

Field Manager's Report
Needles Field Office
California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting
Continental Labor Hall, Desert Empire Fairgrounds
Ridgecrest, June 24, 2006

InterConnect Towers Blind Hills Communication Site

BLM Action: InterConnect Towers (ICT) has proposed to complete construction of the Blind Hills communication site by accessing the project area from the Caltrans I-40 right-of-way, reclaim the Goldhammer Mine residential area, and reclaim trespass related impacts located on BLM administered lands, and utilize an existing road for post-construction access located on the Mojave National Preserve.

Approval of this amendment would require Caltrans' approval of a traffic control plan addressing this action's safety issues. The Mojave National Preserve would issue special use permits for ICT's support vehicles and communication site carriers requiring road access to the site across the National Park Service unit.

BLM issued the right-of-way for the Blind Hills site in April 2000. The Blind Hills site ROW includes an off-site mitigation measure requiring reclamation of the nearby abandoned Goldhammer Mine residential area. Reclamation of impacts resulting from trespass actions on three other ICT communication sites was completed in 2003.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM – public lands lead
NPS – park service unit lead
Caltrans – traffic control plan lead
CHP – traffic control enforcement

Status: An environmental assessment of ICT's proposed action is being jointly prepared by the Needles Field Office and the Mojave National Preserve.

Needles Unified School District

BLM Action: The Needles Unified School District has applied for a Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) lease to build a new elementary school on public lands at Big River across the Colorado River from Parker, Arizona. The school is presently located in old buildings owned by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) at Parker Dam, twenty-eight miles north of where the new school would be built. BOR has given the School District notice that they will need to move, as the buildings are scheduled to be demolished because of safety reasons.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM - public lands lead

California Department of Education – State lead
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Section 404 Permit lead

Status: A draft Initial Study (California Environmental Quality Act) /Environmental Assessment (National Environmental Policy Act) for the proposed school has been prepared. However, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is expected to assert jurisdiction and require the preparation of an alternatives analysis in support of their issuance of a Section 404 permit. Upon issuance, provisions of the Section 404 permit will be incorporated in the initial study/environmental assessment, completing the project's environmental review and facilitating a decision on the project.

Grazing Leases

BLM Action: An environmental assessment for the renewal, relinquishment, and cancellation of grazing leases in the NEMO and NECO planning areas has been completed.

Contact: Kim Allison, Rangeland Management Specialist

Agencies: BLM - lead

Status: Proposed Decisions were issued and protests were received. The Needles Field Office is working on clarifying analysis in the environmental assessment in preparation for additional public review.

Bonanza Spring Riparian Area Restoration and Primitive Camp Site

BLM Action: The Bonanza Springs riparian area is being revitalized through a series of projects to bring back native vegetation and incorporate low level recreation opportunities. Bonanza Spring is located in the southern Clipper Mountains.

Contact: Rodney Mouton, Resources Branch Chief
David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Agencies: BLM - lead

Status: The picnic units (tables and fire/BBQ rings), trail reroute, and roof on the Kiosk have been completed. The interpretative sign bases have been received and are scheduled to be placed along the trail when the signs arrive. The interpretative signs are in the procurement process.

Tecopa Pass Area Riparian Area Restoration and Recreation Management

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office proposes to restore Horse Thief Springs riparian area, protect the public's health and safety when occupying the site, and provide for visitor use of

the area. In addition to restoration of the riparian area, the project would include a wetland habitat observation area, primitive camp sites and a single vault toilet located away from the riparian area, and nature trails in Horse Thief Canyon leading to North Kingston Peak's relict white fir stands and mature Giant nolina. Tecopa Pass is located in the northern Kingston Range area.

In February 2005, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (LRWQCB) selected the Horse Thief Springs project for funding as an Environmental Protection Agency, Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP). The SEP is funded in association with a \$1 million settlement with Molycorp Inc. (in relation to its Mt. Pass facility violations of LRWQCB Board Orders). The Horse Thief Springs project was rated 1st among 13 qualifying SEPs and funded in the amount of \$178,500.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM - lead

Status: The project's environmental assessment will be completed in July 2006. A Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate disbursement of the funds from the LRWQCB to the Needles Field Office is in preparation.

Amboy Crater Recreational Area Enhancements

BLM Action: A Request for Proposals has been made available to qualified contractors for the construction of a wheel-chair accessible concrete trail to lead to an observation overlook, four shade structures, public safety enhancements, information kiosks and traffic control structures. Two benches and associated shade structures have been constructed by Needles Field Office personnel along the 1.2-mile crater trail. Twelve stainless steel interpretive signs have been designed by office staff and are on order through the BLM sign shop.

Contact: David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Agencies: BLM - lead

Status: The ADA walkway, overlook and shade cabañas construction project has been awarded and work is scheduled to start this fall when the temperatures in the area will allow for better working conditions.

Off Highway Vehicle Guidebook

BLM Action: An Off Highway Vehicle Guidebook will feature routes with the most unique travel experiences and the favorite itineraries of partner groups. Volunteer knowledge shared during workshops and interviews are essential to creating the Guidebook and will bring a wealth of information and experience to the manuscript. Needles Field Office is currently holding a series of public meetings and workshops with partner contributors to establish protocols for data collection about popular or challenging

routes, solicit and organize descriptions of “favorite” itineraries for half-day, one-day, or multi-day tours in the resource area. Volunteers and BLM staff have begun traveling selected routes and developing draft text and information.

Contact: David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Agencies: BLM – public lands lead

Status: Thirteen volunteers from partner groups, supported by Needles Field Office personnel, equipment and GIS technology have identified, and surveyed points of interest of 12 primary off-highway routes within the Needles Field Office for inclusion in the guidebook. The data being collected includes, mileage, GPS way points, route description, visual resources, descriptions of the points of discovery and interest, and trail soil conditions.

S.D. Big Game Water Source

BLM Action: The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) is proposing to construct a bighorn sheep artificial water source in the Sheephole Valley Wilderness.

Contact: Rodney Mouton, Resources Branch Chief
Alicia Rabas, Lead Wildlife Biologist

Agencies: BLM – public lands lead
CDFG – project proponent

Status: The Needles Field Office submitted an environmental assessment for public comment on March 21, 2006. The comment period ended on May 22, 2006 with nine comments received in favor of and two comments received in opposition to the proposal. The Needles Field Office is currently revising the environmental assessment to address the comments received.

The original Decision Record for this project was appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, and BLM requested a remand of the decision in November 2003.

Molycorp Inc. Waste Discharge Pipeline and Contamination Removal, and Fresh Water Pipeline Replacement

BLM Action: A temporary use permit would be issued to Molycorp to remove their waste discharge pipeline, replace their fresh water pipelines and remove radiological and hazardous material contamination associated with 59 pipeline releases having occurred between 1984 and 1995 (reported in 1998). Removal of eleven 1996 radiological/hazardous material pipeline releases was completed in 2001. Molycorp’s mine and processing facility are located at Mt. Pass and their now closed evaporation ponds are located on Ivanpah Dry Lake.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM – public lands lead
National Park Service (NPS) – park service unit lead
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) – threatened species lead
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board – water quality
California Department of Health Services, Radiologic Health Branch – radiological health,
Environmental Health Investigation Branch - health and exposure investigation
California Department of Fish and Game – streambed alteration and pollution of surface waters enforcement
California Department of Toxic Substances Control – hazardous wastes protection

Status: FWS issued a Biological Opinion (BO) for the project on June 5, 2006; Section 7 consultation on the project was initiated with FWS in February 2003. Provisions of the BO are now being incorporated in the environmental assessment, completing the Bureau's environmental review of the project. The Bureau's issuance of a decision record approving the project is anticipated in July 2006. The NPS will consider adoption of the Bureau's environmental assessment and issue a decision record for the project independently.

PENDING ACTIONS

CalTrans I-15 Joint Point of Entry

BLM Action: Caltrans is perfecting an application for a Joint Port of Entry (JPOE) between Mt. Pass and Primm, Nevada. The JPOE would include an Agricultural Inspection Facility and a Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Facility located on the north side of Interstate 15 between Nipton Road and Yates Well Road.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies BLM – lead
Caltrans – applicant; roads and traffic control
California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) - agricultural inspection facility
California Department of General Services (CDGS) – cooperating applicant for CDFA
California Highway Patrol (CHP) – commercial vehicle enforcement facility

Status: Caltrans is presently reconsidering the proposal as a phased project based on funding availability. Approval for the facility may be administered under a right-of-way, a Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease/patent, a land exchange or a land sale. The CDGS legal department is presently considering which mechanism best meets their requirements for constructing the agricultural inspection facility.