



Field Office, Fire and Fuel Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

DECEMBER 2022



Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



Photo: Dumont Dunes Recreation Area by BLM

Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Calico Early Man Site

BLM Action: The BAFO continues to address safety concerns. Once the remaining public safety issues are remediated, the site will re-open to the public for self-guided tours.

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

West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement

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

Status: In FY2022, the BLM completed 1,002 acres of Class III surveys along Western Mojave routes; hosted a virtual Consulting Parties Meeting in March 2022; prepared the FY2021 site documentation, evaluation, and report; developed the evaluation plan; and re-requested FY2022 funding for Model Analysis and Class I Literature Review (required every five years). The FY2022 site documentation, evaluation, and report are in progress.

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer and Alexis Francois, Archaeologists, and Jeff Childers, Acting 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. The BLM compiled data on field methodology and previous excavation reports for the Old Spanish Trail Association (OSTA).

Status: The nomination is being reviewed. Quarterly consultation and a collaborative mapping project with the Old Spanish Trail Association is ongoing.

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

Recreation

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: Issue special recreation permits (SRP) for a variety of recreation activities and vending. The BAFO has 16 upcoming SRPs for FY 2023.

Status: For FY2022, a total of 129 SRPs were administered, not including 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 multi-event permits. The BAFO issued several letters of agreement for various events.

BLM Contacts: Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner and Jefferey Childers, Acting 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, Inyo County Road Department, Purdue University, U.S. Geological Service, University of California Davis, University of California Berkeley, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: UC Davis and California Department of Fish and Wildlife initiated a range-wide survey of the Amargosa vole last spring/summer. Initial results show low numbers of voles, likely due to drought.

The BAFO received funding to initiate a “mega-marsh” project with our partners at UC Davis. The project will create 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 additional supplementations are being conducted.

The BAFO continues to work with the Inyo County Road Department to install a weir at the outflow of “Borehole Marsh.” The weir has been successfully installed and is operational. This project 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. There are continuing issues with illegal fires, trash accumulation, and human waste and BAFO is working with partners to resolve these issues.

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

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, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. 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. As part of this survey effort, two new populations of the endangered Niterwort (a plant) were discovered and BAFO is working with partners to resolve management issues identified as potentially impacting these populations.

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. In December 2022, we are planning to plant an additional 11,000 – 14,000 trees (mesquites and willows) on this site through a partnership with the Nature Conservancy. BAFO received an additional \$100,000 in directed funding to further expand upon this project in FY 2023.

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.

The BAFO is working with researchers from the University of Las Vegas on a study that hopes 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. One of the study sites is up near Shoshone. BAFO is working with another group of researchers who will be conducting a study of using biocrusts (soil crusts created by fungi and mosses) in route restoration efforts. One of the study locations is proposed in the Chicago Valley area near the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts

BLM Action: The BAFO continues a focused wildlife habitat enhancement program on the Afton Canyon portion of the Mojave Trails National Monument, 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 Our Mojave (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 2023 data gathering effort has been completed and the interns provided a summary of findings in October 2022 through a public online presentation. The BAFO received 2022 funding to continue tamarisk beetle studies associated with this program in 2023.

The BAFO 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

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 holes adjacent to their active open pit mine to determine a zeolite deposit. The proposal would disturb approximately 1.5 acres of land.

Status: BAFO staff conducted a site visit with the proponents and is providing input to have environmental studies and documents completed.

BLM Contacts: Jamie Livingood, Geologist

Other / Misc.

Apple Valley Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan Development

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

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

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

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

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

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. The plan was 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 ACECs. The \$2.2 million in FY 2022 funding for the initiative is through the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program, BNSF, and Fort Irwin.

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 on 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: Jeff Childers, Acting Field Manager

El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



Photo: Installation of geo-webbing material under the Wash Road to prevent flash flood erosion in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. Photo by BLM

Archaeological/Cultural or Paleontological Resources

Assisting Imperial Valley Desert Museum with Archaeology Display

BLM Action: The El Centro Field Office (ECFO) is assisting the Imperial Valley Desert Museum (IVDM) with the development of a museum display about archaeological fieldwork. The ECFO met with the IVDM to explain fieldwork methods, unit excavations, and tools used. The display will educate the public about archaeological field methods and increase the desire to record, protect, and preserve archaeological sites and artifacts.

Partners: Imperial Valley Desert Museum

Status: The BLM and IVDM are still discussing interpretative aspects of the display. Display should be ready for viewing in the museum by the end of the year.

BLM Contact: Grant Day, Archaeologist

Yuha Buttes Paleontological Survey & Assessment

BLM Action: The ECFO contracted with PaleoServices (San Diego Natural History Museum) to

survey and provide a baseline assessment and inventory of the paleontological resources preserved in the Yuha Buttes. This resource assessment and inventory will provide summaries of locations of fossil-bearing strata, the types of fossils occurring in different strata, their mode of preservation, and their distribution of both laterally and vertically. The inventory will also summarize data on how fossil remains are being affected by the public. Collected fossils will be prepared, identified, catalogued, and curated at a BLM approved curation facility for future research and analysis. An ArcGIS geodatabase will be compiled to document the geographic and stratigraphic distribution of strata, fossil assemblages, modes of preservation, and areas of resource use and disturbance. This project increases our understanding of the history of this area and will also be used to direct future paleontological investigations within the region and help preserve and interpret these fossil formations for public education.

Partners: San Diego Natural History Museum - PaleoServices

Status: This survey was started October 2022 and will be completed in the spring of 2023.

BLM Contact: Grant Day, Archaeologist

Vinagre Wash Special Management Area Cultural Survey

BLM Action: The ECFO is responsible for management of the Vinagre Wash Special Management Area (SMA) - as designated in Public Law 116-9 (Dingell Act), aims to conserve, protect, and enhance recreational, cultural, and ecological resources across 81,800 acres in eastern Imperial County. Included within the Vinagre Wash SMA are approximately 117 miles of BLM designated recreational travel routes. The Dingell Act further addresses the need to protect Tribal cultural resources, including the resources identified in a Tribal cultural resources management plan to be completed. This cultural survey will help the ECFO fulfill the timeline of this bill through a cultural inventory of the designated routes and other areas of tribal interest in the Vinagre Wash SMA.

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

Status: In 2022 and continuing into 2023, the ECFO surveyed 117 miles of travel routes and up to 12 sample block areas totaling approximately 1,660 acres within the Vinagre Wash SMA. The ECFO received funding to sample up to 15 additional sample blocks this fall. Survey of the travel routes has been completed and the number of recorded archaeological properties in the SMA has nearly doubled. Using the data collected during the routes surveyed, the BLM, in consultation with Native American Tribes, will select 12 to 27 (500M2) blocks to archaeologically survey in Fall/Winter 2022. These combined efforts will bring the total area surveyed within the SMA to nearly 5 percent. The Quechan Indian Tribe, the Campo Band of Mission Indians, and the San Pasqual Band of Diegueño Indians have voiced an interest in participating in the block surveys. This project increases our understanding of the history of this area and will be used to direct future investigations within the SMA and surrounding areas and to create a management plan to help preserve and interpret this history.

BLM Contact: Grant Day, Archaeologist

Lands and Realty

Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range ROW

BLM Action: Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma needs permission from the BLM to conduct periodic repair and maintenance on four select road segments, which provide access into the Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range (CMAGR). These roads serve as the sole ground access routes for Marines and support personnel to enter facilities on the CMAGR to conduct military missions. Repair and maintenance consist of surface grading to accommodate target builds and ensure safe and timely access into Key Forward Operating Base locations.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM and MCAS Yuma are establishing an interagency agreement, which will provide necessary funding for the BLM to process the right-of-way request. The BLM anticipates preparing a Categorical Exclusion to authorize the proposed action.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Minerals and Mining

Imperial USA Corporation Exploration Plans of Operations

BLM Action: On October 14, 2021, Imperial USA Corporation 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.

On May 24, 2022, IUC submitted to the BLM 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 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 Plan was revised twice in response to requests for more information from the BLM and a final determination of completeness is still pending. A mineral examination report would be completed by the BLM after the BLM issues an Interlocutory Decision withholding a final action on the Plan, and one for cost recovery of the mineral examination report. The Imperial Site segment is located within the Indian Pass mineral withdrawal area. The BLM will not approve a Plan until the BLM has completed 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 the completion of biological surveys, cultural surveys, and all necessary information has been gathered. Cultural surveys began in April 2022, were suspended due to weather. The BLM will be issuing two Interlocutory Decisions on the Imperial-Hyduke Plan.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

SMP Gold Corp. Exploration Plan of Operations

BLM Action: On September 3, 2021, SMP Gold Corp. (SMP) submitted a revised Plan to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the Oro Cruz historic mining area located in the Cargo Muchacho Mountains in Eastern Imperial County. The project proposes new temporary and permanent roads, road improvements, a staging area, and 65 drill pads which includes up to 8 helicopter accessed drill pads. All activities at the project area will disturb a combined estimated 21 acres of public lands. The ECFO reviewed the Plan and found it to be complete. Public scoping on the Plan ended on April 4, 2022. The BLM is working to prepare a joint Environmental Assessment/Mitigated Negative Declaration (EA/MND) in accordance with NEPA/CEQA regulations.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: The BLM has reviewed a draft EA/MND and intends to post for a 30-day public comment period by December 2022. The BLM is reviewing tribal comments to a revised cultural resources findings report.

BLM Contacts: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Wild Horse & Burro

Chocolate Mule Mountains HMA Programmatic EA

BLM Action: In August 2022, the ECFO restarted work on a programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Chocolate Mule Mountains Herd Management Area (HMA), located in eastern Imperial County. The programmatic EA will allow the ECFO to initiate wild burro gathers and address resource damage in the Chocolate Mule Mountains. Population surveys completed in 2017 showed an increase in wild burro populations over the appropriate management level. In 2022, a vegetation monitoring protocol was created to help determine the impacts of excess burro populations to native vegetation in the HMA.

Partners: N/A

Status: Vegetation monitoring will occur during the 2022 winter season (Dec/Jan). The EA is projected to be completed for review in 2023.

BLM Contact: Ismael Ramirez, Natural Resource Specialist

Wildlife and Botany

Pierson's Milk Vetch Surveys

BLM Action: In March 2022, the ECFO conducted annual monitoring of the federally threatened Pierson's Milk Vetch (PMV) in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. A total of 206 PMV plants were counted in the 2022 survey, possibly due to lower amounts of precipitation in the past couple of years.

Partners: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Status: Annual monitoring completed. Annual PMV report submitted to U.S. Fish & Wildlife. Planning for 2023 spring monitoring will occur in winter of 2022.

BLM Contact: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist & Ismael Ramirez, Natural Resource Specialist

New Hire

BLM Action: The ECFO welcomed Ismael Ramirez, new Natural Resource Specialist to the team in August 2022. A native of El Centro, Ismael has worked seasonal jobs with the BLM, U.S. Forest Service and California State Parks as a botany intern, range technician, wildland firefighter and state park peace officer. His responsibilities include the ECFO's Wild Horse and Burro program, Air, Soil & Water and Botany.

Recreation

Special Recreation Permits (SRPs)

BLM Action: The ECFO works with clubs, businesses, and non-profit organizations on Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) and Letters of Agreement (LOAs). The ECFO is currently in the process of reviewing, drafting and approving SRPs for the 2022–2023 OHV season. Last season, the ECFO managed a total of 65 SRPs, which were comprised of 36 vending, 10 competitive, 10 general, and nine LOAs.

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 continues to work with partners, OHV clubs, and businesses to manage SRPs and agreements that promote responsible and sustainable recreation and the conservation of resources. Besides three SRP event areas at the Superstition Mountain Special Recreation Management Area, the ECFO is working on a new 46 acres archaeological survey to address the increased requests for SRP events and to de-conflict future requests for events in the same area and time. Several cleanups with 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 final phase of the deferred maintenance project on Wash Road in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area was completed. More than 200,000 visitors travel this gravel road each year to access OHV camping sites in the area south of Glamis. The ECFO applied new road base material and installed geo-webbing materials under the road to prevent significant erosion.

Partners: N/A

Status: Ongoing, the last portion of the project will be completed in the summer of 2023 and will consist of leveling out a vault toilet restroom adjacent to the Wash Road.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

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. A preliminary list of 38 lease nomination parcels, totaling approximately 80k acres, is under review. The BLM will determine which parcels will be recommended for NEPA analysis and which parcels are recommended to be deferred from the lease sale. NEPA will be initiated after BLM has completed 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 Orni 5. A Geothermal Drilling Permit (GDP) for well #87-6 was reviewed and approved by the BLM on December 31, 2020. Following GDP approval, Ormat completed a seismic exploration program at the project site in April 2021. A second GDP for the drilling of well #84-6 was reviewed and approved by the BLM on August 10, 2022. Two sundries for the grading of both well pads and an access road have also been approved by the BLM.

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

Status: The BLM is working with Orni 5 to complete Imperial County permitting needs. Orni 5 plans to complete all permitting requirements to mobilize and drill both wells concurrently.

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

Other / Misc. Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Updates

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement (LE) staff now includes 11 LE Rangers and one new hire started the law enforcement academy October 2022. One new Ranger is completing field training November 2022. The ECFO has two new emergency law enforcement sand rails for the Imperial Sand Dunes. These updated vehicles will allow law enforcement to reach areas in deeper dunes for protection of closures and emergency calls for service

Partners: Imperial County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, United States 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: Chemehuevi Wilderness Boundary

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 determined that NEPA previously prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration was not adequate to authorize these facilities.

Partners: FRA Brightline West, Southern California Edison

Status: The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the lead agency for Section 106 compliance, just released their Finding of Effects (FOE) for the greater highspeed rail project, which includes the BLM action. The FOE showed that the overall project would have an adverse effect on historic properties in California. The NFO is reviewing the FOE and the interdisciplinary team review and environmental assessment will be completed once the NFO receives guidance from the FRA.

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

MP Materials Water Monitoring Wells

BLM Action: The NFO received a right-of-way application from MP Mine Operations, LLC for four new monitoring wells. Construction of the water monitoring wells are at the request of the State of California Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board for the purpose of

identifying groundwater conditions within the distal portions of the Wheaton Wash plume. The wells would be constructed at two different sites. The location of the two new well sites were selected based on the recognition that the Wheaton Wash plume likely widens as it discharges into Ivanpah Valley.

Status: The NFO interdisciplinary team is reviewing the project and is expected to complete the interdisciplinary team checklist by November 2022.

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. The BLM is still waiting for cost recovery to be paid. Once cost recovery has been paid, the NFO will process the renewal request.

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

Nipton Communication Site Update

BLM Action: On October 12, 2018, the NFO issued a new communication site lease to Interconnect Towers LLC on public lands near Nipton, California. Construction was delayed due to requirements from California Department of Fish and Wildlife Service (CDFW), one of which included a requirement to amend the access road route.

Status: All requirements from the CDFW and have been met and Interconnect Towers, LLC began construction activities early October 2022 in accordance with the amended communication site lease issued on May 2, 2022.

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

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: NPS, BLM Las Vegas Field Office, and San Bernardino County.

Status: The BLM determined the proposed project would cause potentially significant impacts and an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required. The NFO will develop a preparation plan which will prioritize public involvement and address strategies for interagency coordination and consultation.

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 and 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 reviewed the modification and determined it incomplete. The NFO is requesting the operator address identified deficiencies in the operations and maintenance plan provided. Final recommendations should be incorporated into the revised plan along with project design measures. Upon submission, NFO will restart the review process to determine if the modification is complete.

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

Recreation

Amboy Trail and Sign Planning

BLM Action: The NFO proposes to add a trail network consisting of a series of looped trails (eight to 10 new trails) to enhance recreation opportunities at Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, located within the Mojave Trails National Monument. The looped trails would provide a range of hiking lengths for different skill levels. New signage is 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. Other signing would include maps and trail signs.

Status: Necessary resource survey work has been completed and the NFO started environmental review and consultation with multiple Tribes.

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

National Monuments

Mojave Trails National Monument Planning process

BLM Action: The NFO drafted the Notice of Intent for the Mojave Trails National Monument-Monument Management planning process and intends to start the planning effort in 2023.

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 on April 16, 19, and 21, 2022. The meetings educated the public 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 MTNM reengagement report and video is available online:
<https://on.doi.gov/2YimYpp>

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

Mojave Trails National Monument 7th Anniversary

BLM Action: The NFO is starting anniversary planning and intends to hold two celebrations. The first celebration will be the Historic U.S Route 66 National Scenic Byway Celebration in Needles, CA at the El Garces Harvey House. The second event is still in the planning phase but will highlight the historic town of Goffs, CA.

Partners: California Historic Route 66 Association, Needles Chamber of Commerce, Mojave Desert Heritage, and Cultural Association.

Status: Planning is underway.

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

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)



Photo: Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument by Tracy Albrecht, BLM

Renewable Energy and Transmission

The Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) manages more than 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 adding a gen-tie to the project. Battery Energy Storage System completion was in October 2022.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Arica Solar Project and Victory Pass Solar Projects

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Clearway Solar

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

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Caroline Woods, Project Manager, Project Support

Oberon Solar

No update to this entry since the August 2022 DAC report

BLM Action: Granted

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 for the Oberon Solar Project in July 2022.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Desert Sunlight Solar

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Sunlight Solar LLC

Status: A ROW grant was issued on December 7, 2021, to Sunlight Solar LLC (a subsidiary of NextEra Energy) for construction of a 230-MW battery energy storage system on approximately 94 acres and wholly within the Desert Sunlight project; additionally, it would tie into the existing Desert Sunlight 230-kVgen-tie line and connect to the Red Bluff Substation. A new ROW application has been submitted for construction of a second battery energy storage system wholly within the Desert Sunlight project.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, 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), Section 1003)

BLM Action: The John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey 417.50 acres of public land in San Bernardino County managed by the BLM to the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District). In exchange, the Conservation District would convey about 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 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 in June 2022. Resolution of trespass issues and cleanup of BLM and SBVWCD are ongoing and required prior to the land exchange.

BLM Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Realty Specialist

Wildlife

Dos Palmas Core Marsh Prescribed Burn – Habitat Restoration

BLM Action: The PSSCFO partnered with the Center for Natural Land Management (CNLM) to complete a habitat restoration project to benefit the California Black Rail (CA State Listed) and Yuma Ridgeway's Rail (federally listed) within the Dos Palmas Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). To maintain the health of the marsh, CNLM has received a Proposition 1 Grant from the State of CA, for the BLM to conduct a prescribed burn and treat tamarisk across property managed by CNLM, BLM, and San Diego County Water Authority.

This prescribed burn has been reviewed through NEPA, Section 106, and Section 7. The private lands are analyzed through the Core Marsh and Aquafarms Rail Habitat Restoration – Prescribed Burn CEQA Addendum to the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, Recirculated EIR/EIS (2021).

Partners: Center for Natural Land Management, San Diego County Water Authority, and Coachella Valley Water Authority

Status: Decision Record to be signed by November 2022. Prescribed burn scheduled for December 2022.

BLM Contact: Chelsea Collins, Natural Resource Specialist

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. A joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled in 2022 and is developing a draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The draft AMS identifies the current and existing baseline management for the SSNM, 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: Preparation plan submitted to BLM HQ. Data collection ongoing to include cultural, water resources, and recreation management in 2022 and 2023. Community conversations to begin winter 2022/2023.

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

Whitewater River Wild and Scenic River Planning

No updates to this entry since August 2022 DAC report

BLM Action: Develop a Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP). The 2019 John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation 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 IDT has compiled and submitted draft management actions. Contractor is currently analyzing collected user data. 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

Trailhead Pop-up Events in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument

BLM Action: The trails within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument have experienced greater recreation use over the past year and has led to the creation of new/modified trails, non-compliance of rules, and some safety issues with user conflicts on multi-use trails. Monument staff and partners will host trailhead pop-up education events every month to educate recreationist on responsible recreation and bring more attention to Leave No Trace principles to promote safety. Monument staff will collaborate with partners to encourage responsible recreation messages.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service, Friends of the Desert Mountains, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), and others.

Status: The new education and outreach program will start in November 2022. On-going throughout the 2022-2023 season.

BLM Contact: Dani Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains 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 may work with the US 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, including responding to fellow law enforcement agencies for support 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), Burning Man, and support fire season through resource orders for wildfires and Emergency Support Function throughout the country during national emergencies. The current focus of operations is working with field office staff on the land exchange in Redlands as well as assisting the El Centro Field Office with coverage at the

Imperial Sand Dunes on holiday weekends. 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.

Off-Highway Vehicle Program

BLM Action: The BLM annually applies for California State Grants from the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. The PSSCFO is managing four grants this fiscal year, totaling over \$1,000,000.00 supporting motorized recreation. A Planning Grant was awarded in 2019 to PSSCFO, to analyze new opportunities for off-highway vehicle (OHV) facilities in the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area. A Restoration Grant was awarded to restore desert lands impacted by illegal OHV use and a Ground Operations grant was awarded to complete OHV route improvements in eastern Riverside County. The PSSCFO is annually awarded a Law Enforcement Grant that support our Officers ensure the public recreates legally and safety on BLM-managed lands.

Partners: American Conservation Experience (ACE) Americorps; CA OHMRV Division

Status: The Planning Grant is undergoing public scoping and wildlife/cultural surveys. The Restoration Grant is in the inventory and planning stage. On the ground implementation to start in Jan./Feb. 2023. The Ground Operations and Law Enforcement grants have yet to be funded for the most recent grant cycle, intent to award was posted late in FY2022. Project initiated expected for Jan./Feb. 2023.

BLM Contact: Chelsea Collins, Assistant Field Manager – Recreation and Resources, PSSCFO

Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



Photo: The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office Interdisciplinary Specialist Team took a field trip to evaluate current conditions at Conglomerate Mesa on Oct. 19, 2022.

Archaeology

Haiwee North Dam #2 Coordination

BLM Action: The RFO continues communication with several Tribes and the 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. Post-review discoveries during construction require additional SHPO and Tribal coordination. Field monitors are included during excavation activities. Monthly meetings are scheduled and will continue until ground disturbing activities are complete.

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

Grazing

Kelso Valley Grazing Permits Renewal Process

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: A 30-day comment period on the grazing EA closed October 7, 2022. The RFO and Bakersfield Field Offices have started the comment response and EA editing process. Notice of Proposed Action (Wilderness) was released in May 2022. A proposed grazing decision and environmental assessment may be available for 30-day public comment in December 2022.

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

Fish Lake Valley Grazing Permit Renewals

BLM Action: The RFO has completed the necessary condition surveys to begin the grazing permit renewal environmental assessment for four grazing allotments in the California side of Fish Lake Valley area, near Dyer, NV. The allotments to be reviewed in 2023 include Oasis, S. Oasis, Deep Springs, and Last Chance. The permittees will be contacted to discuss desired permit changes so it can be considered in the EA.

Partners: BLM grazing permittee.

Status: The RFO has completed most of the Rangeland Health Evaluations for the four allotments. The next step is to contact permittees to discuss permit terms and conditions. A proposed grazing decision/EA may be available by September 2023.

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

Lands and Realty - Major Right-of-Ways

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. Construction of the site is anticipated June 2023.

BLM Contacts: Carrie Woods, Project Manager; Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist

8- Minute Energy (Bellefield Aerial)

BLM Action: Application for a 994 ft aerial crossing for a 230 KV gen-tie line.

Partners: 8- Minute Energy

Status: Right-of-Way issued August 18, 2022,

BLM Contacts: Yvonne Castro, Project Manager; Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist, Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

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

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

California Southern California Edison – Ivanpah Control

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 Eddison (SCE)

Status: The RFO is seeking public input and holding virtual public scoping meetings on the Ivanpah-Control transmission line project, a proposal to demolish existing transmission lines and rebuild near to or adjacent to the existing alignment in portions of Inyo, Kern, and San Bernardino counties. The 45-day comment period ends January 3, 2023.

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

California Southern California Edison – 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.

Partners: Southern California Edison (SCE)

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

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

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA)

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: California State Office and Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Status: The RFO will continue to work through the withdrawal process. A cadastral survey land description must be completed before a draft withdrawal *Federal Register* Notice can be published for the expansion.

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 August 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 as a Wilderness Study Area but has since been released from study by Congress without designation.

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; Kevin Schrecengost, 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/1yDr1L0>). 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 either to bedrock or 150 feet depth, whichever comes first. An environmental assessment is in progress for this project.

Partners: Gold Discovery Group, LLC

Status: The environmental assessment for the Gold Discovery exploration drilling may be completed in FY 2023.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist; Kevin Schrecengost, Geologist.

G22 Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division's Grant Applications

BLM Action: The RFO applied for Restoration and Ground Operations grants during the G22 Grant Program. Application results will be posted to the OHMVR Division's website in August.

Partners: N/A

Status: The RFO was successful in our efforts to obtain grant funds from the OHMVR Division's. Implementation of these grants will begin in early 2023 and continue forward.

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

Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

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

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 Bickauskas, 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. The RFO is awaiting a centerline engineering survey from Nextera to complete the amendment to the trail easement.

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

Wild Horses and Burros

Chemehuevi Herd Area Nuisance Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: On August 11, 2022, the RFO began a nuisance wild burro gather. On September 21, the gather was complete, removing 243 burros from the Chemehuevi Herd Area. The burros were removed from Chemehuevi and Colorado Indian Reservations and from Metropolitan Water District lands where they were posing a public safety issue and damaging infrastructures.

Partners: N/A

Status: Attempting to trap an additional 15 burros from the Chemehuevi Reservation Community Center.

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

Piute Mountain Herd Area Emergency Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: On August 18, the RFO began an emergency wild burro gather to remove up to 60 burros from the Piute Mountain Herd Area (HA). To date, 19 burros have been removed. This action is taking place due to Fenner Spring, the only perennial water source within the Piute Mountain HA, not able to support a growing population of burros and wildlife which depend on it for their survival. The monsoonal rains at the end of August and into September provided the area with substantial precipitation creating water pockets and germination of plants which has dispersed the burros in the area.

Partners: N/A

Status: On-Going

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

Wildlife

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area 50th Anniversary Celebration

BLM Action: The BLM and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee will host a 50th anniversary celebration on March 25, 2023, highlighting their partnership establishing and maintaining the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area for the preservation of the desert tortoise.

Partners: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc

Status: The RFO met with DTPC partners to discuss the event.

BLM Contacts: Sophia Osho, Budget Analyst.

Law Enforcement

Vacant Law Enforcement positions

BLM Action: The RFO filled the vacant Supervisory Field Staff Ranger position and one of three vacant Field Staff Ranger positions.

Partners: N/A

Status: Ridgecrest is currently working to fill two vacant Law Enforcement Ranger positions.

BLM Contacts: James Watson, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Misc. / Other

The RFO hired two new Administrative Assistants. Noel Mollinedo works at the Field Office and his effort will be focused on records, fleet, and property. Karen Sanders started work at the Wild Horse and Burro corrals where she'll manage the admin aspects of adoptions and corrals operations.

The Wild Horse and Burro Corrals hired a new Wrangler named Ryan Greenwalt. Ryan is a U.S. Marines veteran who has certification as a horse trainer and farrier and previously led the Marines' training program for mountain warfare in Bridgeport, CA, where he taught high altitude logistics and packing using livestock.

The RFO hired LaReina Van Sant for the Wildlife Biologist position to support the Range and Wilderness programs.

California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



Photo: CCC Inland Crew 5, First Responder Mental Health Training Course, 2022

Fire Incidents

Fires as of October 28, 2022

BLM Action: There have been 86 fires on lands managed by the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) as of October 2022. Approximately 37,000 acres were burned: 71 fires burned approximately 4,925 acres of BLM-managed land, 12 fires burned approximately 131 acres on National Park Service lands, and three fires burned approximately 10 acres on Bureau of Reclamation lands. The largest fire was the Fairview Fire near Hemet, CA in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office which burned over 27,000 acres. The remaining acres associated with the 86 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, the City of Highland, 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 6,480 acres of fuels treatments 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 in FY2023. Disaster Bill funding may provide for an increase in acres treated.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

Mitigation and Education Projects

BLM Action: The BLM completed over 25 community assistance activities in FY2022. 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 or Garth Crow and Jason Winbigler, Mitigation-Education Specialist

Hiring Updates

Workforce Transformation

BLM Action: The BLM hired a biological technician to assist with planning and monitoring fuels treatments. The BLM hosted a job fair November 19-20 at Northridge University. Applicants were able to apply, interview and possibly receive a job offer during the event.

Status: The BLM and NPS 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. These funds will likely run out by 2024 unless additional funds are approved by Congress. 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