

**Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

Unit Name and Number: **WIU #CDCA 132A (Darwin Falls)**

Summary for **WIU #CDCA 132A-4 and #CDCA 132A-5**

Results of Analysis:

1. Do these areas meet the size requirements?  
Yes. WIU #CDCA 132A-4 meets the size requirement; it is contiguous to wilderness.  
No. WIU #CDCA 132A-5 does not meet the size requirement; it is only 4,864 non-contiguous acres.
  
2. Do these areas appear to be natural? No.

Conclusion

**These areas do not have wilderness characteristics.**

Summary for **WIU #CDCA 132A-1, #CDCA 132A-2, & #CDCA 132A-3**

Results of Analysis:

1. Do these areas meet the size requirements? Yes
  
2. Do these areas appear to be natural? Yes
  
3. Do these areas offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? Yes
  
4. Do these areas have supplemental values? Yes

Conclusion

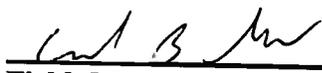
**These areas have wilderness characteristics.**

**Prepared by:**

Team Member Marty Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator, BLM Ridgecrest FO

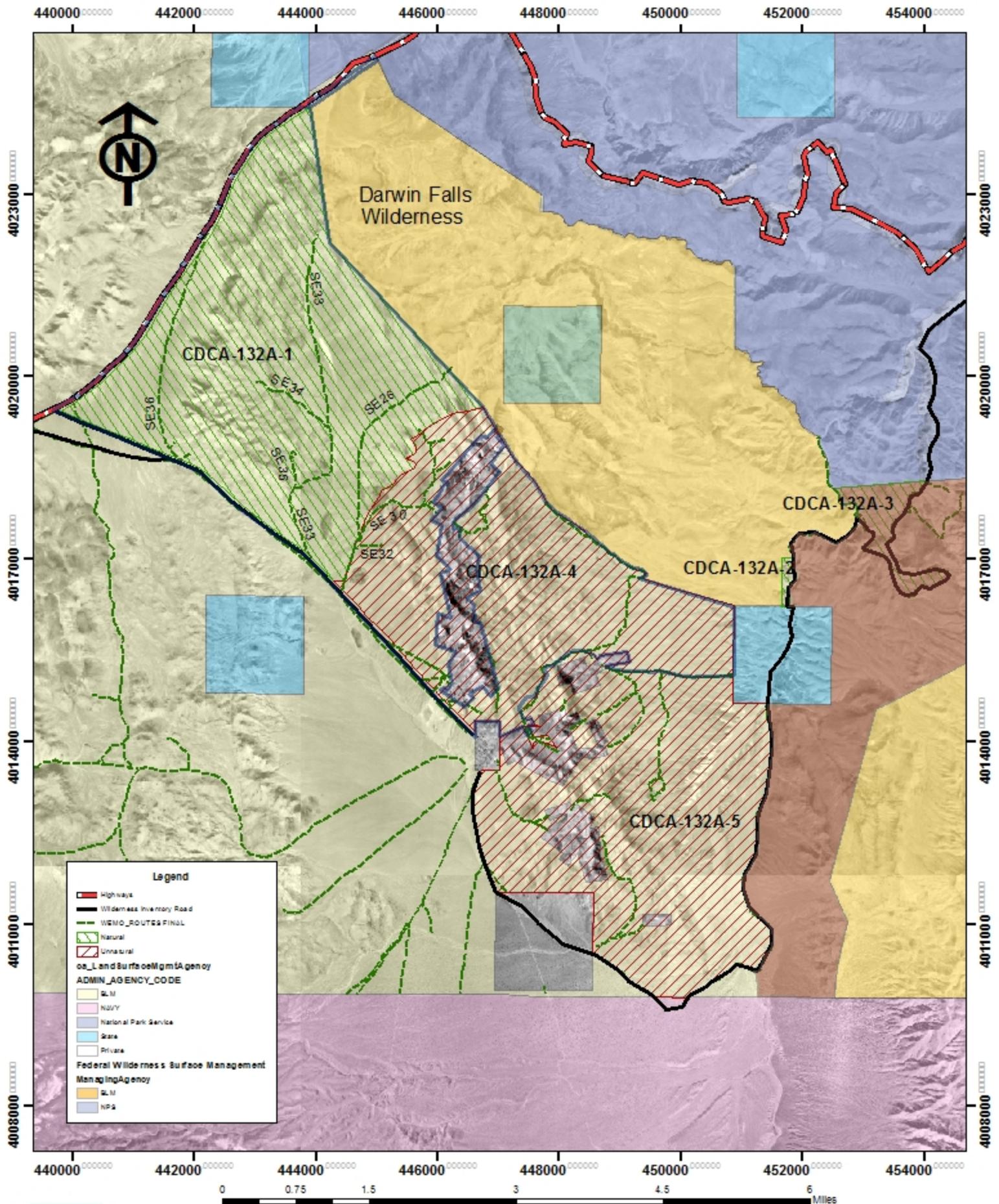
Date: 2015-04-19

**Approved by:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Field Manager**

5/22/2015  
**Date**

*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.*



**MU #CDCA 132A (Darwin Falls) Map**  
 March 2015

Year 2015 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 132A (Darwin Falls)

**FORM 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 CDCA Wilderness Inventory Final Descriptive Narratives, BLM Ridgecrest FO

**Inventory Unit Name(s)/Number(s):** WIU #CDCA 132A (Darwin Falls)

**Map Name(s)/Number(s):** USDI BLM CASO Wilderness Final Inventory, March 31, 1979

**BLM District(s)/Field Office(s):** Ridgecrest Field Office

**2. BLM Inventory Findings on Record**

Existing inventory information regarding wilderness characteristics:  
Inventory Source: 1979 CDCA Wilderness Inventory Final Descriptive Narratives, BLM, Ridgecrest FO

<b>Unit#/ Name</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>	<b>Natural Condition? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Solitude? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Primitive &amp; Unconfined Recreation? Y/N</b>	<b>Supplemental Values? Y/N</b>
1979 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A (Darwin Falls)	>20,000 (historic acres)	Y-7,438	Y-7,438	Y-7,438	Y-7,438
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A-1	Y -5,459 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A-2	Y- 30.7 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A-3	Y – 273 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y

<b>Unit#/ Name</b>	<b>Size (acres)</b>	<b>Natural Condition? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Solitude? Y/N</b>	<b>Outstanding Primitive &amp; Unconfined Recreation? Y/N</b>	<b>Supplemental Values? Y/N</b>
1979 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A-4 (Darwin Falls)	Y- 4,313 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 132A-5	N -4,864 Non- contiguous acres	N	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

The original WIU #CDCA 132A encompassed more than 20,000 acres. It was bordered on the north by Highway 190, on the west by the Darwin Road, on the south by a blacktop road running east from Darwin, and on the east by a maintained dirt road in Darwin Canyon. It also included Darwin Falls and adjacent areas that are now part of Death Valley National Park.

The 1979 analysis and decision was that an unspecified number of acres within the northern part of the unit (subsequently identified as 7,438 acres), encompassing the Darwin Plateau, China Gardens Springs, and Darwin Falls fully met wilderness criteria. Mining activity was non-existent. Road and way development was minimal. The area was natural, retaining its primeval character and influence. The deep, quiet canyons bisecting the volcanic plateau provided outstanding opportunities for solitude (isolation). The springs and falls provided outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

In contrast, the southern half of the unit comprising the Darwin Hills, the historic Darwin Mines within the large, private (patented) claim block, the town of Darwin itself, and associated community and private developments south of town was found to be ineligible. The imprint of man's work from all the housing, mining, and road development, was substantially noticeable and pervasive. The areas no longer appeared to be affected primarily by the forces of nature. As a result, these areas were subsequently dropped from what became a considerably smaller, 7,438-acre Darwin Falls Wilderness Study Area (CDCA 132A).

In 1990, the BLM recommended 0 acres within this WSA for wilderness. The non-suitable recommendation was based upon findings that (1) the landforms and ecosystems were not unique and could be found in other areas; (2) deposits of sand and gravel were abundant within the area; and (3) the area showed a moderate to high occurrence for other minerals, such as copper, lead, silver, and zinc. The area was also thought to be too

narrow and too proximal to bordering non-conforming activities to fully meet criteria for naturalness and opportunities for solitude.

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) established an 8,189-acre Darwin Falls Wilderness, without Darwin Falls. Darwin Falls was incorporated into an expanded Death Valley National Park.

The remaining portions of the original WIU currently under review are west and south of the Darwin Falls Wilderness. These portions have been subsequently subdivided into units that have been found to have or not have wilderness character. In addition, the area immediately south of the town of Darwin (not a part of the original unit) has been assessed to keep all wilderness inventories within the WEMO planning area current.

A recent inventory found that almost 2/3 of the area remaining outside of designated wilderness did not have wilderness character. These units are identified in this report as 132A-4 and 132A-5 (See attached overview map labeled “WIU #CDCA 132A(Darwin Falls) Map, March 2015.”) WIU #132A-4 roughly corresponds to the southern half of the original unit that was determined to not have wilderness character back in 1979. It has been found again not to have wilderness character for the reasons cited earlier. The area is dominated by vestiges of large-scale mining activity, housing and associated private and public developments, and an extensive network of well-developed roads. The historic Darwin Mines on a very large, private (patented) claim block takes up almost a 1/3 of the unit. It is located dead smack in the middle, subdividing the unit into two less heavily-disturbed halves.

The other ineligible unit, 132A-5, is within the portion of the subregion immediately south of the town of Darwin that has never been inventoried. This unit is also split up by several large private property blocks, both within Darwin and at some distance from the town center. It too, has been found to be dominated by vestiges of large-scale mining, housing and associated private and public developments, and by an extensive network of well-developed roads. The unit lacks naturalness, is isolated from wilderness, and is too small to qualify (at less than 5,000 acres) as a stand alone unit.

**The recent inventory (2015) found 5,459 contiguous acres in unit 132A-1, 30.7 contiguous acres in 132A-2, and 273 contiguous acres in 132A-3 to have wilderness character.**

## **FORM 2**

### **Documentation Of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions**

Unit Numbers/Names **WIU #CDCA 132A-1, #CDCA 132A-2, & #CDCA 132A-3**

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

Yes. **Acreage:**

5,459 acres contiguous to wilderness in #CDCA 132A-1.  
30.7 acres contiguous to wilderness in #CDCA 132A-2.  
273 acres contiguous to wilderness in #CDCA 132A-3.

All on BLM land as calculated by GIS Measuring Tool in 2015.

**Boundary revision:** Boundaries have been redrawn to reflect 1994 wilderness and park designations in the area. Boundaries have also been redrawn to include two small, contiguous parcels left out of wilderness, as well as additional lands to the south of the original WIU that are within the Darwin Subregion of the WEMO planning area.

#### **Boundaries:**

#CDCA 132A-1: The northwestern boundary runs east of the Highway 190 ROW. The northeastern boundary follows and is contiguous with the Darwin Falls Wilderness boundary. The southeastern boundary runs along the top of a prominent ridgeline separating two basins, a large natural basin to the west and a more heavily-disturbed basin to the east, down to the intersection of two jeep trails, identified as SE30 and SE26. The boundary continues south of this intersection, west of SE30, down to some ROWs located along the Darwin Road. The southwestern boundary runs north of these ROWs, one associated with an underground pipeline and the other with the Darwin Road, back to Highway 190.

#CDCA 132A-2: The southern boundary follows the northern edge of State Section 16, T 19S, R41E; the western and northern boundaries are contiguous with the Darwin Falls Wilderness boundary; and the eastern boundary runs west of the Darwin Wash jeep trail.

#CDCA 132A-3: The northern boundary follows the Death Valley National Park boundary; the eastern, southern, and western boundary follows west, north, and east of the Darwin Wash jeep trail; and the northwestern boundary follows and is contiguous with the Darwin Falls Wilderness boundary.

## **Description of Current Conditions**

**Land ownership:** BLM (5,459 acres, 30.7 acres, and 273 acres respectively); private inholdings (0 acres).

**Location:** Immediately northwest and northeast of the community of Darwin, T18&19S, R40&41E, and 25 miles south and east of Lone Pine, CA.

**Topography:** The area includes the extreme southern end of the Darwin Plateau and the mountains and intervening basins west of the Darwin Hills. Steep-sided, rugged, volcanic mountains are cut by several steep drainages. Broad, undulating basins are bisected by large wash systems.

**Vegetation features:** Plant associations representative of the Joshua tree woodland and Great Basin scrub communities.

**Major human uses/activities:** 4WD touring and hiking to see scenery and visit old mine sites in the area.

### **(2) Natural condition**

Yes. In the northwestern half of the unit, encompassing #CDCA 132A-1, the same natural conditions exist as were described for the northern half of the original unit in the 1979 inventory. Man's influence upon the primeval character of the land is markedly less noticeable here than in the rest of the original unit: mining activity is non-existent, and road and way development is minimal. The sliver of the area along Highway 190 is virtually indistinguishable from the adjacent Darwin Falls Wilderness area. The large interior basin flanked by two high mountain systems west of the Darwin hills and historic Darwin Mines has been virtually untouched by man. There are a few old mine sites, but these are small, discrete, and widely dispersed. Many of the vehicle routes are in such infrequent use that they have largely or entirely disappeared. There has been only one new vehicle trespass route (the bypass route into the cabin site inside wilderness). Otherwise, there have been no new roads, routes, rights of ways, or developments of any kind anywhere within the area. The feeling one has in the middle of it all is of a vast, untrammled, oceanic-like space. The flanking mountains act as effective visual shields to the much more highly disturbed areas to the east and southeast.

Unit 132A-2 was originally excluded from wilderness as private land; it is now contiguous public land. It is located on the wilderness side of the Darwin Wash road which defines the wilderness boundary. The unit encompasses Miller Spring and contains ruins of an historic water pumping plant, water tank, mine, and a small mill. The ruins are partially obscured by two large salt cedars which would probably be considered heritage trees in this context. There is a small, concrete Civilian Conservation Corp spring box at the spring itself. The spring is one of only two springs found in the area above Darwin Falls (now on NPS land). (The other spring with an identical spring box is located at China Gardens inside BLM wilderness.) The developments here are very discrete and are of considerable historic interest. They are confined to a relatively small area by rocky cut banks and hillsides culminating in towering vertical walls.

Unit 132A-3 is also located on the wilderness side of the Darwin Wash road. It is contiguous to Park as well as BLM wilderness. It contains features of historic interest (old rock walls associated with old trails/wagon routes) that have long been inaccessible to vehicles.

### **(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude**

Yes. The 1979 inventory noted the area provided outstanding opportunities for solitude and for many types of unconfined and primitive types of recreation “within the deep, quiet canyons which penetrate the southern end of the Darwin Plateau.” The establishment of the Darwin Falls Wilderness has extended these types of opportunities in the vicinity of wilderness by curtailing what was once, a much more extensive vehicle route system. The two principal routes in the area (SE33 & SE26) now dead-end at the wilderness boundary instead of arriving at what was once considered very desirable and worthwhile destinations. This has caused use of these routes to drop off in popularity and many of the secondary routes associated with them to fall into relative obscurity. Not a single other vehicle was observed in the area in more than 6 visits in one year.

It is very, very easy to be well out of sight and sound distance of others within a very short time and distance of Darwin Road. The central basin and flanking ranges are very large: a single vehicle would appear as a speck in the sheer scale of the place. And the topography is very variable: the land undulates and low hills and basaltic outcrops often intrude on the basin floor.

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

Yes. There are few primitive vehicle routes and myriad opportunities to set off on foot in any direction. While some of the mountainsides are quite steep and forbidding (and probably not negotiable), much of the basin floor and surrounding ridgetops accessed by low saddles would lend themselves well to cross-country hiking and in some areas, perhaps even, to horseback riding.

### **(5) Supplemental values**

Yes. This area contains several prehistoric Native American sites and historic mining sites dating as far back as the 1870s.

Three special status plants are likely to occur in the area: Darwin Rock Cress (*Arabis pulchra* var. *munciensis*), Darwin Mesa Milkvetch (*Astragalus atratus* var. *mensanus*), and Half-Ring Pod, Curved-Pod, or Mojave Milkvetch (*Astragalus mohavensis* var. *hemigyris*).

The area supports a variety of lizards, snakes, and small mammals, both rodents and lagomorphs. These in turn support many predators, including raptors, bobcats, and coyotes. Raptors most likely to inhabit the area include Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), Prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), and various owl species. Old prospects, shafts, and adits provide roosts for many sensitive bat species.