

# Deep Springs South Potential Recommended Wilderness Area Inyo National Forest

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*This recommendation was derived from Wilderness Evaluation Polygon #1046*

## **Number of Acres**

Approximately 11,840 acres.

## **Location and a Description of Recommended Boundary**

The Inyo National Forest's recommended boundary encompasses a roughly "L" shaped portion of the Soldier Canyon Inventoried Roadless Area within the Inyo Mountains. The boundary uses a combination of the Inyo National Forest boundary, natural features, forest system roads and motorized trails. The boundary is set back 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 and western sections of the boundary are generally adjacent to either Forest System Road 08S106 or motorized trails 35E302 through 35E305. The boundary setback distance from the motorized trails is 75 feet. The southern boundary generally follows a prominent natural feature, an east-west trending ridgeline. The eastern end of the southern boundary departs the ridgeline to become a 200 foot offset from Forest System Road 09S109 and several of its spurs (09S109J and 09S109k). The eastern boundary is formed by the Inyo National Forest boundary, which follows section lines to form the "L" shape. The recommended boundary also includes two cherry stems, areas where the boundary skirts segments of road or motorized trail that protrude into the area. The first cherry stem is approximately .6 miles long along Forest System Road 07S135. The second cherry stem is approximately 1 mile long along motorized trail 36E301. The boundary for both cherry stems is intended exclude historic mining sites and structures from the potential recommended wilderness.

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

- With the exception of the boundary along motorized trails noted above, visitors would be able to locate the boundary on both a map and on the ground.
- The eastern boundary uses the legally determined forest boundary.
- The boundary minimizes the potential for motorized incursions into wilderness because the boundary is offset from roads and motorized trails the public can locate both on maps and on the ground.
- The boundary excludes all motorized trails in the Soldier Canyon Inventoried Roadless Area.
- The boundary excludes known historic mining sites and structures.
- All lands adjacent to the recommended wilderness are managed by either the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. A portion of the east boundary is adjacent to the Piper Mountain Wilderness, which is administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

## General Geography, Topography and Vegetation

Deep Springs South is located at the northern end of the Inyo Mountains, an area where complex geological forces have produced a striking desert range that contrasts with Deep Springs Valley, a large playa to the northeast of this area. Within the potential recommended area is a geological area known as the Poleta Folds, which is used as a field study area by universities. Alluvial fans cover large portions of the eastern side of the area near Deep Springs Valley, where elevations are around 5,000 feet. In the southwest corner of the area elevations reach 8,600 feet. The area is incised with numerous drainages, but surface water is scarce because there are no perennial streams flowing within the area.

Vegetation communities in the area include pinyon juniper forests and xeric shrub and blackbrush assessment types<sup>1</sup>.

## Current Uses

Because of the lack of surface water and the extreme summer heat, the area receives low amounts of recreation use that includes hiking and hunting. There is no known existing motorized use by the public in the area. Portions of the area are also used as a geological field study area.

There are no known improvements in the area that represents a departure from apparent naturalness. Mining sites and structures in this portion of the Inyo Mountains have been excluded from the recommended wilderness area.

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

The recommended area has intact ecological integrity, and generally appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention. Because the majority of the area is comprised of pinyon-juniper forests, it is likely that cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*) occurs in some of the higher elevation areas.

The area provides opportunities for solitude, primitive types of recreation and unconfined recreation. There are no forest system trails or other recreation facilities within the area. The numerous steep drainages and lack of surface water would facilitate the current low 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. A section of California State Highway 168 is within 1 mile of the western boundary of the area, and it is not known whether the topography would effectively screen visitors along the western periphery from the noise generated by vehicles traveling the highway. These potential effects to a sense of remoteness would likely be confined to areas near the boundary, because most of the likely travel routes are through the bottom of steep drainages some distance from roads or motorized trails.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

This area's other features of value include the Poleta Fold geologic features, which have scientific and educational values, and cultural resource sites including encampments, rock rings and lithic scatters.

The Inyo National Forest has the ability to preserve the area's wilderness characteristics primarily through the recommended boundary for the area. A portion of the eastern boundary is contiguous with the 72,192 acre Piper Mountain Wilderness. The location of the remainder of the boundary is intended to minimize the potential for incursions by motorized vehicles. There are 4 unauthorized routes in the potential recommended area, and the routes are 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 Deep Springs South as potential wilderness because of the following ecological and social characteristics:

- The intact condition of the ecosystem types in the recommended area.
- The area is contiguous with the Piper Mountains Wilderness.
- The area contains geologic features that are features of scientific and educational value.
- The area represents a good opportunity to add underrepresented ecosystems to the National Wilderness Preservation System. The entire area is comprised of pinyon-juniper forest or xeric shrub and blackbrush assessment types. These two assessment types consist of ecological groups that may be considered underrepresented in the National Wilderness Preservation System.