

**HIGHLIGHTS
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District
Advisory Council Meeting**

December 5, 2015

Sustainability

BLM Action: Imperial Irrigation District Transmission Line

Contact: Veronica Vogan, Realty Specialist

Status: The Imperial Irrigation District completed the construction of the eastern section of the “SA” line, a 92 kV transmission line with an underbuilt 12.5 kV distribution line to connect the Anza Substation on Hwy 78, west of Hwy 86, to the San Felipe Substation in San Diego County. The 50 foot wide right of way not only completes the line, originally granted back in 2002, but also adds clean power to the grid from the Seville Solar Farm Complex on private land just south of Hwy 78.



View of the Anza Substation facing west along Hwy 78

BLM Action: Formation of the Imperial County Geothermal Working Group

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) organized a working group with members from different agencies to discuss geothermal resources in Imperial County and how this affects those agencies. The first meeting of the working group was held on September 10, 2015 at the Imperial County Administration Center and was attended by management and staff of the California State Office, the El Centro Field Office, California State Parks, California State Lands Commission, Imperial Irrigation District, Imperial County Planning Commission, Department of the Navy, California State Department of Conservation and Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources. The next meeting for the geothermal working group will be held on March 16, 2015.

BLM Action: El Centro Field Office Currently Processing an Application to Conduct Seismic Geothermal Survey within the Truckhaven Geothermal Lease Area

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The El Centro Field Office received a “Notice of Intent to conduct Geothermal Resources Exploration” from Ormat proposing to drill test wells and conduct a 3D seismic study covering approximately 26 square miles in the Truckhaven Geothermal Lease Area. The proposed survey would encompass BLM, Private and State Park lands. An Environmental Assessment will be done for this project. The Imperial County Planning & Development Division is the lead for CEQA. The BLM is currently coordinating with all respective agencies to complete processing of this application.

BLM Action: Remote Automatic Weather Station (RAWS) replacement at Cahuilla Ranger Station

Contact: Andrew Trouette, Botanist

The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) has RAWS stations at each of the Ranger Stations. The RAWS unit at the Cahuilla Ranger Station was recently replaced with a more reliable model. The Buttercup Ranger Station’s RAWS unit is in the queue for replacement. These RAWSs provide visitors with real time weather information. Simply click Current wx at [Cahuilla](#) and [Buttercup](#) on the ISDRA web page:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/recreation/ohvs/isdra.html>

The BLM utilizes the precipitation data from these stations to determine what biological monitoring will be carried out each year in the dunes, including Peirson’s milkvetch.

Heritage

BLM Action: Audio Tour Podcast for the Yuha ACEC

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Resources Branch Supervisor

Status: In 2010, the El Centro cultural resource program developed a downloadable self-guided audio tour that features information about 3 points of interest along one of the main OHV routes through the Yuha Desert ACEC. The audio tour encourages children and adults to get off of, or out of, their vehicles and explore the desert. Other goals of the audio tour include educating the public about the Yuha Desert landscape, helping the public understand the vast cultural history of the region, and invoking a feeling of stewardship. The three stops on the audio tour include the Juan Bautista de Anza Overlook Monument, the Yuha Well and the Yuha Geoglyph. This audio

tour is featured on a free CD that is available on the counter at the El Centro Field Office. It is also downloadable as a podcast on the BLM website:

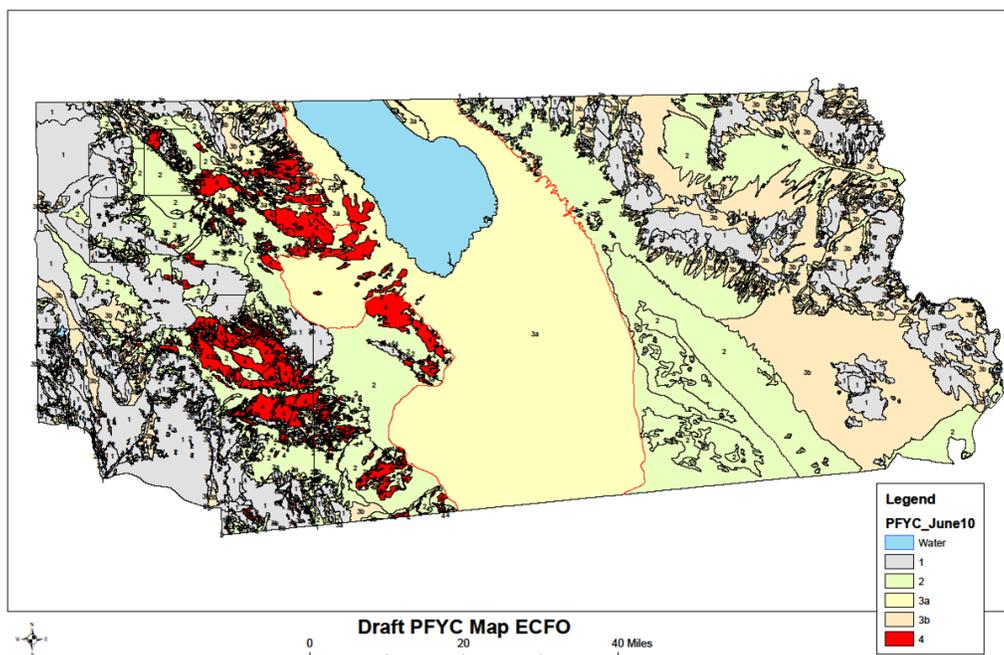
http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/arch_cult/yuha_pc.html

The December 4, 2015 DAC field trip will stop at two of the three audio tour locations.

BLM Action: Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Contact: Jeffrey Sahagun, GIS Specialist

Status: The El Centro Field Office recently received a draft Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) report written by the San Diego Natural History Museum. The report consists of two components: a written report detailing the types and likelihood of fossils within the Imperial County and a GIS component that includes a geological formation map and a PFYC map. The report will aid the El Centro Field Office in identifying and analyzing localities within the BLM management area for various kinds of paleontological resources. Staff will be able to advise applicants, proponents, and the public on the likelihood and type of fossils that may be encountered at various locations within the Field Office. The El Centro Field Office is the first field office to receive a PFYC report and this report will serve as a model for future reports covering other portions of the California desert.



BLM Action: El Centro Welcomes New Archaeologist

Contact: Tom James, Archaeologist

Status: Tom James joined the El Centro Field Office filling the position of archaeologist on November 2, 2015. Born in central Mississippi, Tom received Bachelor of Arts degrees in Anthropology and Philosophy/Religion and a Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology with a focus on Archaeology from Mississippi State University (MSU).

After graduating from MSU, Tom went on to work for the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago for 8 years, where he worked on many projects related to middle-eastern archaeology as well as museum design.

Just prior to coming to El Centro, Tom worked for FEMA on the Hurricane Katrina recovery mission as the supervisory archaeologist in FEMA's Mississippi Recovery Office. While at FEMA, he documented damage to archaeological sites caused by the storm, worked on paleoclimatological and paleoecological reconstructions, and researched seasonal use of various environments by the prehistoric people of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Community

BLM Action: Lands & Realty Filming Nomination

Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Business Support Associate/Realty Specialist

Status: The lands and realty team in the El Centro Field Office was nominated by the Imperial County Film Commission for the California On Location Award (COLA) for Federal Employees of the Year. The team made it as finalists and attended the COLA Award Ceremony along with other Imperial County Nominees. The BLM team received finalist plaques for their hard work and dedication. The El Centro Field Office continues to receive a high number of permit requests and have already issued 17 permits this fiscal year.



BLM Action: Lands & Realty

Contact: Veronica Vogan, Realty Specialist

The lands and realty team started off the new fiscal year with bang! We completed a right-of-way (ROW) to the City of Yuma approving the addition of communications equipment to the United States Marine Corps Communications Site on Black Mountain. This will enhance the City of Yuma's Emergency Response radio signals for police, fire, and ambulance during the high use season on the Colorado River in the summer.

We have received requests for permits from the United States Geological Survey and Texas A&M for scientific studies, and numerous other continuing projects and applications coming in every day. We look forward to a great year in Imperial County!

BLM Action: El Centro Field Office Participation at the 2015 BLM SoCal Youth Summit

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The California Desert District hosted the Southern California Youth Summit, *Lead the Way Outdoors*, at Mount San Antonio College in Walnut, California. Hundreds of high school students, partner agencies and organizations participated in the day's events including hands-on workshops, discussion circles and a higher education and career expo. Efe Erukanure, from the El Centro Field Office, headed the BLM logistics team in planning for the summit and also took charge of the career circle discussions with BLM professionals as well as other federal, state and local government agencies and Non-Government Organizations.

Thirteen students attended the youth summit from Imperial County, most of them from Brawley High School. Some partners from El Centro participated in the Career Circle and Expo portion of the summit including Barrett's Biological Surveys, the United Desert Gateway and Imperial County Film Commission. Tanya Baca (Administrative Assistant), Veronica Vogan (Realty Specialist) and Karissa Blevins (Public Contact Representative) were among the career circle discussion leads at the Youth Summit. Student members of the Imperial Valley College Adventure Club also played a major role in planning and running the summit. They helped in different areas on the day of the summit including the registration desks, standing in as chaperons for some of the students from El Centro, and wearing the BLM Seymour and California Desert Maxine mascot costumes.



Students and teachers from Brawley High School



Seymour and students representing the Centro Field Office

BLM Action: Social Media

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The Imperial Sand Dunes Facebook page recently celebrated its third year of providing visitors with information about the Imperial Sand Dunes. We currently have 7,059 “likes” and our posts reach thousands of people weekly. Most posts include information about current conditions, dunes safety, ISDRA Subgroup Meetings, OHV news, the historic Plank Road, and other dunes related information. We continue to highlight the Discover the Desert initiative through posting desert filming photos and news. Discover the Desert focuses on educating, engaging and informing people about what the desert has to offer. We also work with the BLM National and California State Offices to provide Imperial Sand Dunes stories and highlights for their Facebook pages.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: For the third consecutive year, we negotiated a new fee collection contract with assistance from our National Operations Center in Denver. We then worked with the contractor to prepare for the current season. This year’s season permit was printed with a better ink to withstand longer periods of moisture. This year’s weekly permits are in the same scratch off, hanging placard style we used last year. The visitor use season is underway and we are currently managing the second of four major holidays with staff detailed here from offices across the country. So far this year, visitation seems to be on the rise, perhaps attributable to a favorable economy with lower gas prices.

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

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: A staff of four seasonal park rangers and two permanent park rangers completed all required technical search and rescue training and medical license certifications to begin the dune season. Since the ranger stations opened on October 16th, these park rangers have responded to 67 medical and rescue calls within the ISDRA, including four incidents involving fatalities. This equates to an 18% increase in calls compared to the same time period last season. There are no apparent trends or injury patterns associated with the increase in calls.

We continue to coordinate and cooperate with partnering agencies and entities such as the US Border Patrol, Imperial County Emergency Medical Services Agency, Reach Air Medical Service, and others who provide medical and rescue services in the Imperial Sand Dunes. Interagency training courses have been scheduled in cooperation with the US Border Patrol for this winter and spring. These courses provide BLM staff, Border Patrol Agents, and other emergency medical providers from Imperial County with continuing education, core refreshers, and initial training and certification at both the EMT and Advanced EMT levels. Paramedic continuing education courses are also being taught jointly between BLM and US Border Patrol paramedics locally.

BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The El Centro Field Office received 101 applications for Special Recreation Permits (SRP) for events between October 2015 and September 2016. These SRP applications are for a variety of recreational activities such as off-road racing, vending, 4X4 touring, a motorcycle trials event, and many others. Noteworthy among these events was the SCORE Imperial Valley 250 which was successfully held in September of this year.

BLM Action: Dunes Maintenance

Contact: Barrett Trost, Maintenance Worker

Status: Our Maintenance crew continues its annual battle with encroaching sand dunes to keep access roads and camping areas open in the ISDRA. When heavy winds blow sand across roadways and camping areas, Nathan Yearsley, Barrett Trost and volunteer Alex Schlumpberger team up to remove mountains of sand that impede access and create hazards for our visitors.



Nathan Yearsley, Barret Trost, and volunteer Alex Schlumpberger using heavy equipment to move sand from roadways.

BLM Action: Wash road repair

Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator

Status: Maintenance staff from the El Centro Field Office teamed up with CDD's Sai Syhaphom, and maintenance staff from the Needles and Palm Springs Field Office to reinforce low water crossing along Wash Road at washes 1, 2, and 10 in the ISDRA. The work that was done will help prevent wash out of the roadway from flash flooding caused by rains in the surrounding area.



BLM Action: Law Enforcement

Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Status: The high visitation season is upon us! Law Enforcement Rangers are busy providing public safety throughout all of our recreations areas, ISDRA, Plaster City, Superstition Mountains, and the McCain Valley. We also patrol our limited use areas where we are seeing an increase in seasonal campers interested in visiting our historic mining communities such as TUMCO.

During the Halloween weekend we saw visitation rise to over 77,000 visitors in the ISDRA, Plaster city and Superstition Mountain OHV open areas. Rangers from all over the country assisted in providing public safety and law enforcement to the visiting community. The visitation increased by nearly 17,000 from the 2014 Halloween weekend. Compliance with applicable laws was high and we saw a reduction in the amount of enforcement incidents from previous years. When Rangers conducted a DUI and Registration checkpoint, however, several alcohol related offenses were detected. This leads us to believe that we should continue these efforts to educate the public and enforce laws and regulations related to the use of alcohol in our recreation areas.

The Law Enforcement team welcomes a Wyoming LE Ranger to the area for 60 days as he helps provide education, public safety, and law enforcement to the 1.4 million acres of public lands throughout the Imperial Valley and eastern San Diego County. Ranger Weisend, brings an extensive background in resource protection and law enforcement activities to the El Centro Field Office and is a great temporary addition to the LE team.

We are currently in the process of growing our Law Enforcement Team by hiring of new supervisory rangers and entry level field rangers. These newest members of our team will help us meet the mission of the BLM and the goals and objectives of the El Centro Field Office for protecting cultural and natural resources, managing recreation, and providing for public safety.