

G 9/11/87



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

NEVADA STATE OFFICE

850 Harvard Way

P.O. Box 12000

Reno, Nevada 89520-0006



IN REPLY REFER TO:

4700

(NV-931.3)

SEP 11 1987

Commission for the Preservation of  
Wild Horses  
c/o Terri Jay, Executive Director  
58 Hardy Way  
Sparks, NV 89431

Dear Madam:

The Bureau of Land Management proposes to gather excess wild horses and burros from public lands in the State of Nevada no sooner than 28 days from the date of this letter.

The proposed gathering will be conducted in the Elko District in the areas shown on the enclosed maps and as described below.

<u>Herd Management Area/Herd Area Name</u>	<u>Environmental Analysis Record Number</u>	<u>Reason for Gathering</u>	<u>Approximate Number to Be Removed</u>	<u>Approximate Number to Remain</u>
Little Humboldt	NV-010-7-036	Implement land use planning	61	107
Rock Creek	"	"	71	119
Spruce/Pequop	"	"	52	64

Sincerely,

  
Edward F. Spang  
State Director, Nevada

1 Enclosure

1 - Proposed Gather Area Maps (2pp)



TALL CORRAL ALLOTMENT

LITTLE HUMBOLDT  
HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

ROCK CREEK  
HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

JAKES CREEK ALLOTMENT

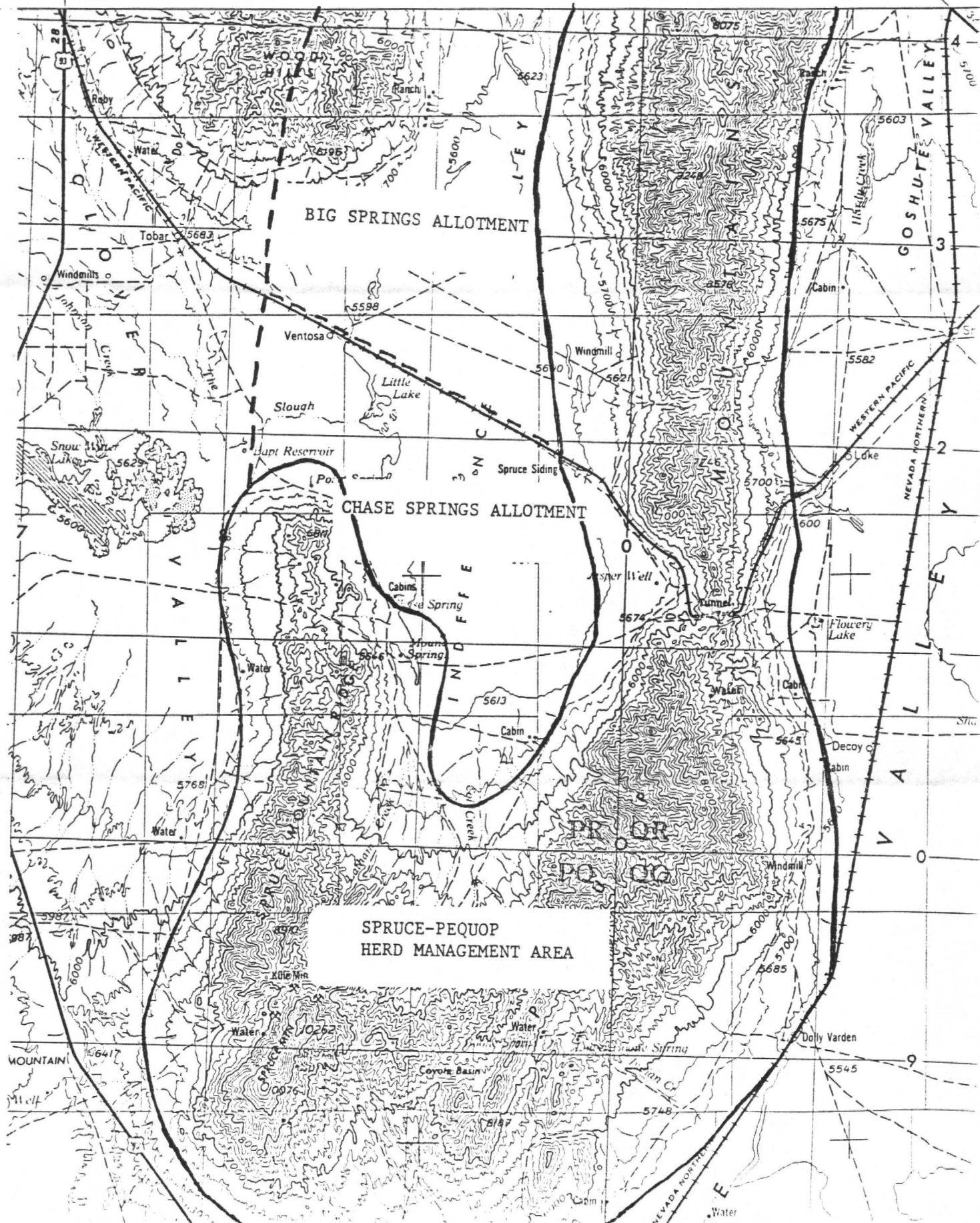
67

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BIG SPRINGS ALLOTMENT

CHASE SPRINGS ALLOTMENT

SPRUCE-PEQUOP  
HERD MANAGEMENT AREA

GOSHUTE VALLEY

W  
Y  
A  
L  
L  
E  
Y

C  
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SNOW MOUNTAIN

COYOTE BASIN

DOLLY VARDEN

Ruby

Tobar

Ventosa

Little Lake

Slough

Reservoir

Spruce Siding

Cabin

Spring

Spring

Cabin

Jasper Well

Summer

Flowers Lake

Decoy Cabin

Windmill

Water

Water

Water

Water

Water

28

3

7

8

9

4

3

2

1

9

45° - E.

100° E.

110° E. 30'

NEVADA NORTHERN

WESTERN PACIFIC

WESTERN PACIFIC

JOHNSON

SNOW MOUNTAIN

SNOW MOUNTAIN

WOODRUFF HILLS

WOODRUFF HILLS

8075

5623

5600

5603

5683

5598

5610

5621

5582

5611

5700

600

5613

5768

6000

5645

5987

5970

6000

5700

5641

5652

6000

5700

5545

5887

5748

Cabin

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO. NV-010-7  
ELKO DISTRICT FY87 HORSE ROUND-UP

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The Elko Resource Area and Wells Resource Area, both in the Elko District and the Paradise Denio Resource Area in the Winnemucca District, are proposing the use of a helicopter, construction of traps, and holding corrals to gather excess wild horses. Refer to the Resource Management Plans for the aforementioned resource areas for analysis of the appropriate management levels of wild horses.

A. Introduction

As a result of excess wild horses within several Herd Use Areas (see attached Elko District FY87 Horse Capture Plan), it is necessary to determine the most cost efficient, effective and safest (to horses as well as people involved in the gather) method of gathering excess animals.

Several methods of wild horse capture exist, but only those methods accepted by BLM will be discussed.

Regardless of the method of capture chosen, it will also be necessary to construct temporary traps as well as temporary holding corrals. Impacts from such construction will be discussed within the proposed action.

B. Proposed Action

The proposed action consists of using a helicopter to gather excess wild horses in FY88. The helicopter would locate the bands of wild horses and drive them into the traps using wing riders (wranglers on horse back) where desired and necessary. The gathering would continue until the appropriate herd management levels have been reached. Hazards such as cliffs and fences would be scouted in advance and existing roads and trails would be used.

Several temporary traps with deflector wings encompassing less than one acre would be erected on lands in each herd area. Temporary trap and corral sites would be mutually selected by the contractor and BLM. Each facility would be constructed from portable panels. These traps and corrals would be moved from place to place during the gathering operation and completely removed from the area after the contract is completed.

Due to the movement of the herds, it is not feasible to establish traps sites or corral sites in advance thus site locations will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

C. Stipulations

1. Horse handling will be kept to a minimum. Capture and transporting operations are exceedingly traumatic to the animals. Minimizing the handling would increase the safety of the animals, as well as the handlers.
2. No gathering will be allowed after March 1, 1988 because of the potential stress to pregnant and lactating mares and the possibility of induced abortions. Gathering may be resumed after the foaling period and after foals are grown enough to withstand the stress of gathering operations.
3. Horses will not be run more than 10 miles during gathering operations.
4. A veterinarian will be on call during gathering operations.
5. Helicopters will be used with caution. A qualified district BLM representative will be present during gathering attempts to insure strict compliance with the above mileage limitations and CFR 4700 regulations.
6. Captured horses that are obviously aged, lame, deformed, or sick will be humanely disposed of at the trap site.
7. Captured horses that are clearly unsuitable for adoption but that do not fall under (6) above, will be collared with identifiable neck bands and released for study purposes.
8. A cultural resources investigation by an archaeologist or D.A.T. will be made prior to any trap construction. If a significant find was discovered, an alternative trap site will be selected.
9. Trap sites or holding corrals will not be placed on any sites with any threatened or endangered plant species present.

D. Alternatives

1. Water trapping as an alternative has been considered. This involves placing temporary corrals with one way gates at water sources.

Due to the numerous water sources within the areas being trapped, it would not be possible to use this method and will no longer be considered.

2. Gathering of wild horses by wranglers on horse back as an alternative has been considered. This involves people on horse back locating the horses and trying to drive the wild horses into the portable traps.

Often times, the wild horses will out run the wranglers and scatter prior to reaching the trap. There is also an increased risk of injury to the wild horses as well as the wranglers and their horses since hazards cannot be seen in advance. This method takes longer and is not cost effective. For these reasons, this alternative is not feasible and will not be considered further.

3. No Action - the no action alternative would result in no wild horses being gathered, and herd levels would not be held at authorized management levels. Increasing horse numbers would severely impact wildlife and livestock, therefore, this alternative is not considered further.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

The proposed gathering area covers five wild horse herd use areas and portions of four adjoining allotments outside designated horse use areas. The majority of the area is located in the Elko Resource Area of the Elko District and the Paradise/Denio Resource Area, the Winnemucca District (Appendix A). This area straddles the north end of the boundary between Elko and Humboldt Counties. The gathering area also covers a herd management area in the Wells Resource Area of the Elko District. This area is in eastern Elko County (Appendix B).

The following table shows the herd areas/allotments (non herd areas) that will be affected as well as the number of wild horses to be gathered:

<u>Herd Area</u>	<u>Nos. to be Managed</u>	<u>No. Inventoried</u>	<u>Nos. to be Gathered</u>
Little Humboldt	107	168	61
Rock Creek	119	190	71
Bullhead	50 (adults)	133	67
Little Owyhee *	200 (adults)	409	159
Spruce/Pequop	<u>64 to 80</u>	<u>116</u>	<u>52</u>
TOTAL	540 to 556	1016	410

This is based on census and 1987 estimated populations.

- \* Gathering efforts will be concentrated in the Lake Creek Field of the Little Owyhee Herd Area.

For discussion purposes, the subject area will be divided into 2 major geographic locations, the first being that portion of the subject area lying within Elko and Paradise-Denio (A) Resource Areas and the second being that portion lying within the Wells Resource Area (B)

A. Elko and Paradise-Deno Resource Areas

1) Topography

Topography of the subject area consists of a flat desert in the northern part and mountains, canyons, alluvial fans, basins and valley floors in the southern part. Annual precipitation varies from 20 inches in the Snowstorm Mountains to 8 inches on the Owyhee Desert. Precipitation occurrences are highest from November through January, occurring mostly as snow. Average temperatures range from 95° F. in summer to -10° F. in winter.

2) Air, Soils and Water

Prevailing winds are usually out of the west and are common from April through October.

Air quality is good and does not appear to exceed the State of Nevada Ambient Air Quality Standards. Air inversion layers may occur in some areas but are generally of short duration. There is no knowledge of air pollution occurring due to these inversions.

Soils are predominantly Aridosols and Mollisols and are shallow to moderately deep. The following table depicts soil characteristics.

<u>GENERAL DISTRIBUTION</u>	<u>PRODUCTIVITY</u>	<u>EROSION SUSCEPTIBILITY</u>	<u>TEXTURES</u>
Alluvial plains, bottoms	Moderate-High	Moderate	Mod. fine-medium
Benches, fans, terraces	Moderate	Moderate	Fine-Mod. fine
Mountain uplands	Moderate-High	Slight	Fine-Mod. fine

The majority of the streams flow intermittently and contribute most runoff during the spring. Reservoirs, springs and wells provide additional water.

3) Vegetation

Major plant associations are characterized as big sagebrush-grass, low sagebrush-grass, shadscale and riparian.

The big sagebrush-grass and low sagebrush-grass types are dominated by big sagebrush and low sagebrush respectively. Other shrubs include currant, rabbitbrush, snowberry, and antelope bitterbrush. Major grass species include bluebunch wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, Idaho fescue, Sandberg bluegrass, and bottlebrush squirreltail. Forbs include arrowleaf balsamroot, lupine, phlox and aster.

Tree species occurring in the Spruce/Pequop Herd Area include pinyon, white fir and spruce.

The shadscale type is found in the northern portion of the Owyhee Desert. Major plant species include shadscale, bud sagebrush and big sagebrush. Smaller amounts of winterfat grow in this type. Major grass species include squirreltail, Sandberg bluegrass, and cheatgrass.

The only major riparian areas are along the South and North Forks of the Little Humboldt River and along the Little Owyhee River. The major tree species is willow. Major shrub species include big sagebrush, currant, Wood's rose and rabbitbrush. Various rushes, sedges and grasses comprise stringer meadows along portions of the streams. Forbs are typical of those found in wet meadows and include dandelion, yarrow and iris.

4) Animals

Wildlife in the subject area include deer, pronghorn antelope, chukar, dove, and sage grouse as game species and coyote, bobcat, small mammals and birds as nongame species.

Domestic livestock include horses, sheep and cattle.

5) Mining Claims

Mining claims exist in the area however, will not be affected as a result of the proposed activities and will not be discussed further.

6) Threatened and Endangered Plant Species

The following species, located within 10 miles of the subject area, have been given a 3C status in the Federal Register (Volume 50, Number 188, Friday, September 27, 1985). A status of 3C are "taxa that are no longer being considered for listing as threatened or endangered species."

Hackelia ophiobia - has been located in shaded areas at the base of cliffs along Milligan Creek and extending up the cliff.

Eriogonum ammophilum - apparently associated with low sage plant community where soils are usually shallow.

The following species located within 10 miles of the herd area(s) have been given a 2 status in the same Federal Register. The information now available indicates it may be appropriate to list these plants as either threatened or endangered. The plants in this status need further research to determine their vulnerability, taxonomy and/or threats to these taxa.

Ivesia rhypara - found on tuffs and volcanic ash soils.

Mentzelia pachardiae - associated with loose slopes high in volcanic ash devoid of woody vegetation.



Astragalus yoderwilliamsii - found in association with low sage.  
Leptodactylon glabrum - is not listed in the Federal Register.  
Though it is not Federally listed, it is on a "watch list". It is found on steep canyon walls and vertical cliffs.

7) Wilderness Study Area (WSA)

Two WSAs (North Fork Little Humboldt WSA and Little Humboldt River WSA) occur, in part, within the area to be gathered (see Appendix E). The use of aircraft for removing wild horses from within WSAs is consistent with the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines (IMP), for lands under wilderness review 12/12/79, and revised 7/12/83, since it is considered as a nonimpairing activity.

No traps or corrals will be established within the WSA's and motorized vehicles will be confined to existing roads and ways therefore, no impacts are anticipated to the WSA's.

8) Visual Resource Management

Visual resources will not be affected by the proposed action since all structures are temporary.

9) Archeology

Numerous archeological sites occur within the subject area. To ensure no impact to this resource, an archeologist or a district archeological technician will be required to clear selected areas prior to any ground disturbing activity, including erection of the traps or corrals. Only areas with existing roads or trails will be used.

B. Wells Resource Area

1) Topography

Topography of the subject area is valley bottom in the western part and mountains, canyons and alluvial fans to the east. Annual precipitation varies from 4 to 8 inches in the valley bottoms to 8 to 16 inches on the upper benches and mountains. Precipitation is received primarily during the winter in the form of snow.

2) Air, Soils, Water

See II.A.2 for Air, Soils, and Water information.

3) Vegetation

The major plant associations are very similar to those mentioned in II.B.1.a except for the domination of juniper on the uplands and the larger percentage of shadscale and winter fat vegetation types within the Wells Resource Area.

- 4) Animals - Refer to II.A.4.
- 5) Mining Claims - Refer to II.A.5.
- 6) Threatened and Endangered Species - The following species located within 10 miles of herd area(s) have been given a 3C status in the Federal Register (Volume 50, Number 188, Friday, Sept. 27, 1985). Status of 3C "are taxa that are no longer being considered for listing as threatened or endangered species."

Lepidium nanum - has been found on dry gravelly knolls, rocky hillsides, and chalky areas associated with black sagebrush plant community.

Cryptantha interrupta - associated with rocky hillsides on sandy or clayey soils with a big sagebrush plant community.

- 7) Wilderness Study Area (WSA)

A portion of the South Pequop WSA occurs within the boundary of the subject area (see Appendix (2)).

No traps or corrals will be established within the WSA and motorized vehicles will be confined to existing roads and ways so no impacts are anticipated to the WSAs.

- 8) Visual Resource Management - Refer to II.A.8.
- 9) Archeology - Refer to II.A.9.

### III. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

#### A. Proposed Action

The use of helicopters to capture excess wild horses may result in leppy foals and split bands, as well as injured horses. Incidents like these tend to be increased if the animals are pushed too hard. However, a Bureau official will be present at the gathering site to ensure minimum injury occurs to the horses and that the stipulations in I.B.3. are adhered to. The authorized officer will also have a helicopter on site to use in monitoring and supervising the contract. This helicopter will be used with discretion to minimize disturbance of horses that would make gathering more difficult.

Vegetation may be disturbed as a result of erection of the portable traps and/or corrals. Some soil compaction and vegetation trampling may occur due to the concentration of horses within a 1 acre area. The horses may be kept within these facilities for no longer than 5 days unless approved by the authorized officer. Numbers of horses may vary depending on how many are caught in any one area.

Any areas having a threatened or endangered species occurring within the area or archeological artifacts will not be used for trap sites or corral sites. If either of these resources are discovered at any proposed sites, locations will be recorded and turned into the appropriate specialists or area manager.

Since the helicopter will not result in any ground disturbing activity, and trap and corral sites are temporary (5 days or less), no significant impacts to any other resources are anticipated.

B. Alternatives

The alternatives have been discussed and determined not to be feasible for the reasons mentioned in I.C.1-3.

IV. APPENDICES

- A. Location Map, Elko RA, Paradise-Denio RA
- B. Location Map, Wells RA
- C. T&E Species Map, Elko RA, Paradise-Denio RA
- D. T&E Species Map, Wells RA
- E. WSA Map, Elko RA, Paradise-Denio RA
- F. WSA Map, Wells RA
- G. Wilderness Clearances
- H. VRM Clearances

V. PERSONS, GROUPS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

- A. American Horse Protection Assn.
- B. National Mustang Assn.
- C. International Society for the Protection of Wild Horses and Burros
- D. Fund for Animals
- E. U.S. Humane Society
- F. Nevada State Dept. of Agriculture
- G. Animal Protection Institute
- H. American Humane Assoc.
- I. National Wild Horse Assoc.
- J. Wild Horse Organized Assistance
- K. Deborah Allard
- L. Save the Mustangs
- M. American Bashkir Curley Register
- N. Humane Society of Southern Nevada
- O. Nevada Humane Society
- P. Mr. Donald Molde
- Q. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- R. Nevada Federation of Animal Protection Organization
- S. Craig C. Downer
- T. Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses
- U. Elko District Office
- V. Winnemucca District Office
- W. Nevada Dept. of Wildlife

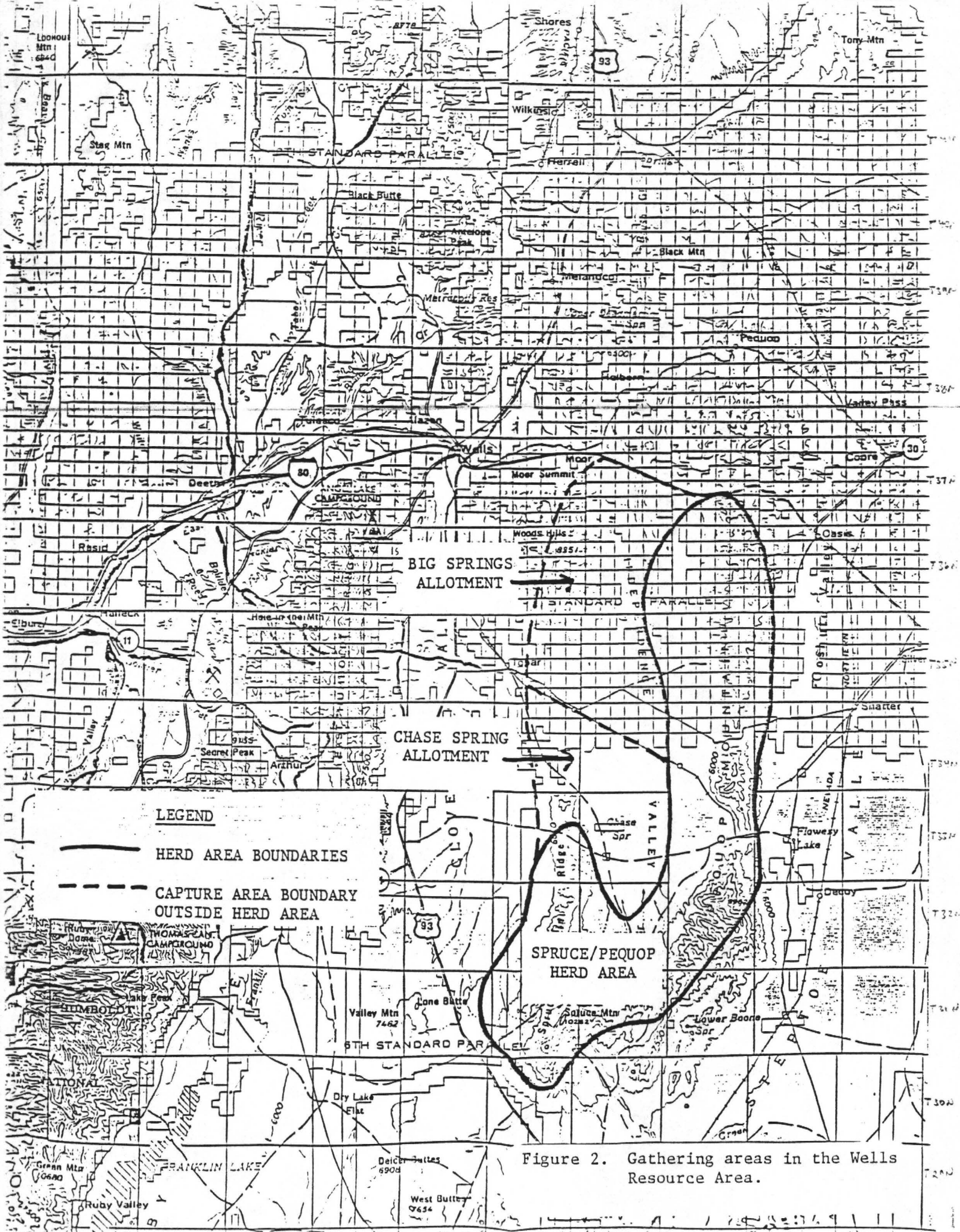
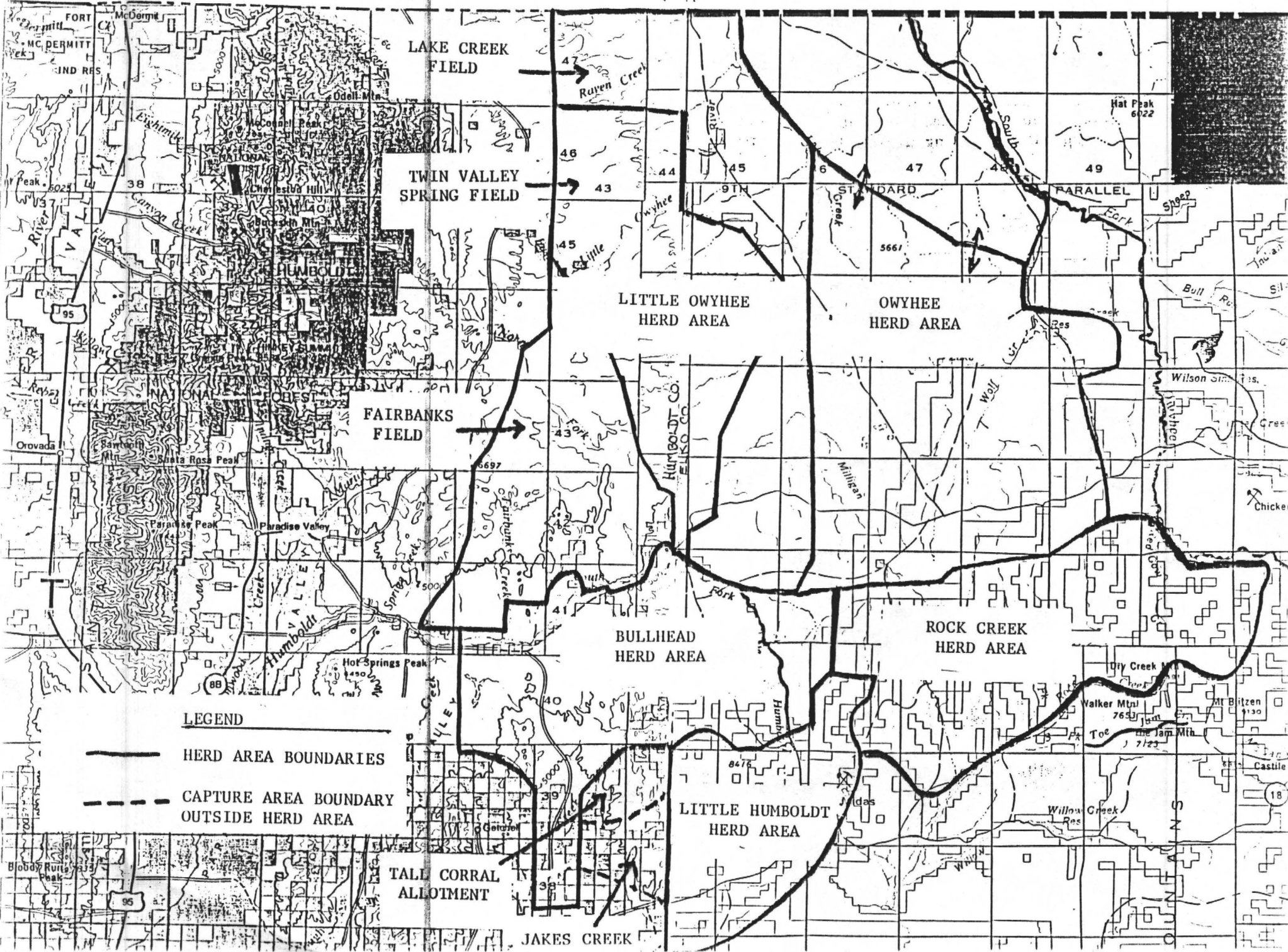


Figure 2. Gathering areas in the Wells Resource Area.



LEGEND

- HERD AREA BOUNDARIES
- - - CAPTURE AREA BOUNDARY OUTSIDE HERD AREA

TALL CORRAL ALLOTMENT

JAKES CREEK

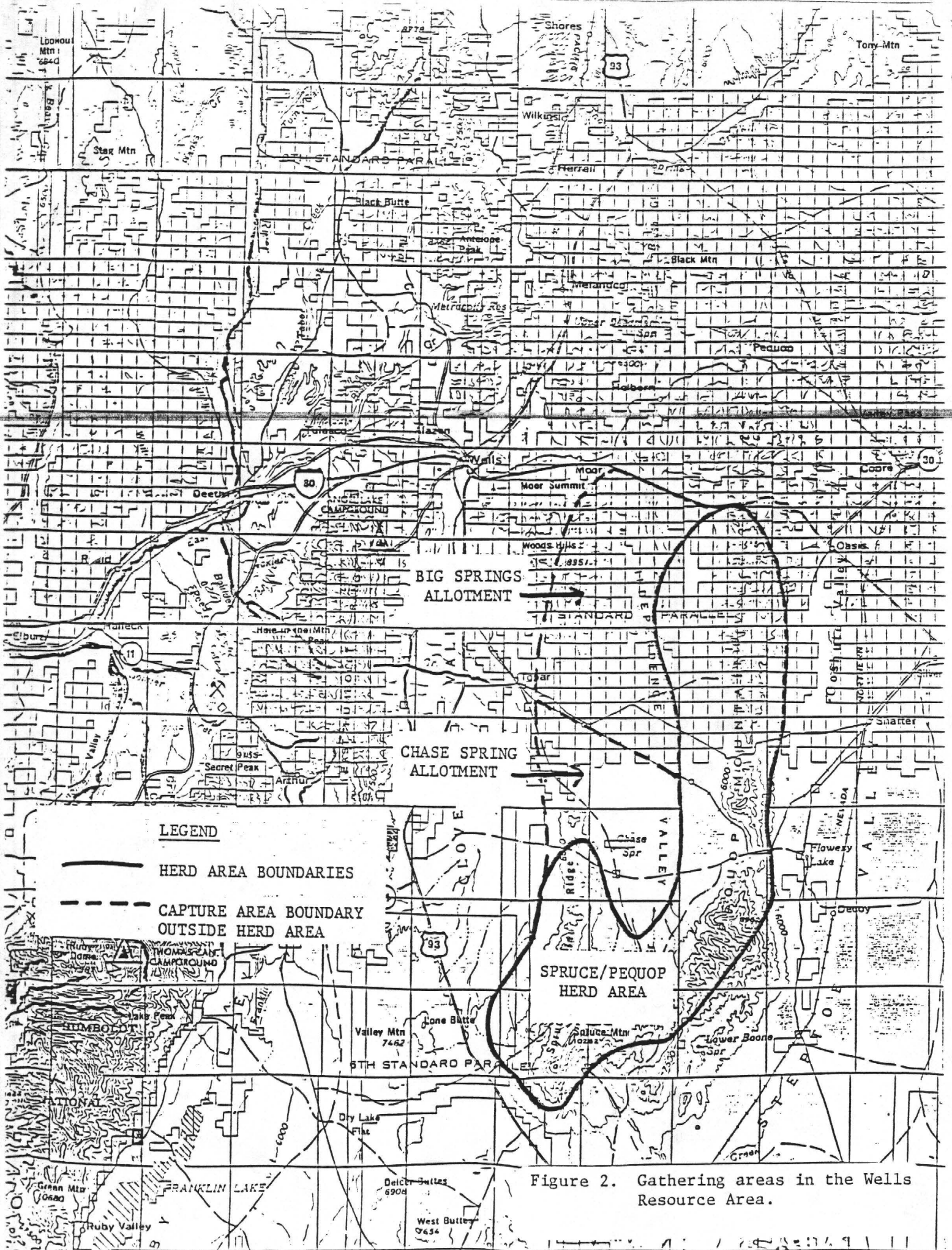
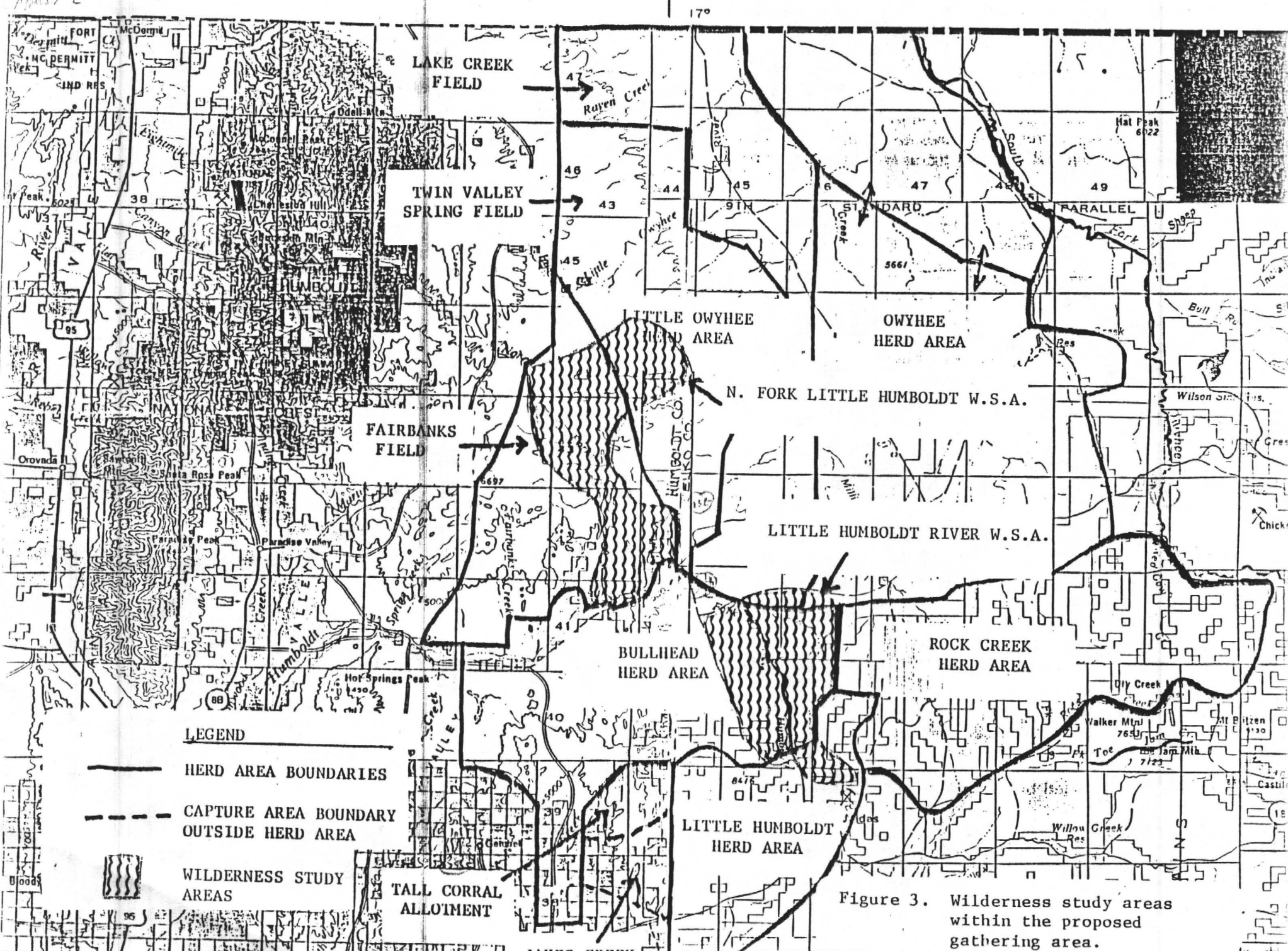


Figure 2. Gathering areas in the Wells Resource Area.



**LEGEND**





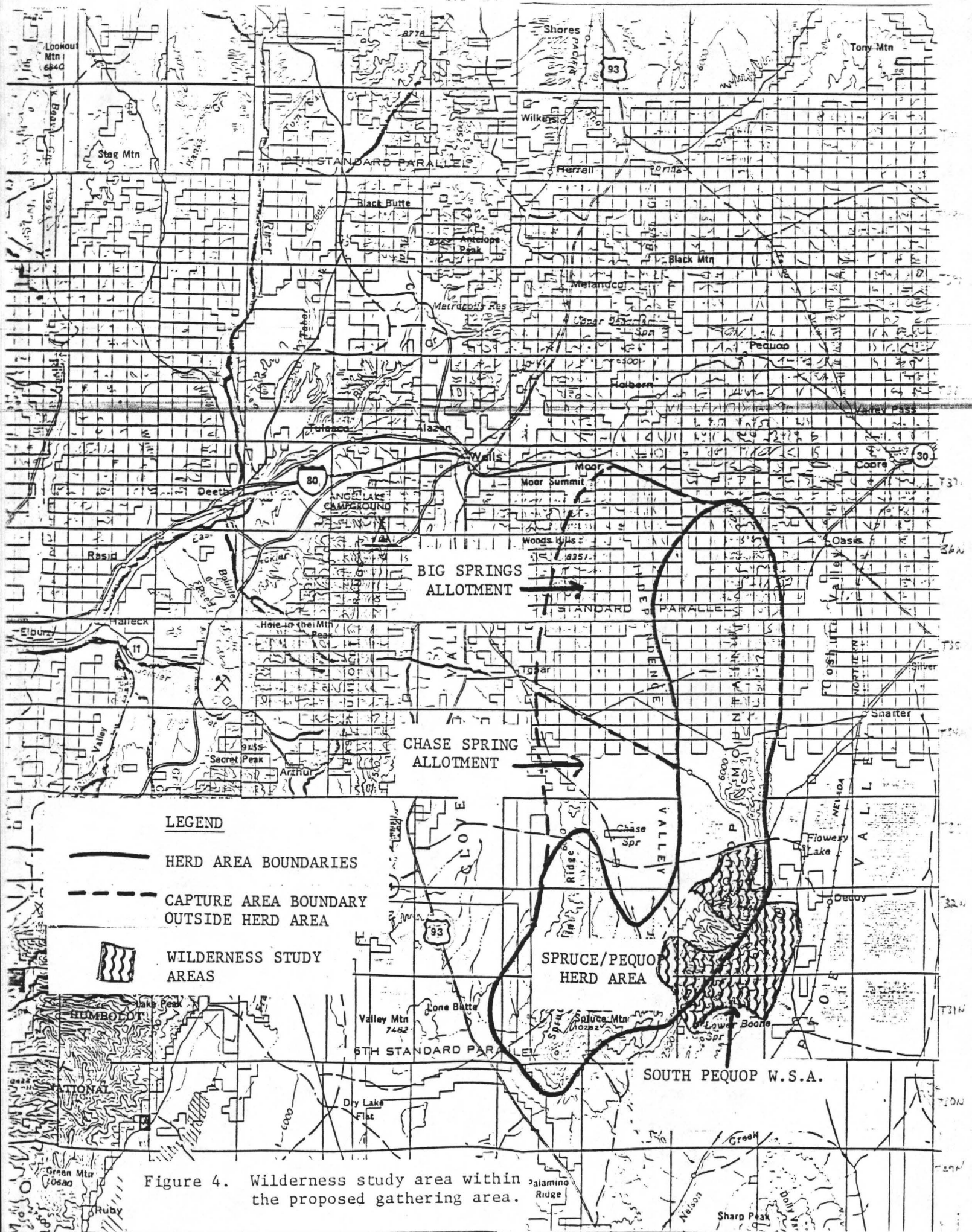



-  HERD AREA BOUNDARIES
-  CAPTURE AREA BOUNDARY OUTSIDE HERD AREA
-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS
-  TALL CORRAL ALLOTMENT

Figure 3. Wilderness study areas within the proposed gathering area.



**LEGEND**

-  HERD AREA BOUNDARIES
-  CAPTURE AREA BOUNDARY OUTSIDE HERD AREA
-  WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

BIG SPRINGS ALLOTMENT

CHASE SPRING ALLOTMENT

SPRUCE/PEQUOP HERD AREA

SOUTH PEQUOP W.S.A.

Figure 4. Wilderness study area within the proposed gathering area.



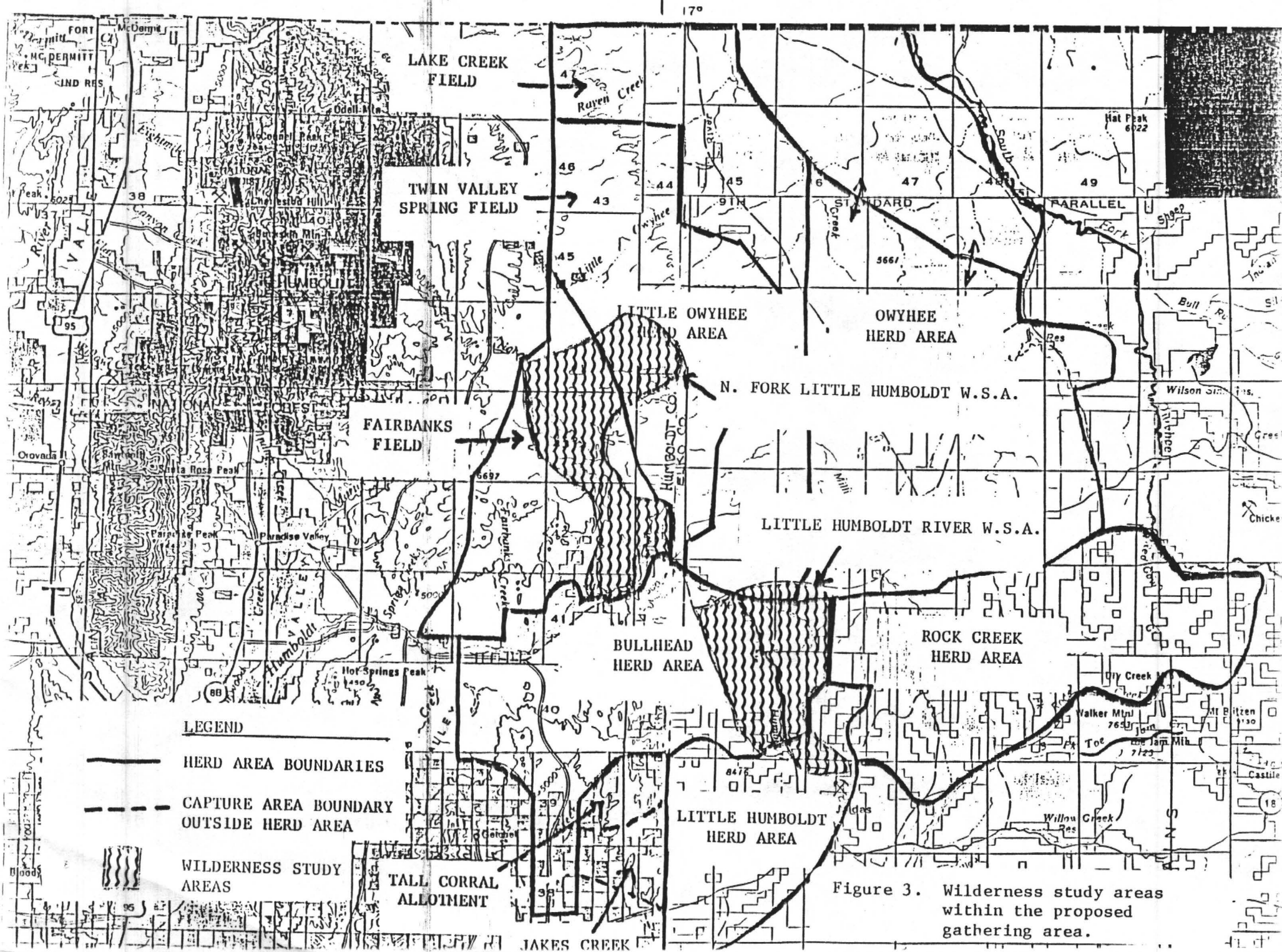


Figure 3. Wilderness study areas within the proposed gathering area.

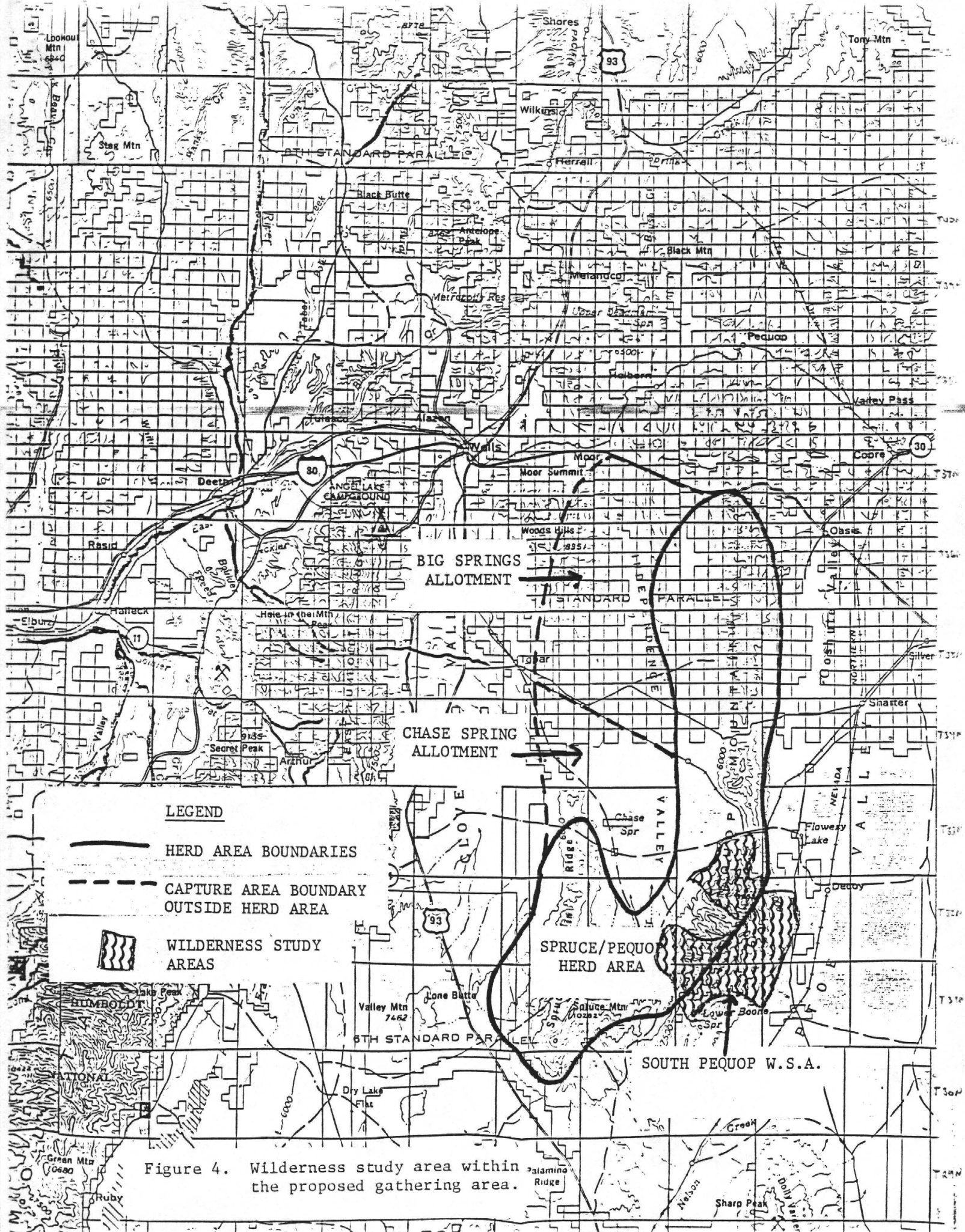


Figure 4. Wilderness study area within the proposed gathering area.