Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Unit Name and Number: **WIU #CDCA 158 (South Sierras)**

Summary

Results of Analysis:

1. Does the area meet the size requirement?
   No. For WIU #CDCA sub-units: 158-5, 158-6, 158-7, 158-8, 158-9, 158-10, 158-11, 158-12, and 158-13.

   Yes. For WIU #CDCA sub-units: 158-1, 158-2, 158-3, and 158-4.

2. Do the areas that meet the size requirement appear to be natural?
   Yes.

3. Do the areas that meet the size requirement offer outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation?
   Yes.

4. Do the areas that meet the size requirement have supplemental values?
   Yes.

Conclusion

Sub-units WIU #CDCA 158-5, 158-6, 158-7, 158-8, 158-9, 158-10, 158-11, 158-12, and 158-13 do not have wilderness characteristics.

Sub-units WIU #CDCA 158-1, 158-2, 158-3, and 158-4 have wilderness characteristics.

Prepared by:

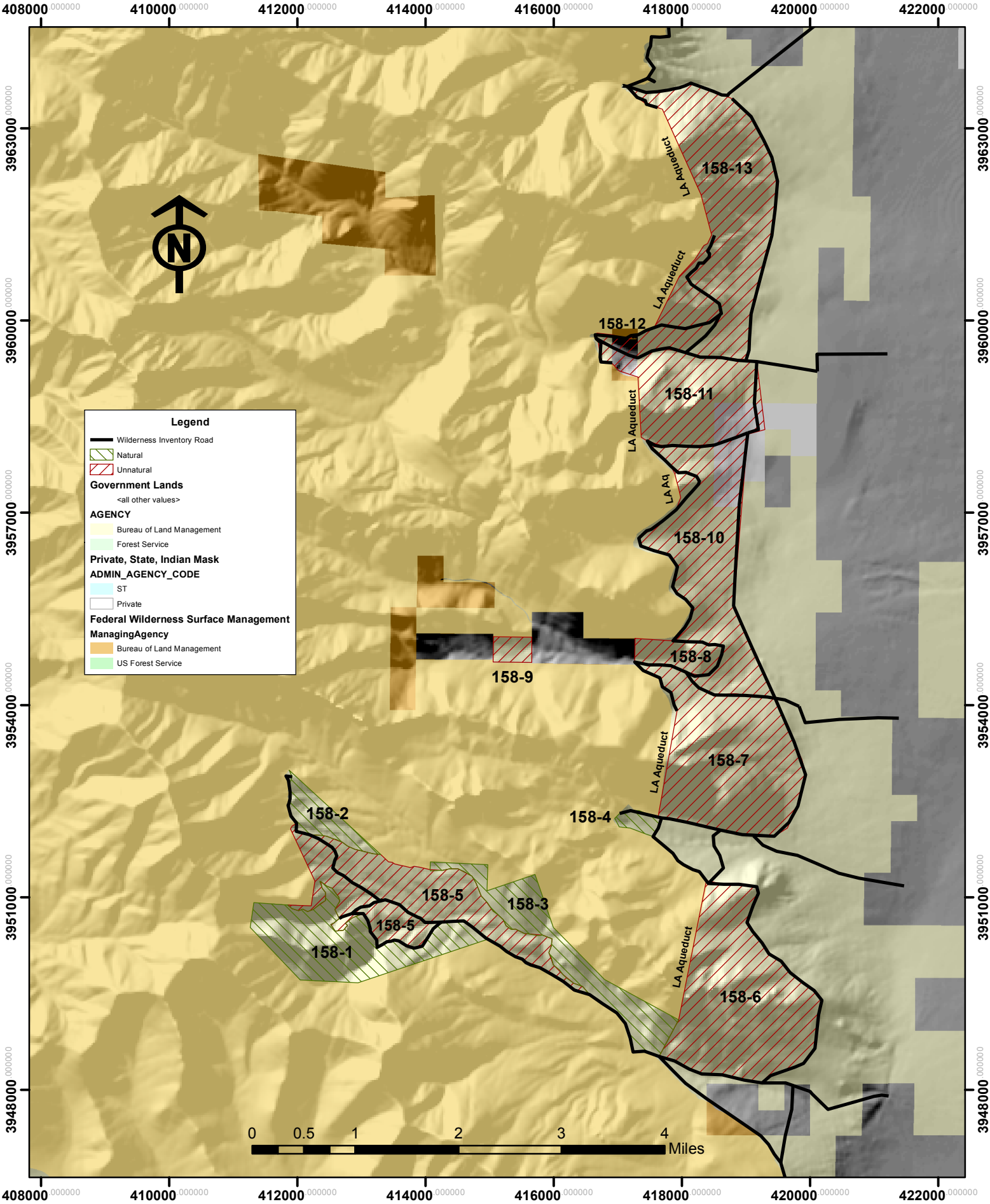
Team Member Marty Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator, BLM Ridgecrest FO
Date: 2015-08-05

Approved by:

5/27/2015

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.



Overview Map Eligible & Ineligible WIU Units #158
May 2015

Year 2015 Inventory Unit Number/Name WIU #CDCA 158 (South Sierras)

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 158 (South Sierras)

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 158 (Owens Pk./South Sierras)	53,000-plus acres estimated from stated boundaries of the original unit	Y	Y	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-1 (Indian Wells Cyn.)	Y – 612.5 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y

Unit#/ Name	Size (acres)	Natural Condition ? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-2 (Indian Wells Cyn.)	Y – 154.5 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-3 (Indian Wells Cyn.)	Y – 467.3 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-4 (Short Cyn.)	Y – 45.2 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	Y	Y/N	Y	Y
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-5 (Indian Wells Cyn.)	N-859.6 Non-contiguous acres	N	N/A	N/A	N/A`
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-6 (Between Indian Wells and Short Cyns.)	N-1,172 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-7 (Between Short & Grapevine Cyns.)	N-1,078.5 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-8 (Mouth Grapevine Cyn.)	N-141.7 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-9 (Upper Grapevine Cyn.)	Y – 58.6 Contiguous to Existing Wilderness	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-10 (Between Grapevine & Sand Cyns.)	N- 992.2 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-11 (South of Sand Cyn.)	N-671.8 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Unit#/ Name	Size (acres)	Natural Condition ? Y/N	Outstanding Solitude? Y/N	Outstanding Primitive & Unconfined Recreation? Y/N	Supplemental Values? Y/N
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-12 (Sand Cyn.)	N-128.8 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015 Findings WIU #CDCA 158-13 (Between Sand & NoName Cyns.)	N-1,235.3 Non-contiguous acres	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

The original 1979 WIU #CDCA 158 was quite large, extending 16 miles from north to south. The northern boundary was the Nine-Mile Canyon Road; the eastern boundary, the Los Angeles Aqueduct maintenance road; the southern boundary, Highway 178; and the western boundary, the California Desert Conservation Area boundary.

The 1979 analysis and decision were that with a few exceptions all of the unit met wilderness criteria. The majority of the area was classified as "undeveloped land that has retained its primeval character." The two notable exceptions were a portion of the Sand Canyon road and the Indian Wells Canyon road and its branches. These roads were excluded from what BLM eventually managed as a WSA due to their maintained character. The report noted that many of the branch roads in Indian Wells Canyon were associated with active mining sites. However, these sites and their developments were "predominantly screened by the varied topography" in the canyon. Most if not all of them were determined to be "substantially unnoticeable."

Outstanding opportunities for solitude or for primitive and unconfined recreation were found throughout the area. The diverse terrain, with its high, winding canyons and dense pinyon pine forest, provided ample screening between visitors. The topography and vegetation supported a wide range of primitive recreational opportunites and allowed unconfined movement in support of those activities. It was noted that the Pacific Crest Trail also passed through the area.

In 1990, the BLM recommended 40% of the area (or 26,285 acres out of 53,330 total acres considered) suitable for wilderness. The wilderness recommendations were confined to the high country and excluded all approaches that contained primitive ways or past traces of mining activity. The partial wilderness recommendation was based upon the following: The recommended area possessed excellent wilderness values and high scenic quality. The area would be easy to manage and would not displace traditional users. The non-recommended areas possessed poorer quality wilderness values. They contained human intrusions that detracted from naturalness. These areas were used for OHV recreation and had less manageable wilderness boundaries.

In 1994, the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) designated virtually all of the original study area (approximately 45,712 acres out of 53,330 acres or approximately 85% of Ridgecrest's original unit) wilderness. The 73,796-acre Owens Peak Wilderness Area is comprised of 45,712 acres from the Ridgecrest Field Office Area and 28,084 acres from the Bakersfield Field Office Area.

This 2015 inventory report takes a second look at the 7,618 acres within the original unit that were not designated as wilderness in 1994. The report finds that 83% or 6,338.5 acres split up among 9 sub-units, do not have wilderness character. Eight of these units are not contiguous to wilderness. They are further subdivided by wilderness inventory roads. And, in the case of WIU #CDCA-5, also by a number of well-delineated motor vehicle campsites and by a large clean-up, depression-era mining site (centered around the Seibert Cabin) that detract from the unit's overall naturalness, separating it from the adjacent unit. All of these units are too small to meet the minimum size requirement (of 5,000 acres) for stand alone eligible units.

WIU #CDCA 158-9 (Upper Grapevine Canyon) meets the size requirement, but not the natural condition requirement. It is contiguous to wilderness on two sides. However, it is sandwiched between two heavily-developed private parcels on its other sides. It also contains the main access road used in the canyon to travel from one private parcel to the other. Under these circumstances, it is not thought to contain sufficient naturalness.

The report finds that 1,279.5 acres (or 17% of all acres inventoried), split up among 4 sub-units that are contiguous to wilderness, have wilderness character.

FORM 2

Documentation Of Current Wilderness Inventory Conditions

Unit Numbers/Names **WIU #CDCA 158 (South Sierras)**

(1) Sufficient size

Yes. For WIU #CDCA 158 sub-units: 158-1, 158-2, 158-3, and 158-4.

Acreage:

612.5, 154.5, 467.3, and 45.2 respectively, as calculated by the wilderness specialist in GIS in 2015.

Boundary revision: Boundaries have been redrawn to reflect 1994 wilderness designations in the area. Boundaries have also been redrawn to exclude all ROWs, including those attached to the Los Angeles Aqueduct where the aqueduct tunnels underground. Boundaries also exclude all private property found within the area.

Boundaries:

158-1: The eastern and northern boundaries follow wilderness inventory roads SE164 & SE175 to the Seibert Cabin site (excluding the developments there on both sides of SE175) and then follow an unmaintained jeep trail identified as SE172 to the Owens Peak Wilderness boundary. The northwestern, western, and southern boundaries follow the wilderness boundary back around to SE164.

158-2: The southern boundary follows SE177 to its intersection with SE164. The western boundary follows SE164 to and around the eastern side of the Owens Peak trailhead parking loop to the wilderness boundary. The northeastern boundary follows the wilderness boundary back to SE177.

158-3: The eastern boundary is the LA Aqueduct ROW where the Aqueduct crosses the mouth of Indian Wells Canyon. The southern boundary follows wilderness inventory road SE164 to its intersection with an unmaintained jeep trail identified as SE177. The southern boundary continues along SE177 crossing the creek and continuing up the north side of the drainage to the wilderness boundary. The unit boundary follows the wilderness boundary north, then east, then south, around a formerly private parcel that is now public land, before following the wilderness boundary back to the LA Aqueduct ROW.

158-4: The southern boundary follows the wilderness boundary along an unmaintained jeep trail (an extension of SE143) to a dry fall with a campsite at its base. The western boundary follows the wilderness boundary around this dry fall

and the western edge of the large wash to the southern edge of the upper Short Canyon trailhead/parking lot at the terminus of SE139. The northern boundary follows the edge of the parking lot and SE139 back to its intersection with a wilderness inventory connecting road between SE139 and SE143. The eastern boundary follows this connecting road back to SE143.

Description of Current Conditions

Land ownership: BLM (612.5, 154.5, 467.3, and 45.2 contiguous acres respectively); private inholdings (0 acres).

Location: Approximately 15 miles northwest of Ridgecrest, CA, within Ts25&26S, R37&38E.

Topography: The units are located within Indian Wells Canyon and Short Canyon in the Eastern Sierra Nevada mountains, outside of Ridgecrest, CA. The units in Indian Wells Canyon (WIUs #CDCA 158-1, 158-2, & 158-3) start at the mouth of the canyon above the LA Aqueduct and follow along the outside perimeter of the principal roads and jeep trails in the canyon. The terrain flanking these roads and jeep trails is quite steep, encompassing most of the foot hills and vertical mountainsides of the canyon that were left out of wilderness in 1994. Elevations climb from 3400' to 3800' at the mouth of the canyon, from 4,000' to 5200' in mid-canyon, and from 5,000 to 5,900' near the top of the canyon. These hillsides and mountainsides are spectacular. They are studded with several large granite boulder outcrops and spires.

The unit in Short Canyon (WIU #CDCA 158-4) is located at the terminus of the large sandy wash leading up to the first dry fall in the canyon, immediately below the parking lot and trailhead to upper Short Canyon. It is framed by a series of large granite outcrops that provide good partial screening from the parking lot area.

Vegetation features: Vegetation in Indian Wells Canyon changes with proximity to springs/streams, elevation, and slope aspect. The vegetation ranges from cresote scrub desert, to willow/cottonwood riparian, to sagebrush scrub/Joshua tree woodland, to pinyon, live oak, and gray pine forests at upper elevations, especially on north-facing slopes.

The vegetation in the unit in Short Canyon is confined mostly to rabbitbrush and other prominent wash species, flanked by more typical creosote scrub desert/Joshua tree woodland species on the wash banks.

Major human uses/activities: Hiking, horseback riding, backpacking, and climbing. Car camping at the base of the dry falls, below the upper Short Canyon parking lot and trailhead.

(2) Natural condition

Yes. All of the more developed, disturbed areas within the original WIU #CDCA 158 have been excluded from these units by subdivision. In fact, the eligible sub-units identified in this inventory report have been managed as roadless areas for quite some time, both as a result of the Owens Peak Closure, a prescription in the original 1980 California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, and by subsequent plan amendment, establishing the Short Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

With two small, discrete exceptions within unit WIU #CDCA 158-3 (a pull-out able to accommodate horse trailers and an established campsite), both of which could be easily excluded from the unit, and two small exceptions within WIU#CDCA 158-5, a small pullout before the camp site at the terminus of the SE143 jeep trail, as well as the unmaintained jeep trail itself, there are *no established camp sites or open vehicle use routes, let alone, open designated vehicle routes*, within these eligible units. Additional "ground transportation linear features" that may show on some maps are closed and have been restored for many years. This has occurred either naturally, as a result of erosion, wash-outs, or disuse, or purposefully, as a result of previous actions taken in support of non-motorized recreation (i.e., in the vicinity of the Seibert Cabin) and restoration to preserve visual values and stop wilderness trespass. For example, the loop that still shows up on some maps west of SE164 before the SE164/SE175 intersection, is barely visible and has been rehabbing well on its own for nearly 20 years (per the Owens Peak Closure). The hill climb at the bottom of Indian Wells Canyon has also been closed and restored, most recently with a long wing fence and several rock check dams, for about as long. Similarly the Y at the top of Indian Wells Canyon leading to another hill climb culminating in wilderness has been closed and fenced off. It is currently undergoing restoration as authorized by a more recent environmental assessment aimed at stopping wilderness trespass. A second user-created connector between the wash camp site and upper Short Canyon parking lot (which I believe has now been taken off all GTLF maps) was one of the very first, original SCA restoration sites dating back to the period between 1999-2001.

The disturbances at the Seibert Cabin (a depression-era mine site) are nearly all confined to the north side of SE175, outside of any of the eligible units. This heavily vandalized and developed site is located at the base of some steep hills, and is partially obscured by the riparian vegetation from the creek running beside it. The site was partially cleaned up and modified with good intentions in the years following wilderness designation by volunteers who "adopted" it with the approval of the mine claimant. They embarked on an ambitious project to keep the cabin open for visitor use, to interpret some of the remaining structures and large mining equipment left on-site, to expand picnic and camping opportunities, and to turn most of the jeep trails leaving the site into non-motorized foot/stock trails, particularly where these trails accessed the Pacific Crest Trail or entered wilderness. Unfortunately, while most of the trails have remained closed to vehicles, the site itself has been abused and vandalized in more recent times. It is now in need of being cleaned-up again, properly stabilized, and interpreted.

In general, the lands within the eligible sub-units are indistinguishable from adjacent wilderness. They are a part of the same landforms, comprising part of the same hills, the same mountainsides found inside wilderness. They are just as pristine, just as undeveloped, just as rugged, steep, and severe. They are in fact natural extensions of the wilderness area.

(3) Outstanding opportunities for solitude

Yes. The intervening topography, the deep, winding drainages, steep hills, and large, rock outcrops within these units, provide excellent screening between visitors. Screening is also available in the tall, dense vegetation found in riparian areas, and throughout the Joshua tree woodlands and pine forests. Opportunities for solitude diminish in the burn areas along the most frequently traveled and maintained dirt roads. However, these areas are located in the middle of Indian Wells Canyon, outside of the peripheral eligible units.

Elsewhere in the canyon, even on the most exposed hillsides and mountainsides, the long distances and extreme gradations of scale help maintain opportunities for solitude. Often when visitors appear, they will appear as moving specks on the landscape, dwarfed by the enormity of the rock outcrops and spires, and steep mountainsides towering above them.

(4) Outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation

Yes. Primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities begin at road's end and are fascilitated and extended by non-motorized trails, whether they be historic foot and stock trails, or closed vehicle routes. There are many such trails on the periphery of the maintained roads in Indian Wells Canyon. Many old vehicle routes have been closed within the eligible units short of the wilderness boundary, sometimes as a result of their brevity with respect to the wilderness boundary, or because of poor, eroding, and unsafe conditions, or simply because they lack sufficient room to park or turnaround at the wilderness boundary itself. These closed vehicle routes now provide additional points of entry and in conjunction with the closed vehicle networks and established stock and foot trails inside wilderness, provide many more opportunities to hike, ride horseback, backpack, climb, or to hunt up to as well as across and beyond the wilderness boundary.

(5) Supplemental values

Yes.

The unit at the end of the Short Canyon wash falls within the Short Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This ACEC was established to "interpret, protect, and enhance natural resources" in the Short Canyon watershed, with a particular emphasis on protecting "the large numbers of plant species, many of which are unusual for the area and/or are BLM-sensitive species." (Short Canyon ACEC Management Plan, CA-06-ACEC-81, 1990)

Vegetation is highly diverse throughout this portion of the Southern Sierras. Three major floristic provinces occur here: the Desert, the California, and the Great Basin. Three Jepson subregions occur here as well: the Mojave Desert, the Southern Sierra Nevada foothills, and the

Southern High Sierra Nevada. The area is renowned for its spring wildflower displays. Some of the special status plants that occur in these areas include: Charlotte's phacelia (*Phacelia nashiana*), Mojave tarplant (*Deinandra (Hemizonia) mohavensis*), Gilman's goldenbush (*Ericameria gilmanii*), and Latimer's woodland-gilia (*Saltugilia latimeri*). Other plant species of interest include: Pygmy poppy (*Canbya candida*) and Solitary blazing star (*Mentzelia eremophila).*

Water occurs within or immediately alongside at least two of the eligible units. These areas contain seeps, springs, and intermittent streams with riparian vegetation. In the California Desert, riparian areas are categorized as Unusual Plant Assemblages (UPAs). UPAs provide water, forage, and cover for wildlife.

Wildlife consists of a wide variety of bird and mammal species and known occurrences of large carnivores, including black bear, mountain lion, coyote, and bobcat. Important game species are also present, such as mule deer, chukar, mountain quail, and California quail. Large cottonwoods and cliffs provide nesting sites for raptors. Riparian areas provide essential habitat for both resident and migratory songbirds.

Several T&E and sensitive wildlife species also occur within the general area. The Mohave ground squirrel (MGS) (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*) occurs within elevations from 1800 to 5000 feet. The Southern Sierra is also within the northwest edge of the desert tortoise's range. The Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) has been documented at several locations at lower elevations. Suitable habitat for several special status bat species is present, and the pallid bat and Townsend's big-eared bat probably occur within the area. Burrowing owls have been observed at lower elevations. Golden eagles nest in most, if not all canyons. Other raptors, such as northern harriers, prairie falcons, coopers hawks, and red-tail hawks also nest in the canyons. The yellow-eared pocket mouse (*Perognathus xanthonotus*) has been documented in Sand Canyon, and probably occurs in most South Sierra canyons with moisture. This rodent is a BLM sensitive animal species.

The area is within the region that is ethnographically considered to be the territory of the Tubatulabal and Kawaiisu tribes. However, the area is believed to have been shared to some degree with their tribal neighbors to the northeast and east, specifically the Owens Valley Paiute, Panamint Shoshone, and possibly, the Chemehuevi. The occurrence of prehistoric and to a lesser extent, historic sites is high, with numerous documented locations. The prehistoric resources most frequently encountered include food processing milling stations, lithic flake scatters, midden deposits, and residential camps. Historic resources typically include mining sites and remains associated with ranching and livestock operations, as well as sites associated with the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct.