



Field Office, Fire and Fuel Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

AUGUST 2022



Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



Photo: Old Spanish National Historic Trail

Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Calico Early Man Site

BLM Action: The BLM is completing remediation of remnant archaeological excavation and study features of the Calico Early Man Site to address concerns for public safety. Once the remaining public safety issues are remediated, the site will be re-opened to the public for self-guided tours.

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

Status: Contractors began remediation work on January 13, 2022. The installation of cupolas/air gates and backfilling has been completed. The BLM is addressing additional safety concerns.

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

West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement

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

Status: In FY2021, the BLM completed 1,549 acres of Class III surveys; hosted two virtual

Consulting Parties Meetings in March 2021 and September 2021; prepared the FY2021 site documentation, evaluation, and report; developed the evaluation plan; and requested FY2022 funding for Model Analysis and Class I Literature Review (required every five years). Currently, FY22 field surveys are ongoing.

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer and Alexis Francois, Archaeologists, and Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

Old Spanish National Historic Trail

BLM Action: The BLM submitted a nomination for the National Register of Historic Places of a segment of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail known as Emigrant Pass.

Status: The nomination is being reviewed. Quarterly consultation with the Old Spanish Trail Association is ongoing.

BLM Contacts: Alexis Francois, Archaeologist, and Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

Recreation

Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area

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

Partners: Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center

Status: The Marine Corps plans to utilize the SUA in Fiscal Year 2023 in October (10/18-11/1) and February (2/17-2/28), the latter of which occurs during the Presidents' Day Holiday. During these training periods, the SUA will be temporarily closed to the public, but the adjacent Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area will remain open. The Marines issue a news release as they control when the area is open or closed for military training and the Barstow webpage links to the latest information on Johnson Valley closures.

BLM Contacts: Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

Special Recreation Permits

(No update to this entry since the May 2022 DAC report)

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

Status: Currently for FY2022, a total of 129 SRPs were administered by field office staff, not including the vendor permits for the King of the Hammers. The SRPs included a variety of

recreation events (e.g., European scramble, vehicle testing, UTV races, car/truck race, speed timing trials, hare and hound, sand drags, dual sport ride, poker run), most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The BAFO issued several letters of agreement for various events (e.g., LA Police Baker to Las Vegas Race).

BLM Contacts: Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner and David Kotlarski, Assistant Field Manager

Wildlife

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

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

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

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

The BAFO received funding to initiate a “mega-marsh” project with our partners at UC Davis, this project will ultimately lead to the creation of a large marsh complex near “Borehole Marsh” to serve as a refugia / breeding site; this is a multi-year endeavor. In FY2021, BAFO received \$150,000 in funding to initiate planning efforts (UC Davis is contracting this work out). For FY2022, BAFO received \$300,000 to cover the costs of the implementation phase of this project.

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

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

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

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

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

The BAFO wrote an article about the successes of the Amargosa vole for the *Desert Journal* - a publication circulated to approximately 2,000 subscribers.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions

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

- Amargosa niterwort population monitoring
- sensitive bird species spot mapping/Cowbird Management Program
- tamarisk control efforts
- SCAN monitoring
- fish monitoring
- hydrology studies including US Geological Survey stream gauges
- habitat restoration
- endangered plant studies
- spring studies

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

Status: The BAFO continues to implement tamarisk management on the Amargosa River and treated approximately 20 acres in 2021. The BAFO is developing a burn plan to address a large stand of tamarisk which is not suitable for treatment through other means. In February 2022, the BLM Fire Program continued management efforts by treating and retreating approximately 75 acres on the Amargosa River.

The BAFO is working with Point Blue Conservation Science to conduct the 17th year of long-term bird monitoring efforts. Funding has been secured to continue work this year as well.

The BAFO established eight Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River in 2021. In 2022, half of the sites are being re-sampled to establish trend data sets, and four new sites are being established to sample parts of the Wild and Scenic River which were not surveyed in 2021. Three new wetland AIM sites were sampled in 2022 to help support the Amargosa Vole recovery project. Volunteers from Adventure Scientists began collecting water samples for analysis as part of their national Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

Our partners at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden finished their rare plant survey / mapping effort in 2022 and provided a summary of the BLM-funded two-year project.

The BAFO completed the implementation of the Bring Back the Natives Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in May 2021. This completes a project which was initiated in 2018 to improve habitat for the Amargosa Pupfish and other riparian dependent species. Over 650 trees were planted through a partnership with the BLM West Mojave Native Plants program and Victor Valley Community College. The BAFO is also working with CalTrans to implement additional plantings in the vicinity of this project. In March 2022, BAFO initiated another planting effort with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens which will build upon this initial work. BAFO is currently seeking funding to expand this project.

The BAFO initiated a partnership with researchers to study the massive Screwbean Mesquite die-off observed on the Amargosa River. This project will feed into a larger project looking at this issue on a regional scale. The BAFO is working with the Mojave Native Plant Program to obtain seed collections from the Shoshone area to ensure the populations' genetics are preserved – and to serve as a seed source for future re-planting of screwbeans in the area once the source of the local die-off have been identified and addressed.

BAFO is working with researchers from the University of Las Vegas on a study to measure plant response to ongoing drought and potential native plant recovery, as well as develop tools for land managers to use in response to increasing drought from climate change.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts

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

BLM Action: The BAFO is continuing a focused wildlife habitat enhancement program on the Afton Canyon portion of the Mojave Trails National Monument, which is largely modeled on the successful program associated with the Amargosa River Wild and Scenic River. The section of the Mojave River flowing through the Afton Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is currently considered “eligible” under the National Wild and Scenic River Act and is managed to maintain the scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, and cultural outstanding and remarkable values on which this determination was based. The canyon has also been designated a Watchable Wildlife Area due to its high biodiversity as reflected by the 180 bird species utilizing the region. The BAFO is collecting data to help in the development of the management plan for the Mojave Trails National Monument.

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

Status: The BAFO has been working with the Mojave Desert Land Trust to implement the Women in Science Discovering the Desert (WISDOM) program. Through WISDOM, minority female interns are recruited to collect resource data (bighorn sheep, tamarisk beetle, bird, and

Night Skies) from Afton Canyon to enhance their training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). The BAFO received 2022 funding to continue tamarisk beetle studies associated with this program in 2023.

The BAFO, through the Fire and Fuels Program, has continued with tamarisk treatments within Afton Canyon and approximately 200 acres of tamarisk were treated / re-treated this year. The BAFO continues to work with our partners at USGS and The Living Desert to develop a captive breeding / re-introduction program for the Southwestern Pond Turtle in Afton Canyon. The BAFO continues to work with Southern California Edison and Brightline to conduct restoration projects in Afton Canyon which will integrate with other on-going restoration efforts. The BAFO is working with researchers from the California Institute of Technology to deploy a research project looking at natural methane emissions as it relates to climate change. Afton Canyon will be one of the study sites. Three aquatic AIM Survey points were established in Afton Canyon in 2022.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

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

BLM Action: The BAFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BAFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team to set recovery action priorities.

Partners: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and various county, state, and federal agencies

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

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Minerals

Ash Meadows Exploratory Drilling Proposal

BLM Action: The BLM received a modification to an existing plan of operations held by St Cloud Mining for drilling 50 exploratory drill holes adjacent to their active open pit mine. This will assist St Cloud in determining the zeolite deposit. The proposal would disturb approximately 1.5 acres of land.

Status: BLM staff conducted a site visit with the proponents and is addressing several questions regarding the plan modification.

BLM Contacts: Jamie Livingood, Geologist

Pinto Mountains Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Remediation II

BLM Action: The BAFO inventoried AML lands in the Pinto Mountains area and identified 16 features to be remediated.

Status: The BAFO selected a contractor to perform the remediation in fall 2022. Remediation could include a simple backfill or construction of wildlife-friendly steel gates.

BLM Contacts: Jamie Livingood, Geologist

Grazing

Round Mountain Allotment Fencing Project

BLM Action: The proposed Round Mountain Allotment fencing project would add and improve current fencing in the allotment and allow rotational grazing of the land to reduce impacts to the soil and native plants. The project would also increase the grazing area for cattle and reduce invasive cheat grass.

Status: The environmental assessment for Round Mountain Allotment pasture fencing and rotational grazing project is open for 30-day public comment.

BLM Contact: Kelly Sandersfield, Natural Resources Specialist

Other / Misc.

Apple Valley Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan Development

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

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

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

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

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

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

BLM Action: The BAFO is developing the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP).

Status: The scoping period for the development of the Amargosa River CRMP ended on June 1, 2021. Twelve letters were received, and BLM is considering the substantive comments in the formulation of the Draft CRMP/Environmental Assessment (EA). BLM anticipates the Draft CRMP/EA to be available for public review the fourth quarter of FY22.

BLM Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) Initiative

BLM Action: The BAFO is working with the Marine Corps, Army, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop and implement the RASP Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Plan, completed in the spring of 2022. In early 2022, a NFWF RFP was released to select restoration projects for funding under the plan within the Fremont-Kramer, Superior-Cronese, and Ord-Rodman Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Partners: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Army, Marine Corps, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Status: BAFO provided input on the scope and priorities of the FY2022 RFP and is working with RASP partners to provide input on project selection and RFP development for FY2023 funds. Final funding awards are expected this summer. Targeted restoration work within the Fremont-Kramer and Superior-Cronese ACECs is anticipated to start in 2023 and take up to three years.

BLM Contacts: Brian Croft, Acting Field Manager

El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



El Centro's newest K-9, Falco, Law Enforcement Officer Gilberto Navarrette's partner. Photo by: Michael Carpenter, BLM

Archaeological/Cultural or Paleontological Resources

Vinagre Wash Special Management Area Cultural Resources Survey

BLM Action: The Vinagre Wash Special Management Area (SMA), as designated in the 2019 John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act, aims to conserve, protect, and enhance recreational, cultural, and ecological resources across 81,800 acres in eastern Imperial County. The Dingell Act addressed the need to protect Tribal cultural resources and directed the Department of the Interior to complete a cultural resources inventory for the SMA.

Partners: Quechan Indian Tribe, Campo Band of Mission Indians, and the San Pasqual Band of Diegueño Indians.

Status: In 2021 and 2022, the El Centro Field Office surveyed 117 miles of travel routes and up to 27 sample block areas totaling approximately 1,660 acres within the Vinagre Wash SMA. The travel route surveys have been completed and the number of recorded archaeological properties in the SMA has doubled. The BLM, in consultation with Tribes, will select 27 (each 500 meters²) blocks to survey in fall of 2022. The Quechan Indian Tribe, the Campo Band of Mission Indians, and the San Pasqual Band of Diegueño Indians wanted to participate in the surveys and the BLM sought additional funding for their participation. This project will increase the BLM's understanding of the history of this area and will be used to direct future investigations within the SMA.

BLM Contact: Grant Day, Archaeologist

Lands and Realty

Vega 2, 3, 5 Solar Project Environmental Assessment - Solar energy storage project on private lands in eastern Imperial County

BLM Action: Apex Energy Solutions, LLC is requesting a BLM right-of-way (ROW) that would authorize the construction, operation, maintenance and termination of a 34.5 kV overhead collector line and associated site access roads for Apex's Vega SES 2, 3, 5 solar energy project being developed on private lands in eastern Imperial County. The project is in an area with a checkerboard pattern of land ownership and the ROWs are necessary to gain ingress/egress to the site and interconnect with an existing Imperial Irrigation District transmission line that traverses BLM-managed public lands north of the project site.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services (serving as the CEQA lead)

Status: The BLM is coordinating with the project proponent to finalize the Plan of Development. The next project milestone will be to schedule and hold the second stakeholder meeting.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

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

BLM Action: The BLM is a cooperating agency for the United States Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) programmatic EA, which analyzes and discloses the effects of the proposed implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program's (SSMP) Phase I: 10-Year Plan. The plan implements up to 29,800 acres of aquatic habitat restoration and dust control projects around the perimeter of the Salton Sea. The ECFO is serving as the lead BLM office. The BLM anticipates responding to numerous site-specific right-of-way requests submitted by California Department of Water Resources and other parties for implementation of dust suppression and habitat projects under the SSMP 10-Year Plan.

Partners: United States Army Corps of Engineers (lead agency), Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other state and federal partners.

Status: The Corps has proposed to establish alternative permitting procedures, specifically Letter of Permission procedures, associated with the State of California's Salton Sea Management Plan 10-year Plan and a draft environmental assessment has been published to analyze the procedures and the environmental impacts associated with the projects. The public comment period on the environmental assessment closed July 21, 2022.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Apiary Site Renewals

BLM Action: The BLM is in the process of renewing land use permits for multiple commercial

entities which authorize the placing of apiaries/beehives for beekeeping on BLM-managed land in western Imperial County and parts of San Diego County. Beekeeping in Imperial County dates back to the early 1900s.

Partners: N/A

Status: The ECFO received three requests for renewed permits and is expecting several additional applications. The field office is reviewing and updating outdated NEPA documents.

BLM Contact: Katherine Johnston, Realty Specialist

Minerals and Mining

Imperial USA Corporation Exploration Plans of Operations

BLM Action: On October 14, 2021, Imperial USA Corporation (IUC) submitted an amended Plan of Operations (Plan) to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the East Mesquite and Ogilby project segments, located in eastern Imperial County. The project proposes road improvements, 10 test pits for sampling, and 58 drill pads, with an estimated total disturbance of 3.5 acres of public lands. The amended Plan excludes activities within the Indian Pass mineral withdrawal area. The BLM reviewed the amended Plan and found it to be complete, meeting all the surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.401.

On May 24, 2022, IUC submitted a second Plan proposing additional exploration activities on two project segments in eastern Imperial County: the Imperial Site segment and the Hyduke Site segment. The project proposes a two-track trail establishment, use of BLM routes of travel, grading of 131 drill pads and sumps, 19 test pits for sampling, and the installation of four monitoring wells and three piezometers, with an estimated total disturbance of 15.8 acres of public lands. The BLM reviewed the Plan and determined it was not complete, per 43 CFR 3809.411(a)(2). A mineral examination report would be completed by the BLM after IUC submits a Plan the BLM determines is complete. The Imperial Site segment is located within the Indian Pass mineral withdrawal area. The BLM will not approve a Plan until it completes a mineral examination report to determine whether the mining claims were valid before the withdrawal, and whether they remain valid.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services (CEQA and Reclamation lead)

Status: For the Ogilby and East Mesquite Plan, the ECFO will initiate NEPA after completion of biological and cultural surveys and all information has been gathered. Cultural surveys began in April 2022 and were suspended due to weather, but expected to resume in September 2022. IUC submitted a revised Plan for the Imperial and Hyduke sites and it is under review.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Wildlife and Botany

Avian Survey Project

BLM Action: In June 2022, the ECFO hired an intern to complete an avian survey project under the Direct Hire Authority Resource Assistance Internship Program - a hiring initiative to develop an 11-week summer internship program for current college students or recent graduates. The intern is conducting point count surveys in the diverse ecosystems and land designations managed by the ECFO. This project will give the BLM information to effectively manage bird populations, conserve species of interest, and inform projects such as renewable energy development and recreation.

Partners: Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences

Status: The intern has completed more than half of the point count surveys and will finish in mid-August. Point surveys were completed in the Imperial Sand Dunes wilderness area, the San Sebastian Marsh and McCain Valley. Remaining survey sites are in East Mesa, Crucifixion Thorn, Vinagre Wash, Gavilan Wash, Rodriguez Canyon, and Salton Sea. Avian data analysis from the point count survey sites are being recorded on field maps.

BLM Contact: Manuel Alfaro, Wildlife Biologist Intern

Recreation

Travel and Transportation Management / Off-Highway Vehicle Trail Management

BLM Action: This summer, all the OHV routes in the Vinagre Special Management Area, designated through the 2019 John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act, were signed. Signs along the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail were replaced and refurbished between the Mexico border and Highway 78 to ensure easy navigation. OHV signs have also been repaired and replaced throughout the western portion of Imperial County. During signing work, the BLM picked up several truckloads of “trigger trash” along the OHV routes.

Partners: California State Parks OHMVR Division

Status: Active. Work continues through the summer.

BLM Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Special Recreation Permits (SRPs)

BLM Action: The ECFO works with clubs, businesses, and non-profit organizations on SRPs and Letters of Agreement (LOAs). The ECFO is reviewing Post Use Reports and closing all SRPs from the 2021– 2022 season. Last season, ECFO managed a total of 56 SRPs, which were comprised of 36 vending, 10 competitive, and 10 general SRPs.

Partners: El Centro Naval Air Facility, Tread Lightly, SD Must, Tierra Del Sol 4x4 Club, San Diego Off-Road Coalition, and San Diego 4 Wheelers.

Status: The ECFO is preparing for the upcoming season and continues to work with partners, OHV Clubs, promoters, and vendors for future races, events, and business operations. The ECFO added three new SRP event areas to the Superstition Mountain Special Recreation Management Area to address increased requests for SRP events and to de-conflict future requests for events in the same area and time. Several cleanups with our SRP applicants and non-profits groups are being planned in coordination with non-profit organizations and OHV clubs.

BLM Contact: Asdrubal V. Estrada, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Wash Road

BLM Action: The ECFO started the final phase of the deferred maintenance project on Wash Road in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. Every year, more than 200,000 visitors travel this dirt and gravel road to access OHV camping sites in the area south of Glamis.

Partners: N/A

Status: The ECFO applied new road base material and installed geo-webbing materials under the road to prevent significant erosion during the monsoon flash floods in the summer and fall. This third phase was completed in early August and the re-installation of a CXT remains. The ECFO completed about 5 miles of road, including more than 48,000 tons of natural aggregate of road base and 8,000 tons for Gecko Pads and nine low water crossings, over the course of two years.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Mobile Rescue Beacons within the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness

BLM Action: The BLM and the U. S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are working together for deployment (i.e., installation, operation, maintenance, repair; dismantlement, and removal) of supporting infrastructure for three Mobile Rescue Beacons (MRB) within the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness. Each MRB is equipped with a numerated sign, solar panels, a telescoping mast, a strobe light that activates during use, and a continuously blinking red light to help people in need find the system at dark and provide life-saving assistance. The placement of the MRBs will be via established wilderness ways.

Partners: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Status: Active. Minimum Requirements Decision Guide has been signed, NEPA has been completed and MRBs are in place.

BLM Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Renewable Energy and Transmission

Geothermal Lease Nominations

BLM Action: The ECFO is completing a land use plan conformance review, followed by NEPA for geothermal lease nomination parcels for a competitive geothermal lease sale.

Partners: N/A

Status: Review of the geothermal parcel nominations is being led by the CDD in coordination with the ECFO. NEPA will be initiated after BLM has completed the land use plan review of the geothermal parcels.

BLM Contact: Jamie Palmer, CDD Project Manager

Truckhaven Geothermal Exploration

BLM Action: In 2019, the BLM prepared an Environmental Assessment for the drilling of four geothermal wells at the Truckhaven resource area for lease CACA-055559 held by Ormat. A Geothermal Drilling Permit (GDP) for well #87-6 was reviewed and approved by the BLM on December 31, 2020. Ormat completed a seismic exploration program at the project site in April 2021. Ormat has submitted to the BLM a second GDP for the drilling of well #84-6.

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

Status: The GDP for well #84-6 and a geothermal sundry notice for the well pad and road grading of well #87-6 are under final review by the BLM. Ormat plans to complete all permitting requirements to mobilize and drill both wells concurrently. Implementation of the project is planned for Fall 2022.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist and Matthew Wokosin, Petroleum Engineering Technician

Other / Misc. Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Updates

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement (LE) staff now includes 11 LE Rangers and one Evidence Technician. Two new rangers completed field training and one new hire is pending an academy date in fall 2022. The ECFO gained a new canine team with the addition of Falco who completed K-9 training and is fully deployed.

Partners: Imperial County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, U.S. Border Patrol

Status: ECFO Law Enforcement staff continue to patrol BLM-managed public land for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public, and the protection of resources, the environment, and BLM staff.

BLM Contact: Camilo Gonzalez, Chief Ranger

Needles Field Office (NFO)



Photo: Mojave Trails National Monument, Cadiz Dunes Wilderness

Grazing

Livestock Grazing Program Activities

BLM Action: The NFO manages three grazing allotments: the Lazy Daisy, Horse Thief, and Clark Mountain. The NFO participates in two annual meetings with the San Bernardino County Range Improvement Advisory Committee to review the need for new maintenance projects for range improvements at each allotment.

Partners: San Bernardino County Range Improvement Advisory Committee

Status: The NFO recently hired two Natural Resource Specialists to help manage the Livestock Grazing program. One position will oversee the administration of the NFO Range Management program including development of the Horse Thief Corral, and renewal of the Clark Mountain lease. The second position is nested within the Mojave Trails National Monument and will provide support for the continued management of the Lazy Daisy Allotment and other conservation management duties.

BLM Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Lands and Realty

Brightline West High-Speed Train, Ivanpah Substation

BLM Action: The BLM is considering an application to construct, operate, and maintain an electric highspeed train from Victorville to Las Vegas by Brightline West. As a part of that approval, a substation, converter station, and transmission line will need to be constructed near Ivanpah Dry Lake. The BLM has determined that NEPA previously prepared by the Federal

Railroad Administration is not adequate to authorize these facilities. The NFO will complete a separate environmental assessment to consider the facilities authorization.

Partners: FRA Brightline West, Southern California Edison

Status: The NFO interdisciplinary team review is near completion. The NFO started drafting an environmental assessment and is determining mitigation measures required for the project design.

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

Primadonna Well Sites and Pipeline Renewal

BLM Action: The BLM received a renewal application from The Primadonna Company LLC for their existing water well sites, monitoring wells, water pipeline, and access road. The water source is managed by the Nevada Division of Water Resources and is the primary source of water serving the community of Primm, Nevada.

Partners: N/A

Status: The NFO interdisciplinary team has completed their review and determined cost recovery. This review included guidance from the California State Office hydrologist. The interdisciplinary review described no significant resource concerns and that a categorical exclusion would be adequate.

Minerals & Mining

Castle Mountain Mine Modification to Plan of Operations

BLM Action: The NFO received a proposed plan modification from Castle Mountain Mine to expand the mine operation. Castle Mountain Mine is an open pit gold mine located in the Hart Mining District of San Bernardino County. The expansion of mining will occur on private and public lands within the previous Castle Mountain Mine planning area.

Partners: BLM continues to facilitate collaboration and consultation with NPS and BLM Las Vegas Field Office.

Status: The NFO is working with Castle Mountain Ventures to perfect the proposed modification. Once complete, the NFO will begin review and consideration.

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

Beck Mine Modification to Plan of Operations

BLM Action: The BLM received a request from US Iron, LLC to change the designated access and transport route in the Beck Mine Mill Site Plan of Operations from Smith Talc Road to Excelsior Mine Road (EMR). Smith Talc Road, a BLM-managed road, connects to Old Spanish Trail Road, a road maintained by Inyo County. Due to recent weight restrictions imposed by

Inyo County, US Iron has proposed use of EMR. The proposed route provides access to active allotments, designated campgrounds, and surrounding recreational areas. EMR is predominantly a BLM road with the last 11 miles maintained by San Bernardino County.

Partners: San Bernardino County

Status: The NFO is reviewing the application for completion and developing project design measures. The NFO conducts joint inspections and weekly consults with San Bernardino County.

BLM Contacts: Mitchell Owens, Assistant Field Manager; Rose Pettiette, Geologist

Recreation

Amboy Trail and Sign Planning

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

BLM Action: The NFO, to enhance recreation opportunities at Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, located within the MTNM, proposes to add a trail network consisting of a series of looped trails (eight to 10 new trails) to further the MTNM Recreation Resource. These looped trails would range from short-to-long in duration to provide a hiking experience for different skill levels. New signing is also being developed to warn and educate visitors about hiking in the extreme heat, the importance of packing water, and the time of year to avoid hiking in the area due to extreme heat conditions. Other signing would include maps and trail signs.

Status: Resource survey work has been completed and the NFO started environmental review.

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

Wildlife

Desert Stateline Solar Mitigation

BLM Action: The NFO and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified a project that can be completed by Desert Stateline Solar Farm (DSSF) as mitigation for resource impacts caused by the construction of their solar facility. NFO and the Mojave National Preserve (MNP) had previously agreed with DSSF to conduct their mitigation within the MNP by installing 13.1 miles of desert tortoise fencing on each side of Morning Star Mine Road. This was determined to not be feasible due to the multiple washes along the roadside and flooding events.

The NFO has a pending project to construct desert tortoise fencing along Goffs Road, within the MTNM. This section of road is 24.5 miles in length, entirely within critical desert tortoise habitat, and the entire southern side of the road and the northeastern half are within the MTNM; the second half of the northwestern side of the road is within the MNP.

Partners: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mojave National Preserve, Desert Stateline Solar Farm

Status: The NFO is working with Desert Stateline Solar Farm to identify the location of the fence line and what private land parcels the fence intersects. The BLM and Aspen Consultants are providing information on these private land holds to identify if a right-of-way can be secured. In August 2022, the NFO will discuss a funding option with Desert Stateline Solar Farm.

BLM Contacts: Justin Saiz, Wildlife Biologist

Mojave Springs Restoration and Maintenance Plan for the Needles Field Office

BLM Action: The BLM is required to ensure the springs on public lands are in proper functioning condition. Many of the springs across the NFO, and within the MTNM, are being negatively impacted by climate change and invasive species. The NFO has reduced invasive species at some springs. The BLM is working on an EA for a treatment plan for the entire NFO.

Partners: Conservation groups and local livestock permittees

Status: The NFO completed the survey of the springs, and secured funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL). The secondary IDT check list has been reviewed and secondary edits to the wilderness minimal tool analysis is occurring. The ECFO secured a contract for purchasing fencing supplies and allocated money for work this fall.

BLM Contacts: Justin Saiz, Wildlife Biologist

National Monuments

Mojave Trails National Monument Planning process

BLM Action: The NFO is working on the Notice of Intent for the Mojave Trails National Monument planning process.

Partners: N/A

Status: The Notice of Intent is under review.

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

Mojave Trails National Monument Public Engagement Zoom Meetings Update

BLM Action: The MTNM held three virtual educational meetings in April 2022 on the Mojave Trails National Monument future planning strategy. Topics discussed covered BLM planning policy, presumed key planning issues, information shared during the 2016 BLM Envisioning Sessions, and the draft planning schedule.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM will draft a report on the findings and will be available in fall of 2022.

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

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)



Photo: Sand to Snow National Monument

Renewable Energy and Transmission

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

Crimson Solar Project

BLM Action: The BLM issued a right-of-way (ROW) grant to Sonoran West Holding, LLC for the battery energy storage system, substation, access roads, and an operations and maintenance building. The applicant applied to add a gen-tie to the project located West of the Colorado River Substation.

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

Status: BLM is reviewing the application. Battery Energy Storage System completion expected mid-November 2022.

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

Arica Solar Project and Victory Pass Solar Projects

BLM Action: Right of Way (ROW) authorization granted and Notice to Proceed (NTP) issued.

Partner: Clearway Solar

Status: The Department of the Interior announced the final approval for full construction of the Arica and Victory Pass Solar Projects in June 2022. Once complete, the combined projects will generate a total of up to 465 megawatts of electricity and up to 400 megawatts of battery storage. Together these renewable energy projects will result in an estimated combined infrastructure investment of \$ 689 million, \$5.9 million in annual operational economic benefit and power approximately 132,000 homes.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Caroline Woods, Project Manager /Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Oberon Solar

BLM Action: ROW authorization granted and NTP issued.

Partner: Intersect Power

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

The BLM released the Environmental Assessment in August 2021, and the 30-day comment period ended September 14, 2021. Endangered Species Act consultation with USFWS initiated September 9, 2021. National Historic Preservation Act consultation anticipated before the end of September 2021. The project was approved in January 2022 and will generate up to 500 megawatts of renewable energy and have capacity for 200 megawatts of battery storage. The BLM issued the final approval for construction of the Oberon Solar Project in July 2022.

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

Desert Sunlight Solar

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

BLM Action: Granted ROW

Partner: Sunlight Solar LLC

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

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

Lands and Realty

Santa Ana Wash Congressional Land Exchange (Public Law 116-9 (Dingell Act))

BLM Action: The John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey approximately 417.50 acres of public land in San Bernardino County currently managed by the BLM to the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District. In exchange, the Conservation District would convey up to approximately 369 acres of land to the BLM.

The land to be exchanged lies within the Upper Santa Ana Wash Land Management and Habitat Conservation Plan (Plan) area and hosts nearby cities, county, mining companies, wildlife agencies, and water organizations. The area is regionally important for mineral aggregates, flood control, groundwater recharge, recreation, and habitat for threatened and endangered species. Section 1003 requires the Conservation District to pay all related exchanges costs.

Upon completion of the exchange, and pursuant to the Dingell Act, the Conservation District could continue maintenance, operation, construction, or relocation of, or expansion of, groundwater recharge facilities on the lands conveyed to the BLM to accommodate groundwater recharge of the Bunker Hill Basin if the activities do not in conflict with the Plan.

The non-federal lands within sections 9 and 12 of Township 1 South, Range 3 West, are encumbered with easements, leases, and agreements to which the exchange will be subject.

Partner: San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District

Status: The Environmental Site Assessment was submitted to the Environmental Professional in June 2022.

BLM Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Realty Specialist

Wildlife

San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area- Avian and Bat Study

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

Partners: U.S. Geological Survey, Rogue Detection Teams

Status: USGS field surveys concluded June 2022. Expected analysis completed by 2024.

BLM Contact: Kristen Lalumiere, Wildlife Biologist

National Monuments

Sand to Snow National Monument Planning

BLM Action: Develop a land use management plan. The Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM) is jointly managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) through a Service -First Agreement. Both agencies are initiating actions to meet the new responsibilities in managing this national monument. The Monument Manager is a USFS employee based out of the San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office. A joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled in 2022 and is developing an early draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The draft AMS identifies the current and existing baseline management for the SSNM, specifically as it applies to items mentioned in the monument proclamation. The draft AMS is the first step in the planning process for the SSNM Land Use Plan (Monument Plan). The Monument Plan will provide for the proper care and management of the objects of historical and scientific interest for which the monument was designated, and to conserve and protect the cultural, ecological, and scientific resources found within the monument for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. BLM policy requires a unique set of land use decisions for each national monument.

Partners: U.S. Forest Service San Bernadino National Forest

Status: The PSSCFO submitted the preparation plan. Data collection is ongoing to include cultural, water resources, and recreation management in 2022 and 2023. Community conversations to begin fall 2022.

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

Whitewater Wild and Scenic River Planning

BLM Action: Develop a Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP). The 2019 John Dingell Recreation and Conservation Act designated the Whitewater River as a Wild and Scenic River. The Whitewater River originates in the San Bernardino National Forest and terminates in land managed by the BLM. The CRMP planning effort was contracted out in 2021 through the U.S. Forest Service and includes all segments of the Whitewater River. A joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled in 2021 to begin development of the CRMP. To date, a preliminary Resource Assessment has been drafted that identifies existing baseline conditions of the river corridor. The CRMP will identify current land uses and provide guidance on how to maintain outstanding river values for which the Wild and Scenic River designation was made. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires an EA level CRMP be completed for each designation.

Partners: U.S. Forest Service San Bernadino National Forest

Status: Resource assessment submitted to partners and public. Visitor use data collected 2021 and 2022. Data collection scheduled in 2022 to include cultural and recreation.

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

Other/Misc.

Law Enforcement

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

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

Status: BLM law enforcement officers work with other federal, state, and local agencies on a variety of issues and support fellow law enforcement agencies with search and rescue and medical emergencies. The PSSCFO LEO's assist other BLM offices with national events to include high-visitation holiday weekends at the Imperial Sand Dunes in the El Centro Field Office, Saving America's Border Resources (SABR) in Arizona and California, the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), and support fire season through resource orders for wildfires and Emergency Support Function throughout the country during national emergencies. PSSCFO LEO's have been deployed to numerous wildfires throughout the country since the beginning of fire season. CAMP is underway and has been focusing efforts in Western Riverside County. LE staffing levels for PSSC are at eight LEO's with two upcoming vacancies expected.

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

Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



Photo: Run with the Burros Special Recreation Permit April 2022

Archaeology

Haiwee North Dam #2 Coordination

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

BLM Action: The RFO continues communication with the Timbisha Tribe and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on Haiwee North Dam #2 project which is monitored by archaeological and Tribal cultural monitors under the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding. Continued artifact discovery during construction required additional SHPO and Tribal coordination. Field monitors are included during excavation activities.

Status: Coordination is on-going between the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, California Office of Historic Preservation, and Tribes for unanticipated discoveries on the Haiwee North Dam #2 Project.

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

NAGPRA Collections Compliance

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

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

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

BLM Contacts Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Amy Girado, Archaeologist

Grazing

Kelso Valley Grazing Permits Renewal Process

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

BLM Action: The RFO and Bakersfield Field Offices continue to renew grazing permits for remaining portions of the Rudnick Common Allotment and adjacent allotments along the field office boundary. A voluntary relinquishment of the Rudnick Common Allotment in the California Desert Conservation Area in 2021 required this allotment to be reconfigured. Three pastures of the Rudnick Common Allotment remain, including Pinyon Wells, Cane Canyon, Rocky Point. The renewal process on grazing permits for Kelso Peak and Woolstaff Creek began in May 2022.

Partners: Two BLM grazing permittees currently holding permits on the remaining pastures and allotments.

Status: Notice of Proposed Action (Wilderness) was released in May 2022. A proposed grazing decision / environmental assessment may be available for 30-day public comment in August 2022.

Contacts: Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Grazing Natural Resource Specialist; Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Deep Springs Range Improvement Projects

BLM Action: After completing the Proposed Range Improvements in Deep Springs Valley and South Oasis Grazing Allotments environmental assessment last year, the RFO is working with the permittee to install new range improvements. The first improvement will help mitigate water issues and allow cattle to disperse evenly within the South Oasis allotment.

Partners: BLM grazing permittee

Status: Coordination between the BLM range specialist and permittee is ongoing. Installation of the first range improvement will be completed in 2022, with continued work for all approved range improvements in subsequent years.

Contacts: Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Grazing Natural Resource Specialist

Lands and Realty - Major Right-of-Ways

California High Speed Rail – Palmdale-Burbank Segment

BLM Action: In 2018, the California High Speed Rail Authority submitted a right-of-way application to complete the high-speed rail line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The RFO awaits the Plan of Development from the California High Speed Rail Authority for the Palmdale-Burbank phase. The previous phase of planning, Bakersfield-Palmdale, was completed in summer 2021 with the final Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Statement.

Partners: California High Speed Rail Authority

Status: Corresponding with applicant with no recent progress on the Palmdale-to-Burbank section. The RFO will continue to process the Bakersfield-to-Palmdale application by completing a Record of Decision for the alignments on BLM-managed land and may issue a right-of-way in fiscal year 2023.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Naturgy Candela Development LLC (Yeager Solar)

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to construct a 400-megawatt photovoltaic solar facility with Gen-Tie.

Partners: Naturgy Candela Development LLC

Status: The RFO met with the applicant in June 2022 to discuss the project. The California Desert District and the RFO will continue to process the application.

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

Deep Rose Water Pipeline

BLM Action: Proposed completion of a buried water pipeline that supports a geothermal plant on California State Trust Land.

Partners: Deep Rose, LLC

Status: A compliance inspection was completed in July 2022. The RFO continues to process an application with completion anticipated in fall of 2022.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Cole Dowdy, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Ivanpah-Control Transmission Line Project

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to upgrade seven existing 115-kilovolt transmission lines across 360 miles of the Ivanpah-Control line to meet transmission line safety and reliability requirements.

Partners: Southern California Edison

Status: SCE and the RFO continue to process the application.

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

Control Silver Peak

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to replace poles for the purpose of increasing clearance of a 55-kV transmission powerline within the RFO Jurisdiction.

Partners: Southern California Edison

Status: SCE and the RFO continue to process the application.

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

Land Donation

BLM Action: The CDD and RFO are processing a land donation on the southwest end of the Tehachapi Mountain and East of Covington Mountain.

Partners: Martha Farwell

Status: CDD and RFO continue to process the application.

BLM Contacts: Allison Lipscomb, Realty Specialist; Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Land Sale – Golden Queen Mining Company

BLM Action: The CDD and RFO continue to process the land sale to the Golden Queen Mining Company.

Partners: Golden Queen Mining Company, LLC.

Status: CDD and RFO will continue to process the application.

BLM Contacts: Alison Lipscomb, Realty Specialist; Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area

BLM Action: The RFO is processing the withdrawal renewal and extension of the 25,428-acre Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. The extension is approximately 12,000 acres and will make the natural area approximately 37,428 acres.

Partners: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Status: RFO will continue to process the application.

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

Minerals and Mining

Conglomerate Mesa Mineral Exploration

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

BLM Action: The RFO is processing a modified Plan of Operations submitted by Mojave Precious Metals for exploratory drilling. The proposal calls for drilling 4 holes from each of 30 drilling locations, for a total of 120 holes located on Conglomerate Mesa in Inyo County (rough map at <https://arcg.is/0j9SyG0>). The BLM determined March 9, 2022 to prepare in environmental impact statement for analysis of how this operation may proceed subject to Surface Management regulations [43 CFR 3809](#). The area has been explored for gold over the past 40 years and was formerly considered for wilderness designation but has since been released from wilderness consideration by Congress.

Partners: Mojave Precious Metals, Inc., a California subsidiary of K2 Gold of Vancouver, CA.

Status: In the next few months, the RFO anticipates publishing a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS and to hold public scoping meetings.

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

Exploratory Drilling by Gold Discovery Group LLC

BLM Action: The BLM has received an exploration plan from Gold Discover Group, LLC to drill approximately 299 shallow holes to gather physical samples and explore for placer gold in the area surrounding Johannesburg, Red Mountain, and Atolia, California (map at <https://arcg.is/0XHmXS0>). The exploration holes are within an area designated as critical tortoise habitat by [50 CFR 17.95](#). If approved, holes would be approximately 8 inches in diameter and drilled to bedrock, but in no case any deeper than 150 feet.

Partners: Gold Discovery Group, LLC

Status: The environmental assessment for the Gold Discovery exploration drilling is in process and may be completed in fiscal year 2022.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist

Proposal for Placer Mining by Atolia, CA

BLM Action: The BLM received a plan of operations from Gold Discovery Group, LLC to establish a gold placer mine on BLM lands immediately south of Atolia, CA (rough map at <https://arcg.is/1u9q4n2>). The area is excluded from lands designated as critical tortoise habitat. The current proposal calls for mining up to four million tons of material, concentrating heavier minerals/materials onsite, and establishing a processing plant in or near Johannesburg, CA. \

Partners: Gold Discovery Group LLC

Status: BLM has requested and is waiting on further information to clarify the amount and type of operations on public land. The proposal requires an authorized plan of operation subject to analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist.

Recreation

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The RFO issued and managed 45 different Special Recreation Permits in FY2022. T Seventy-three percent of the permits were OHV focused; the majority being dirt bike races in the Spangler Hills OHV Open Area.

Partners: N/A

Status: There are four events scheduled for August 2022.

BLM Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Recreation Planner; Aly Heare, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area Fencing Project

BLM Action: The RFO and Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew completed a nine-mile fence line along the southern boundary of the Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area that was designated as part of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act.

Partners: Student Conservation Association

Status: Completed May 2022

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

FY22 Off-Highway Vehicle Restoration Efforts

BLM Action: The RFO and Student Conservation Association (SCA) fielded two crews to complete 53 restoration projects within the Red Mountain subregion and monitored and performed retreatments as needed on over 200 sites along Wilderness boundaries.

Partners: Student Conservation Association

Status: New crews will start in October 2022.

BLM Contacts: Katy Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Restoration and Resource Interns

BLM Action: The RFO hired three interns in Spring 2022 through American Conservation Experience (ACE). Two interns are Restoration Technicians and perform effectiveness monitoring on previously restored sites, prepare work plans for work crews, and provide outreach and education to the public. The third intern is a Biological Resource Intern and is monitoring sensitive species and habitats for impacts from Off-Highway Vehicle recreation and management actions. Each intern will be on for a minimum of one year.

Partners: American Conservation Experience

Status: Ongoing

BLM Contacts: Katy Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

BLM Action: The Cottonwood Creek WSR flows through Inyo National Forest and Ridgecrest Field Office in Inyo County, east of Big Pine, CA. With the Inyo National Forest (Inyo NF) as the lead agency for the planning the Comprehensive River Management Plan, interested public provided scoping comments and data through the Inyo NF's website. The BLM's ePlanning site directs readers to the Forest Service website for consistency and to reduce redundancy.

Partners: Inyo National Forest

Status: The comment period closed on April 14, 2022, and the RFO is working with U.S. Forest Service to review comments. The RFO has addressed public comments and adjusting the plan and environmental assessment accordingly. A decision may be issued in FY2022.

BLM Contacts: Carrie Woods, Project Manager and Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Renewable Energy and Transmission

Reroutes to Pacific Crest Trail Occurring on Sky River Wind Farm

BLM Action: The RFO is working with the Pacific Crest Trail manager, a USFS employee, to create a new easement on private property owned by NextEra. The company owns the Sky River wind farm near Tehachapi, CA.

Partners: U.S. Forest Service. Region 5, Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA), NextEra Inc.

Status: The trail realignments have been completed. The PCTA will perform minor adjustments to the trail alignment to ensure full access for equestrians.

BLM Contacts: Randy Masner, Civil Engineering Tech, Tom Bickaaskas, Associate Field Manager

Wild Horses and Burros

Centennial, Panamint and Slate Range Herd Areas Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: The RFO completed a wild burro gather in the Centennial, Panamint, and Slate Range herd areas and in the National Park Service's Death Valley National Park. These areas are not managed to support wild burros and a gather is necessary to address resource impacts and reduce the risk of burro-vehicle collisions.

Partners: U.S. Navy at National Air Weapons Station China Lake, National Park Service – Death Valley National Park

Status: The BLM gathered 181 wild burros.

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

Misc. / Other

The RFO hired a new Geologist starting on August 1, 2022.

California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



Photo: BLM Engine 7375 at the Los Angeles County Fair in 2022

Fire Incidents

Fires as of July 27, 2022

BLM Action: There have been 71 fires on lands managed by the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) as of July 2022. Approximately 1,400 acres were burned: 59 fires burned approximately 160 acres of BLM-managed land, nine fires burned approximately 130 acres on National Park Service lands, and three fires burned approximately 10 acres on Bureau of Reclamation lands. The largest fire was the Border 13 Fire in San Diego County in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office which burned 568 total acres. The remaining acres associated with the 71 fires were on cooperators' lands.

Partners: The CDIFP has cooperative fire agreements with several counties and cities as well as other federal and California State partners. Riverside County Fire, San Bernardino County Fire, Kern County Fire, Redlands City Fire Department, Apple Valley City Fire Department, Victorville City Fire Department, Palm Springs City Fire Department, Canyon Lake City Fire Department, CAL FIRE, the United States Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are some of the partner fire departments we work with the most often.

Status: All fires mentioned are currently out.

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

Fuels Projects

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

Partners: Partners for the BLM and National Park Service (NPS) fuels treatments for 2022 include the California Conservation Corps and the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands and California Conservation Corps to implement treatments to protect Joshua trees in areas modeled to be refugia in the face of a warming and drying climate. Other BLM partners include the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), The Wildlands Conservancy, the Friends of the Desert Mountains, the Ramona Band of Cahuilla Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The CDIFP has completed 6,428 acres of fuels treatments to date in FY2022. If fully funded, the plan is to treat approximately 30,000 acres in the California Desert District, Joshua Tree National Park, and Mojave National Preserve. Disaster Bill funding provided for an increase in acres treated. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding will be used to complete additional fuels treatments later in the year. An additional 1,365 acres remain to be treated with FY2022 funding.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

Mitigation and Education Projects

BLM Action: The BLM completed 25 of 40 planned community assistance activities to date. Assistance activities help communities withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience into the communities if a fire were to occur. Mitigation-education staff worked with cooperators and communities to plan and implement local fuels treatments such as the Sunrise Community Fuel Break in Julian and the North Mountain Fuel Break near Poppet Flats south of Banning. Both treatments have been used repeatedly to protect the two communities from wildfires including the Cedar Fire of 2003 and the Esperanza Fire of 2006. Ongoing maintenance occurs to ensure their effectiveness.

Partners: San Diego County Fire Safe Council and 26 of the community fire safe councils throughout the county, U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies.

Status: The BLM participated in educational events and activities such as the Los Angeles County Fair, Temecula Balloon and Wine Festival, and the California State Fair. Two additional Wildland-urban Interface workshops are planned for the spring in San Diego County along with Community Wildfire Protection Plan updates. BLM Mitigation-Education staff trained Fire Safe

Councils and community members at the Last Chance Survival simulation and Wildland-urban Interface for Fire Safe Councils workshop.

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

Hiring Updates

Workforce Transformation

BLM Action: The CDIFP is expanding the workforce in mitigation, fuels, and fire prevention, hiring two new mitigation-trespass technicians to assist communities, and support fire prevention and fire trespass program. The BLM hired a Supervisory Mitigation Technician and is in the process of hiring a biological technician to assist with planning and monitoring fuels treatments. If additional funds become available, the BLM is planning to achieve an 80/20 split between full-time and part-time fire positions, with the current split at 60/40. Additional funds could be used to staff BLM engines seven days a week instead of the current five days a week.

Status: The BLM and NPS have received additional funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). These funds have been used to temporarily increase the salary of firefighters by 50% or \$20,000 (whichever is less) for 2022 to recruit and retain federal wildland firefighters. Only approximately 60% of the firefighter positions in the CDIFP program are currently filled.

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