

6301 - Wilderness Characteristics Inventory

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: Avawatz Mountains CA-080-221

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:

Name: 

Title: Barstow Field Manager

Date: 12/10/13

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 Avawatz Mountains CA-080-221

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): Avawatz Mountains CA-080-221

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
1990 California Statewide Wilderness Study Report, Avawatz Mountains

Unit#/Name	Size (historic acres)	Natural Condition? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
221	N/A	Y	Y	Y	N/A
221	108,992	Y	Y	Y	Y

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

The original Avawatz Mountains inventory unit was much larger than today's version. The unit included the current Avawatz Mountain Wilderness Study Area. The boundaries of the unit included State Highway 127, Fort Irwin Military Reservation and some graded roads. Around ninety percent of the unit was public lands of which it appeared that the forces of nature were influencing the landscape. While there was a series of active mines in the area, there were opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation for users. The unit was found to have wilderness characteristics in the 1979 report; however the 1990 reported that the area would best be managed as a non-wilderness area due the anticipated mineral wealth that could be developed. A portion of the unit was released as a Wilderness Study Area in the 1994 California Desert Protection Act. The U.S. Army expanded the Fort Irwin National Training Center and the entire South Avawatz Mountains WSA and the lower portion of the Avawatz Mountains WSA was transferred from BLM to the U.S. Army.

Documentation of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name: CA-080-221 Avawatz Mountains

(1) Sufficient size

Acreage: Estimated at approximately 22,984 acres pending GIS calculation with a perimeter of roughly 50.3 miles. The unit has a sickle shape to it running northwest to southeast with a width of nearly two miles for the entirety of the unit's almost twenty three miles in length.

Boundaries: The area is bounded on the west by the Avawatz Wilderness Study Area, on the south by a utility corridor/transmission lines and a private land parcel, on the east by Highway 127, and on the north by a county road (Harry Wallace Exit Route).

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: The area is entirely public land managed by the BLM except for three state sections totaling 1,920 acres.

Location: This area is located in northeastern San Bernardino County, roughly in the northeastern portion of the Barstow Resource Area. The unit is located approximately fifteen miles north of Baker, CA and twenty-seven miles south of Shoshone, CA.

Topography: Much of the unit consists of east sloping bajadas at the foot of the Avawatz Mountains. The southern portion includes the western edge of Silurian Valley and includes a portion of the Salt Creek drainage and a small unnamed dry lake.

Vegetation features: The entire area is covered with creosote bush scrub vegetation.

Major human uses/activities: Little evidence of human use is found in the area. The bajadas and adjoining peaks provide a spectacular backdrop for visitors entering Death Valley from the south, but the area itself receives minimal use. Historic uses included mining, the travel on what is now the Old Spanish National Historic Trail and minimal Off Highway Vehicle activity.

(2) Natural condition

Yes

In the majority of the unit, the only impact to naturalness is the minimal evidence of vehicle use. A number of two-track unimproved routes were observed, but these are only visible in their immediate vicinity and do not degrade from the overall naturalness of the unit. The bajadas are very in-tact and retain their natural character. However, in the extreme southeastern section of this unit there are more routes and tracks. Roughly 5,000 acres in size, this small portion of the unit does not abut the current WSA but Fort Irwin National Training Center.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude

Yes.

The vast bajadas and valley floor contain opportunities for solitude. When considered in combination with the adjoining wilderness study area and its narrow canyons and mountain peaks with sweeping views of Death Valley National Park, these opportunities are outstanding.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation

Yes.

The opportunities of the unit itself are not considered to be outstanding. However, when considered in combination with the adjoining Avawatz Mountains WSA, there are outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The rugged peaks offer scrambling opportunities and vistas of some of the most undeveloped landscapes in the lower 48 states in nearby BLM wilderness and Death Valley National Park.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes

There are several mine sites in the unit which attract rock-hounds and these places have associated structures, buildings and cabins which highlight California's mining history.

Appendix A
Photos of Area 221



Photo #1 - The picture illustrates the bajadas that slope down from the Avawatz Mountains.



Photo#2 - This image captures the Silurian Valley in the southern portion of the unit.

Appendix B

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

Written Description of Area 221

AREA 220

I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This area is bordered on the north by a mining access road; on the east by Highway 127; on the south by the Saratoga Springs Road; and, on the west, by the administratively-endorsed wilderness in Death Valley National Monument.

II: LAND OWNERSHIP

The small area consists primarily of public land with one square mile, located in the southern portion of the area, being non-public land.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

This small area is almost entirely level and covered predominantly with creosote vegetation.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

This area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature. A patented mining claim in the far northwestern corner has been excluded.

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

Opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are limited by the restrictive size of this immediate area. Active mine operations one mile west of the Death Valley National Monument boundary tends to have a confining effect on freedom of movement. However, the roadless area has been retained because of the adjacent administratively-endorsed wilderness area in the National Monument.

VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

The few comments received referred to mineral potential in the area, and challenged the evaluation of areas less than 5000 acres in size. Others supported further wilderness consideration due to the adjacency of administratively-endorsed wilderness areas.

AREA 221

I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This area is bordered on the north by Death Valley National Monument and a graded road from the Monument east to Highway 127 at Salt Creek; on the east by Highway 127; on the south by Silver Lake Road and a portion of a utility corridor; and on the west by the Fort Irwin Military Reservation and an improved road through Avawatz Pass used by the military.

II. LAND OWNERSHIP

The area includes approximately 12 sections of non-public land which are distributed throughout the area and account for approximately 10 percent of the total land area.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

The area consists of the large mountain mass of the Avawatz Mountains which contain many colorful eroded slopes, rugged ridges and steep-walled narrow canyons. These mountains are surrounded by a steeply descending creosote-covered bajada which transforms into a dry lake near Highway 127. White talc deposits dot the landscape at intervals, and the northern portion provides outstanding views into Death Valley National Monument.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The majority of the area retains its primeval character and influence and appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature with man's work substantially unnoticeable. Areas where man's work were substantially noticeable were excluded: (1) the

Sheep Creek Springs area in the north for extensive open-pit talc mining operations, a house, four small cement foundations, an outhouse, and associated roads and ways; (2) the extreme southwest corner where extensive open-pit mine operations degrade and reduce the natural appearance of the landscape through bulldozer scrapings, tailings and associated roads; (3) a circular quarter-mile track of pavement, adjacent to Highway 127 in section 19, (T. 16 N., R. 8 E.); (4) the graded south Mormon Springs Road and the area around the Chinaman Mine in Sections 1 and 2 (T. 16 N., R. 6 E.), due to bulldozing and mining scars; (5) a graded road, 1 mile east of, and paralleling, the Sheep Creek Spring Road into the Avawatz Mountains, and associated mining operations; and (6) in the extreme southeast corner, a State Department of Transportation paved pull-out in section 16, (T. 15 N., R. 8 E.) and mining activity (scrapes and road cuts) in the low hills there. The area west of Avawatz Pass Road contains evidence of mining activities scattered throughout. Several primitive ways penetrate the area but are insignificant due to their vegetative regrowth and repeated washouts. Another way extends up to the Old Mormon Springs from Highway 127. This way is substantially unnoticeable from a majority of the area.

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

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation are available. Spaciousness on the mountain peaks and large bajadas, combined with vistas into Death Valley National Monument, complement the numerous opportunities for solitude found in the narrow canyons and rugged mountain ridges which screen visitors from one another. The area also provides for unconfined movement and a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Those comments relative to the inventory dealt with the improper omission of roads to active mines within the Avawatz Mountains and with the area's wilderness qualities. After further field checks, changes were made where appropriate.

AREA 221A

I. PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

This triangular area has as its northern boundary Silver Lake Road. 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). The western boundary is the Camp Irwin Military Reservation.

II. LAND OWNERSHIP

The area is approximately 95 percent public lands. The non-public holdings consist of two separate undeveloped sections.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT

The boundaries encompass a large bajada of coarse gravel and scattered boulders criss-crossed throughout by many graveled washes. This large bajada slopes generally east from 1400 feet near the southern Avawatz Mountains to less than 900 feet at the eastern limit of the area. The southern end of the Avawatz Mountains occupy the western end of the area rising abruptly to maximum elevation of 3262 feet. The Creosote Bush Scrub is the dominant plant community throughout.

IV. NATURAL CONDITION

The area is largely untrammelled by man throughout. An area of light mining operations has been excluded at the northwest corner and along the extreme southwest edge. Another road used for access to a transmission tower also has been excluded in the southwest corner. Patented mining claims have been excluded in Section 12 and 13 (T. 14 N., R. 6 E.) and Section 18 and 19 (T. 15 N., R. 7 E.). The narrow strip between Fort Irwin and the utility corridor were excluded because of the width being less than one-half mile. With these exceptions, the imprint of man is substantially unnoticeable or entirely absent within the boundaries. The entire area remaining retains its primeval character and influence.

Appendix C

Current Land Status Map of Area 221

Current Land Status for Area 221

