

**Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

Unit Name and Number: **WIU #CDCA 170-4 (224) & 169 (Spangler Hills)**

Summary

Results of Analysis:

1. Do these areas meet the size requirements?  
**YES.**
  
2. Do the areas appear to be natural?  
**NO** for all units.
  
3. Do the areas offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?  
**NO**
  
4. Do these areas have supplemental values?  
**N/A**

Conclusion

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

**Prepared by:**

**Team Member:**

Marty Dickes, Outdoor Recreation Planner/Wilderness Coordinator, BLM Ridgecrest FO

**Date:** 12-30-13

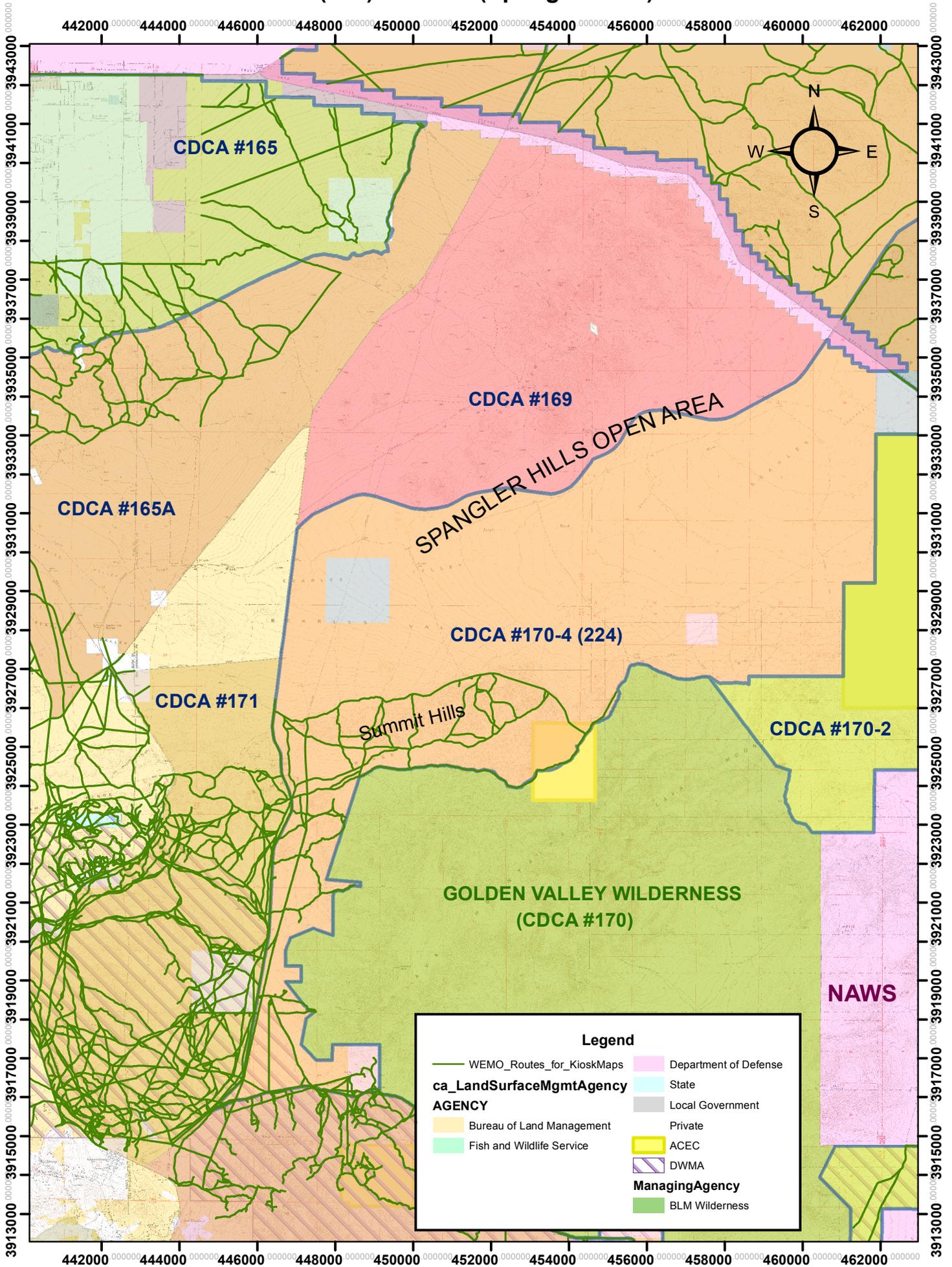
**Approved by:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Carl B. Symons, Field Manager**

1/6/2014  
**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.*

# WIU CDCA #170-4 (224) & #169 (Spangler Hills) DETAIL MAP



Year 2013 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 170-4 (224) & 169  
(Spangler Hills)

**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):** WIUs #CDCA 170 & 169

**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 170	Y <39,512 acres out of more than 100,000 acres in original unit	Y	Y	Y	Y
2013 Findings within WIU #CDCA 170-4	Y 36,328 acres	N	N	N	N/A
1979 Findings within WIU #CDCA 169	Y ~18,200 acres	N	N	N	N/A
2013 Findings within WIU #CDCA 169	Y ~18,200 acres	N	N	N	N/A

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

The **original 1979 WIU #170** was huge, involving more than 100,000 acres. It included all of the Spanglers, the Christmas Canyon ACEC, the Summit Hills, the Golden Valley Wilderness, the Limited Use lands west of the wilderness, as well as the Limited Use lands east of the wilderness. The part of the original unit that comprises the southern half of the Spangler Hills Open Area, the Summit Hills, and the Limited Use lands west of and contiguous to the Golden Valley Wilderness comprise WIU #CDCA 170-4.

The 1979 analysis found everything outside of the Spangler Hills Open Area within the original WIU #170 eligible for consideration as wilderness, noting that the “quality of the landscape is a direct reflection of [historic] use designations.” Vehicle use outside of the Open Area is restricted to “designated roads and trails only.” Mountainous areas are closed to vehicle use and are mostly inaccessible to such use due to their extremely rugged nature. Intensive sheep grazing resulting in sheep trails and some damage to vegetation were noted but these impacts did not appear “to be so intensive as to be irreversible or irretrievable.”

Outstanding opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation were found in the interior canyons and ridgetops of the Lava and Almond mountains (now part of the Golden Valley Wilderness). A big part of their effect included sweeping vistas of adjacent natural areas. “These expanses show little significant imprint of man at these distances and lend a psychological feeling of vastness.” While the primary focus of the analysis was on the Lava Mountains and interior of Golden Valley itself, this argument can be extrapolated to include the predominantly natural areas to the east and northeast which were not called out or dropped from further consideration in the report as were the Spanglers, Teagle Wash, Summit Hills, or areas immediately west of the Golden Valley Wilderness.

In 1990, the BLM recommended just 29,195 acres for wilderness within the 39,512 acre Golden Valley Wilderness Study Area (CDCA-170) in its Statewide Wilderness Study Report. These acres were confined to what is now the core of the Golden Valley Wilderness. BLM reasoned that there were too many old prospect holes, rockhounding sites, and vehicle routes now used recreationally in the surrounding areas to include additional areas in its wilderness recommendations. Noise from the Trona Road was cited, as were “visual intrusions and associated noise” from military overflights. These impacts compromised opportunities for solitude throughout the area. In addition, significant portions of the WSA were found to have moderate to high potential for gold, silver, lead, zinc, tungsten, and geothermal energy.

The report noted that the area supported desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizi*) and Mohave ground squirrel (*Spermophilus mohavensis*), also that it contained several important prehistoric cultural sites. Golden Valley, in particular, was singled out for its exceptional wildflower displays.

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act designated 37,000 (36,536 actual) acres as the Golden Valley Wilderness.

The original **1979 WIU #CDCA 169** was bordered on the south by the Trona Railroad, on the north by the Randsburg Wash Road, and on the west by a pipeline road. One-hundred percent of the area (100%) was made up of public lands.

The unit is described as consisting of steep slopes with several large dissecting washes. The hills are noteworthy for being strewn with granite boulders. Elevations range from 2,220' to 3,561.' Where soil depth is sufficient to support vegetative cover, creosote scrub is the dominant plant community.

The area was found not to be in a natural condition. The forces of nature were felt to be no longer dominant. The central hills are marred by several large-scale abandoned mining operations with substantial excavations. Human activity and impulses are very visible and prominent, and operative everywhere. Most of the area is within an open vehicle play area that has historically accommodated as many as 20-30 motorcycle races per year. The evaluators felt that no part of the unit had escaped impacts caused by OHV use. Impacts were seen as most severe where large numbers of off-road vehicle users typically assemble before dispersing, i.e., at the popular RV camping and staging areas immediately off of the Trona Road. These areas are blown out and denuded of vegetation; every rise, hill, and rock outcrop criss-crossed by vehicle tracks. Cross-country travel within reasonable (gas) range of staging areas has resulted in an exceptionally dense, spidery network of user-created (mostly dirtbike) trails.

Outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or for primitive and unconfined (non-motorized) recreation were felt to be severely limited within the unit. This was not because of the topography: the area is described as "remote with expansive views." It was because of the large number of off-road vehicle users and the large and extensive network of vehicle ways and motorcycle trails available to them. There is no place a person on foot or horse can go to escape them.

The unit was dropped from further wilderness consideration and was not evaluated in the 1990 Wilderness Study Report.

## **FORM 2**

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

Unit Number/Name **WIU #CDCA 170-4 (224) & 169 (Spangler Hills)**

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

**Yes for Units 170-4 (224) & 169.**

**Acreage:** Unit 170-4 is comprised of 36,328 acres. Unit 169 is comprised of approximately 18,200 acres.

**Boundary revision:** The boundaries of unit **170-4** have been adjusted to exclude the Golden Valley Wilderness, Christmas Canyon ACEC, and lands east and northeast of the Golden Valley Wilderness that have been determined to have wilderness character. The unit includes the southern half of the Spangler Hills Open Area, the Summit Hills, and contiguous lands west of the Golden Valley Wilderness and east of the Trona Road. The boundaries of unit **169** have not changed at all. This unit comprises the northern half of the Spangler Hills Open Area. (See attached map.)

#### **Description of Current Conditions**

**Land ownership:** BLM (~35,000 and 18,200 acres); private inholdings (~1,280 acres, all within unit 170-4).

**Location:** San Bernardino County, approximately 10 miles southeast of Ridgecrest and 20 miles southwest of Trona.

**Topography:** Variable, with elevations ranging from 2,200' to over 3,500.'

**Vegetation features:** Creosote scrub desert.

**Major human uses/activities:** RV camping and off-road vehicle (primarily dirtbike) staging and riding. A small amount of prospecting, rockhounding, and bouldering.

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

**NO.** All of unit 169 and most of unit 170-4 are located within the Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Area. This is an open vehicle play area where vehicles are free to travel off-route and cross-country. Outside Limited Use lands adjacent to the Open Area, specifically, the Summit Hills and contiguous lands west of the Golden Valley Wilderness, are treated as if they were parts of the Spangler Hills Open Area. Users here make no distinctions.

Historically, the Summit Hills provided the most challenging competition “C” routes used in enduro events. Enduro races are no longer permitted outside of the Open Area; but the challenging “C” routes endure and are used both casually and for non-competitive dual sport events. The Summit Hills are riddled with many other vehicle tracks as well. BLM has expended little effort in trying to secure compliance with a designated route system here. Few routes are signed open and fewer routes are signed closed. Signs routinely disappear and/or are damaged before they can be replaced. Frankly, this area will never be successfully restored as a Limited Use area without a hard vehicle closure. There would have to be a period during which no vehicles were permitted inside of the area until it is successfully restored. And, the area would have to have some kind of fence or hard vehicle barrier constructed around its perimeter to effectively enforce such an interim closure. At this point, it’s probably not worth the effort. The land is badly degraded and should be incorporated into the Spangler Hills Open Area.

The Limited Use lands immediately south of the Spangler Hills Open Area and west of the Golden Valley Wilderness, between the wilderness and the Trona Road, are also badly degraded, becoming more so with time, as more users spill into the area from the Spanglers. The chief problem here is the expansion of the RV camping areas and the off-road vehicle use associated with those areas. In 2007, I observed the largest of these camping areas grow in one weekend from a site accommodating up to ten vehicles, to one accommodating more than 35 vehicles! Since then, BLM has made attempts to define the acceptable limits of new disturbance in these camping areas, using rocks and “camping boundary” signs, as well as restoration, where users have exceeded acceptable limits. These efforts are helping with RV camping disturbance per se, but have not stopped users from driving off-route out of these campsites in multiple directions, like spokes in a wheel. Again, users do not make a distinction here between the Spangler Hills Open Area and the adjacent Limited Use areas, and they probably won’t make the distinction unless some additional camping restrictions are put in place, i.e., camping in designated areas only, with limits on the number of vehicles per campsite. This area is worth salvaging, not only because of its proximity to wilderness along an unfenced boundary, but also because it is the only wedge of non-wilderness land between the Spangler Hills Open Area and the Desert Tortoise Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA) that can be used to slow people down and prepare them for modifying their behavior in the DWMA.

**(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude and/or primitive and unconfined recreation.**

**NO.** Most of the area, especially the Limited Use lands that are close to RV camping and off-road vehicle staging areas are intensively used and ridden by dirt bikers and other off-road vehicle users. Large numbers of off-road vehicle users descend on these areas on weekends during the cool weather off-road vehicle season. They camp in large groups, with typically as many as 10-30 RVs per campsite. They often ride

in large groups as well, with a lead vehicle leading a long string of vehicles trailing behind.

Off-road vehicles are noisy and their dust plumes can be visible for miles. The topography is variable and the Spangler Hills Open Area is huge and can absorb many more visitors than either of the two Limited Use areas. Still, even within the vastness of the Spanglers themselves, a visitor can expect to be disturbed by more than one vehicle per hour, especially during peak daylight hours from 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

**(4) Supplemental values**

N/A. Supplemental values have not been evaluated for these areas.