

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: WIU #CDCA 131-1

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:

Team Members:

Marty Dickes, Wilderness Coordinator, Ridgecrest FO
Steve Gomez, Natural Resource Specialist, Ridgecrest FO
Shelley Ellis, Biologist, Ridgecrest FO

Date: 2012-02-28

Approved by:



Acting Field Manager

5/7/12

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.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: WIU #CDCA 131-2, 131-3

Summary

Results of Analysis:

1. Do the areas meet the size requirements? Yes, for 131-2; No, for 131-3
2. Do the areas appear to be natural? No
3. Does the area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation? N/A
4. Does the area have supplemental values? N/A

Conclusion

These areas do not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

Team Members:

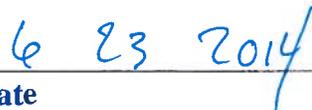
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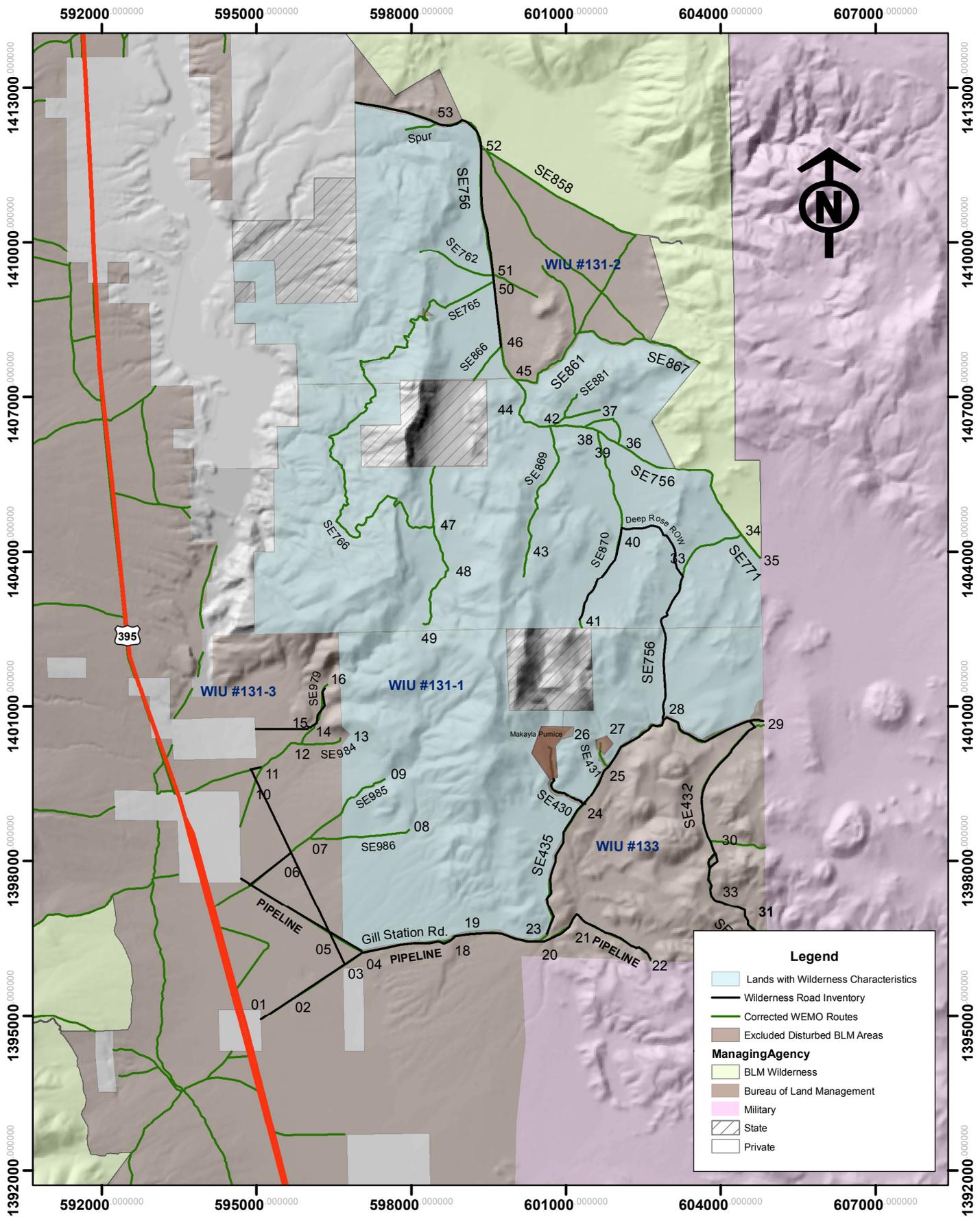
Approved by:



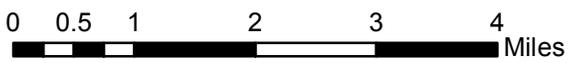
Acting Field Manager


Date

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WIU #CDCA 131-1
Updated Wilderness Inventory Map
July 22, 2013



Year 2012 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 131 (Coso)

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 131 (Coso)

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 WIU #CDCA 131 (Coso)	90,000+ (historic acres)	Y-26,486	Y-26,486	Y-26,486	Y-26,486
2012 Findings WIU #CDCA 131-1	Y - 21,322.5	Y	Y	Y	Y
2012 Findings WIU #CDCA 131-2	Y- 2560 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	N			
2012 Findings WIU #CDCA 131-3	N - 4481 acres	N			

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

The original WIU #CDCA 131 was huge, extending almost 40 miles north to south. The northwestern boundary was Highway 190, the northeastern boundary were the roads south of Highway 190, the western was the access road to the power line along Highway 395, the eastern boundary was the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, and the southern boundary was approximately 4 miles south of Coso Junction.

The 1979 analysis and decision was that approximately 26,486 acres located in the Coso Mountains and Joshua Flat met wilderness criteria. However, the numerous mines and associated roads and trails in the remainder of the area, specifically in Cactus Flat, McCloud Flat, and in adjacent mountains to the west, had substantially noticeable imprints of man. As a result, these areas were found not to have wilderness character. They were subsequently dropped from the 26,486-acre Coso Range Wilderness Study Area (CDCA 131).

The Coso Range Wilderness was designated in 1994. It encompassed all of the 26,486-acre Coso Range Wilderness Study Area (CDCA 131) and added an additional 22,810 acres. The Coso Range Wilderness added a total of 49,296 acres to the wilderness preservation system.

The remaining portion of the original WIU currently under review is west and south of the Coso Range Wilderness. This area has three distinct topographic components. From north to south, they are: (1) the easterly half of Cactus Flat and all of McCloud Flat; (2) an unnamed mountain range along the east side of Haiwee Reservoir extending 12 miles southeasterly into the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station; and 3) a southwesterly trending bajada from these mountains to the powerline road on the east side of Highway 395.

A quick inventory completed in July 2010 found none of this remaining area to have wilderness characteristics. It relied heavily on the 1979 decision and was not field checked. It was conducted before the Secretary of Interior issued new standards for inventoring lands for wilderness characteristics.

In March 2012 a new inventory was completed to the Secretary's standards with field checks. It found 4481 acres identified as WIU #131-3 that did not qualify due to insufficient size and loss of naturalness. It found another 2560 acres identified as WIU#131-2 that met the size requirement but did not meet requirements for naturalness, solitude, or opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation.

WIU #131-3 is located north of Coso Junction between an unnamed mountain range and the power line road along 395. Here, there are a large number of permanent developments and large mining disturbances on both private and public lands. They include homes and alfalfa fields, transmission lines, a new water pipeline, two inactive but only partially reclaimed, open pit pumice mines, numerous roads and vehicle routes, and several associated ROWs.

WIU #131-2 encompasses the part of Cactus Flat east of SE756 that was left out of wilderness. It meets the size criteria, because it is contiguous with wilderness. However, it does not meet wilderness standards for naturalness, solitude, or opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation. Today, most of this area east of SE756 and north of SE861 and SE867, is still a hub of intersecting jeep trails. These trails are frequently and easily accessed by people recreating in the area. They are also heavily-used for water haul sites and other grazing purposes. One such route, SE858, defines the western boundary of the Coso Range Wilderness. It does not qualify as a wilderness inventory road, but it does isolate the more intensively-used and driven portion of Cactus Flat from the adjoining wilderness area. Similarly, routes SE861 and SE867 separate the bulk of Cactus Flat from the far more wild and mountainous terrain located to the south.

The March 2012 inventory found 21,322.5 acres identified as WIU#131-1 to have wilderness character.

FORM 2

Documentation Of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 131-1

(1) Sufficient size

Yes

Acreage: 21,322.5 acres BLM land as calculated by BLM Ridgecrest Natural Resource Specialist using GIS tools in 2012.

Boundary revision: The boundaries have been adjusted to reflect only that portion of the original WIU west and south of the Coso Range Wilderness now found to have wilderness character. These boundaries are clearly defined and describable in conformance with current guidance.

Boundaries: The area is described as follows: From the intersection of Cactus Flat Road (SE756) and the eastern boundary of a block of private land (the Point of Beginning), the boundary runs south along the private/public and State/public boundary through T 20S, R37E, Sections 12, 13 and 24, to the section line between sections 24 and 25. It then follows said section line east to the section line between sections 25 and 26. It then turns south, following the section line between sections 26 and 25 and sections 35 and 36 to the township line between T20S and T21S. It then turns and heads east along said township line to the section line between sections 1 and 6 in T 21S. It then follows south along said section line between sections 1 and 6, 12 and 7, 13 and 18, and 24 and 19, excluding a large, disturbed area (an inactive pumice mine) straddling the line between sections, before continuing south along the section line between sections 24 and 19, 25 and 30, 36 and 31, to the intersection with a power line road crossing section 31. From there, the boundary heads southeast, northeast of and parallel to the power line road, to Gill Station Road, where it continues east, north of and parallel to Gill Station Road to the intersection with SE435. It then continues north, west of and parallel to SE435, to the intersections of SE430 and SE431, excluding both access roads and pumice mine sites, before continuing north and then east to the edge of another active pumice mine straddling the BLM/NAWS boundary. The boundary skirts the northerly edge of this disturbance and continues north along the NAWS boundary to the intersection of SE771 and the Coso Range Wilderness. It then follows the western wilderness boundary northwesterly then northeasterly to the intersection with the southerly edge of SE867. It then follows the southerly edge of SE867 to the intersection of the southerly edge of SE861. It then follows the southerly edge of SE861 to the start of the improved portion of SE756 (Cactus Flat Road). The boundary crosses this road, excluding it to continue north, west of the road, and then west, south of the road, to the intersection with private land (the POB).

SEE ATTACHED MAP.

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: BLM (21,322.5 acres); private inholdings (1,440 acres).

Location: north of Coso Junction, east of Highway 395 and the Haiwee Reservoir, west and south of the Coso Range Wilderness, T 20S/T21 S, R 37E/38E.

Topography: Rugged, steep mountainous terrain, V-shaped flats, and rounded hills with large boulder outcrops.

Vegetation features: Creosote scrub to Joshua tree woodland. Saltbush scrub in lower flats and along dry lakebeds, with stands of silver cholla at selected locations.

Major human uses/activities: Cattle grazing, semi-primitive motorized recreation, including 4WD touring, camping, hunting, wildlife watching, and photography.

(2) Natural condition

Yes

Conditions have changed since the 1979 inventory. Mining activity has significantly declined in the area as a whole. Currently there are only two active pumice mines in the area. In 1979, there were six. The two active mines are on the periphery of the area found to have wilderness character and have been excluded from it. All old, inactive pumice mines have been excluded from the area as well. Most of these mines are tucked back into canyons, where they are largely hidden from view. Pumice mines are confined to discrete pumice outcrops. These outcrops must be of sufficient size to be worth exploiting. When the pumice is exhausted, the mines are closed and abandoned. It is unlikely that any new pumice outcrops of sufficient size will be discovered here in the future.

The Coso Mining District is perhaps the oldest mining district in the Ridgecrest Field Office Area. There are visible remains of older mining activity scattered throughout the area. However, these remains are remnants of hard rock mining and consist largely of a few, isolated developments, such as adits, a few wooden structures, small debris, and one, intact stone cabin. They are not in themselves inconsistent with wilderness and may be considered supplementary values due to their historic nature.

There are 12 vehicle routes extending into the area now defined as having wilderness character. Only one of these routes qualifies as a wilderness inventory road. (See Appendix C). These routes could all be cherry-stemmed out without significantly reducing the area's size or diminishing its integrity. The most intrusive of these routes – the route SE766 extending from Haiwee Reservoir, up and over the mountains, and down into Cactus Flat – no longer qualifies as a wilderness inventory road. It is not in frequent or general use. It is so badly eroded, with extensive washouts and deep ruts and gullies, that it is virtually impassible to all but the most determined dirt biker. The route is typical of many old mining roads in the area. The soils here are soft and highly erodible. The roads easily become impassible. They have not been maintained and they frequently fall into disuse. Many of these roads are now eroding away and rehabbing on their own. Many routes on the DAG and WEMO maps can no longer be found. These routes have all but disappeared.

One ROW has been approved in this area. If the ROW were exercised, it would improve parts of two existing routes and would construct a new connecting route between them. The route would run from SE756 over to State Section 16 where Deep Rose, a geothermal development company, plans to do some exploratory drilling. However, thi ROW has not yet been developed. It has been held by the company for 5 years and the ROW expired in December 2011. The proposed drilling and geothermal site is entirely on State Lands. Development of the ROW would not significantly diminish the area's size or affect its wilderness character.

The area is predominantly natural. There are no developments inside the area identified as having wilderness character. The area retains is primeval character and influence. Man's works, which include a few, widely separated, historic mining features and unimproved vehicle routes are dwarfed by the natural topography. They remain substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude

Yes

The 1979 inventory found the area to have “outstanding” opportunities for solitude and for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, largely because of the lack of permanent improvements, diversity of terrain (bajadas, rugged mountains, and interior valleys), and vastness of the large flats, combined with the surrounding mountains.

This remains true within the area identified as having wilderness character today. The land here is characterized by rolling expanses of Joshua tree woodland broken by massive boulder outcrops and two vast flats surrounded by steep, rugged mountains that eventually pour off into narrow, V-shaped canyons. These features screen the presence of others and enhance the feeling of isolation and solitude in an area that relatively few people frequent each year.

Twelve vehicle routes intrude into the area. These routes are widely-separated by space and isolated by topography. Eight of these routes are less than a mile-and-a-half long. Three are less than 3 ½ miles long. The longest of the routes (SE766) is six miles long but is so severely washed out and gullied, that it could not be followed for more than two miles by BLM staff working on quads to complete route signing in the area. Most of the area cannot be reached by vehicle or the casual visitor. It is seldom visited.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation

Yes

There are no developed recreation facilities. Only a few, primitive camp sites exist. Two out of four fire rings were choked with vegetation. Twelve vehicle routes extend into the area, but again, these are of short length and are widely-spaced apart. They are well-isolated by topography. Most of the area can only be visited by horseback and on foot. There are no established foot and equestrian trails. Apart from the vehicle routes, all travel is cross-country.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes

The 1979 inventory reported that the area was known for its outstanding volcanic displays, large outcroppings of obsidian, and evidence of Pauite Indian habitation. The area is rich in cultural resources. In many places, the ground is covered with lithic scatter. Ayers Rock, a rare pictograph site, is located here. The area is rich in history as well as prehistory. The oldest mine workings may date back to the mid-1800's.

The area has exceptional scenic values. The only north-south route through the area, SE756, is popular with sightseers and photographers. The hills are studded with impressive rock outcrops comprised of massive granite blocks. There are robust stands of Joshua trees and in some places, silver cholla. The mountains are stark and quite dramatic, with dark, nearly vertical walls and vivid splashes of color. At higher elevations, the area offers outstanding views of the Sierra.

The area is also rich biologically. It has extensive Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilis mohavensis*) habitat due to vegetation type and loose soils. The loose soils favor burrow construction. MGS critical shrubs found in the area include winterfat, spiny hopsage, and saltbush (*Atriplex spp.*)

Raptors are also present because of the many rock outcrops that allow them to perch above the flats. Suitable raptor nesting sites occur in the nooks and crannies of the boulder jumbles. The open areas are good habitat for rodents and rabbit that raptors often prey upon.

The area supports valuable Joshua tree woodland habitat used by loggerhead shrikes, ladder-backed woodpeckers, cactus wrens, and dozens of other bird species – both residents and migrants. The boulder habitat and abandoned mine features are also used by a variety of bat species, including pallid bats.