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### Dumont Dunes crowds causing heap of problems for Tecopa

BLM trying to educate recreationists on importance of truly packing out trash – not just dumping it in nearby towns

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Off-road enthusiasts enjoying the Dumont Dunes have been well-trained when it comes to the “pack it in and pack it out” concept concerning their trash. Now they are getting a little reminder that they need to pack their trash all the way back home, instead of stopping and dumping it in Tecopa.

When it became apparent earlier this winter that Tecopa’s limited number of private dumpsters was getting swamped with trash, the Bureau of Land Management moved “aggressively and fast” to staunch the flow of drive-by garbage dumping, said Roxie Trost, the Barstow-based BLM field manager for Dumont Dunes. The BLM paid for additional dumpsters in Tecopa, paid to have those dumpsters emptied and is providing flyers concerning trash and Tecopa to Dumont Dunes users, she said.

Those moves, however, were seen as short-term solutions. The long-term solution, she said, is getting people to take their trash home and not dump it anywhere along the route. Putting dumpsters or other trash collection stations in the Dumont Dunes is not currently being considered, Trost said.

The BLM will keep working on the Dumont Dunes trash situation, she added, so Inyo County doesn’t feel the financial burden of having to pick up after visitors to the dunes.

The Dumont Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area is located about 18 miles south of Tecopa, along State Route 127, in San Bernardino County. The 10,500-acre site is managed by the BLM and designated for OHV use, and is getting plenty, with about 130,000 visitors a season (from October to May). Trost estimated that about half those visitors come from the Las Vegas area, thus travel through Southeast Inyo to and from the dunes.

This winter, those Las Vegas-bound travelers have been packing their garbage out of the Dumont Dunes, then stopping in Tecopa and other towns along the way home to deposit their trash, said Chuck Hamilton, director of Inyo County’s Integrated Waste Management Program. “Most of the time, the waste exceeded the capacity of the bins in Tecopa,” he noted.

That situation is what prompted a call to Trost, and the BLM’s decision to install one new dumpster in Tecopa and add another one during holiday weekends, when use soars at Dumont Dunes, said Trost. Signs were also posted informing travelers that they shouldn’t be dumping in Tecopa.

In addition to the dumpsters and signs, Trost and other BLM staffers were stationed at the dumpsters to query potential dumpers about their deposits, and inform them Tecopa wasn't the place to unload a weekend's worth of garbage.

That two-pronged approach to holiday weekends started during Thanksgiving and continued through New Year's Day, and seems to have made a difference. "We've already seen a decrease" in the number of people and amount of trash ending up in the Tecopa dumpsters, said Trost.

There's a good side and a downside to the dumpster plan, noted Second District Supervisor Susan Cash. Everyone should be "grateful the public is using the dumpsters and not trashing the land," she said. But a wave of trash washing up in Inyo County from visitors would impose "a huge burden on a small county," she added.

The sight of "neat little bundles of trash along U.S. 395" is evidence, however, that not every traveler is so thoughtful about garbage disposal, pointed out Fourth District Supervisor Jim Bilyeu.

Trost stressed the BLM would be working to take care of the trash problem, and would monitor how the extra dumpsters and educational efforts worked this season. Since the Dumont Dunes site is operated under the federal "Recreational Fee Program," the BLM generates about \$300,000 a year in fees that can be used to maintain, staff and police the area, Trost noted. The dumpsters in Tecopa and the cost of hauling that trash comes from the fees, she added. If Inyo County feels it is being impacted by visitors to Dumont Dunes, the county can "call me anytime" to discuss any costs or impacts "the BLM needs to cover," said Trost.

"That sounds reasonable," said Cash, who suggested the county and BLM meet in May to review the situation and address any concerns.

Currently, Trost said the BLM has no dumpsters in the Dumont Dunes, and would prefer not to put dumpsters at the site. In several instances, the BLM has had "bad luck with dumpsters" at several recreation areas, said Trost, and often finds a site will be "cleaner when no dumpsters" are available, forcing people to pack their trash out.

She cited several instances where on-site dumpsters created problems similar to those at a regular dump. The Glamis Dunes, managed by the BLM El Centro Field Office, offers trash collection on-site, Trost noted, but that move created a dumpster-full of problems. Those problems included people not quite getting their trash in the dumpsters, leaving mountains of garbage on the ground, locals and visitors rummaging through the trash looking for recyclables, animals rummaging through the trash looking for a meal and people using the BLM dumpsters for regular trash to avoid dump fees.

"We don't want to promote a dumpster-dependent society," she said.

Instead, the BLM's approach at Dumont Dunes is "an education effort" to get users to follow all the way through with the "pack it in, pack it out" concept by taking their trash back home, she said, instead of dumping it at the site or in nearby towns.

The dunes provide a good setting for the educational approach, she noted, since there is only one entrance to the site. Thus, when visitors pay the \$20 fee, they can also be “educated” either verbally or with the informational flier that addresses the trash situation and strongly suggests a solution.

The flier states rather boldly, “Do Not Dump Your Trash in Tecopa or Any Place Else,” and explains the BLM’s stance on not providing trash collection at the Dumont Dunes.

The flyer concludes, “Dispose of it at home! We recognize that this is a burden, but the best solution for everyone is for each of us to Pack It In and Pack It Out.”

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