



Field Office, Fire and Fuel Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

APRIL 2023



Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



Photo: Afton Canyon by BLM

Archaeology and Cultural Resources

West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement

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

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

Status: In FY2022, the BLM completed 1,002 acres of Class III surveys along WEMO routes; hosted one virtual Consulting Parties Meetings 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). Currently, the FY22 site documentation, evaluation, and report are in progress.

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

Old Spanish National Historic Trail

BLM Action: The BLM completed and 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 continues to work on compiling informational data on field methodology and previous excavation reports for Old Spanish Trail Association (OSTA).

Status: The nomination has been reviewed. Quarterly consultation with the Old Spanish Trail Association is ongoing. A collaborative mapping project with OSTA remains ongoing. All

requested documents have been sent to the pertinent OSTA members.

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

Recreation

Special Recreation Permits

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

Status: Currently for FY2023, a total of 84SRPs 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 Jefferey Childers, Associate Field Manager

Wildlife

El Mirage Off-highway Vehicle Area Fencing Project

BLM Action: The BAFO is working with the Friends of El Mirage to install post-and-cable fencing along the new northern boundary of the El Mirage OHV Area established under the Dingle Act. The project will prevent incursions from the OHV area into desert tortoise critical habitat north of the OHV Area.

Partners: Friends of El Mirage

Status: The BAFO provided fencing materials and coordinated with the Friends of El Mirage for the installation of this fence. Work was completed in the fall of 2023.

BLM Contact: Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

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 completed 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. A final formal report is pending.

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. Planning efforts are continuing for this project in FY2023.

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 conducted. Recent monitoring efforts have confirmed that translocated voles have successfully produced young in the new habitat.

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 chronic issues.

Based on the generally improving vole populations and habitat improvements over the last few years, the ad hoc Amargosa Vole Team has decided that the insurance captive colony at UC Davis is no longer needed. A plan has been developed to release the captive voles into the wild over the course of this summer. Vole numbers and habitat conditions are continuing to be monitored, and there is a contingency plan in place to re-establish the captive colony should it be warranted.

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 75 acres in 2022. The BAFO is developing a burn plan to address a large stand of tamarisk which is not suitable for treatment through other means. There are plans to continue this work in 2023.

The BAFO is working with Point Blue Conservation Science to conduct the 18th year of long-term bird monitoring efforts. Surveys will be initiated in April.

The BAFO established eight Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River in 2021. In 2023, several of these sites will be re-sampled and some additional sites that could not be surveyed in 2022 will be added. Volunteers from Adventure Scientists continued collecting water samples for analysis as part of their national Wild and Scenic Rivers Program in 2023.

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. To that end, a Niterwort Working Group is engaging in this effort.

The BAFO is continuing to work with CalTrans to implement additional plantings in the vicinity Shoshone to add to restoration efforts in the area. In March 2022, BAFO initiated another planting effort with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens which will build upon this initial work. In January 2023, the Nature Conservancy planted approximately 11,000 coyote willow and 880 screwbean mesquites on a 2.74-acre portion of this site. BAFO received an additional \$100,000 in directed funding to further expand upon this project in FY 2023. Additionally, The Nature Conservancy planted 8,000 coyote willows on a 0.75-acre site at the confluence of the Amargosa River and Willow Creek in January 2023.

The BAFO has received California State OHV funds to move forward with signing open/closed routes within the Amargosa North and Amargosa South Areas of Critical Concern which will allow us to address unauthorized route usage in the vicinity of the Amargosa River.

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 also 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. Both studies are taking place in the Chicago Valley area near the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River. BAFO is also working with a researcher to investigate the microbiology of springs, including those associated with the Amargosa River.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts

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 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 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.

A journal article titled *Injuries and abnormalities of the southwestern pond turtle (Actinemys pallidia) in the Mojave River of California* was recently published. The article, co-authored by Chris Otahal, is partially based on survey work that was funded by BAFO.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

No update to this entry since the December 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 (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

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

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

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Minerals

Ash Meadows Exploratory Drilling Proposal

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

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 providing input to have environmental studies and documents completed.

BLM Contacts: Jamie Livingood, Geologist

Other / Misc.

Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) Initiative

BLM Action: The BAFO continues working with the Marine Corps, Army, National Fish and

Wildlife Foundation, 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 DOD REPI program, BNSF, and Fort Irwin. These funds are still pending distribution and the FY 23 proposals are under review.

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

Status: The BAFO provided input on the scope and priorities of the FY2022 RFP and is working with partners 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: Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



Photo: View of the new Yuha Well sign funded and installed with partners

Archaeological/Cultural or Paleontological Resources

BLM Action: The BLM and partners installed a historic Yuma Well replica sign on the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail in the Yuha Basin Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) using funds acquired by Tread Lightly from the Quadratic '50-for-50' Trail and Public Land Stewardship Grant.

Partners: Tread Lightly, Rebelle Rally, Total Chaos Fabrication, and Quadratic

Status: The project was completed in January 2023.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager Support Services

Minerals and Mining

SMP Gold Corp. Exploration Plan of Operations Update

BLM Action: On September 3, 2021, SMP Gold Corp. (SMP) submitted a revised plan of operations 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 BLM reviewed the plan, and it met all surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.401. Public comment on the environmental assessment and mitigated negative ended on December 16, 2022.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: The BLM is working with Imperial County to respond to public comments. The BLM is finalizing the cultural resources report and preparing its findings and determinations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for a 30-day consultation period with consulting parties.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Wildlife and Botany

Winter Bat Surveys

BLM Action: In January and February 2023, the ECFO conducted annual bat outflight surveys at abandoned mines throughout the Cargo Muchacho Mountains. Acoustic monitoring equipment was set up to help staff identify which species of bats utilize the abandoned mines.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM surveyed six mines: Turkey Vulture Adit, King Mine, Mesquite Mine, Queen Mine and Queen West. Total bats counted were 266.

BLM Contact: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist

Recreation

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)/ Visitor Services Unit Statistics

BLM Action: To date, Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) visitation has reached 704,298. Since opening the ranger stations on October 15, 2022, OHV/ EMS Park Rangers have responded to 229 calls to service for public land users requiring emergency medical care or rescue services. During the four national incidents (Halloween, Thanksgiving, New Year's, and Presidents' Day) additional EMS staff were brought in from our partners with BLM Alaska Fire Service, BLM Law Enforcement Operational Medical Unit, and El Centro Sector Border Patrol to assist local BLM staff. OHV/ EMS Park Rangers made hundreds of visitor contacts to educate the public on rules, regulations, and safe and responsible OHV recreation.

Partners: Imperial County EMS, AMR, Reach, Mercy, Surrounding Hospitals, BLM Alaska Fire Service, BLM Law Enforcement Operational Medical Unit (OMU). El Centro Sector Border Patrol.

Status: OHV/ EMS Park Rangers continue staffing ranger stations, providing emergency medical and rescue services, and making proactive visitor contacts thru mid-April. The ECFO is in the application process for the G23 El Centro Safety Grant with the CA OHV Division and requesting \$200,000 in grant funds for the upcoming FY2024 season. Grant funds will be used to pay for seasonal and temporary EMS staff labor, and medical and rescue supplies and equipment.

BLM Contact: Alex Schlumpberger, OHV Park Ranger/ Advanced EMT

New Custom Illustrated Portal Sign

BLM Action: The BLM is working on a custom illustration for the ISDRA portal signs. The ISDRA is a world-class OHV recreation area and a well-known recreation resource for residents and visitors. The ISDRA is the most intensively used OHV recreation area the BLM manages nationwide, with more than one million visitors per year.

Status: Paperwork has been reviewed and is awaiting approvals.

BLM Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist

Navy Tower Project Completed

BLM Action: The BLM and the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Corona Division (Navy) have been working on communications tower project at the BLM Cahuilla Ranger Station to improve radio communications for emergency services, law enforcement, recreation area operation and maintenance, and Navy target flight operations.

Partners: Department of the Navy

Status: The communications tower and shelter have been built and the Navy is working on powering the site.

BLM Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist

Outreach: Star Wars – Discover the Desert Day

BLM Action: The ECFO partnered with L.A.N.D.S. to host Star Wars Discover the Desert Day in the ISDRA at the Buttercup Ranger Station on Feb. 4. The event drew about 2,500 Star Wars enthusiasts with several educational including an arts and crafts area, an art show, a film information booth, a station for identifying animal tracks, and an archeological dig. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the popular film “Return of the Jedi” that filmed several scenes in BLM’s Buttercup Valley.

Partners: L.A.N.D.S.

Status: The event concluded on Feb. 4, 2023.

BLM Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Renewable Energy and Transmission

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 BLM rights-of-way (ROWs) for the construction, operation, maintenance and termination of a 34.5 kV overhead collector line, several aerial collector line crossings, 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 to cross public lands with the collector line to interconnect with an existing Imperial Irrigation District transmission line that traverses BLM-administered public lands north of the project site. The project is on the California Desert District's (CDD) priority project list and has been assigned a CDD Project Manager to oversee the review process.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services (serving as the California Environmental Quality Act (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 pre-application meeting. The Draft Environmental Impact Report was made available by Imperial County Planning and Development Services (ICPDS) in December 2022. The BLM is coordinating with ICPDS to coordinate the CEQA and NEPA processes.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Truckhaven Geothermal Exploration Update

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: Ormat has completed grading of the access road and pad for well #87-6. An archaeological inadvertent discovery was made during the staking of well pad #84-6 and the site was evaluated and recommended not eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. The BLM reviewed the cultural report and prepared its findings and determinations under Section 106. Construction activities at well pad #84-6 are expected to resume in March 2023.

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

Other / Misc. Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Updates

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement staff includes 11 law enforcement rangers, and one new hire who graduated from the law enforcement academy in February 2023. The ECFO is in the process of hiring an Evidence Technician to better process crime scenes.

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

Status: ECFO Law Enforcement staff continue to patrol BLM-managed public land to ensure public safety and protect people, resources and the environment. The ECFO has two new emergency law enforcement sand rails for the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area that can reach areas deeper in the dunes for protection of closures and emergency calls for service.

BLM Contact: Camilo Gonzalez, Chief Ranger

Facilities/Maintenance Projects

BLM Action: A deferred maintenance project was completed on McCain Valley Road in Eastern San Diego County. Three locations were in jeopardy of collapse due to damage caused by several storms. The road slopes were controlled with the installation of geo-textile materials, and geo-webbing filled with new material. Trail maintenance and erosion control work was completed in Lark Canyon OHV Day-use area and campground to protect access roads and the restroom from flooding. Several volunteer cleanups occurred in Imperial Sand Dunes, Plaster City OHV Area, and Mountain Springs. Work continues to move forward on the replacement of Cahuilla Ranger Station in the Imperial Sand Dunes and demolition is expected to begin in FY2024.

Partners: Tread Lightly, L.A.N.D.S, San Diego Off Road Coalition, California Off Road Association, SD Must, Quadratech, Total Chaos Fabrication, and Rebelle Rally

Status: Storm damage repairs are ongoing. Back Country Discovery Trail maintenance is scheduled for Spring 2023.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager Support Services

Needles Field Office (NFO)



Photo: South of Whipple Mountain Wilderness

Lands and Realty

Brightline West High-Speed Train, Ivanpah Substation

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

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, has released a draft Programmatic Agreement and draft Historic Properties Treatment Plan Overview. The interdisciplinary team review and environmental assessment will be completed once the NFO has received guidance from the FRA.

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

MP Materials Water Monitoring Wells

BLM Action: The BLM 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.

Partners: N/A

Status: The right-of-way decision was issued on January 17, 2023. The well site is currently under construction. While the right-of-way was issued for 30 years, it is not expected by MP Materials that the right-of-way would be needed for the entire time frame and would be restored after use by the right-of-way holder.

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

Castle Mountain Water Pipeline

BLM Action: The BLM received an application from Castle Mountain Venture for a water pipeline in Nipton Road and Walking Box Ranch Road, the access road to their mine, to provide water to their existing Castle Mountain Mine.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM is reviewing the jurisdictional status of the application and will complete cost recovery and a cadastral review.

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

Cadiz MLA Assignment

BLM Action: The BLM received an application from Cadiz Real Estate, LLC to assign a portion of a natural gas pipeline held by El Paso Natural Gas Company.

Partners: N/A

Status: Cost recovery has been determined. The BLM is reviewing jurisdictional status and awaiting information from Cadiz and Edwards Air Force Base to complete a cadastral review of the lands.

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

Frontera Solar Project

BLM Action: The BLM received an application from Boulevard Associates to construct a 700MW solar facility on public lands in Inyo and San Bernardino counties. The project will be on a mixture of Development Focus Areas, General Purpose Lands, and private lands. Nine solar photovoltaic units would be constructed and connected by collection lines within project utility corridors. Each unit would consist of photovoltaic solar panels with a tracking system. Transmission would originate in California, pass through Nevada, and connect to the GridLiance 230kV transmission line from an off-site substation, and connect to battery energy storage system facilities.

Partners: N/A

Status: Cost recovery has been determined. The BLM will initiate tribal consultation and public scoping.

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

Agricultural Inspection Station

BLM Action: The BLM received an application from the California Department of General Services to construct a new agricultural inspection station near Goffs to replace the existing station east of Needles, California. The inspection station would be in an existing Federal Highway Administration right-of-way just adjacent to Interstate 40 and west of Goffs road. The current on-ramp from Goffs road to westbound Interstate 40 would be replaced with a new on-ramp through the inspection station. The inspection station east of Needles would be removed and restored.

Partners: N/A

Status: The BLM is reviewing the jurisdictional status of the lands. Several maps showed the lands in the Mojave National Preserve (NPS lands). A preliminary BLM cadastral review showed evidence that the lands located within the Federal Highway Administration were not supposed to be part of the Preserve. The BLM will send a cost recovery decision to the California Department of General Services and the funds will be used to officially determine the jurisdiction of said lands. If the lands are determined to be BLM-managed lands, the BLM will initiate an interdisciplinary review of the proposed action.

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 participated in a meeting and inspection at the Castle Mountain Mine with the County of San Bernardino and no deficiencies were identified as a part of the inspection. The BLM determined the proposed plan modification is insufficient to begin analysis and requested additional information and clarification.

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

National Monuments

Mojave Trails National Monument Planning process

BLM Action: The NFO is currently in the pre-planning stage of the MTNM Plan.

Partners: Numerous cooperating agencies and stakeholders

Status: The Notice of Intent for the MTNM-Monument Management planning process is under review and anticipate starting the planning effort in 2023. Three contracts are in the procurement process including a Class I Cultural Survey, a planning consultant contract to assist with the plan assembly and analysis, and a consultant to support facilitation of the scoping process.

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

Mojave Trails National Monument Advisory Committee (MAC)

BLM Action: The NFO provided support for the Desert Advisory Council appointed Mojave Trails National Monument Subgroup.

Status: The NFO supported the MAC for four field tours in the Mojave Trails National Monument. The tours were in the three gateway communities of Barstow, Needles, 29 Palms and the MDHCA facility and focused on the resources, objects, and values of the MTNM.

Manchester Mine Restoration/Dead Mountain Wilderness

BLM Action: In 2014, the Manchester Mine, located one mile within the Dead Mountains Wilderness, was closed after years of working with county, state, and other federal agencies. During the closure, the mile long access haul road was hardened with material. Several youth teams assisted with restoration.

Status: Universities visited the site to review the restoration success and plant recovery. In February, the BLM's Las Vegas Field Office visited the site to review the outcome of the restoration project.

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)



Photo: Coachella Valley Preserve by Jesse Plum, 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: The BLM is reviewing the application adding a second gen-tie to the project. Battery energy storage system completion was in October 2022, with the BLM reviewing pre-construction plans prior to issuing approval for construction of Solar Facility.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Angela Wadman, Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Arica Solar Project and Victory Pass Solar Projects

BLM Action: Authorization 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 recently completed CX and will be amending the right-of-way to include access roads to Red Bluff Substation. Construction and review of Desert Tortoise Mitigation land package ongoing.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Angela Wadman, Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Oberon Solar

No update to this entry since the December 2022 DAC report.

BLM Action: Authorization 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 photovoltaic facility about 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 2021. Endangered Species Act consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated in September 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. Construction and review of desert tortoise mitigation land package ongoing.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Angela Wadman, Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Desert Sunlight Solar

BLM Action: Authorization 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 within the Desert Sunlight project.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Angela Wadman, Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Desert Quartzite Solar

BLM Action: Authorization granted

Partner: EDF Renewables

Status: Amended right-of-way for reduced footprint issued March 2022 and phased notice to proceed issued January 2023. Construction began February 2023 and ongoing. Power Delivery anticipated 12/24 with testing to begin 9/24.

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Angela Wadman, Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

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 approximately 417 acres of public land in San Bernardino County currently managed by the BLM to the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District). In exchange, the Conservation District would convey up to 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 of the Dingell Act 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 Conservation District lands have been completed and required prior to the land exchange. Updated environmental site assessment documenting actions has been developed and the BLM and the Conservation District signed the binding exchange agreement.

BLM Contact: Dara J. Glass, Associate Field Manager

North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project

BLM Action: Riverside County applied for geotechnical testing to complete the feasibility study for the proposed North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project.

Status: BLM is preparing a categorical exclusion for geotechnical investigations.

BLM Contact: Dan Kasang, Assistant Field Manager

Wildlife

Dos Palmas Core Marsh Prescribed Burn – Habitat Restoration

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

This prescribed burn has been reviewed through NEPA, Section 106 NHPA, and Section 7 ESA. 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.

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

Status: The Decision Record was signed November 11, 2022. Prescribed burn was completed in 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 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 has developed an early draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The draft AMS identifies the current and existing baseline management for the SSNM, specifically as it applies to items mentioned in the monument proclamation. The draft AMS is the first step in the planning process for the 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 is ongoing and includes cultural, water resources, and recreation management in 2022 and 2023. Community conversations with the public, special interest groups, and Tribes are targeted to begin late spring 2023.

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

Whitewater River Wild and Scenic River Planning

No updates to this entry since December 2022 DAC report

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 IDT has compiled and submitted draft management actions that are currently being prioritized. 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. Draft plan, user data analysis report, and EA CRMP expected May 2023.

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 2023 to include cultural and recreation/OHV.

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. One new element that will be integrated in these outreach program will be a new community science tool app that is being piloted in the Monument – BLM

Leave No Trace Conditions Surveys. Staff and the public will be encouraged to use this new recreation focused community science tool to monitor trails and campground conditions, as well as report litter and waste issues in real time.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service, Friends of the Desert Mountains, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, 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: More than 20 law enforcement agencies, 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, 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 and assisting the El Centro Field Office with coverage at the Imperial Sand Dunes on holiday weekends. LE staffing levels for PSSC are eight LEOs.

BLM Contact: Kevin M. Maclean, Acting 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 six grants this fiscal year, totaling over \$1 million, supporting motorized recreation and maintenance. The Planning Grant awarded in 2019 to analyze new opportunities for off-highway vehicle facilities in the Meccacopia Special Recreation Management Area is in inventory awaiting to be used. A restoration grant was awarded to restore desert lands impacted by illegal OHV use and a ground operations grant was awarded to complete off-highway vehicle route improvements in eastern Riverside County. Each year the PSSCFO applies for law enforcement grants to ensure public safety on BLM-managed lands.

Partners: American Conservation Experience, Americorps; CA OHMRV Division

Status: The planning grant is undergoing review and the restoration grant is in the inventory and planning stage and will be extended. The ground operations and law enforcement grants have been awarded for the most recent grant cycle, and the PSSCRO is working to submit a second funding request for law enforcement. Project initiation is expected in 2023.

BLM Contact: Kristopher Ellis, Assistant Field Manager – Recreation and Operations

Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



Photo: The Ridgecrest Field Office opened a 30-day public review for an Environmental Assessment for exploratory drilling by Gold Discovery Group near Red Mountain

Archaeology

Haiwee North Dam #2 Coordination

No update to this entry since the December 2022 DAC report, but the project is continuing.

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, Acting 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 Woolstalf Creek began in May 2022.

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

Status: A Proposed grazing decision / EA were released for a 15-day protest period. Ridgecrest and Bakersfield staff is addressing the protests currently. A final grazing decision will be issued next which will conclude with a 30-day appeal period.

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

Sheep Grazing FY23

BLM Action: In response to winter precipitation events, the RFO received multiple requests from permittees to graze sheep this year. The BLM will conduct measurements to analyze pound per acre when enough annual forage is available. After appropriate pounds per acre is reached, grazing will be authorized. Allotments will be assessed weekly.

Partners: BLM sheep grazing permittees

Status: The range is starting to green up. Recent weather events have kept annual plants from growing in. Predicted turn out is mid-March.

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

Lands and Realty - Major Rights-of-Ways

Naturgy Candela Development LLC (Yeager Solar)

No update to this entry since the December 2022 DAC report, but the project is continuing.

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

Minerals and Mining

Conglomerate Mesa Mineral Exploration

No update to this entry since the December 2022 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 an 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 Bickaaskas, Acting Field Manager; Randall Porter, Geologist; Kevin Schrecengost, Geologist.

Exploratory Drilling by Gold Discovery Group LLC

BLM Action: The BLM received an exploration plan from Gold Discover Group, LLC to drill approximately 293 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 is available for public review until March 27.

BLM Contacts: Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist; Kevin Schrecengost, Geologist.

Keeler Shale Pit Exploratory Trenching/Drilling by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

BLM Action: The BLM received a request to implement exploratory trenching and drilling in a previously authorized Free Use Permit for a mineral material pit off State Route 136. The scope of work consists of digging up four temporary excavation areas to assess the sites' soil

characteristics. If more detailed soil information is needed, up to two borings will be drilled to collect samples for lab testing. The total exploration area will not exceed one acre with material disturbance of up to 150 cubic yards. All excavated areas and boring holes will be backfilled. Exploration activities are anticipated to take 12 to 24 months with no impacts outside of the previously authorized footprint.

Partners: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

Status: The BLM initiated preparation and planning for a categorical exclusion to authorize the project.

BLM Contacts: Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager; Kevin Schrecengost, Geologist; Randy Porter, Geologist.

Recreation

Previous Years' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division's Grant Project Work

BLM Action: The RFO is currently operating under Ground Operations funding received during the G22 grant cycle, repairing fences, signs, kiosks, and scheduling route maintenance for areas washed out during the storms in late 2022 and early 2023. The RFO also has two active restoration grants that are in the process of active restoration with field crews, and monitoring completed work for any new vehicle incursions.

Partners: Student Conservation Association

Status: All open grants are actively being worked on.

BLM Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner and Katy Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

No update to this entry since the December 2022 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 is adjusting the plan and environmental assessment accordingly.

BLM Contacts: Carrie Woods, Project Manager and Tom Bickauskas, Acting Field Manager

Wild Horses and Burros

Chemehuevi Herd Area Nuisance Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: On December 9, the RFO began a nuisance wild burro gather in the Chemehuevi Herd Area removing 256 burros. These burros were removed from Chemehuevi and Colorado Indian Reservations and Metropolitan Water District lands due to a public safety issue and damaging infrastructures.

Partners: BLM Lake Havasu Arizona Field Office

Status: Completed on September 21, 2022

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

Piute Mountain Herd Area Emergency Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: In August 2022, the RFO began an emergency wild burro gather to remove up to 60 burros from the Piute Mountain Herd Area (HA). This action is taking place due to Fenner Spring, the only perennial water source in the Piute Mountain Herd Area, not able to support a growing population of burros and wildlife. Monsoonal rains at the end of August and into September created water pockets and germination of plants which dispersed the burros in the area. A burro population survey is planned for the Piute Herd Area and surrounding areas within the Mojave Trails National Monument later this spring.

Partners: N/A

Status: Ongoing. To date, 19 burros have been removed.

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

FY 2022 California Desert District Wild Horse and Burro Gather and Removal Statistics

Centennial Herd Management Area – Horses: 214 (Gathered 10/9 – 10/15/2021)

Centennial Herd Area – Burros: 37 (Gathered 10/9 – 10/15/2021)

Panamint HA – Burros: 4 (Gathered 12/17/2021)

Outside HA (NPS – Panamint HA) – Burros: 43 (Gathered 4/25 – 4/29/2022)

Panamint HA – Burros: 111 (Gathered 4/25 – 5/2/2022)

Centennial Herd Area – Burros: 28 (Gathered 5/3 -5/5/2022)

Outside HA (Chemehuevi HA/HMA) – Burros: 243 (Gathered 8/11 – 9/21/2022)

Piute Herd Area – Burros: 19 (Gathered 8/20 - 9/30/2022)

Total wild horse removed: 214
Total wild burros removed: 485

Partners: Include China Lake Navy Air Weapons Center, China Lake and the National Park Service – Death Valley, Lake Havasu, AZ Field Office

Status: Complete

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

Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral reopened to the public on February 1 with open adoptions on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of most months unless there are satellite events scheduled. Visitor center hours are 8 a.m. to noon.

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

Wildlife

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area Naturalist and Weed Monitoring

BLM Action: The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is the recipient of the Federal Financial Assistance award through a Cooperative Agreement from the BLM – California Threatened and Endangered Species.

Partners: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc

Status: The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has utilized funds from a Federal Financial Assistance Cooperative Agreements to hire a full time naturalist who will be on site March 18. The DTPC has hired a monitor for the DTRNA weed monitoring and mapping project from March 17 to May 31, 2023, with funds associated with these agreements.

BLM Contacts: LaReina Van Sant, Wildlife Biologist and Katrina Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

South Oasis Windmill Russian Thistle Project

BLM Action: Located in the South Oasis allotment in the northern portion of the field office, the RFO is working on a multi-year project to treat noxious weeds and restore rangelands to improve wildlife habitat quality and forage production for cattle. About 130 acres of Russian thistle dominate the landscape, outcompeting native vegetation. The goal of the project is to reduce the Russian thistle seed bank and restore native vegetation.

Partners: Lake Mead Inter-Regional Invasive Plant Management Team, NPS; Deep Springs College- Permittee of South Oasis allotment

Status: The RFO is in the third year of the project and is planning the upcoming field season for Russian Thistle treatments.

BLM Contacts: Martha Dickes, Wilderness Specialist; Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Grazing Natural Resource Specialist; Tom Bickauskas, Acting Field Manager

California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



Photo: CCC Inland Crew 5 at Dos Palmas prescribed fire December 2022

Fire Incidents

Fires as of February 28, 2023

BLM Action: There have been three fires on lands managed by the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) as of February 2023, with approximately half an acre burned on BLM-managed lands.

Partners: The CDIFP has cooperative fire agreements with several counties and cities, 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 often.

Status: The fires mentioned above are 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 helps control wildfires and protect infrastructure and private property.

Partners: Partners for the BLM and National Park Service (NPS) fuels treatments for 2023 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. Other BLM partners include 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 U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The CDIFP completed 1,547 acres of fuels treatments in FY2023. The core marsh at the Dos Palmas Preserve was burned to restore habitat for Yuma Ridgway's rail. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding may increase acres treated.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

Mitigation and Education Projects

BLM Action: To date, the BLM completed two community assistance activities in FY2023 that help communities withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience 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 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 is planning educational events and activities at 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 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 Specialists

Hiring Updates

Workforce Transformation

BLM Action: The BLM hosted a job fair November 19-20 at Northridge University and filled

approximately 35 key fire management positions. Most positions will start in April or early May and are both permanent and temporary.

Status: The BLM and NPS received additional funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These funds have been used to temporarily increase the salary of firefighters by 50% or \$20,000 (whichever is less) since early 2022 to recruit and retain federal wildland firefighters. Approximately 80% 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