

Glass Mountains Potential Recommended Wilderness Area Inyo National Forest

This recommendation was derived from Wilderness Evaluation Polygon #1012

Number of Acres

Approximately 17,440 acres.

Location and Description of Recommended Boundary

The Inyo National Forest's recommended boundary encompasses a large portion of the Glass Mountains Inventoried Roadless Area. The boundary uses a combination of natural features, county Roads, forest system roads and motorized trails. The boundary is set back 200 feet from the county road and 75 feet from Forest Service maintenance level 2 and 3 roads and motorized trails to be consistent with other wilderness boundary setbacks on the forest.

The northern, eastern and western sections of the boundary are set back from 3 county roads, Taylor Canyon Road, McGee Canyon Road and Sawmill Meadow Road, or set back from a number of forest system roads and motorized trails. The southern boundary generally follows a prominent natural feature, the rim of the Long Valley Caldera. The southern boundary is specifically aligned to avoid proposed sage grouse critical habitat along the caldera escarpment, and avoid Lahontan cutthroat trout populations in O'Harrel Canyon Creek. The recommended boundary also includes 1 cherry stem where the boundary skirts an approximately 1.4 miles long segment of Forest System Road 01S90A in McGee Canyon that protrudes into the area.

The boundary supports management of the area as potential wilderness because of the following:

- Visitors would be able to locate the boundary on both a map and on the ground.
- The boundary minimizes the potential for motorized incursions into wilderness because the boundary is offset from roads the public can locate both on maps and on the ground.
- The boundary excludes all motorized trails in the Glass Mountains Inventoried Roadless Area.
- All lands adjacent to the recommended wilderness are managed by the Forest Service.

General Geography, Topography and Vegetation

The Glass Mountains and the Long Valley Caldera are part of the spectacular landscape formed by volcanic activity in the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains over the past 4 million years. Volcanic eruptions between 2.1 and 0.8 million years ago formed the lava domes and rhyolite or obsidian flows of the Glass Mountains on the northeastern rim of the caldera. About 760,000 years ago, cataclysmic volcanic eruptions and accompanying subsistence of the magma chamber

formed the present Long Valley Caldera¹. The potential recommended wilderness encompasses the upper elevations of the northwest to southeast trending Glass Mountains. The southern boundary generally follows the rim of the caldera, where elevations range from 9,000 feet to over 11,000 feet. The majority of the potential recommended area lies along slopes that descend steeply to the north and northeast from the caldera rim. Elevations along the northern and eastern boundary are from 7,000 feet to 8,000 feet. Surface water is scarce, with O'Harrel Canyon Creek the only perennial stream flowing south from the caldera rim, and McGee Creek the only perennial stream flowing to the north.

The area is notable for its diverse vegetation communities including these assessment types²: pinyon-juniper forests in the lower elevation areas; mountain mahogany, jeffrey pine forests and mixed conifer forests in mid-elevation areas; and subalpine conifer forests of whitebark pine and limber pine in the higher elevations along the caldera rim. The whitebark pine population in the Glass Mountains may be important for future conservation efforts because it is apparently resistant to white pine blister rust. The majority of the Sentinel Meadow Research Natural Area, which has lodgepole pine and limber pine as its target elements is within the potential recommended area. There are also several aspen communities, which represent an important component of biodiversity on the forest.

Current Uses

Livestock grazing occurs on the portions of the Clover Patch and Turner Grazing Allotments within the recommended area. Portions of the Black Canyon Allotment are also within the recommended area, but this allotment is currently inactive. Range improvements associated with the allotments that represent a departure from apparent naturalness include fences and spring boxes.

Outfitting and guiding under special use authorization occurs in the area. The Inyo National Forest typically issues several authorizations for summer backpacking and hiking trips by credited educational groups each year.

The area receives low to moderate amounts of recreation use including camping, hiking, hunting and cross-country skiing. There is an existing use trail (not a forest system trail) to the summit of Glass Mountain from Sawmill Meadow. There is no known existing motorized use by the public in the area.

A Forest Service communication site on Glass Mountain is the only other improvement in the area that represents a departure from apparent naturalness. The Forest Service periodically uses helicopters to access the site and maintain the communication system.

There is one inholding in the potential recommended area, a 40-acre parcel west of Wilfred Canyon. There is no known existing road access to the inholding.

¹ US Geological Service: Volcano Hazards Program website: Long Valley Caldera Geology and History

² The Forest Service assessment of terrestrial ecosystems for the forest plan revision process are derived from the Forest Terrestrial Ecological Unit Inventory ecological types, with several ecological types combined into each of the assessment types. Please refer to Inyo National Forest Assessment Topic Paper Chapter 1 (November 2013).

Wilderness Characteristics and the Ability to Protect and Manage the Area so as to Preserve Wilderness Characteristics

The potential recommended area is believed to have at least moderate ecological integrity, and generally appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention. An assessment of conflicting impacts in the Sentinel Meadow Research Natural Area indicated no impacts except disturbance to portions of the sagebrush scrub community cause by livestock grazing. Although the condition of riparian vegetation has not been recently assessed, the Inyo National Forest has implemented meadow restoration treatments in McGee Meadow in the past. The majority of the area is above elevations or does not contain the ecological types where invasive weeds, primarily cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*), would affect ecological integrity. Public comments indicated the area is an important migratory route for wildlife.

The area provides good opportunities for solitude, primitive types of recreation and unconfined recreation. There are no forest system trails or other recreation facilities within the area. The steep topography and lack of surface water would facilitate the current low to moderate number of visitors' experience of remoteness from the sights and sounds of people inside the wilderness. Visitors' sense of remoteness from occupied and modified areas outside the wilderness may be diminished along the area's periphery by motorized vehicle use on forest system roads. The majority of the potential recommended area, however, is at least 1 mile from a Forest Service road, and can be considered distant from occupied and modified areas.

This area's other features of value include: outstanding geologic features associated with the Long Valley Calder; cultural resource sites (the Glass Mountains were an important obsidian source for Native Americans); the Sentinel Meadow Research Natural Area; and the rare plant species Mono Lake lupine, Raven's milkvetch, and Mono milkvetch. Further taxonomic work might help better resolve the differences between these rare milkvetch species.

The Inyo National Forest has the ability to preserve the area's wilderness characteristics primarily through the recommended boundary for the area. The boundary excludes proposed sage grouse critical habitat and Lahontan cutthroat trout habitat, where the forest may undertake activities to manage habitat or ecological processes. And as indicated above, the boundary is intended to minimize the potential for incursions by motorized vehicles. There are fewer than 20 unauthorized routes in the recommended area, and the routes are generally less than one-half mile in length. The unauthorized routes are expected to return to natural conditions through passive restoration processes.

Summary of Factors Considered in the Selection of this Area

The Inyo National Forest recommends the Glass Mountains as potential wilderness because of the following ecological and social characteristics:

- The diversity and intact condition of the ecological types in the recommended area.
- The Glass Mountains contain geologic features that are both outstanding landscape features and features of scenic value.
- The Sentinel Meadow Research Natural Area contains ecological features of scientific value.
- The area contains a large number of documented prehistoric sites.

- There are good opportunities for solitude and primitive types of recreation in the area, which is relatively distant from occupied and modified areas.