

**6301 - Wilderness Characteristics Inventory
Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

Unit Name and Number: Unit Name CA-080-150A-1 Tecopa Pass

Summary: While unit 150 A possesses sufficient size, the abundance of human activity, including mining activity, power lines, and various routes of travel, prevent it from being classified as natural. Due to its unnaturalness, unit 150A-1 Tecopa Pass does not possess wilderness characteristics.

Results of Analysis:

Does the area meet any of the size requirements? Yes No

Does the area appear to be natural? Yes No N/A

Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? Yes No N/A

Does the area have supplemental values? Yes No N/A

Conclusion

The area, or a portion of the area, has wilderness characteristics and is identified as Land with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC).

The area does not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

Team Members:

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Approved by:

Name: _____

Title: Barstow Field Manager

Date: 10/3/14

This form documents information that constitutes an inventory finding on wilderness characteristics. It does not represent a formal land use allocation or a final agency decision subject to administrative remedies under either 43 CFR parts 4 or 1610.5-2.

Year 2014

Inventory Name/Unit Number Unit Name CA-080-150A-1

Documentation of BLM Wilderness Inventory Findings on Record

1. Is there existing BLM wilderness inventory information on all or part of this area?

Yes

Inventory Source: 1979 Wilderness Inventory files, California Desert Conservation Area.

Inventory Unit Name(s)/Number(s): CA-080-150A South Nopah Range

Map Name(s)/Number(s): USDI BLM California Desert Wilderness Final Inventory, Dec. 1979

BLM District(s)/Field Office(s): Barstow Field Office

2. BLM Inventory Findings on Record

Existing inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics: Yes.

Inventory Source: 1979 Wilderness Inventory files, BLM Barstow FO

1988 CDCA-150A South Nopah Range Wilderness Study Report

Unit#/Name	Size (historic acres)	Natural Condition? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
150A	5,796	Y	Y	Y	N/A
150A-1	5,000	N	N	N	N

Summarize any known primary reasons for prior findings in this table. The 1979 wilderness inventory and subsequent studies did not recommend this area for wilderness designation because the mineral wealth was considered to exceed any potential wilderness values. However, the eastern portion of the unit was found to have wilderness characteristics and was designated wilderness in the 1994 wilderness California Desert Protection Act (CDPA). The inventory did not discuss the excluded portions of the unit, and therefore it does not include a description of this area.

The 1979 report did note the area "is predominately public land and is dominated by the southern portion of the Nopah Range. The range is rugged and folded with color striations throughout. The western bajada and valley of the Nopah Range is a moderately low rolling slope that appears light gray brown, becoming lighter toward the valley floor... The western bajada and valley of this range are also sparsely vegetated with predominately light green creosote, cacti, and other desert shrub and grass species."

The 1990 report noted: "the wildlife and vegetative resources within the area are typical of the surrounding desert. The area contains no unusual plants or State or Federally listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species. A plant eligible for State listing may be located within the WSA.... The WSA contains an area of high cultural resource sensitivity and represents traditionally used land of the Panamint Shoshone, Southern Ute, River Chemehuevi, Southern Chemehuevi, and Mohave. A portion of the WSA is within the Chicago Valley Wild Horse and Burro Herd Management Area"

The areas natural condition was noted in 1988 to have "retained its primeval condition and generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable... The substantially noticeable works of man in the southern portion of the area have been excluded from further wilderness consideration. This is due to the extensive, active, open pit mining in the area." The excluded area referred to is the new Area 150A-1 and the subject of this report.

The 1979 area description did not contain a discussion or evaluation of the southern portions outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. The 1988 report notes that in the new boundary, "The terrain and vegetative variety provide areas where a sense of isolation and seclusion are available. The mountains generally screen the evidences of extensive mining activity just across the southern border of the WSA." That is where this area, Area 150A-1, is located.

Documentation of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name: CA-080-150A-1 Tecopa Pass

(1) Sufficient size: Yes.

Acreage: This area contains 5,718 acres of land contiguous with lands formally designated wilderness. This unit is bordered on two sides by the South Nopah Range.

Boundaries: This unit is irregularly shaped due to its northern and eastern borders along the South Nopah Range Wilderness. The northwestern boundary is the paved Old Spanish Trail Road and the southern side is Furnace Creek Road

Description of Current Conditions:

Land ownership: The unit contains 5,718 total acres. There are several privately owned parcels that were patented in the northeastern portions around the large Noonday and War Eagle Mines (566 acres). All other property in this unit is public land 5,152 acres.

Location: The unit is located in northeast Inyo County, California, east of Tecopa California. The South Nopah Range Wilderness is to the north and east of the unit.

Topography: The land consists mostly of a gently sloping bajada draining west into the Amargosa River. There are a few fingers on the east that intrude into the rugged South Nopah Range Mountains. The area includes several minor washes and gentle rolling hills. In the far northwest corner, the land is more level and the soil particles become increasingly finer, with a higher content of silts and clays. There are several large mesquite covered springs mounds in along the western boundary adjacent to Old Spanish Trail Highway.

Vegetation features: The vegetative cover for most of the area is creosote and desert shrub with a few grass species. The surrounding bajadas and valley have an equal amount of vegetative cover, composed of creosote, various cacti, yucca, desert fir, ephedra, rabbit bush, desert holly and a few other desert shrub species. The washes receive more water and provide shielding from the drying wind and sun; therefore, they support larger desert shrub species, such as desert willow, desert fir, mesquite and invasive tamarisk.

Major human uses/activities: The 1988 report states that the South Nopah Wilderness Study Area (WSA), now the South Nopah Wilderness, and surrounding area had a long and intense history of mineral exploration and development. The entire area contains at least moderate potentials for geothermal resources as well as high or moderate potentials for oil and gas, gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver, dolomite, silica, sodium, potassium, and sand and gravel. Almost 850 acres of the unit are encumbered with mining claims which are concentrated in the areas of high mineral potential.

Sightseeing is another important use, as the Nopah Range Mountains have long been known for their scenic qualities.

This unit occupies a relatively narrow valley floor between adjoining mountain ranges. To the north is the rugged South Nopah Range and to the south are the Kingston Mountains. This corridor has served as a popular travel and trade route between the impassable mountains. This is why the area is traversed by several mechanically constructed roads, railroad grades, primitive roads, ways, trails, and paths

(2) Natural condition: No, this unit is not natural. Numerous scattered surface disturbances and developments occur throughout this unit, as noted in the 1979 and 1988 reports. These include roads with regular use, old roads, abandoned railroad grades, powerlines, fences, wells, pump foundations, rusted water tanks, and mining support structures. The unit is crossed by a variety of old foot trails, mule trails, wagon roads, railroads and mechanically constructed roads. The northeastern and eastern portions of the unit are substantially impacted by the presence of the NoonDay and War Eagle mines. Very little of this area is undisturbed by man. The area is substantially affected by modern human activities.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude: N/A

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation: N/A

(5) Supplemental values: N/A