

# 6301 - Wilderness Characteristics Inventory

## Summary of Findings and Conclusion

**Unit Name and Number:** Upper Johnson Valley CA-080-215

### 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:

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### Approved by:

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Date:

11/22/13

*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 Upper Johnson Valley CA-080-215

## 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):** Upper Johnson Valley CA-080-215

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

**BLM District(s)/Field Office(s):** California Desert District/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
215	N/A	N	N	N	N/A

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

The boundaries for this area included Bessemer Mine Road, Harrod Road, Highway 247 and a steel structure powerline. Just over sixty percent of the land was public and the shape of the area was like a femur bone in that it was long and narrow with a widened finish in the southwestern section. The topography ranged from valley to mountains 1300 feet above them. Soggy Dry Lake anchored the southern end while the northern end juts up into the Iron Ridge. OHV activities were the main form of human recreation while evidence of mining was seen throughout the hills and mountains and thus the activities of human dominated the landscaped. There was little screening in the area due to scarce creosote scrub in the valleys and little vegetation in the mountains. This area was not considered for further wilderness consideration.

## **Documentation of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions**

**Unit Number/Name:** CA-080-215 Upper Johnson Valley

### **(1) Sufficient size**

**Acreage:** This area encompasses approximately 65,377 acres with a perimeter of roughly 53.6 miles.

**Boundaries:** The area is bounded by Camp Rock Road to the west and Transmission Line Road to the north. The boundary generally follows Bessemer Mind Road (Canyon Route) along the eastern border and Highway 247 to the south.

### **Description of Current Conditions**

**Land ownership:** The unit is comprised of seventy percent BLM lands (roughly 45,848.5 acres), 1,634 acres of State property (approximately 2.5%) and the remaining lands are privately held (about 27.5% at 17,894 acres).

**Location:** Area 215 is within the heart of the Johnson Valley Open OHV Recreation Area in San Bernardino County. The area is the south central portion of the Barstow Resource Area sitting just north of State Highway 247 between the Village of Lucerne Valley to the west and Yucca Valley to the southeast.

**Topography:** Physical features are high desert valleys, generally of 3,000 feet elevation with interspersed with scattered decomposed granite buttes and cinder cone formations, and the large playa of Soggy Lake. The volcanic Fry Mountains and cinder cone butte rise abruptly to 4,335 feet.

**Vegetation features:** The dominant vegetative community is Creosote Bush Scrub, with the exception of the Soggy Lake Depression where the Alkali Sink Scrub plant community is evident. A notable botanical feature is the Upper Johnson Valley Yucca Rings ACEC, designated to protect the largest and oldest known rings of Mojave Yucca, estimated to be 2,250 years old. The Area of Critical Environmental Concern is partially located within this area in the Fry Mountains.

**Major human uses/activities:** The Johnson Valley OHV Area was designated through the California Desert Conservation Area Plan to facilitate intensive OHV use. Under the CDCA Plan, this area is open to all vehicles which may generally drive cross-country and off designated routes. The area is also popular for large group camping and off highway vehicle competitive events. The BLM issues several special recreation permits each month per year for these competitive events which attracts several hundred competitors and a corresponding number of spectators. The area receives several hundred visitor use days per year associated with events as well as the handful of film permits issued within this area. Scattered mining activity occurs around the Fry Mountains and cinder formations, including a quarry operation and numerous mineral prospects.

**(2) Natural condition**

No

Because of the intensive OHV use, camping, competitive events, and mining, the area is not primarily affected by the forces of nature. The unit is crisscrossed by numerous OHV routes, and other routes to mining operations.

**(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude**

No

The flat topography and creosote vegetation provide little in the way of screening. Solitude is hampered by the frequent passage of vehicles and the associated noise of OHV's, large camping groups, and often, by competitive OHV events.

**(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation**

No

While the vastness of the area and the associated hills and valleys may offer opportunities for hiking or other primitive or non-motorized recreation activities, the sights and sounds of OHV use and the lack of solitude diminish the qualities of primitive or unconfined recreation.

**(5) Supplemental values**

Yes

The Upper Johnson Valley Yucca Rings ACEC is located within the inventory unit. The ACEC contains both the largest and oldest known rings of Mojave Yucca (*Yucca schidigera*), estimated to be 2,250 years old. Yucca rings in Upper Johnson Valley have diameters of up to 20 feet, with as many as 130 individual plants. While these are a unique and rare botanical resource, they do not in themselves contribute to wilderness characteristics as they are localized and surrounded by the Johnson Valley OHV Open Area. The ACEC is also between two designated OHV staging areas (Anderson Lake and Rockpile) that contribute to extensive OHV play activity. The area also has a series of historic mines and other related artifacts to California's mining history.

Appendix A  
Photos of Area 215



Photo #1 - Organized Motorized Activity with Area 215 (Johnson Valley Open Area)



Photo #2 - Along a route junction within Area 215

Appendix B

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

Written Description Area 215

## AREA 214

### I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This elongated triangular area has as its northern and southeastern boundaries large steel-structure powerline rights-of-way with accompanying maintenance roads. The west boundary is Camp Rock Road. A short two-mile section of Northside Road forms a southern boundary.

### II. LAND OWNERSHIP

This area is 75 percent public land. Non-public sections are in north-south strips of alternating sections.

### III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

From southwest to northeast, the area boundaries include a small portion of Lucerne Valley; the Wilson Hills, an abrupt, rocky ridge oriented northwest to southeast across the area; Anderson Dry Lake, a small playa just north of the Wilson Hills; and scattered low, rugged hills and canyons associated with the north end of the Fry Mountains. With the exception of a small area around Anderson Dry Lake, where the Alkali Sink Scrub plant community is dominant, the Creosote Bush Scrub plant community is the characteristic type encountered. Scattered Mojave yucca and assorted species of cactus are evident in portions of the Fry Mountains. Desert wash plant species are found in the intervening washes among the scattered hills of the northern Fry Mountains.

### IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The principal activity of man within this area is the use of off-road vehicles. BLM has previously designated this area as "open" to use by motorized vehicles. Courses for the dozens of organized competitive events held here annually lace the entire area. The impact is most noticeable on Anderson Dry Lake. This playa retains none of its natural character. Commonly used as a pit and staging area, its formerly smooth surface is now a series of ruts and rolls one-half to three feet in height throughout its length. Scattered mining occurs in the northern Fry Mountains, but it is relatively unnoticeable when compared to the off-road vehicle impacts. This is an area where the works of man dominate the landscape. The forces of nature are no longer the primary forces at work.

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

The nature of the sparse Creosote Bush Scrub vegetation provides little in the way of screening in this area. Likewise, the topography offers little isolation except in relatively small portions of the northern Fry Mountains where washes separate the hills providing small areas of solitude. Opportunities for solitude are not outstanding and are rather limited. Opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are severely limited also by the frequently encountered areas of intensive off-road vehicle use.

### VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Most comments were general in nature and indicated motorized recreational interest.

## AREA 215

### I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This elongated area has as its long eastern boundary Bessemer Mine Road. The long northwestern border is a large steel-structure powerline right-of-way. The western boundary is Harrod Road and the southern border is Highway 247.

### II. LAND OWNERSHIP

This area is 62 percent public lands. Non-public sections are concentrated in the southwestern end, with scattered non-public sections in an alternating strip pattern in the northeast one-third.

### III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

The area is approximately 21 miles long and 3 to 8 miles wide. The long axis runs from southwest to northeast. Physical features from south to north include the far eastern end of Lucerne Valley with scattered decomposed granite formations and Negro Butte cinder cone. The valley floor lies generally between 3000 feet and 3200 feet. Beyond the granite formations is Fry Valley with the large playa of Soggy Lake. North of Fry Valley, the volcanic Fry Mountains rise abruptly to over 3800 feet with a large cinder cone at the west end reaching 4335 feet. North of the cinder cone the mountains are reduced to a series of low ridges with several large sandy dissecting washes. Northeast from the Fry Mountains is Upper Johnson Valley which is the only feature for the remaining 11 miles to the northeast corner of the area. The dominant vegetative community is Creosote Bush Scrub, with the exception of the Soggy Lake depression where the Alkali Sink Scrub plant community is evident.

### IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The primary activity of man within this area is the use of off-road vehicles. BLM has previously designated the area as "open" to use by motorized vehicles north from Fry Valley. Courses for the dozens of competitive events held here annually lace the entire area. These impacts are especially noticeable along the north side of Bessemer Mine Road from Soggy Lake to the lowest elevation in Upper Johnson Valley. In these areas, the forces of nature are not the primary forces affecting the landscape. Scattered mining activity occurs in the low hills north of the Fry Mountain cone, but is substantially unnoticeable when compared to the impacts of off-road vehicles use. One inhabited mining claim exists on the south side of Fry Mountain in a privately owned section. A small quarry and minor mineral prospects are evident in the granite formations around Negro Butte. All land south and west of Negro Butte is in private ownership and includes a number of roads and ways which run along section lines. Primeval character and influence have been severely altered throughout this area.

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

The creosote vegetation provides little in the way of screening. The topography offers little isolation except in relatively small portions of the northern Fry Mountains, where washes separate the hills. Solitude is offered in the vastness of Johnson Valley. Opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are severely limited by the frequently encountered areas of intensive off-road vehicle use.

### VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Few comments related to inventory criteria though some did indicate the presence of many ways.

## AREA 216

### I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This is an extremely large area with irregular boundaries. The short northern border is defined by a steel-structure powerline right-of-way. The long western boundary is defined along its entire length by Bessemer Mine Road. The long eastern boundary is the border of the U.S. Marine Corps Training Center at Twentynine Palms. Highway 247 and the maintained dirt Mikiska Road border the south end of the area.

### II. LAND OWNERSHIP

The area is 73 percent public land. A large block of contiguous non-public land is located in the southern one-third of the area. Other non-public sections are scattered in north-south strips of alternating sections in the northern one-half.

### III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

These boundaries encompass all of Johnson Valley and most of Upper Johnson Valley. Elevations of these features range from 2600 feet in the south to 3400 feet in Upper Johnson Valley. The even terrain of these creosote valleys is broken by several large playas, including Melville Lake, Emerson Lake, Means Lake, and Galway Lake. Adding further relief are scattered low ridges and decomposed granite hills rising to 3600 to

Appendix C

Current Land Status Map of Area 215

# CDCA-215 Wilderness Characteristics Inventory - Map 1

