

HIGHLIGHTS

EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting December 7, 2013

Sustainability

1. RENEWABLE ENERGY – Eight national priority energy projects at various stages of processing or development

a. Solar

1. Ocotillo Sol Solar – Applicant San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) – This project is a proposed 100 acre solar facility that would connect to the adjacent Imperial Valley Substation within the BLM Yuha Area of Critical Environmental Concern via a buried 12.47-kilovolt transmission line. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released in the summer of 2012 and the Final Environmental Impact Statement was published on July 26, 2013. This project would generate electricity for up to 5,400 homes.

2. Wind - Ocotillo Express Wind Energy Facility and the Tule Wind Project are two projects that are helping or will help to achieve the Administration and Interior initiative to make a rapid and responsible move to large-scale production of renewable energy on public lands.



3. Ocotillo Express Wind Project – Applicant Pattern Energy Group, LP - The first renewable energy project to send energy across the Sunrise Powerlink Transmission Line. Construction and energization of 112 wind turbines was completed in FY13. This project is currently generating approximately 265 megawatts of electricity which can power up to 125,000 California homes. It employed 350 workers during peak construction, and 20 workers permanently. Offset approximately 288,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year. Ocotillo Wind Project awarded the California Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) highest award for Outstanding Environmental Analysis. Litigation update: On November 6, 2013,

the US District Court denied Protect Our Communities Foundation, Backcountry Against Dumps and Donna Tisdale's motion for summary judgement and granted the federal defendant's (BLM) motions for summary judgement.

4. Tule Wind Project – Applicant Iberdrola Renewables, LLC - ROD for 62 wind turbines approved by Secretary, ROW and NTP for geotechnical investigations issued in FY12. During FY13, initial geotechnical exploration work was completed and some changes have resulted. Micro-siting for resource protection will occur in response specialist feedback, continued survey results, interdisciplinary meetings and administrative oversight. Once in operation the project will produce electricity to 65,000 homes (186 megawatts), create 325 jobs during peak construction and 12 permanent jobs, generate \$3.5 million into the local economy during construction, generate \$2 million annually in overall economic output, and provide an annual base rental of \$785,295 for use of public land.

b. Transmission

1. Campo Verde Solar and Gen-tie – ROD for gen-tie from 139-megawatt solar project approved by Secretary and construction of the Gen-tie on BLM lands was completed in FY13. Supported up to 250 jobs, will generate \$17.5 million in local tax revenue, provide \$239 million of financial benefits, and produce electricity for 41,700 homes.
2. Imperial Solar Energy Center (CSolar) South and Gen-tie – ROW and NTP issued and construction of 230 kV gen-tie between 200 megawatt solar project and Imperial Valley Substation completed on BLM Gen-tie. Will generate electricity to power between 75,000 and 187,500 homes, employ 285 workers during peak construction, and generate \$5.4 million in local sales tax revenue.
3. Imperial Solar Energy Center (CSolar) West – ROW issued in FY13, completing pre-construction requirements for 230 kV gen-tie between 250 megawatt solar project and Imperial Valley Substation. Will generate electricity to power between 75,000 and 187,500, employ 285 workers during peak construction, and generate an estimated \$5.4 million in local sales tax revenue. Construction expected to begin in FY14.
4. Centinela Solar and Gen-tie- ROD for 275-megawatt solar project signed by Secretary. ROW and NTP issued and construction of the Gen-tie on BLM land was completed in FY13. Will support 360 jobs and produce electricity for 82,500 homes.
5. East County (ECO) Substation – ROD signed and NTP issued in FY13 for 138 kV transmission line between new ECO substation and upgraded Boulevard substation approved by Secretary. Construction on BLM lands currently underway.

- c. Environmental Compliance
 - 1. Patrolled Sunrise Powerlink transmission line and other renewable project areas. Patrols are directed at resource protection in and around the 117 mile project, and funded through a partnership with San Diego Gas and Electric.
 - 2. Law Enforcement staff supported numerous renewable energy projects by conducting patrols and monitoring projects to ensure compliance and public safety.
 - 3. During FY13 a dedicated Surface Compliance Technician (SCT) was hired for ECFO.
 - i. Monitored and ensured strict compliance with renewable energy project mitigation measures and ROW stipulations. Ensured compliance during the reclamation of temporary disturbances from construction including routes or trails that were built for temporary construction access. These were closed and returned to “more natural” conditions. Monitored the removal of temporary project structures such as MET towers and water sample wells and the process of reclaiming the land back to its natural state. Provided protection for environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) not only from project construction on BLM land but also from casual use by the public through strategic placement of signage directing the public back onto authorized BLM routes. Worked with the renewable energy construction companies to ensure proper warning signs were installed in construction areas.
- d. DRECP
 - 1. Participated in refining the rulesets and alternatives for the continued efforts of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan as it pertains to the resources and recreation opportunities within the ECFO jurisdiction.
 - 2. Proposed two new ACECs and expanding several others to fold in new data from recent surveys and ensure protection of sensitive biological and cultural resources.
 - 3. Continued tribal outreach and government to government consultation on the DRECP with 14 local Indian Tribes. Hosted open house in December 2013 to hear tribal concerns, explain the DRECP December Document and gather cultural resource input. Attended the Federal Leadership conferences in Palm Springs.
- e. West Chocolates Mountains Renewable Energy Evaluation Area PEIS
 - 1. Signed the Record of Decision in FY13 for the programmatic EIS selecting Alternative 6—Geothermal Development Emphasis with Moderate Solar Development and No Wind Development. Selection of this alternative amended the CDCA Plan to identify areas in the REEA as suitable for geothermal leasing and development and solar energy development, subject to constraints related to the presence of sensitive resources. In addition, renewable energy development that would require high water usage will not be

allowed nor would wind energy development projects. Additionally, lands east of the Coachella Canal will have a disturbance cap of 10 percent and BLM lands west of the Coachella Canal were identified as a Solar Energy Zone. Finally, a noncompetitive Federal geothermal lease application was approved; however, before development of the lease is authorized, site specific NEPA analysis will be required. This will be completed in FY14.

2. GEOTHERMAL PROGRAM – Supporting renewable energy production in the Imperial Valley:

- a. Processed and approved 24 geothermal sundry notices for surface disturbing activities in support of on-going geothermal production from federal leases on East Mesa. Six geothermal plants on seven leases covering 13,220 acres generated 90 megawatts and \$1,615,000 in federal royalties, 17% of the total geothermal royalties produced statewide.
- b. Completed 135 geothermal lease inspections at well sites and power plants to ensure compliance with all lease and permit terms and conditions.
- c. Worked with the BLM CASO to cancel leases within the Truckhaven Geothermal leasing area due to non performance. Reviewed documentation and draft letters to leasees.
- d. Hosted CASO geothermal tour to view existing and potential leasing areas within the ECFO.

3. HARDROCK MINING – Supporting mineral production in the Imperial Valley:

- a. Provided education and outreach to the Imperial Valley Gem & Mineral Society regarding current information the BLM mineral program as well as the AML program
- b. Completed five inspections at two active locatable mineral sites to ensure compliance with approved plans of operations. The Mesquite Mine is the largest producing gold mine in the state and the Jimenez Mine is a gravel operation on a pre-1955 mining claim.

4. MINERAL MATERIALS – Supporting economic growth in the Imperial Valley

- a. Issued five noncompetitive mineral material contracts totaling 594,600 tons and amounting to a total value of \$433,200
- b. Issued five free use permits to the County of Imperial and the Bureau of Land Management.
- c. Conducted 45 compliance inspections for all mineral materials operations managed by the ECFO, including commercial sales and free use permits.
- d. Coordinated final reclamation of three former sand and gravel mine sites with the County of Imperial and the Office of Mine Reclamation totaling 290 acres of public land.

5. WILDERNESS & VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT - Managing units of the National Lands Conservation Systems for the future enjoyment of all Americans:

- a. Monitored approximately 150,000 acres within ten designated wilderness areas to detect and respond to vehicle incursions and other unauthorized use. Provided leadership and guidance for a group of Student Conservation Association WildCorp interns who assisted with monitoring, installed route designation and wilderness boundary signs, and removed trash when encountered in the field.
- b. Updating phase of ten wilderness characteristic inventories in support of various priority renewable energy projects and important land use planning efforts, including the ISDRA RAMP and the DRECP.
- c. Completed a Notice of Proposed Action and Minimum Requirements Decision Guide to utilize Helicopters in the wilderness for a Bighorn sheep capture occurring in October of 2013 (FY14). The capture will be conducted by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as California Fish and Wildlife Service.

6. BOTANY, WILDLIFE & HABITAT RESTORATION - Conserving habitat for T&E and BLM sensitive species, promoting healthy public lands:

- a. Provided extensive program support for renewable energy and other ECFO projects with the potential to affect T&E and BLM sensitive species, consulting when necessary with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to obtain compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.
- b. Provided additional on-the-ground program support for various projects, including completion of bat surveys in support of AML projects and completion of field surveys to assess next steps for the clean-up and reclamation of damage resulting from a train derailment.
- c. Worked with the Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) to have student interns from the University of Arizona completed Flat-tailed horn lizard (FTHL) demographic monitoring sessions in FTHL management areas.
- d. Actively participated with the interagency FTHL management oversight group and coordinating committee to continue implementation of the conservation agreement and management strategy for this species. Membership of the oversight group and coordinating committee is comprised of several federal and state agencies in California and Arizona who work together to maintain habitat for the viability of the species.
- e. Completed a noxious weed inventory of 225 acres and treated 10 acres for Sahara mustard, an invasive noxious weed, near the Buttercup Ranger Station in the ISDRA.



7. LANDS & REALTY - Providing land use authorizations to support local and National priorities:

- a. Filled two vacant Realty Specialist positions in FY13. One specialist started in November and attended Lands School for three months and one specialist started in the fourth quarter of the fiscal year.
- b. Processed 100% of 25 planned FLPMA leases, permits, licenses and easements and 100% of 8 planned right-of-way actions covering assignments and relinquishments.
- c. Completed eight compliance inspections of communications facilities (100%) to ensure compliance and took appropriate actions to correct safety hazards at three sites.
- d. Sixty-four bills were issued on time and action was taken as appropriate to collect rental revenue totaling \$1,111,270 for the United States Treasury.

Heritage

1. HERITAGE RESOURCES - Preserving America’s Heritage Resources for future generations:

- a. Provided extensive program support for renewable energy and other ECFO projects with the potential to affect historic properties, including taking required steps to obtain compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s regulations at 36 CFR 800, and the BLM’s protocol agreement with the California State Historic Preservation Officer. Prepared Section 106 findings and determinations to document compliance for all projects.
- b. Coordinated and participated in government-to-government consultation meetings with 28 different Native American Indian Tribes on up to 33 projects. Facilitated Section 106 meetings and field visits with tribes and other consulting parties.
- c. Assisted CDD and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to help provide a free, one-day training on Section 106 for tribes in southern California. Thirty participants representing 13 tribes participated in the training.



- d. Completed site monitoring of 25 heritage resources in Imperial and Eastern San Diego Counties, including the fragile Spoke Wheel geoglyph which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Expanded the site steward program and signed up two new volunteers.

Community

1. EDUCATION & OUTREACH - Working with America's youth for a sustainable future

- a. Coordinated and participated in 7 community outreach events, reaching a total of 810 people. This includes collaboration with partners, federal agencies, and community organizations.
- b. Revitalized the ECFO hiking program, establishing popular dog hikes, and reaching 41 hikers of all ages (and 15 dogs).
- c. Prepared and submitted 27 NewsBytes articles highlighting El Centro Field Office accomplishments, with several articles highlighted on BLM Daily Mail.
- d. Provided a variety of education and outreach opportunities for America's youth. The Dunes Guard and Take it Outside programs focus on safety and environmental education in the ISDRA. With help from partners, ECFO made tee shirts, frisbees, and Take it Outside cards available to kids to promote environmental awareness and reinforce safe behavior.
- e. Converted two Pathways Interns upon their completion of schooling, placing them into career positions. In addition, converted a California State Office Pathways Intern into one of the vacant realty positions.



2. RECREATION

A. OUTDOOR RECREATION - Providing safe and exciting opportunities to Take it Outside in America's Great Outdoors

- a. Provided effective visitor services, including law enforcement, emergency medical services, education and outreach for thousands of visitors to off highway vehicle open areas at Lark canyon, Plaster City, and the Superstition Mountains.
- b. Managed visitor use on the four busiest holiday weekends as national incidents under the incident command in conjunction with the ISDRA.

- c. Continued to exercise management controls to reduce costs and increase efficiencies during both incident weekends and throughout the use season in these areas.
- d. Issued 79 commercial vendor Special Recreation Permits for the El Centro Field Office.
- e. Issued 20 Special Recreation Permits for a variety of events. Conducted appropriate monitoring before, during and after all events to ensure permit compliance and enhance public safety, and took appropriate corrective actions as necessary when issues were identified during events.
- f. Issued 22 permits for commercial filming, all within the ISDRA.
- g. Issued long-term and short-term permits for winter visitors camping in any of the three Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVAs) managed by the ECFO. Conducted compliance checks and provided appropriate visitor services (e.g., trash pickup) with assistance of volunteer campground hosts.
- h. Renewed emergency closure order for target shooting on 210 acres of public land near Jacumba in response to a request by Border Patrol. Closure protects agents working in the area from stray gunfire. Provided information regarding ECFO public lands available for target shooting on the ECFO website.
- i. Researched, designed, produced and installed 12 new interpretive panels for Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail.

B. IMPERIAL SAND DUNES RECREATION AREA - Providing family friendly off-highway vehicle recreation opportunities in America’s Great Outdoors for >1,000,000 visitors per year

- a. Completed the final ISDRA Business Plan and coordinated approval with the DAC and the CASO. The Final ISDRA Business Plan assesses alternative approaches to change in the context of fair market value and cost recovery and weighs these against the need provide effective visitor services, including law enforcement, emergency medical services, education and outreach.
- b. Completed the Imperial Sand Dunes Proposed Recreation Area Management Plan, Proposed Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (Proposed RAMP/CDCA Plan



Amendment) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). The Final EIS describes and analyzes eight alternatives for managing approximately 214,930 acres of BLM administered lands within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Management Area (ISD SRMA) in Imperial County, California. Major issues addressed in the Final EIS include management of recreation and public access, special designations, special status species, mineral resources, and lands and realty.

- c. Provided effective visitor services, including law enforcement, emergency medical services, education and outreach for over 1,000,000 visitors during the 2012-2013 visitor use season.
- d. The 2013 Halloween Weekend had approximately 30,000 visitors. 34 medical emergencies were responded to and Law Enforcement Rangers made over 11,583 contacts.
- e. Managed visitor use on the four busiest holiday weekends as national incidents under the incident command system to maximize employee and public safety.
- f. Continued to exercise management controls to reduce costs and increase efficiencies during both incident weekends and throughout the use season including cost savings measures to reduce emergency expenditures by 41% of over the past two fiscal years.
- g. Hired six seasonal Park Rangers. Including five military veterans.
- h. Worked extensively with volunteers to provide quality visitor service to visitors. Volunteer campground hosts clean restrooms, staff ranger stations and help provide facilities maintenance.
- i. ECFO Law Enforcement and EMS staff responded to 325 emergency medical services incidents, ECFO staff also responded to five fatalities.
- j. Sold 54,260 ISDRA individual Special Recreation Permits and generated over \$2,000,000 in fee revenues. Off-site permit sales is 79% and, based on 12,313 compliance checks, obtained a 95% permit compliance rate among dunes visitors.



- k. Worked with the NOC to select a new fee contractor for the ISDRA, reducing the cost of fee collection.

3. PARTNERSHIPS

A. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES

- a. Coordinated projects with other agencies including US Fish and Wildlife Service, State Parks and Recreation, US Border Patrol, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- b. Coordinated with the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, Imperial County Sheriffs Office, Imperial County CEO, Imperial County Planning and Public Works Departments and the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District.
- c. Implemented flat-tailed horned lizard population monitoring studies to meet the responsibility of the agencies identified in the Rangewide Management Strategy for FTHL. These management activities assist in accomplishing the goal of maintaining the species and prevent the need to list the species under the Endangered Species Act.
- d. Collaborated with the Border Management Task Force through quarterly meetings to discuss Border Patrol activities on public lands.

B. IMPERIAL SAND DUNES RECREATION AREA

- a. Continued to meet and collaborate with the ISDRA DAC Subgroup.
- b. Collaborated with the United Desert Gateway and American Sand Association to develop OHV safety messages and associated outreach and interpretive projects for ISDRA visitors.
- c. Partnered with local EMS providers, hospitals, County EMS department, Border Patrol, air and ground ambulance services, and local search and rescue to provide enhanced medical services to visitors on public lands.

4. PUBLIC SAFETY

A. ABANDONED MINE LANDS - Reducing hazards to public health and safety:

- a. Remediated six Abandoned Mine Land features through coordination between the BLM and the California State Department of Conservation.
- b. Remediation actions included backfilling shafts and installation of bat-friendly gates and cupolas on shafts and adits.

B. LAW ENFORCEMENT – The largest and busiest law enforcement program in the BLM:

- a. Provided law enforcement services to 1.4 million acres of public land which traverses 85 miles of International Border with Mexico, includes 10 Wilderness Areas and 17 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern..
- b. Participated in a law enforcement ranger swap program where two ECFO Rangers spent the summer in Idaho to assist the BLM during Idaho’s busy season.
- c. Participated in Details to Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Montana and Northern California.
- d. Coordinated four National Details to provide law enforcement and public safety services to the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area.

C. OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE - Maintaining and improving facilities to protect investments and enhance employee and visitor health & safety:

- a. Completed road and facility maintenance in the ISDRA on Wash and Gecko Roads, Gecko and Midway Campgrounds, Osborne Overlook, and Dunes Vista. Made repairs and improvements to Cahuilla and Buttercup Ranger Stations, and 61 vault toilets.
- b. Constructed a handicap accessible parking area at vault toilets in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area to meet ADA standards for restroom facilities.
- c. Maintained signage demarcating ISDRA administrative closures to protect sensitive habitat for Pierson’s milkvetch by installing new signs and resetting existing signs.



- d. Completed road and facility maintenance in McCain Valley, including Lark Canyon and Cottonwood Campgrounds. Obtained end of year funding for

replacement of inoperative windmill pumps with solar pumps for the Lark Canyon campground water system and the McCain Valley fire tanks.

D. FIRE

- a. Provided support to the California Desert District Fire program and California State Fire Program by making staff available as public information officers, wildland firefighters and resource advisors on fires within the field office both in state and out of state.
- b. Coordinated with the Palm Springs Field Office to bring fire management staff to El Centro to teach two fire refresher courses and one resource advisor (READ) course.
- c. Assisted CALFIRE on the Chariot and General Fires located on public lands within the El Centro Field Office.

Policy & Procedure

1. NEPA & LAND USE PLANNING – Documenting effective decision-making and public participation:

- a. Completed 90 NEPA documents during FY 2013 in support of land use planning and other decision making. This includes one Environmental Impact Statement, two Environmental Assessments, 42 Categorical Exclusions and 45 Determinations of NEPA Adequacy.
- b. Initiated an additional 35 NEPA documents during FY 2013, including four Environmental Assessments, 26 Categorical Exclusions, and five Determinations of NEPA Adequacy.
- c. Supported additional NEPA efforts lead by CDD RECO staff by providing technical input and review, and management oversight.
- d. Lead or participated in Land Use Planning efforts including the West Chocolates Renewable Energy Evaluation Area PEIS, Imperial Sand Dunes RAMP and the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. Also provided support for the United States Navy's Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range Legislative EIS and the Joint Land Use Study with NAF El Centro.
- e. Ensured effective DOI solicitor involvement in document preparation for renewable energy and other high-priority projects such as the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area RAMP.
- f. Provided effective support to DOI solicitors and DOJ attorneys representing BLM in various IBLA appeals and federal complaints (e.g., ISDRAMP), including assembly of administrative records, input and review of briefs, and preparation of declarations.

2. ADMINISTRATION – Providing customer service to ECFO employees and the public alike:

- a. Processed over 70 personnel actions for employees including details, within-grade increases, promotions, awards, and requests for eligibles. All personnel actions were processed in a timely and efficient manner.
- b. Processed 16 Freedom of Information Act Requests (FOIA) for agency records by members of the public, coordinating searches of agency records among the various divisions in the ECFO, and producing responsive documents in a timely manner.
- c. Maintained accountability for a property inventory consisting of over 710 items with a total value of almost \$40,000,000.
- d. Completed the sale of two government vehicles returning over \$28,000 to the working capital fund.
- e. Processed 78 bank deposits with a total value of nearly five million dollars.