



Enjoy the View – Visual Resources Inventory Inventory Report

Mojave National Preserve

Natural Resource Report NPS/MOJA/NRR—2016/1322



ON THE COVER

Photograph of View of Ivanpah Valley from Morning Star Mine
Photograph courtesy of NPS

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Mojave National Preserve

Natural Resource Report NPS/MOJA/NRR–2016/1322

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Abstract

Each unit of the national park system has special visual characteristics that are often a central component to the unit's management and visitor experience. Mojave National Preserve (NP) offers visitors vast expanses of mostly undisturbed Mojave Desert but the seemingly barren landscape has a rich history of pre-historic and historic human use. The existing scenery is an important way to better understand the connection between natural and cultural resources and visualizing this connection is a critical part of the visitor experience. As part of the National Park Service's Call to Action #38, Enjoy the View, Mojave NP completed a visual resource inventory that focused on identifying key facts about the scenic views for a portion of the Preserve. The inventory was completed according to the methodology developed by the National Park Service (NPS) for assessing and protecting visual resources. The inventory system consists of both fieldwork associated with view description and scenic quality ratings, and an office-based process for assigning importance values to the views. Mojave NP selected six views for the initial visual resource inventory to inform internal view management objectives and help develop external view conservation goals. The results of the inventory identified that all the views except for one fell into the very high category of scenic inventory value.

Acknowledgments

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Keywords

Visual resources, scenic resources, scenery, viewsheds, scenic inventory, Mojave National Preserve

1. Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act identifies that the purpose of establishing the NPS: “...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” With this central mission, NPS has been entrusted with some of the most spectacular and historically significant landscapes throughout the country.

Each unit of the national park system has special visual characteristics that are often a central component of the unit’s management and visitor experience. Visitors typically rank scenic views as one of the top five reasons for visiting a park (Kulesza, 2013). Inspiring vistas can lift the human spirit, expand our sense of place, and provide connections to the natural world and our history as a country.

From a cultural and historical perspective, views are not just about the scenery, but an important way to better understand the connection between natural and cultural resources. At Mojave National Preserve the seemingly barren landscape has a rich history of pre-historic and historic human use and visualizing this connection as part of the landscape is a critical part of the visitor experience.

The NPS Director Jonathan B. Jarvis issued a 5-year “Call to Action” plan for moving toward its second century. The purpose of the Enjoy the View Call to Action item is to ensure that by protecting visual resources and air quality the NPS can actively preserve these stunning and historically significant views for future generations. Many of these views extend beyond park boundaries and can be affected by actions outside parks that impact air quality and adjoining land use. As part of NPS’s Call to Action #38, Enjoy the View, Mojave National Preserve completed a visual resource inventory for a portion of the preserve.

The specific objectives of the visual resources inventory were to:

1. Conduct visual resource inventory assessment that establish a baseline crucial for park planning and internal and external decisions that may impact scenic, cultural, and natural resources.
2. Identify, describe, and map scenic resources at Mojave NP.
3. Provide an understanding of the value of clean air and scenic views and inform collaboration efforts with a variety of stakeholders to protect them.

2. Methods

2.1 Visual Resource Inventory Overview

The visual resource inventory (VRI) focused on identifying key facts about the scenic views at Mojave National Preserve. The inventory was completed according to the inventory and evaluation methodology developed by NPS for assessing and protecting visual resources. The unit of inventory in the NPS VRI is “a view” consisting of the viewpoint, the viewed landscape, and potential viewers, i.e., park visitors. The inventory system consists of both fieldwork associated with view description and scenic quality ratings, and an office-based process for assigning importance values to the views. See Appendix 2 for more information on the methods.

For each view, the inventory fieldwork process included the collection of descriptive data, as well as a standardized assessment of scenic quality. Scenic quality assessments were conducted in the field on March 10-11, 2015. The process included photo documentation, written descriptive information about the viewpoint and viewed landscape, and the scenic quality rating for each view. Scenic quality ratings are determined by objective criteria and through group discussions resulting in a single scenic quality value for the view. The rating was based on scores from three scenic quality factors: landscape character integrity, vividness, and visual harmony. Scenic quality ratings fall into five classes: from A to E based on how high they score. Class A views have the highest scenic quality and class E the lowest.

The view importance rating identifies NPS and visitor values for the view and also identifies key descriptive information about the viewpoint and viewed landscape that helps inform the rating process. The importance evaluation of each viewpoint was conducted at Mojave National Preserve on March 12, 2015. Importance of a view involves assessments of the following factors: viewpoint importance, viewed landscape importance, and viewer concern. Each factor was assessed by a team of NPS staff and resulted in a single view importance rating for the view. View importance ratings fall into five classes: from 1 to 5 based on how high they score. Class 1 views have the highest view importance and class 5 the lowest.

The scenic quality and view importance ratings are combined to determine a scenic inventory value (SIV) for each view. The SIV is determined using a matrix that consolidates the 25 potential combinations of scenic quality and view importance into five values ranging from very low to very high (Figure 1). The SIV and all other data collected during the scenic quality and view importance evaluations are stored in a geospatial database.

Scenic Inventory Value Matrix						
		View Importance Rating				
		1	2	3	4	5
Scenic Quality	A	VH	VH	VH	H	M
	B	VH	VH	H	M	L
	C	H	H	M	L	L
	D	H	M	L	VL	VL
	E	M	L	VL	VL	VL

Figure 1- Scenic Inventory Value Matrix

2.2 Inventory Team

The scenic quality fieldwork for the visual resource inventory at Mojave National Preserve was conducted by an interdisciplinary team. Team members attended joint workshop at Joshua Tree National Park in February along with staff from Joshua Tree, Death Valley National Park and Parashant National Monument. The workshop included two days of training provided by staff from the NPS Air Resources Division that provided guidance on the NPS visual inventory process and a field training exercise. Staff and volunteers from all the parks then initiated the field inventory process at Joshua Tree. ARD staff returned to assist Mojave NP with the field inventory as a separate effort following the work at Joshua Tree. The Mojave field work included some of the same park management, staff and volunteers from the workshop.

2.3 View Selection

Mojave National Preserve selected six views for the initial visual resource inventory to inform internal view management objectives and external view conservation goals (Table 1, Figure 2). The selection process was based on the following general criteria:

- Critical inventory priorities include views that are highly valued as part of the visitor experience or where there an immediate threat to the view from a proposed project or land management or development decisions.
- Moderate inventory priorities included views that are not likely subject to changes in the view in the near future but where eventual land management or development could affect the view.
- Low inventory priorities included views that are currently somewhat protected from visual intrusions, and if needed, could be included in the inventory at a later time.

Table 1. Views Inventoried at Mojave NP

#	View Name	UTM 11 E Coordinate	UTM 11 N Coordinate	View Bearings - Left/Right	Approximate Width of View
1	Morning Star Mine	637703	3913758	36E/162S	126°
2	Ten Mile Tank	640497	3908423	12N/180S	168°
3	Eagle Well	667706.2	3890727.5	286W/98E	180°
4	Ivanpah Road	661511	3903816	22N/125E	103°
5	Keystone	657322	3904711	358N/102E	104°
6	Connie's Place	653635	3912147	325N/132S	167°

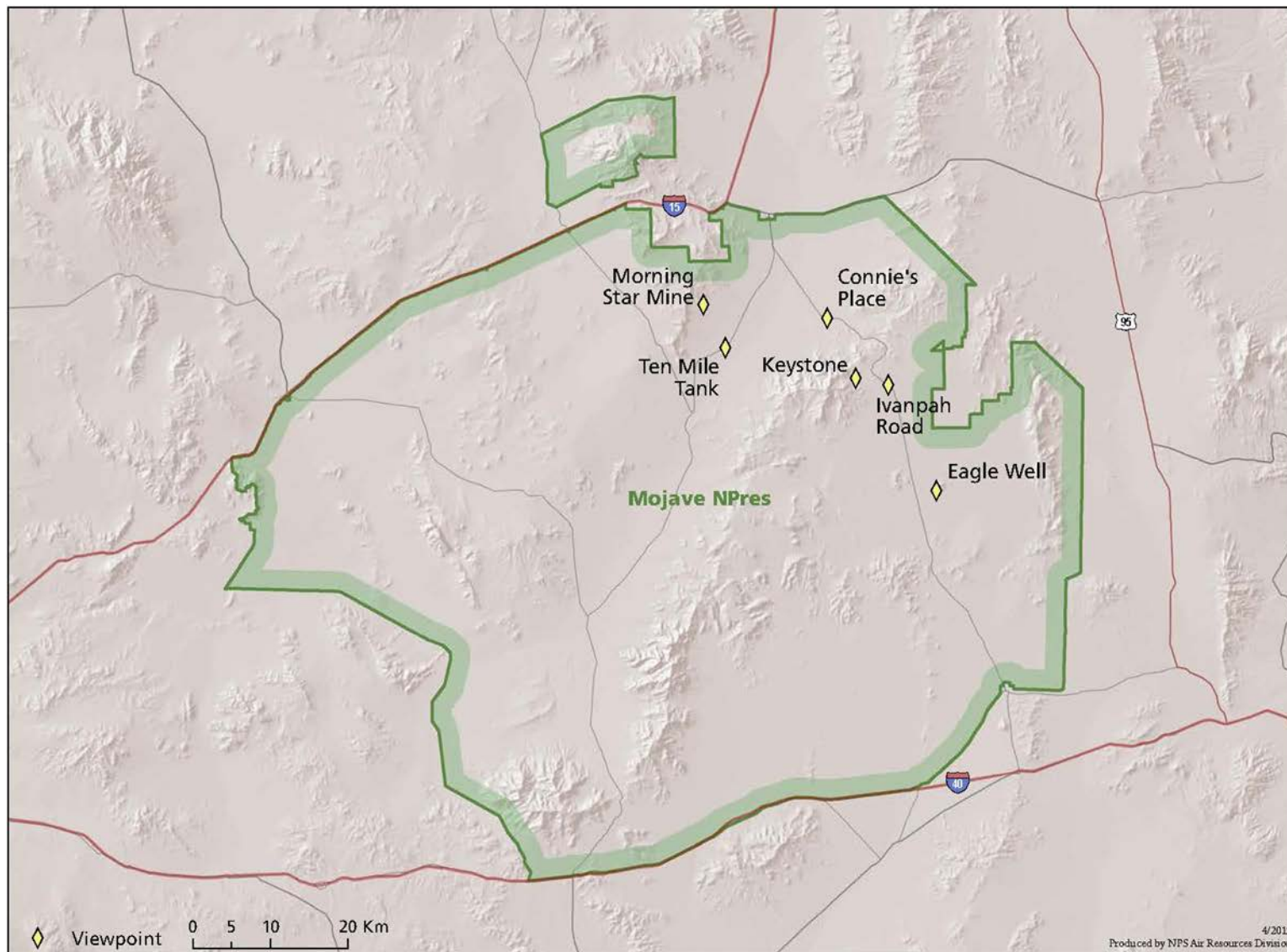


Figure 2. Mojave NP Inventory Viewpoints.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1 Landscape Character at Mojave National Preserve

The landforms, geology, vegetation, and other features of the regional location of an NPS unit help define the visual characteristics of the landscape. Mojave National Preserve is located in south eastern California in the Mojave Basin and Range Eco-region (EPA). The landscape is composed of broad, gently sloping basins and rugged mountain ranges scattered across the region. Vegetation typically consists on creosotebush, white bursage, Joshua-tree and other yuccas, and blackbrush at lower elevations with sagebrush, juniper, and singleleaf pinyon occurring at higher elevations.

Landscape character is based on the physical objects and patterns in the landscape and represents a distinct, recognizable visual composition that makes one landscape different from another. At Mojave the overall landscape is natural appearing and in most areas there are generally few modern visual intrusions that are out of context with the landscape setting. Development that does occur is typically widely scattered and often is rural residential or related to historic and/or ongoing ranching and mining activities. Several railroads and transmission lines cross the preserve and are visual reminders of the connections of the Mojave Desert to the modern world. The mostly undisturbed landscape helps visitors understand the vastness of the Mojave Desert and the hearty spirit the early settlers to the area needed to survive in the harsh environment.

3.2 Scenic Quality, Importance Ratings

At most of the viewpoint locations inventoried, visitor attention is not typically directed to the finer details in the immediate foreground, but rather to the surrounding landscape and distant views that help visitors experience the vast scale and undisturbed nature of the Mojave Desert. The scenic quality ratings for most of the views fall into Class A, and the view importance rating ranged from 2 to 4 (Table 2). An overview of the scenic quality and view importance ratings at each location is below. Viewshed maps and panoramic photos for each view are in Appendix 2.

Table 2. Scenic Quality, View Importance Ratings and Scenic Inventory Values

#	View Name	Scenic Quality Rating	View Importance Rating	Scenic Inventory Value
1	Morning Star Mine	A	3	Very High
2	Ten Mile Tank	A	3	Very High
3	Eagle Well	A	2	Very High
4	Ivanpah Road	A	3	Very High
5	Keystone	A	2	Very High
6	Connie's Place	C	4	Low

3.2.1 Morning Star Mine – Viewpoint #1

This viewpoint offers a sweeping view of the Ivanpah Valley and a nearly pristine Mojave Desert landscape (Figure 3). There are few visual intrusions and the view received a scenic quality rating of A (40.5). Multiple mountain ranges provide a backdrop to the sloping valley floor providing strong forms and lines that add interest the landscape. Colors are mostly muted but compatible with the desert environment.



Figure 3. View across Ivanpah Valley from Morning Star Mine

Though mining is a strong component of the Mojave NP interpretive themes, the Morning Star Mine is closed and this location is not publicized by NPS. The viewpoint generally receives low levels of visitation and received a view importance rating of 3 (26.5). Morning Star Mine does show up on maps and in other publications about mining in the Mojave Desert. Since the focus of visitors to this location would primarily be on mining it is likely that only a moderate number of visitors would be sensitive to potential changes in the view across Ivanpah Valley because they are not necessarily looking for pristine landscapes.

3.2.2 Ten Mile Tank – Viewpoint #2

The view from Ten Mile Tank also offers a sweeping view of Ivanpah Valley except from the perspective of being on the valley floor (Figure 4). The view received a scenic quality rating of A (40.5), and as at Morning Star Mine there are few visual intrusions. There is a historic corral at the viewpoint and several transmission towers are visible east of the viewpoint between Ten Mile tank

and the New York Mountains. The historic corral at the viewpoint is a dominant feature in the immediate foreground but adds interest to the views. The natural tendency for viewers tends to be to take in the view to the ranging from the northwest to the northeast and the towers do not seem to be a major distraction.



Figure 4. View across Ivanpah Valley from Ten Mile Tank

Ranching in the Mojave Desert is also an important part of the Preserve's interpretive themes. Ranching features including tanks, corrals etc. are publicized in NPS materials as well as outside media. Ten Mile Tank's view importance rating is 3 (28.0). Visitation at this this location is expected to be higher than at Morning Star mine, but overall level of interpretation and viewer sensitivity is fairly similar.

3.2.3. Eagle Well

The view at Eagle well provides another valley floor perspective of the Mojave Desert (Figure 5). Distant mountains, healthy, diverse vegetation and the rock art formations of the Lanfair Buttes combine to create a scene with bold forms and colors that received a scenic quality rating of A (43.0). The view varies from open across the Lanfair valley to tightly enclosed, with the rock art formations in the immediate foreground. The view across the open valley creates a visual experience where visitors can view the petroglyphs up close in a setting that likely has not changed dramatically since the time period when the rock art was made.



Figure 5. View from Eagle Rock

Eagle Well is mentioned in outside literature and web sites but NPS does not publicize the site because Mojave NP as at many other parks, does not direct visitors to archeological sites that are not sufficiently staffed and protected. The view importance rating at Eagle well was *B* (34) because it does receive a moderate level of visitation because of the proximity to the Mojave Road and aforementioned outside publicity. The location is also within the Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company cultural landscape. It is anticipated that most visitors would be somewhat sensitive to changes that could substantially change the visual setting and diminish the visitor experience. The site and petroglyphs at Eagle Well are interpreted for visitors at the Kelso Station visitor center.

3.2.4. Ivanpah Road

The viewpoint on Ivanpah Road represents a typical view for travelers along this segment of the road (Figure 6). The Castle Mine is a prominent visual intrusion in an otherwise undisturbed landscape that received a scenic quality rating of *A* (40.5). The elements of a Mojave Desert landscape from the broad open valley, the bold forms of the Castle Peaks and Castle Mountains, and a wide variety of vegetation combine to create high quality views in all directions.

Ivanpah Road is one of the primary routes through Mojave NP and gets a relatively high amount of traffic. While many travelers are likely going through the preserve it is expected that most would still be somewhat sensitive to potential changes in the landscape that could diminish the visual experience and the view received a view importance rating of 3 (29). The mostly pristine valley and the Castle



Figure 6. View toward the Castle Mountains from Ivanpah Road

Peaks – which get a fair amount of publicity as a landmark – provide a positive scenic experience for through travelers and visitors alike. This segment of the road is also within the Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company cultural landscape, further enhancing its value as a visual experience because of the historic setting.

3.2.5. Keystone

The Keystone viewpoint is an elevated location in the New York Mountains overlooking the northern reaches of Lanfair Valley (Figure 7). The Castle Mountains can be seen in the distance but some of the view of the valley is blocked by small hills in the foreground. The Castle Mine is somewhat of an intrusion from this location but the distance diminishes its visibility and impact on the view and the view received a scenic quality rating of A (42.5). There are multiple focal points and a variety of colors that add interest to the view. The noted hill that blocks some of the view of the valley distracts from the view somewhat because the viewer wants to know what's behind it.

Keystone is located along the Keystone Canyon hiking corridor that receives a fair amount of publicity in NPS and outside media. This view received a view importance rating of 2 (31.0) due the level of visitors, the fact that many spend an extended period of time at the location and because it also is within the Rock Spring Land and Cattle Company cultural landscape. The location is also a popular campsite, especially in hunting season, and often has repeat visitors. Though it gets a fair amount of use the site generally receives a low level of management so that it retains its undeveloped



Figure 7. View toward the Castle Mountains from Keystone

characteristics. Most visitors are expected to be sensitive to potential changes in the landscape that could diminish the visual setting because they are expecting a back country experience for their recreation activities.

3.2.6. *Connie's Place*

The view from Connie's place also has many of the Mojave Desert elements but lacks the diversity of vegetation in the view as compared to other viewpoints. There are also multiple intrusions in the view including the Ivanpah Solar facility and the corrals associated with former activities at the viewpoint and the view received a scenic quality rating of *C* (27) (Figure 8). While the corrals in the foreground tend to be the biggest distraction the viewer's eye is also drawn to the Ivanpah solar facility. Its unique visual character – tall towers topped with a very bright light, surrounded by the shimmering fields of mirrors that almost appear to be lakes – can make visitors curious about the facility and even move to a location to get a better view of it. Views to the south and east toward the New York Mountains are generally undisturbed, natural views of the Mojave Desert.



Figure 8. View across Ivanpah Valley from Connie's Place

Connie's Place, in its current condition of run down structures and extensive amount of debris, does not attract many visitors and the ones who do stop may just be curious about the mess. There are no interpretive facilities at the site. Though it is identified as Ivanpah 3 in the interpretive materials at the Kelso Station visitor center it is not a major visitor destination and received a view importance rating of 4 (18). The viewers who do stop are not likely to be sensitive to additional changes in the landscape that could disturb the view because of the amount and condition of intrusions visible from the site.

3.3 Scenic Inventory Values

Except for Connie's Place, the scenic inventory values for all the views inventoried as derived from Figure 1, the Scenic Inventory Value Matrix, fall into the very high category (Table 2). The views receiving a scenic quality rating of A featured many of the identifying elements of the Mojave Desert, and were mostly free from human-made intrusions. Even though the viewpoints were not the most highly visited the locations the views represent important interpretive themes at Mojave NP. Several locations are also interpreted remotely at the Kelso Depot Visitor Center.

4. Conclusions

Mojave National Preserve offers visitors expansive views that retain the natural character of the Mojave Desert as well as the cultural values that connect visitors to the long history of human use in this harsh landscape. The views selected for this inventory are primarily located in the eastern portion of the Preserve to assess the scenic qualities and visitor values in an area that may be affected by land management outside the preserve. The views in this area of the Preserve generally have very high scenic inventory values through the combination of scenic quality and importance values.

Connie's Place, a potential viewing location for some visitors was determined to have moderate scenic quality. Visual intrusions including the Ivanpah Solar facility and historic structures in the immediate vicinity of the viewpoint dominate the view to the northeast while the portion of the view to the southeast is mostly undisturbed desert. Though historically known as the community of Ivanpah 3, the debris and run down structures at the viewpoint make this location of little value to most visitors.

The remaining views inventoried are mostly undisturbed expansive views of Mojave Desert valleys and mountain ranges. All were determined to have very high scenic quality and importance ratings were moderate or high. Views such as Ivanpah Valley from Morning Star Mine or Ten Mile Tank have generally minor visual intrusions that do not dominate the view along with historic structures or features that connect with the interpretive themes of the Preserve. Keystone is located along a hiking corridor and is a popular camping location for hunters and the natural setting that is virtually free of disturbances is an important part of the visitor experience. Eagle Well provides visitors a landscape setting that retains the historic character of the Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company cultural landscape, while at the same time allowing them to connect with the prehistoric culture in the same landscape. The views along Ivanpah Road, represented by Viewpoint 4, offer travelers expansive views with a mix of vegetation, landforms and colors that represent the classic Mojave Desert landscape. The Castle Mine, visible in the Castle Mountain Range is a relatively large disturbed area in the mountains and exposes colors and forms that can attract a viewer's attention, but not substantially diminish the driving and scenic view experience of the road.

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Appendix A: Scenic Quality and View Importance Rating Methods

Scenic Quality

Assessing scenic quality involves field-based assessments of: Landscape Character Integrity, Vividness and Visual Harmony.

Each component is assessed in the field while viewing the landscape from the viewpoint, and the assessments requires that the group evaluate three factors for each component. All factors are equally weighted.

Landscape Character Integrity

Scenic integrity indicates the degree of intactness and wholeness of the landscape character identified in the landscape description section. The highest scenic integrity ratings are given to those landscapes which have little or no deviation from the character valued for its aesthetic appeal.

The rating process assumes that in order to have the highest degree of integrity, i.e. a high quality example of the identified landscape character the view must:

- Have most or all of the key elements of landscape character present;
- Have elements that are of high quality and in the appropriate condition for the landscape character, i.e. well built, well cared for, or, for historic/rustic landscapes, appropriately worn/aged; and
- Be relatively free of elements that are inconsistent with the landscape character.

Vividness

Vividness is the degree to which landscape elements are distinctive or striking enough to make a view memorable. The rating assumes that to have a high degree of vividness, the view must:

- Contain one or more dominant visual features or focal points;
- Contain striking forms and/or lines; and
- Contain striking colors, textures, or visible motion.

Visual Harmony

Visual harmony is the extent to which there is a pleasing array of visual elements in a landscape, usually as a result of a sense of visual order, compatibility, and completeness between and among the land forms, water forms, vegetation, or built elements visible in the landscape. The approach assumes that a high degree of visual harmony is achieved when:

- There is a clearly recognizable structure, pattern, or order to the spatial relationships of the landscape elements;
- The landscape elements display pleasing scale relationships; and
- The landscape displays pleasing color relationships.

Scenic quality ratings fall into five classes from A to E. Class A views have the highest scenic quality and Class E the lowest.

Importance Values

The view importance rating identifies NPS and visitor values for the viewpoint, the viewed landscape and the viewers. The view importance rating is an office-based exercise. Each component is assessed by a team of NPS staff. In the same manner as Scenic Quality, the process requires that the group evaluate three factors for each component and all factors are equally weighted.

Viewpoint Importance

Viewpoint importance assesses the extent to which the viewpoint is publicized and managed for visitors. The rating system assumes that to have the highest importance rating the viewpoint must:

- Be extensively publicized, especially for its scenic views, in NPS or external communications and media (e.g. hiking guides, web sites, movies).
- Have facilities that have been added or are planned for the viewpoint area to enhance the visitor experience and;
- Have a high level of interpretive services that contribute to the visitors' enjoyment of scenic, historical, cultural scientific or other NPS values of the unit.

Viewed Landscape Importance

Viewed landscape importance assesses the extent to which the elements in the viewed landscape are publicized and used for interpretation. The assessment also evaluates how important special designations such as Wilderness or historic sites are within the view. The viewed rating system assumes that to have the highest level of importance the viewed landscape must:

- Be extensively publicized, especially for its scenic views, in NPS or in external communications or media (e.g. hiking guides, web sites).
- Consist of all or mostly specially designated areas, or nationally/regionally significant scenic, historic, cultural, or scientific features or landmarks (e.g. wilderness areas, cultural landscapes).
- Strongly illustrate the NPS unit's scenic character or important interpretive themes and/or be connected to the unit's goal for visitor experience

Viewer Concern

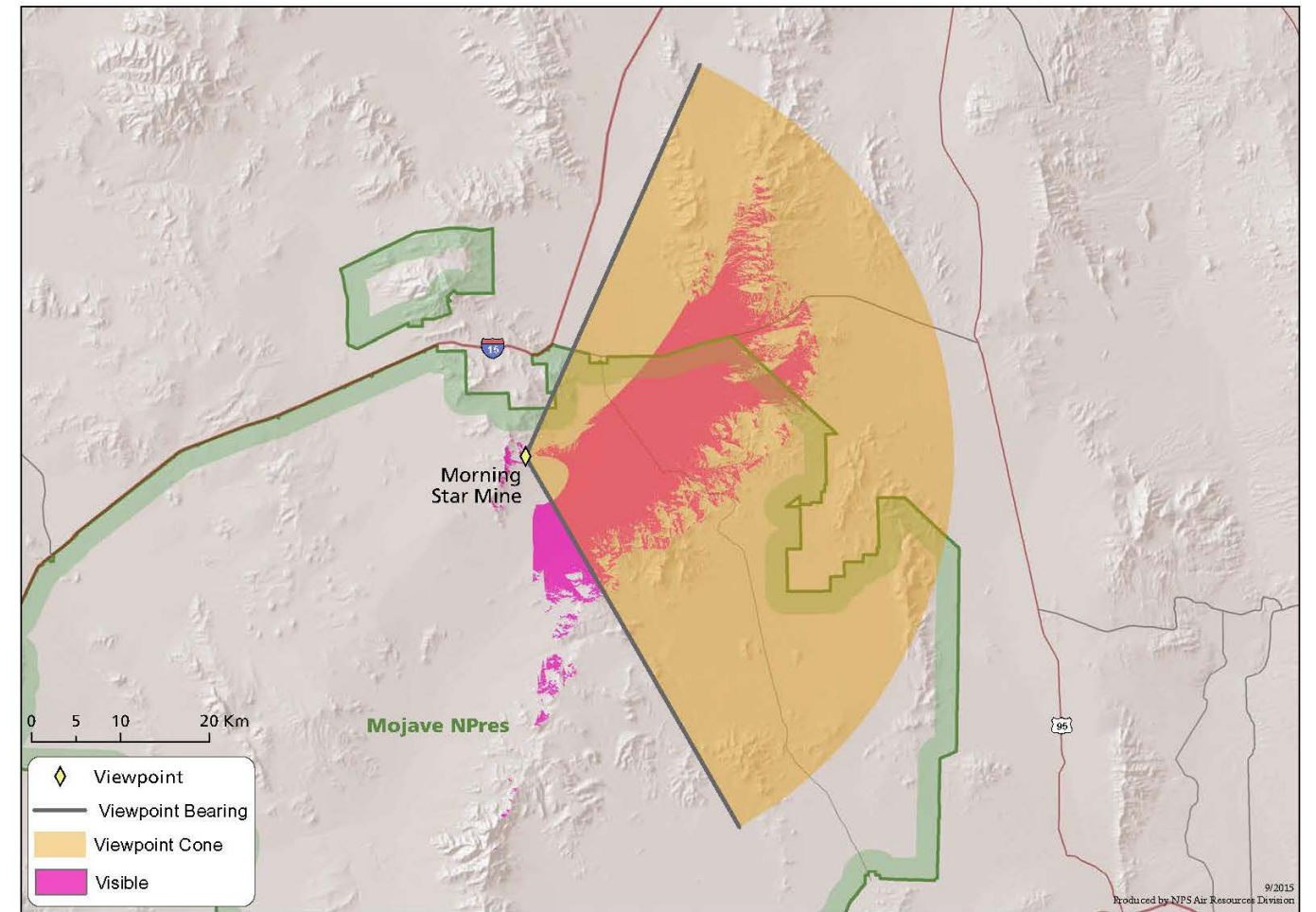
The evaluation of viewer concern relies primarily on the knowledge and professional judgment of NPS staff, and the rating system assumes that to have the highest level of viewer concern:

- The viewpoint must have a high level of visitation in relation to other viewpoints in the park;
- Viewers generally spend an extended period of time at the viewpoint; and
- Most visitors would be unusually sensitive to potential changes in a view because they are seeking views of natural character or historic significance.

View importance ratings fall into five classes from 1 to 5. Class 1 views have the highest view importance and Class 5 the lowest.

Appendix B: Viewshed Maps and View Panoramas

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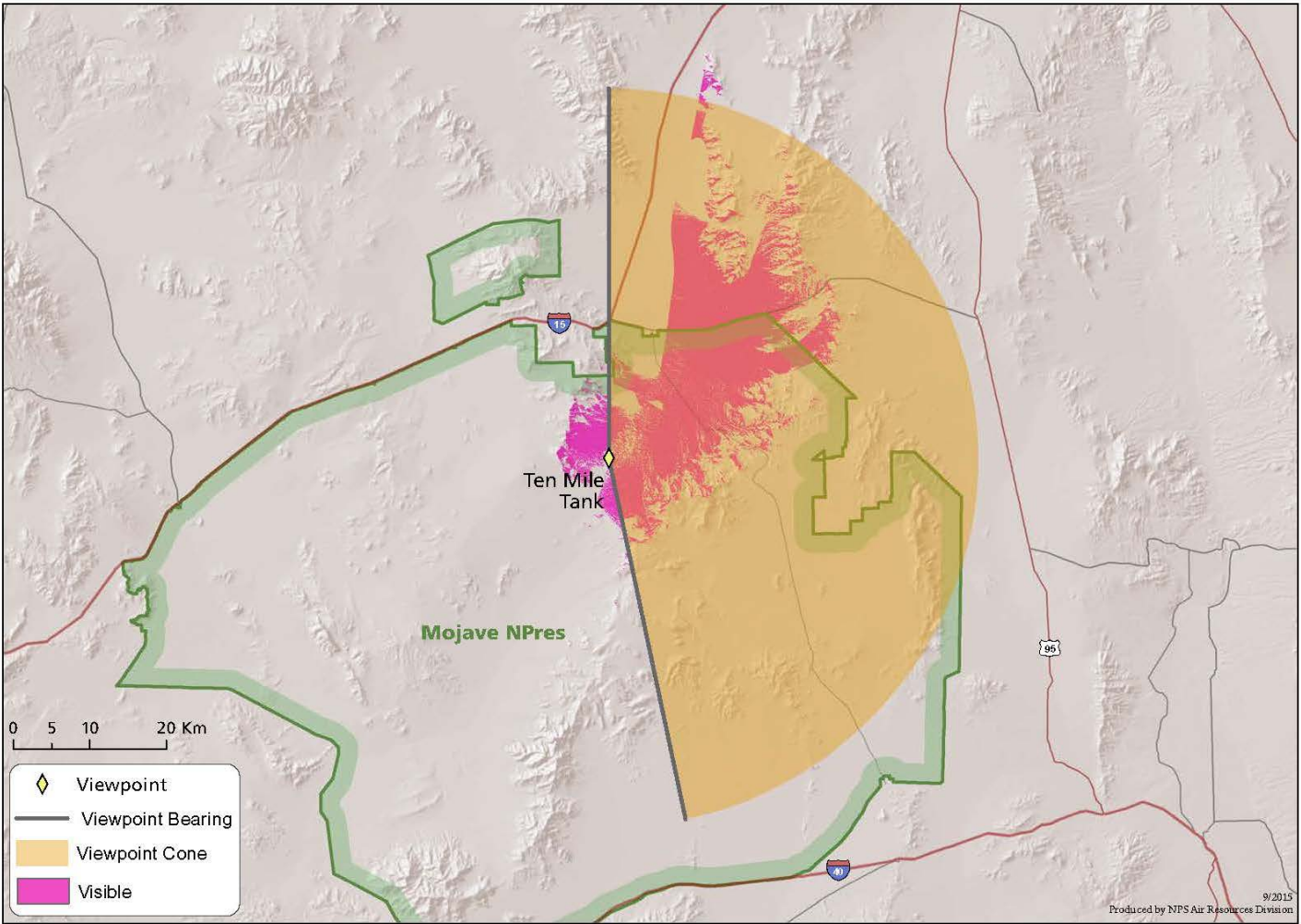


Viewshed Analysis from Morning Star Mine Viewpoint



Morning Star Mine; View Direction: East; Approximate Width of View: 126 degrees

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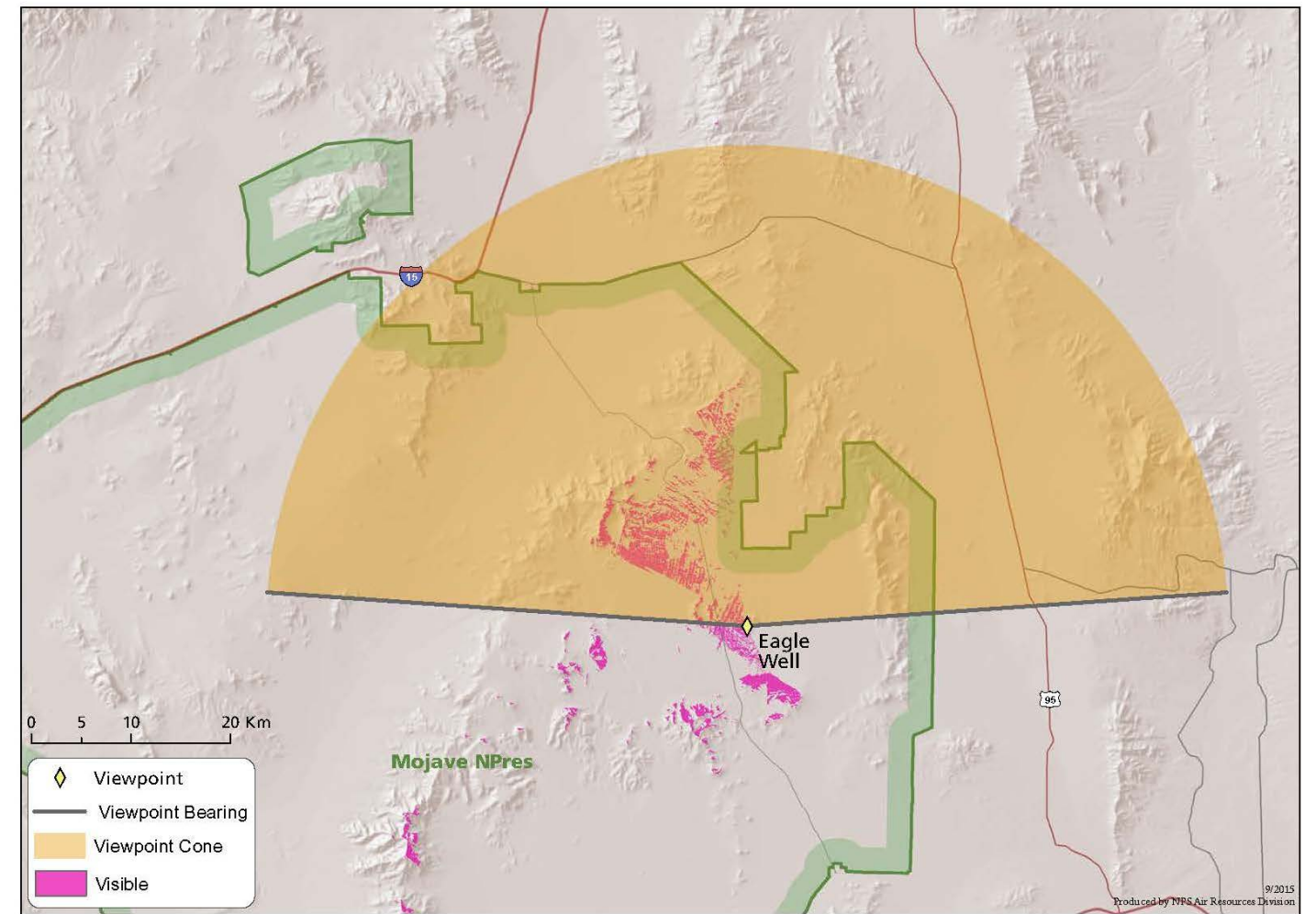


Viewshed Analysis from Ten Mile Tank Viewpoint



Ten Mile Tank; View Direction: East; Approximate Width of View: 168 degrees

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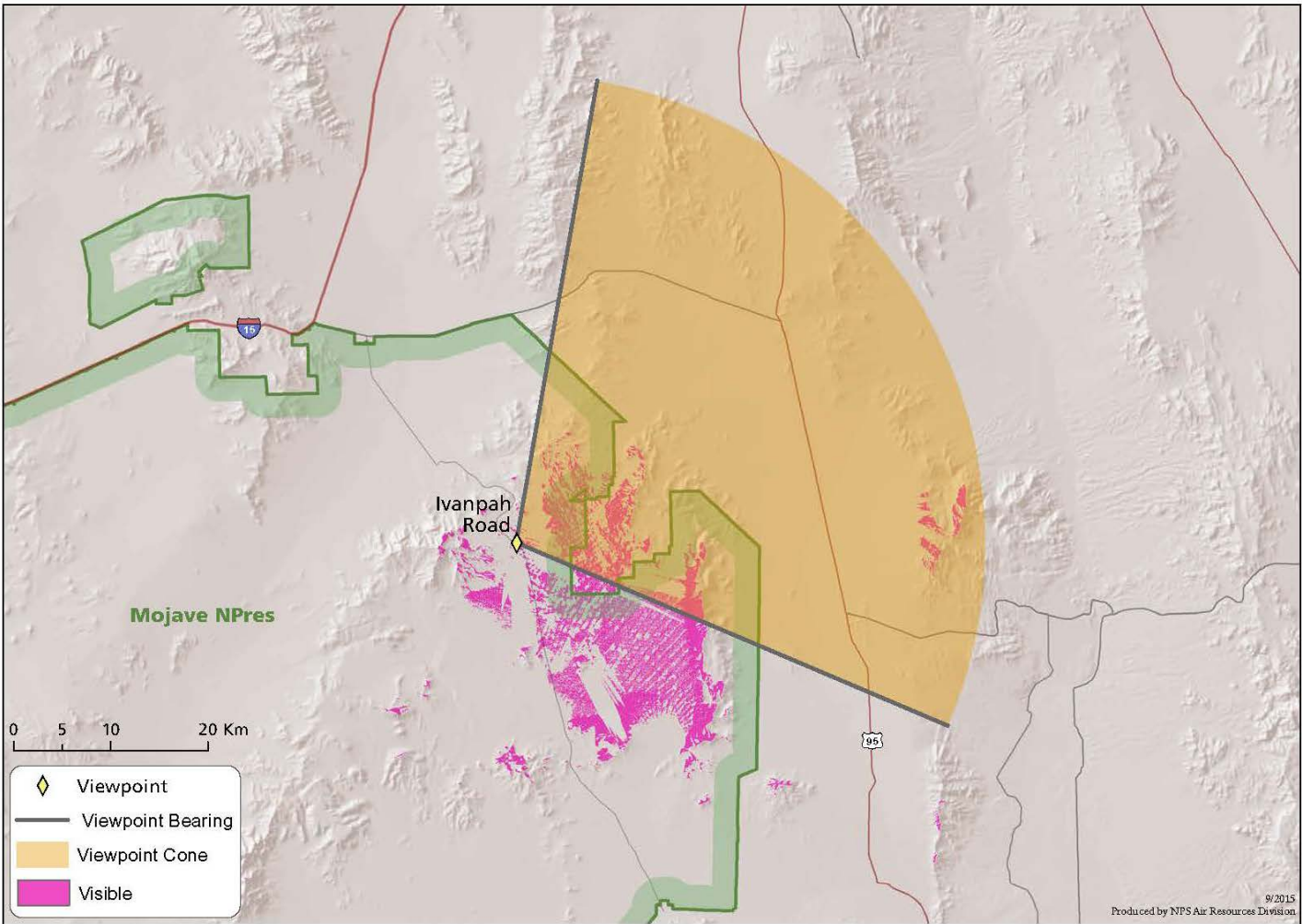


Viewshed Analysis from Eagle Well Viewpoint



Eagle Well; View Direction: North; Approximate Width of View: 172 degrees

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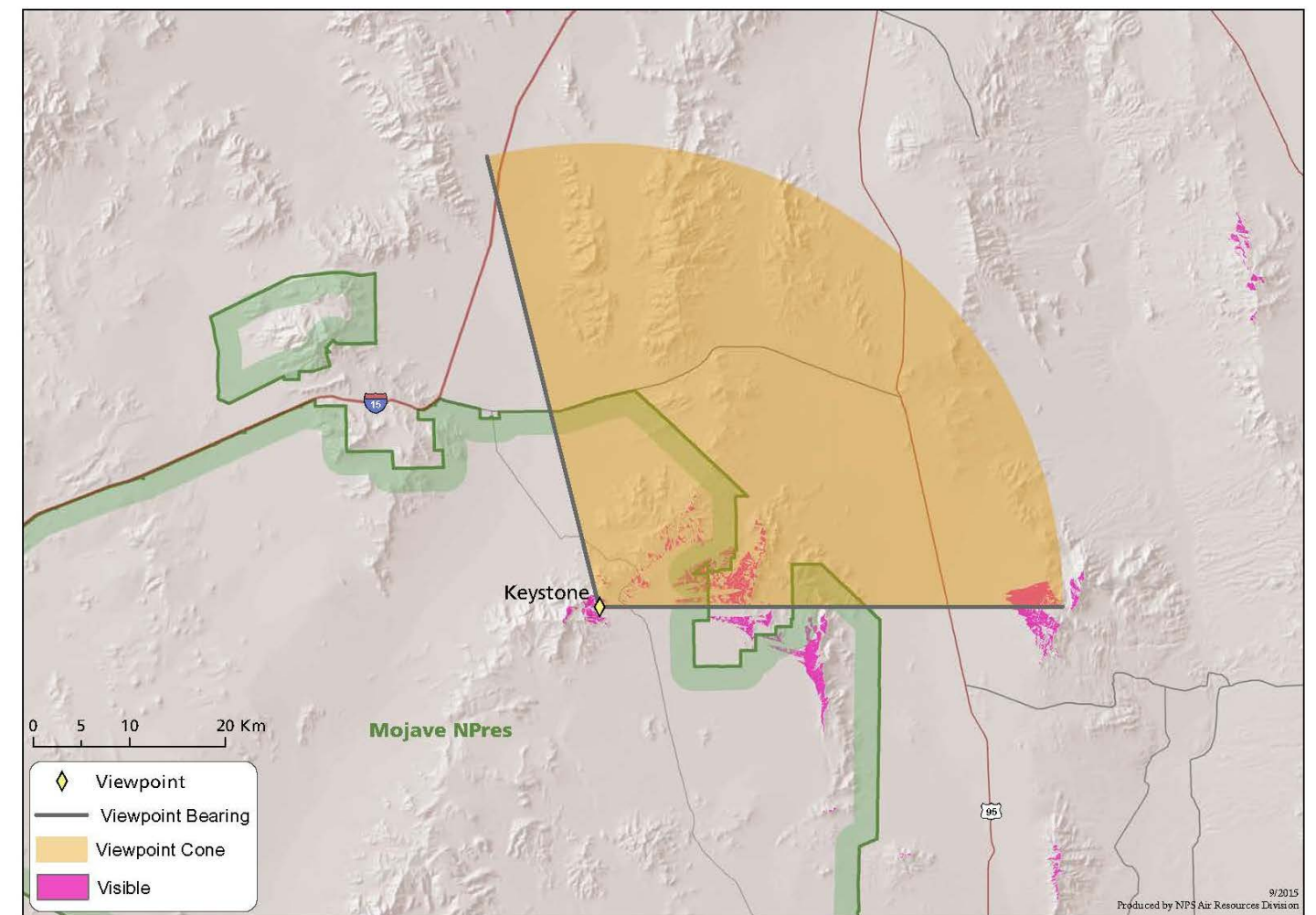


Viewshed Analysis from Ivanpah Road Viewpoint



Ivanpah Road; View Direction: Northeast; Approximate Width of View: 103 degrees

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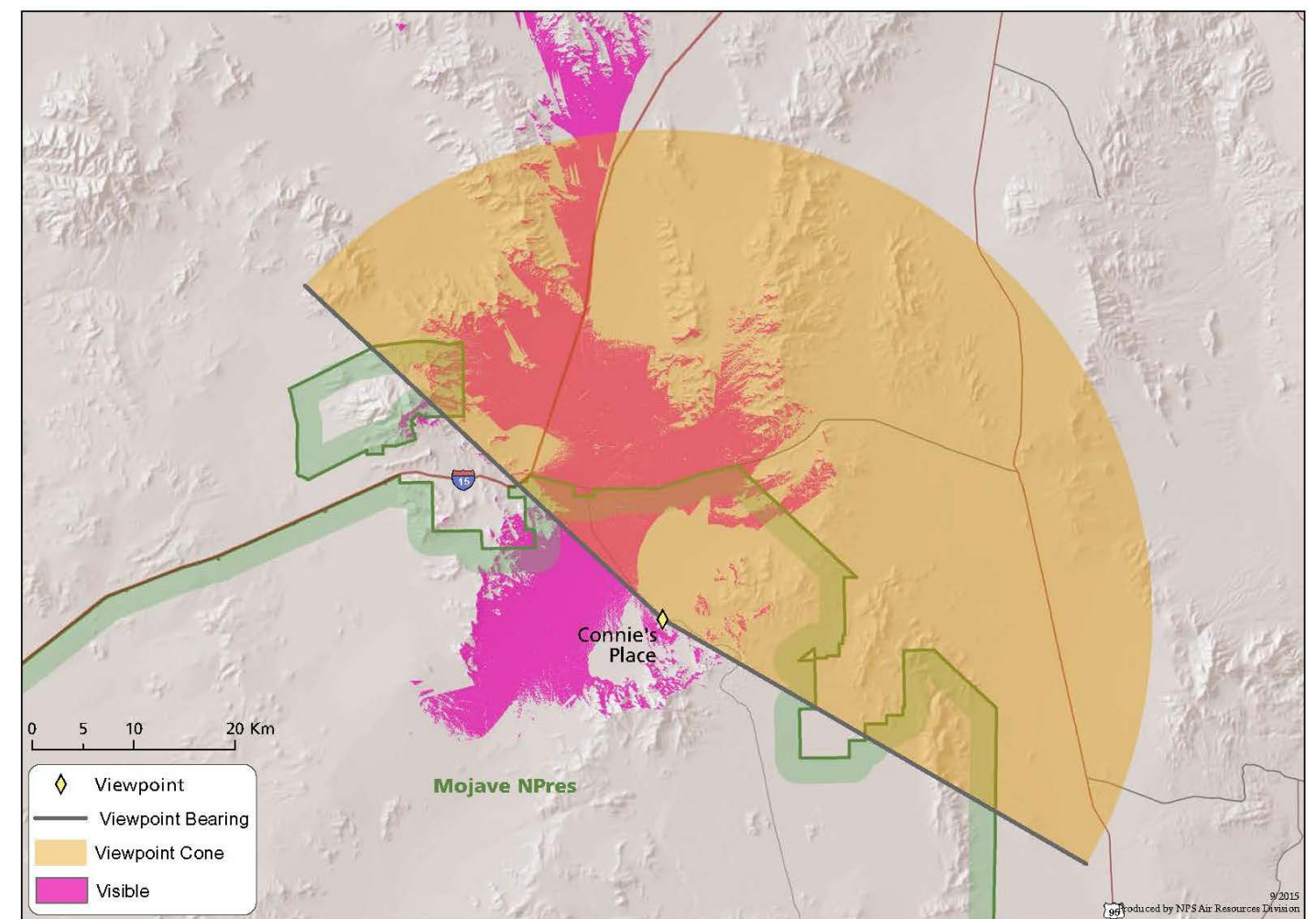


Viewshed Analysis from Keystone Viewpoint



Keystone; View Direction: Northeast; Approximate Width of View: 104 degrees

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Viewshed Analysis from Connie's Place Viewpoint



Connie's Place; View Direction: Northeast; Approximate Width of View: 167 degrees

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