

**Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

Unit Name and Number: WIU #CDCA-136

Summary

Results of Analysis:

1. Does this area meet any of the size requirements?  
Yes
2. Does this area appear to be natural?  
Yes
3. Does this area offer outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?  
No
4. Does this area have supplemental values?  
Yes

Conclusion

**CDCA-136 does not have wilderness character.**

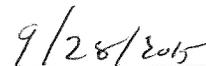
Prepared by:

Rurik Fencel, Wilderness Inventory Intern, BLM Ridgecrest FO

Date: 9/25/2015

**Approved by:**

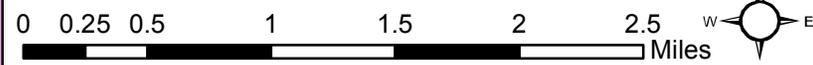
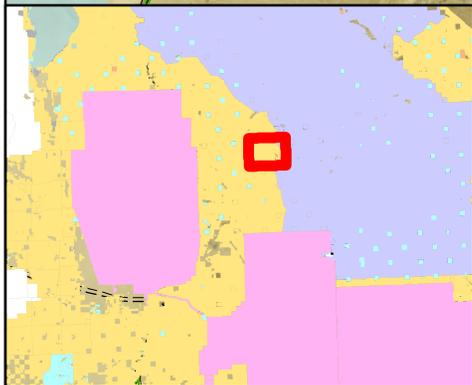
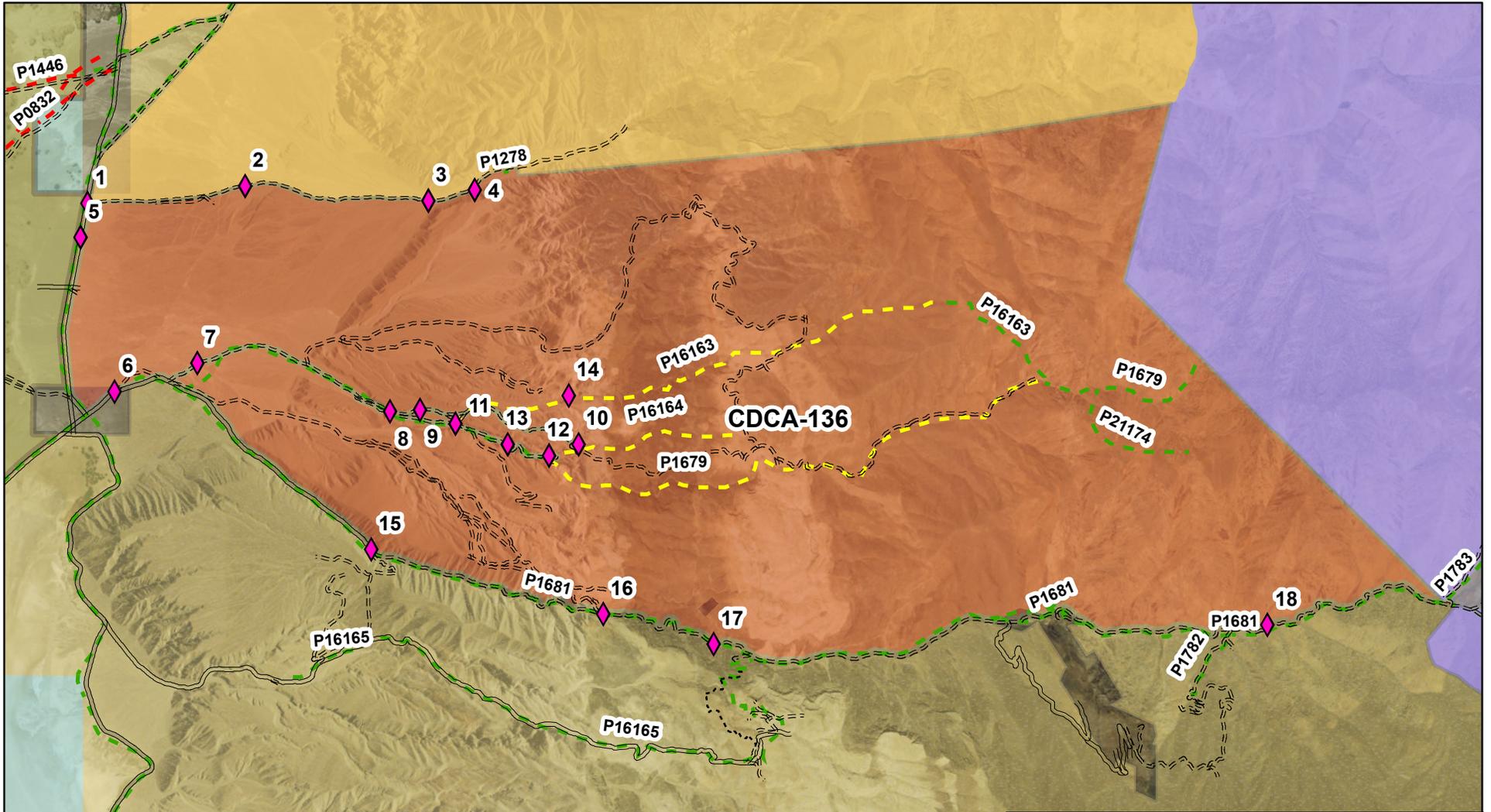




**Field Manager**

**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.*



**CDCA-136**

- Photo Points

**Routes on the Ground**

- Unpaved
- 4wd
- ATV, Motorcycle

**Designated Routes**

- Designated Routes

**Route Comments, 2015**

- Rehabbing Naturally
- Designated, but signed closed

**Has Wilderness Characteristics?**

- Yes
- No
- Not Groundtruthed Yet

**Government Lands**

- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- State

**Year 2015 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA-136 (Happy Canyon to Pleasant Canyon)**

**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

1990 California Statewide Wilderness Study Report, Part 4, Volume 3

**Inventory Unit Name(s)/Numbers:** WIU #CDCA-136

**Map Names/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-136	70523 GIS acres calculated using the stated boundaries of the original unit	Y	Y	Y	N/A
1990 Findings WIU CDCA-136 (Surprise Canyon WSA)	58398 GIS acres stated in the 1990 report	N	N	N	Y
2015 Findings within CDCA-136	8,373 GIS acres	Y	N	N	Y

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

**1979 Findings:** The original 1979 WIU# CDCA-136 was bordered on the south by the road running up Pleasant Canyon from Ballarat, on the west by Indian Ranch Road, on the east by Death Valley National Monument, and on the north by Wildrose Canyon Road. It included portions that are now part of Death Valley National Park and the Surprise Canyon Wilderness. The original unit was approximately 95% public land, with two separate pieces along the western boundary: Indian Ranch and private land near Ballarat.

The terrain in the unit was found to be rugged mountains with deep canyons. The small, steep alluvial fans at the mouth of the canyons were included in the units, as well as the badlands in the northwest part of the unit. The fans tended to be rocky and gray with lots of small washes cutting channels across them, the hilly areas were found to have similar features.

Vegetation was found to vary with elevation and substrate. The badlands and fans had widely spaced vegetation dominated by creosote and desert holly. The canyons had extensive riparian plant communities dominated by cottonwood and willow. Pinyon, juniper and great-basin sage dominate the upper elevations, with the highest elevations being dominated by limber pine and great-basin sage. Rocky areas at 1200-4000 feet of elevation supported the Panamint Daisy, a rare and endangered plant species. The area was also found to be a refuge for Desert Bighorn Sheep. The area is also home to two indigenous reptiles: the Panamint Valley Alligator lizard and a sub-species of the Speckled Rattlesnake. There were also ruins of mining settlements found in at least one canyon.

Maintained roads penetrated the area from the west and went up Jail, Surprise, Happy, and Jackpot Canyons. Happy, Jackpot, and Pleasant Canyons had branch roads that went up to mining camps further up the canyons. The rest of the area was in an undeveloped state that retained its primeval character and was primarily affected by the forces of nature with no permanent improvements.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude for and primitive recreation were found to be outstanding throughout the area. Opportunities for solitude were found to be abundant in the mountain areas due to topographic screening at the lower elevations and the topographic and vegetative screening at high elevations. These opportunities were enhanced by the proximity of the area to then Death Valley National Monument.

Public comments identified mining roads and activity, all of which were field-checked and appeared on the unit's map. A substantial number of comments identified the unit has having outstanding primitive recreation opportunities.

**1990 Findings:** The 1990 unit was reduced in size and comprised the entirety of what is now the Surprise Canyon Wilderness, plus the upper elevations of Happy, Jackpot, and

the north wall of Pleasant Canyon. The roads up Jail, Surprise, Happy, and Jackpot were cherrystemmed out from the unit.

None of the area was recommended for wilderness designation because 1) despite meeting the wilderness criteria defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964, the area's wilderness values were found to be only marginal and did not exceed the potential for other uses, chiefly the exploration and development of minerals; 2) The area possessed areas of high mineral potential; and 3) the area would be extremely difficult to manage as wilderness due to a 25 mile route network within and between the canyons of the unit.

**1994:** Surprise Canyon Wilderness and Death Valley National Park were created, and the majority of unit 136 was set aside to preserve wilderness values. The high elevation portion and majority of the original unit, approximately 37,187 acres, was transferred to Death Valley National Park. The middle elevation portions of the unit north and west of Happy Canyon, approximately 24,963 acres, were set aside as the Surprise Canyon Wilderness. The remaining 8,373 acres of the unit, from Happy Canyon to the bottom of Pleasant Canyon were returned to general public lands.

**The September 2015 inventory found 8,373 acres identified as WIU # CDCA-136 not to have wilderness character.**

## **FORM 2**

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

**(1) Sufficient Size:** Yes

**Acreage:**

CDCA-136 is approximately 8,373 acres.

**Boundary Revision:** The original unit's boundaries were revised to reflect the changes in land status and land transfers since 1979. 62,150 acres of the original unit are now protected as either BLM wilderness or National Park. All non-BLM lands have been removed from the unit and excluded from further consideration.

**Boundaries:**

The southern border is formed by Pleasant Canyon Rd (NEMO # P1681); the eastern border is Death Valley National Park; the northern border is the border of the Surprise Canyon Wilderness; the western border is Indian Ranch Road.

**Description of Current Conditions:**

**Land Ownership:**

BLM owns all 8,373 acres stated to be in the unit.

**Location:**

This unit is located immediately east of Ballarat, CA in the western canyons of the Panamint Mountains.

**Topography:**

The unit is primarily low to mid elevation canyons, and includes the alluvial fans at the mouth of the canyons. The high point of the unit is around 7000 feet, and is a ridgeline shared with the National Park. The canyons provide a lot of topographic screening from one canyon to the next as well as from the bottom of the canyon to its respective ridgeline, but not from the views of Ballarat, the highway, and the radar station that the canyons look directly out to.

**Vegetation Features:** Creosote scrub dominates the whole unit at all elevations. Jackpot and Pleasant canyons have significant riparian areas for small portions of their lengths.

**Major Human Uses / Activities:** The major human use in the unit is recreational touring to visit historic mining camps and mining areas. The canyons in the western Panamints are challenging routes that draw a respectful visitor base. The highest concentration of use is in November during the annual Panamint Valley Days event. There are two patented mining claims in Pleasant Canyon, at least one of which is an active mine overlaps a little into unit 136 from unit 137A.

**( 2 ) Natural Condition: Yes**

The area within the stated boundaries has natural character. The unit is affected predominantly by natural forces, which are slowly eroding the human impacts that were so negatively impacting the unit as of the 1990 report. The road up Happy Canyon has been closed due to the Surprise Canyon Wilderness crossing that road; the roads up Jackpot Canyon have washed out multiple times and are no longer obvious as roads.

**( 3 ) Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude and/or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: No**

Outstanding opportunities for solitude do not exist. The settlement of Ballarat, the highway, and the radar station are visible from the mouths of the canyons, and would be visible from the ridgelines in the unit. There are no more active mines in the unit, but there is an active mine immediately adjacent to the southeast portion of the unit that negatively impacts the soundscape inside this unit.

Opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation do not exist. While the roads in Happy and Jackpot Canyons are recovering where they pass through the canyon bottoms, anywhere the road is not on the bottom of the canyon is still intact and would confine movement.

At this point in time the number of roads, both designated routes and non-designated routes, detracts significantly from both opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation. However, these roads are no longer maintained except for the road up Pleasant Canyon, and are slowly returning to a more primitive state. It is likely that they will always be identifiable unless they are washed away entirely, but they are becoming less noticeable with each flood event.

The unit has opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation, but they do not warrant being considered 'outstanding'. It is possible that the opportunities will become outstanding in the future, if the roads continue to deteriorate.

**( 4 ) Are there Supplemental Values? Yes**

There are known and recorded prehistoric sites within the unit, as well as a high likelihood of unknown prehistoric sites due to the prevalence of water within the canyons. There are a lot of historic ruins and mining camps within the unit as well.

Biologically, the unit provides habitat for Desert Bighorn Sheep, the endemic Panamint Valley Alligator Lizard, endemic Panamint Daisy, and an endemic subspecies of the Speckled Rattlesnake.