



**Field Office and Fire and Fuel Reports  
California Desert Advisory Council**

August 2021

## Barstow Field Office (BFO)



*Photo: Ord Mountain*

### *Archaeology and Cultural Resources*

#### **Calico Early Man Site**

**BLM Action:** The BLM proposes to remediate the remnant archaeological excavation and study features of the Calico Early Man Site as they pose a significant threat to on-site public safety. The method of remediation (e.g., installation of cupolas/air gates, backfilling, removal, etc.) for each of the features depends on both the historic significance of that feature and its potential threat to human health and safety. Once the public safety issues are remediated, the site would be re-opened to the public for self-guided tours.

**Status:** The release of the environmental assessment on July 2 began a 30-day comment period and substantive comments were due by August 2, 2021.

**BLM Contacts:** Jim Shearer, Archaeologist; Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager; and Katrina Symons, Field Manager.

#### **West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement**

**BLM Action:** The BLM continues to implement the 2015 Programmatic Agreement for the West Mojave Route Network Project.

**Status:** For FY21, implementation actions include completion of 1,549 acres of Class III

surveys; hosting a consulting party virtual meeting on March 17, 2021; scheduling a second consulting party meeting for September 15, 2021; preparing FY20 site documentation, evaluation, and report; development of the evaluation plan through a contractor; and requesting FY22 funding for Model Analysis and Class I Literature Review (required every 5-years).

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer, Archaeologist; Tiffany Arend, CDD Archaeologist; and Katrina Symons, Field Manager.

## *Lands and Realty*

### **Brightline West High-Speed Rail**

BLM Action: DesertXpress Enterprises, LLC dba Brightline West, proposes to construct and operate a high-speed passenger rail service between Victorville and Las Vegas, NV within the median of Interstate 15. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the lead federal agency, and the BLM is a cooperating agency.

Partner: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Status: The FRA has completed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reevaluation and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act consultation is ongoing. The proposed start of construction is 2022.

BLM is currently reviewing a right-of-way application and plan of development for two power inverter stations located in Barstow and Ivanpah on approximately six acres of BLM-administered land outside the I-15 corridor.

BLM Contacts: Joan Patrovsky, CDD-Project Manager and Katrina Symons, Field Manager.

## *Minerals & Mining*

### **Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)**

BLM Action: BLM secured funding in FY2021 to remediate abandoned mine lands (AML) in the Pinto Mountains southeast of Twentynine Palms.

Status: Approximately 18 AML features are in the process of environmental clearance in order to be remediated by constructing wildlife compatible gates, utilizing expandable foam, or backfilling with parent material.

BLM Contacts: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, and Sterling White, CDD Environmental Protection Specialist

## *Recreation*

### **Dumont Dunes Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area**

BLM Action: The BLM is working with the Federal Highway Administration on a project to improve the access roads to Dumont Dunes Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area. Improvements consist of paving the first 3.3 miles of the Dumont Dunes Access Road, replacing the weathered low water crossing, providing aggregate surfacing for the next half mile of Dumont Dunes Access Road that does not receive asphalt pavement, and paving the .1-mile entrance road to Little Dumont Dunes. The project is being funded through the Federal Lands Transportation Program.

Partners: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Status: BLM is currently reviewing FHWA's 95% engineering design. Anticipate implementation of the road improvement project in 2022.

BLM Contacts: David Kotlarski, Assistant Field Manager; Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager; and Katrina Symons, Field Manager

### **Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area**

BLM Action: The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the Marine Corps to utilize the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area (SUA) for two 30-day periods annually during which time the area would be closed to the public. The BLM manages the SUA for the remaining 10-months annually.

Partners: Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

Status: A joint pre- and post-use inspection of the SUA occurred for the military training that took place on April 30 to May 10, 2021, with no issues being identified.

The Marine Corps plan to utilize the SUA in calendar years 2021-2022 during the periods of October 15 to November 1, 2021, April 26 to May 9, 2022, and October 18 to November 1, 2022. During these training periods, the SUA will be temporarily closed to the public, but the adjacent Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area will remain open. The Marines issue a news release as they control when the area is open or closed for military training and the Barstow webpage links to the latest information on Johnson Valley closures.

BLM Contacts: Katrina Symons, Field Manager

### **Special Recreation Permits**

BLM Action: Issuing special recreation permits for a variety of recreation activities and vending.

Status: To date, a total of 169 Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) have been administered by the BFO this fiscal year. Of these, 130 were vending permits and 39 were for recreation events, most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The BFO has also issued six letters of agreement for various types of recreation events.

Contacts: Debbie Flores, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner; and David Kotlarski, Assistant Field Manager

### **Film Permits**

BLM Action: Issuing film permits and letters of authorization.

Partners: Inland Empire Film Services

Status: A total of 31 film permits have been administered by the BFO this year. The BFO has also issued nine letters of authorization. The most popular shoot locations included El Mirage, Johnson Valley, and Dumont Dunes OHV Recreation Areas.

Contact: Nathan Bingham, Outdoor Recreation Planner

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

#### **Sunbaked and Cady Solar Energy Project**

BLM Action: The BLM has received applications from NextEra Energy Resources for two Solar Plant locations; one proposed site is near Chicago Valley in Inyo County, and the other proposed site is in the Pisgah area in San Bernardino County.

Status: One pre-application meeting is completed.

BLM Contacts: Amy Schow, Realty Specialist

#### **EDF Renewable Wind Testing Project**

BLM Action: The BLM received applications from EDF Renewables to place four Meteorological Wind Testing Towers in the Johnson Valley area in San Bernardino County.

Status: National Environmental Policy Act documentation is being prepared.

BLM Contacts: Amy Schow, Realty Specialist

## *Wildlife*

### **Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study, Habitat Enhancement and Population Augmentation Program**

BLM Action: A multi-year study of the Amargosa vole in the Tecopa area is being conducted to determine the extent of disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. A captive breeding effort has also been established. These studies have provided information to help guide management actions and prevent the extinction of this highly vulnerable species.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Inyo County Road Department, Purdue University, US Geological Service, University of California (UC) Davis, University of California Berkeley and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: UC Davis/CDFW initiated a range-wide survey of the Amargosa vole this spring / summer. Initial results are concerning due to low numbers of individuals present which are likely drought related.

The Amargosa Vole Team is convening to discuss potential remedial actions. The BFO received funding to initiate a “mega-marsh” project with our partners at UC Davis, this project will ultimately lead to the creation of a large marsh complex near “Borehole Marsh” to serve as a refugia / breeding site; this is a multi-year endeavor.

After several years of preparation, a marsh has been restored on adjacent private lands and was successfully repopulated with Amargosa voles. This is the first-time voles have been present in this marsh for over 120 years. Monitoring is continuing and potential additional supplementations are being considered.

The BFO continues to work with the Inyo County Road Department to install a weir at the outflow of “Borehole Marsh.” Once this project is completed the structure will allow the BFO to manage the site more efficiently.

UC Davis continues to maintain the captive breeding colony to serve as an insurance population.

The Amargosa Vole Team was awarded the 2020 Recovery Champion Award from the USFWS.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

### **Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions**

BLM Action: The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies / management actions associated with the Amargosa River including:

- Amargosa niterwort population monitoring
- sensitive bird species spot mapping/Cowbird Management Program
- tamarisk control efforts
- SCAN monitoring

- fish monitoring
- hydrology studies including US Geological Survey stream gauges
- habitat restoration
- endangered plant studies
- spring studies

Partners: Amargosa Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Point Blue Conservation Science, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey

Status: The BFO continues to implement tamarisk management on the Amargosa River and has treated approximately 20 acres in 2021. Staff are working on developing a burn plan to address a large stand of tamarisk which is not suitable for treatment through other means.

The BFO is working with Point Blue Conservation Science to conduct the 17<sup>th</sup> year of long-term bird monitoring efforts.

The BFO established eight Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River this year.

Volunteers from Adventure Scientists began collecting water samples for analysis as part of their national Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

Our partners at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden are continuing their rare plant survey / mapping effort this year.

The BFO continued to implement the Restore the Natives grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and planted over 400 mesquite trees this spring. The BFO is also working with CalTrans to implement additional plantings in the vicinity of this project.

In April 2021, there was a fire on the Amargosa River near China Ranch involving 31.8 acres (8.8 acres on BLM-managed lands, 23.0 acres on private lands) of prime Least Bell's Vireo habitat. The BFO is monitoring the situation and is working with our partners on habitat recovery efforts.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

### **Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts**

BLM Action: The BFO is continuing a focused wildlife habitat enhancement program on the Afton Canyon portion of the Mojave Trails National Monument, which is largely modeled on the successful program associated with the Amargosa River Wild and Scenic River. The section of the Mojave River flowing through the Afton Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is currently considered "eligible" under the National Wild and Scenic River Act and is managed to maintain the scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, and cultural

outstanding and remarkable values on which this determination was based. The canyon has also been designated a Watchable Wildlife Area due to its high biodiversity as reflected by the 180 bird species utilizing the region. The BFO is collecting data to help in the development of the management plan for the Mojave Trails National Monument.

Partners: 3M Corporation, Amargosa Conservancy Point Blue, California Alliance for Tamarisk Biocontrol, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Institute of Technology, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, Mojave Desert Land Trust, Oregon State University, Princeton University, Townson University, University of California, Santa Barbara, and United States Geological Survey (USGS)

Status: The BFO has been working with the Mojave Desert Land Trust to implement the Women in Science Discovering the Desert (WISDOM) program. Through WISDOM, minority female interns are recruited to collect resource data (bighorn sheep, tamarisk beetle, bird, and Night Skies) from Afton Canyon to enhance their training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).

The BFO, through the Fire and Fuels Program, has continued with tamarisk treatments within Afton Canyon and approximately 200 acres of tamarisk were treated / re-treated this year.

The BFO continues to work with our partners at USGS and The Living Desert to develop a captive breeding / re-introduction program for the Southwestern Pond Turtle in Afton Canyon.

The BFO continues to work with Southern California Edison and Brightline to conduct restoration projects in Afton Canyon which will integrate with other on-going restoration efforts.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

### **Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities**

BLM Action: The BFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

Partners: United States Fish and Wildlife Service and various county, state, and federal agencies

Status: The RIT has been meeting on a regular basis and the current focus is on discussions relating to fencing along roads and highways.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist



*Other / Misc.*

**Apple Valley NCCP/HCP Development**

BLM Action: The BFO is working with the Town of Apple Valley and associated permitting agencies on their development of the city's Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP). The BLM's main interest in this process is to work with the Town of Apple Valley to best determine how the NCCP/HCP mitigation requirements can work hand-in-hand with the BLM's management of the surrounding area consistent with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, as amended.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Town of Apple Valley, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: The city is nearing its target date for completion of the NCCP/HCP and the BFO is engaged in coordination meetings to facilitate this effort.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

**Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan**

BLM Action: Development of the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP)

Status: The scoping period for the development of the Amargosa River CRMP ended on June 1, 2021. Twelve letters were received, and BLM is considering the substantive comments in the formulation of the Draft CRMP/Environmental Assessment (EA). BLM anticipates the Draft CRMP/EA to be available for public review by October 2021.

BLM Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

## *El Centro Field Office (ECFO)*



*Photo: Buzzards Peak Wilderness*

### *Lands and Realty*

#### **Salton Sea Management Program 10-Year Plan and Dust Suppression Action Plan – United States Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment (EA)**

BLM Action: The BLM is serving as a cooperating agency to an EA being prepared by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, which analyzes and discloses the effects of the proposed implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program’s Phase I: 10-Year Plan. The SSMP 10-Year Plan proposed project is being planned with the goal of implementing a total of 29,800 acres of aquatic habitat restoration and dust control projects around the perimeter of the Salton Sea. The SSMP Project area falls within the jurisdictional boundaries of the ECFO and the Palm Springs South Coast Field Office. To ensure clear coordination in the BLM’s cooperating agency capacity, the BLM California Desert District has designated the ECFO to serve as the lead BLM office for the project. The BLM anticipates responding to numerous site-specific right-of-way requests submitted by California Department of Water Resources for implementation of dust suppression projects under the SSMP 10-Year Plan.

Partners: United States Army Corps of Engineers (lead agency), Bureau of Reclamation, US

Fish and Wildlife Service and other state and federal partners.

Status: The BLM ECFO is actively involved in its role as a cooperating agency with the review of the USACE's SSMP 10-Year Plan EA.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

### *Minerals and Mining*

#### **Imperial USA Corporation Exploration Plan of Operations**

BLM Action: On July 2, 2020, Imperial USA Corporation (IUC) submitted a Plan of Operations (Plan) to the ECFO to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the East Mesquite, Ogilby, and Indian Pass project segments, located in eastern Imperial County. The project estimates a total disturbance of 13.2 acres of BLM-managed public lands. Eleven millsites within the Indian Pass project segment required the completion of a supplemental mining claim validity exam report to determine if the millsites retained their valid existing rights after the 2019 Dingell Act permanent withdrawal of Indian Pass to mineral entry. The BLM has reviewed the Plan and found it to be complete meeting all the surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.401.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services, State Lands Commission

Status: A supplemental mining claim validity exam report for the millsites located in the Indian Pass segment was completed by the BLM California State Office in June 2021. NEPA will be initiated after the completion of biological and cultural surveys. The BLM will issue a decision on the Plan after NEPA analysis is complete.

BLM Contacts: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

#### **SMP Gold Corp. Exploration Plan of Operations**

BLM Action: On September 28, 2020, SMP Gold Corp. (SMP) submitted to the ECFO a Plan to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the Oro Cruz historic mining area located in the Cargo Muchacho Mountains in Eastern Imperial County. The project proposes new temporary and permanent roads, road improvements, a staging area, and 65 drill pads. The project area activities would disturb a combined estimated 21 acres of public lands. The BLM has reviewed the Plan and found it to be complete meeting all the surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.401. SMP also submitted two notices to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the American Girl and Padre Y Madre heap leach sites on May 14, 2020, and May 15, 2020. The BLM found the notices to be complete, containing all the surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.301. On Feb. 3, 2020, SMP completed the exploration drilling program at the American Girl and Padre Y Madre heap leach sites. On March 24, 2021, SMP submitted two notice modifications to conduct additional exploration drilling at each heap leach site.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: Biological surveys have been completed and Section 106 consultation has been initiated. BLM will issue a decision on the Plan after NEPA analysis is complete.

BLM Contacts: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

## *Recreation*

### **Special Recreation Permits (SRPs)**

BLM Action: ECFO staff are processing 55 vending, competitive, and commercial SRPs from the previous season. In addition, the new 2021-2022 vendor application package will be disseminated during the next few weeks. The Field Office is preparing for the approaching OHV season and has started planning and coordinating several major events and competitions.

Partners: El Centro Naval Air Facility and the National Park Service.

Status: The ECFO plans to manage approximately 55-65 SRP events during the next recreation season, including the Rebelle Rally scheduled for October 14-16, 2021, in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) and the San Diego Four-Wheeler 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Superstition Run tentatively scheduled for January 14-16, 2022, in the Superstition Mountain OHV Open Area.

BLM Contact: Asdrubal V. Estrada, Outdoor Recreation Planner

### **Travel and Transportation Management / Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) trails**

BLM Action: Staff continue to improve the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, Backcountry Discovery Trail, and Vinagre Wash Special Management Area trails. One and a half miles of trail grading was completed last winter, and trail sign maintenance continues through spring and summer. The improved facilities have increased recreational opportunities for the increased level of visitors and enhanced their public lands experience.

Partners: National Park Service, Anza Society, California State Parks Off Highway Motor Vehicle Division,

Status: Work continues on a weekly basis.

BLM Contact: Eric Solomon, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

## *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

### **East Mesa Solar and Green Hydrogen Facility Renewable Energy Project**

BLM Action: IP Land Holdings, LLC has submitted an application requesting the BLM issue a right-of-way authorizing the construction and operation of a 2,500-megawatt solar energy and hydrogen electrolyzer facility on up to 11,220 acres of public lands designated as a Development Focus Areas under the Desert Renewable Energy and Conservation Plan in eastern Imperial

County. The project will consist of arrays of solar photovoltaic panels and related facilities. The project would construct a new gen-tie and high-voltage substation or interconnect to an existing transmission line. In addition, the project would include a green hydrogen electrolyzer to convert water into H<sub>2</sub> gas.

The project is currently being reviewed as a BLM California priority project. The BLM anticipates preparing an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: The project is in the initial review stages and the application has yet to be deemed complete. The ECFO is currently reviewing a revised Plan of Development and anticipates holding a second preliminary application meeting near the end of October 2021. Identified stakeholders will be invited to the second preliminary application meeting.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

### *Wild Horses and Burros*

#### **Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Wild Burro Gathers**

BLM Action: The ECFO, in coordination with the Ridgecrest and Yuma Field Offices, is in the pre-NEPA stage of drafting a programmatic EA to authorize wild burro gathers for up to 10 years on public lands within the jurisdiction of the ECFO. Currently, inflated wild burro populations in eastern Imperial County are placing a strain on the limited resources available for other wildlife through increased herbivory, ground disturbance, and water usage. The ECFO aims to implement wild burro gathers to restore proper ecosystem functioning to the planning area, which will allow it to better support sensitive wildlife such as the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise, maintain sustainable populations of healthy wild burros, and allow damaged vegetative communities to recover and thrive.

Partners: BLM Yuma and Ridgecrest Field Offices, BLM California State Office

Status: Pre-NEPA research and document development phase.

BLM Contacts: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist, and Dale Ohnmeiss, Planning and Environmental Specialist

### *Wildlife*

#### **Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Demographic Monitoring**

BLM Action: On June 7, 2021, the ECFO began implementing the annual demographic monitoring of the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*) (FTHL), a BLM sensitive species proposed for federal listing three times since an original proposal in 1993. As part of a

large, inter-agency effort to conserve and manage FTHL populations for the species' recovery, the ECFO conducts surveys within three key "Management Areas" across the species' range to evaluate FTHL population health, learn how FTHL populations are changing over time, and inform management decisions within FTHL habitat. During this summer's monitoring, four nine-hectare demographic plots were surveyed over the course of six weeks, with a total of 151 FTHL captures. Demographic data such as age, sex, weight, length, and location were collected, and the lizards were individually marked with Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags. This mark and recapture survey design helps managers determine population estimates and trends in abundance, survivorship, and recruitment.

Partners: United States Navy, California State Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Arizona Department of Fish and Game

Status: The six-week 2021 annual demographic monitoring was completed on July 2, 2021. A report summarizing the monitoring effort and visualizing the collected data will be completed by the end of August 2021.

BLM Contact: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist

*Other / Misc.*

### **El Centro Field Office and National Resource Conservation Services Soil Sampling**

BLM Action: The ECFO and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have completed a soil survey for previously unmapped soils on BLM public lands in Imperial County under the jurisdiction of the ECFO. The fieldwork included hand-auguring, shoveling, and extracting up to six-foot-deep soil samples from 113 observation sites. These soil data will assist the ECFO in managing the lands under its jurisdiction by providing site-specific soil information which will allow resource managers to better understand the potential uses and limitations of the soil. This work was analyzed under a categorical exclusion, but the BLM and NRCS are also currently working on an EA to collect additional, more comprehensive soil data for use in informing future land management actions on public lands within Imperial County.

Partners: NRCS and California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Status: The soil samples have been collected and are being compiled and analyzed by the NRCS. The proposed NRCS EA soil sampling project is in the development phase and is intended to collect more detailed soil information within Imperial County.

BLM Contacts: Dale Ohnmeiss, Planning and Environmental Specialist

## Needles Field Office (NFO)



**Before**

*Photo: Iron Mountain Divisional Camp Protestant Altar*

**After**

### *Archeology and Cultural Resources*

#### **Desert Training Center – Iron Mountain Divisional Camp Protestant Altar Phase II Stabilization and Restoration**

BLM Action: Phase II of the stabilization and restoration of the Protestant altar at Iron Mountain Divisional Camp was completed between December 23, 2020, and January 6, 2021. The 183<sup>rd</sup> and 951<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalions of the U.S. Army constructed the altar using local stone and mortar in 1943. Extreme desert climate and monsoon-fed washes threatened the structural integrity, which if unaddressed would have resulted in the altar becoming ruined.

Phase II work included:

- installing a subsurface supporting base foundation where undercutting had occurred.
- straightening the entirety of the back wall.
- repairing the cracks throughout the structure.
- replacing and reattaching large cobbles and small boulders that had cracked and/or separated.
- utilizing stone, concrete, and mortar to rebuild the most vulnerable section of the Phase I stream-diversion berm.

Partners: Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California pre-graded the access

road, and provided access to ice, RV waste and trash disposal facilities. It was MWD's provision of all labor, equipment and supplies in Phase I, that freed up funding and created the ability for the BLM to hire a specialist to ensure quality and reliable restoration and pay for the various supplies needed for Phase II.

Status: All goals identified in the design of the work have been met beyond expectations.

BLM Contacts: Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager and Chris Dalu, Archaeologist, Needles Field Office.

## *Lands & Realty*

### **Goffs Butte Communication Site Amendment**

BLM Action: GTP Towers submitted an application to amend their existing communication site lease to install a 100 kilawatt backup diesel generator within their facility.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team reviewed the proposed action, and it was determined a categorical exclusion would be appropriate. NEPA requirements have been completed and the amendment was authorized on May 19, 2021.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist, Needles Field Office.

### **Solar Partners Corrected Grant and Hardship Request**

BLM Action: In 2017, Solar Partners submitted a hardship claim and alternative rent schedule for their solar facility, the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System. While reviewing the hardship claim, it was determined one of the solar facility right-of-way (ROW) grants required a review of the authorized acres and a corrected ROW grant to reflect the accurate acreage prior to the hardship request decision.

Status: The corrected ROW grant was issued. The hardship request decision has been reviewed by the Needles Field Office and approved by the California State Office Director.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist, Needles Field Office and Erik Pignata, Realty Specialist, CA State Office.

### **Federal Aviation Administration Yucca Grove Restoration**

BLM Action: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) submitted a restoration plan to restore their microwave repeater communication site. The facility had been removed; however, the site was not restored to BLM standards. The FAA will be recontouring the lands per guidance from the BLM and US Geological Survey (USGS).

Partners: While there are no partners in the proposed action, the BLM and USGS would be



meeting with FAA contractors on the first day of restoration to provide guidance on recontouring.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team is reviewing the draft NEPA document (categorical exclusion). The NEPA is expected to be approved within the next few weeks.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist, Needles Field Office.

### **Castle Mountain Short-Term Water Pipeline**

BLM Action: Castle Mountain Venture has applied for a short-term use right-of-way (ROW) for a temporary water pipeline and access road (on an existing railroad access route) for the purpose of discharging water from a water well pump test located on private lands. The water discharge would occur in an existing ephemeral drainage channel located on public lands and 1/3 of mile northwest of the town of Nipton. The drainage is expected to have negligible disturbance on public lands.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team is reviewing the plan of development/proposed action and determining resource concerns. Appropriate level of NEPA for reviewing the proposed action is expected to be determined by July 30, 2021.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist, Needles Field Office.

### **Bonanza Springs Connectivity Study**

BLM Action: Three Valleys Municipal Water District has applied for a short-term use right-of-way (ROW) for the purpose of conducting a geotechnical study to understand the hydraulic connection between the groundwater that supports Bonanza Spring and the aquifer in Fenner Valley. The proposed action includes a geophysical and hydrological assessment, an ecological assessment, and water sampling.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team has reviewed the administrative draft of the NEPA document (categorical exclusion).

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist, Needles Field Office

## *Minerals & Mining*

### **Castle Mountain Mine (CMM) Modification to Plan of Operation**

BLM Action: Castle Mountain Venture (CMV) submitted a plan modification for water well installation and testing to supplement declining supply from historic wells located on National Park Service (NPS) lands and to support upcoming expansion of their cyanide heap leach operation. Test wells will be within existing footprints of recently completed monitoring wells. Castle Mountain Mine (CMM) is an open pit gold mine located in the Hart Mining District of San Bernardino County. CMM shares a watershed and road access with the Castle Mountains

National Monument and Mojave National Preserve.

Partners: No partnering agencies enlisted, though BLM continues to facilitate collaboration and consultation with NPS as necessary.

Status: BLM is drafting a Determination of NEPA Adequacy based on recent revisions and data submitted by CMV following BLM's initial review.

BLM Contacts: Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager; Bill Webster, Planning and Environmental Coordinator; and Rose Pettiette, Geologist

### *Recreation*

#### **Mojave Trails National Monument/Route 66 National Scenic Byway Needles to Barstow**

BLM Action: U.S. Route 66 has been recognized by the Federal Highways Administration as a National Scenic Byway. The Barstow Field Office, California Historic Route 66 Association, and Main Street Murals is planning to hold a celebration event at the Desert Discovery Center. This event will highlight the historic road with a planned reopening of the Desert Discovery Center. US Route 66 Needles to Barstow is an artery road that traverse though the Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM). Identified in the 2016 Presidential Proclamation, Route 66 is a vital object that adds to the unique resources of MTNM.

Partners: California Historic Route 66 Association and Main Street Murals

Status: A planning team consisting of partners and BLM staff are working on the event which is planned for Nov 6, 2021. Currently the team has drafted the RSVP invite list, the planning schedule, and are formulating agenda, speakers, and partner events. All DAC members will be invited to attend.

BLM Contacts: Noelle Glines-Bovio, Mojave Trails National Monument Manager

#### **Ivanpah Windsailing SRMA Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP)**

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office is developing a Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) for the Ivanpah Windsailing Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA). Staff has identified both immediate and future action items to be addressed, which include access, staging, facilities, controlled access, and the possibility of an access fee.

Partners: There are no partners with the project at this time, but there are several interested volunteers and windsailing groups who would like to be included in the planning effort. A California Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Division grant has been requested to fund a portion of the project.

Status: Initial resource survey work has begun, along with initial conceptual planning.

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels and David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planners, Needles Field Office

### **Ivanpah Kiosk and Fence Installation**

BLM Action: Four new informational kiosk panels have been installed at three different locations within the Ivanpah Special Recreation Management Area. At the West Lake Recreation Management Zone (RMZ), a set has been installed in the visitor parking area and a mile of post and cable have been installed along the shoreline with plans to extend it the entire length with two locking gate access points to protect the lakebed during rain events. On the East Lake RMZ a new set of informational kiosk panels have been installed at the comfort/picnic area and another set has been installed at the proposed new entry location and parking lot.

Partners: The local BLM staff worked with the California Conservation Corps to complete the work.

Status: Recently Completed

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels and David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planners, Needles Field Office

### **Amboy Trail Reroute**

BLM Action: Amboy Crater Trail, recognized as a National Recreation Trail, is a popular hiking destination located within the Mojave Trails National Monument. The BLM Needles Field Office recently rerouted sections of the trail from the base of the crater to the rim, improving visitor access. The previous route to the top included a steep grade of roughly 40 to 45 percent over approximately 260 feet. The new route stretches out the trail making it less steep, with only a 10 to 15 percent grade over 550 feet, making the trail accessible for more users. The work on the new trail sections were completed by a California Conservation Corps crew and BLM staff.

Partners: California Conservation Corps

Status: Recently Completed

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels Outdoor Recreation Planner and Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager, Needles Field Office

### **Amboy Trail and Sign Planning**

BLM Action: In order to enhance recreation opportunity at Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, located within the Mojave Trails National Monument, the NFO proposes to add a trail network which consists of a series of looped trails (8 to 10 new trails). These looped trails would range from short to long in duration to provide a hiking experience for different skill

levels. New signing is also being developed to warn and educate visitors of hiking in the extreme heat, importance of packing water, and the time of year to avoid hiking in the area during extreme heat conditions. Other signing would include maps and trail signs.

Status: Conceptual planning phase, will begin internal review soon.

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels Outdoor Recreation Planner, Mitch Owens Assistant Field Manager

### *Wild Horses and Burros*

#### **Burro and Drought Management**

BLM Action: Due to the continuing drought and burro populations, the NFO will begin hauling water to support wild burro populations located in the Mountain Pass and Fenner areas. Local springs the burros typically rely on for water are drying up due to the extended drought conditions.

Status: The NFO will begin hauling water in late July or early August to Halloran, Groaner, and Fenner springs areas for burros and other wildlife and to relieve the pressure currently on those and other springs. The NFO is also working with the Wild Horse and Burro Program to arrange for potential emergency gathers using the bait trapping method.

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager and Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager

### *Other/Misc.*

#### **Mojave Trails National Monument Planning Update**

BLM Action: Mojave Trails National Monument began the preliminary planning phase in early 2017, which was later paused that same year Based on administration priorities, the NFO will restart the planning process.

Partners: BLM is eager to identify partners and stakeholders as this planning effort begins.

Status: Mojave Trails National Monument is in the preliminary stages of resuming the National Monument's planning process, which consists of revisiting the Interdisciplinary Team along with drafting a communications plan. The communications plan will help guide the BLM with how to resume future outreach events. Outreach tools under consideration could consist of using a virtual platform to produce listening sessions, webinars, and/or updating envisioning sessions. Currently the BLM is considering the virtual format when appropriate. Additionally, BLM looks forward to working with the DAC in the possible formation of a DAC Subgroup to be involved in future MTNM planning.

BLM Contacts: Noelle Glines-Bovio, Mojave Trails National Monument Manager

## **Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)**



*Photo: Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Windmills*

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

The Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) is processing and overseeing over three dozen individual operational and proposed energy development projects:

#### **West of Devers Transmission System Upgrade**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of operations.

Partners: Southern California Edison (SCE) and California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

Status: Construction is complete, and the project was commissioned operational May 14, 2021.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager

#### **Ten West Link Transmission Project**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: Delaney-Colorado River Transmission, LLC (DCR Transmission)

Status: The project would include construction of a new 500 kV transmission line between the Arizona Public Service (APS) Delaney Substation in Tonopah, AZ, and the SCE Colorado River Substation, west of Blythe, CA. DCR Transmission submitted a ROW grant application with the BLM on September 14, 2015. The Project would span approximately 114 miles, including 97 miles in Arizona and 21.5 miles in California, partially following the existing Devers Palo Verde #1 Transmission Line in an established utility corridor.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement was published September 13, 2019, with a signed Record of Decision (ROD) on November 22, 2019. The right-of-way (ROW) was issued on August 8, 2020. DCR Transmission seeks a Full Notice to Proceed from the BLM AZ by Fall 2021.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, CDD Project Manager

### **San Jacinto Wind (SJW) formerly Terra-Gen Repower**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of operations.

Partners: San Jacinto Wind, formerly Terra-Gen

Status: Construction is complete, and the project was commissioned operational on May 14, 2021.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager

### **Mesa Wind Repower**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: AM Wind Repower, LLC and Brookfield Renewable U. S.

Status: The BLM issued a right-of-way grant for Mesa Wind Repower project on June 24, 2021, which consists of removal of 400 smaller, older generation turbines replacing them with a total of nine larger turbines within the same footprint. The larger, newer turbines have a maximum rotor diameter of 427 feet with a base width of 20 feet and a maximum hub height of 309 feet. Total new temporary disturbances will be approximately 62.91 acres but will result in a total project reclamation of -2.93 acres of reclaimed lands.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, CDD Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Blythe Solar Power Project**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: NextEra Energy

Status: NextEra Energy holds the right-of-way for the generation of 485 megawatts (MW) of photovoltaic (PV) with the Blythe Solar Power Project consisting of three 125 MW units and one 110 MW unit, 230 kV generation-tie line, Operation and Maintenance Building, access road and other related facilities. A notice to proceed for project construction was issued on March 19, 2015. Phase I (one 125 MW unit and one 110 MW unit) was completed in December 2016. NextEra is finishing constructing Phase II (two 125 MW units 3) and 4 of the solar field Summer 2021.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Palen Solar Project**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: EDF

Status: Issued a ROW grant to EDF Renewables for a 500 MW solar PV energy facility in March, and subsequently amended to adjust the project boundary in November. The project would be constructed entirely on BLM lands and consist of three solar fields, a main access road from the Corn Springs Road offramp, and a 230kV generation tie-line extending from the project switchyard to the Red Bluff Substation. The BLM issued a full Notice to Proceed on September 7, 2019; the project is under construction and anticipated to be complete by end of year 2021.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager

### **Desert Harvest Solar**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of operations.

Partners: EDF Renewables

Status: In September 2013, the BLM issued a ROW to EDF Renewables to construct a 150 MW PV project on approximately 1,412 acres, located directly south of the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center. The BLM issued a full Notice to Proceed on September 6, 2019, and construction was completed in December 2020. The project is sharing operations and maintenance facilities with the neighboring Palen Solar Project Farm.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager

### **Athos Solar Gen-Tie**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: Softbank Energy (SBE)

Status: Softbank Energy (SBE) proposed to construct and maintain a gen-tie line in support of their solar facilities which are located on private land. The gen-tie line will include up to seven miles located on BLM land, within a buffered right-of-way. The access roads are located on previously disturbed agricultural lands and roads are being improved. This project is a 220kV transmission line with up to 120 structures north of I-10 in the Desert Center area.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Record (DR) published and subsequently the BLM issued a ROW to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission a gen-tie line on approximately 90 acres, located directly southeast of Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center. The BLM issued a full Notice to Proceed on January 14, 2020.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager

### **McCoy (and Arlington) Solar Energy Project**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: McCoy Solar, LLC and NextEra Energy

Status: McCoy Solar, LLC, owned by NextEra Energy, is authorized to construct a 750 MW PV solar project on 7,700 acres of BLM and 470 acres of private lands, located directly north of the Blythe Solar Project, near Blythe. The BLM issued the ROD on March 11, 2013. The right-of-way grants were issued for Units 1 and 2 on December 2, 2013, and August 12, 2014. Unit 1 is fully operational. Unit 2 (renamed the Arlington Solar Project) is currently under construction.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, CDD Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Desert Quartzsite Solar Project**

BLM Action: Monitoring and compliance of construction

Partners: Desert Quartzite, LLC and EDF Renewable

Status: The BLM issued the right-of-way grant in August 2020. The current right-of-way holder has submitted an amendment application to add land outside of their existing right-of-way boundary. Application is pending BLM adjudication.

Contact: Brandon Anderson, CDD Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Crimson Solar Project**

BLM Action: Completing authorization of requested need, then monitoring and compliance of construction.

Partners: Sonoran West Holdings, LLC and Recurrent Energy, LLC



Status: The BLM has issued a right-of-way grant to Sonoran West holding, LLC for the battery energy storage system, substation, access roads, and O&M building and is expected to issue a ROW grant for the solar photovoltaic facilities by September 2021. BLM anticipates construction commencing on the battery storage facility in September 2021.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Blythe Mesa Solar Project**

BLM Action: Compliance and monitoring of construction.

Partners: Renewable Energy Group

Status: The solar plant will be constructed entirely on private lands. Construction on the Gen-tie line is anticipated to begin in late September 2021.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, CDD Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Arica Solar Project (Clearway)**

BLM Action: Processing request

Partners: SunPower Corporation and Clearway

Status: SunPower Corporation filed a ROW application in summer 2016, for a 400 MW PV project on roughly 4,000 acres of public lands within Desert Focal Areas near Desert Center and submitted a Plan of Development on November 21, 2016. The BLM hosted a pre-application meeting with SunPower (previous applicant) on November 21, 2016; Clearway is now the applicant for this project going forward. The project consists of a 265 MW solar PV project located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with 50 MW storage capacity. The project will consist of two substations and 3.2 miles of 230kV gen-tie from the switchyard to the existing Red Bluff Substation. Gen-tie will be shared with Victory Pass Solar project.

The BLM anticipates releasing the Environmental Assessment in August 2021, initiating a 30-day comment period.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Victory Pass Solar (formerly Jupiter) (Clearway)**

BLM Action: Processing request

Partners: Jupiter Solar

Status: Jupiter Solar filed an ROW application on July 6, 2015, for a PV project on roughly

1,800 acres of public lands within DFAs near the Desert Center area. Clearway is now the applicant for this project going forward. The project consists of a 200 MW PV project located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with an optional 50 MW battery storage. As well as a shared 3.2-mile 230 kV gen-tie line with Arica Solar Project.

The BLM anticipates releasing the Environmental Assessment in August 2021, initiating a 30-day comment period.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### *Lands and Realty*

#### **Whitewater Recharge Facility (Coachella Valley Water District)**

BLM Action: Processing request

Partners: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD)

Status: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) held a ROW grant for the Whitewater Recharge Facility within the City of Palm Springs; the ROW expired April 2014. CVWD has applied for a new ROW grant that would continue the use of public lands and they propose to recharge up to 511,000 acre-feet per year, on 690 acres of BLM managed public lands. No new construction is proposed. The BLM released the draft Environmental Impact Statement for a 45-day public comment period on June 11, 2021.

Contact: Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

#### **Chiriaco Water Facilities Expansion (Chiriaco Summit Water District)**

BLM Action: Processing request

Partners: Chiriaco Summit Water District (CSWD)

Status: Chiriaco Summit Water District (CSWD) holds a ROW grant for the Chiriaco Water Facilities within the Chiriaco community. The ROW is on 2.44 acres and expires in 2038. CSWD received a \$2.9 million state grant from the CSWRCB to upgrade the facilities; the state grant funding is subject to CSWD constructing the project by September 2022. CSWD has applied for an amendment to the existing ROW grant that would continue the use of public lands and they propose to replace their antiquated 35,000-gallon steel tank with a 500,000-gallon bolted steel tank, rehab the existing 300,000 open reservoir, and relocate / upgrade the microfiltration treatment plant from private property to BLM lands. Other upgrades include below-grade and onsite yard piping for connection of facilities and future relocation of a diesel engine-driven fire pump. The amendment would increase the acreage by an additional 2.5 acres for approximately five total acres, a 1,500-gallon precast concrete septic tank, distribution box and leach field for disposal of wastewater. On July 16, 2021, the BLM published the draft Final EA and unsigned FONSI. The public comment period ended July 31, 2021. CSWD plans to

advertise the project for bid soon.

Contact: L. Nancy Robledo, Project Lead/Realty Specialist

### **Coachella Valley Link**

BLM Action: Processing Request

Partners: Coachella Valley Association of Governments

Status: The CV Link extension will cross approximately one mile of BLM lands and be approximately 70 feet wide. The ROW will provide access for a multi-modal transportation path which will extend from Palm Springs to the city of Coachella.

Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Project Lead/Realty Specialist

### **Santa Ana River Wash Land Exchange**

BLM Action: The San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District) and the BLM entered into an agreement in 2005, to initiate an assembled exchange pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would transfer 327.5 acres of federal estate with the Santa Ana River Wash ACEC to the Conservation District and in exchange, the BLM would acquire approximately 310 acres of non-federal land located within the Santa Ana River Wash Area, which would be incorporated into a new ACEC boundary. This action would also require an amendment to the South Coast Resource Management Plan to allow for the exchange. The BLM would also need to amend the Santa Ana Wash ACEC Plan to realign the ACEC boundary.

Partners: San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District)

Status: The John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Sec. 1003, directed the BLM complete a land exchange with the Conservation District in the Santa Ana River Wash area. The BLM is engaged with the Conservation District regarding the conveyance of the referenced lands to the respective parties. PSSCFO staff have completed the Environmental Site Assessment for both the public and private lands, have an updated title commitment and are currently involved in the appraisal process with the Office of Valuation Services (OVS) and the Conservation District. Response for bids were due to the Water District July 23, 2021.

Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Realty Lead

### **Water Projects: Implement Canal Lining Projects as part of PL100-675**

BLM Action: PL 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing habitat creation / restoration sites and groundwater from public lands to help meet project environmental requirements; the Dos Palmas ACEC is a

focus area for these efforts. Dos Palmas was designated as a California Desert National Conservation Lands area in September 2016 by the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan.

Partners: Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, US Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), California Department Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) and CVCC

Status: In cooperation with multiple parties and partners, . The BLM is implementing an MOU that includes the BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of a 17-acre marsh / aquatic habitat (completed), preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, and long-term management of these projects. This habitat management focuses on protection and enhancement of habitat for the endangered desert pupfish and Yuma clapper rail.

Current actions: The PSSCFO is finalizing an EA and biological assessment to programmatically manage the Created Marsh Yuma Clapper Rail habitat with prescribed burns.

Contact: Chelsea Collins, Natural Resource Specialist

## *Wildlife*

### **Riparian Restoration Activities**

BLM Action: Approximately 2,000 acres are annually inventoried for ecological condition including stream corridors, mountain and desert oases, and other desert riparian communities. Riparian assessments review avian riparian species present, noxious weed infestations, disturbances etc. Approximately 250 acres are treated annually; techniques include:

- manual: hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as Sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, salt cedar, and fountain grass.
- mechanical: chainsaw, dozer use for removal of salt cedar
- chemical: herbicide cut stumps of salt cedar
- biological: excessive aquatic vegetation removal within sensitive desert oasis using sterile grass carp in Dos Palmas ponds. The vast majority of the restoration is with the removal of tamarisk (salt cedar). Once the salt cedar is removed, the existing native seed bank responds quickly re-establishing itself.

- Locations: Numerous locations, including the Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill / Willow Hole Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); various drainages within the Santa Rosa Mountains including Boo Hoff, Sheep Canyon, Bear Creek, Cathedral Canyon, and Devils' Canyon.

Partners: multiple

Status: On-going

Contact: Kevin Doran, Natural Resources Specialist

## **San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area, Avian and Bat Study**

BLM Action: In 2013, the PSSCFO initiated meetings with wind facility operators to discuss the need for more rigorous avian and bat surveys. Due to a lack of cohesive monitoring data to date, staff continues to have an insufficient understanding of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to bird and bat species from wind energy development. To compensate for this, the BLM has entered into its second year of a regional surveying effort to estimate wildlife abundance and estimates of fatality rates and develop statistical frameworks linking the two. The BLM has worked collaboratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Conservation Canines, Rogue Detection Teams and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized surveying protocols. These surveys are also designed to meet guidance by the USFWS for developing Bird and Bat Conservation Strategies and Eagle Conservation Plans which will provide the information needed for permitting and adaptive management. Surveys started in 2018 and have continued into 2021. The USGS is analyzing the data collected over the past few years of the study and has canine detection teams currently out in the field for the third second year of this research study.

Partners: USFWS, CDFW, Conservation Canines, Rogue Detection Teams and the USGS

Status: Continuing surveys into 2021

Contact: Kristen Lalumiere, Wildlife Biologist

## **Feral Cattle Removal**

BLM Action: An estimated 50-120 feral, unbranded cattle have found their way into the Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM). A plan is being drafted that will be cooperative in nature and include replacing and / or repairing cattle exclusion fencing and removing cattle via rounding up and / or panel trapping.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Wildlands Conservancy, the Morongo Tribe of Mission Indians, and the San Bernardino National Forest

Status: Removal operations began in the spring of 2019 and is ongoing. Work to install fencing began in the spring of 2020 and is also an ongoing effort.

Contact: Jihadda Govan, Sand to Snow National Monument Manager

## **Desert Tortoise Monitoring**

BLM Action: Monitoring desert tortoises in the Santa Rosa Mountains.

Partners: USGS, University of California Riverside

Status: Interns through American Conservation Experience (ACE) have continued monitoring a “new” population of desert tortoises in the Santa Rosa Mountains for their second season.

Interns have been inventorying all signs of desert tortoise and performing a habitat assessment of areas not yet formally surveyed for the species – primarily the La Quinta Cove and Cathedral Canyon areas. Data collected is being shared with USGS and the University of California Riverside to update the model for the species in the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Plan.

Contact: Danielle Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Manager

## *National Monuments*

### **Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM) Planning**

BLM Action: Develop a land use management plan. The Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM) is jointly managed by the BLM and US Forest Service (USFS) through a Service-First Agreement. The monument manager, Jihadda Govan, was hired in January 2017 and is an USFS employee based out of the San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office. A joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled in 2016 and developed an early draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The draft AMS identifies the current and existing baseline management for the SSNM, specifically as it applies to items mentioned in the proclamation. The draft AMS is the first step in the planning process for the SSNM Land Use Plan (Monument Plan). The Monument Plan will provide for the proper care and management of the objects of historical and scientific interest for which the monument was designated, and to conserve and protect the cultural, ecological, and scientific resources found within the monument for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. BLM policy requires a unique set of land use decisions for each national monument. If necessary, the Monument Plan may become a stand-alone plan, or amend the USFS Forest Plan and / or the BLM California Desert Conservation Area plan.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service (USFS)

Status: The planning effort is currently on hold.

Contact: Jihadda Govan, Sand to Snow National Monument Manager

### **Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJMNM) 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

BLM Action: Education and outreach.

Partners: Friends of the Desert Mountains and the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy

Status: On October 24, 2020, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJMNM) celebrated its 20th anniversary. Due to the pandemic, nearly all of the special events and programs planned for this special milestone were postponed. Through the monument's partnership with Friends of the Desert Mountains, upgrades to the exterior of the Visitor Center were 90% completed through a \$84,000 grant from the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy. New and upgraded installations include a shaded, three panel

orientation and safety kiosk, new “Welcome” and “Leave No Trace” signs outside the front door of the Visitor Center, and new railing with five interpretive panels about desert tortoise around the desert tortoise enclosure. These interpretive improvements were planned as part of the Monument’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

Contact: Danielle Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Manager

## Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



*Photo: Guest of the Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corrals*

### *Archaeology*

#### **Retirement for Don Storm, Lead Archaeologist**

Status: Ridgecrest Field Office's long-time archaeologist, Don Storm, retired on July 31, with 31 years of federal service. The Field Office is attempting to fill his position through an interest announcement circulated among California BLM archaeologists.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### *Grazing*

#### **Crossing/Trailing permit considered near Weldon**

BLM Action: A trailing/crossing permit application was received in March 2021 by Hafenfeld Ranch to move 90 head of cattle. The move would take place in two groups one-week apart, from private property near Kelso Creek in low country, to their allotment in the Sequoia National Forest in high country, returning in the fall via a different route to the south of the Bright Star wilderness area. The five-mile uphill movement has been proposed as an overnight



trip, using a combination of an existing cow trail in the Bright Star wilderness area and a designated BLM road, in a non-wilderness corridor for a majority of the distance. Water would be trucked to the overnight resting area in the road corridor to avoid impacts to a nearby riparian area. The trailing is requested due to the drought conditions and has been proposed in the relinquished Rudnick allotment where Hafenfeld Ranch used have a grazing permit. Relinquishment occurred in 2019.

Partners: Hafenfeld Ranch (applicant)

Status: The protest period has closed on this proposed decision. Ridgecrest issued a decision approving the permit on July 29, 2021.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### **Range improvements project nearing decision near Deep Springs Valley**

BLM Action: An environmental assessment has been prepared to analyze the effects of constructing seven new water trough sites, two water pipelines, one permanent corral, and one water tank. The purpose of the additions is to disperse grazing across a larger area, thus making better use of forage and reducing the effects of cattle at existing watering sites.

Partners: Deep Springs Trustees (grazing permit holder) on Deep Spring Valley and South Oasis allotments

Status: Public comments have been received on a draft EA and are being considered. Ridgecrest plans to issue a decision by September 30, 2021.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

## *Lands and Realty*

### **California High Speed Rail – Bakersfield to Palmdale segment**

BLM Action: The California High Speed Rail Authority (CAHSRA), has completed the Final Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement, which includes four parcels of BLM land ranging from 40 acres to 160 acres each on land between Bakersfield and Palmdale. The CAHSRA submitted a right-of-way application in 2018 as part of completing the high-speed rail line between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Partners: California High Speed Rail Authority (applicant)

Status: Ridgecrest BLM will continue to process the application by completing a Record of Decision for the alignments on BLM-managed land and may issue a right-of-way over the next year.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist and Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

## *Minerals and Mining*

### **Exploration Plan of Operation for Conglomerate Mesa near Olancho**

BLM Action: Mojave Precious Metals submitted a Plan of Operations to reopen roads and re-establish drill pads for 30 locations on Conglomerate Mesa, east of Lone Pine, CA. Four holes would be directionally drilled from each pad for a total of 120 holes. BLM will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Record to determine if the exploration can proceed. The area has been explored for gold over the past 40 years and has been considered for a wilderness designation; the area has been released from wilderness consideration by Congress.

Partners: Mojave Precious Metals (applicant)

Status: The 30-day scoping period for the EA runs July 30 through August 30. Scoping issues and data may be submitted via the BLM's ePlanning website. An email to interested parties and a press release will include a project website link and include details for the scoping period.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager and Randy Porter, Geologist

### **Mining Plan of Operation for Makayla 2 Pumice Quarry near Coso Junction**

BLM Action: Southwest Global Pumice submitted a Mining Plan of Operations to expand operations to a new quarry location a quarter mile from their existing pit, east of U.S. 395 near Coso Junction. The 25-acre site has been previously disturbed on 15 acres and would include 10 acres of new disturbance. Environmental issues include dust, the Mojave ground squirrel and maintaining public access.

Partners: Southwest Global Pumice (applicant / mining claimant)

Status: Ridgecrest BLM issued a decision on July 19, 2021, approving the plan.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager and Randy Porter, Geologist

## *Recreation*

### **Fuel tank installed at Jawbone Station**

BLM Action: A new fuel station has been installed at Jawbone Station. The new tank will allow heavy equipment to fuel road and trail maintenance equipment efficiently while protecting the environment. The project received funding from the California OHV Fund's G20 Operations grant.

Partners: Friends of Jawbone

Status: Completed

BLM Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Recreation Planner, and Randy Masner, Civil Engineering Technician

### **Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River scoping begins**

BLM Action: Scoping for the Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River (WSR) opened on June 22, 2021. The Cottonwood Creek WSR flows through Inyo National Forest (Inyo NF) and the Ridgecrest Field Office area of responsibility in Inyo County, east of Big Pine. With the Inyo NF as the lead agency for planning, interested members of the public can provide scoping comments and data through the Inyo NF's website. The BLM's ePlanning site directs readers to the Forest Service website for consistency and to reduce redundancy.

Partners: Inyo National Forest

Status: Scoping period open until August 6, 2021. Information and commenting at ePlanning

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

#### **Sky River Road appeal dropped**

BLM Action: In 2019, the BLM issued a decision record and right-of-way to construct a new road for access to the NextEra Sky River wind farm on private land, east of Tehachapi and the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) appealed the decision. During the appeal, the PCTA and NextEra entered into negotiations, attempting to resolve their differences. After successful negotiation, the appeal was dropped by PCTA and dismissed by the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).

Status: Appeal dismissed by IBLA in June 2021; NextEra has resumed construction on the road.

BLM Contacts: Carl Symons, Field Manager and Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist

### *Wild Horses and Burros*

#### **Centennial Burro Gather removes 290 burros.**

BLM Action: Excess burros were gathered and removed from the Centennial Herd Area, near

Darwin and Trona. The decision to gather burros was completed in April 2021 and resulted in the gathering of 290 burros. The BLM retained a gather contractor to perform a drive-trap gather between May 28 and June 11, 2021, on BLM-managed land and bordering Navy land at the Navy Air Weapons Station – China Lake (NAWS-CL). No burros were injured during the operation.

Partners: U.S. Navy at NAWS-CL

Status: Completed in June 2021.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager and Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

### *Wildlife*

#### **Naturalist completes 2021 Spring season at Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area**

BLM Action: Through a partnership with the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC), two naturalists staffed the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA) visitor center March 15 through May 31, 2021. This year’s staffing of the DTRNA marked 32 consecutive years of providing education and outreach related to the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise. The BLM and DTPC jointly fund the naturalist(s) to educate the public about the desert tortoise, threats and habitat needs, as well as monitor habitat and repair damage to fences and signs.

Partners: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Status: Completed for the 32<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year

BLM Contacts: Clint Helms, Wildlife Biologist and Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### *Misc. / Other*

#### **Owens fire burns 1,800 acres near Inyokern**

BLM Action: A wildfire started in the Owens Peak wilderness area in May 2021, burning 1,800 acres before containment; the cause is unknown. The fire, west of U.S. Highway 395 near Inyokern, burned quickly due to high winds and destroyed a trailhead at Indian Wells Canyon and a riparian area in the Owens Peak wilderness area. Crews from the BLM and U.S Forest Service fought the fire over a five-day period. Work has started to rebuild wilderness boundary fences along designated routes in the burned area. A categorical exclusion has been completed to rebuild protective fences along wilderness boundary. American Conservation Experience brought in a youth crew to rebuild the fences.

Partners: U.S Forest Service, American Conservation Experience

Status: The fire is out and fence work has been started.

BLM Contacts: Carl Symons, Field Manager and Katy Meyers, Recreation Planner

## California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



*Photo: BLM firefighters at work*

### *Fire Incidents*

#### **Fires for Calendar Year 2021**

**BLM Action:** There have been approximately 88 fires within the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) so far this year. The total land burned as a result of these fires was approximately 10,829 acres; of these 5,6761 acres were on BLM lands and 2,497 acres were on National Park Service (NPS) lands; the remainder were either private property or on another agency's lands. The largest fire was the Southern Fire in San Diego County in the El Centro Field Office. It was 5,250 acres of which 3,031 acres were on BLM lands. The largest fire in one of the park units was the 2,490-acre Mojave Fire in the Mojave Preserve. The 1,512-acre Owens Fire in the Ridgecrest Field Office was the largest fire on only BLM lands.

**Partners:** The CDIFP has cooperative fire agreements with several counties and cities as well as other Federal and California State partners. Imperial County Fire, Riverside County Fire, San Bernardino County Fire, Kern County Fire, Redlands Fire Department, Apple Valley Fire

Department, Victorville Fire Department, Palm Springs Fire Department, CAL FIRE, the United States Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are some of the partner fire departments we work with the most often.

Status: All of the fires are currently out except the Marron 4 Fire which is 80 percent contained and is in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office in San Diego County.

BLM Contacts: Paul Gibbs, District Fire Management Officer and Freddie Espinoza, Assistant Fire Management Officer

### *Fuels Projects*

BLM Action: Fuels treatments using methods such as hand, mechanical, chemical and prescribed burning have been completed to protect natural and cultural resources. Fuels management also provides fire suppression personnel opportunities to take action to control wildfires and protect infrastructure and private property. Fuels treatments were used to contain, control, or otherwise suppress 19 wildfires in 2020 and three fires to date in 2021.

Partners: Partners in both BLM and NPS fuels treatments for 2021 include the California Conservation Corps. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps. Other BLM partners include the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), The Wildlands Conservancy, the Friends of the Desert Mountains, the Ramona Band of Cahuilla Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The BLM has completed 3,668 acres of fuels treatments: 2,789 acres in the Palm Springs Field Office, 717 acres in the Barstow Field Office, one acre in the Needles Field Office, and 161 acres in the Ridgecrest Field Office. There were 340 acres completed in Joshua Tree National Park.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

### *Mitigation and Education Projects*

BLM Action: The BLM completed 22 community assistance activities this year to help them withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience into the communities to help in the recovery if a fire were to occur. Mitigation-Education staff worked with cooperators and communities to plan and implement local fuels treatments such as the Sunrise Community Fuel Break in Julian and the North Mountain Fuel Break near Poppet Flats south of Banning. Both treatments have been used repeatedly to protect the communities from wildfires including the Cedar Fire of 2003 and the Esperanza Fire of 2006. Maintenance of each was completed to ensure their effectiveness.

Partners: Partners in mitigation and education efforts include the greater San Diego County Fire Safe Council and 26 of the community fire safe councils throughout the county. Other agencies

the BLM works with include the U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team has reviewed the administrative draft of the environmental assessment. Iron Age Mine LLC is currently analyzing an alternative route into the project site. Cultural and biological surveys are also underway.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager and Jason Winbigler, South Zone Mitigation-Education Specialist

### *Hiring Updates*

#### **Workforce Transformation**

BLM Action: The CDIFP was able to convert two lead firefighters on the BLM helicopter at Apple Valley to year-round positions. In addition, a lead firefighter position was added to all nine BLM engines. The lead firefighter positions on the engines are currently guaranteed to work six months per year. These changes were accomplished with funds provided by the previous administration.

Status: The BLM/NPS are working with the current administration to increase the minimum wage of Federal Firefighters to \$15 per hour and include retention incentives for many existing permanent employees at the lower and mid-level positions. If additional preparedness funds become available, converting the lead firefighter positions on the fire engines to year-round positions is a high priority for the CDIFP.

BLM Contacts: Paul Gibbs, District Fire Management Officer and Freddie Espinoza, Assistant Fire Management Officer





**IMPORTANT NOTICE:**

The California Desert District Office has moved to our new location,  
and we are now collocated with the  
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office at  
1201 Bird Center Drive  
Palm Springs, CA 92262  
760-833-7100