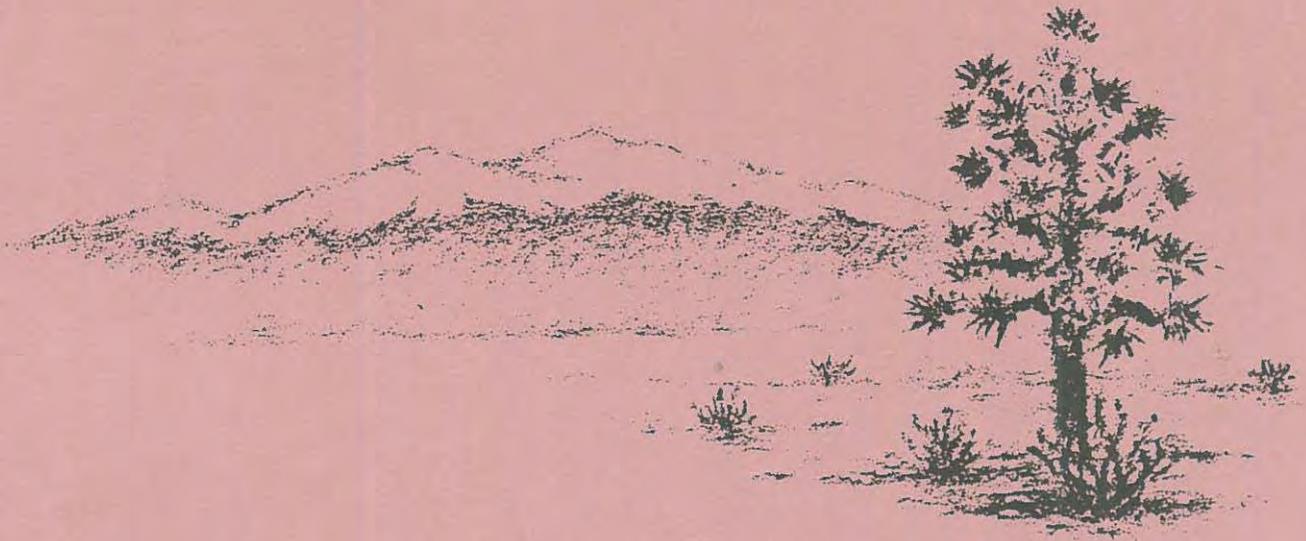


Bureau of Land Management



**CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE
WILDERNESS STUDY
REPORT**

Part 3

National Monuments Expansion



1991

NATIONAL MONUMENTS EXPANSION SUMMARY

Since development of the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, in 1980, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Park Service (NPS) have worked cooperatively to improve the manageability of the lands each administers. As a part of these efforts, both agencies have been involved in studies examining adjustments to the boundaries of the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Monuments. The purpose of these adjustments is to provide more manageable borders that will not split ecological and topographic land areas.

These studies were conducted in 1988. Five parcels of land administered by the BLM totalling 247,000 acres were studied for possible transfer from the BLM to the Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Monuments. The transfer of these parcels was examined in an environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by the BLM, NPS, and Bureau of Mines (BOM). Based on this EIS, further review of management and administrative needs, and public review, four parcels totalling nearly 109,000 acres were eventually proposed for transfer to the NPS. Of this amount, three parcels totalling 103,774 acres are proposed for transfer to Death Valley National Monument. The fourth parcel, totalling 4,800 acres is proposed for transfer to Joshua Tree National Monument.

The Secretary of the Interior concurs with these recommendations and has forwarded them to Congress for their review and action.

Introduction

The Joshua Tree National Monument and the majority of the Death Valley National Monument are located in southern California. A small portion of Death Valley (roughly 15 percent) is located in southern Nevada. The Death Valley region includes Inyo and San Bernardino Counties in California and Esmeralda and Nye Counties in Nevada. It is one of the largest areas in the National Park System, consisting of 2,067,628 acres. The Joshua Tree region includes Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in California and consists of 560,000 acres. Both are surrounded by millions of acres administered by the BLM which are managed for their recreation, grazing, mining, and wildlife habitat values.

At present, portions of the monument boundaries divide natural topographic areas, split the habitat of bighorn sheep, deer, or burro herds, and are located in open desert areas making them difficult to identify and administer. Over the last few years the BLM and NPS have been studying boundary adjustments for ways to improve these boundaries.

As a result of this, the BLM and NPS originally studied the possibility of transferring 5 parcels of public lands currently managed by the BLM to the Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Monuments. These parcels totalled 247,349 acres and are depicted on Maps 1 and 2. In Death Valley, 242,849 acres were considered for transfer. The parcels studied included: Parcel 1, North Death Valley (84,389 acres); Parcel 2, Hunter Mountain (26,687 acres); Parcel 3, Pyramid Peak (14,268 acres); and Parcel 4, Greenwater Valley (117,505 acres). The remaining area, Parcel 5, Pinto Basin (4,500 acres), is adjacent to Joshua Tree.

To assess the effects of the proposed transfer, the BLM initiated an EIS, with the cooperation of the NPS and the BOM. The Draft EIS was released in July 1988 for a 90-day public comment period. Based on comments obtained during the public comment period, consideration of resource data, and further review of management and administrative needs, The Monuments Final EIS, describing the BLM/NPS final recommendation, was released in April 1989.

Recommendation and Rationale

Under the BLM/NPS recommendation outlined in the Final EIS, 108,574 acres of public land currently administered by the BLM would be transferred to the National Park System for inclusion in the two monuments.

Death Valley National Monument

In Death Valley, the boundaries would be adjusted to include 79,389 acres in Parcel 1, 16,998 acres in Parcel 3, and 7,387 acres in Parcel 4, for a total of 103,774 acres of land.

Parcel 1 - North Death Valley (84,389 acres studied; 79,389 to be transferred)

North Death Valley is located on the extreme north end of the Monument (see Map 3). This area is a topographic extension of Death Valley. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, 79,389 acres of the parcel would be transferred to the NPS to perfect Death Valley as an ecosystem and enhance the manageability of the area. The remainder of the area studied -- roughly 5,000 acres -- would be retained by the BLM. This area is highly mineralized, having a moderate to high potential for the occurrence of mercury, sulphur, gypsum and gold and includes a number of mining claims.

Parcel 2 - Hunter Mountain (26,687 acres studied; 0 acres to be transferred)

Hunter Mountain is located on the western boundary of the Monument. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation the parcel would not be transferred to the NPS but would be retained and managed by BLM. Hunter Mountain is not an integral part of Death Valley. Public reaction to this proposal plus a variety of resource values and uses (such as grazing, hunting, and mining) indicated that multiple-use management within the CDCA was the most appropriate management of the area.

Parcel 3 - Pyramid Peak (14,268 acres studied; 16,998 acres to be transferred)

Pyramid Peak lies along the eastern boundary of the Monument within the Funeral Mountains (see Map 4). Under the BLM/NPS recommendation the boundaries of the area studied would be modified to include 3,180 acres northeast of the parcel and exclude 450 acres in the southeast portion of the parcel. These modifications would avoid two problems created by the original boundary proposal. First, as originally proposed, the transfer would leave the proposed Funeral Mountains wilderness with a long, narrow extension to the north. The modification resolves this by transferring the extension to the Monument. Second, the southeastern corner of the original parcel included an area with high potential for sand and gravel resources, as well as 640 acres of land belonging to the State of California. The modified boundary eliminates this conflict.

Parcel 4 - Greenwater Valley (117,505 acres studied; 7,387 acres to be transferred)

Greenwater Valley lies along the eastern boundary of Death Valley National Monument (see Map 5). Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, a small triangular-shaped parcel which encompasses the Greenwater Historic District, totaling 7,387 acres, would be transferred to the NPS. This would permit single-agency management and interpretation of the historic district. The recommendation would also allow the closing and better control of access to Copper Canyon, an area of sensitive paleontological resources. The remainder of the parcel would be retained and managed by the BLM. This area contains numerous mining properties and roads, and little compelling reason to transfer the area from the CDCA and multiple-use management.

Joshua Tree National Monument

In Joshua Tree, the boundary would be adjusted to include 4,800 acres in Parcel 5.

Parcel 5 - Pinto Basin (4,500 acres studied; 4,800 acres to be transferred)

Pinto Basin lies along the southern boundary of Joshua Tree National Monument and is topographically related to the adjacent Monument lands (see Map 6). Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, the entire parcel and an additional 300 acres would be transferred to the NPS. In addition, the eastern boundary of the parcel will be moved eastward about one-quarter mile. This will create vehicular closure to the area and provide a more enforceable boundary.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

The potential impacts of this recommendation on several issues identified during the initial scoping process were considered in the selection of the preferred alternative and were the focus of the environmental analysis. These issues included the effects of the proposed transfer on sensitive wildlife species (particularly desert bighorn sheep), sensitive plants, livestock grazing, wild horse and burros, Native American concerns and cultural resources, existing land use authorizations (e.g., rights-of-way), manageability, recreation, wilderness preservation, and the exploration and development of mineral resources. A detailed discussion of these impacts can be found in The Monuments Final EIS, (April 1989). A summary of these impacts is included below.

1. **Wildlife** - With the exception of Parcel 5, Pinto Basin, desert bighorn sheep are found within portions of each of the parcels studied. Several artificial wildlife watering sources (guzzlers) have been installed and are currently being maintained in Parcel 1, North Death Valley, and Parcel 3, Pyramid Peak, to improve desert bighorn sheep habitat. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation these guzzlers would continue to be maintained unless it was determined that the facilities are no longer needed to maintain the bighorn sheep population. The BLM will retain Parcel 2, Hunter Mountain, but the number of cattle grazing along the Death Valley Monument boundary would be adjusted through the implementation of the Allotment Management Plan currently being prepared for the area. Construction of additional water sources for livestock, desert bighorn sheep and deer would also be considered. As a result of these measures, desert bighorn sheep and deer habitat would improve.

2. Botany - The springs and seeps at and near Big and Little Sand Springs within the area transferred to the NPS in Parcel 1, North Death Valley, support an Unusual Plant Assemblage and a population of the rare plant, the Sodaville milk vetch. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation potential impacts to the milk vetch would be curtailed. The enclosure of Big Sand Spring would be completed and maintained by the NPS as long as needed to protect the area's resources; all burros would be removed from the area; and more restrictive mining regulations would be imposed. These restrictions would ensure protection of Big Sand Springs and some of the rare plant population.
3. Livestock Grazing - Hunter Mountain, Parcel 2, includes a portion of the Hunter Mountain livestock grazing allotment. In recent years, the use of this parcel has been up to 450 animal unit months per year. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, this use would continue. In addition, the permittee would continue to use and maintain the existing water diversion (the Hunter Mountain Pipeline) this is the only permanent source of water in the Hunter Mountain Allotment, and sustains the permittee's current livestock operations and provides a valuable water source for deer and bighorn sheep. Livestock operations would be eliminated in North Death Valley, Parcel 1, once the current grazing lease expires (ten years from the date of issuance), but this would have little or no impact on the lessee's current livestock operations.
4. Wild Horses and Burros - There has been historic wild horse and burro use of the North Death Valley and Hunter Mountain allotments (portions of Parcels 1 and 2), resulting in numerous impacts on other resources. Several thousand animals have been removed from these parcels in the past few years. However, animals continue to drift into the parcels, requiring an ongoing removal program. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation these animals would continue to be removed. As a result, impacts to sensitive wildlife and plants would be reduced.
5. Cultural Resources - Many sensitive archaeological sites are found throughout the study area. In addition, portions of the area are of cultural and religious significance to contemporary Native American communities. Neither the cultural resources nor Native American values would be adversely affected by this recommendation. Livestock grazing would be eliminated on those parcels transferred to the NPS and mining activities would be restricted reducing the potential effect of these activities on the area's cultural resources and Native American communities.
6. Existing Land Use Authorizations - Several land use authorizations have been granted in the study area. These include public water reserves, and rights-of-way for utility lines and roads. In addition, much of the study area is within a military airspace zone used for aircraft training, research and development. Use of this airspace has increased significantly over the past decade and is expected to remain high. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, there would be no effect on any existing right-of-way or other authorized surface use. No future linear right-of-way would be available within those parcels transferred to NPS, but this will have little or no impacts as little demand is anticipated. There would also be no adverse impact on currently designated military flight training routes.

7. Management Presence - Since recently doubling its ranger force, BLM has increased its capability to establish and maintain a field presence in critical locations throughout the desert, including many parts of the study area. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, however, additional field presence would be provided by the NPS as the frequency of ranger patrols and staff visitations increase, especially in North Death Valley, Parcel 1, and Pinto Basin, Parcel 5. In addition, the transfer of these parcels would enhance the manageability of the monuments, creating boundaries that are easy to identify, on the ground, and reduce incompatible uses of the monuments.
8. Recreation - Recreation use throughout the study area is low. Current recreation uses are primarily vehicle-dependent activities such as hunting, off-highway vehicle touring, etc. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, these uses would not change appreciably--motorized vehicle access would still be permitted on designated roads on those portions of the North Death Valley, Parcel 1, Pyramid Peak, Parcel 3, and Greenwater Valley, Parcel 4, transferred to NPS and on Hunter Mountain which would be retained by BLM, thereby maintaining a broad range of recreational diversity on these parcels. Only non-motorized types of recreation use would be allowed to continue in Pinto Basin, benefiting primitive types of recreation use such as hiking and backpacking. Consumptive recreational pursuits such as rockhounding, hunting, and trapping would not be allowed on those parcels transferred to NPS but the impacts would be negligible based on low current and projected visitor use.
9. Wilderness - Roughly half of the lands within the study area (131,702 acres) have been recommended as suitable for wilderness designation. Under the BLM/NPS recommendation, 81,865 acres of these lands would be transferred to Death Valley National Monument and managed as wilderness. As a result, wilderness values would remain unchanged. Although consumptive recreation uses such as hunting, rock collecting, and trapping would not be permitted under NPS administration, current and projected use levels for these activities are low, so no significant impact on wilderness values is anticipated. Recreation use opportunities would also be unaffected. The following is a summary of the acreage recommended suitable for wilderness by wilderness study area (WSA).

Parcel 1 - North Death Valley

Over 85 percent of the North Death Valley parcel (72,709 acres) is recommended suitable for wilderness. All of the lands within the parcel are within portions of three WSAs -- Saline Valley (CDCA-117), North Death Valley (CDCA-118), and Little Sand Spring (CDCA-119). The Saline Valley WSA consists of 450,727 acres; 392,643 acres are recommended suitable for wilderness. Approximately 30,295 acres of these lands are recommended for transfer to the NPS. The North Death Valley WSA consists of 13,302 acres and lies entirely within the area recommended for transfer to the NPS. None of these lands are recommended suitable for wilderness designation. Little Sand Spring WSA consists of 35,792 acres and lies entirely within the area recommended for transfer to the NPS. These lands are all recommended suitable for wilderness designation.

Parcel 2 - Hunter Mountain

The parcel studied is within the Hunter Mountain WSA (CDCA-123). Approximately, 20,030 acres of the WSA have been recommended as suitable for wilderness designation and 6,579 acres have been recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation. None of this parcel is recommended for transfer to the NPS.

Parcel 3 - Pyramid Peak

The Pyramid Peak parcel is entirely within the Funeral Mountains WSA (CDCA-143). The WSA consists of 56,396 acres of which 23,004 acres are recommended suitable for wilderness designation. Approximately 15,778 acres of the area recommended suitable for wilderness designation (85 percent of the parcel) would be transferred to the NPS. The remainder of the parcel, 1,220 acres, are not recommended suitable for wilderness designation, and would also be transferred to NPS.

Parcel 4 - Greenwater Valley

The entire parcel is within the 58,500 acre Greenwater Valley WSA (CDCA-148). The entire WSA has been recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

Parcel 5 - Pinto Basin

The parcel contains the Pinto Basin WSA (CDCA-334A). The entire WSA has been recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation.

10. Mineral Resources - Implementation of the BLM/NPS recommendation would have a moderate impact on the future mineral exploration and development of the areas transferred to the NPS. Lands transferred to NPS would be subject to more stringent mining regulations causing significant increases in overhead costs of starting and continuing mining operations. New mining claims could not be located within the areas transferred to the NPS. Most of the valuable mineralized areas, however, have been dropped from areas recommended for transfer to the NPS, thereby allowing the continued exploration and development of mineral resources in these areas.

In summary, the BLM/NPS recommendation is the environmentally preferred alternative because it will create no additional significant, adverse environmental impacts. In addition, all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted. Based on the analysis performed by BLM and NPS, the recommendation would also enhance the manageability of the two monuments.

Summary of Public Involvement

On May 31, 1988, a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was announced in the Federal Register. The notice included a description of the proposed transfers and the times and location of five public meetings.

Immediately after the publication of the Notice of Intent, a news release concerning the project and announcing the scoping meetings was released. The news release was sent to media throughout southern California, and to the California Desert District's general mailing list (about 6,000 individuals and organizations).

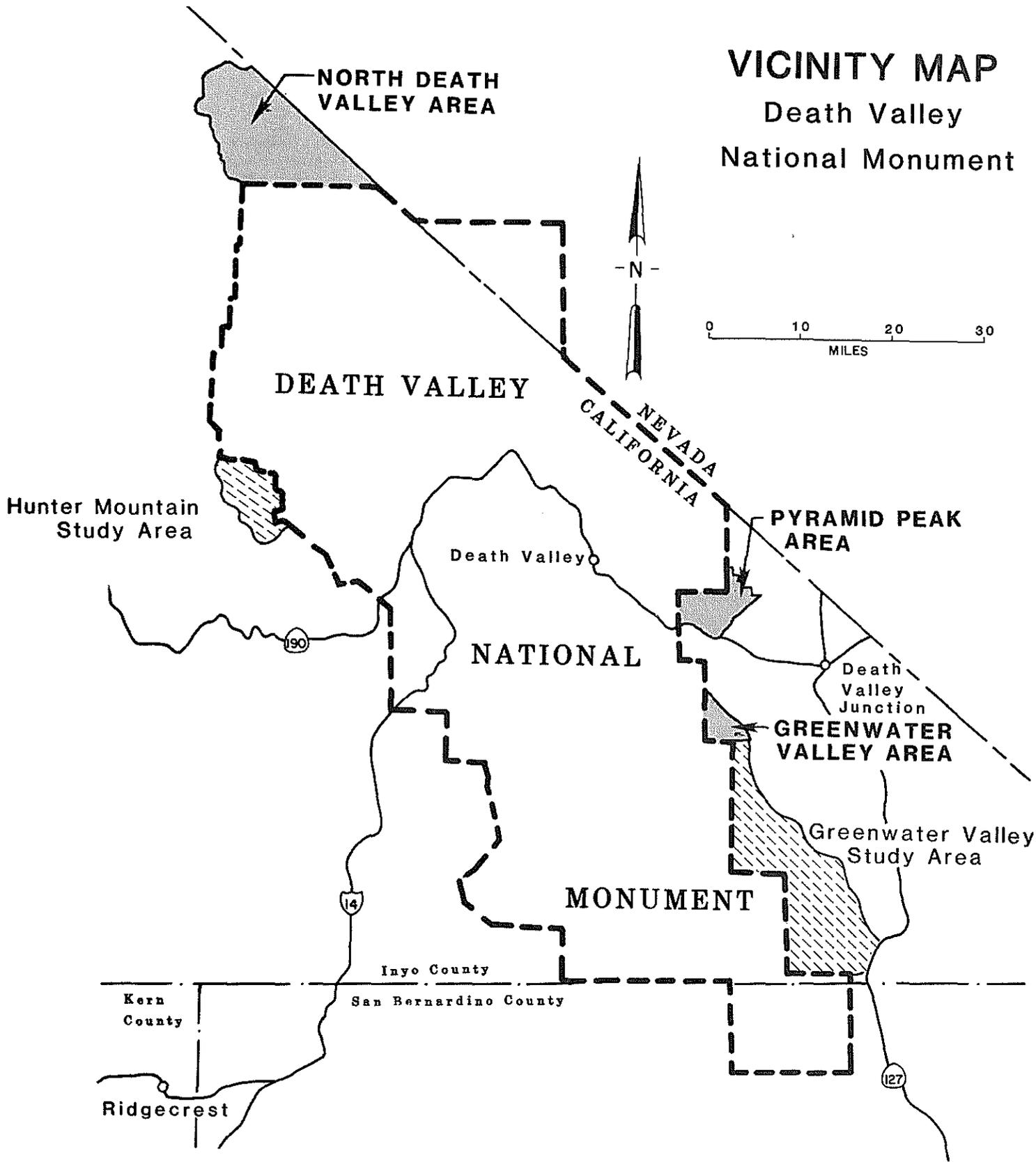
Five public scoping meetings were held in California between June 14 and June 17. Two meetings were held in Riverside (June 14; about 25 persons attended each meeting). Other meetings were held in Palm Springs (June 15; 20 attendees), Ridgecrest (June 16; 35 attendees), and Independence (June 17; 55 attendees).

The stated purpose of the meetings was to allow the public to identify those issues that should be addressed in the EIS. Letters were also accepted from the public during the scoping process. Over 50 letters were received by the BLM.

The public review period for the Draft EIS began July 29, 1988. During the 90 day public comment period (which ended October 27, 1988), six formal public hearings were held in California to solicit comments on the draft EIS. These hearings were held in Riverside (two meetings), Palm Springs, Ridgecrest, Lone Pine and Tecopa Hot Springs. The BLM received 115 letters addressing the draft EIS during the public comment period. All letters were reviewed and analyzed. Comments that presented new data, questions or issues bearing directly on the effects of the proposed land transfer to the Monuments were responded to and, where appropriate, Draft EIS sections were revised.

VICINITY MAP

Death Valley National Monument

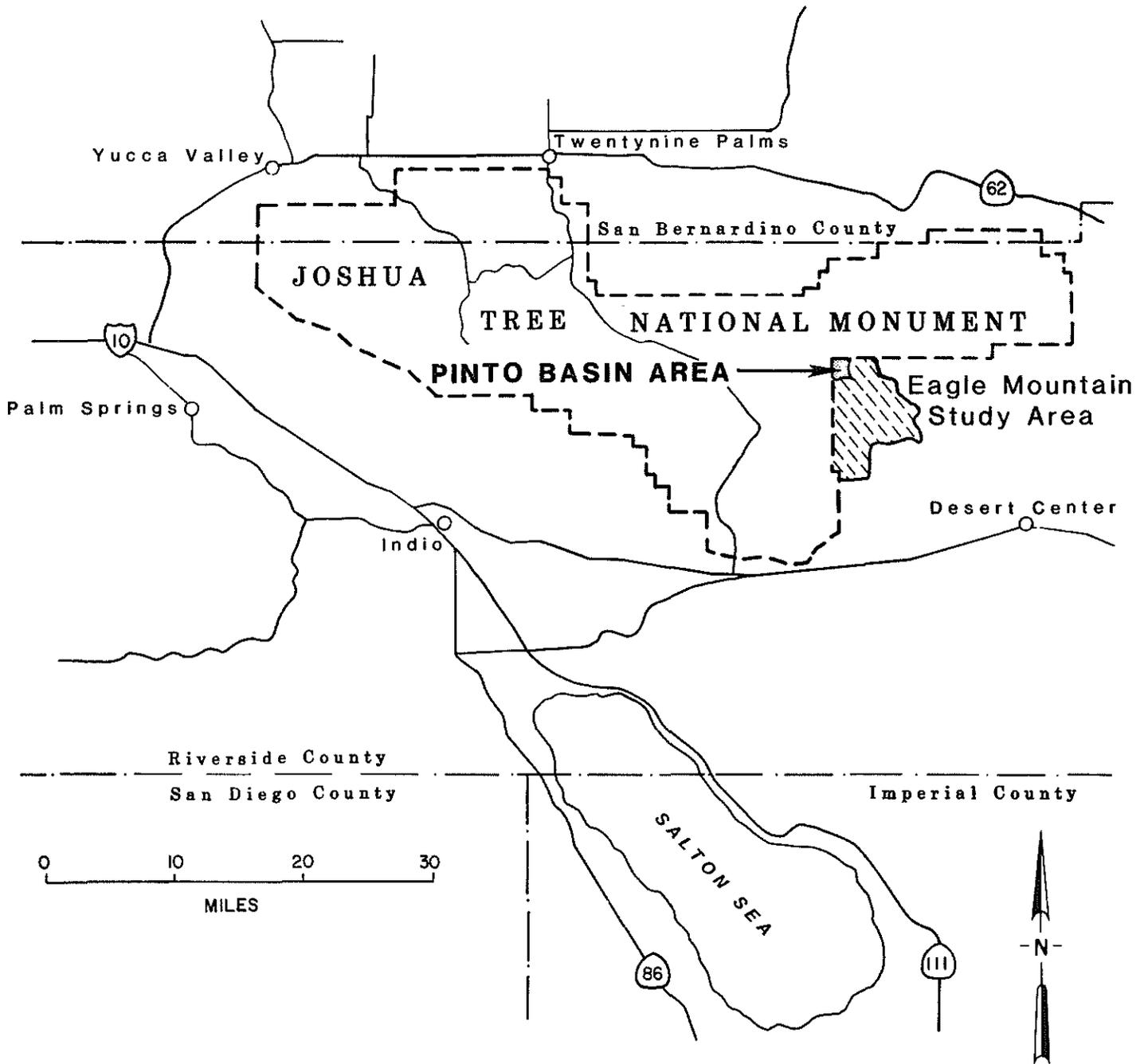


-  Area studied and dropped from further consideration for boundary adjustment
-  Proposed boundary adjustment
-  National Monument boundary

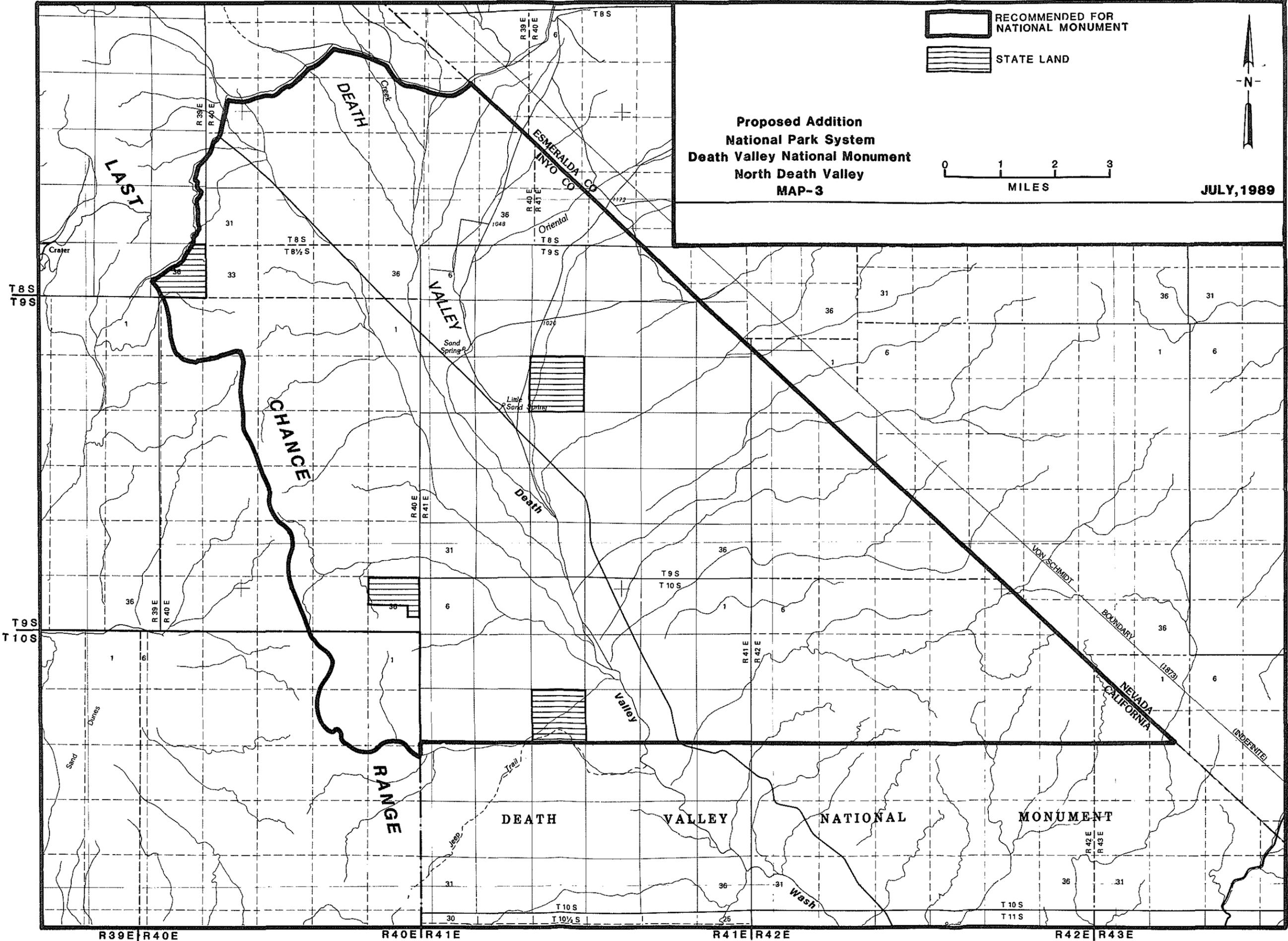
MAP-1

VICINITY MAP

Joshua Tree National Monument



-  Area studied and dropped from further consideration for boundary adjustment
-  Proposed boundary adjustment
-  National Monument boundary



Proposed Addition
National Park System
Death Valley National Monument
North Death Valley
MAP-3



JULY, 1989

T 8 S
T 9 S

T 9 S
T 10 S

R 39 E | R 40 E

R 40 E | R 41 E

R 41 E | R 42 E

R 42 E | R 43 E

LAST
CHANCE

CHANGE

RANGE

DEATH
Creek

VALLEY

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

ESMERALDA CO
INYO CO

Death

Valley

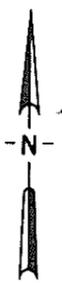
Wash

VON SCHMIDT

BOUNDARY

NEVADA
CALIFORNIA

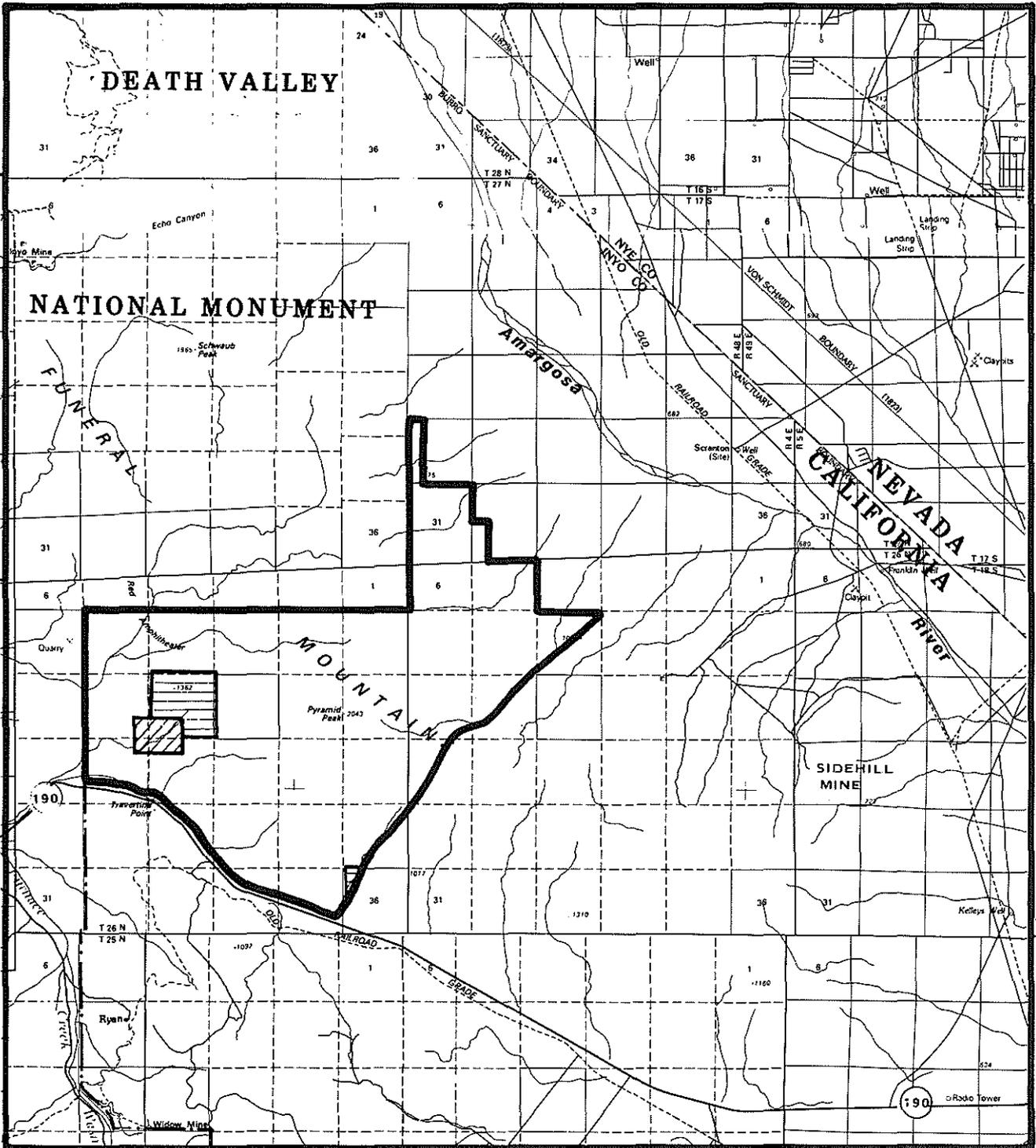
INDENTED



T28N
T27N

T27N
T26N

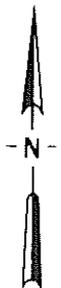
T26N
T25N



R3E R4E

R4E R5E

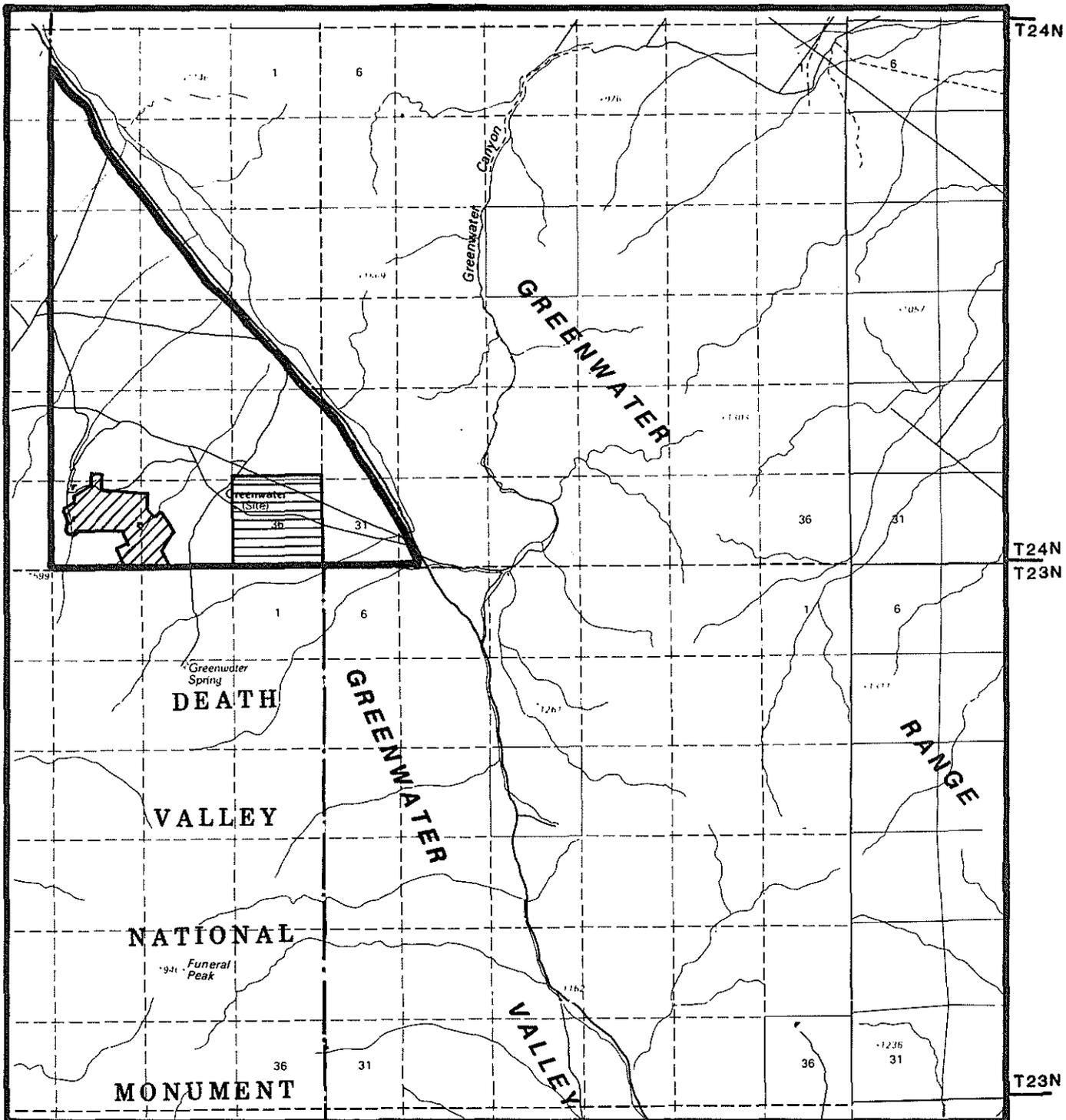
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-  STATE LAND
-  PRIVATE LAND

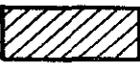


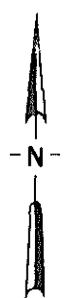
**Proposed Addition
National Park System
Death Valley National Monument
Pyramid Peak Area
MAP-4**



JULY, 1989



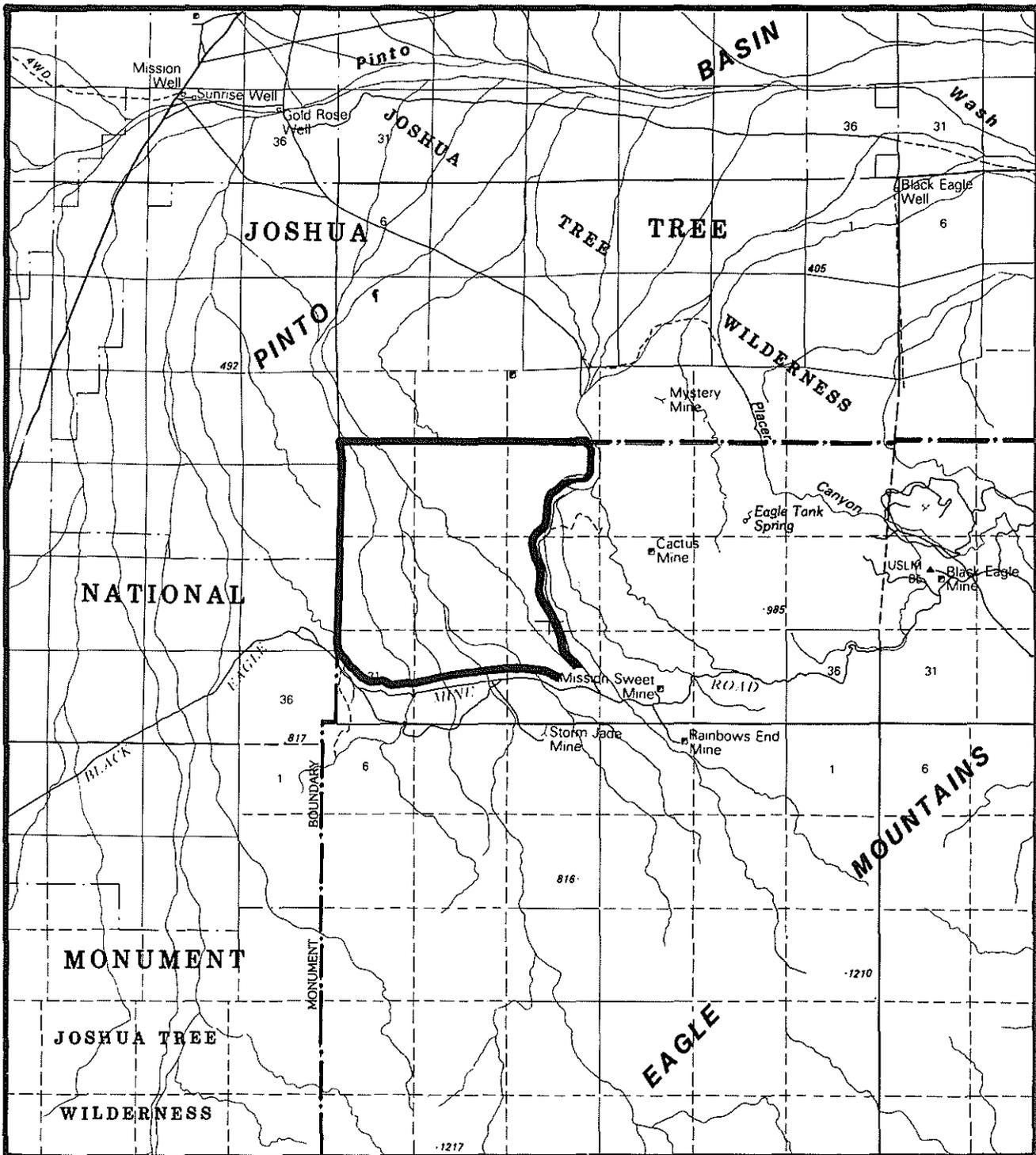
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-  STATE LAND
-  PRIVATE LAND



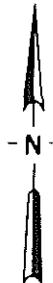
**Proposed Addition
National Park System
Death Valley National Monument
Greenwater Valley Area
MAP-5**



JULY, 1989



RECOMMENDED FOR NATIONAL MONUMENT



Proposed Addition
National Park System
Joshua Tree National Monument
Pinto Basin Area
MAP-6



JULY, 1989