One of the really fascinating areas to visit within the proposed Avi Kwa Ame National Monument is the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness Area. If you are not a hiker or backpacker, a wonderful alternative way to enjoy this wilderness area is to take the backcountry loop drive that follows the boundary of the wilderness area, allowing you to make a 15-mile loop around the entire area. When establishing the wilderness, the boundary included only those lands that had no roads. Much of the adjacent lands have the same density of Joshua Trees and habitat but do have some backcountry roads. In travelling through the area, you are struck by the lush desert vegetation and rich biodiversity.

The Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness Area is relatively small for a designated wilderness, at just 6,050 acres. But what it may lack in size, it more than makes up for in stunning natural history. The name Wee Thump, or “ancient ones” in the Paiute language, tells the story of these Joshua trees. Growing just half an inch per year on average, the stand is home to some of the oldest and largest Joshua trees on the planet. These ancient ones have grown tall in the silence of the desert, some rising to more than 30 feet over 900 years.
Looking at the map, the area doesn't look like an obvious candidate for wilderness. It's an almost completely flat, relatively small triangular area surrounded by a power line, highway and dirt roads. Once you take the loop drive or get out and hike into part of the area, however, you'll see immediately the value this area holds. In addition to Joshua Trees, visitors can also find blackbrush, Mojave yucca, buckhorn cholla, creosote bush, white bursage, banana yucca, bunch grass, matted cholla, and prickly pear cactus along the loop drive. Wee Thump was the first unprotected tract of public land to be designated wilderness in Nevada.
This impressive stand of Joshua trees makes for fascinating bird watching, and the gentle slope of the land allows for relaxed hiking. The area through which the loop trail traverses has also been designated by National Audubon and Bird Life International as an “Important Bird Area,” a national designation recognizing its importance for bird conservation. Birdwatchers may spot-gilded flicker (known to occur in Nevada only in this location), northern flicker, ladder-backed woodpecker, black-throated sparrow, red-tailed hawk, cris-sal thrasher, golden eagle, loggerhead shrike, and cactus wren. Other wildlife roaming the area include desert tortoise, desert bighorn sheep, coyote, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit, valley pocket gopher and desert wood rat.

There is only one designated trail in the Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness, and that trail is along the southern edge of the area on an old wagon trail known as the "Eldorado Trail." The Eldorado Trail was built to serve the mining areas in the Eldorado Mountains near Nelson back in the day. The off-trail hiking isn't hard but you may want a compass with you: it's easy to become disoriented in hiking through the Joshua tree forest and there are very few landmarks to steer by in this flat piece of Mohave Desert.

**Directions:** The Wee Thump Loop Drive starts off Nevada Highway #164 (Nipton Road) about 9 miles west of Searchlight and 1.5 past the turnoff for the Walking Box Ranch Road. The dirt road follows the east boundary of the Wee Thump Wilderness boundary and then the north boundary. That road then connects to the transmission line maintenance road and follows along the west boundary of the wilderness area, connecting back to Highway 164 about 5 miles west from the starting point. The entire loop tour is around 15 miles, 10 miles on dirt roads and 5 miles on a paved road. A high-clearance vehicle is recommended, but four-wheel drive is not necessary.