

**HIGHLIGHTS
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District
Advisory Council Meeting**

March 22, 2014

Sustainability

BLM Action: Renewable Energy

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Resources Branch Chief

Status: The El Centro Field Office is currently overseeing the compliance of operations and maintenance for four renewable energy projects including Campo Verde, Centinela, ISEC South, and the Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility. One project, the East County (ECO) Substation, is under construction. Two renewable energy projects, Tule Wind (see below for more detail) and ISEC West, have been authorized but have not yet started construction. ISEC West anticipates beginning construction in summer 2014. The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed 100 acre San Diego Gas & Electric Ocotillo Sol solar project was published in July 2013 and a BLM Record of Decision is anticipated in spring 2014.

BLM Action: Tule Wind Project

Contact: Brian Paul, Project Manager

Status: On April 10, 2012, the BLM issued a right-of-way grant to Iberdrola Renewables for the Tule Wind Project located in San Diego County, California. This project will generate up to 186 megawatts of energy via 62 wind turbines on public lands. On March 7, 2013, the BLM issued an amended Record of Decision approving the above-ground construction of the 138kv transmission line, as described in the proposed action, with a 1,100ft shift necessary to connect to the San Diego County approved substation on the Rough Acres Ranch parcel. On December 16, 2013, the Bureau of Indian Affairs issued a Record of Decision which authorized the lease of up to 720 acres of land held in trust by the United States for the Ewiiapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians to be used for the Tule Wind Reduced Ridgeline Project. The Tule Wind Reduced Ridgeline Project allows the development of up to 20 turbines on Ewiiapaayp reservation lands. On January 17, 2014, the BLM signed a Record of Decision that approves Iberdrola's request to build ancillary facilities on BLM managed lands in association with the Tule Wind Reduced Ridgeline component of the project.

BLM Action: Geothermal Energy Program- Imperial Valley

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The geothermal leases in the North Truckhaven Geothermal Unit Area were recently terminated due to failure of the lessees to comply with the unitization stipulation included in each lease. The BLM has received new nominations for 4 of the parcels in this area.

These nominations are currently under review in preparation for placing them on a competitive lease auction sale later this year.

BLM Action: Youth Lead Route Restoration Projects on BLM Lands

Contact: Dallas Meeks

Status: Through a grant from the State of California’s Off- Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, the El Centro Field Office hired a restoration crew through an agreement with the American Conservation Experience (ACE) to do restoration work within the East Mesa and Yuha ACEC areas. The ACE crew arrived on December 2, 2013, to begin seven nine-day hitches split between the East Mesa and the Yuha ACEC to restore illegal motor vehicle impacts to the resources as well as improving the signage of legal routes of travel.



Yuha Desert- Before Restoration



Yuha Desert- After Restoration

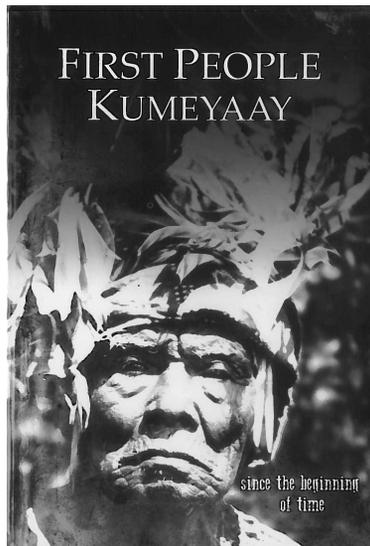
Heritage

BLM Action: Early Prehistoric Archaeology, First People Kumeyaay Film, Memorandum of Understanding with La Posta Band of Mission Indians

Contact: Christine McCollum, Archaeologist
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

Status: Early Prehistoric Archaeology: One of the most exciting archaeological discoveries in El Centro Field Office history was brought to light in early FY 2014. Deeply buried prehistoric archaeological features were identified at the San Diego Gas & Electric East County (ECO) Substation Project in eastern San Diego County. Radiocarbon data obtained from the investigation date to 9,700 years before present (BP), pushing back the earliest dates for this area by several thousands of years. ASM Affiliates is conducting further radiometric testing to determine if there has been continual occupation and use of the site. This rare and important find has significant implications for California prehistory and will be presented to the archaeological community at the 2014 Society for California Archaeology Annual Meeting in Visalia, California. Jeff Sahagun will be co-chairing a symposium, “The Desert Mountain Cultural and Archaeological Landscapes of San Diego and Imperial County”, with ASM Affiliates, Inc.

First People-Kumeyaay Film: As a result of mitigation measures for the Sunrise Powerlink Transmission Line project, the film *Kumeyaay –The First People* was developed. It was released in January 2014 with a well-received first showing to the public and Indian tribes during its premier at the Borrego Valley Film Festival. A lesson plan was also created to accompany the film and is appropriate for integration into the curriculum of grades four through 12 tying into *Traditional Culture in San Diego County*. The BLM El Centro Field Office distributed copies of the film via DVD to the BLM California State Office and California Desert District Office.



DVD Cover Art

Memorandum of Understanding with La Posta Band of Mission Indians: The El Centro Field Office executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the La Posta Band of Mission Indians on February 11, 2014. This MOU governs both formal government-to-government consultation and informal coordination between the La Posta and the BLM. It follows a 2012 revision to the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 National Programmatic Agreement that enhances tribal consultation and public participation. This is the first executed MOU for tribal consultation within the BLM California Desert District.

BLM Action: Anza National Historical Trail

Contact: Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

Status: Five new kiosks replaced worn ones along the trail; each featuring site specific interpretation of Juan Bautista de Anza's colonizing expedition to Alta California. Additionally, a wayside tells the story of the Yuha Well's importance along the trail. Another wayside is located at the Anza overlook featuring Padre Font's observations. Phase II of the Anza NHT work continues, with the replacement of the remaining 4 obsolete kiosks in the Yuha, and the installation of a new kiosk at Route 191/Hwy 98 underway. Interpretive panels will include route maps and site specific interpretation in an effort to help protect the valuable historic and prehistoric character along the trail.



[New Interpretive Panels Highlighting the Anza National Historical Trail in the Yuha Desert](#)

Community

BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits (SRP)

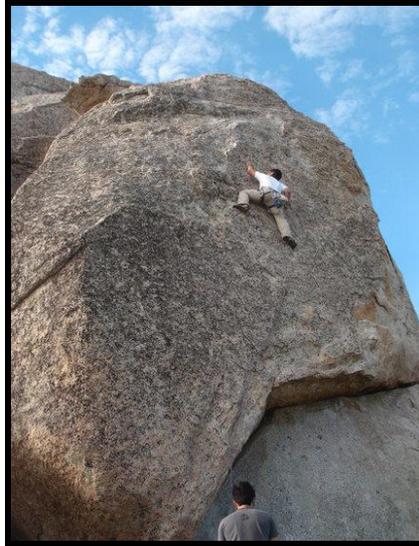
Contact: Dallas Meeks, Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM El Centro Field Office received 18 applications for SRPs for events beginning in September 2013 through September 2014. Two of the applications were cancelled due to the government furlough which occurred from 10/01/2013 through 10/16/2013. Nine of the applications are for AMA District 38 races within the Plaster City and Superstition Open OHV Areas, two for Rocketry events in the Plaster City East Open Area, one for an Equestrian event within McCain Valley and one for a 4X4 touring event within the Superstition Mountain Open Area. In addition, the El Centro Field Office received one application for a “rock crawling” event for the Devils Canyon trail and two applications for bicycle events; parts of which run through Chariot Canyon in Eastern San Diego County. We also received application for a car and truck race to be held in April 2014. All events that have occurred to date have been successful and no serious safety issues were noted.

BLM Action: Wilderness Partnerships

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: The El Centro Field Office is working on an official partnership with rock climbing group Allied Climbers of San Diego (ACSD). ACSD utilizes areas within the BLM El Centro Field Office to climb and hold their annual public lands clean-ups. Underway currently is development of a MOU, a pocket guidebook for climbers, and improvement of climbing areas.



Rock Climber attempting to make it to the top!

BLM Action: Wilderness Training

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: Chris Barns, a BLM representative from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Missoula Montana, came to the BLM El Centro Field Office to conduct a 1-day training session on Wilderness Management. The course was designed to bring the El Centro Field Office Staff and members of the local US Border Patrol up to speed on the special responsibilities that exist for the stewardship of Wilderness areas designated by Congress.

Chris Barns talked about why wilderness areas were designated and the class participants learned about wilderness law, by looking at specific sections of the Wilderness Act of 1964. There were many group discussions, including specific projects that include US Border Patrol and the BLM. These discussions brought out how to apply the laws through basic wilderness management principles, including a process to make minimum requirements decisions.



Instructor Chris Barns Talks about Wilderness Law

BLM Action: Hiking Program

Contact: Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

Status: Dog Hikes continue to be popular, with at least one hike per month, to various wilderness locations in the El Centro Resource Area. To date, 87 hikers have joined a Park Ranger to discover America's Great Outdoors and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. This doubles attendance from last year. Three hikes remain, with the last one finishing up the season over Memorial Day Weekend.



A Four-Legged Friend Accompanies Hikers on a Wilderness Hike

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: For the 2013/2014 season, BLM El Centro Field Office hired a total of seven Seasonal Park Rangers funded through fees and grants. One is a returning seasonal Park Ranger and four of six new military veteran staff completed and passed Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Rescue training. In addition, one permanent Park Ranger/Paramedic and one permanent Park Ranger/Advanced EMT are primary leads for EMS/SAR staff for ISDRA. EMS/SAR Park Ranger staffing is planned for mid-October 2013 through mid-April 2014.

During FY13, BLM El Centro Field Office reduced EMS/SAR expenditures by over 14% to \$513,000. When compared to FY11, BLM El Centro Field Office reduced total EMS/SAR expenditures by 41%.

ISDRA Park Rangers have responded to 259 calls YTD in FY14, down 3% from same time last season. Although call volume has dropped, many of the victims have severe injuries and are located in the deep dunes. Emphasis is being placed on more advanced EMS in-house training and certifications completed through BLM interagency partnerships with Reach Air Medical Services, and US Border Patrol.

The 2015 seasonal jobs are currently being advertised on www.usajobs.gov.

BLM Action: ISDRA Fee Program Update

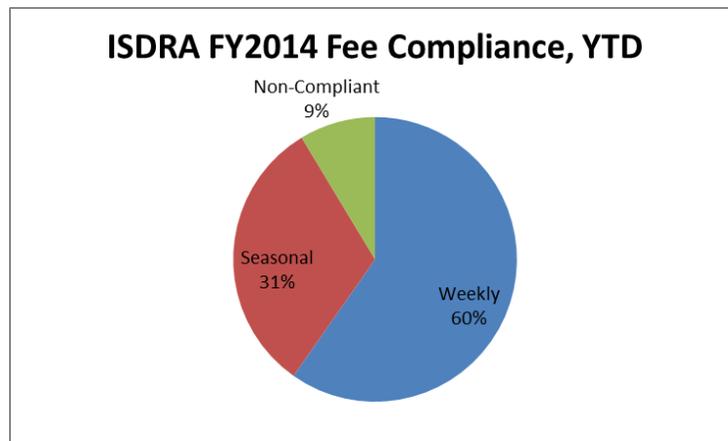
Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: The BLM El Centro Field Office closed the previous collection contract and a new fee collection contract and fee structure is in place. The cost of fee collection has decreased significantly. The estimated cost of fee collection for FY14 is \$271,300. The cost was reduced through a reduction in services. Visitors will need to plan when and where to purchase a permit in advance instead of on site near the main access points.

The new fee contractor made permits available at the Sand Sports Super Show, on-line, over the phone, through 55 vendors around Southern California and Arizona, and at both Ranger Stations in the dunes. Customers, and the Desert Advisory Committee, were concerned about the new season permit stickers being stolen and how they would replace them when they break their windshields. In response, the BLM El Centro Field Office developed a system with the fee contractor to address their concerns.

Although the cumulative visitation (580,018) is down 24% from the same time in FY 2013, 37,177 permits were sold generating \$1,993,000 in revenues.

Permit compliance remains high in the ISDRA. After collecting data on 4,985 vehicles this season, compliance is at 92%.



The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area is seeing a shift in patterns during our first quarter under the new fee structure. Overall, total permit sales have increased from 25,584 to 31,744. Season permit sales have decreased from 8,829 to 6,400 and weekly permits have increased from 16,755 to 25,344.

BLM Action: ISDRA Grants Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: OHV Grant funded projects are underway. Current projects include El Centro Field Office Law Enforcement (part ISDRA) - \$600,000, ISDRA Education - \$10,000 for map

reprinting, ISDRA Ground Ops - \$145,000 for facility maintenance, and ISDRA Safety - \$105,000 for EMS/SAR services. The fee program allows the BLM to have the sufficient matching funds to apply for the projects.

BLM Action: ISDRA Education and Outreach

Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: Park Rangers continue to offer outreach programs at both north and south dunes locations, featuring “Fatal Vision,” GPS 101, sound testing, terrain hazard, etc. to educate the visitor to the hazards associated with drinking and riding, terrain hazards, how to use GPS in an emergency. To date, 410 visitors have attended the programs. There are two programs remaining for this season – “Fatal Vision,” – the all-time visitor’s favorite. These outreach programs emphasize OHV safety, new ROV laws, RAMP, and the fee program through new outreach programs in the ISDRA schedule throughout the season. The schedule is located at www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/recreation/ohvs/isdra/dunesinfo/outreach.html.



Park Ranger Brian Puckett leads the “Fatal Vision” Program at Oldsmoible Hill

The ISDRA Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/blmimperialsanddunes) currently has 3,359 likes since it began in September 2012. During the first week of December the ISDRA Facebook Page hit a new record for the ISDRA Facebook page and reached 77,372 people. Discussion/Notification topics have included: outreach, education, road conditions, weather updates, event announcements, animal pictures, safety reminders, and more.

The El Centro Field Office Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area continues to work together with the United Desert Gateway to provide maps, Frisbees, and “Dune Guard” shirts, at the ISDRA.



Park Ranger Daniel Baca gives a young rider a Dune Guard Card and Frisbee for riding safely in the ISDRA

BLM Action: Partnership in Action- ISDRA Kiosks

Contact: Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

Status: The BLM El Centro Field Office, Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area partnered with Imperial County, United Desert Gateway, American Sand Association, and Kawasaki to fund new kiosk panels for this season. The Buttercup kiosk was unveiled on November 22, 2013.

Four of the existing kiosks in the ISDRA have been rehabbed and refreshed with new paint, roofs, and new interpretive panels. Each of these kiosks feature map panels, site specific interpretation and management messages.



One of the new interpretive panels located at Glamis Flats in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area

BLM Action: Maintenance

Contact: Martin Gibson, Maintenance Operations Supervisor

Status: An access lane was painted on the first asphalt pad at Road Runner Campground to allow easier access for the cleaning staff to get to that vault toilet as well as provide a safe distance to prevent any accidental damage to visitor RV's and motorhomes and allow easier access for other visitors to use those facilities. The barricade in Fossil Canyon was repaired after heavy rains washed out one of the bollards last year. The Wash Road located in the ISDRA was graded prior to Presidents' Day Weekend. Road watering continues for dust abatement commitments. At the start of the season, three seasonal maintenance workers and one emergency hire provided toilet cleaning to the 61 vault toilets and the signing 49,000 acres of administrative closures. Staffing is currently at three fulltime employees, two seasonal employees and two emergency hires that will help carry current operations toward the end of the season. ISDRA toilet vaults have been pumped.

BLM Action: ISDRA RAMP Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: Administrative closures remain in place while the plan is reviewed and briefings occur with the court, plaintiffs, and interveners this season.

BLM Action: Volunteers

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: Homer Himes, camp host at Buttercup Ranger Station, is still working full time. He works on site all year and continues to maintain the facility, vault toilets, vehicle counters, and campground. He also greets the constant flow of visitors throughout the year and provides them information about the area, OHV safety information and educates visitors about the historic Plank Road.

We are currently recruiting volunteers to be camp hosts. For more information, visit <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/recreation/ohvs/isdra/dunesinfo/volunteers.html>

The 17th annual Martin Luther King Day Clean Up Event was another successful partnership event due to the 900 volunteers, dozens of private sponsors, the United Desert Gateway, and BLM working together. Participants had a great time and were treated to a free lunch and t-shirts.



Volunteers gather after volunteering for a lunch and raffle in the Imperial Sand Dunes.

BLM Action: Law Enforcement

Contact: Sal Nieblas, Law Enforcement Supervisor

Status: The table below lists the total number of visitor contacts made by BLM Law Enforcement Rangers during four holiday weekends in the 2012-2013 high visitor use season during the same holiday weekends in the 2013-2014 use season. Last year, 6 percent of all visitor contacts resulted in a citation or arrest. This year, 4 percent of all visitor contacts resulted in a citation or arrest.

These statistics reflect the implementation of a fair, but firm law enforcement and resource protection program aimed at protection of public resources and ensuring the safety of BLM employees and public land users. Our Law Enforcement Rangers are the BLM's most visible ambassadors to public land users. They are there to educate, assist, and protect. They exercise their law enforcement authority (i.e. warning, citation or arrest) only when necessary to protect public safety or public land resources. They maintain a visible, friendly presence on the public lands, serving as a "welcome neighbor or guide" to those who use the ISDRA and as a deterrent to visitors who might misuse public resources or threaten public safety.

During the holiday weekends, BLM law enforcement rangers contacted 44,181 visitors. Rangers passed out frisbees with important safety messages such as, "Speed Limit 15 Within 50 Feet of Camping Areas / People" and "Click It Or Ticket - On & Off-Road". They also distributed "Dune Guard" cards to kids "caught" setting an outstanding example of responsible and safe OHV riding behavior. Kids can bring the cards to one of our two Ranger Stations and redeem them for a free "Dune Guard" t-shirt

	2012-2013	2013-2014
Visitor Contacts	31,796	44,181
Contacts Made For Violations	6,531 (21% of all contacts)	8,077 (18% of all contacts)
Warnings	4,545 (14% of all contacts) (70% of all violations)	6,276 (14% of all contacts) (78% of all violations)
Citations	1,824 (6% of all contacts) (29% of all violations)	1,709 (4% of all contacts) (21% of all violations)
Arrests	162 (.5% of all contacts) (2% of all violations)	92 (.2% of all contacts) (<1% of all violations)