

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: **WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos)**

Summary

Results of Analysis:

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

Conclusion

The area has wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

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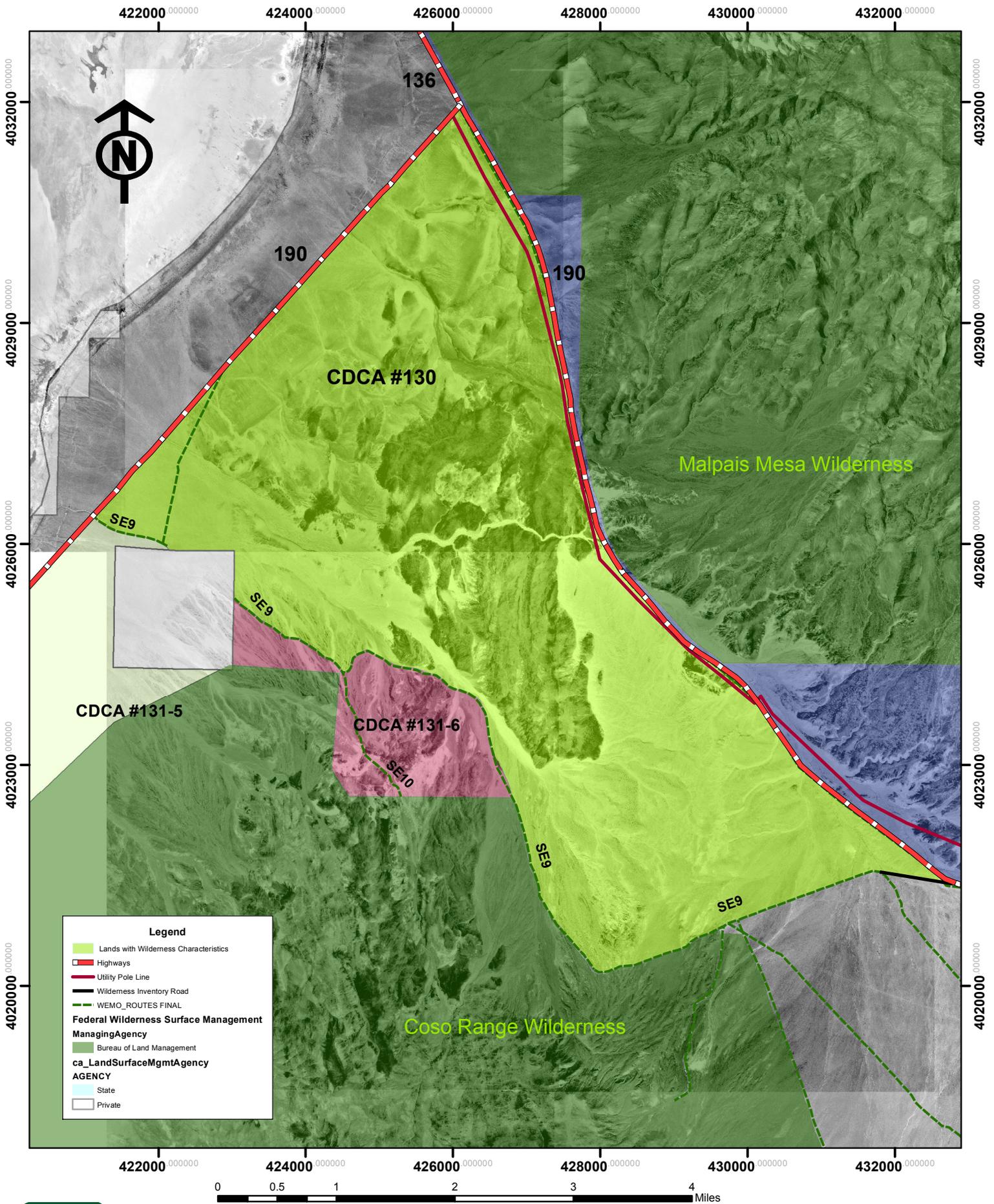
Approved by:



Field Manager

3/18/2014
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.



Aerial Detail WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos) Map
February 2014

Year 2014 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos)

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 130

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

Unit#/ Name	Size (acres)	Natural Condition? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
1979 Findings within WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos)	11,619.45 acres	Y	Y	Y	Y
2013 Findings within WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos)	~11,316 acres	Y	Y	Y	Y

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

The original 1979 WIU #130 was approximately the same size and shape as the current unit. It was comprised of 11,619.45 acres. It was bordered on the northwest by U.S. Highway 190; on the northeast by a powerline ROW; on the southeast by an “improved” dirt road (now SE9) and on the SW by the same road, described as a “maintained dirt road used for access to the Sierra Talc Mine.” All (100%) of the area was public lands.

The area was described as topographically diverse, “with smooth mountains, gentle sloping bajadas, interior valleys, and sheer bluffs.” The description elaborates: “The mountains rise gradually from the bajadas and have smooth ridges and rounded peaks. The bajadas on the north and south drain north to Highway 190 and east towards the Inyo Mountains. Within the mountains are relatively large interior valleys and small washes, giving the landform a rolling appearance. In the center, numerous bluffs with sheer faces and flat tops add to the diversity.” Creosote bush scrub was identified as the dominant plant community, intermixed with other sparse low lying shrubs and annual plants.

The area was found to be in a natural condition with a few exceptions. Some surface grading scars were found in the far northern corner of the unit (near the intersection of Highways 190 & 136). A “woodpole utility line without a maintenance road” was found paralleling the southern extension of Highway 190 on the northeastern boundary. A subsequent boundary adjustment was made to exclude the utility line (see boundary description). Otherwise, the boundaries of the adjusted unit were found to be common with the boundaries of the roadless area. There were no other disturbances and few primitive ways found in the area, and none of these were found to detract from the area’s overall naturalness.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude and for a variety of primitive and unconfined types of recreation were found in the area. This was attributed to the pristine nature of the area and to the area’s extreme diversity in terrain and available vegetative screening. “Besides having its own diverse scenery,” the evaluators pointed out, “the area offers beautiful vistas of both the Sierra Nevada to the west and, to the east, Cerro Gordo Peak in the Inyo Mountains.”

In the 1990 California Statewide Wilderness Study Reports, BLM recommended 0 acres for wilderness. While the Wilderness Study Area (WSA) was found to meet general criteria of wilderness as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act, it was determined that the area’s value for uses other than wilderness exceeded its value as wilderness. The area exhibited a “moderate” potential for uranium and cinder mining. Off-highway vehicles were purported to use the area “extensively.” And solitude was determined to be “drastically affected by highway and military aircraft noise.”

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act released the area as a WSA.

FORM 2

Documentation Of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name **WIU #CDCA 130 (North Cosos)**

(1) Sufficient size

Yes

Acreage: ~11,316 acres refined acres estimated with GIS measuring tool out of the 11,619.45 calculated by a BLM CA State Office GIS Specialist in 2013. Refined acreage excludes the utility pole line which becomes the new eastern boundary where it diverges from Highway 190 and the corner of private property along SE9 that intrudes into the unit along the southern boundary.

Boundary revision: The northern boundary of the unit follows Highway 190's ROW and excludes the utility pole line paralleling Highway 190 on its northeastern boundary, drawing the northeastern boundary along the utility line's ROW until it intersects the highway. Otherwise the boundary remains much the same, following what is now identified as SE9, an unmaintained jeep trail, on the southeast and southwest. A corner of private property overlapping the area along SE9 has also been excluded. See attached map.

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: BLM (~11,316 acres); private inholdings (0 acres).

Location: Approximately 12 miles west of Darwin off of Highway 190, and 15 miles southeast of Olancho along Highway 395.

The boundaries of **CDCA #130** are as follows: The northern boundary runs along Highway 190's ROW; the northeastern boundary follows the utility pole's ROW excluding the utility pole to the intersection with the ROW for the southern extension of Highway 190; and the southeastern and southwestern boundary follows north and east of SE9, an unmaintained jeep trail (excluding an overlapping corner of private property), which loops back to Highway 190 on the unit's northern boundary.

Topography: Highly variable and colorful badlands, comprised of rolling basalt mountains and flat mesa tops, deep canyons and inner valleys, striking pink and white crenellated bluffs and formations, pristine sand dunes, and broad alluvial fans and washes.

Vegetation features: Vegetation is highly variable, ranging from low elevation, Coloradan desert species such as desert holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*) to more typical Mohavean saltbush scrub, creosote scrub, lava bed and desert wash species, to scattered Joshua trees at upper elevations.

Major human uses/activities: Hiking and photography. There are no designated open vehicle routes in the area and little to no evidence of off-highway vehicle use off of the designated route system (SE9).

(2) Natural condition

Yes. The unit is essentially roadless. There are no open, designated vehicle routes in the area. Only two-three undesignated jeep trails off of SE9 are depicted on topo maps for the area. These trails are not being used, have been rehabbing for years, and are now barely visible (see 2/18/2014 photos 9399, 9403). There are no range improvements, no visible mining disturbances, no vehicle pull-offs or campsites in the area.

Three factors have contributed to enhancing naturalness in the area:

- (1) The WEMO Plan Amendment reclassified most of the area previously thought of as an extension of the Olancho Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle Area as a Limited Use Area. The Olancho Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle Area is now restricted to a very small area of 407.6 acres, located 6-10 miles west and south of WIU #CDCA 130.
- (2) No applications for uranium or cinder mining have materialized. The Sierra Talc Mine has been inactive for more than 20 years. This mine is located outside of WIU #CDCA 130, on the opposite (south) side of SE9. Lack of activity at the mine has resulted in no road maintenance on SE9.
- (3) Cattle have not grazed this part of the Lacey-Cactus McCloud Allotment for 14 years and are unlikely to resume grazing here in the foreseeable future due to stipulations in the current grazing permit.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude

Yes. Aircraft noise from military overflights is no more frequent here than elsewhere in the Ridgecrest Field Office Area. Jets flew overhead only once over the course of two days while staff was field truthing these findings. Highway noise was remarkably absent. Distance and intervening topography made the highways invisible from virtually all locations within the unit. The natural area appears to extend across an uninterrupted expanse to the Inyo Mountains, Owens Valley, Sierra Nevadas and Northern Coso Range.

We saw no foot or vehicle tracks in the main wash and only two isolated (and illegal) random dirt bike tracks on the sand hills on our first visit. We saw only one off-route, illegal 4x4 track and one dirt bike track in the main wash on our second visit. It appears that very few people visit this area. There are no open, designated vehicle routes and no well-defined destinations where people might tend to congregate and spend significant amounts of time. As a result, it is easy to feel quite alone and isolated, well out of sight and reach of other people.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation

Yes. The area offers a number of high quality, primitive, non-confined, non-motorized recreational opportunities for cross-country hiking, short overnight backpacking, and photography. There are no obvious, well-defined routes of travel. Visitors can explore any number of washes, dunes, canyons, and ridgelines criss-crossing the area. The topography is extremely diverse and complex. One could visit this area any number of times, never taking the same route, and still be surprised by something. The area is noteworthy for its relative accessibility and small size, coupled with its sense of extreme isolation and exclusion from the rest of the world. One looks out over the Inyos, Owens Valley, the Sierras and the Coso Mountains, with no awareness of the intervening highways or developments in the distance. Wilderness-type opportunities are available to virtually anyone, regardless of age or physical condition.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes. WIU #CDCA 130 is a large area of undisturbed, pristine wildlife habitat nearly contiguous with the northeast part of the Coso Wilderness Area. The unit adds an additional expanse of natural environment, increasing the size of wildlife movement corridors and valuable, unfragmented habitat.

Plants:

- Creosote bush mixed scrub
- Mid-elevation mixed desert scrub, which contains dominants of spiny menadora (*Mendora spinescens*) and Mormon tea (*Ephedra nevadensis*)
- Saltbush scrub, containing desert holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), and other saltbush (*Atriplex*) species
- Desert Wash Systems
- Active Sand Dunes in small patches across the area

Wildlife: Some of the special status wildlife species that have been documented nearby and which very likely reside in this area or use it as foraging habitat are:

- Mohave ground squirrel (part of the unit falls within the Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Area)
- LeConte's Thrasher
- Golden Eagle
- Various hawk species (Redtail hawk and others)
- Various bat species that are designated BLM sensitive Animal Species, including the spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), small-footed Myotis (*Myotis ciliolabrum*), and Yuma Myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*). These 4 species have been documented in the general area and are in the CNDDDB database. They may forage for insects in the desert wash systems here.

Other more common desert wildlife species that use the area are Bell's sparrow (formerly sage sparrow), cactus wren, black-throated sparrow, verdin, hummingbird species, white-crowned sparrow, and horned lark. The burrowing owl is likely to occur here in years of adequate precipitation when invertebrate and rodent prey is plentiful. Migrating neotropical warblers and other migrants pass through the area in fall and spring. Mammal species that most likely occur here are kit fox, badger, coyote, black-tailed jackrabbit, desert cottontail, and various rodent species. A variety of lizard and snake species also reside in this area. The area also supports a diversity of arthropods and insects, including migrating butterfly species and unusual dune beetles.

Proposed Olancha Greasewood Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC):

Part of the WIU falls within the proposed Olancha Greasewood ACEC, which is being created to conserve unusual biological resources. The sand dune hummocks in the area create habitat for an unusual plant assemblage described in the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan as a Great Basin Enclave with greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) as the dominant plant. The goals of the proposed Olancha Greasewood ACEC are to conserve this unusual plant assemblage and its associated wildlife community, as well as the cultural values of greasewood. This greasewood community is unique because it is growing on tall sand dune hummocks, which are unusual features in this region. Greasewood is a deciduous shrub growing to 0.5-3 m tall with spiny branches and succulent leaves. Its leaves are bright green, in contrast to the grey-green color of most of the other shrubs within its range. Greasewood is a halophyte, tolerant of alkaline and saline soil conditions. Native Americans used the hard, yellow wood as firewood and ate the seeds and succulent leaves. The plant provides shade and resting sites for small mammals and birds. A variety of desert wildlife is associated with this greasewood community that has established on the sand dune hummocks.

Cultural Resources:

A great amount of detail about cultural resources is known within this unit. About a dozen cultural surveys were done in the 1970's with respect to permitted OHV events. These surveys discovered several dozen prehistoric and/or historic sites within the general area.

One prehistoric and/or historic camp site was discovered in the course of this inventory off of SE9. See photos: 8661-8665, 8666, and 8672-8675.