

**HIGHLIGHTS  
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting  
February 2017**



**The 2016-2017 visitor use season is in full swing. The BLM places a high priority on providing opportunities for safe, family-friendly recreation in America's Great Outdoors!**

## **Collaboration**

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Subgroup**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup held a meeting on December 15, 2016 to discuss the current 2016-2017 OHV season overview. Additionally, meeting dates were also selected for the 2017 calendar year. The meeting dates for 2017 are March 16, May 18, August 17, and December 14, 2017. The ISDRA Subgroup meets three to four times per calendar year. Meeting dates are selected to include a meeting prior to the start of the season, during the season and after the season. A meeting is also scheduled to provide the subgroup an opportunity to discuss the BLM's off-highway vehicle (OHV) preliminary grant applications.

The next ISDRA Subgroup meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2017 at 9:30 a.m. at the El Centro Field Office (ECFO). Discussion will include information from the BLM regarding the preliminary OHV grant applications.

## **Community**

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Education and Outreach**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** During the 2016-2017 visitor use season, BLM will continue education efforts and has a goal to schedule at least five OHV safety educational events. The events will be advertised on the BLM Facebook page. Topics may include impaired driving, navigation, natural resource issues and OHV laws and regulations.

Recently, one of our partners, the United Desert Gateway (UDG), helped put on another successful Discover the Desert - Star Wars event which drew a crowd of over 1,000 people. Many visitors to the event were from the local gateway communities and others traveled from all parts of the United States to attend. Visitors partook of educational booths, a fan art show, an off-road tour to the filming site, and photo opportunities with cosplayers. A free, outdoor showing of the movie, *Return of the Jedi*, partially filmed in the ISDRA, was the highlight of the event.



Visitors gather around to enjoy the movie





Left: Costumed Star Wars characters posed for pictures with fans while the Imperial Sand Dunes provided the perfect backdrop. Right: Archeologist Sheila Brierley talks to visitors at the Discover the Desert Booth

### **BLM Action: Monster Energy 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Filming Permit**

**Contact:**Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

**Status:** On December 5 through December 8, 2016, Monster Energy shot their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual film for their YouTube video series “Doonies”, this year titled “Doonies 3”. During filming BLM Park Rangers/EMTs were on sight to provide emergency services. Monster was permitted for 2 helicopters, pyrotechnics and a “Ball of Steel”.



Park Rangers Ruben Duran and Brian Puckett on site to monitor and provide medical services

**BLM Action: National Public Lands Day**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The ECFO hosted a National Public Lands Day (NPLD) event on November 12, 2016, over Veterans Day weekend. NPLD is an annual volunteer event on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of September where members of the public have the opportunity to “give back” to the land that they recreate on, usually in the form of a cleanup or restoration activity. This year the ECFO partnered with two off-road groups, Tierra del Sol and Straightline Engineering, to host an event centered around thanking military veterans and members. Both of these groups have engineered their vehicles for bouldering, and they regularly apply for permits with our office to rock-crawl through Devil’s Canyon near San Diego county. The groups agreed to perform their usual bouldering activity through the canyon while hosting military members as passengers. The Jacumba Hikers out of San Diego County and volunteer photographers from the Imperial Valley Desert Museum also helped with the interpretation/education/history event.



Drivers from the off-road groups helped each other navigate the difficult terrain



The off-road groups, hikers, military members, and BLM staff gather for a photo



**BLM Action: San Diego Off-Road Coalition (SDORC) Monthly Meeting****Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** McCain Valley is a popular area within Eastern San Diego County for camping, hunting, hiking, dirt-bike and horseback riding, and bird-watching, among other recreational activities. Sites within the area include Cottonwood Campground, Lark Canyon Campground, and the Lark Canyon Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) area. SDORC, who regularly uses the site for riding, invited the BLM to attend their January 3, 2017 meeting, along with representatives from other interest groups within McCain Valley, to discuss the Tule Wind project. Tule Wind LLC obtained approval to construct 52 wind turbines throughout McCain Valley in 2012 and began construction in late 2016. Members of San Diego Adventure Riders, San Diego Trials Riders, San Diego Dirtbikers Meetup, and friends groups attended the meeting. BLM staff answered questions and worked to mitigate concerns that the members had concerning construction. The meeting had a successful turnout, and members were grateful for the time BLM put into attending and alleviating some angst.



Horse corrals at Cottonwood Campground



Lark Canyon Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Day Use Area

## **Public Service**

### **BLM Action: ISDRA Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)**

**Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger**

**Status:** Since the ranger stations opened on October 14, 2016, our Park Rangers have responded to 227 medical and search and rescue calls within the ISDRA, including five incidents involving fatalities. Call volume is comparable to the past five year average for this same timeframe. These calls range from stranded or lost visitors, to minor cuts and burns to major multi-system trauma and medical illness.

ISDRA Staff continue to stay busy with continuing education and skills training to ensure medical and rescue skills stay on point. This training includes emergency medical care at basic and advanced levels, technical off-road driving for search and rescue, and technical skills for rope, swiftwater, and vehicle rescue. These trainings are taught in house or with partnering agencies such as the US Border Patrol.

ISDRA Staff have also been asked by the BLM Alaska Fire Service to instruct a 50-hour training course in austere medicine and trauma for BLM, US Forest Service, and National Park Service staff, including hotshot crews and smokejumpers in Fairbanks, Alaska this March.



BLM and Imperial County Sherriff's Office staff work together to extricate, treat, and evacuate two seriously injured occupants from a sand car which rolled several times at a high rate of speed



**BLM Action: Law Enforcement****Contact: George Masner, Acting Chief Law Enforcement Ranger****Status:** The ECFO Law Enforcement staff is engaged in the busy winter OHV season, and the National Details hosted by the ECFO.

Staff strives to implement a fair, but firm law enforcement and resource protection program aimed at protection of public resources and ensuring the safety of BLM employees and public land users. Our Law Enforcement Rangers are the BLM's most visible ambassadors to public land users. They are there to educate, assist, and protect. They exercise their law enforcement authority (i.e. warning, citation or arrest) only when necessary to protect public safety or public land resources. They maintain a visible, friendly presence on the public lands, serving as a "welcome neighbor or guide" to those who use the ISDRA and as a deterrent to visitors who might misuse public resources or threaten public safety.

During the holiday weekends and through regular patrols, BLM Law Enforcement Rangers distribute "Dune Guard" cards to kids "caught" setting an outstanding example of responsible and safe OHV riding behavior. Kids can bring the cards to one of our two Ranger Stations and redeem them for a free "Dune Guard" t-shirt.

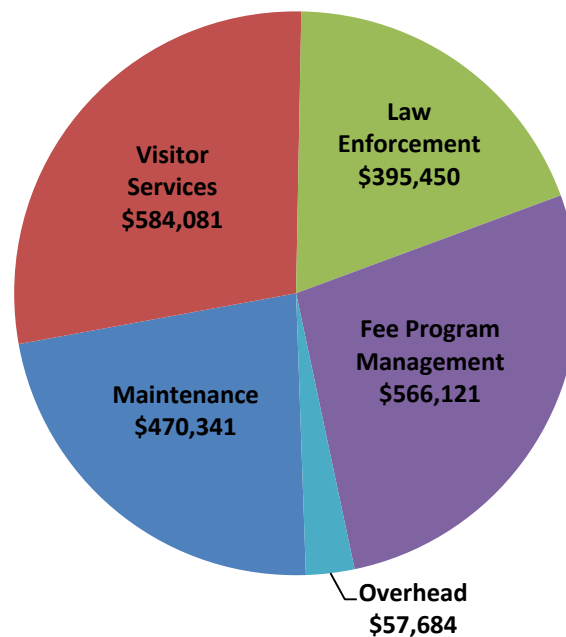
The El Centro Law Enforcement Team is growing as one of our new Law Enforcement Rangers will be graduating the Federal Law Enforcement Academy on February 21, 2017. We have one new Law Enforcement Ranger who started the Federal Law Enforcement Academy this month and another starting in June 2017.



**BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update and Visitation**  
**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**  
**Status:** The fee season began on October 1, 2016. Since October there were 4,578 Season and 31,345 Weekly permits sold, an increase from last season.

As of February 5, 2017, visitation in the ISDRA reached a total of 510,167 visitors. Visitation counts began October 2, 2016 with the final count being collected the last week of September 2017.

## FY 2016 Expenditures



**BLM Action: OHV Grant Program**  
**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**  
**Status:** In 2016, ECFO was successfully awarded \$845,017 in OHV grants for the 2016-2017 use season. Grant dollars were awarded from the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division for projects in the categories of Ground Operations, Law Enforcement and Safety.

Currently, ECFO is writing preliminary grant applications for the 2017-2018 use season. Preliminary grant applications are due to the OHMVR Division by March 6, 2017. ECFO will be applying for grant dollars for OHV areas throughout the field office. Grants applications will be submitted for ground operations, law enforcement, safety/education and for planning. Public comment on grant applications will begin Tuesday, March 7, 2016 and grant applications will be available for comment through April 3, 2016. To review and comment the preliminary OHV grants visit: <http://ohv.parks.ca.gov/> and click on the "Grants" tab.



**BLM Action: Social Media**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The Imperial Sand Dunes Facebook page has been providing visitors with information about the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area for four years. We currently have 10,616 “likes” and our posts receive thousands of views. Most posts include information about current conditions, dunes safety, ISDRA Subgroup Meetings, OHV events and other dunes related information. We also share posts of volunteers and staff contributing to the public lands in ways such as cleaning trash or helping reunite lost dogs with their owners. We continue to highlight the Discover the Desert initiative through posting desert filming photos and news. Discover the Desert focuses on educating, engaging and informing people of the cultural, historical, archaeological, environmental, and recreation opportunities within the desert. We also work with the BLM National and California State Offices, providing Imperial Sand Dunes stories and highlights for their Facebook pages and other social media networks. "Like" us on Facebook!

**BLM Action: Volunteer Program**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** El Centro BLM volunteers are working diligently to promote the mission of the BLM. The office currently oversees 7 volunteer campground hosts between the Imperial Sand Dunes and our Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVAs), designated areas where campers can stay up to six months at campgrounds. We also have an annual “Flagpole Ceremony” in the ISDRA over Veteran’s Day weekend that includes a volunteer cleanup, as well as our biggest volunteer event: the annual MLK Dunes Cleanup, where we partner with United Desert Gateway during Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend and offer volunteers free access to the dunes, free food, and a raffle in return for their hard work. Some volunteers this season had a very unique job: they drove their own personal technical rock-crawling vehicles through Devil’s Canyon as part of our National Public Lands Day event. Volunteer photographers from the Imperial Valley Desert Museum also helped with the interpretive event, as well as members of the military and hikers who participated in it. With a total of 1027 volunteers already contributing thousands of hours this season, we are well on our way to a successful volunteer season once again.



Photo of Homer Himes, year-around campground host at Buttercup in the ISDRA

**BLM Action: Restoration/Signing Project**

**Contact: Astrubal Estrada, Park Ranger**

**Status:** The ECFO Restoration Crew is composed of four Park Rangers, one permanent and three seasonal. The three seasonal park rangers were hired for the current ISDRA season and reported for duty on October 1, 2016. The Restoration Crew spends the majority of their time working in the ISDRA. Their main responsibilities are monitoring and signing approximately 9,000 acres of critical habitat for Pierson's milk-vetch which is closed to OHV use. Along with other Park Ranger duties, they also conduct visitor contacts and inform the public about the designated critical habitat areas of the Imperial Sand Dunes.

Before starting their duties, the crew members undergo off-road vehicle and UTV training instructed by a BLM certified OHV instructor. Along with off-road training, they also completed radio communications and GPS exercises, also instructed by local BLM staff. After completing their training and gaining adequate experience, they are gradually introduced to driving in more difficult terrain. The duties of the Restoration Crew are physically demanding, therefore the proper adaptation of the crew members to the dunes extreme terrain and weather is essential to mission success.



**The Restoration Crew in action east of the Test Hill Closure**



**The Restoration Crew after a hard day of signing at the Border Closure**



**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The ECFO received 117 Special Recreation Permit (SRPs) applications for a wide variety of activities, including competitive off-road racing, 4X4 touring, OHV demo rides, and vending goods and services. Of the 117 applications, 16 were for UTV, ATV and motorcycle races sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA) District 38. The great relationships we have built with AMA District 38, the racing community, and other local agencies enable us to work collaboratively to manage safe events. The ECFO continues to accept SRP applications for 2017.



A “pee-wee” race participant in Superstition Mountain Special Recreation Management Area



Competitors line up at sunrise for a land navigation event in the Imperial Sand Dunes

**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits- Vending**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** So far this season, the ECFO has processed 71 SRPs for vendors: businesses with the goal of enhancing the recreation opportunities and providing necessary services to the public. In the ISDRA, vendors provide services such as OHV rescue, OHV repair and rentals, RV rentals, safety equipment, souvenirs, water, food, and septic. The businesses also have the opportunity to provide their services to visitors of the west desert (Superstition and Plaster City OHV Open Areas) and the Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVAs), but the ISDRA remains the most popular location.



Trailer rented by visitors from the popular RV rental vendor, Camp N Style



Examples of flags sold by ISDRA vendors.



**BLM Action: Sand removal for visitor access**

**Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator**

**Status:** High winds have caused large sand drifts to cover roadways and campgrounds. The ECFO Maintenance Staff have been working hard to ensure safe access to the ISDRA for both duners and travelers alike.



Sand removal at Osbourne Overlook

**BLM Action: Gecko and Gray's Well Road Repaving Project**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** A repaving and repair project is set to begin April 15, 2017 on Gecko Road. The road will be closed to traffic while the entire road, including campgrounds, receives much needed repairs and replacement. We anticipate the project will take five months to complete. Depending upon availability of funds, Gray's Well Road will also be repaved. These repairs will provide for a safer and smoother drive for visitors accessing the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area.



Gecko Road in need of repairs

**BLM Action: New Signs****Contact: Barrett Trost, Maintenance Worker**

**Status:** El Centro Maintenance staff replaced outdated and damaged signs throughout the ECFO area with new, updated signs. The new signs add to the aesthetics of the ECFO Area and are in conformance with the BLM's new nationwide sign policy.



Before and after photos of the new Plaster City East OHV Area Sign

**Sustainability****BLM Action: Desert Restoration****Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist**

**Status:** On October 18, 2016, American Conservation Experience (ACE) began their second of three seasons restoring, monitoring and inventorying closed and illegal routes of travel. They are funded mainly through the California Off-Highway Vehicle Grants. Through their grant, they have contracted out for Archaeological Surveys for routes in need of restoration.



Left: ACE Crew Members sweeping out tracks Right: ACE Crew Member vertical mulching



**BLM Action: Wilderness Update****Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist**

**Status:** Wilderness monitoring efforts continue and approximately 75,000 acres have been monitored for the year. We monitor for illegal vehicle incursions into the wilderness and make sure wilderness signs are standing and in good condition. In January, we had a WildCorp team from Student Conservation Association (SCA) come out and monitor Big Game Guzzlers and natural *tenajas* (depressions in bedrock that hold water). The crew did this for 9 days and then came back and began a small signing project. They drove around the boundaries of several wilderness areas to check the signage. They installed over 100 new wilderness boundary signs.



SCA Members collecting water data

**BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Special Status Species Reports Submitted****Contact: Camden Bruner, Wildlife Biologist**

**Status:** Annual monitoring is conducted by BLM El Centro staff in the Imperial Sand Dunes for Federally Threatened Peirson's milk-vetch (*Astragalus magdalenae* var. *peirsonii*) in addition to other BLM sensitive plant species. This monitoring effort studies areas in the dunes closed to vehicle traffic as well as areas open for OHV use. A report on the results of this monitoring effort has been prepared and made available to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Further, a report detailing ECFO efforts to sign and enforce closed areas of the dunes as well as efforts to implement desert tortoise conservation measures have been prepared and submitted to the USFWS.

**BLM Action: Field Work Concludes on Fringe-toed Lizard Study****Contact: Camden Bruner, Wildlife Biologist**

**Status:** Researchers from the United States Geological Survey in partnership with ECFO concluded 3 years of data collection in the Imperial Sand Dunes. The researchers walked transects surveying for Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizards (*Uma notata*) recording lizard activity in relation to ground temperature, lizard presence in relation to vegetation, and lizard densities in open versus closed OHV areas. The project will now enter a data processing and writing phase in which numerous statistical models will be run on the data and the results prepared for publication. This long term study has the potential to yield new and important information regarding conservation and management of this BLM sensitive species.



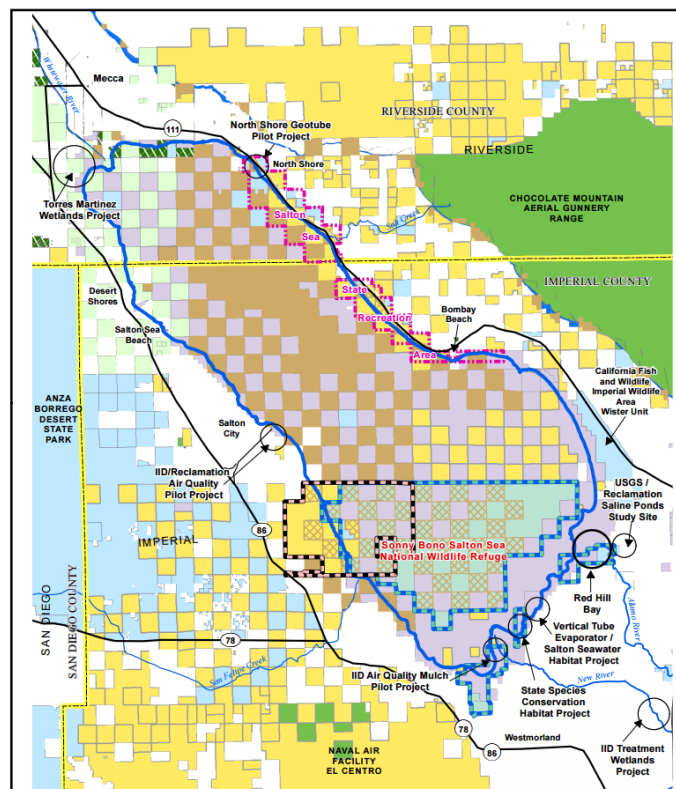


Fringe-toed lizard showing "fringes" on hind foot

## BLM Action: Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project Right-of-Way Grant

**Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist**

**Status:** On February 8, 2017, the California Department of Water Resources (CADWR) and ECFO signed a right-of-way grant authorizing the Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) Project on public lands. The BLM grant covers approximately 480 acres of the project area, which totals 3,770 acres along the southern end of the Salton Sea. The overall goal of the SCH is to develop needed aquatic habitats that will continue to support fish and wildlife species dependent on the Salton Sea. Without the project, this important habitat will continue to decline. Additional benefits of the project include increased recreational opportunities and improvements to air quality. The commencement of the SCH is an exciting conservation and land management action aimed at the long-term viability of the Salton Sea. The BLM is pleased to have a role in the project and looks forward to its successful outcome and continued enhancement of this important habitat area.



**BLM Action: Resources welcomes two new staff members**

**Contact: Carrie Sahagun, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning**

**Status:** The Resources and Planning Division of the ECFO is pleased to announce the hiring of two new staff members: Sheila Brierley, Archaeologist and Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist, who began their careers with the BLM in November 2016 and January 2017 respectively.

Tristan grew up in the bay area spending time in both San Jose and Pleasanton. He attended Humboldt State University where he received a BA degree in Economics, emphasizing Natural Resources and Planning. Following his time in Arcata, Tristan decided to begin his career in rural community development. He moved to Montana where he spent five plus years working for the Ravalli County Planning Department in the city of Hamilton and two years with the Cascade County Planning Department located in Great Falls. Realizing a desire for higher education and continued professional growth, Tristan attended the Alexander Blewett III School of Law at the University of Montana, earning a juris doctor in 2016. During law school Tristan served as an editor for the Public Land and Resources Law Review, a scholarly journal focused on publishing work focused on legal matters impacting the management of public lands. This is Tristan's first stint with the federal government, and he is thrilled to be with the BLM. In his free time he enjoys exploring our public lands, shooting hoops, imbibing a hoppy beer or two and zealously following Oakland A's baseball.



**Realty Specialist Tristan Riddell at Iceberg Lake,  
Glacier National Park**

Sheila Brierley joined the ECFO filling the position of Archaeologist on November 14, 2017. Born in Denver, Colorado and also living many years in northeastern Nevada and western Washington, Sheila received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology with a focus on Cultural and Archaeology and attained a minor in Spiritual Beliefs of the Indigenous groups of the Pacific Northwest, Canada, and Alaska as well as Eastern Religions from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Sheila went on to earn her Masters of Applied Anthropology with a focus in archaeology and indigenous groups of the high mountain desert of the Great Basin Region from Boise State University (BSU), Boise, Idaho. After graduating from BSU, Sheila

worked for the United States Forest Service at the Toiyabe National Forest based out of Austin and Tonopah, Nevada, working on historic mining towns and prehistoric sites. Sheila then worked for the BLM Tonopah Field Office focusing on Regulation 3809, site revaluation and recommendations for reclamation efforts. Sheila has currently become involved with cultural resources monitoring for the Tule Wind Project located at McCain Valley. Also, very exciting for her, has been the Tribal Participation Plan. This gives Sheila the opportunity to work with the many different bands and tribes of the southern California desert region, having a dialog with them on projects that affect their ancestral home lands as well as measures that will help ensure a better future for their children and families.



View from the Tule Wind Project area

### **BLM Action: Ocotillo Wind Facility Turbine Failure**

**Contact: Thomas Zale, Field Manager**

**Status:** On Nov. 21, 2016, a wind turbine at the Ocotillo Wind Facility collapsed at the half-way point causing nacelle and blades to impact the ground near the turbine base. There were no reports of injuries. Pattern Energy immediately suspended operations followed by the BLM issuance of a notice to formally suspend operations on Nov. 22, 2016. The turbine is one of 112 turbines at the Ocotillo Wind project located on public lands managed by the ECFO. Pattern Energy, along with turbine manufacturer Siemens Energy and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory determined that a fatigue driven crack observed in the web shear of the blade had buckled causing the blade to strike the tower which then caused the tower to collapse. The parties developed and implemented an inspection, documentation and repair process for the remaining turbines on the project and as of February 8, 2017, the BLM temporary suspension of operations has been lifted on all remaining 111 turbines. A physical inspection of each turbine will continue to be required once every four months and the ECFO anticipates receiving a construction plan from Pattern Energy to replace the original collapsed turbine.





Collapsed turbine at the Ocotillo Wind Facility

# **HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE**

## **California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting**

**February 25, 2017**

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

**BLM Action:** On February 12, 2016 the President designated the Mojave Trails National Monument comprised of 1.6 million acres of land located primarily in San Bernardino County, the majority of which is managed by the Needles Field Office, but also overlaps into the Barstow Field Office. Additionally there is a small area encompassing Camp Granite Mountain within Riverside County managed by the Palm Springs Field Office.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office is the primary point of contact.

**Contact:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** The MTNM Manager has been very busy working with the staff of the Barstow and Needles Field Office to move forward the management of the MTNM. Highlights of the efforts include numerous service projects sponsored by our many partner organizations, the development of an Interdisciplinary Planning Team, and the proposed make and selection process for the MTNM Sub-Group. The DAC will be briefed on these and other aspects of the MTNM planning at the DAC Meeting.

### **Castle Mountain Mine Re-opening**

**BLM Action:** The NEFO has been contacted by Castle Mountain Mining Company (CMMC) about the possibility of re-opening the Castle Mountain Gold Mine. The mine was operated by the Viceroy Mining Company from approximately 1991 through 2001. The NEFO has been in informal consultation with the CMMC since December 2013. CMMC has indicated that they do want to pursue re-opening the mine and that we can anticipate a proposed Plan of Operations (POO) soon. Indications are that the proposed POO will be to initiate operations within the previously authorized foot print of the mine.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contact:** Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manger

**Status:** NewCastle Gold has continued with previously authorized exploratory drilling all located within the mining area. NewCastle has requested a third phase of exploratory drilling. The access road to the mine washed out numerous time this year due to monsoonal storms.

NewCastle has requested permission to replace culverts and other water control features in the road to prevent this in the future. The NEFO is in consultation with NewCastle Gold and the Las Vegas Field Office regarding the re-establishment of a Right-of-Way for the access road.

### **First Solar Stateline Solar Farm**

**BLM Action:** Desert Stateline, LLC, now owned in partnership with Southern Power and First Solar Development, Inc. (First Solar) constructing a 300-megawatt alternating current solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating project known as the Stateline Solar Farm. The PV generating facility (Solar Farm), the corridor for the Project's 220-kilovolt (kV) generation interconnection (gen-tie) transmission line, and the access road is to be located in western Ivanpah Valley, east of Interstate 15 and northeast of the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System project. The project connects to the Southern California Edison (SCE) regional transmission grid via SCE's Ivanpah Substation.

**Agencies:** California Desert District Renewable Energy Action Team and Needles Field Office

**Contacts:** Greg Helseth, Project Manager  
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** **No Change:** Construction of the facility is nearly complete and most of the construction office complex has been removed. BLM continues to work with First Solar to complete a few off-site mitigation measures.

### **Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System**

**BLM Action:** Solar Partners', LLC have constructed the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System, a concentrated solar electrical generating facility capable of generating 370 megawatts (MW) of renewable power. The project is located in the Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada, and consist of three power plants, Ivanpah 1, Ivanpah 2 and Ivanpah 3. Shared facilities include a substation and natural gas pipeline. The three independent power plants and shared substation are co-located on approximately 3,671 acres of Bureau administered public land.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contacts:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** The plant is operational and all off-site mitigation measures have been completed. NEFO continues ongoing operational, tortoise, and avian monitoring.

### **Interconnect Towers, LLC.**



**BLM Action:** Interconnect Towers, LLC (ICT) have submitted applications to construct communication sites along I-40 and I-15. The proposed locations are Blind Hills, Ash Hill, Halloran Springs, Nipton, I-40/HWY 95 junction, and I-40 near Park Moabi Rd. The proposed projects would potentially provide increased cell phone and emergency response services in areas currently deemed as limited

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contacts:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** The NEFO continues to work with ICT to complete authorization of the Ash Hill, Halloran Springs, and I-40/Hwy 95 sites.

### **Abandoned Mine Lands**

**BLM Action:** The NEFO is actively pursuing inventories, prioritization and closures of abandoned mines that may present a public safety hazard.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office with support from the California Desert District and California Department of Conservation

**Contact:** Sterling White, CDD AML  
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** Bat surveys and other natural and cultural resource surveys are being conducted as funds and staffing allow for the development of a NEPA document and a possible contract for the closures. Much of the inventory work and bat surveys are accomplished by contractors, staff, and volunteers.

### **Partnerships**

Chicago Botanical Garden – The NFO will be partnering with the Chicago Botanic Garden's Conservation and Land Management Internship to host 4 interns this spring. Two interns will be working on the Seeds of Success program. The program collects native plant seeds which are stored for use in research, restoration, or reclamation projects. Two other interns will be working on an OHMVR Grant-funded Invasive and Sensitive plant inventory project. This work will be the last season of a three year project that is focused on the inventory of invasive and sensitive plant species adjacent to NEMO and NECO roads and trails.

Amargosa Conservancy - The NFO and the Amargosa Conservancy (AC) are working together in protective and conservation efforts at Crystal Springs, Wildhorse Spring, and Horse Thief Springs in the Kingston Range. AC has provided cleanup efforts and are "eyes and ears" for the field office in this remote area.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) – the RSABG helps with sensitive plant inventory and SOS collections in remote portions of the NFO, and partners with NFO SOS interns to

complete large seed collections.

California Trail Users Coalition - The NFO has entered into an agreement with the California Trail Users Coalition (CTUC) to extend their successful map series to include the NFO. This includes the development of a three map series covering our jurisdiction. The project is funded through a grant from the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

All three maps covering the Needles Field Office jurisdiction have been completed and are now available through the CTUC, and the Needles Field Office. The NFO has also initiated a distribution network utilizing local RV Resorts along the Colorado River.

All maps use a comprehensive route network, developed by staff based on the designated open route system for the map series. This network highlights long distance touring opportunities and access to recreational points of interest. The routes are marked; those with assigned names have been marked with stickers showing the names and numbers that correspond to labels on the maps.

Native American Lands Conservancy (NALC) – The NFO is partnering with the NALC to support the management of the Old Woman Mtn. Wilderness and the adjacent NALC Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The NFO supported the NALC in the development of an OHMVR restoration grant to provide restoration and barriers along the borders of the Old Woman Mtn Wilderness and the Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The grant will be administered by the NALC.

Research Institutions – The NFO supports research proposals through timely submissions of research permits and letters of support for funding proposals within the NFO. This year, the NFO has provided logistical support to researchers from the University of California – Davis, the San Diego Zoo, USGS, Point Blue Conservation Science, Cornell University, the California Academy of Sciences, and others, to facilitate relevant and timely research in the region.

Outreach – The NFO has provided multiple outreach events to the Chemehuevi Native American Tribe, including presenting at their winter festival, at an event for visiting students, and at an Earth Day event in 2016. They are also about to host a SCA wildcorps crew, who is doing ongoing restoration on a road in wilderness.

# PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE

Desert Advisory Council • Update • February 2017



Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and wind turbines, viewed from Sand to Snow National Monument • January 2017

The BLM's Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) administers about 1.7 million acres (2,650 square miles) of public lands in five Southern California counties (Riverside, San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, and Orange). Alongside our partners, the PSSCFO serves the Bureau of Land Management's largest human population, from the Pacific coast, to the Colorado River, to the international border with Mexico, with wildland-urban interface areas and open deserts between. We strive to be a laboratory for innovation, collaboration, and excellence.

As part of the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mission, the PSSCFO encompasses a broad portfolio of activities. Because of where we are located and whom we serve the PSSCFO primarily focuses on renewable energy, rights-of-way and permitting, recreation and visitor services, National Conservation Lands, outreach with Native American tribes, law enforcement, and fire and fuels management.

*NOTE: This report is undergoing renovation, so you might notice that some sections seem incomplete. Please pardon our dust. We are working on improving the quality of this report; check back next time for more.*



# Contents

- 1. State-Wide Priorities**
  - 2. Energy, Lands, and Minerals**
    - 2.1. Renewable energy
    - 2.2. Transmission
    - 2.3. Land exchanges
    - 2.4. Rights-of-Way and permitting
  - 3. Renewable Resources and Recreation**
    - 3.1. Natural resources
    - 3.2. Cultural and paleontological resources
    - 3.3. Native American tribal outreach
    - 3.4. Recreation and visitor services
  - 4. National Conservation Lands**
    - 4.1. National Monuments
    - 4.2. Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas
  - 5. Law Enforcement**
  - 6. Fire and Fuels Management**
    - 6.1. Tamarisk removal at Dos Palmas Preserve
-

# 1 State-Wide Priorities

On September 30, 2016, BLM California State Director Jerome Perez issued a letter outlining the state's priorities. The PSSCFO is working on several of those priorities as they relate to the California Desert Conservation Area and the Desert Advisory Council, including:

- Implementing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), including participating in public meetings regarding the Programmatic Agreement with Native American tribes, discussing Conservation Management Actions with project proponents, and working toward incorporating National Conservation Lands;
- Land use planning for new National Monuments, primarily focused on Sand to Snow;
- Diversity and Respect, including full support and furthering the We Stand Together campaign; and
- Facilities Security, including upgrades to physical security at our Field Office and a plan to better secure other field-based facilities.

## 2 Energy, Lands, and Minerals

### 2.1 Renewable Energy

#### 2.1.1 SOLAR

**Project proponents:** SunPower, Nextera, Renewable Energy Group, Recurrent, enXco, FRV, EDF

**Status:** on-going

The PSSCFO is currently managing, processing, or considering 14 solar energy projects, including 4 new solar applications within Development Focus Areas (DFAs) near Desert Center near Interstate 10 and Highway 177. The BLM is working on defining the process for a possible competitive lease under the new rules (43 CFR Parts 2800 and 2880). In addition to the new applications, we continue to process multiple applications for solar energy projects as part of the District-wide process. Please see individual project descriptions, below:

##### 2.1.1.1 *Arica Solar Project (SunPower)*

SunPower Corporation filed an SF-299 right-of-way application in Summer 2016 for a 400 MW photovoltaic project on about 4,000 acres of public lands within DFAs near Desert Center, and submitted a Plan of Development on November 21, 2016. BLM hosted a pre-application meeting with SunPower on November 21, 2016. No decisions or formal actions have been taken since then. If it proceeds, it will be subject to both the DRECP and the new competitive leasing rules.

##### 2.1.1.2 *Blythe Solar Power Project (Nextera)*

The Blythe Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was proposed as a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with four adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatt (MW) capacity each for a total capacity of about 1,000 MWs. The BLM Record of Decision was issued October 25, 2010. The right-of-way grant was issued on November 4, 2010. Solar Trust of America filed for bankruptcy prior to any significant project work commencing. The project was sold to Nextera Energy under a Solar Trust bankruptcy auction.

An amendment to the existing ROW authorization was submitted to reduce the acreage of the project, change the technology from concentrated solar trough to photovoltaic, and reduce output from 1,000 MW to 485 MW. The BLM published a Draft EIS on February 7, 2014. The public comment period closed on March 24, 2014. The final EIS/Record of Decision was issued August 1, 2014 and the Right-of-Way Grant was issued August 12, 2014. A notice to proceed for project construction was issued on March 19, 2015. Phase I of the project (units 1 and 2) is complete and in full operation.

#### **2.1.1.3 *Blythe Mesa Solar Project (Renewable Energy Group)***

On August 18, 2015, the BLM issued a Record of Decision approving issuance of a right-of-way grant in support of the Blythe Mesa Solar Project, owned by the Renewable Energy Group. This 485 MW photovoltaic project will occupy 3,665 acres located on lands under the jurisdiction of the County of Riverside, BLM, and the City of Blythe. The project will likely be developed in phases that extend over several years. The project includes construction of a 230 kV gen-tie line to connect the solar facility to the Colorado River Substation. The total length of this line will be 8.8 miles; 3.6 miles will be located on private lands within the array site boundary and 5.2 miles will be located off site on 72 acres of BLM-managed lands. The solar plant itself will be constructed entirely on private lands. The project has not yet begun construction.

#### **2.1.1.4 *Crimson Solar Project (Recurrent)***

Sonoran West Holdings, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Recurrent Energy LLC, proposes to construct and operate the Crimson Solar Project, a utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) and energy storage project. The project would be located on 2,900 acres of public lands and would generate up to 350 MW, with up to 350 MW of integrated energy storage capacity.

The proposed project is located in unincorporated eastern Riverside County, about 13 miles west of Blythe, just north of Mule Mountain and just south of Interstate 10. The Project site was formerly proposed by BrightSource Energy for development of a larger project as the Sonoran West Solar Energy Generating Station, with submittal of an SF-299 application for CACA-051967 in 2009. A modified Plan of Development for the project is currently proposed and was submitted to BLM in January 2016. This project is in the early stages of consideration by the BLM. It is not subject to the land use plan amendment decisions within DRECP.

#### **2.1.1.5 *Desert Harvest Solar (enXco)***

EnXco proposes to construct a 150 MW photovoltaic project on approximately 1,280 acres located immediately south of the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center, California. A Notice of Intent was published on September 15, 2011 with a scoping period that ended October 17, 2011. The draft EIS on the project was released on April 13, 2012 with public meetings in the communities of Desert Center and Joshua Tree on May 14, 2012. The Final EIS has been published and the ROD issued on March 13, 2013. As of this date, the project has not obtained a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and has not settled outstanding issues with the shared gen-tie line for power distribution to the Red Bluff sub-station. Required documentation for a Notice to Proceed (NTP) has not been submitted to



BLM as of this date. The applicant requested and received through BLM an extension of one (1) year to commence construction of the project and the extension date expires in September 2017.

#### **2.1.1.6 Desert Quartzsite Solar Project (First Solar)**

Desert Quartzite, LLC proposes to construct and operate a 300 megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) energy-generating project known as the Desert Quartzite Solar Project (Project). Desert Quartzite, LLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of First Solar Development, Inc. The facility will utilize First Solar's thin-film cadmium telluride (CdTe) photovoltaic modules. The Project Site is located on BLM lands in eastern Riverside County, approximately 2.75 miles southwest of the western extent of the City of Blythe, California. The facility footprint will occupy approximately 2,453 acres, and the 600-footwide Gen-Tie Line study corridor occupies approximately 205 acres. The Gen-Tie Line is approximately 2.8 miles long ending at the Colorado River Substation.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the project was published in the Federal Register on March 6, 2015. Public meetings were held in Parker, Arizona and Blythe, California in March, 2015. An admin draft of the joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (BLM/Riverside County Planning Department) has been completed. BLM/Riverside County/FWS completed their review of the document and provided their input to Desert Quartzite. In November 2016, First Solar submitted a revised POD that the BLM had further comments. The applicant is working on addressing BLM's comments. The first draft of the admin draft EIS requires major revisions and the BLM is working on developing the final set of alternatives for the Desert Quartzite.

#### **2.1.1.7 Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (First Solar)**

First Solar Development, Inc. is authorized to construct and operate a 4,245 acre 550-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant project known as the Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF). The DSSF includes three main components: 1) the Solar Farm site, 2) a transmission line, and 3) a Southern California Edison (SCE) owned and operated substation (Red Bluff Substation). The Notice of Intent was published January 13, 2010, the public comment period for the draft EIS ended November 26, 2010, the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published on April 15, 2011; the Record of Decision signed on August 8, 2011, project construction is complete and the project formally commissioned on February 9, 2015. A request for additional 50 acre feet per year of water was filed in November 2014. This variance was approved on August 31, 2015 with the ROD and ROW grant.

#### **2.1.1.8 FRV Solar (FRV)**

FRV submitted an SF-299 on December 21, 2016 for a 200 MW photovoltaic project wholly within DFAs near Desert Center. BLM hosted a pre-application meeting on January 25, 2017. No decisions or formal actions have been taken since then. This project would be subject to DRECP and the new competitive leasing rule.

#### **2.1.1.9 Genesis Solar Project (NextEra)**

Genesis Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC, is authorized to construct and operate the Genesis Solar Energy Project consisting of a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with a total net electrical output of 250 MW. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the project was published in March

2010; public comment period on the Final BLM EIS ended 9/27/10; the BLM Record of Decision was issued November 4, 2010; a Notice to Proceed for site preparation and facility construction was issued on August 24, 2011; and construction was completed in April, 2014. The facility is in full operation. Genesis Solar, LLC has filed with the California Energy Commission a plan to modify the natural gas storage tanks. The Ethnographic portion of the Genesis mitigation is complete and being distributed to consulting parties. For more information contact George Kline at 760-833-7135.

**2.1.1.10 IO Solar: no update**

**2.1.1.11 Jupiter Solar Project: no update**

**2.1.1.12 McCoy Solar Energy Project (Nextera)**

McCoy Solar LLC, owned by Nextera Energy, is authorized to construct a 750 MW photovoltaic solar project on 7,700 acres of BLM and 470 acres of private lands located directly north of the Blythe Solar Project, near Blythe, California. The comment period on the Draft EIS ended August 23, 2012. The Final EIS for the project was issued on December 12, 2012 and the Record of Decision issued on March 11, 2013. The right-of-way grants were issued for Units 1 and 2 on 12/2/13 and 8/12/14. Unit 1 is fully operational and the BLM has not yet issued a notice to proceed for Unit 2.

**2.1.1.13 Palen Photovoltaic Solar Project (EDF)**

The Palen Solar Power Project, originally proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was for a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with two adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatts (MW) each for a total capacity of 500 MW. A joint BLM Draft Environmental Impact Statement and California Energy Commission (CEC) Staff Assessment for the project was published on April 7, 2010. The Final BLM EIS was published on May 13, 2011; however, a Record of Decision was not issued due to a bankruptcy filing by Solar Trust of America. The project was subsequently purchased by BrightSource Energy during a Solar Trust bankruptcy auction. BrightSource Energy then proposed a technology change for project involving two concentrated solar towers with a combined generation capability of 500 MW. BrightSource submitted a right-of-way amendment application to the BLM and an Amendment Petition to the CEC involving using solar towers in lieu of the original concentrated solar trough technology.

A BLM Supplemental Draft EIS was released for this amended project on July 26, 2013 while the CEC proceeded with their permitting process. Release of the Final BLM Supplemental EIS was being timed to correspond with the CEC decision on this project. On September 26, 2014, however, BrightSource (Palen Solar Holdings, LLC) withdrew their Amendment Petition to the CEC involving the proposed use of the solar tower technology. On September 29, 2014, the CEC issued an order terminating their proceedings on this proposed amendment. The partnership between BrightSource and Abengoa Solar on this project has been terminated with the project being acquired by EDF Renewable Energy.

EDF Renewable Energy submitted an application and Plan of Development, dated December 22, 2015, for a 500 MW photovoltaic solar generating facility. The project would be constructed entirely on BLM lands within the original project footprint, a main access road from the Corn Springs off-ramp, and a 230kV generation tie-line extending from the project switchyard to the Red Bluff Substation. The BLM is in the early stages of processing this application and the draft supplemental EIS is scheduled to be

published in the second or third quarter of 2017. The BLM will be publishing a “draft alternatives” document, which is not a NEPA document, in February 2017.

#### **2.1.1.14 Rice Solar Power Project**

The BLM permitted Rice Solar Energy, LLC to construct a 10 mile electrical transmission line that would connect a private land, 150-MW solar-powered electrical generation facility to a Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) managed substation. This project was located on the former Rice Army Airfield in Rice Valley, eastern Riverside County, California, approximately 40 miles northwest of Blythe. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) were agency leads for the project; BLM was a cooperator. The CEC approved the project on December 15, 2010.

An abbreviated Final EIS was released by WAPA on August 5, 2011 and a Record of Decision approving the BLM portion of the project was signed December 8, 2011. The BLM right-of-way for the electrical transmission line was granted on April 13, 2012. However, on October 28, 2015, the BLM accepted Rice Solar Energy, LLC’s request to relinquish their rights to the electrical transmission line permitted on public lands. Rice Solar Energy, LLC made its final rental payment for 2015 and the BLM is in the final steps of terminating this right-of-way grant and closing the casefile.

For additional information on these and the other pending projects, see:  
[https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa\\_register.do](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do)

**Status:** On-going

#### **2.1.2 WIND**

**Project proponent:** Various

**Status:** The PSSCFO oversees 21 wind energy rights-of-way grants in the San Geronio Pass and Coachella Valley areas, including processing ROW applications and assignments, assessing and monitoring cost recovery accounts, completing environmental reviews, and issuing notices and decisions. As part of on-going monitoring of these rights-of-way grants, we are initiating additional studies to assess the impact of these facilities on avian populations. In addition, we are in the early stages of processing two possible re-power projects. Collectively, these are the second largest wind energy production facilities in California.

### **2.2 Transmission**

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

**Status:** Record of Decision signed December 27, 2016; ROW grant pending

**Project proponent:** Southern California Edison (SCE);

**Co-lead:** California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

**Status:** Southern California Edison (SCE) is proposing to upgrade and adjust the routes of the following existing 220 kV transmission lines between the communities of North Palm Springs and San Bernardino, in



incorporated and unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties: Devers-El Casco (30 miles), El Casco-San Bernardino (14 miles), Devers-San Bernardino (43 miles), Devers-Vista No. 1 and No. 2 (45 miles), Etiwanda-San Bernardino (3.5 miles), and San Bernardino-Vista (3.5 miles). Of the overall 48-mile length of the transmission corridor, approximately 6 miles would cross the reservation Trust Lands of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians and approximately 1 mile would cross BLM-administered public lands. The BLM lands are located east of the City of Banning and west of the City of Desert Hot Springs in Riverside County.

In addition to the transmission line improvements, substation equipment at Devers, El Casco, Etiwanda, San Bernardino, Timoteo and Tennessee and Vista Substations would be upgraded to accommodate the project changes to transmission and sub-transmission systems. The project would consist of the upgrade and removal of 48 corridor miles of 220 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, relocation of 66 kV and 12 kV lines, and associated telecommunications and substation upgrades in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The BLM is the lead Federal agency for the preparation of this EIS in compliance with the requirements of NEPA. The CPUC is the lead State of California agency for the preparation of this EIR in compliance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The BLM identified a preferred alternative in the Final EIS based upon feedback on the Draft joint EIR/EIS from the public and cooperating agencies. The BLM preferred alternative is the Proposed Action with incorporation of the Tower Relocation Alternative and the Iowa Street 66kV Underground Alternative. The Final EIS Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) published in the Federal Register August 8, 2016. The USFWS issued Biological Opinion FWS-SB-RIV-14B0011-16F0668 on December 23, 2016. On December 27, 2016 the BLM issued the Record of Decision selecting the preferred alternative identified in the FEIS. The BLM is expected to offer the new right-of-way grant by February 28, 2017.

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

**Project proponent:** Delaney-Colorado River Transmission, LLC (DCR Transmission), is a joint venture company owned by Abengoa Transmission & Infrastructure, LLC, and is an affiliate of Starwood Energy Group Global, Inc. DCR Transmission was selected as the Project Sponsor by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) as part of a competitive solicitation process authorized by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Order No. 1000 (Transmission Planning and Cost Allocation).

**Status:** The Project would include construction of a new 500 kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the Arizona Public Service (APS) Delaney Substation in Tonopah, Arizona, and the Southern California Edison (SCE) Colorado River Substation, west of Blythe, California. DCR Transmission submitted a right-of-way grant application with BLM on September 14, 2015. The Project would span approximately 114 miles, including 97 miles in Arizona and 17 miles in California, largely following the existing Devers Palo Verde #1 Transmission Line in an established utility corridor. Public open houses were held in November, 2015. Three public scoping meetings have taken place and the project is in the early stages of processing.

## 2.3 Land Exchanges

### 2.3.1 Land Exchange with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

The BLM and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians entered into an agreement in 2002 to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would reduce the extent of checkerboard landownership within and outside the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, thereby facilitating effective and efficient management of public and Tribal lands in the National Monument.

In July 2010, the BLM released an environmental assessment to the public addressing environmental effects of the proposed land exchange. Comments were received from 144 individuals, ten nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. Based on public comments and upon further internal review, it was determined that preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) was necessary to address potentially significant effects of the proposed land exchange.

Two public scoping meetings were held in March, 2012 to identify issues, impacts, and potential alternatives that should be addressed in the EIS. About 125 members of the public attended the scoping meetings. Additional scoping comments were submitted to the BLM by mail and email.

The draft EIS, released to the public on December 29, 2014, analyzes the exchange of certain federal lands (5,799 acres) for properties owned by the Tribe (1,470 acres) within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. This draft EIS describes and analyzes alternatives based on varying amounts of public lands to be exchanged for Tribal lands, as well as the no-action alternative. Lands would be exchanged on an equal value basis between BLM and the Tribe pending outcome of the land appraisal. The comment period for this draft EIS closed on Sunday, March 29, 2015. The draft EIS is found under the heading “Other Ongoing Projects” at: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings.html>

Comments on the draft EIS were received from 469 individuals, nine nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. The Environmental Protection Agency rated the preferred alternative as *Lack of Objections*, which means it did not identify any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through informal consultation, concurred with BLM’s determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect Peninsular bighorn sheep or its designated critical habitat, least Bell’s vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, or desert tortoise.

The administrative review draft of the final EIS has been completed. BLM’s publication of a joint Notice of Availability (NOA) for the final EIS and Notice of Decision (NOD) will occur upon completion of review of the exchange package by the Washington Office.

The exchange decision was approved by the BLM Deputy Director of Operations, Steven Ellis on October 14, 2016. Since the exchange is an EIS level decision, a NOA/NOD will be published in the Federal Register and local newspaper to launch the 45-day protest period. WO requires that the NOA/NOD be submitted separately from the exchange decision process for publication in the Federal Register. The notice is currently

being reviewed for publication by the Washington Office and we expect the NOA/NOD to be published in Spring 2017.

**Status:** On-going.

### **2.3.2 Land Exchange with Hester Granite Company**

The BLM and Hester Granite Company (Hester) entered into an exchange agreement in 2014 to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would transfer 40 acres of Federal sub-surface (mineral) estate to the private surface owner (Hester) and in exchange, the BLM would acquire approximately 589.74 acres of non-Federal land located within the newly designated Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM).

Hester owns the surface estate of a 93.7 acre quarry along with all of the respective sub surface estate; except for the subject 40 acre portion which contains a mineral reservation (subsurface estate) to the U.S. by patent. The patent created a 40 acre split estate where the private landowner (Hester) owns the surface estate and the U.S. owns the subsurface estate (minerals). The patent did not include surface entry or public access to the U.S. minerals and the parcel is surrounded by private lands in a residential/commercial area. Mineral trespass has been ongoing concern because the split estate is located within a privately owned quarry operation. The proposed exchange would dispose of the difficult to manage split estate while facilitating the reduction of checkerboard land ownership pattern for improved management efficiencies of public lands.

Public involvement concerning the exchange was pursued by the BLM with the issuance of a Notice of Exchange Proposal in December 2014 followed by a 45 day comment period. Only two comments were received; one comment was in support of the exchange and the other noted a concern about their existing rights on a non-Federal parcel. All comments were considered during the evaluation of issues in the NEPA-Environmental Analysis and Decision Record.

The exchange decision has been approved by BLM and was signed by Douglas Herrema on December 16th, 2016. A NOD was published in the Desert Sun and San Diego Union Tribune on January 4th/5th, 2017 which began a 45 day protest period ending on February 21, 2017. No protests have been received by the PSSCFO.



## **3 Renewable Resources and Recreation**

### **3.1 Off-Highway Vehicle Green Sticker Grant Program**

The PSSCFO continues to install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities in the Palm Springs Field Office. Perform BLM Ranger patrols to inform the public of OHV designations, provide assists and enforce regulations.

Grants were provided to BLM Palm Springs in 2008-17 for ongoing restoration work, outreach, enforcement and signage conducted in the Mecca Hills, Dos Palmas, Big Morongo ACEC, Coachella Valley Preserve and eastern Riverside County. The BLM Palm Springs Office is currently working through the 2017 grant applications for law enforcement and restoration at the Steele Peak area. BLM will host a public meeting on February 28, 2017.

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

Public Law 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing potential 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.

In cooperation with multiple parties including the Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, US Bureau of Reclamation, FWS, and DF&G; the BLM is implementing an assistance agreement that includes BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of 17 acre marsh/aquatic habitat (completed), preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, acquisition of up to 875 acres of additional lands within the ACEC, 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.

### **3.3 Riparian Restoration Activities Update**

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 annually treated; techniques include:

- Manual: Hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as Sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, Salt cedar.
- 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 ACECs Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill/ Willow Hole; isolated oasis within the Santa Rosa's including Boo Hoff, Blasdell Canyon, Bear Creek, Magnesia Springs, Cathedral Canyon drainages etc.

**Status:** On-going.

### **3.4 San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area, Avian, and Bat Surveys.**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for land management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands. This responsibility includes protecting migratory birds and promoting their conservation on public lands as directed by Executive Order 13186 and a 2010 Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

In 2013, the Palm Springs South Coast Field Office initiated meetings with the wind facility operators to discuss the need for more rigorous avian and bat surveys. Due to a lack of cohesive monitoring data to date, we continue to have an insufficient understanding of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to bird and bat species from wind energy development. To correct for this, the BLM will now implement a regional surveying effort to estimate abundance and mortality rates. The BLM has worked collaboratively with the USFWS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized surveying protocols. These surveys are also designed to meet guidance by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for developing Bird and Bat Conservation Strategies and Eagle Conservation Plans which will provide the information needed for permitting and adaptive management.

A third party contractor, working directly for BLM, has been selected to gather data through avian point counts, line transect surveys, golden eagle point count surveys, ground-based fatality surveys, and bat acoustic surveys. The U.S. Geological Survey will assist BLM by analyzing the data and producing peer reviewed publications.

Status: Surveys will begin sometime between March and May 2017.

## **4 National Conservation Lands**

### **4.1 Sand to Snow National Monument**

Sand to Snow was established by President Obama on February 12, 2016: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/12/presidential-proclamation-establishment-sand-snow-national-monument>

Encompassing 154,000 acres, including just over 100,000 acres of already congressionally-designated Wilderness, Sand to Snow National Monument is an ecological and cultural treasure and one of the most biodiverse areas in southern California. The new monument supports more than 240 species of birds and twelve threatened and endangered wildlife species and will protect outstanding sacred, archaeological and cultural sites including an estimated 1,700 Native American petroglyphs.

The Monument is home to the regions tallest alpine mountain, at 11,500 feet, and lies at the cross-roads of the Mojave, Colorado and Sonoran Deserts. Featuring thirty miles of the world famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, the area is a favorite for camping, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, photography, wildlife viewing, and even skiing.

Sand to Snow National Monument is jointly managed by the BLM and US Forest Service. Both agencies, together, are initiating actions to meet these new responsibilities in managing this new national monument. Jihadda Govan recently started as national monument manager.

## **4.2 Volunteers**

The PSSCFO promotes volunteerism in a wide range of public land management initiatives. This program is mainly focused on management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC/Preserve. Extensive volunteer programs within the Monument are developed by the Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM) and are outlined on their website:

<http://www.desertmountains.org/volunteer.html>. FODM volunteers contributed over 14,000 hours of their time, worth over \$500,000 employment-equivalent in 2016.

Friends of Big Morongo Preserve has a robust volunteer program serving Sand to Snow National Monument. <http://www.bigmorongo.org/a8Volunteer.htm>. Volunteer efforts are implemented throughout the year including habitat restoration, public land clean-ups, and archaeological site monitoring and facility development/maintenance. About 75 volunteers participated at the Big Morongo Preserve National Public Land Days event in 2016. Three friends groups attended along with a representative from Congressman Ruiz's office.

These volunteer programs and contributions are invaluable. Beyond direct, on-the-ground effects, these programs also contribute to youth and public education about public lands.

Status: On-going.

## **5 Law Enforcement** (check back for more next time)

## **6 Fire and Fuels Management**

### **6.1 Dos Palmas Tamarisk Removal**

In January 2017, Dos Palmas Preserve and fire staff performed prescribed burns to remove over 100 piles of invasive tamarisk that had been cut in previous months. This action protects the fragile Dos Palmas oasis ecosystem and is part of the BLM's Salton Sea strategy.



**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT  
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING  
February 2017**



**Sage Flat**

**Photo by Carrie Woods**

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RFO)**

**BLM Action:** Ridgecrest Field Office overview

**Contact:** Carl Symons is the Field Manager and can be reached at 760-384-5400 (main office line).

**Status:** The Ridgecrest Field Office serves a variety of audiences. Recreation, mining and livestock grazing drive our multiple-use programming, as does transmission of water and energy up and down the 395 and 14 corridors. Many areas are set aside as wilderness or special recreation areas, yet host a variety of land uses. Several ACECs serve as important habitat for wildlife. These uses often overlap, creating conflicting demands on the resource.

RIFO's approach to multiple-use lies squarely with public involvement – whether it's encouraging miners, grazers or energy companies to utilize Best Management Practices near sensitive wildlife habitat, supporting community participation such as the Public Lands Roundtable of Ridgecrest and friends groups, soliciting comment on proposed alternative energy projects, educating the public about our Wild Horses and Burros, or working with partners to restore undesignated roads and to enhance watersheds.

The Ridgecrest staff keeps up with a high demand for permitting and programming, including:

- Special Recreation Permits
- Film Program
- DRECP and renewable energy
- West Mojave Route Network
- Haiwee Geothermal
- Grazing

- Central Hazmat and Abandoned Mine Lands
- Youth Initiative
- Wild Horse and Burro Program
- Grant Administration
- Cultural and Biological
- Mining operations

## **CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PUBLIC LANDS**

Carl Symons, Field Manager

### **Youth and Young Adult Employment**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office currently employs two Cultural Resource interns and two Recreation Interns. Two Chicago Botanical interns start in late February. Twelve ACE members began working in the Red Mountain and Rands Mountain in October and will continue through May. Some of the many tasks that these individuals have undertaken include: desert restoration, seed collection, rangeland health assessments, riparian and spring proper functioning condition assessments, cultural resource inventory and recordation, interpretation and outreach, along with NEPA planning.



**Outreach:** Interns routinely conduct outreach at several field locations to inform visitors of use regulations for the public lands and especially the Rand Mountain and Fremont Valley Management Area.

**Contact:** Carl Symons

**Status:** Additional interns may be added or replaced as funding sources are identified that can be managed effectively by the on board permanent staff. Staff is scheduling events that can be attended to further educate and inform the public about the many features and benefits that Americans receive from their public lands.

## **RECREATION AND WILDERNESS**

Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief



Photo Courtesy South Bay Riders

### **Jawbone Station**

**BLM Action:** The Friends of Jawbone continue to provide the staffing to operate and maintain the visitor center 7 days a week throughout the year 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Additionally, for about the last eight years the BLM has partnered with the Friends of Jawbone (FOJ), a local non-profit group, to assist with management plan implementation efforts within the area. The FOJ maintain a staff of between eight and twenty individuals for field work crews. These staff members take on the many different task including habitat restoration, road and trail maintenance using heavy equipment and hand tools, management area and route signing, recreation facility maintenance, and trash pickup.

**Contacts:** Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

**Status:** Visitation to the Jawbone Station and surrounding Public Lands picked up with the weather turning cooler this fall. Today people are coming out and enjoying the snowcapped peaks of the Jawbone – Butterbrecht ACEC. When you are in the area stop in and see what guide books and maps you might need that you cannot find other places.

## Special Recreation Permits

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office (RIFO) special recreation permit (SRP) season is ongoing. Some of the activities that we issue SRP's for are motorcycle races, running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, off-road vehicle education clinics, and vending permits.



**Contact:** Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** The RIFO is in the busy SRP season. So far this winter we have hosted motorcycle races, dual sport motorcycle tours, four wheel drive tours, equestrian rides, and a mountain bike race. Upcoming in the next few months are more motorcycle races, the SNORE race, four wheel drive tours, and equestrian endurance rides, off road vehicle safety clinics, group outings, and a truck race. A few local vendors sell their products at related events, such as competitive OHV races in the Spangler Hills OHV Open Area.

## West Mojave Route Monitoring and Route Maintenance

**BLM Action:** The West Mojave Route Network Project (WMRNP) is a travel management planning effort covering 9.24 million acres in the West Mojave area of the California desert. Approximately 3.1 million acres in the planning area are public lands managed by the BLM. The WMRNP supplements the 2006 West Mojave Plan. The planning area covers the western portion of the Mojave Desert in southern California including parts of San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Kern, Inyo, and a small portion of Riverside Counties.

The BLM RIFO continues to perform route monitoring and maintenance of the designated routes and kiosks within our management scope of the West Mojave Planning area.

**Contacts:** Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** We are routinely monitoring and maintaining the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. We continue to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. If you discover missing or confusing signs in your travels please let us know so that we may look at the issue and try to correct the issue at hand.



**Above:** Jawbone Butterbredt ACEC

## State OHV Grants



**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office will be submitting three grants to the Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) for the 2016/2017 grant cycle, Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. The three grants that we will be putting in for are: Ground Operations, Restoration and Law Enforcement. On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the Ridgecrest Field Office hosted an Open House for public input we had about 13 members from the public show up.

South Park Bridge was submitted in September 2016 through the RTP; was awarded by the Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) and we are now starting the documents to enter into contract to replace the bridge.

**Contact:** Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for staffing, management actions and maintenance efforts that result in providing for the many various activities enjoyed by the public land users. Some these actions and efforts would not be possible without this outside funding source.



#### Restoration in the Red Mountain Sub-region

##### Partnerships

**BLM Action:** Twenty two youth -- members of the Friends of Jawbone Restoration Crews -- are finishing up on-the-ground restoration of degraded sites within the Ridgecrest Resource Area.

**Contact:** Carrie Woods, Wildlife Biologist; Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Rec Planner

**Status:** Restoration crews apply their newly acquired skills to improve, protect and maintain existing trails and to erase illegally-generated scars on the landscape with techniques such as vertical mulch and barriers.

**BLM Action:** FIELD: Our partnership with Farmworker Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD) carries out





ecosystem restoration along with site maintenance and enhancement activities.

**Contact:** Elaine Hanson, Realty Specialist; Carl Symons, Field Manager

**Status:** Restoration efforts at Middle Knob began in late spring 2016. Through May 2017, FIELD will send a crew twice monthly to restore and remove impacts from visitation and off route travel.

**Cuddeback is really a lake, at least for a while! Elaine Hanson**

### **Lands with Wilderness Characteristics**

**BLM Action:** All LWC inventories within the WEMO and DRECP Planning Areas for the RIFO have been completed. The CA State BLM office is currently making these inventories Section 508 compliant. The CA State BLM website is being incorporated into the National BLM website. The expectation is that you will be able to find the inventories there once the compliance issue has been addressed and the Washington website is up and running.

**Contact:** Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** The remaining inventories outside of the WEMO & DRECP Planning areas are nearly completed.

### **Wilderness Management Activities**

**BLM Action:** For the 2016-2017 season, the Ridgecrest Field Office Wilderness program is utilizing volunteers to work on a wide variety of projects in nine of our seventeen Wilderness areas. Our first trip was in November with a group of high school students from the Los Angeles area. The 14 students came to the Malpais Mesa Wilderness, located roughly 70 miles north of Ridgecrest, for a weekend of route restoration. They successfully disguised two large routes that vehicles were using to enter into Wilderness and turned one into a primitive trail to still allow easy foot access to the top of Malpais Mesa.



Eight more volunteer trips are planned for Spring 2017. Volunteers will have the opportunity to help repair fences, remove graffiti, monitor trails, and remove invasive species amongst other activities. If you would like more details on upcoming trips, please contact Katy Meyer at [kmeyer@blm.gov](mailto:kmeyer@blm.gov).

### **BLM Action: Erskine Fire, Bright Star Wilderness Area**

A Notice of Event (NOE) was sent out for the Erskine Fire which burned up approximately 2/3 of the Bright Star Wilderness last May. The fire was catastrophic, incinerating nearly everything in its path. RFO staff has spent the last several months planning and developing projects to rebuild critical infrastructure and to protect and restore the area. At the present time, weather (rain, mud, and snow!) is hampering our efforts to get started on these projects, but we expect to get into full swing come April. We will be repairing the Bright Star corridor route, delineating portals, felling hazard trees, stepping up wilderness boundary signing along the route, and replacing vehicle barriers, restoration fences, and range fences that were burned up in the fire.

**Contact:** Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** Currently, we are having a lot of problems with off-route vehicle incursions into wilderness and into sensitive burn areas with known Kelso Creek monkey flower populations.



Bright Star Wilderness, Photos by Marty Dickes

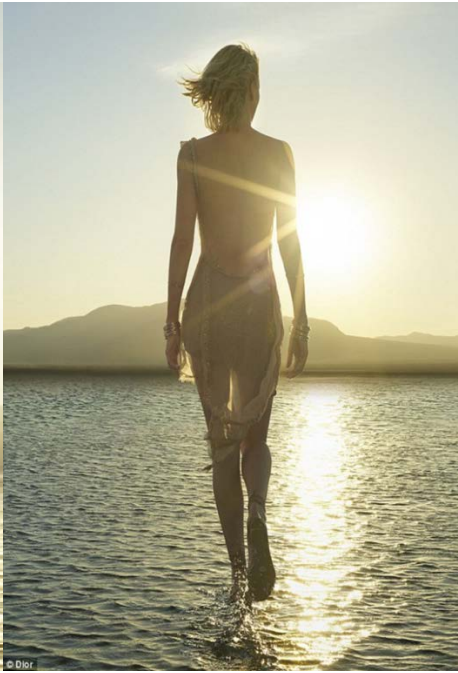
## **LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY**

Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Rec Planner

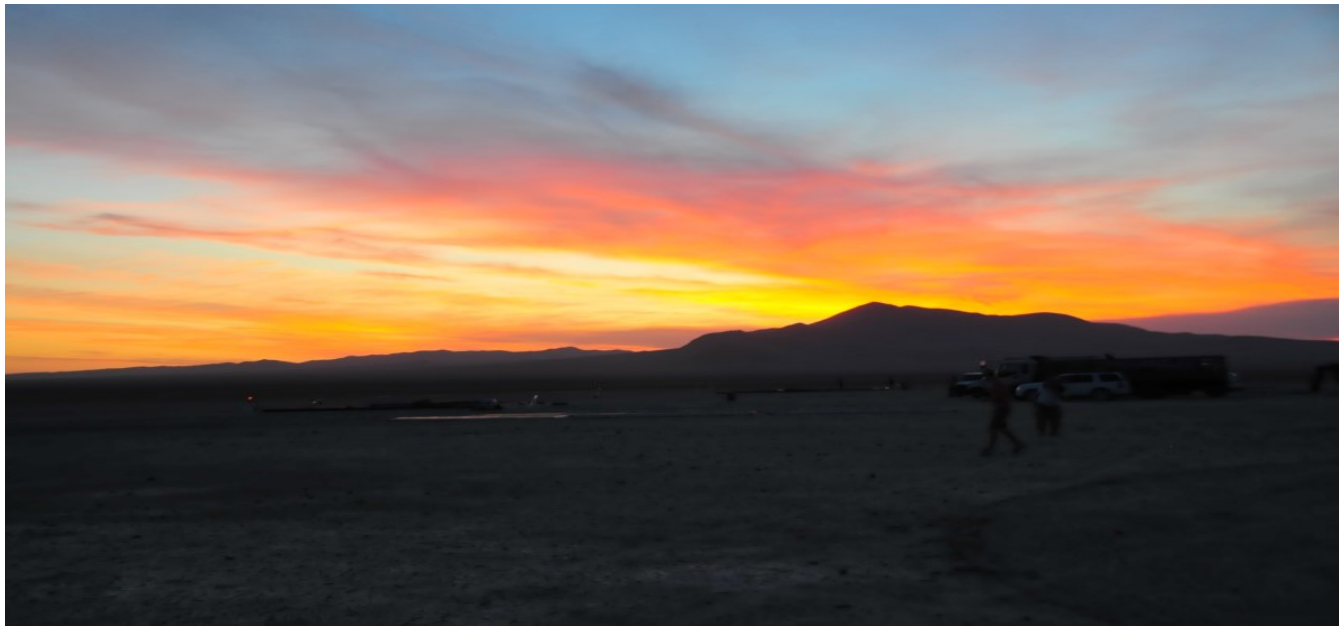
### **BLM Action: Film Permits**

Filming in the Ridgecrest Field Area continues to be quite busy. In October, November, and December a number of production companies scrambled to complete their film projects before the holidays. One of these projects was the newest DIOR commercial for *J'adore* perfume filmed at Cuddeback Dry Lake. Below are a few pictures as to how some of the magic happens...hard working crews, beautiful woman, and of course, beautiful landscape and sunsets.





Photos courtesy Dior®



Sunset over Cuddeback – the golden light needed for the shoot



Cuddeback after the recent rains. Taken Jan 20, 2017.



Other film productions were the Nissan Rogue One TV commercials and the Nissan Rogue One Virtual Reality shoot for the LA Car Show.





**LA Car Show Virtual Reality, Trona Pinnacles**

**Contact:** Elaine Hanson, Lands and Realty Specialist

**Status:** Filming continues to be an important use on the public lands within the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office area and continues to highlight the region in film and television productions of the natural wonder in this desert landscape. Even more filming will be conducted in FY18.

## Non-Renewable Energy

**BLM Action:** **Right-of-ways**  
Numerous ongoing right-of-ways (ROW) applications from SCE, LADWP, Universities, Counties, Verizon, etc., are ongoing for the authorization and reauthorization of ROWS.



**Contact:** Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist

**ABOVE:** Haiwee Winter Deer Herd Mgt Area

**Status:** Pending: Archeological and biological clearance, preliminary application meetings, on site visits, authorizations and reauthorizations

**BLM Action:** Southern California Edison Pole Replacement:  
SCE is proposing to replace 27 utility poles near Keeler, Little Lake, California City, and Trona, CA on BLM along roads within SCE Right of Ways (ROWs). For Cerro Gordo, the proposed action consists of the replacement of 19 wood electric distribution poles and associated hardware. Pole 271569S will be brought in and set via truck. The other 18 poles will be brought in and set via helicopter. For the rest of the poles, the proposed action consists of the replacement of wooden electric distribution poles and associated hardware. The new poles will be brought in and set via truck or hand-set. For all pole locations, no new access roads will be constructed.

**Contact:** Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist

**Status:** The new holes will be dug via machine auger or by hand. Standard excavation depths range between 7 and 10 feet with a diameter of 3 feet. The area of soil disturbance will be limited to a radius of 5 to 10 feet around the pole, as well as light disturbances relating to construction within a general 50-foot radius around the pole. No significant brush removal or trimming is expected to be required of the project.

## Renewable Energy

**BLM Action:** Camino Solar Project:  
Aurora Solar, LLC has applied for a Right-of-Way grant for a solar energy facility with a maximum generating capacity of 44 megawatts. Their Plan of Development is based on previous work of the Tylerhorse Wind Project, in the same general vicinity of Kern County where Camino is now proposed. Tylerhorse is no longer under consideration for development.

Tylerhorse would have been constructed on three BLM-administered parcels. Only one BLM parcel would be impacted by construction of Camino. Aurora anticipates that permitting and development of Camino would take place in 2016 and that construction would begin in mid-2017.

**Contact:** Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist

**Status:** Preliminary application meetings are ongoing. NEPA analysis is necessary.



**ABOVE: Owens Peak Wilderness**

## **Geothermal Leasing Inspections**

Carl Symons, Field Manager

### **BLM Action:**

BLM RIFO is continuing to administer leases at Coso.

### **Contact:**

Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech

### **Status:**

There are currently three pending non-competitive geothermal lease applications covering about 4,460 acres of BLM-administered public lands in the proposed Haiwee Geothermal Lease Area (HGLA).

## **MINERALS: SALEABLE & LOCATABLE**

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

**BLM Action:** BLM RIFO continues to process minerals sales and small mining claims.

- On December 28, 2016 the Department of Interior (DOI) published a Federal Register Notice temporarily segregating 1,337,904 acres of California Desert National Conservation Land from location & entry under the Mining Law of 1872. Of these 235,604 acres are in Inyo & Kern Counties. The same Notice applies for a long-term withdrawal of these lands from operation of the Mining Law.

Public comment period on this proposed withdrawal runs through March 28, 2017. An Environmental Impact Statement will analyze/ disclose impacts of this proposed withdrawal. Scoping comments for the proposed EIS are also due March 28, 2017.

The Federal Register Notice & maps are available at <http://go.usa.gov/x96Ru>. Comments need to state whether they regard the DOI's withdrawal application, or scoping comments for the proposed EIS.

- SRK Environmental Consulting has provided a draft Environmental Assessment on the Perdito Drilling Project on behalf of Silver Standard Resources. The BLM staff is currently reviewing the EA and considering how the requirements of the DRECP may affect the conditions of approval for this project. The EA will be released for public comment sometime in the near future. The proposal involves entering a previously-reclaimed access route to drill seven sites on Conglomerate Mesa.
- Bush Management, Inc. proposes to acquire drill samples from 7 sites at the Keystone lode claims in the southern Panamint Mountains. The Keystone lode claims are accessed by Goler Canyon Road, immediately by the Manly Peak Wilderness and Death Valley National Park. The operator has hired SRK Environmental Consulting to draft an environmental assessment for the project.
- The Golden Queen Mine at Soledad Mountain continues to operate south of Mojave. It has poured its first gold bar. Most of the pit and mineral deposit is on private lands.
- The Briggs Mine is now owned & operated by DV Natural Resources, LLC of Natural Bridge, VA. Excavation has ceased, but some gold continues to be produced from the existing heap leach pad. Bonds are in place.



- Sydney Peak Stone has requested a mineral material sale contract for expansion of their flagstone quarry onto public land, located on the south side of the Rand Mountains and accessed by the Randsburg-Mojave Road. A draft Environmental Assessment is under review and should soon be released for public comment.
- Global Pumice owns, and has requested a mineral sale contract to expand the “Makayla” pumice quarry in the Coso Mountains. BLM is preparing an environmental assessment, but it is not yet ready for public review.
- Green Planet LLC proposes a ½-acre placer operation north of Red Rock Canyon State Park and south of BLM route EP-15. The location is in the new Mohave Ground Squirrel ACEC.
- Sleepy Bear Mining, Fremont Valley: Need to review bond and collect 5:1 habitat compensation. Both are conditions of approval for any authorized expansion.
- An environmental assessment is pending for a 2-acre clay mining operation at the Snow White #5 placer claim on Public Lands within Red Rock Canyon State Park.

**Contact:** Randy Porter - Geologist

**Status:** Continuing work on other small mining operations.

#### **Abandoned Mine Lands**

##### **BLM Action:**

AML inventories are currently being conducted in conjunction with routes and trails in the Rand Mountains. The AML Program plans to remediate (safeguard) dangerous mine openings in this region over the next several years to remove potential life threatening fall hazards.

**Contact:** Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist  
Ridgecrest Field Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant

**Status:** Staff is being cross trained to aide in field work related to AML work.

#### **CERCLA**

##### **BLM Action:**

Continuing efforts to complete actions to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) through the CERCLA processes. Kelly Mine Site (OU1) undergoing stabilization of the interim remediation in conjunction with the potential for permanent site remediation.

**Contact:** Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

**Status:** Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) is at the Department for review.

#### **RESOURCES**

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

#### **Rangeland Management**



**BLM Action:**

- **Grazing:**  
Rangeland Health Assessments continue to be a priority, due to permit expirations February 2018. Most stream assessment sites remain to be evaluated. We should be transitioning to a more thorough monitoring protocol in the next two years, which will yield statistically valid land health data, allowing trends to be more easily monitored over time and will be useful to multiple programs in the Field Office.
- **Erskine Fire ESR:**  
Utilizing Apple Valley Fire Crew and Rec Branch Contractors, corner and gate posts, line posts and braces are being replaced on the fence line at Esponda and Niccoll Spring on the Rudnick Common Allotment. Alex Neibergs, Rangeland Mgt Specialist (WH&B) is the ramrod on this project.
- **Bright Star Wilderness Boundary Fence:**  
Staff are completing onsite supply estimates and will be using 5-10 ACE crewmembers for a week to 10 days to complete the project.

**Contact:** Alex Neibergs, RMS (WH&B)  
Ryan Klausch, NRS on detail from Bakersfield FO  
Loren Dunham, Contract Range Tech

**Status:** All grazing turnouts are subject to range condition assessments prior to turnout.

**Cultural Resources**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office Cultural Program has been working on:

**WEMO:**

Cultural resources field work for the WEMO Supplemental EIS and the Route Network Project continues with on-the-ground testing of the Archaeological Predictive Model by a joint Ridgecrest-Barstow field crew.

**LA Aqueduct:**

The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office continues to work with the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power on two significant projects involving the LA Aqueduct at the Haiwee Reservoir in Inyo County. One project involves the physical relocation of a short segment of the LA Aqueduct onto BLM managed lands at the northwest corner of the Haiwee Reservoir as part of the construction by LADWP of a second North Dam. Eligibility evaluation excavations were conducted by the consulting firm AECOM of six prehistoric archeological sites that could be affected by this relocation and final field work investigations are currently being completed with reports expected during the spring 2017. Consultation with the Californian State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the five involved Tribes is also occurring presently.

**Haiwee Penstock:**

The LADWP is also proposing the replacement of the 10,000 foot long Haiwee Penstock located on the south side of Haiwee Reservoir. A hydraulic flow incident several years ago caused damage to the structure and LADWP would like to replace it for preventative maintenance purposes. An interesting part of this research was the use of an excavator to dig a series of small trenches 20 feet deep in an attempt to ascertain whether the Pleistocene Owens River alluvial gravels would be affected by the proposed construction of the new penstock. No such types of geologic deposits were encountered, but this activity did contribute important data about the geomorphological formation of the locale. This evaluation investigation did establish that one Eligible historic site will be adversely affected by the undertaking and consultations with the SHPO is continuing.

Other work includes the oversight and review of cultural survey reports by consultants for Southern California Edison and their on-going deteriorated wood power pole replacement program; the intensive survey of OHV designated routes and illegal tracks radiating outward from them prior to the rehab of these tracks by ACE work crews in the Jawbone-Butterbrecht, Rand Mountain, and Argus Mountain sectors. During the past six months, cultural staff has also reacted to and interacted with vandalism and public contact reports of such activities about a dozen times.

**Contact:** Donald Storm, Senior Archaeologist  
Danny Tyree, Archaeologist  
Liz Negrete-Gonzales, Contract Archaeologist

**Status:** Extremely busy program.

### **Wildlife Management**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office Wildlife Program is working on:



**ABOVE:** Mojave Shoulderband Snail

- Working with State Office and the NOC on the CERCLA Projects in the historic Rand Mining District
- Oversaw completion of the USGS/BLM Common Garden fence
- Assisted with Mojave Shoulderband Snail surveys on Soledad Mountain.
- Contracted new Bio Tech to assist with all things Inyo California Towhee
- Hiring the Chicago Land Management-Seeds of Success Program Interns
- DRECP implementation for new projects
- Erskine fire oversight
- WEMO Route Designation
- DTRNA: secured Naturalist Funding and presented report to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Annual Meeting
- ROW clearances including Southern California Edison, LADWP, Caltrans

**BELOW:** Walker Pass, January 22, 2017

**Contact:** Caroline Woods –  
Wildlife Biologist

**Status:** Active



### **Wild Horse and Burro Program**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Corral is currently home to 600 wild horses and burros.

Adoptions: Budget allocation target of 100 animals. Approximately 110 animals have already been adopted in FY17. The Wild Horse and Burro staff will be offering several venues in the coming months including Oceanside, Temecula and Paso Robles.

Gathers: Crews spent much of January bait trapping at the NASA Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex near Fort Irwin Army Base. Target was 75. Actual gathered 72. Operations are ongoing at Molycorps Mine, Chemehuevi Indian Reservation and Park Moabi on the Colorado River.

Public Relations: Last Fall, the Swedish version of “60 Minutes” paid a visit to the Ridgecrest Corrals. The news crew got a first class demonstration of how skillfully our Wranglers can cut a single horse from the herd and move it gently through the chutes for a mock adoption. They were highly impressed.

**Contact:** Grant Lockie, Corral Manager

**Status:** Adoptions continue year round by appointment. Paso Robles adoption TBA soon. Our staff consist of Megan Zehendner, WHB Program Assistant; Alex Neibergs, RMS, JJ Nolan, Wrangler; Louie Andreas, Wrangler; and Craig Owens, Wrangler-On-Loan-from-Fire.



ABOVE: A TIP trainer examines a prospective adoptive horse at the Ridgecrest Corrals.





ABOVE: A January afternoon at Olancha

## Soil-Water-Air-Botany

### BLM Action: Groundwater Sustainability Agency

In September 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed historic legislation requiring California's most critical groundwater resources to be sustainably managed. With the governor's signature, groundwater will be comprehensively managed for the first time in the state's history.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) gives local agencies the powers needed to manage groundwater in a sustainable manner over a long-term horizon. The act requires that Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) be established and that Groundwater Sustainability

Plans (GSPs) be developed for medium- and high-priority basins.

Critically Overdrafted Groundwater Basins – January 2016 — Southern Region



The Indian Wells Valley (IWV) GSA was formally established in September. GSA-Eligible agencies reported on efforts thus far to form a Groundwater Sustainability Agency, including discussion of a draft Joint Powers Authority Agreement.

**Contact:** Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

**Status:** Since IWV has been officially announced by the DWR as a Critically Overdrafted Basin the designation affects the deadline for managers in the basins to prepare their GSP by Jan. 31, 2020 instead of Jan. 31, 2022 for basins that are not critical. From the map at left, one can see that the Indian Wells Valley basin is in critical overdraft. The US Navy and BLM are Associate (non-voting) Members of the GSA.

**BLM Action:** Seeds of Success Program



Continue native seed and tissue collections to support restoration of desert tortoise habitat.

**Contact:** Caroline Woods -Wildlife Biologist, Loren Dunham - Contract Range Tech

**Status:** Active/ongoing

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

James Watson, Chief Ranger

**BLM Action:** RIFO Law Enforcement is spending considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas including wilderness boundaries and ACEC as well as other closed and limited use areas to detect and deter illegal off road travel activity. BLM and Public safety continue to be highest priority.

We are continuing with monitoring efforts of SRPs.

We are patrolling open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail.

We are participating in national and state priority details as required.

We are coordinating with DOI, CHP and County Sheriffs to resolve ongoing felony investigations

**Contact:** James Watson, Chief of Law Enforcement, RIFO

**Status:** We are pleased to have hired a new Supervisory Ranger and Ranger; both arrived in January 2017. Ranger Lisa Bleinshroth was hired last year FY16. Lisa is wrapping up her training at FLETC and then it's on to Field Training. She should be available sometime in May of 2017. Rex Harding will attend FLETC this summer. Current staffing: Ranger Dengel; Ranger Chaidez; Ranger Woods; Ranger Bleinshroth; Ranger Harding and Chief Ranger Watson.

