

BLM California Desert Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
December 9, 2023 – In-person Meeting in Palm Desert, CA

For complete meeting discussion, please see meeting transcript

Desert Advisory Council Members: Randy Banis, Nathan Francis, Hans Haas (Chairperson), Jennifer Henning, Richard Holliday, Robert Robinson, Ann Kulikoff, Dawn Rowe (virtual), Paul Martin (virtual), Terry McGlynn, Desirea Haggard, Ed Stovin and Jack Thompson.

BLM Attendees: Shelly Lynch, Greg Miller, Michelle Van Der Linden, Kate Miyamoto, Julia Mogen, Marc Stamer, Paul Gibbs, Tom Bickauskas, Brandon Anderson, Carrie Sahagun, Jihadda Govan, Mike Ahrens

Guests: Matthew Gibbs (Zoom tech), Anitra Kass, Greg Herring, Andrew Silva, Steven Gjerstad, Luke Basulto, Sarah Bliss, Susy Boyd, Sendy Hernandez, Kayla Browne (virtual), Illeene Anderson (virtual), Mark Carrington (virtual), Russ Chung (virtual), Naomi Gordon (virtual), David Kuskie (virtual), Meg Foley (virtual), Kent Madison (virtual), Teresa Pierce (virtual), Kevin Fitzgerald (virtual), Susan Jerring (virtual), Jean Delucia (virtual).

Opening and Introductions:

District Manager Shelly Lynch opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Kate Miyamoto, CDD Public Affairs Specialist, went over Zoom, public comment period protocols and housekeeping for the meeting. Shelly introduced BLM employees and turned it over to Hans Haas, DAC Chairperson, to introduce Desert Advisory Council members. DAC members provided a brief update and introduction.

First presentation: The BLM's New Recreation Strategy

- California State Director Karen Mouritsen presented on the BLM's Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation.
- Karen cited the increased use of public lands since 2020 and how the BLM will strategize to meet demands in coming years.
- The Blueprint highlights plans within the agency to increase partnerships and training. Karen touched on the six pillars laid out in the plan, titled "Opportunities In Action."
- California Desert District Manager, Shelly Lynch, chimed in to provide current examples of the recreation strategy as implemented by the BLM. Examples include the Spanish translation of BLM's National Conservation Lands brochure as well as QR code translations available at popular recreation sites.
- Lastly, Karen highlights The Foundation for America's Public Lands, a newly established foundation built to aid the BLM in their outreach and funding.
- Questions? Karen received positive feedback and questions about National Monument proposal processes.

Second presentation: History of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan

- California Desert District Deputy Manager Greg Miller provided an overview of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).
- Greg discussed the history of renewable energy in the Southern California desert, citing increased interest in the 2000s and 2010s.

- The Palm Springs – South Coast Field Office developed one of the first project coordination teams to manage the influx of solar and wind right of way applications.
- Specific energy, climate and wildlife protection goals led to the DRECP which amended the Desert Conservation Area Plan. The DRECP became a plan for federal land only.
- Lastly, Greg highlighted key land allocations and touched on National Conservation Lands and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern existing under the plan.

Questions: Nongovernmental organizations involvement in creating the DRECP was discussed further by DAC members. Greg answered clarifying questions about DRECP amendments and key land designations. Full discussion and questions included in meeting transcript.

Morning break

Third presentation: Status Update on Renewable Energy Projects in the Palm Spring – South Coast Field Office

- Acting Field Manager for the Palm Springs – South Coast Field Office, Brandon Anderson, provided a status update on renewable energy projects within the field office.
- Brandon presented a map of Southern California near the Arizona border to highlight permitted solar energy sites. Several are legacy projects started prior to DRECP.
- He highlighted project prioritizations, current energy outputs from sites and projects currently under construction.
- To conclude, Brandon gave examples of areas where renewable energy development is prohibited and why under the DRECP.

Lunch Break

District, Field Office, and Fire Overviews

- Shelly Lynch presented on the new leadership in the District (Brandon Anderson as Acting Palm Spring – South Coast Field Manager). Discussed fuels reduction projects funding infrastructure and broadband access in the California desert since 2022. Presented on important milestones coming in the new year. The Public Lands Rule will be finalized in spring 2024. The 30th anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act is in September 2024.
- Field Managers from each of the five field offices reported on issues and projects. Full reports and discussion included in meeting transcript.

Public comment period – 1:45 p.m.

- Hans Haas went over public comment period protocols. There were four in-person public comments and three virtual public comments.
- Greg Herring, a mining claim owner in the high desert community, expressed concerns over the proposed establishment of Chuckwalla National Monument. Commented that local OHV riders and rockhounds share similar concerns with miners.
- Steven Gjerstad, representing private landowners, expressed concerns over OHV incursions on private acreage within the Barsow Field Office District. Commented on potential for public safety hazards.
- Andrew Silva, member of the public, thanked DAC members and BLM staff for their efforts.

- Anitra Kass, The Pacific Crest Trail's Southern California Regional Representative, shared updates on trail access following tropical storm Hilary. Shared personnel updates.
- Illeene Anderson, representing the Center for Biological Diversity, thanked Greg Miller for his presentation on the DRECP.
- Kayla Browne, representing Friends of Inyo County and a resident of Lone Pine, shared information from the recent Public Lands Roundtable meeting. Asked the BLM to consider issues regarding the Conglomerate Mesa mineral exploration in Inyo County.
- Mark Carrington, on behalf of the Lake Tamarisk community, shared input on the Easley Solar Project. Expressed concern over impacts on the community.

Third presentation: Sand to Snow Monument Planning

- Sand to Snow Monument Manager Jihadda Govan shared an overview of monument planning and pre-planning processes. Information sessions were recently held virtually and in-person to gain input from the public for Sand to Snow's upcoming Monument Management Plan.
- Jihadda provided background on Sand to Snow's designation in 2016 and outlined precious resources, objects and values that define the area's uniqueness.
- Jihadda touched on local community involvement, outreach events and ongoing Tribal consultations for the monument. Full transcript available online.

Afternoon break

Discussion on Future Agenda Topics

- The DAC expressed interest in composing a letter with their position on the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument. Interest in several topics for future meetings include lithium resources, The Butterfield Overland Trail, Salton Sea, how the border wall affects habitat connectivity, and changes in allocation of the Colorado River.
- The DAC had quorum but did not make any official recommendations.

Wrap up and closing

- The DAC decided to move the public comment period to the morning before presentations.
- The DAC chose dates for 2024 meetings. The next DAC meeting is April 26, 27 in El Centro.
- Seven of the 15 remaining members are expiring in January 2024.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.



Hans Haas, Chair
Desert Advisory Council