

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE
HIGHLIGHTS for the**

**CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

December 7, 2013

RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RIFO)

BLM Action:

Contact: Carl Symons is the Field Manager and can be reached at 760-384-5400 (main office line).

Status: The Ridgecrest Field Office is extremely busy focusing on priority projects such as:

- Special Recreation Permits
- DRECP
- West Mojave
- Haiwee Geothermal
- Renewable Energy projects
- Central Hazmat and Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)
- Vacancies
- Wild Horse and Burro Program
- Grant applications
- Mining operations
- Cultural issues

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Don Washington, Fire Management Officer

BLM Action: Ridgecrest Fire responded to two minor wildland fires in September. None since then.

The Olancho Fire Station is closed for the season.

The Salt Wells Station is staffed with six permanent firefighters.

Provided S-212 chainsaw training for 11 youth from Farmworkers Institute for Education and Leadership Development (FIELD) Conservation Corps.

Contact: Don Washington, Fire Management Officer

Status: On call.

RECREATION AND WILDERNESS

Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Jawbone Station

BLM Action: The Friends of Jawbone continue to provide the staffing to operate the visitor center, provide maintenance of OHV routes, campground areas, facilities within the Jawbone Butterbrecht OHV area. They also performed these duties in other OHV areas, to include the Rands, Red Mountain, El Paso, Middle Knob, and Kelso Valley areas.

Contacts: Eddie Duque, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Status: Friends of Jawbone staff and the recreation staff has been continuing maintenance and outreach operations.

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office (RIFO) annually issues numerous Special Recreation Permits for activities on public lands. These activities traditionally consist of motorcycle races, ultra marathon running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, and vending permits.

Contact: Eduardo Duque, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Thus far in FY 2014 the following types of permits and activities have occurred in the RIFO: 1) backcountry camping, hiking, and vision quest outing, 2) man versus horse foot race, 3) two equestrian events, 4) mountain bike race 5) four wheel drive touring, 6) and a multi-year permit to the local running club to host monthly events.

West Mojave Route Monitoring and Route Maintenance

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO continues to perform route monitoring and maintenance of the designated routes and kiosks within our management scope of the West Mojave Planning area.

Rand Mountain Management Area – The BLM RIFO continues to conduct permit outreach programs during holiday weekends in and around the Rand Mountains area. Users are introduced to the permit system, given a short narrative on the purpose and requirements, and then given their own permit to fill out. Over 50,000 permits have been issued and this number continues to go up during these outreach efforts. The RMMA has been routinely monitored by BLM staff, Student Conservation Association (SCA), and volunteers. The two corridors routes R50 and R5 remain closed. Off-route travel continues to occur sporadically throughout the RMMA, mostly during holiday weekends.

Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: We are still focusing on maintaining and monitoring the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. We continue to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. We are also compiling and analyzing the input provided to the BLM by the public.

State OHV Grants

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO, with the help of several partners, submitted four state OHV grant proposals for FY 2014. The four grants totaled approximately \$1,552,475 and are in the Ground Operations, Law Enforcement, Planning and Restoration categories.

Contact: Dana Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The RIFO was successful and awarded all four grants requested for FY 2014. The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for many of the on-the-ground activities enjoyed by the public land users would not be possible.

Planning Grant: We are in the process of developing a Statement of Work so that we may obtain engineering assistance to plan and then design a safe, cost effective solution for the repair or replacement of the South Park Bridge that is located in South Park Canyon located in the Panamint Range of Inyo County.

Desert Restoration

BLM Action: Desert Ecosystem Restoration to assist in the return of natural diversity within several management areas.

On November 12th, we welcomed four Student Conservation Association restoration crews consisting of 5 persons each working in the within the Jawbone-Butterbredt Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Rand Mountains Fremont Valley Management Area, Kiavah Wilderness, and the Grass Valley Wilderness.

Contact: Dana Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Matha Dickes, Wilderness Specialist

Status: The FY 2013 crews will work from November 2013 and end in June 2014.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

BLM Action: We are working to complete Lands with Wilderness Characteristics reviews of public lands located within the DRECP and WEMO planning areas managed by the RIFO.

Contact: Martha Dickes

Status: Reports should be completed by the 3rd quarter of FY 2014.

Wilderness Character Monitoring

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO, with the help of the neighboring Bishop Field Office is working on the Wilderness Character Monitoring Report for the Inyo Wilderness. Upon the completion of this report staff will be working on reports for the Pipe Mountains and Sylvania wilderness areas.

Contact: Martha Dickes, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Reports should be completed by end of fiscal year 2014.

Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for Cottonwood Creek

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing to collect data to write the management plan for the 4-mile reach of Cottonwood Creek WSR on BLM land.

Contact: Dana Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Coordinating efforts with USFS

LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY

Jeff Childers, Acting Lands, Minerals and Realty Chief

Renewable Energy

BLM Action:

Wind Energy Projects

- 16 Type II applications pending
- 4 Type III applications pending

Haiwee Geothermal project:

- We are hoping to publish a final EIS in December with a decision in the 1st quarter of 2014.

Barren Ridge Transmission Project

- Right of way grant to be issued in December

Barren Ridge 1

- Application for a gen-tie line near Jawbone from Private land to substation (Recurrent Energy) .

Tyler Horse

- EIS still in draft status
- Projected for Federal Register release middle of January.

Contact: Paul Rodriguez – Realty Specialist for Type II & Type III applications
Jeff Childers – For Haiwee, Alta East
Cedric Perry – Tyler Horse

Status: High Priority

Non-Renewable Energy

BLM Action:

DTNRA- Desert Tortoise Natural Research Area withdrawal

- Working with Desert Tortoise Committee/CASO Cadastral. Should have final for publication by January.

R & PP/Sale-Exotic Feline Breeding Compound.

- Pending ESA (December) and Appraisal

Other reviews, etc.

- 04 ROWs to private lands.
- 07 Communication site plans review pending

- 02 ROW amendments for CALTRANS
- Oasis realignment HWY (Mono County)
- HWY 14- expansion of 2 lanes into 4 lanes in certain locations.
- 02 Optical cables between Bakersfield and Ridgecrest. (Media Com HWY 78, Verizon in Kelso Valley)
- 20 other type of ROWs pending.
- Filming permits

Contact: **Elaine Hanson** – Realty Specialist for filming
Paul Rodriquez – Realty Specialist for other ROWs

Status: Normal

Leasable Minerals

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing with its lease to Searles Minerals (SVM)

- BLM conducts inspections once a month and verifies production verification
- Products are Soda ash, Borax, Salt.
- 8,634,125 paid as royalty to the Federal Government.
- Bird rescue program has a mitigation plan for bird rehabilitation.

Contact: Kathleen Cox, Geologist

Status: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer the lease.

Geothermal Leasing Inspections

BLM Action: COSO Geothermal lease

Contact: Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech.

Status: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer these leases.

Minerals

Saleable and Locatable

BLM Action: BLM RIFO continues to process minerals sales and small mining claims.

- Recently authorized: CDM Mining Claim, EMI Mineral Exploration, and Bronco Mining Exploration
- Minerals Sales to California Light Weight Pumace.

Mining / Prospecting cases pending at Ridgecrest Field Office (not in any particular order):

Sleepy Bear Mining. In Fremont Valley. Environment Assessment pending to authorize expansion.

KAT Bentonite. In the Summit Range along the Trona-Johannesburg Road. Environmental Assessment pending for a 30-acre pit, and approval for a sale of clay materials.

Red River Creek. Application for a ½-acre excavation on the floor of Cuddeback Dry Lake bed. Pending field trip inspection and NEPA conformance.

LaPozz Project. In El Paso Mountains. Environmental Assessment is completed & pending final decision. Waiting on California Portland Cement to complete requirements of Kern County Planning.

Golden Queen Mine. South of Mojave, CA. EIS/EIR approved in 1997 for open-pit mining. Has been idle for many years, but is preparing to open. Staff recommends reviewing the case and mitigation measures.

Big Dyke lode claim. Between Randsburg/Johannesburg. Operator wishes to prospect underground workings, placing support generator and trailer on surface. (no excavation)

Betty Jean Placer. Prospecting operation on moderate use lands west of Red Mountain. Application to move/adjust prospecting location.

Snow White Bentonite. Environmental Assessment pending for small, 2-acre operation on public lands within Red Rock State Park.

Dragonfly Drilling Project. Proposal to drill 12 exploration holes by Last Chance Canyon, El Paso Mountains. Pending initiation of Environmental Assessment.

Contact: Randy Porter

Status: Continuing review of the Sleepy Bear Mining application, Kat Bentonite Material Sale, and Holiday Rock material sale.

Abandoned Mine Lands

Sterling White, CDD AML & HAZMAT Lead

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its inventories (features along roads in the Rands completed and El Pasos are in progress), and contracts for remediation of abandoned mines that can present a public safety hazard will be awarded this summer.

The Mojave Project (Whitmore/Gum Tree) NEPA is currently being finalized and should be available for public review in December. Solid waste (trash) is planned to be removed in April. The construction of wildlife-friendly gates is also expected to begin in the early spring. Backfills will be scheduled for a later date to accommodate bird nesting and bat maternity season.

Bellflower Complex is a solid waste clean-up and removal action project that addresses the remediation of 15 AML site features for public health and safety (Ridgecrest Sub-region). The mine site is within 5 miles of the City of Ridgecrest, is heavily used and is the recipient of much vandalism. This is a continuation of the Rademacher Hills Trails AML Remediation project. This site was completed in November 2013. BLM utilized a Forest Service AML Force Account Crew to complete the work. The crew removed over 200-yards of solid waste. Installation of bat gates is being performed with help from the CA- Department of Conservation.

The Blue Rock Mill Site lies within the Piper Mountain Wilderness and has been the focus of a multi-year, multiple phase clean-up and removal action for hazardous materials. This final action addresses the rehabilitation of the site by remediating the physical safety hazards and restoring the site to conditions more suitable to wilderness characteristics. This site received funding and the work is currently being scheduled.

Contact: Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist
Ridgecrest Field Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant

Status: During the past year, the Ridgecrest Field Office has worked with the CDD Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) coordinator, to issue a contract for the remediation of 18 features in the Rademacher Hills (Ridgecrest Sub-region). Several bat gates will be constructed and the remainder of the features will be backfilled. This project was completed in April 2013.

NEPA for the Bellflower Complex and the Blue Rock Mill Site is completed.

Outreach for the Mojave project began in February 2012. The NEPA for this project is in progress.

HAZMAT

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BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its efforts to complete actions to remediate three old burn dumps operated by Kern County prior to 1972. BLM has met with Kern County Waste Management and the State of California Waste Management to develop a plan and time line to upgrade the closure method used on these sites to meet the current environmental conditions. Interim measures would cover fencing and signing to protect the public health and safety. Status is unchanged.

Contact: Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

Status: Cooperative planning is in progress with Kern County Waste Management and the State of CA Waste Management.

CERCLA

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BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its efforts to complete actions to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) through the CERCLA processes.

Kelly Mine Site (OU1) is undergoing site investigations for stabilization of the interim remediation in conjunction with the potential for permanent site remediation.

Contact: Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

Status: Public outreach is on-going for the Yellow Aster and the Kelly Mine Site. The time critical work at OU-2 was completed in Oct/Sept 2013 and we are moving forward to address issues at the Kelly Mine.

RESOURCES

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

Rangeland Management

BLM Action: Current Projects

The Aqueduct pipeline project is still on hold until permittee settles a private water contract issue.

Since July, at least ten PFC assessments have been performed on various stream reaches in response to WEMO.

Deep Springs water haul sites have been identified and have had cultural and biological surveys done.

Providing assistance to State Office in Eastern Kern County Acquisition project.

Lacy-Cactus-McCloud EA was appealed. Staff is also responding to additional FOIA requests.

Lava Mountain donation has been accepted and the (sheep) allotment has been retired. approx. 15,000 ac.

We received and accepted a donation request for the Walker Pass (cattle) allotment. The allotment has been retired. Approx. 97,000 ac. and 2,300 AUMs

Contact: Sam Fitton, Natural Resource Specialist
Jeff Gicklhorn, Natural Resource Specialist

Status: Cattle grazing has been significantly reduced due to drought and lack of forage.

Cultural Resources

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Cultural Program has been working on:

Focusing efforts on the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) and the West Mojave Plan Court Remediation (WEMO).

- DRECP: Consolidating CA GIS Data for Cultural Resources to provide to contractor for further analysis. Section 106 compliance will occur after specific project proposals are received in accordance with the appropriate CFRs and regulations.
- WEMO Route designation, cultural resources GIS review, and field inventory
- Six field surveys, under the provisions of the BLM-SHPO Protocol Agreement for AML Closures and Small Miner Placer Mining Plans and Notices.
- Providing expertise support to the CDD RECO for two Type III Wind Energy facilities applications.
- Formal consultations with the State Office of Historic Preservation and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regarding wind energy projects.

- Twelve screened exemption determinations for minor NEPA actions under the provisions of the BLM-SHPO Protocol Agreement.
- Issued 15 Field Work Authorizations for Archeologist-consultants doing field work on BLM lands.
- Cultural Resources Data Sharing Partnership Representative (CRDSP) for BLM California is Ashley Blythe; she provides GIS Support and training to other BLM-CA archaeologists and works with the Washington Office to find funding and staff to further GIS initiatives for Field Offices and the California Office of Historic Preservation
- Cabin Management Plan: Working to secure funding for Section 106 recordation and evaluation of historic structures in the field office. Physical protective measures to protect cultural resources include the trash clean-up of Edith E and Dawson cabins, the removal of burned debris from the Mingus Meade cabin site and the emergency replacement of boards in a vandalized door board at the Bonanza Gulch Post Office.
- California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP): Working with volunteers who have the capacity to identify recent impacts to cultural sites.
- National Register eligibility determinations for this reporting year are based on the results of large scale renewable energy projects and Section 110 efforts. Ten eligibility determinations have been made for this quarter. Two of those resources have been determined eligible.

Contact: Donald Storm - Archaeologist,
Ashley Blythe – Archaeologist
Danny Tyree – Contract Archaeologist

Status: Extremely busy program.

Wildlife Management

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Wildlife Program has been working on:

Alternative Energy

DRECP – providing input as requested by state office

Alternative energy projects – providing input

WEMO Route Designation – provide input and attend meetings

Restoration of routes: presenting information and instruction on plant identification to the SCA crews.

Public Outreach

Interpretive panels: installed tortoise panels in high use areas

Websites: continuous update of Ridgecrest BLM website along with submission of news, info, photos to NewsBytes.

Public events

Planned and/or participated in events such as National Public Lands Day, DTNA work day, local festivals, Moose Anderson Day, Audubon, Ridgecrest 50th Anniversary (2000 contacts), Naval Air Weapons Station - China Lake Community Day (1000 contacts) etc. to spread information about wildlife and recreational opportunities on BLM lands.

DTNA:

Supporting the DTNA and the DTPC (Desert Tortoise Preserve committee and their efforts to conserve the tortoise. Assist in updating DTNA management plan . Withdraw for DTNA should be completed soon. Annual joint meeting was in June.

Quail Forever:

Collaborating with the local chapter to maintain guzzlers and to develop wildlife water sites in the desert. Current projects are Cow Heaven water tank replacement, and Willow Spring Habitat Improvement (Kelso Valley area).

Brochures:

Distributed brochures to Lone Pine Death Valley Visitor Center, the Maturango Museum and at BLM events. The topics of the brochures are hiking in exceptionally beautiful BLM areas, wildflowers, butterflies, desert tortoise.

Mineral Project support – Current Projects:

LaPozz Mine –opalized silica deposit – East side of El Pasos. Consultation with USFWS on the tortoise. Provide biological stipulations for the project. Consultation with USFW done but still need CFWS concurrence.

Sleepy Bear Mine- in the Rands within tortoise Critical Habitat (DWMA). The mine will exceed 10 acres and will require an EIS and a new Biological Opinion.

Small mining claims – require tortoise fencing, monitoring, and restoration. We are distributing the BLM brochure that explains the dangers of open top pipes to birds.

Mining Exploration Projects in the El Pasos- Working on NEPA for Last Chance Canyon and Conglomerate Mesa area proposed explorations.

Abandoned mines – assessing habitat use by wildlife- bats, owls, other birds, tortoises, etc. Out-flight surveys for bats.

Range Project support – Current Projects:

Riparian fence at Bright Star Wilderness to protect Upper Kelso Creek.

Habitat and species monitoring- current projects:

Special status plant species – monitoring fall blooming spp- Mojave tarweed (*Deinandra mojavensis*). Also monitoring other BLM special status species: Kelso Monkeyflower, Charlotte’s phacelia, Ripley’s Cymopterus, Desert Cymopterus, Palmer’s Mariposa lily, and alkali Mariposa lily.

Black toad monitoring – Deep Springs

Fall bird migrations in Sierra Canyons. The spring surveys with the Kerncrest Audubon Society in Sand Canyon and Indian Wells Canyon will be conducted spring 2014. All data will be entered into “e-bird” available to researchers, the public, and land-use planners.

Riparian fence monitoring

Habitat monitoring and input for Wilderness Characteristic reports coordinated with wilderness staff.

News:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently published an announcement in the Federal Register a proposal to remove the Inyo California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis eremophilus*) from its current listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act based on successful recovery efforts by the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, BLM, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Contact: Shelley Ellis – Wildlife Biologist,
Carrie Woods – Wildlife Biologist

Status: And more to come!

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

BLM Action:

Approximately 850 burros and horses at the Ridgecrest Corrals.

Several new requests for nuisance burro gathers have been submitted by neighboring military installations. A formal written request from the Navy for burro removal at China Lake cannot be honored at this time, per WH&B National Program Office, due to a bottleneck at long term facilities.

Staff assisted NAWS China Lake in rescuing approximately 60 horses at Etcheron Valley on the base, when a man-made water supply malfunctioned.

Adoptions: Ridgecrest exceeded its target for FY13. Budget reductions have drastically reduced the adoption target for FY14. Ridgecrest has already met its target for FY14.

Feeding approximately 12 ton of hay per day at \$285/ton.

Contact: Grant Lockie, Corral Manager

Status: Adoptions continue year round by appointment.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wayne Dengal, Chief Ranger

BLM Action: RIFO Law Enforcement is spending considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas including wilderness boundaries and ACEC as well as other closed and limited use areas to detect and deter illegal off road travel activity.

Continuing with monitoring efforts of SRPs.

Patrolling open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail.

Ridgecrest Rangers participated in three marijuana eradication ops on neighboring jurisdictions. None in the Ridgecrest resource area in FY13.

Patrolling and monitoring areas of cultural and historical archeological significance.

Participating in national and state priority details as required.

Working on wildland fire incidents and investigations.

Working with Special Agent to resolve ongoing felony investigations

Contact: Wayne Dengal, Chief of Law Enforcement, RIFO

Status: BLM and Public safety continue to be highest priority.