

**BLM California Desert Advisory Council**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**May 14, 2022 - Virtual Meeting**

**Desert Advisory Council Members:**

Randy Banis (Chairperson), Jim Bagley, Richard Holliday, Jayne Powell, Ed Stovin, Dan Taylor, Jack Thompson, Paul Whitehead

**BLM Attendees:**

Greg Miller, Brandon Anderson, Kate Miyamoto, Jeff Childers, Ryan Chatterton, Freddie Espinoza, Jamie Palmer, Carl Symons, Tim Gilloon, Caroline Woods, Mike Ahrens, Carl Symons, Chris Otahal

**Guests:**

Paul Denholm (National Renewable Energy Lab presenter), Matthew Gibbs (Zoom tech), Simone Knudsen (Court reporter), Kayla Browne, Robert Laudy, Ileene Anderson, Alyson Heare, Evan Hoffman Jastermsky, Robert Hermes, Anitra Kass, Mason Voehl, Ruth Hidalgo, Janelle Williams, Jean DeLucia, Lisbet Thorensen, Meg Foley, Gregor Losson, Moises Cisneros

**Opening and introductions:**

The meeting opened by Acting District Manager Greg Miller who welcomed everyone to the meeting and went over Zoom and public comment period protocols and housekeeping for the meeting. Greg introduced BLM employees and turned it over to Randy Banis, DAC Chairperson, to introduce Desert Advisory Council members. DAC members provided a brief update on their background.

**Amargosa Vole Conservation Efforts**

- Wildlife biologist Chris Otahal presented on Amargosa vole conservation efforts. Chris talked about the many partners involved in the conservation efforts, the demographics of the vole in 2012 and the Amargosa Vole Team started in 2013 - a collaborative forum for BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, researchers, and private landowners to plan, coordinate and implement recovery actions for the vole.
- Chris talked about the first action the team completed was to establish a captive breeding program at U.C. Davis to set up the breeding colony. The captive breeding program has been ongoing since 2012 and is successful. The second recovery action was to stabilize the borehole marsh, a five-acre marsh where at the time about 90% of voles that we knew existed lived.
- The team completed several restoration and management projects in and around the marsh and established the Shoshone Refugia. Future work includes establishing a mega-marsh, which depends on groundwater.
- The Barstow Field Office is focusing on establishing water rights to maintain groundwater for the voles. The BLM is completing range-wide surveys with U.C. Davis with population estimates.

**Geothermal Leasing Process and Projects**

- Carrie Woods (BLM Acting Assistant District Manager for Project Support) presented on geothermal energy, what it is, BLM's delegated authority for geothermal leasing, and geothermal production in Imperial County.
- Showed a video on how geothermal energy works, and discussed geothermal technologies and development, how the BLM issues a lease for geothermal in a defined area.
- Discussion on geothermal projects in Imperial County and the advantages of geothermal energy.

### **Morning break**

#### **Subgroup Recommendations**

- Randy Banis (Chairperson) presented on subgroup recommendations.
- There were not enough applicants for the Imperial Sand Dunes and Dumont Dunes subgroups and the BLM is keeping the application period open and will continue to seek applicants to fill those subgroups.
- The Mojave Trails National Monument subgroup had enough applicants and Randy presented the nominees and DAC members in the subgroups.
- DAC members approved the nominees for the Mojave Trails National Monument subgroup.

#### **Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)**

- Brandon Anderson (Acting Associate District Manager) presented on the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan as the guiding document the BLM uses in the Desert District for protecting sensitive species and their habitat, ecosystems, cultural resources, recreation, and other resources and to provide areas for renewable energy development.
- Brandon went over the history of the Plan, the most recent amendment, and what the DRECP does not affect like grazing, mineral development, off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation areas, and wild horses and burros.
- Brandon talked about the three designations the plan allows for renewable energy development including development focus areas, variance process lands, and general public lands.
- Brandon talked about the recent project permitted under the DRECP, Arica and Victory Pass.
- Brandon addressed a question on the definition of general public lands which are categorized under the DRECP, with each parcel having a designation.
- Discussion on why development focus areas were the smallest in terms of acreage in the DRECP. The BLM said it was how the process worked when developing the plan and some of the constraints with wilderness, etc.

### **Lunch Break**

#### **District, Field Office, and Fire Overviews**

- Greg Miller presented the State Director's report on leadership in California and the BLM National Office. He discussed the budget and statewide priorities including OHV recreation, renewable energy development, and national monuments.
- Field Managers from each of the five districts reported on issues and projects in their field office. The fire and fuels program also gave an update.

## **Battery Energy Storage Systems**

- Paul Denholm, researcher from the National Renewable Energy Lab, presented on battery energy storage systems, how the technology ties in the grid, lithium ion (as the typical technology used for batteries), and how the storage works.
- Discussion on concerns of fire from battery energy storage systems. Paul said it is a new technology so there is more interest when a battery catches on fire, but there are also early-stage technology issues to work through.
- Discussion on if battery storage is required for solar projects and it isn't required.
- Discussion on if battery storage makes sense for the residential consumer. Right now, the economics do not make sense, but could in the future.

## **Discussion on Future Agenda Topics / Elect Chairperson**

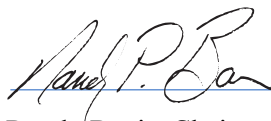
- Discussion on wanting in-person meetings to resume.
- Requested agenda topics of monument planning presentations and process, specifically for Mojave Trails National Monument.
- Randy Banis was nominated and elected as chairperson for the next year.

## **Public comment period**

- Anitra Kass from the Pacific Crest Trail Association gave kudos to the collaboration between the Cleveland National Forest, Regional National Forest Service, and the BLM. Expressed appreciation for the update on Sand to Snow Monument Management Plan and how public input works with in-person meetings.
- Lisbet Thorensen appreciated the educational meetings on the preplanning for Mojave Trails National Monument, expressed pleasure in Randy Banis's reelection as chairperson, and asked the best way to communicate with the DAC.
- Ruth Hidalgo thanked the DAC for creating a subgroup for the Mojave Trails National Monument and for including rock and mineral collecting as a category in the subgroup. Rockhounds are concerned with losing their ability to continue their hobby in the Mojave Trails National Monument. Expressed that in-person meetings are the best way to engage the public.

## **Closing remarks by Randy Banis and Greg Miller**

**Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.**



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Randy Banis, Chair  
Desert Advisory Council