

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: **WIU #CDCA 131-6 (Sierra Talc Mine**

Summary

Results of Analysis:

1. Does the area meet any of the size requirements? **Yes**
2. Does the area appear to be natural? **No**
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 does not have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

Team Members:

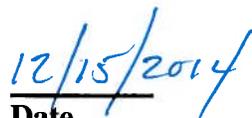
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Date: 2014-12-12

Approved by:

 acting

Field Manager

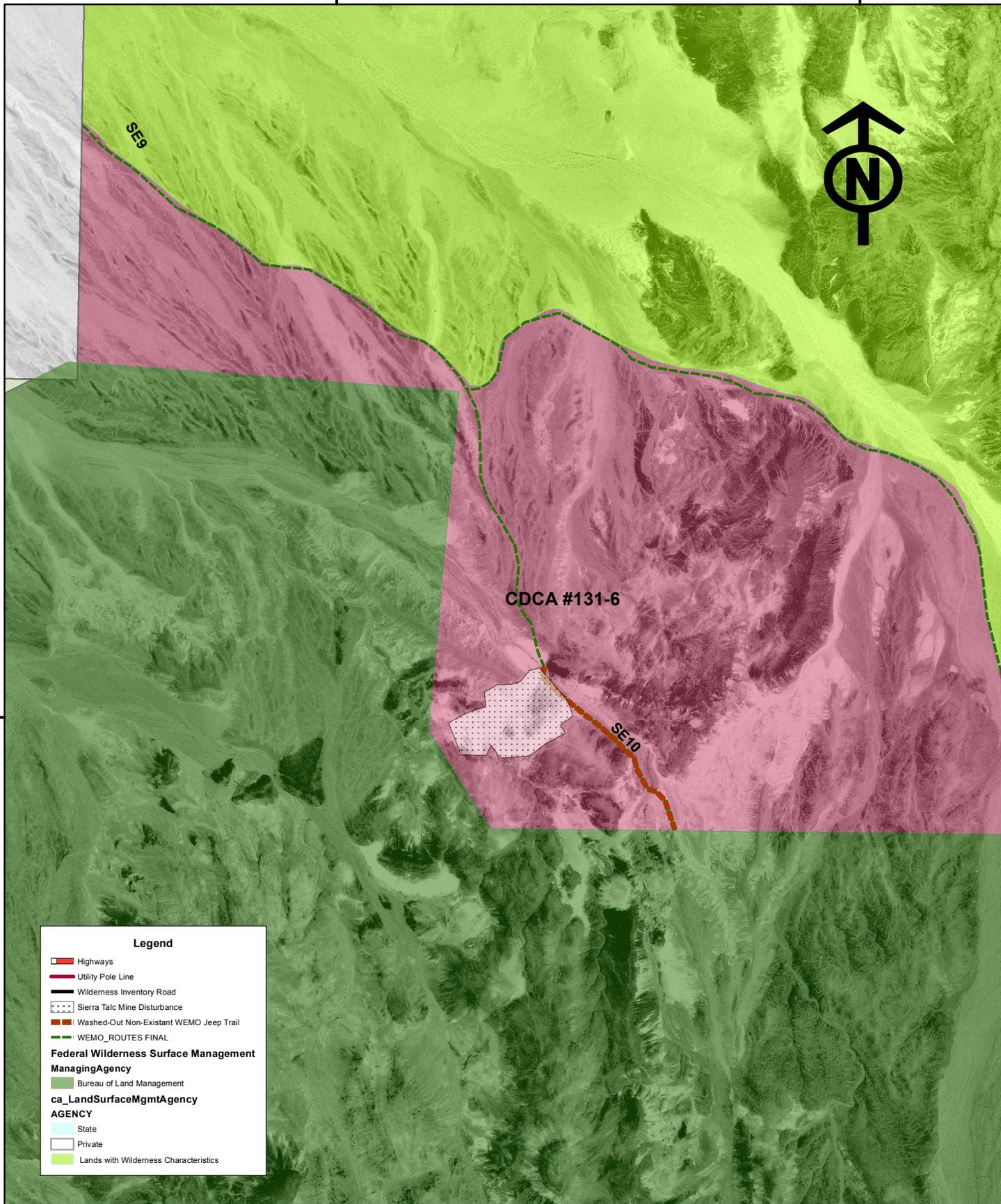


Date

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.

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Legend

- Highways
- Utility Pole Line
- Wilderness Inventory Road
- Sierra Talc Mine Disturbance
- Washed-Out Non-Existant WEMO Jeep Trail
- WEMO_ROUTES FINAL

Federal Wilderness Surface Management
ManagingAgency

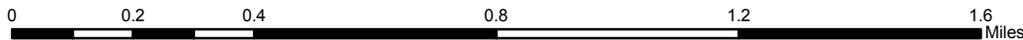
- Bureau of Land Management

ca_LandSurfaceMgmtAgency
AGENCY

- State
- Private
- Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

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**Aerial Detail WIU #CDCA 131-6 (Sierra Talc Mine Area) Map
 February 2014**

Year 2014 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 131-6 (Sierra Talc Mine)

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 within WIU #CDCA 131 (North Cosos)	90,000+ (historic acres)	Y 26,486	Y 26,486	Y 26,486	Y 26,486
2014 Findings within WIU #CDCA 131-6 (Sierra Talc Mine)	Y ~1,587 contiguous acres	N	Y	Y	Y

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

The original 1979 WIU #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 boundary 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, Cosos).

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 portion of the original WIU currently under review here (**WIU #CDCA 131-6**) is northeast of the Coso Range Wilderness.

Unit #CDCA 131-6 is located between the northeast corner of the Coso Range Wilderness and SE9. (SE9 separates this unit from Unit#CDCA 130 (North Cosos) which has been found to have wilderness characteristics.) The unit is mostly natural but is dominated and separated from wilderness by the workings of an abandoned Talc Mine tucked up against the wilderness boundary.

A March 2014 inventory found this ~1,587 acre area did not have wilderness character at this time due to residual visible large-scale mining disturbances. However, it could have wilderness character in the future if the mine workings are left undisturbed to continue rehabbing on their own.

FORM 2

Documentation Of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Number/Name **WIU #CDCA 131--6 (Sierra Talc Mine)**

(1) Sufficient size

Yes.

Acreage: ~1,587 contiguous acres estimated with GIS measuring tool. This unit is immediately contiguous to northeastern boundary of the Coso Range Wilderness.

Boundary revision: The southwestern boundary follows the Coso Range Wilderness boundary. The western boundary is the public/private property boundary in Section 16 (Ts. 18S., R. 38E.). The northern boundary is SE9. See attached map.

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: BLM (~1,587 acres); private inholdings (0 acres).

Location: Approximately 10- 12 miles northeast of Olancho, CA.

Topography: Colorful, red and black volcanic plugs and white talc hills, heavily-eroded bajadas and alluvial fans coming off of the Coso Range, divided by several small canyons and large wash systems.

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 higher elevations.

Major human uses/activities: This area receives very little use. Only one vehicle route intrudes into the area (SE9). The route terminates about half-way along its purported length at an impassible gully. The gully blocks vehicle access to the Sierra Mine on the other side of the gully. The Sierra Mine is an old, inoperative, abandoned talc mine. No current mining claims are attached to this site. The site attracts a few visitors each year who visit the site to explore the old mine workings.

(2) Natural condition

No. The mining area is rehabbing well on its own, however, it is still very visibly and heavily disturbed. There are multiple, eroding, intersecting roads cut into the hillsides,

several collapsed adits, and two-three large pits excavated by heavy machinery that are now slowly filling-in and revegetating. The mine only comprises about 1/10th of the total acreage within the unit. However, it occupies a central position within the unit, right up against and alongside the wilderness boundary. Most of the rest of the area outside of wilderness, excluding the mine, is roadless and pristine. (See photos.)

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude

Yes. Aircraft noise from military overflights is no more frequent here than elsewhere in the Ridgecrest Field Office Area. Highway noise is remarkably absent. Distance and intervening topography makes the highways invisible from most locations within the unit. Beyond the mine site, the natural area appears to extend across an uninterrupted expanse into wilderness, up through the Owens Valley, and over to the Inyo Mountains.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation

Yes. The area offers a number of high quality, primitive, non-confined, non-motorized recreational opportunities in conjunction with the flanking wilderness for cross-country hiking, short overnight backpacking, and photography. Visitors could move out from the mine on foot and in some places, on horseback, in multiple directions to explore the surrounding territory with its expansive desert pavements, beautiful badlands topography, and small, deeply entrenched canyons and gullies. The country is moderately easy to difficult to cross on foot, more restrictive to cross with respect to topography on horseback. Wilderness-type opportunities are available to many if not most people, with some off-trail experience and in reasonably good physical condition.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes. Outside of the mining area, WIU #CDCA 131-6 is a small area of undisturbed, pristine wildlife habitat contiguous to the northern part of the Coso Range 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*), Mormon tea (*Ephedra nevadensis*), and Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*)
- Saltbush scrub, containing desert holly (*Atriplex hymenelytra*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), and other saltbush (*Atriplex*) species
- Plants associated with desert wash systems
- Plants associated with small dune habitats

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 (the unit falls within a 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.

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.