



**Field Office**  
**Fire and Fuel Reports**  
**Desert Advisory Council**  
February 2022

## Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



*Photo: Rainbow Basin*

### *Archaeology and Cultural Resources*

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

**BLM Action:** The BLM plans 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 will be re-opened to the public for self-guided tours.

The Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact was issued on August 30, 2021.

**Status:** Contractors began remediation work on January 13, 2022 and work should be completed within 45 days.

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

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

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

Status: The BLM is continuing consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), tribes, and consulting parties, consistent with the Tribal Consultation and Reporting requirements of the Agreement. Pursuant to the Agreement, the BLM is concurrently providing the BLM's determinations of eligibility for the FY2020 Inventory to all consulting parties and tribes for a 30-day review. The BLM will discuss determinations at the annual Consulting Parties Meeting scheduled for March 16, 2022.

The FY2020 Inventory included 43 linear miles of routes, which accounted for 2,997 acres. The BAFO staff observed and documented 35 newly recorded archaeological sites, 16 newly recorded isolates, monitored 17 previously recorded sites, and updated five previously recorded archaeological sites during the survey.

The results of the FY2020 Inventory are documented in the report entitled West Mojave Route Inventory: Fiscal Year 2020 Ridgecrest, Barstow, Needles, and Palm Springs Field Offices.

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer, Archaeologist; Tiffany Arend, CDD Archaeologist; and Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

### *Lands and Realty*

#### **Land Use Permits**

BLM Action: Issuing land use permits and letters of authorization.

Partners: Inland Empire Film Services

Status: For FY2022, a total of 24 film permits and two research/development permits (SpaceX and Ford) have been administered by field office staff. The BAFO also issued eight letters of authorization. The most popular land use permit locations included El Mirage, Johnson Valley, and Dumont Dunes OHV Recreation Areas.

BLM Contact: Michael Marks, Realty Specialist

### *Recreation*

#### **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

Status: A joint pre- and post-use inspection of the SUA occurred for the military training that took place on October 22-November 1, 2021, with no issues identified.

The Marine Corps plan to utilize the SUA 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: Jeff Childers, Acting Field Manager

### **Special Recreation Permits**

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

Status: Currently for FY2022, a total of 14 SRPs were administered by field office staff, not including the vendor permits for the King of the Hammers. The SRPs included a variety of recreation events (e.g., sprint enduro, navigational, UTV race, car/truck race, speed timing trials, hare and hound, sand drags, dual sport ride, poker run), most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The field office has also issued several letters of agreement for various events (e.g., wedding, Boy Scout outing).

BLM Contacts: Chailenn Young, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Nathan Bingham, Outdoor Recreation Planner; and David Kotlarski, Assistant Field Manager

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

#### **Sunbaked and Cady Solar Energy Projects**

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

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

Status: Two pre-application meetings have been held. The applicant is planning a pre-application meeting with the consulting parties.

BLM Contacts: Amy Schow, Realty Specialist

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

BLM Action: The BLM authorized a right of way for a wind testing project to EDF

Renewables to place four meteorological wind testing towers in the Johnson Valley area in San Bernardino County.

Status: Right of way issued

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 last spring / summer. Initial results are concerning due to low numbers of individuals present which are likely drought related.

The BAFO 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. In FY2021, BAFO received \$150,000 in funding to initiate planning efforts (UC Davis is contracting this work out). For FY2022, BAFO received \$300,000 to cover the costs of the implementation phase of this project.

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 BAFO continues to work with the Inyo County Road Department to install a weir at the outflow of “Borehole Marsh.” A second phase of the installation is scheduled for the end of September. Once this project is completed the structure will allow the BAFO to manage the site more efficiently.

In November 2021, BAFO installed 1,000 feet of new post-and-cable near Borehole Marsh to address incursion issues in the area.

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.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

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

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

BLM Action: The BAFO 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, California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), 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 BAFO continues to implement tamarisk management on the Amargosa River and 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 BAFO is working with Point Blue Conservation Science to conduct the 17<sup>th</sup> year of long-term bird monitoring efforts. Funding has been secured to continue this work this year as well.

The BAFO established eight Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River last 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 BAFO completed the implementation of the Bring Back the Natives Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in May 2021. This completes a project which was initiated in 2018 to improve habitat for the Amargosa Pupfish and other riparian dependent species. Over 650 trees were planted through a partnership with the BLM West Mojave Native Plants program and Victor Valley Community College. The BAFO 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 BAFO is monitoring the situation and working with our partners on habitat recovery efforts. In October 2021, BAFO planted 400 trees (cottonwood/willow) as part of the fire recovery efforts in partnership with The Nature Conservancy.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

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

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

BLM Action: The BAFO 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 BAFO 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 BAFO 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 BAFO received 2022 funding to continue tamarisk beetle studies associated with this program.

The BAFO, 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 Field Office 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 BAFO 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.

The Field Office is working with researchers from the California Institute of Technology to deploy a research project looking at natural methane emissions as it relates to climate change. Afton Canyon will be one of the study sites.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

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

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

BLM Action: The BAFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BAFO 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.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

*Other / Misc.*

### **Apple Valley NCCP/HCP Development**

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

BLM Action: The BAFO 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 town is nearing its target date for completion of the NCCP/HCP and the BAFO is engaged in coordination meetings to facilitate this effort.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

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

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

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 the first quarter of FY22.

BLM Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

## El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



*Photo: Recently discovered prehistoric ollas found during a fire in eastern San Diego County  
Photo Credit: Carrie Sahagun*

### *Minerals and Mining*

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

**BLM Action:** On October 14, 2021, Imperial USA Corporation (IUC) submitted the ECFO an amended Plan of Operations (Plan) to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the East Mesquite and Ogilby project segments, located in eastern Imperial County. The project proposes road improvements, 10 test pits for sampling, and 58 drill pads, with an estimated total disturbance of 3.5 acres of public lands. The amended Plan excludes activities within the Indian Pass mineral withdrawal area. The ECFO has reviewed the amended 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

**Status:** A cultural inventory workplan has been sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer and tribes for a 30-day comment period. NEPA will be initiated after the completion of biological surveys, cultural surveys, and all necessary information has been gathered.

**BLM Contact:** Mayra Martinez, Geologist

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

**BLM Action:** On September 3, 2021, SMP Gold Corp. (SMP) submitted the ECFO a revised Plan (Plan) to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the Oro Cruz historic mining area located

in the Cargo Muchacho Mountains in Eastern Imperial County. The Plan proposes new temporary and permanent roads, road improvements, a staging area, and 65 drill pads which include up to eight helicopter accessed drill pads. Project area activities would disturb a combined estimated 21 acres of public lands. The ECFO 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

Status: Biological and cultural resources surveys have been completed. NEPA will be initiated after ECFO staff have completed review of the cultural resources report and after all necessary information has been gathered.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

### *Recreation*

#### **Travel and Transportation Management / Off-Highway Vehicle Trail Management**

BLM Action: OHV race route trail maintenance has started in Plaster City Open Area and is funded through the SRP OHV race fees. Approved race routes have seen heavy use and trail maintenance includes smoothing out whoop-de-dos and deep ruts caused by fast moving long travel trucks with active biological monitoring for Flat-tailed horned lizards. The same type of OHV trail maintenance will be funded by OHV grants on approximately two miles of the Back Country Discovery Trail in the Superstition Mountain Open Area.

Partners: American Motorcycle Association District 38, CA State Parks OHMVR Division

Status: Active. Work continues through the winter

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

#### **Recreation Management**

BLM Action: ECFO supported a map replacement in the kiosk located within the Superstition Mountain OHV area and worked with the San Diego 4 Wheelers group to design a new map of trails in the area. The kiosk also includes regulations and safety information for visitors. The San Diego 4 Wheels group works to maintain the kiosk and monitors for damage or vandalism.

Partners: San Diego 4 Wheelers, Tread Lightly! San Diego Off Road Coalition

Status: Complete

BLM Contact: Eric Solomon, Outdoor Recreation Planner

## **Cleanup Event at Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA)**

BLM Action: A Letter of Agreement was issued to the San Diego Off-Road Coalition to host a large-scale cleanup in the ISDRA on Martin Luther King weekend annually from 2022-2025. An estimated 1,000 participants take part in the massive cleanup effort with multiple partners and business coming together to support the effort. ECFO staff is on hand to offer logistic support and assist in the cleanup.

Partners: ASA, Desert Cleanse Project, Tread Lightly, Glamis Black Bag Project, Glamis Veterans, Glamis Beach Store, Polaris, CAL 4 Wheel, Desert Whips INC, Gillmore's Off-Road, Boardmanville Trading Post, Daddy's Famous Foods, Shreddy Lyfe, and Coyne Powersports.

Status: Active annually

BLM Contact: Asdrubal Estrada, Outdoor Recreation Planner

## **Interagency Emergency Management Technician Cooperation**

BLM Action: ECFO has a staff of four Advanced EMT's to provide medical services to ISDRA visitors. Additional Basic EMT's in the ECFO provide additional coverage when necessary. During major holiday weekends, an agreement between the Alaska Fire Service and BLM allows the ordering of additional EMT's to travel to the ISDRA to provide EMS coverage in the dunes. ECFO EMS personnel travel to Alaska each year to teach an EMT-Basic and Advanced EMT courses and refresher training.

Partners: Alaska Fire Service, Imperial County EMS, AMR, Reach Air, Mercy Air, Aero Care, Surrounding Hospitals

Status: Active. The ISDRA dune season is in progress. Average (non-holiday) visitation averages around 20k visitors per weekend.

BLM Contact: Eric Solomon, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

## *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

### **East Mesa Solar Facility Renewable Energy Project**

BLM Action: IP Land Holdings, LLC has submitted a third updated ROW application for the originally proposed 2,500 MW solar energy and hydrogen electrolyzer facility on public lands designated as Development Focus Areas (DFA) under the Desert Renewable Energy and Conservation Plan. The project is proposed to generate and store up to 650 megawatts of renewable electricity via arrays of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and appurtenant facilities, including a battery energy storage system. The project would also construct a new gen-tie and high-voltage substation or an interconnection to the existing SDG&E 500kV transmission line (Southwest Powerlink). The previously proposed green hydrogen electrolyzer is no longer a feature of the project and lands designated as geothermal only DFA have been removed. The

current site layout is proposed on lands designated as DFA for all renewable technologies. The project is currently being reviewed as a BLM California priority project.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: The BLM is currently reviewing the third version of the project Plan of Development. The next project milestone will be to schedule and hold the second pre-application meeting (stakeholder meeting).

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

### **Wilderness Management**

BLM Action: Wildlife Water Source Monitoring

Partners: Student Conservation Association (SCA)

Status: The ECFO works with the SCA through cooperative agreements on annual water monitoring efforts. Monitoring efforts are performed during the same timeframe annually (January) to determine trends. This year, a crew of three will look at natural springs and *tenajas*, as well as wildlife guzzlers to record data to include estimates in area, depth, and gallons along with animal use in determining what type, and whether it is heavy or light use. The crew also documents known plant and animal species in all areas to assist with updating baseline wilderness character inventory.

BLM Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist

### **Special Recreation Permits**

BLM Action: The ECFO works with clubs, businesses, and non-profit organizations on Special Recreation Permits (SRP) and Letters of Agreement (LOAs). Currently, the ECFO has approved 34 vending SRPs, nine competitive SRPs, six general SRPs, and four LOAs. In December 2021, the ECFO managed the Red Bull Sand Scramble, the largest competitive event in the ISDRA of recent years. With over 50 participants and hundreds of spectators, this race is tentatively scheduled as an annual recurring event. The ECFO is also working on future events such as the Annual Superstation Run and the Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Cleanup.

Partners: El Centro Naval Air Facility, San Diego Off Road Coalition, Glamis Black Bag Project, and San Diego 4 Wheelers

Status: Continuously working with partners, OHV clubs, and businesses to manage SRPs and agreements to promote responsible and sustainable recreation and the conservation of resources.

BLM Contact: Asdrubal V. Estrada, Outdoor Recreation Planner

*Other / Misc.*

### **Law Enforcement Updates**

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement (LE) staff includes 11 LE Rangers and one Evidence Technician. ECFO LE Rangers conduct patrols of Imperial County from the Riverside County line, to the Colorado River/Arizona state line of BLM lands, eastern San Diego County, and the US/Mexico Border. The LE Rangers patrol these lands to provide a safe and enjoyable experience to the public while recreating, and to verify commercial activities conducted on public lands are done in accordance with applicable regulations and permitted agreements. In 2021, ECFO LE Rangers made 19,320 public contacts while patrolling ECFO public lands with visitation of approximately two million visitors. LE staff collected 781 items of evidence in law enforcement actions, all processed and stored by the ECFO evidence technician. LE also conducted 5,480 patrols of cultural and resource areas within the ECFO.

Partners: Imperial County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, United States Border Patrol

Status: Active and continuous patrols of BLM public lands for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public, and the protection resources, the environment, and BLM staff.

BLM Contact: Camilo Gonzalez, Chief Ranger



## Needles Field Office (NFO)



*Photo: Overlooking the Mojave Trails National Monument from the crest of Amboy Crater*

### *Lands and Realty*

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

BLM Action: Castle Mountain Venture (CMV) applied for a short-term use right-of-way for a temporary water pipeline and access road (on an existing railroad access route) for the purpose of discharging water from a 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.

Partners: N/A

Status: The pump test was successfully conducted; post action monitoring identified some minor erosion which the NFO has requested Castle Mountain Venture to correct.

BLM Contact: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist

#### **The City of Twentynine Palms Tourism Filming Project**

BLM Action: The City of Twentynine Palms is a Gateway Community to the Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) and the city's tourism organization has requested to use MTNM as a backdrop for promotional filming. The city seeks to highlight some of the area found in the NFO portion of the MTNM.

Partner: The City of Twentynine Palms Tourism

Status: The NFO issued a letter of agreement allowing the promotional filming

BLM Contact: Noelle Glines-Bovio, MTNM Monument Manager

### **Cox Comb Communication Site Amendment**

BLM Action: Verizon Wireless applied to amend their existing communication site lease for the purpose of installing additional solar panels at their facility.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team finalized their NEPA review (categorical exclusion) and sent an amendment offer to Verizon Wireless on November 22, 2021; NFO is awaiting response.

BLM Contact: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist

### **Mojave Desert Lands Trust Temporary Access**

BLM Action: The Mojave Desert Lands Trust (MDLT) submitted an application for a short-term use road right-of-way on an existing open route for the purpose of accessing a private land parcel requiring remediation work. The private land parcel is part of a conveyance package from the MDLT to the BLM.

Partner: MDLT

Status: The NFO's interdisciplinary team has reviewed the proposed action and determined the appropriate level of NEPA is a categorical exclusion. NFO staff determined cost recovery and requested additional information from MDLT; NFO is awaiting a response.

BLM Contact: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist

### **Brightline West High-Speed Train, Ivanpah Substation**

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

BLM Action: BLM is considering an application to construct, operate, and maintain an electric highspeed train from Victorville to Las Vegas by Brightline West. As a part of that approval a substation, converter station, and transmission line will need to be constructed near Ivanpah Dry Lake. BLM has determined that the current NEPA previously prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration is not adequate to authorize these facilities. BLM NFO will complete a separate EA to consider the facilities authorization.

Partners: Proponents of the project are FRA Brightline West, Southern California Edison (SCE).

Status: BLM is awaiting a complete Plan of Development from Brightline West and SCE.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist and Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

## **Union Pacific Railroad Tower Replacement**

BLM Action: Union Pacific Railroad Company submitted an amendment application to their existing communication use lease site, for the purpose of replacing an existing 60-foot guyed tower with an 80-foot self-supporting tower made of non-reflective galvanized steel. This facility serves as an ancillary facility to the Union Pacific Railroad and provides necessary communications to ensure safe operations of the railroad. The current tower was manufactured with an earlier Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) standard that is no longer applicable. The new tower would bring the communication facility up to current TIA standards and improve communication for the railroad and would be constructed adjacent and northwest of the existing tower. Once the new tower has been placed and communication equipment is installed and operating, the old tower would be removed.

Partners: N/A

Status: The NFO's interdisciplinary team is close to finalizing their review; the appropriate level of NEPA and cost recovery is expected to be completed very soon.

## *Minerals & Mining*

### **Castle Mountain Mine Modification to Plan of Operation**

BLM Action: NFO authorized the Castle Mountain Mine a minor plan modification for water well installation and testing; the well was installed within the existing footprint of a monitoring well completed in 2020.

Partners: BLM continues to facilitate collaboration and consultation with NPS

Status: NFO completed a Determination of NEPA Adequacy based on a recent environmental assessment of the project area ([DOI-BLM-CA-D090-2020-002-EA](#)) and updated cultural surveys. Well installation and testing are complete; drilling and pumping equipment have been removed. NFO is currently monitoring the progress of site reclamation.

BLM Contacts: Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager, and Rose Pettiette, Geologist

## *Recreation*

### **Ivanpah Windsailing Special Recreation Management Area Access**

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office is addressing OHV intrusion issues on the dry lakebed by adding five miles of post and cable fencing, repairing fencing, and addition seven heavy duty gates, and addressing and improving the access road.

Partners: There are several interested volunteers and windsailing groups who desire to be included in the effort. A California Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Division grant for \$860,000 has been approved 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

### **Mojave Trails National Monument 6<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event / Route 66 National Scenic Byway Needles to Barstow Celebration**

BLM Action: The BLM Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) is supporting a partnership event on Saturday, February 12, to celebrate the first year of National Scenic Byway U.S Route 66 Needles to Barstow. The City of Needles, Needles Area Chamber of Commerce, and the California Historic Route 66 Association are hosting the commemorative event.

Partners: California Historic Route 66 Association, City of Needles, and the Needles Area Chamber of Commerce

Status: The event will be held at the El Graces, Harvey House

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

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

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

BLM Action: The NFO, to enhance recreation opportunities at Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, proposes to add a trail network consisting of a series of looped trails (eight 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 about hiking in the extreme heat, the importance of packing water, and the time of year to avoid hiking in the area due to extreme heat conditions. Other signing would include maps and trail signs.

Status: Conceptual planning phase, have begun an internal review.

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

## *Wildlife*

### **Desert Stateline Solar Mitigation**

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

BLM Action: The NFO and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have identified a project that can be completed by Desert Stateline Solar Farm (DSSF) as mitigation for resource impacts caused

by the construction of their solar facility. NFO and the Mojave National Preserve (MNP) had previously agreed with DSSF to conduct their mitigation within the MNP by installing 13.1 miles of desert tortoise fencing on each side of Morning Star Mine Road. This was later determined to not be feasible due to the multiple washes along the roadside as well as flooding events which would cause heavy destruction to the fence line rendering it useless.

Currently the NFO has a pending project involving construction of desert tortoise fencing along Goffs Road. The goal is to create a barrier using tortoise fencing along both sides of Goffs Road, starting at Hwy 95, and moving west until the intersection of Goffs Road with I-40. This section of road is 24.5 miles in length, entirely within critical desert tortoise habitat, and the entire southern side of the road and the northeastern half are within the MTNM; the second half of the northwestern side of the road is within the MNP.

Partners: USFWS, Mohave National Preserve and Desert Stateline Solar Farm

Status: Alternative Development, Internal Review, Beginning of NEPA Process.

BLM Contact: Justin Saiz, Wildlife Biologist

*Other/Misc.*

### **Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) Planning Update**

BLM Action: Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) has reengaged in the preliminary monument planning phase. MTNM staff have awarded a contract through the Department of Interior's Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR) program.

Partners: N/A

Status: MTNM staff is working with the contractor and gathering the information to support facilitation, presentation, and design for the planned public listening sessions. Additionally, there will be a draft public engagement strategy created before and updated after the public meetings. Staff is currently in the beginning stages.

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



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



*Photo: DOI Secretary Deb Haaland speaking at a recent press conference at the PSSCFO while BLM California State Director Karen Mouritsen, and Congressman Raul Ruiz look on.*

### Renewable Energy and Transmission

The Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) manages over three dozen individual operational and proposed energy development projects. The following are updates on projects that have occurred since October.

#### Crimson Solar Project

BLM Action: Completing authorization of requested need, followed by monitoring compliance of construction.

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

Status: The BLM issued a right-of-way (ROW) grant to Sonoran West Holding, LLC for the battery energy storage system (BESS), substation, access roads, and an operations and maintenance building. Construction started on the BESS September 22, 2021 and is approximately 50% completed. Issuance for a ROW and notice to proceed on construction for the solar facility is pending the proponent finalizing a power purchase agreement. Construction is anticipated to start before the end of 2022.



BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon G. Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Arica Solar Project and Victory Pass Solar Projects**

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Clearway Solar

Status: The Department of The Interior announced the approval of the Arica and Victory Pass Solar Projects on December 21, 2021 via a national press release. With the approval to move forward, construction of the photovoltaic solar projects will begin. Once complete the combined projects will generate a total of up to 465 megawatts of electricity and up to 400 megawatts of battery storage. Together these renewable energy projects will result in an estimated combined infrastructure investment of \$ 689 million, \$5.9 million in annual operational economic benefit and power approximately 132,000 homes.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Carrie Woods, Project Manager

### **Oberon Solar**

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Intersect Power

Status: Intersect Power filed a ROW application on September 5, 2019, for a PV project on roughly 6,000 acres of public lands within the DFA near the Desert Center area, the proposed project area was reduced to roughly 2,600 acres. The project currently consists of a 500 MW PV facility located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with an optional battery storage.

The BLM released the Environmental Assessment in August 2021, and the 30-day comment period ended September 14, 2021. Endangered Species Act consultation with USFWS initiated September 9, 2021. National Historic Preservation Act consultation anticipated before the end of September 2021. The project was approved last month and will generate up to 500 megawatts of renewable energy and have capacity for 200 megawatts of battery storage.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

### **Sunlight Solar**

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Sunlight Solar LLC

Status: A ROW grant was issued on December 7, 2021, to Sunlight Solar LLC (a subsidiary of NextEra Energy) for construction of a 230-MW battery energy storage system on approximately 94 acres and wholly within the Desert Sunlight project; additionally, it would tie into the existing Desert Sunlight 230-kVgen-tie line and connect to the Red Bluff Substation. NTP was issued on December 21, 2021. Mobilization to begin the week of January 4, 2022 and construction to start the beginning of February 2022.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Nancy Robledo, Project Lead/Realty Specialist

### *Lands and Realty*

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

BLM Action: Granted

Chiriaco Summit Water District (CSWD) holds a Right-of-Way (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 California State Water Resources Control Board 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 proposes to replace its antiquated 35,000-gallon steel tank with a 500,000-gallon bolted steel tank, rehab the existing 300,000 open reservoir, and relocate and upgrade the microfiltration treatment plant from private property to BLM lands. Additional upgrades include below-grade and onsite yard piping for connection of facilities and future relocation of a diesel engine-driven fire pump. The ROW amendment would increase the project footprint by an additional 2.5 acres for a total of approximately five acres.

Partner: CSWD

Status: On July 16, 2021, the BLM published the Final EA and unsigned FONSI. The public comment period ended July 31, 2021. The grant was issued September 17, 2021, subject to a reclamation cost estimate, bond, a pre-construction meeting, and the notice to proceed. A meeting was held with CSWD on January 31. NTP pending.

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

### *Wildlife*

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

BLM Action: The PSSCFO partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized field surveys to assess the potential effects of wind energy turbine repowering on wildlife mortality rates in the San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area. This cooperative study was designed to provide information for use in guiding repowering projects on federal lands

throughout the region. The BLM entered its third year of regional surveys in 2022, which will continue into midway through the year. Survey protocols being developed call for the use of canine detection teams. The USGS designed these surveys and will analyze the data collected through these studies.

Partners: Rogue Detection Teams and the USGS

Status: Continuing surveys into mid-2022.

BLM Contact: Kristen Lalumiere, Wildlife Biologist

### *National Monuments*

#### **Sand to Snow National Monument Planning**

No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing

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. Both agencies are initiating actions to meet the new responsibilities in managing this national monument. The Monument Manager, Jihadda Govan, is an USFS employee based out of the San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office. Prior to her hire, 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 monument 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.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service

Status: Preparation plan submitted to BLM HQ. Statement of work being drafted.

BLM Contact: Jihadda Govan, Sand to Snow National Monument Manager

### *Other/Misc.*

#### **Law Enforcement**

BLM Action: The PSSCFO continues year-round law enforcement operations to protect public safety and resources.

Partners: PSSCFO federal law enforcement officers (LEOs) work with over 20 law enforcement agencies. On any given day, PSSCFO law enforcement (LE) staff may work with the US Border Patrol, National Park Service, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife, Drug Enforcement Agency, the counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego, as well as the local jurisdictions within the Coachella Valley.

Status: LEO's work in partnership with other federal, state, and local agencies on a variety of issues, including responding to fellow law enforcement agencies for support with search and rescue and medical emergencies. The PSSCFO LEOs also assist other BLM offices with national events to include high-visitation holiday weekends at the Imperial Sand Dunes in the El Centro Field Office, Saving America's Border Resources (SABR) in Arizona and California, the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), and also support fire season through resource orders for wildfires and Emergency Support Function throughout the country during national emergencies. PSSCFO LEOs participated in a variety of high-profile events in 2021 to include a visit from BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning and Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland. LE staffing levels for the PSSCFO are currently at seven LEOs, one in the hiring process, and one vacant supervisor position.

BLM Contact: Aaron R. Titus, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger (Acting), PSSCFO.

## Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



*Photo: A Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corrals favorite*

### *Archaeology*

#### **Haiwee North Dam #2 Project**

BLM Action: Construction on the Haiwee North Dam #2 project began last summer and is being monitored by archaeological and tribal cultural monitors under the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding.

Status: Coordination is on-going between the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, California Office of Historic Preservation, and tribes for unanticipated discoveries.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager and Amy Girado, Archaeologist

BLM Action: Museum collections owned by the BLM are periodically reviewed to ensure compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). When items are discovered in museum collections that qualify for protection under NAGPRA, the BLM works in conjunction with the facility to conduct consultation with the tribes and Most Likely Descendants to ensure compliance.

Status: Recent discoveries in four curated collections not previously reviewed under NAGPRA have been identified and the BLM is initiating tribal consultation to ensure the protected items are repatriated respectfully. Tribal notification letters were sent the summer of 2021. Consultation is on-going with support provided from the BLM Bishop Field Office.

BLM Contacts Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager and Amy Girado, Archeology

## *Grazing*

### **New Range Hire**

BLM Action: The RFO made a selection for the vacant Natural Recourse Resource Specialist - Range position.

Partners: N/A

Status: Working with HR to set a start date.

BLM Contact: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

## *Lands and Realty*

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

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

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, CA. 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.

Partner: 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 Rodriquez, Realty Specialist and Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### **Naturgy Candela Development LLC**

BLM Action: Application received to construct a 400-megawatt photovoltaic solar facility with Gen-Tie.

Partners: Naturgy Candela Development LLC

Status: California Desert District and the RFO are processing the application.

BLM Contacts: Yvonne Castro, Project Manager and Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist



## **Minor Rights-of-Way**

BLM Action: Evaluating submitted right-of-way applications received for various utility systems, telecommunication sites, and other facilities.

Partners: Various entities

Status: The RFO continues to process applications for transportation, utility systems, telecommunication, and facility (SF299), amendments, assignments, and conduct compliance inspections.

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

## *Minerals and Mining*

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

BLM Action: Mojave Precious Metals submitted a Modified Plan of Operations in order to re-enter previously reclaimed roads and re-establish drill pads for 30 locations on Conglomerate Mesa, east of Keeler, CA. If approved, four holes would be directionally drilled from each pad for a total of 120 holes. BLM will prepare an environmental document as part of the process for determining if or how the operation may proceed subject to regulation [43 CFR 3809](#). 43 CFR 3809. The area has been explored for gold over the past 40 years and was formerly considered for wilderness designation but has since been released from wilderness consideration by Congress. Additional resources: [Map](#)

Partner: Mojave Precious Metals

Status: The 30-day scoping period for the project is closed. The RFO is going through the comments received (approx. 23,800) and working with an environmental contractor on the NEPA process.

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

### **Mining Plans of Operation by Gold Discovery Group LLC**

BLM Action: Gold Discover Group, LLC has submitted an exploration plan to drill approximately 337 shallow holes to gather samples and explore for placer gold in the area of Johannesburg and Red Mountain, near Johannesburg, CA. If approved, holes would be approximately 8 inches in diameter and drilled into bedrock not deeper than 150 feet. The same company also applied for authorization to mine approximately 70 acres in San Bernardino County, near Atolia, CA. Both projects are required to comply with the NEPA process as part of determining whether or how the operations may be approved.

Partners: Gold Discovery Group, LLC

Status: Two environmental assessments are in progress

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

## *Recreation*

### **Special Recreation Permits**

BLM Action: The RFO issued and managed 16 Special Recreation Permits during the first quarter of FY2022 and is processing an additional 15 slated to occur the second quarter of FY2022.

BLM Contact: Craig Beck, Supervisory Recreation Planner

### **Dingell Act Implementation**

BLM Action: Through the assistance of a Student Conservation Association crew, the RFO is installing a fence line along the southern boundary of the Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area, which was designated in the Dingell Act.

Partner: Student Conservation Association

Status: Approximately one-third of the fence has been built to date.

BLM Contacts: John Thomas, Park Ranger and Katy Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

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

BLM Action: A new fuel station has been installed at Jawbone Station and is now fully operational. The tank will allow BLM and its partners 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.

Partner: Friends of Jawbone

Status: Fully operational

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

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

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

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 and Ridgecrest Field Office in Inyo County, east of Big Pine, CA. With the Inyo National Forest (Inyo NF) as the lead agency for the planning, interested 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.

Partner: Inyo National Forest

Status: Scoping period closed until July 23, 2021. BLM is working with FS to review comments.

BLM Contact: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

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

(No update to this entry since the Oct DAC report, but the project is continuing)

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. The Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) appealed the decision. During the appeal, the PCTA and NextEra entered into negotiations, attempting to resolve 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 Horse Gather**

BLM Action: RFO completed wild horse and burro gather in October 2021 and removed 214 horses and 37 burros from the Centennial Herd Management Area located on the Navy Air Weapons Station – China Lake (NAWS-CL). The management level for the area is 168 horses and zero burros and is currently estimated at 536 horses and 150 burros.

Partner: U.S. Navy at NAWS-CL

Status: Complete

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

## **Panamint and Slate Range Burro Gather**

BLM Action: The RFO is scheduled to conduct a burro gather in April in both the Panamint and Slate Range Herd Areas for up to 200 burros and 384 burros respectively. The management level is zero burros for both herd areas; the current estimated population is 200 and 473 burros. respectively.

Partners: U.S. Navy at NAWS-CL and National Park Service – Death Valley

Status: Coordinating with partners

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

### *Wildlife*

#### **Biologist positions**

BLM Action: Since the October DAC meeting, the RFO lost a second Biologist. Currently, both positions are being advertised.

Partners: N/A

Status: Ridgecrest is currently working on filling two biologist positions.

BLM Contact: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

### *Misc. / Other*

The RFO welcomed a new Environmental and Planning Coordinator, Max Wiegmann to the team on January 18.

The RFO also made a selection for the Administration Officer position and is working with the employee on a start date.

## California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



*Photo: BLM firefighters on a Prescribed Fire, January 2022*

### *Fire Incidents*

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

**BLM Action:** There were approximately 143 fires within the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) in 2021. Approximately 11,511 acres burned as a result of these wildfires; 5,740 acres were on BLM lands and 2,996 acres were on National Park Service (NPS) lands; the remainder were either on private property or on another agency's lands. The largest of these fires was the Southern Fire in San Diego County, located within the El Centro Field Office's area of responsibility; it was 5,250 acres, of which 3,031 acres were on BLM-managed lands. The largest fire in one of the NPS units was the 2,490-acre Mojave Fire in the Mojave Preserve. The 1,512-acre Owens Fire in the Ridgecrest Field Office's area of responsibility was the largest fire on BLM-only lands within the CDIFP.

**Partners:** The CDIFP has cooperative fire agreements with several counties and cities as well as other Federal and California State partners. 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 fires mentioned are out; there have been about a half dozen fires on BLM land so far in January.

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

### *Fuels Projects*

BLM Action: Several fuels treatments, using methods such as hand, mechanical, chemical, and prescribed burning, have been completed to protect communities, and natural and cultural resources. Treated areas provide fire suppression personnel opportunities to control wildfires and protect infrastructure and private property. Fuel treatments were used to contain, control, or otherwise suppress 19 wildfires in 2020 and six fires in 2021.

Partners: Partners in both BLM and NPS fuels treatments for 2022 include the California Conservation Corps. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps to implement treatments to protect Joshua trees in areas modeled to be refugia in the face of a warming and drying climate. Other BLM fuels projects 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 4,996 acres of fuels treatments within the Palm Springs resource area since October 2021. If fully funded, we will treat approximately 31,000 acres throughout the CDD, Joshua Tree National Park, and Mojave National Preserve this year. If and when we receive the additional required funding will significantly affect the ability to complete planned treatments this year. Disaster Bill funding provided for an additional 905 acres to be treated this year; to date, 599 of those acres have been treated in the Barstow, El Centro, and Palm Springs Field Offices. There are an additional 184 acres to be treated in Joshua Tree Park and the Mojave Preserve.

BLM Contact: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

### *Mitigation and Education Projects*

BLM Action: The BLM completed eight community assistance activities since October of 2021. Assistance activities help communities withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience into communities to help in their 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 two communities from wildfires including the Cedar Fire of 2003 and the Esperanza Fire of 2006 respectively; maintenance of each is ongoing to ensure 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 on mitigation include the U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies. BLM Mitigation-Education staff have presented training to Fire Safe Councils and community members including the Last Chance Survival simulation and Wildland-urban Interface (WUI) for Fire Safe Councils workshop.

Status: The BLM has completed eight community assistance activities with four education events coming up this spring including the Los Angeles County Fair. An additional two WUI workshops are planned for the spring in San Diego County for residents. Community Wildfire Protection Plan updates are also planned.

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

## *Hiring Updates*

### **Workforce Transformation**

BLM Action: The CDIFP is expanding our workforce in fuels, mitigation, and fire prevention. Additional fuels funds will be arriving later this year and in 2023 due to the passage of the infrastructure bill. We are in the process of advertising a biological technician position and three fire mitigations specialist positions within the BLM fire program to assist with the planning and implementation of fuels treatments, fire mitigation, and fire prevention.

Status: The BLM/NPS are waiting on an additional bill(s) to pass and be signed by President Biden which will increase the preparedness budget; otherwise, no increase in preparedness funding is expected until FY2023. Preparedness funds are used to staff our fire engines.

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

Just in case you haven't heard...



## **ANDREW ARCHULETA NAMED BLM WYOMING STATE DIRECTOR**

Will oversee the management of 17.5 million surface acres of public lands

CHEYENNE, Wyo. – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Tracy Stone-Manning announced today that Andrew Archuleta has been selected as the new BLM Wyoming State Director. In this position, Archuleta will be responsible for overseeing the management of 17.5 million surface acres of public lands and more than 40 million acres of Federal sub-surface mineral estate. Archuleta will report to the BLM WY State Office in late February 2022.

As BLM Wyoming State Director, Archuleta will also oversee more than 600 permanent staff and 150 seasonal employees who help manage a myriad of public land uses and resources, including energy development, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation and the protection and control of wild horses and burros.

“Andrew brings almost three decades of service and leadership experience to his new role, and he has been at the forefront of some of our most important initiatives. His understanding of rural communities and the challenges they face coupled with the expertise he has developed will continue to benefit the BLM and the Wyoming communities and constituencies we serve,” Stone-Manning said.

Archuleta’s career in federal service began more than 28 years ago and includes almost 15 years with the BLM. He has held several important assignments in recent years including BLM Colorado’s Northwest District Manager, the acting Division Chief for Fluid Minerals program and most recently served as the District Manager for BLM’s California Desert District. In addition, he has also worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service. A Colorado native, Archuleta earned a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology and a master’s degree in wildlife toxicology, both from Colorado State University. He is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys backpacking, hiking, snowshoeing, biking, skiing, hunting and fishing.

Archuleta replaces Kim Liebhauser, who served as acting director and will return to her permanent role as BLM Wyoming Associate State Director.

---

You are invited to Andrew’s send-off party on Friday, February 25, starting at 4:30 p.m., at the High Bar, located at the top of the Rowan Hotel at 100 W Tahquitz Canyon Way in Palm Springs  
Please RSVP to [mvanderlinde@blm.gov](mailto:mvanderlinde@blm.gov) by Wednesday, February 23



