



Field Office, Fire and Fuels Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

AUGUST 2023



Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



Photo: Ord Mountain by Jesse Pluim, BLM

Archaeology and Cultural Resources

West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement

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

Status: In FY2022, the BLM completed 1,002 acres of Class III surveys along WEMO routes; hosted one virtual Consulting Parties Meetings in March 2023; prepared the FY2022 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 FY23 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 84 SRPs were administered by field office staff, not including the vendor permits for the King of the Hammers. The SRPs included a variety of recreation events (e.g., European scramble, vehicle testing, UTV races, car/truck race, speed timing trials, hare and hound, sand drags, dual sport ride, poker run), most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The BAFO issued several letters of agreement for various events (e.g., LA Police Baker to Las Vegas Race).

BLM Contacts: Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner and Jeffrey Childers, Associate Field Manager

Wildlife

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

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

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

Status: UC Davis/CDFW 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. This tamarisk management has become even more important this year given that the Tamarisk Beetle (an introduced bio-control agent) has become established in the system and is resulting in large areas of dead/dying tamarisk which is posing a significant fire hazard.

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 and will continue through the summer.

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 of Shoshone to add to restoration efforts in the area. 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 \$100,000 in directed funding to further expand upon this project in FY 2023 – a three-year project in which over 1,000 additional honey mesquites will be planted and maintained (watered). 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. A BLM Blog Post summarizing some of these restoration efforts can be found here: <https://www.blm.gov/blog/2023-04-21/crown-jewel-desert>

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. BAFO staff participated in a Screwbean Die-off working Group meeting in June 2023 to catch up on the current research on this subject and to further develop partnerships for research projects in the Amargosa River area.

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.

A new Program Manager has been assigned from the District Office to facilitate the development of the Comprehensive River Management Plan and to expedite the completion of the plan.

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 culturally 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. The management plan will make a “suitability determination” on this river segment which is the next step in deciding if the river segment should be moved to full Wild and Scenic status.

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. A BLM Blog Post summarizing some of the WISDOM activities can be found here: <https://www.blm.gov/blog/2023-05-23/women-science-gather-important-data-mojave-desert>

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. In FY23, BAFO received \$30,000 to further this endeavor. These funds will be used to develop a captive breeding facility on the Living Desert grounds and to develop a head-starting action plan to formalize the effort.

The BAFO continues to build research partnerships in the area. 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.

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 received mid-year funding to work with the Living Desert to conduct a BioBlitz in Afton Canyon. This is anticipated to be a three-day event this summer where professional biologists will go to the field to document as many plant and animal species as possible to give a “snapshot” of the biodiversity of the canyon.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

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. The RIT has been inactive over the last several months.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Minerals

Ash Meadows Exploratory Drilling Proposal

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

Status: BLM staff conducted a site visit with the proponents to obtain additional information for the EA.

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 and an additional NFWF RFP was release in early 2023.

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

Status: Six major projects have been approved to date. BAFO staff have been actively engaged in the project review/development process and will be coordinating closely with our partners as these projects get implemented.

BLM Contacts: Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager, Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Interstate 40 Desert Tortoise Fencing Project

BLM Action: The BAFO is installing several miles of desert tortoise exclusion fencing to help prevent road-kills of tortoise on a section of Interstate 40. This section of road has been identified as a “high priority” area by the USFWS due to the large number of tortoises being lost here.

Partners: California State OHV Program

Status: The BAFO has initiated work on this project and anticipates having it completed in FY23.

BLM Contacts: Jeff Childers, Associate Field Manager

El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



Katrina Berrones, ACE intern, measuring the weight of a Flat-tail Horned Lizard.

Wildlife

Flat-tail Horned Lizard (FTHL) Demography and Occupancy Surveys

BLM Action: In June 2023, the El Centro Field Office (ECFO) hired five interns to conduct the annual FTHL Demography and Occupancy surveys for our three Management Areas (MA). Forty-five occupancy plots are being surveyed in the Yuha MA this summer and will hopefully be visited six times.

Partners: American Conservation Experience (ACE) and Geological Society of America.

Status: First round of occupancy plots has been completed and the East Mesa Demography Plot has been completed. To date a total of 33 FTHL have been found from both survey efforts.

BLM Contact: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist

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 has received documentation concluding consultation from State Historic Preservation Office for the cultural resources inventory and BLM findings and determinations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The BLM is finalizing review of the Environmental Assessment / Mitigated Negative Declaration, Finding of No Significant Impact, Decision Record and responses to public comments.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Recreation

OHV Area, Wilderness, Habitat and Trail Signing

BLM Action: Since October 1, 2022, the ECFO has installed more than 3,000 signs and recycled/reinstalled approximately 4,000 signs identifying the Pierson's Milk-vetch (PMV) Critical Habitat Closures within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA). During spring and summer 2023, staff have installed more than 400 OHV route signs in the Superstition area, Black Mountain/Ogilby Rd., Picacho/Little Picacho, Table Mountain, Lark Canyon, McCain valley, Ocotillo, and Yuha Desert covering 243.7 miles of OHV trails. During these signing efforts, staff also make on-going visitor contacts to educate the public on PMV Closures and OHV rules for safe riding in ECFO managed recreation areas and trails.

Partners: CA State Parks, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division

Status: Park Rangers continue to work on OHV route signage and prepare for the upcoming OHV recreation season.

BLM Contact: Arturo De Jesus Casarez, Park Ranger

Visitor Services Unit

BLM Action: Since October 1, 2022, ISDRA visitation has reached 875,469 and staff responded to 253 emergency medical care or rescue calls. This includes 49 search and rescues, 118 patients treated and released in the field, 41 patients transported by ground ambulance to local hospitals, 40 patients transported by air ambulance to trauma centers and five fatalities related to OHV recreation. The final grant application for the G23 El Centro Safety Grant was submitted, and we are requesting \$200,000. Grant funds will be used to pay for labor and supplies to support rescue operations. The ranger stations were closed for the summer on April 15, 2023. Summer temperatures are currently ranging from 115°F to 120°F.

Since the last report, Park Rangers assisted BLM Law Enforcement by providing medical support for the four California Border Operation work details, instructed an Emergency Medical Technician Refresher class for BLM Alaska Fire Service and provided First Aid / CPR training

to ECFO staff.

Partners: Imperial County EMS, AMR ambulance, Reach Air (medical helicopter), Mercy (medical helicopter), El Centro Regional Medical Center, Pioneer Memorial Hospital, BLM Alaska Fire Service, BLM Law Enforcement Operational Medical Unit, El Centro Sector Border Patrol and L.A.N.D.S. non-profit organization.

Status: The Ranger Stations are scheduled to reopen on Friday October 13, 2023. Staff are actively preparing for the upcoming season by ordering medical supplies and equipment, completing vehicle maintenance on rescue sand rail fleet and hiring of Seasonal OHV Park Rangers.

BLM Contact: Alex Schlumpberger, Park Ranger

Special Recreation Permits (SRPs)

BLM Action: The ECFO continues to process Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for a variety of events. These include off-road trail rides and races, vending activities and group meetups. Last season, 66 SRPs were processed and approved. For events that did not require a permit, a Letter of Agreement was supplied. These are typically issued for trash cleanups or weddings on public lands.

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

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. Permit applications and activity proposals for next season are arriving. This upcoming season the ECFO will begin transitioning to the Recreation and Permit Tracking Online Reporting (RAPTOR) system (<https://permits.blm.gov/raptor/landing>) for accepting and processing SRPs. The RAPTOR website is where the public can submit applications to the BLM for SRPs, Paleontological Resource Use Permits and Scientific Research Permits and Authorizations. Training of staff and the authorized officers is underway.

BLM Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Outreach

BLM Action: Staff have made hundreds of proactive visitor contacts to educate the public on rules, regulations and safe and responsible OHV recreation, and have participated in several community events providing outreach and education to the public. In June, the ECFO recreation staff participated in the 1st Annual Off-Road Jamboree in Lakeside, CA. Staff informed the public of recreation and OHV opportunities available in San Diego County in the BLM's Lark Canyon OHV Area. The ECFO Resource and Recreation Divisions collaborated on presentations for Career Day at Central Union High School and Imperial High School. ECFO staff presented information to Juniors and Seniors about the different career paths and volunteer projects our local office offers, as well as the national opportunities the BLM provides.

Partners: San Diego Off-Road Coalition, Central Union High School, Imperial High School (IHS) and Tread Lightly!

Status: The Visitor Services staff will be attending the upcoming Sand Sports Super Show in Cosa Mesa, CA from September 15-17, 2023. Park Rangers are working with our local L.A.N.D.S. partner on the development of the 2023/2024 Lands Recreation Guide and revamping the “Dune Guard” program. The BLM is developing a Junior Ranger activity book with the assistance of a recently hired Intern. National Public Lands Day events are being planned.

BLM Contact: Michael Mujica, Park Ranger (Interpretation), Ismael Ramirez, Natural Resource Specialist

Renewable Energy and Transmission

East Mesa Solar Facility Renewable Energy Project

BLM Action: The BLM has accepted the initial Plan of Development submitted by IP Land Holdings, LLC (IP) accompanying its right-of-way application for a proposed 500 to 1,150 MW solar energy facility on public lands designated as a Development Focus Area under the Desert Renewable Energy and Conservation Plan in southern Imperial County, California. The project includes arrays of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and appurtenant facilities, including a battery energy storage system. The Project would construct two new gen-tie lines that would connect the project substation(s) to a new high-voltage breaker and a half substation and switchyard to interconnect to the existing SDG&E 500 kV transmission line (Southwest Powerlink). IP has indicated its intent to file an application under the California Energy Commission’s (CEC) new certification program for eligible non-fossil-fueled power plants and related facilities to optionally seek certification from the CEC, using emergency rulemaking authority provided by AB 205. Under this scenario the CEC would serve as the CEQA lead.

Partners: California Energy Commission

Status: The BLM is coordinating with IP to schedule the 2nd Pre-Application Meeting (Stakeholder Meeting) in late August or early September.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Truckhaven Geothermal Exploration Update

BLM Action: Geothermal wells have been approved in the Truckhaven area.

Ormat has completed grading of the access road and pad for two sites. The drilling of two wells has been completed and Ormat is finishing cleanup and installing the final production casing. Ormat anticipates flow testing in September. They have also submitted a utilization plan which proposes the construction of two energy facilities, a solar field, a transmission line, and additional injection and production wells and pipelines.

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

Status: The utilization plan is under BLM review.

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 currently includes 11 LE Rangers. ECFO is in the process of hiring an Evidence Technician which will increase the ability to better process crime scenes for prosecution. The ECFO LE staff is part of the BLM outreach team with a goal to educate the public and increase the protection of public lands.

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

Status: ECFO Law Enforcement staff continues to patrol BLM managed public lands for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public, and conservation of natural and cultural resources.

BLM Contact: Camilo Gonzalez, Chief Ranger

Facilities/Maintenance Projects

BLM Action: The ECFO is working with the National Park Service (NPS) at Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks creating a win-win-win situation for both agencies and the public. The BLM is sending career seasonal employees to the NPS to assist with the recovery efforts from the snow and flood damages to the main roadways. These BLM career seasonals can be placed in non-pay status if funding runs out at the ECFO, so this detail keeps them employed, increases their skill sets, and gets them out of the hot summer heat in Imperial County. The NPS is getting help in a time of need but doesn't have to fund the staff all year long. The public is getting increased efficiency with their tax dollars and increased public access to the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.

Partners: National Park Service, Sequoia & Kings Canyon

Status: In year two of a five-year interagency assistance agreement.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager Support Services

Needles Field Office (NFO)



Photo: Giant Nolina Kingston Mountains

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, anticipates completion and approval of a Programmatic Agreement and Historic Properties Treatment Plan Overview by the end of August. The interdisciplinary team review and environmental assessment will be completed once the Programmatic Agreement is complete and authorized.

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. The BLM Needles FO and Las Vegas FO have met to coordinate our review of the proposed expansion and the utilities right of way applications, as both office jurisdictions are affected.

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 to Cadiz. This application is solely to consider the reassignment of the portion of the right of way to Cadiz, no additional rights or construction will be authorized. Principally this assignment recognizes Cadiz ownership of the pipeline and authorizes them to maintain the pipeline to protect its physical integrity.

Partners: N/A

Status: BLM has accepted the right of way application as complete and established the necessary cost recovery account. The Interdisciplinary Team has reviewed the project and has not identified any Extraordinary Circumstances. As such a CX has been prepared and posted in e-planning at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2025442/510>. Additionally, recognizing past interest in this project, BLM established a 15-day public comment period which began on July 18 and ended on August 1, 2023. NEFO is working through the public comments and preparing responses to those comments.

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 onramp 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 has established a cost recovery account with the California Department of General Services and the funds will be used to officially determine the jurisdiction of said lands. The interdisciplinary review has been initiated.

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: Castle Mountain Mine returned an updated version of the proposed expansion plan, which is under review. The BLM Needles FO and Las Vegas FO have met to coordinate our review of the proposed expansion and the utilities right of way applications, as both office jurisdictions are affected.

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

Jedco East Modification to Plan of Operation

BLM Action: Jedco Gypsum Company Inc. recently submitted a Modification to their Plan of Operation (POO) to expand their mine by 74 acres to the east. The mine's current POO authorizes 160 acres, and the proposal is to expand to 234 acres while also requesting to remove the previous 5 ft mining depth restriction. The mine is located on the Mesquite Lake Playa five miles south of Sandy Valley, NV.

Partners: N/A

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

National Monuments

Mojave Trails National Monument Planning process

BLM Action: On May 5, 2023, the Notice of Intent (NOI) to plan was published in the Federal Register. That kicked off the official planning phase and a 60-day scoping period for the Mojave Trails National Monument, Monument Management Plan. During that time the BLM hosted four public meetings. One was virtual and three were face to face. BLM has provided the public the meeting summaries and will be publishing a scoping report summary derived from the written scoping comments sent into the BLM during the 60-day period. The scoping report summary will be available in the fall of 2023 through the e-planning site.

The BLM has awarded a contract to help with the analysis, assembling, writing and editing of the Monument Management plan. The Project Manager is working with the interdisciplinary team from NEFO, BAFO and PSSCFO to finalize the Analysis of the Management Situation which will then be summarized and made available in the late fall of 2023 through e-planning.

Additionally, the BLM is working on the Draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will be sent out to cooperating agencies.

Partners: Numerous cooperating agencies and stakeholders

Status: The Notice of Intent for the MTNM-Monument Management planning was issued in the Federal Register on May 5, 2023. One contract has been awarded to assist the BLM with the Monument Management Plan.

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, 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 preconstruction plans prior to issuing approval for construction of Solar Facility.

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: 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.

Partner: Clearway Solar

Status: Authorization granted

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

Oberon Solar

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

BLM Action: 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.

Partner: Intersect Power

Status: Authorization granted

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

Desert Sunlight Solar

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

Partner: Sunlight Solar LLC

Status: Authorization granted

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

Desert Quartzite Solar

BLM Action: 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.

Partner: EDF Renewables

Status: Authorization granted

BLM Contacts: Dan Kasang, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon Anderson, 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 2019 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 conflict with the Plan. The nonfederal 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 land exchange conveyance documents will be completed by end of August 2023.

BLM Contact: Dara J. Glass, Deputy 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 has prepared a categorical exclusion for geotechnical investigations and anticipates a notice to proceed by September.

BLM Contact: Dan Kasang, Assistant Field Manager

Wildlife

Dos Palmas ACEC - Desert-Riparian Monitoring - Habitat Restoration

BLM Action: To complete desert - riparian monitoring at the Dos Palmas ACEC. The monitoring is required per mitigation of the lining of the Coachella Valley Canal to create 352.5 acres of new desert riparian habitat to support migratory birds. This California Native Plant Society and California Department of Wildlife Vegetation Assessment method of monitoring is currently how the Coachella Canal Lining Project tracks successful desert riparian habitat acreage. Monitoring will be completed by Living Desert staff and supported by the BLM.

Partners: The Living Desert, Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority and The Bureau of Reclamation

Status: Funding obligated via a contract with the Coachella Valley Water District. Monitoring to start in October/November 2023. Monitoring report to be submitted for BLM and Coachella Valley Water District review by December 2023.

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 and approved by 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 1919 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

Illegal mountain bike installation removal in Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument

BLM Action: The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (Monument) has experienced greater recreation use over the past year including an increase in illegal trails being built and installations constructed for mountain bike users. Of particular concern is the Palm Canyon Trail/Wild and Scenic River, which the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians brought to the attention of the BLM and U.S. Forest Service (FS) due to damages to cultural and biological resources. As a result, Monument staff have partnered with the Tribe and Friends of the Desert Mountains volunteers to remove four large installations (bridges and long, raised ramps) to improve safety and discourage these types of illegal recreational activities. Both agencies will continue to work and communicate with the Tribe and there are plans to develop a Tribal Co-Stewardship Agreement for long term support of the Monument. Additionally, the BLM and FS will be increasing monitoring effort across the trails in the Monument and conducting more outreach and education at the trailheads starting in the Fall of 2023 to promote responsible recreation.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, Friends of the Desert Mountains

Status: On-going throughout the 2023-2024 season.

BLM Contact: Dani Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Manager

Other/Misc.

Law Enforcement

BLM Action: 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.

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

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 four grants this fiscal year, totaling over \$1 million, supporting motorized recreation, maintenance, ground operations, restoration and environmental planning. 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 was extended and the restoration grant is in the inventory and planning stage. The ground operations and law enforcement grants have been awarded for the most recent grant cycle, and the PSSCFO 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

Recreation Program

BLM Action: BLM is currently in the preliminary stages of discovery meetings with the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy to discuss the locations and potential opportunity for the designation of 6 new trails in the Coachella Valley.

Partners: Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC)

Status: This project is still in its infancy stages of research and evaluation for potential. Some biological work has been done by third parties and will require a full NEPA review along with public scoping. There is no timeframe for project initiation at this time.

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

Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



Photo: The Ridgecrest Field Office authorizes mineral materials pits including this pit near Keeler, CA managed by Los Angeles Department of Power and Water. (photo credit: Max Wiegman BLM)

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, 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. Both Ridgecrest and Bakersfield decisions were appealed and are under review.

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

Sheep Grazing FY23

BLM Action: Sheep grazing concluded June 2023 with a total of 14 bands turned out.

Partners: BLM sheep grazing permittees

Status: Sheep grazing concluded.

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

Cattle Grazing FY23

BLM Action: BLM will begin writing two environmental assessments to renew grazing permits in the Deep Springs and Fish Lake Valleys, east of Big Pine, CA. Project pages have been started on BLM's e-planning page: [DeepSprings_RangeImprovements_EA.pdf \(blm.gov\)](#). One EA will cover the Last Chance allotment which contains portions of the Piper Mountains Wilderness and Sylvania Mountains Wilderness (DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2023-0016-EA). The other will cover the Deep Springs Valley, South Oasis and Eureka Valley allotments which contain portions of the Piper Mountain Wilderness, Sylvania Mountains Wilderness and White Mountain Wilderness Study Area (DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2023-0015-EA).

Partners: Deep Springs Trustees, Denver Square Trust, Nick Dowers (Triple D Ranches)

Status: Rangeland Health Evaluations complete. Per California wilderness policy, a Notice of Proposed Action was sent to interested parties. This Notice was extended 30 days until August 5, 2023.

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 west of Mojave, CA.

Partners: Naturgy Candela Development LLC

Status: The Plan of Development has been returned for edits. The Area of Potential Effect for SHPO Section 106 and tribal consultation has been set. The second pre-application meeting is estimated to occur in the fall of 2023.

BLM Contacts: Carrie Woods, Project Manager; Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stepheson, Assistant Field Manager

Alta Wind 1 Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to install a battery energy storage system for the preexisting Alta Wind 1 wind turbine project, southeast of Tehachapi, CA.

Partners: Alta BESS LLC

Status: The BLM is currently in the process of preparing a CX document. Updates are required in the Plan of Development. Tribal consultation letters will be sent out in August 2023.

BLM Contacts: Carrie Woods, Project Manager, Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stepheson, Assistant Field Manager

Indian Wells Valley Ground Water Authority

BLM Action: The RFO received an application for 98 geotechnical boring locations for a future water conveyance pipeline from California City to Ridgecrest. The pipeline would be 50.6 miles in length, of which 20.6 miles of the pipeline are on Public Lands and 30 miles on private and state lands. An application for a pipeline with pump stations has also been received.

Partners: Provost & Prichard Engineering Group, Indian Wells Vally Groundwater Authority

Status: Currently processing the application and CX for the geotechnical boring locations. Boring locations will occur alongside the route of the pipeline along Cantil Road, Garlock Road, US395 and China Lake Blvd.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager

Southern California Edison – Ivanpah Control

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 45-day comment period for 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 ended on January 3, 2023. The comments were distributed to the BLM staff on February 23, 2023. The visual resource team is working with the other resources through the process of determining which alternatives to carry forward into the NEPA analysis.

BLM Contacts: Joan Patrovsky, Project Manager, Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stephenson, Assistant 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: The Plan of Development has been updated and the BLM team is reviewing it for adequacy. An additional route is under consideration that would address concerns for Sage Grouse. The visual resource team is working with the other resources through the process of determining which alternatives to carry forward into the NEPA analysis.

Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area Withdrawal

BLM Action: The RFO is coordinating with the BLM State Office on issuing a new withdrawal for the expired Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area (DTRNA) Withdrawal. The RFO has decided to expand the withdrawal to encompass the original DTRNA footprint as well as the portion of fenced area within the Western Rand Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The approximate acreage for the withdrawal is 30,000 to 40,000 acres. The legal land description is nearly complete by BLM Cadastral. RFO realty staff will create and submit the application/petition to the California State Office to move the withdrawal forward.

Partners: California State Office.

Status: The RFO will continue to work with cadastral on creating a legal land description.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stepheson, Assistant Field Manager

Golden Queen

BLM Action: The RFO received an application for a direct sale of 484.15 acres in the Golden Queen Mine area southwest of Mojave, CA.

Partners: Golden, California State Office.

Status: Currently processing the application for the sales. The project has been moved to the State Office.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stephenson, Supervisor; Tom Bickauskas, Field Manager

Deep Rose Water Pipeline

BLM Action: Application submitted for a proposed 12-inch buried polyethylene water pipeline within the existing road right-of-way, which 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 2024. Adjudicating submitted documentation and waiting for a 30% engineering map.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stepheson, Supervisor; Tom Bickauskas, Field Manager

Desert Land Entry

Action: The RFO received an application for a 20-acre Desert Land Entry north of Haiwee dam south.

Partners: Mike Linnolt.

Status: The RFO continues to process an application with completion anticipated in fall of 2024. Adjudicating submitted documentation.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager

Lands and Realty - Minor Rights-of-Ways

BLM Action: 40 right-of-way application for various right-of way authorization and renewal request being process, i.e., communication sites, roads, pipelines, etc.

Partners: Various companies and individuals.

Status: The RFO continues to process an applications

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Dana Stephenson, Supervisor; Tom Bickauskas, Field Manager

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://arcgis.com/arcgis/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 Bickauskas, 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 public comment period of the environmental assessment for the Gold Discovery exploration drilling ended on March 27, 2023. Public comments were reviewed, and the environmental assessment has been completed. The project is awaiting a final decision.

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 BLM 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 BLM also has two active restoration grants that are in the process of finalizing work plans for the Fall crews, monitoring completed work for any new vehicle incursions, and planning future restoration efforts.

Partners: American Conservation Experience

Status: All open grants are actively being worked on.

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

G23 Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division Grant Applications

BLM Action: The RIFO applied for Ground Operations, Restoration and Law Enforcement grants under the G23 OHMVT Division's Grant Program.

Status: Applications were successfully submitted. The intent to award should be out August 7, 2023.

BLM Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, 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 planning the Comprehensive River Management Plan, interested public provided scoping comments and data through the Inyo NF's website. The BLM's e-planning 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, Field Manager

Pacific Crest National and Scenic Trail

BLM Action: During April and May American Conservation Crew (ACE) completed three 8-day hitches. While on hitch crews cleared downed logs off the trail, installed check steps to mitigate erosion and constructed a timber retaining wall. Their hard work made the trail more accessible to hikers and horseback riders.

Partners: Pacific Crest Trail Association, specifically Michelle DiMeglio, made this work possible. Michelle is the Southern Sierra Regional Trail Stewardship Coordinator.

Status: ACE crew work is completed for the 2023 season.

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

Volunteers Events

BLM Action: Saturday April 29th, 2023 Friends of Jawbone celebrated their 25th Moose Anderson Day Event which also happened to be the 25th anniversary of Friends of Jawbone's (FOJ) incorporation as a 501(c)(3) organization. FOJ is a long-time partner of the Ridgecrest Field Office. 54 volunteers, FOJ staff, and BLM staff installed peeler posts around camping spots in middle knob and picked up trash in jawbone canyon.

Partners: Friends of Jawbone 501(c)(3) organization, 760-373-1146, <https://www.jawbone.org/>

Status: Annual event

BLM Contacts: Katy Meyer and Aly Heare, Outdoor Recreation Planners

Wild Horses and Burros

Wild Horse and Burro Population Surveys:

BLM Action: Conducted Double Observer Method Wild Horse and Burro Population Survey Centennial Herd Area (HA) / Herd Management Area (HMA) and a portion of the Lee Flat HA / HMA utilizing a Bell 206 Long Ranger from May 26 - 31, 2023. A total of 482 wild horses (including 2 mules) and 521 burros were counted in the Centennial HA / HMA. The appropriate management level (AML) for this area is 168 wild horses (high AML) and 0 burros. The survey data will be sent to the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program Population Biologist to evaluate, apply statistical analysis to calculate a population estimate. The Lee Flat HA / HMA was flown adjacent and into Death Valley National Park counting a total of 9 burros. The Lee Flat HMA is identified with an AML of 15 burros.

Partners: Naval Air Weapons Station - China Lake and National Park Service – Death Valley National Park.

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

BLM Action: A Double Observer Method Wild horse and Burro Population Survey for the Chocolate - Mule Mountains HA/HMA and adjacent Cibola-Trigo Mountains is being planned from October 16-18, 2023. Arizona BLM is taking the lead.

Partners: El Centro BLM Field Office, Arizona BLM State Office, Kingman, and Yuma Field Offices.

BLM Contacts: Alex Neibergs, Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Specialist.

Wild Horse and Burro Gathers:

BLM Action: Remove and place up to 75 nuisance burros from the Jack Seiler Farms fields south of Palo Verde, California which are impacting alfalfa crops. Remove and place 100 nuisance burros from the Picacho SRA which are creating a public safety concern and impacting the infrastructure of the park.

Partners: El Centro BLM Field Office, Arizona BLM State Office, Kingman, and Yuma Field Offices.

Status: Gather request has been approved by the Wild Horse and Burro National Program. Yuma (AZ) BLM Field Office in process of completing a Categorical Exclusion for the gather activities.

BLM Contacts: Alex Neibergs, Ridgecrest Wild Horse, and Burro Specialist.

Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral

BLM Action: Receiving wild horses gathered from the following gather events:

Johnnie Herd Management Area (NV) Gather

This event is set to begin July 20, 2023. It is anticipated the Ridgecrest Corrals will receive 25 horses and 100 burros from this gather.

Reveille Herd Management Area (NV)

76 wild horses from the Reveille HMA gather in Nevada arrived at the Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Corrals July 2-3. These horses will be prepped for adoption or long-term pasture over the next few weeks.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Field Manager; Grant Lockie, Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Facility Manager

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral is open to the public generally Tuesday-Friday from 8am-noon 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, Field Manager; Grant Lockie, Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Facility Manager

Temecula and Castaic Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Event

BLM Action: Staff from the corral participated in three satellite adoption events beginning March 24-26, 2023 in Temecula. This event, held in cooperation with the Backcountry Horsemen of California (BHC) saw 33 horses and burros travel to Temecula with a result of 6 horses adopted or purchased and 10 burros adopted or purchased. BHC hosted their spring event at the California Ranch Company in Temecula and allowed the Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Corrals to hold the adoption event at no charge for the use of the facility.

On April 28-30, 2023, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) sponsored an adoption event at the Pitchess Detention Center Arena in Castaic. 30 animals were offered at the event with 11 total adopted – 10 horses and one burro. No charge for the use of the arena was made to the corrals. There was quite a bit of media participation at the event due to outreach by LASD. Local staff represented the corrals and program to the media, including television and radio. The state BLM WH&B program is working with LASD to develop an inmate horse training program. LASD has shown keen interest in hosting another adoption event.

May 19-20, 2023 corral personnel traveled to the Redlands facility with 22 horses and burros. No adoptions were made at this event.

The corrals also hosted two student groups this past spring. The Inyokern Elementary School kindergarten through 2nd grade students and chaperones attended a tour of the corrals April 6. Approximately 63 travelled on two buses to the corrals and were shown a video of how the gather operations work as well as animal prep. The students were escorted to pens inside the facility to see horses and burros up close. They enjoyed their sack lunches on the grounds.

On Friday, April 21, the Hinkley Rollicking Ranchers 4-H group visited the corrals with approximately 14 children in addition to their parents and 4-H leaders. They also enjoyed the gather and prep video as well as the escort to the interior pens at the corrals.

In cooperation with the Mustang Heritage Foundation (MHF) and trainer Luke Castro, the corrals were able to offer approximately 100 horses and burros for adoption/purchase to the participants in the Temecula Valley TIP Challenge. TIP is a 'trainer incentive program' the MHF sponsors. MHF authorized 75 horses and burros for the event, to be held September 29-October 1, 2023. Participants from California and as far away as Nevada have 100 days to train and gentle their chosen horse or burro and show that animal at the event. It will be held at the California Ranch Company facility in Temecula. The Ridgecrest and Litchfield corrals furnished the animals for this activity with an exchange of horses and burros between the two facilities to make it easier for the participants to be geographically closer for pick-up.

Partners: Los Angeles Sheriff's Department

Status: Event completed

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. The Naturalist program at the DTRNA provided visitors with information, personal tours of the area, and occasionally, a tortoise sighting. The southwest corner of the DTRNA received hand pulling of invasive Saharan mustard to improve forage for tortoise and wildlife.

Partners: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Status: The Naturalist has ended for the season. DTRNA weed monitoring and mapping project report has been received in draft.

BLM Contacts: LaReina Van Sant, Wildlife Biologist, Tom Bickauskas, Field Manager

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 RIFO 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 Bickaaskas, Field Manager

Law Enforcement

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office continues their law enforcement operations throughout the year, to protect public safety and Public Land resources through patrol, detection, and enforcement/investigations.

Partners: More than 13 law enforcement agencies, US Forest Service (Sequoia National Forest), US Forest Service (Inyo National Forest), US Park Service (Death Valley National Park), US Navy (Navy Criminal Investigative Services), US Navy (China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station), Kern County Sheriff, San Bernardino County Sheriff, Inyo County Sheriff, California Highway Patrol, China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station Police, Ridgecrest Police Department, California City Police Department, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and California State Parks (Red Rock Canyon State Park).

Status: BLM law enforcement officers work with other federal, state, and local agencies on a variety of issues, including responding to local law enforcement agencies for support with search and rescue, medical emergencies, and other calls for assistance. The Ridgecrest Field Office assists 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/EPIC), Burning Man in Nevada, King of Hammers SRP in Johnson Valley. The Ridgecrest Law Enforcement Section also supports fire season through resource orders for wildfires, as well as Emergency Support Function (ESF-13) throughout the country during national emergencies. The current focus of operations is working with field office staff on illegal motorized incursions into wilderness, trespass issues, fire restriction enforcement and abandoned property.

Current Law Enforcement staffing levels for Ridgecrest: 1 Chief Ranger, 1 Field Supervisory Ranger, 5 Field Staff Rangers

BLM Contact: Jason Woods, Acting Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, Tom Bickaaskas, Field Manager.

California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



Photo: Geology fire June 2023

Fire Incidents

Fires as of July 21, 2023

BLM Action: There have been 35 fires on lands managed by the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) as of July 17, 2023. These fires burned 264 acres of BLM-managed lands and 1062.5 acres in the Parks. The unit responded to 98 other fires that threatened its lands. These fires, totaling 9,940 acres, were stopped short of burning CDIFP jurisdiction.

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. The CDIFP has filled six requests for assistance by cooperating agencies.

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 also provides fire suppression personnel opportunities to 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, the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands, California Conservation Corps and contractors 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 and Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The CDIFP received funding to treat 3,485 acres in FY2023. The unit has completed 1,941 acres of fuels treatment to date. In addition to community protection in Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) areas, Joshua tree refugia areas were treated along roadsides leading into the area to provide access for fire suppression forces to safely enter and engage potential fires. Prescribed fires were managed to restore habitat for Stephens' kangaroo rat in western Riverside County and to restore marsh habitat for Yuma Ridgway's rail at the Dos Palmas Preserve. These projects were completed in cooperation with the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) and the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM) respectively. Many other treatments were planned for FY 2023, if fully funded, approximately 45,000 acres would have been treated in the California Desert District, Joshua Tree National Park, and Mojave National Preserve. In May, the fuels program received additional Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding to treat another 8,817 acres bringing the total planned treatment acreage to 12,302 which would be completed by next summer.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

Mitigation and Education Projects

BLM Action: The BLM completed 25 community assistance activities so far in FY2023. 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: California Fire Safe Council (FSC), San Diego County FSC, Border Agencies Fire Council, and 28 of the community fire safe councils throughout the unit, U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies.

Status: The BLM conducted 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 San Diego County along with Community Wildfire Protection Plan updates. Planning is underway for a mitigation-education event in the Morongo Basin with Joshua Tree National Park. 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: Garth Crow and Jason Winbigler, Mitigation-Education Specialists

Hiring Updates

Workforce Transformation

BLM Action: The California Desert District will host a Job Fair from December 1-3 in Riverside. The firefighter positions advertised will be on engines, the helicopter and our dispatch center. Most of them will start in April or early May of 2024 and include both permanent and temporary positions.

Status: The BLM and NPS have received additional funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). These funds have been used to temporarily increase the salary of firefighters by 50% or \$20,000 (whichever is less) since early 2022 to recruit and retain Federal Wildland Firefighters. These funds will run out by October 2023. A bipartisan effort is underway in Congress to make long-term increases to Federal wildland firefighters' pay. 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