

6301 - Wilderness Characteristics Inventory

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: Mesquite Hills CA-080-251A

Results of Analysis:

1. Does the area meet any of the size requirements? Yes No
2. Does the area appear to be natural? Yes No N/A
3. Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? Yes No N/A
4. 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).

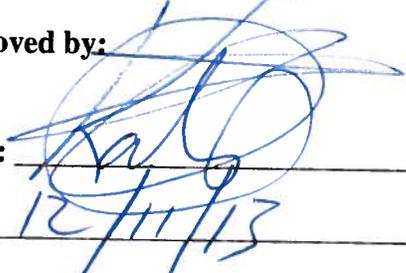
The area does not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

Team Members:

Greg Hill, Wilderness Coordinator, BLM California Desert District
Bradley Mastin, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM Barstow Field Office
Bob Wick, National Conservation Lands Lead, BLM California State Office

Approved by:

Name: 

Title: Barstow Field Manager

Date: 12/11/13

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 2013 Mesquite Hills CA-080-251A

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): Mesquite Hills CA-080-251A

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:

Inventory Source: 1979 Wilderness Inventory files, BLM Barstow FO

Unit#/Name	Size (historic acres)	Natural Condition? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
251A	N/A	Y	Y	Y	N/A

Summarize any known primary reasons for prior findings in this table:

The area is affected primarily by the forces of nature throughout. Ways are used by off-highway vehicles, especially in the Mesquite Hills area, but are subject to rehabilitation by the blowing sand in the area and thus the wilderness condition has been restored. The vastness of the visible landscape and absence of man-made features provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and unrestricted movement through a classic desert setting. Public comments were related to study phase considerations.

Documentation of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name: CA-080-251A Mesquite Hills

(1) Sufficient size

Acreage: Estimated at approximately 27,417 acres pending GIS calculation with a perimeter of roughly 37.5 miles.

Boundaries: North boundary is the Union Pacific Railroad. Southeastern boundary is a utility right-of-way; a line 400 feet north of the three existing transmission lines. The western boundary is a wood pole utility line. The east boundary connects to the west boundary forming a triangle.

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: A majority of the unit are managed by the BLM with roughly sixteen percent privately held and approximately two and half percent managed by the State of California.

Location: This area is located in central San Bernardino County, roughly in the middle of the Barstow Resource Area. The unit is fifteen miles north of Ludlow and roughly fifty miles east of the City of Barstow. The unit is sandwiched between three public land areas. It is northwest of the Kelso Dunes Wilderness, southeast of the Razor Off-Highway Vehicle Area and south west of the Mojave National Preserve.

Topography: The unit contains the scattered low lying Mesquite hills and the sloping alluvial formation associated with the northern Bristol Mountains. The northeast portion of the unit is influenced by the Devils Playground area and contains pockets of deep wind-blown sand. The whole area is very low, with elevations ranging from 988 feet to 1300 feet on the alluvium to 1568 feet on Crucero Hill. This is the southern portion of the eastern terminus of the Mojave River in the Soda Basin.

Vegetation features: Vegetation is distributed by soil types with primarily Creosote Bush Scrub along the southern rocky/gravelly alluvium. There are ribbons of larger brush in the northern section's draining washes, which contains Mormon tea, acacia and smoketree. There are communities of scattered saltbush and clumps of mesquite in the sandy locations and near river basin. Exceptionally beautiful spring wildflower blooms occur in this area after heavy water events and in the spring.

Major human uses/activities: The area appears undisturbed and under the influence of natural erosion. The area receives light recreational use & low visitation. There is evidence of occasional intrusions by off-highway vehicles off the designated routes, otherwise human use in this area is limited to transportation and exploration along the boundaries. This includes the high voltage long distance transmission lines along the southern boundary, the Union Pacific Railroad along the northern boundary and the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad grade and the open route along the western boundary.

(2) Natural condition:

Yes

The interior of the unit appears undisturbed and controlled by the forces of nature. Outside of the occasional OHV tracks off the designated routes, there is minimal evidence of modern human use.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude:

Yes

The vastness of the visible landscape and absence of man-made features provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and unrestricted movement through a classic desert setting. Overall, the entire region is very remote. This unit receives little use because of the handful of designated routes and the difficulties associated with travel through deep sand. The terrain also dips and contours with scattered hills and deep washes breaking up views and creating travel obstacles, which enhances the sense of remoteness.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation:

Yes

This is a large remote area with a variety of opportunities for hiking, exploring, and scrambling in a land with terrain and topography ranging from rocky, stubby hills and deep wind-blown & mesquite riddled sand dunes to deep brushy & rocky washes in expansive alluvial deposits.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes

The Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad grade runs along the western boundary of the unit.

Appendix A
Photos of Area 251A



Photo #1 - View into Area 251A showing sloping into flat plain



Photo #2 - View north into Area 251A from transmission line with Mesquite Hills in background



Photo #3 - Example of an illegal intrusion within Area 251A

Appendix B

BLM California Desert Conservation Area Wilderness Final Inventory, Dec. 1979

Written Description of Area 251A

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

This extremely large area includes the Troy Lake depression, Cady Mountains, and a portion of the Mojave River Sink. The Cady Mountains are a low, dark series of detached ridges rising 1000 feet to 1500 feet from the intervening valleys. Washes which bisect the ridges are broad and contain wind-deposited sand. On the east side of the Cady Mountains, a valley of loose sandy soil slopes generally northeast into the Mojave River Valley and Afton Canyon, with its steep, multicolored, highly eroded, canyon walls. Vegetation in the Cady Mountains is largely saltbush and other low shrubs.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The western edge of the area is in private ownership, from the Mojave River south to the Troy Lake depression. The area contains permanent improvements in the form of small ranches, homes, developed water sources, small lakes, and a lattice of maintained access roads. Several mining and quarry operations are also scattered along the western edge. A microwave relay facility is located along the powerline boundary approximately four miles north of its intersection with the southern border, but is only visible from near the powerline boundary. Elsewhere, unmaintained ways lead to apparently abandoned mining operations, but are substantially unnoticeable. Exclusions from further wilderness consideration have been made for mining activity along the southern slopes of these mountains. The boundaries of the potential Wilderness Study Area are common with the roadless area border from Afton to Balch siding. Returning along the southeast powerline border to the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad, the borders are also common but exclude the microwave relay facility. The southern border has been drawn along the mountain bajada interface and excludes roads and mining impacts along this boundary. The western border starts east of Newberry Road and proceeds due north along the edges of the mountains from Section 19 (T. 9 N., R. 5 E.) to the Mojave River which it follows generally eastward to Afton. This arbitrary western border excludes the western end of the area where permanent improvements (roads, habitations and ways) have severely altered the primeval character and influence of the land and the area north of the Mojave River where solitude and a diversity of recreational opportunities are lacking.

V. OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLITUDE OR A PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED TYPE OF RECREATION

The extreme size of the area gives the visitor a feeling of isolation in the sandy valleys and among the highly-eroded, exposed ridges. This offers an outstanding opportunity for solitude. The character of the landscape does not reflect the presence of man. The area contains vast areas of windblown sand and volcanic ridges, thus providing outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. However, the portion to the north, just south of the Union Pacific Railroad, lacks vegetative or topographic screening and has only limited opportunities for solitude and primitive types of recreation and therefore has been excluded.

VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Comments indicate the presence of several ways within the area used for rockhounding and as access to mines. Potential geothermal and mineral resources are also noted. Other comments are in agreement with the findings. Mining areas along the southern boundary have been excluded from further wilderness consideration, where appropriate.

AREA 251A

I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

The northern border is the Union Pacific Railroad; the southern boundary of the Wilderness Study Area is the northern edge of the utility right-of-way which contains power transmission lines. This boundary is located along a line 400 feet north of the three existing transmission lines (except where a service road may extend outside the right-of-way); and, the western border a wood pole utility line.

II. LAND OWNERSHIP

The area is roughly 75 percent public lands in the north with alternating strip patterns of non-public lands in the south.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

The area includes the scattered Mesquite Hills and sloping alluvial formation associated with the northern end of the Bristol Mountains. The northeast portion of the area is influenced by the Devils Playground area and contains areas of deep wind-deposited dune sand. The whole area is very low, with elevations ranging from 988 feet to 1300 feet on the alluvium to 1568 feet on Crucero Hill. Vegetation is sparse with scattered saltbush in the sandy locations and a Creosote Bush Scrub plant community on the southern rocky alluvium.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The area is affected primarily by the forces of nature throughout. Ways are used by off-road vehicles, especially in the Mesquite Hills area, but are subject to rehabilitation by the blowing sand in the area, thus the wilderness condition is restored. The potential wilderness study area boundary is common with the roadless area boundary.

V. OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLITUDE OR PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED TYPE OF RECREATION

The vastness of the visible landscape and absence of man-made features provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and unrestricted movement through a classic desert setting.

VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

All comments dealt with study phase considerations.

AREA 252

I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This triangle-shaped area is bounded completely by utility lines. The northern boundary of the Wilderness Study Area is the southern edge of the utility right-of-way which contains power transmission lines. This boundary is located along a line 400 feet south of the three existing transmission lines (except where a service road may extend outside the right-of-way); the eastern boundary a graded road and a telephone line right-of-way; and, the southern boundary, a powerline/gas line right-of-way, with associated maintenance road.

II. LAND OWNERSHIP

The roadless area is approximately 60 percent public land with non-public holdings occurring in alternating north-south strips.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

The area contains the South Cady Mountains. A large, sweeping bajada is located near the center, sloping eastward to Broadwell Dry Lake. Vegetation on the bajada is scattered and consists of cactus, creosote, and mixed shrubs. Except in the canyons and washes, vegetation in the mountains is sparse.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The area is relatively undisturbed by man. Man's influence, which includes only a few primitive ways and a few abandoned mine shafts and prospect holes, is substantially unnoticeable due to the topographic screening in the hills. Much of the southern slope of the South Cady Mountains has been excluded from further wilderness consideration due to extensive mining scars which greatly impact naturalness. Both the Black Butte and the Argos Mines have been similarly excluded, along with the other mines on that southern slope. Other mining activity at the Old Dominion Mine and a short maintained road have also been excluded at the northernmost point of the roadless area.

V. OUTSTANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOLITUDE OR A PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED TYPE OF RECREATION

The variety of terrain in the hills offers many outstanding opportunities for solitude by providing areas of seclusion and isolation. Size and terrain variety are also responsible for the area's outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined

Appendix C

Current Land Status Map of Area 251A

Current Land Status of Area 251A

