

# State Director's Report to the California Desert District Advisory Counsel

February 9, 2013

On behalf of BLM California State Director Jim Kenna:

- I want to thank the DAC members for your service and contributions to the BLM and the public lands throughout southern California. Fiscal Year 2013 will be both rewarding and challenging, and I appreciate your commitment to share ideas and work together as advisors to the BLM.
- **Legislation** - The 113th Congress includes several new House members from southern California: Paul Cook - District 8, David Valadao - District 21, Juan Vargas - District 51, **Dr. Raul, Ruiz** - District 36 and Mark Takano - District 41. While in Washington, I made initial contact with some of our new Congressional members and will schedule follow-up visits to discuss the BLM and BLM-managed public lands within their respective Districts. The following months will be a period of transition as we reach out to our new members of Congress and provide more detailed information about the BLM and the BLM-managed public lands within their respective Districts.

Several legislative proposals involving public lands in California died in committee after they were not acted upon before Congress convened in December. The BLM will keep you informed should any of these bills may be reintroduced.

- **Budget** – For FY2013 we continue to operate under a continuing resolution through March 28, 2013.
- **The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)** – The week of January 7, I was in Washington, DC to brief BLM and Department officials on the DRECP. The Plan is being prepared by the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT), a collaborative effort among the California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Game, the BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in collaboration with many local, county and state groups, agencies, organizations and elected officials. On Monday, December 17, the REAT released an interim document called the Description and Comparative Evaluation of Draft DRECP Alternatives, which included a description and evaluation of seven draft alternatives. This informal review provided stakeholders and the public an opportunity to comment on what has been developed so far and the agencies' approach to developing the plan. The informal review ended January 23, 2013, and the comments received will be considered in the preparation of a Joint Draft Environmental Impact Report and Environment Impact Statement (EIS/EIR), tentatively scheduled for public release this summer. The alternatives will reflect various approaches to both conservation of natural resources and renewable energy development. The DRECP is likely to be the most significant conservation effort in the desert in the last two decades both for the direct conservation measures and for its contributions to renewable energy infrastructure. It will allocate millions of acres of the California desert for conservation management, while strengthening and enhancing special recreation areas and identifying areas for developing solar, wind and geothermal projects with the least environmental impact. The DRECP will encompass approximately 22.5

million acres of Federal and non-Federal California desert lands located in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties.

- **Renewable Energy Update** – Development of clean renewable energy remains a high priority for the State, the BLM and the Department. In December Pattern Energy brought 94 turbines on the Ocotillo Express Project online. Unit 1 of Ivanpah Solar is nearing completion, and several new projects are under construction. Within the first quarter of 2013, the BLM anticipates signing the Record of Decision for the West Chocolate Mountain Renewable Energy Evaluation Area, and Secretary may sign the Records of Decision for the Desert Harvest Solar Project near Desert Center, and McCoy Solar Project near the City of Blythe. The BLM also is analyzing numerous other proposed renewable energy projects.
- **Military Withdrawals** – The BLM continues to work closely with the Department of the Navy (DoN) and U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) regarding the DoN’s proposal to renew current withdrawals for the China Lake Naval Weapons Station (NAWS) and the U.S. Marine Corps’ (USMC) Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range (CMAGR) that will expire October 30, 2014, and the withdrawal expansion of the USMC Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) at Twenty-nine Palms. The BLM is a cooperating agency and worked closely with the Department of the Navy and U.S. Marine Corps throughout the development of the legislative environmental impact statements (EIS) for the proposed 25-year renewal of the NAWS and CMAGR withdrawals, and draft and final EISs for the proposed withdrawal expansion of the MCAGCC. The expansion is proposed to accommodate live-fire and Marine Expeditionary Brigade training. It’s anticipated the Secretary of the Navy will soon issue the Record of Decision for the Twentynine Palms Final EIS.

Specific to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, the BLM identified significant impacts the proposed expansion would have on the public and the public lands adjacent to and within the Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area, including potential impacts to regional and national organized and unorganized OHV recreational events, other casual recreational activities such as filming, and socioeconomic impacts to local, regional and state economies. The BLM worked with the Marine Corps to develop mitigation measures that would help reduce impacts to the public and public lands resources throughout Johnson Valley. Ultimately the Department of Defense will submit a proposal that outlines provisions of the withdrawal renewals and expansion. The proposal will be submitted to Congress, and only Congress has the authority to approve the withdrawal, as well as to accept or modify all the terms and conditions specific to each withdrawal.

- **ISDRA Business Plan:** Stakeholder collaboration is currently underway and those who are working toward finding broad level consensus about the Plan can help design the path forward. It is critical we find balance regarding the need for services the public wants and available funding. With the projected declines in available grants and appropriated funding this will be difficult. I encourage everyone to continue to work through the review process to ensure we adequately plan for the present and future management of the extraordinary recreational resources at the Imperial Sand Dunes.

- **BLM Priorities:** Our priorities continue to be renewable energy and America's Great Outdoors, including the National Landscape Conservation System, youth initiatives and recreation. Sustainability, Heritage, Community.