

PEARL PEAK RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS:

The Other Half of the Rubies



Pearl Peak in the distance, taken from the north, near Harrison Pass

Many recognize the Ruby Mountains as a premier destination for high country recreation. They are steeper, rockier, colder, windier, and have more lakes, rivers, snow, and bad weather than many other ranges in Nevada. It's as if a mountain range was transplanted from Colorado above the rolling lowlands east of Elko.

The Ruby Mountains Wilderness Area offers all users a high quality experience, yet of all the impressive country and potential solitude, most people are found near Lamoille Canyon. South of Harrison Pass, however, is a 71,632 roadless area that receives much less attention. Those turned away from Lamoille Canyon's popularity may be interested in exploring Pearl Peak - a 10,847 foot mountain in the heart of the roadless area - to find solitude in a less explored portion of the Rubies. Traveling farther south, one could also visit Sherman Mountain, another 10,000 foot giant in the same roadless area.



Pearl Peak's remote 10,847 foot Summit offers a challenge to the hiker and backcountry navigator. With no trails for easy passage, an ascent deserves celebration

Lush meadows, aspen stands, running water and springs characterize the lower flanks of Pearl Peak, while the upper elevations contain bristlecone pine, mountain mahogany, whitebark pine, and offer habitat to the mountain goats of the Ruby Mountains that are unique to the range. The Ruby Mountains contain the largest alpine zone of any mountain range in Nevada, and are home to the himalayan snowcock because of this habitat.

Though many significant peaks in Nevada are ascended regularly, Pearl Peak's summit is seldom visited, and solitude is assured. Lacking any established trails, an ascent must navigate ridges, steep walls, forests, and talus in order to stand on top. Perhaps someday Pearl Peak will be an extension of the Ruby Crest Trail, and we will be glad the area's wilderness qualities were protected at a time when few had identified immediate threats.

But this area is witnessing the beginning of a disturbing trend; an intrusion of all-terrain vehicles that stray from designated Forest Routes – particularly the basin between Harrison Pass and Pearl Peak. Allowing responsible use of off-road vehicles on existing Forest Routes, while recommending Pearl Peak's backcountry as wilderness, would be an effective management solution which considers all user groups, allows access, and preserves the landscape and wildlife that are unique to the Ruby Mountains.



Aspen stands, Bristlecone Pine, and Whitebark Pine characterize Pearl Peak's steep flanks and defined ridges

Clearly, the current boundary of the Ruby Mountain Wilderness area is not sufficient in protecting the future of Nevada's most visited range. There are 14 sensitive species in the Rubies, 6 of which have reached a global rating of G5. Shielding the landscape from development will shield these species from extinction. A wilderness recommendation for the Pearl Peak Inventoried Roadless Area will ensure that the entire Ruby Mountains remain a legacy in Nevada, not simply the northern half. And the creatures, plants, and human visitors will enjoy the range forever.