sand Mountain WSA

Chronology and documents

- ▶ 1985: Medicine Lodge RMP recommended the Sand Mountain WSA as nonsuitable for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System. If the Sand Mountain WSA is not designated as wilderness, it will be managed as part of the ACEC and SRMA. Detailed management plans would be developed for both areas.
- ▶ 1988: BLM followed up with a more in-depth analysis of the Sand Mountain WSA. NEPA analysis was completed for the Sand Mountain WSA (completing the Study Phase of the process). BLM's decision was that the Sand Mountain WSA was not suitable for inclusion as wilderness.
- ▶ 1991: The Idaho WSA suitability report was submitted to Congress (this completed the Reporting phase of the WSA process).

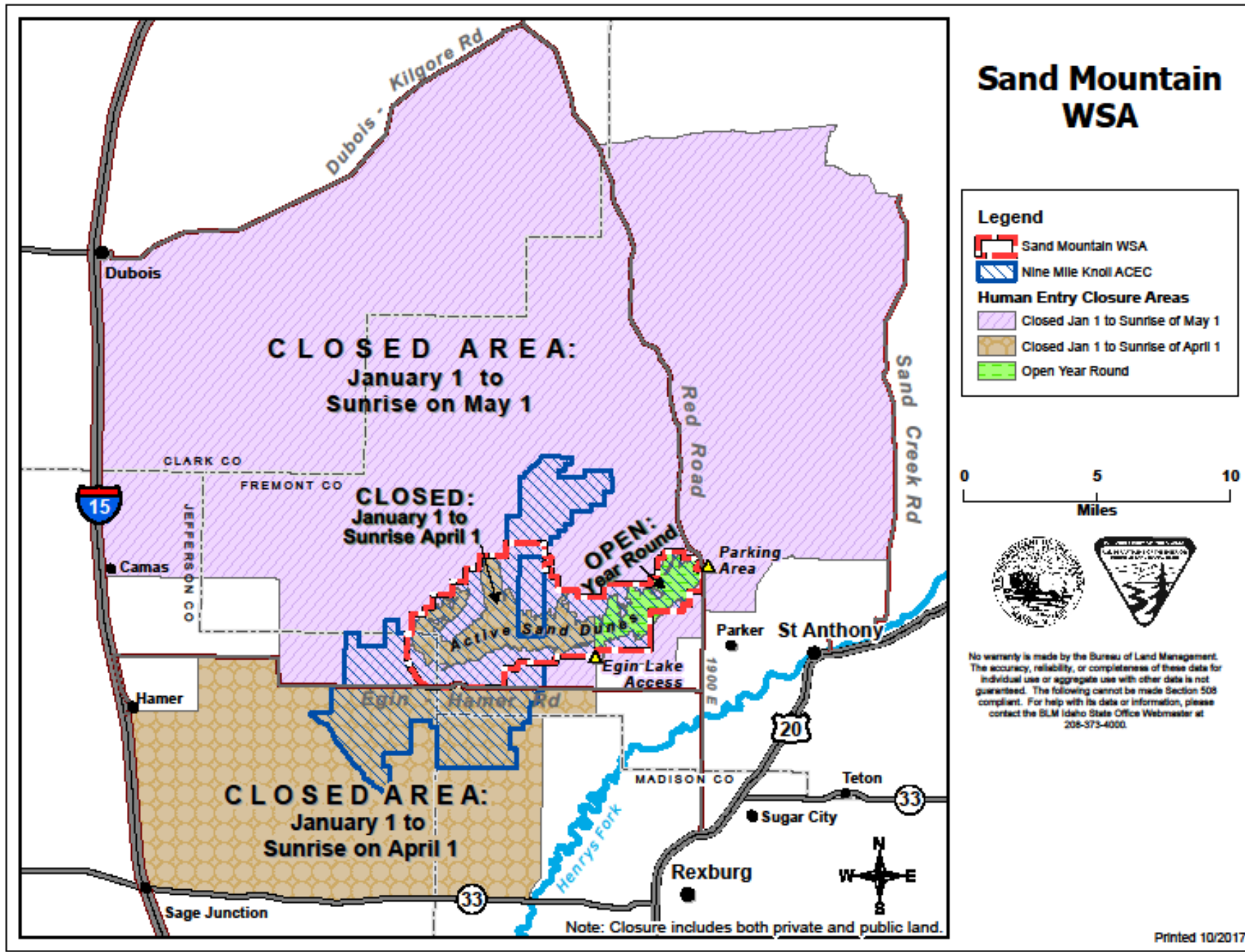


Sand Mountain WSA

Chronology and documents

Suitability Report

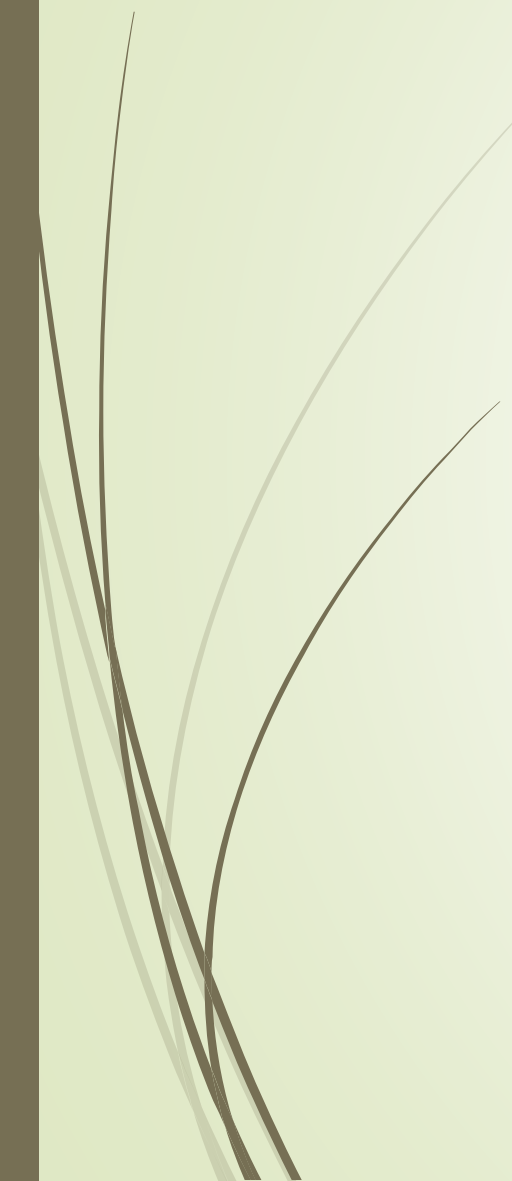
- Sand Mountain WSA was found to be non-suitable for the following reasons:
 - Manageability would be difficult due to unclear boundaries, necessary fencing to prevent trespass, numerous accesses, need for LE.
 - Naturalness and opportunities for solitude are “less than exemplary.”
 - This a premier area for motorized recreation opportunities. Public comments were nearly unanimous in stating the area is best suited for motorized recreation activities.
 - Positive local economic impact resulting from recreational activities.
 - Opportunities for mechanical manipulation of wildlife habitat exist and would be precluded by wilderness designation.





Other Special Designations in the area

Nine Mile Knoll Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

- ACECs are areas within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.
 - In 1985 in the Medicine Lodge RMP, BLM designated the Nine Mile Knoll ACEC primarily to protect habitat for wildlife.
 - Prescriptions to protect these values include no disposal of public land, no new roads or major ROWs, winter vehicle and human entry closure and oil and gas development restrictions.
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Other Special Designations in the area

Egin-Hamer Winter Wildlife Human Entry Closure

- In 1983, Fremont and Jefferson counties submit an application to BLM for a road right-of-way (ROW) from Egin to Hamer to provide a “major farm to market road for the farming area northwest of St. Anthony.” The commissioners propose to use the road 12 months a year and maintain it through the winter.
 - Impacts to wildlife (displacement of big game and loss of big game winter range) were the biggest concerns.
- Original ROW grant issued through an EIS, Record of Decision signed September 21, 1987
 - Seasonal road closure December 1 through March 31
- In 1998 ROW grant amended allowing the road to be opened year-round. However, mitigation to wildlife was required.
 - The current human entry closure was part of the mitigation: January 1 through April 30 with some exceptions

Questions?

