

**HIGHLIGHTS**  
**PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**  
**California Desert District**  
**Advisory Council Meeting**  
**December 5, 2015**

**Energy Projects**

**BLM Action:** The BLM continues to process several energy related proposals. Due to the current energy situation, considerable policy emphasis is still placed on expediting processes and timelines. The following is a summary of the major energy related proposals:

West of Devers Transmission System Upgrade

**Project proponent:** Southern California Edison (SCE);

**Co-lead:** California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

**Status:** Southern California Edison (SCE) is proposing to upgrade and adjust the routes of the following existing 220 kV transmission lines between the communities of North Palm Springs and San Bernardino, in incorporated and unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties: Devers-El Casco (30 miles), El Casco-San Bernardino (14 miles), Devers-San Bernardino (43 miles), Devers-Vista No. 1 and No. 2 (45 miles), Etiwanda-San Bernardino (3.5 miles), and San Bernardino-Vista (3.5 miles). Of the overall 48-mile length of the transmission corridor, approximately 6 miles would cross the reservation Trust Lands of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians and approximately 1 mile is on BLM-administered public lands. The BLM lands are located east of the City of Banning and west of the City of Desert Hot Springs in Riverside County.

In addition to the transmission line improvements, substation equipment at Devers, El Casco, Etiwanda, San Bernardino, Timoteo and Tennessee and Vista Substations would be upgraded to accommodate the project changes to transmission and sub-transmission systems. The project would consist of the upgrade and removal of 48 corridor miles of 220 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, relocation of 66 kV and 12 kV lines, and associated telecommunications and substation upgrades in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The BLM is the lead Federal agency for the preparation of this EIS in compliance with the requirements of NEPA. The CPUC is the lead State of California agency for the preparation of this EIR in compliance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The CPUC held 4 scoping meetings in the project area in May, 2014 and the BLM held one scoping meeting in July, 2014. The Draft EIS/EIR was released on August 7, 2015 for a 45 day comment period. Public meetings were held on August 26 and September 1, 2015. The CPUC held evidentiary hearings on the Project on November 16 & 17, 2015 as part of their proceedings leading to a

decision on the project. An additional hearing on the project will be held on December 7, 2015. The CPUC will release their FEIR on December 11, 2015 in order for this analysis to be brought into their proceedings. The BLM will issue the Final EIS as these proceeding are concluding and a CPUC proposed decision on the project is being released. Separating the BLM's EIS and CPUC's EIR will allow for BLM to utilize these proceedings to make a more informed decision on an agency preferred alternative.

#### Wind Energy:

**Project proponent:** Various.

**Status:** We oversee 20 wind energy rights-of-way grants in the San Gorgonio Pass and Coachella Valley areas including processing r/w applications and assignments, assessing and monitoring cost recovery accounts, completing environmental reviews, and issuing notices and decisions. As part of on-going monitoring of these right-of-way grants, we are initiating additional studies to assess the impact of these facilities on avian populations. In addition, we are in the early stages of processing two re-power projects.

#### Solar Energy:

**Project proponent:** various.

**Status:** We continue to process multiple applications for solar energy projects as part of the District-wide process. Our most recent actions are as follows.

#### **Blythe Solar Power Project**

The Blythe Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with four adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatt (MW) capacity each for a total capacity of about 1,000 MWs. The BLM Record of Decision was issued October 25, 2010 followed by the right-of-way grant on November 4, 2010. Solar Trust of America filed for bankruptcy prior to any significant project work commencing. The project was subsequently sold to Nextera Energy under the Solar Trust bankruptcy auction. An amendment to the existing ROW authorization was submitted to reduce the acreage of the project and change the technology from concentrating solar trough to photovoltaic with a reduction from 1,000 to 485 megawatts. The Draft EIS published on February 7, 2014 and the public comment period closed on March 24, 2014. The final EIS/Record of Decision was issued August 1, 2014 and the Right-of-Way Grant was issued August 12, 2014. A notice to proceed for project construction was issued on March 19, 2015. The project is 6% complete with estimated completion in December, 2016. The first power block will become fully operational and delivery of power is scheduled for Dec. 6, 2015.

## **Palen Solar Power Project**

The Palen Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was for a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with two adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatts (MW) each for a total capacity of 500 MW. A joint BLM Draft Environmental Impact Statement and California Energy Commission (CEC) Staff Assessment for the project was published on April 7, 2010. The Final BLM EIS was published on May 13, 2011, however, a Record of Decision was not issued due to a bankruptcy filing by Solar Trust of America. The project was subsequently purchased by BrightSource Energy during a Solar Trust bankruptcy auction. BrightSource Energy then proposed a technology change for project involving the use of two concentrated solar towers with a combined generation capability of 500 MW. BrightSource submitted a right-of-way amendment application to the BLM and an Amendment Petition to the CEC involving using solar towers in lieu of the original concentrated solar trough technology.

A BLM Supplemental Draft EIS was released for this amended project on July 26, 2013 while the CEC proceeded with their permitting process. Release of the Final BLM Supplemental EIS was being timed to correspond with the CEC decision on this project. On September 26, 2014, however, BrightSource (Palen Solar Holdings, LLC) withdrew their Amendment Petition to the CEC involving the proposed use of the solar tower technology. On September 29, 2014, the CEC issued an order terminating their proceedings on this proposed amendment. The project is now on-hold pending a possible submission of an amended project proposal. The partnership between BrightSource and Abengoa Solar on this project has been terminated with Abengoa Solar preparing a new Plan of Development for a revised project.

## **NextEra - Ford Dry Lake (Genesis) Solar Project**

Genesis Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC, is authorized to construct and operate the Genesis Solar Energy Project consisting of a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with a total net electrical output of 250 MW. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the project was published in March, 2010; public comment period on the Final BLM EIS ended 9/27/10; the BLM Record of Decision was issued November 4, 2010; a Notice to Proceed for site preparation and facility construction was issued on August 24, 2011; and construction was completed in April, 2014. The facility is in full operation.

## **Desert Sunlight Solar Farm**

First Solar Development, Inc. is authorized to construct and operate a 4,245 acre 550-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant project known as the

Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF). The DSSF includes three main components: 1) the Solar Farm site, 2) a transmission line, and 3) a Southern California Edison (SCE) owned and operated substation (Red Bluff Substation). The Notice of Intent was published January 13, 2010, the public comment period for the draft EIS ended November 26, 2010, the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published on April 15, 2011; the Record of Decision signed on August 8, 2011, project construction is complete and the project formally commissioned on February 9, 2015. A request for additional 50 acre feet of water annually was filed in November, 2014. This variance was approved on August 31, 2015 with the environmental assessment and decision record posted on our office website.

### **Rice Solar Power Project**

The BLM permitted Rice Solar Energy, LLC to construct a 10 mile electrical transmission line that would connect a private land, 150-MW solar-powered electrical generation facility to a Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) managed substation. This project was located on the former Rice Army Airfield in Rice Valley, eastern Riverside County, California, approximately 40 miles northwest of Blythe. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) were agency leads for the project; BLM was a cooperator. The CEC approved the project on December 15, 2010.

An abbreviated Final EIS was released by WAPA on August 5, 2011 and a Record of Decision approving the BLM portion of the project was signed December 8, 2011. The BLM right-of-way for the electrical transmission line was granted on April 13, 2012. However, on October 28, 2015, the BLM accepted Rice Solar Energy, LLC's request to relinquish their rights to the electrical transmission line permitted on public lands. The BLM expects Rice Solar Energy, LLC to make the final installment payment for 2015 rental in February 2016, after which the BLM will officially close the file.

### **Desert Harvest Solar**

EnXco proposes to construct a 150 MW photovoltaic project on approximately 1,280 acres located directly south of the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center, California. A Notice of Intent was published on September 15, 2011 with a scoping period that ended October 17, 2011. The draft EIS on the project was released on April 13, 2012 with public meetings in the communities of Desert Center and Joshua Tree on May 14, 2012. The Final EIS has been published and the ROD issued on March 13, 2013. As of this date, the project has not obtained a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and has not settled outstanding issues with the shared gen-tie line for power distribution to the Red Bluff substation. Required documentation for a Notice to Proceed (NTP) has not been submitted to BLM as of this date. The applicant requested and received through BLM an extension of one (1) year to commence construction of the project.

## **McCoy Solar Energy Project**

McCoy Solar LLC, owned by Nextera Energy, is authorized to construct a 750 MW photovoltaic solar project on 7,700 acres of BLM and 470 acres of private lands located directly north of the Blythe Solar Project, near Blythe, California. The comment period on the Draft EIS ended August 23, 2012. The Final EIS for the project was issued on December 12, 2012 and the Record of Decision issued on March 11, 2013. The right-of-way grants were issued for Units 1 and 2 on 12/2/13 and 8/12/14. Project construction is 41% complete with estimated completion in August, 2016. Two of the eight power blocks have been turned over to operations and are delivering power to the Colorado River Substation.

For additional information on these and the other pending projects, see:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/cdd.html>

**Contact:** John R. Kalish, Field Manager @ 760-833-7100

**Status:** On-going

### **Land Exchange with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians**

**BLM Action:** The BLM and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians entered into an agreement in 2002 to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would reduce the extent of checkerboard landownership within and outside the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, thereby facilitating effective and efficient management of public and Tribal lands in the National Monument.

In July 2010, the BLM released an environmental assessment to the public addressing environmental effects of the proposed land exchange. Comments were received from 144 individuals, ten nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. Based on public comments and upon further internal review, it was determined that preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) was necessary to address potentially significant effects of the proposed land exchange.

Two public scoping meetings were held in March, 2012 to identify issues, impacts, and potential alternatives that should be addressed in the EIS. About 125 members of the public attended the scoping meetings. Additional scoping comments were submitted to the BLM by mail and email.

The draft EIS, released to the public on December 29, 2014, analyzes the exchange of certain federal lands (5,799 acres) for properties owned by the Tribe

(1,470 acres) within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. This draft EIS describes and analyzes alternatives based on varying amounts of public lands to be exchanged for Tribal lands, as well as the no-action alternative. Lands would be exchanged on an equal value basis between BLM and the Tribe pending outcome of the land appraisal. The comment period for this draft EIS closed on Sunday, March 29, 2015. The draft EIS is found under the heading “Other Ongoing Projects” at:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings.html>

Comments on the draft EIS were received from 468 individuals, ten nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. The Environmental Protection Agency rated the preferred alternative as *Lack of Objections*, which means it did not identify any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through informal consultation, concurred with BLM’s determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect Peninsular bighorn sheep or its designated critical habitat, least Bell’s vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, or desert tortoise.

The administrative review draft of the final EIS has been prepared. BLM’s publication of a joint Notice of Availability (NOA) for the final EIS and Notice of Decision (NOD) will occur upon completion of review of the exchange package by the Washington Office. Publication of the joint NOA/NOD launches a 45-day protest period of the decision.

**Contact:** Jim Foote, Monument Manager, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (760) 833-7136

**Status:** On-going.

### **Off-Highway Vehicle Green Sticker Grant Program**

**BLM Action:** We continue to install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities in the Palm Springs Field Office. Perform BLM Ranger patrols to inform the public of OHV designations, provide assists and enforce regulations. BLM has submitted a law enforcement grant proposal for FY 15 in order to continue resource protection and public safety activities within this area.

We continue to work on grant closeouts where applicable.

**Contact:** Resources & Recreation Branch Chief 760-833-7100

**Status:** Grants were provided to BLM Palm Springs in 2008-15 for ongoing restoration work, outreach, enforcement and signage conducted in the Mecca Hills, Dos Palmas, Big Morongo ACEC, Coachella Valley Preserve and eastern Riverside County. The BLM Palm Springs Office is submitting 2016 grant applications for law enforcement as well as program management in the South Coast area. A public meeting was held on February 12, 2015 regarding these 2016 grant proposals.

### **Water Projects: Implement Canal Lining Projects as part of PL100-675**

**BLM Action:** PL 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing potential habitat creation/restoration sites and groundwater from public lands to help meet project environmental requirements. The Dos Palmas ACEC is a focus area for these efforts.

**Contact:** John R, Kalish, Field Manager @ 760-833-7100

**Status:** In cooperation with multiple parties including the Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, US Bureau of Reclamation, FWS, and DF&G; the BLM is implementing an assistance agreement that includes BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of 17 acre marsh/aquatic habitat (completed), preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, acquisition of up to 875 acres of additional lands within the ACEC, and long-term management of these projects. This habitat management focuses on protection and enhancement of habitat for the endangered desert pupfish and Yuma clapper rail.

### **Riparian Restoration Activities Update – Palm Springs South Coast Field Office**

**BLM Action:** Approximately 2,000 acres are annually inventoried for ecological condition including stream corridors, mountain and desert oases, and other desert riparian communities. Riparian Assessments review avian riparian species present, noxious weed infestations, disturbances etc.

Approximately 250 acres are annually treated; techniques include:

- Manual: Hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as Sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, Salt cedar.
- Mechanical: Chainsaw, dozer use for removal of Salt cedar
- Chemical: Herbicide cut stumps of Salt cedar
- Biological: Excessive aquatic vegetation removal within sensitive desert oasis using sterile Grass Carp in Dos Palmas ponds. The vast majority of the restoration is with the removal of Tamarisk (Salt cedar). Once the salt

cedar is removed the existing native seed bank responds quickly re-establishing itself as does the water table.

- Locations: Numerous locations, including ACECs Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill/ Willow Hole; isolated oasis within the Santa Rosa's including Boo Hoff, Blasdell Canyon, Bear Creek, Magnesia Springs, Cathedral Canyon drainages etc.

**Contact:** John R. Kalish, Field Manager @ 760-833-7100

**Status:** On-going.

### **Revision of the South Coast Resource Management Plan (RMP)**

**BLM Action:** This plan, encompassing public lands in western Riverside and San Diego Counties as well as Los Angeles County and the southwestern portion of San Bernardino County, has been in effect since May, 1994. The purpose of the plan revision is to update the South Coast Resource Management Plan to: 1) ensure consistency to the extent possible with the various multi-species planning efforts and partnership agreements in South Coast region, 2) re-evaluate management direction in light of new land acquisitions, information, and change in circumstances, 3) assess the impact of BLM management on threatened and endangered species listed since 1993 through formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and 4) assess energy related needs of the region and meet the objectives of the President's energy plan.

Internal reviews of the FEIS are currently underway. Additional information and policy has been added regarding the potential for hydraulic fracturing and environmental consequences. However, we do not anticipate hydraulic fracturing activities within the field office.

More information on this draft plan revision process can be found at:

[http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/SCRMP\\_Revision.html](http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/SCRMP_Revision.html)

**Contact:** John R. Kalish, Field Manager (760) 833-7100

**Status:** The Draft RMP Revision/EIS was out for a 90 day public comment period ending December 23, 2011. Public meetings were held on the Plan Revision in South San Diego County (Rancho Jamul) and Temecula on November 29 and 30, 2011 respectively.

### **Volunteers**

**BLM Action:** The office promotes volunteerism in a wide range of public land management initiatives. This program is mainly focused on management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and the Big Morongo Canyon

ACEC/Preserve. Extensive volunteer programs within the Monument are developed by the Friends of the Desert Mountains and are outlined on their website: <http://www.desertmountains.org/volunteer.html>

Extensive volunteer programs within the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve are developed by the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and are outlined on their web site: <http://www.bigmorongo.org/a8Volunteer.htm>

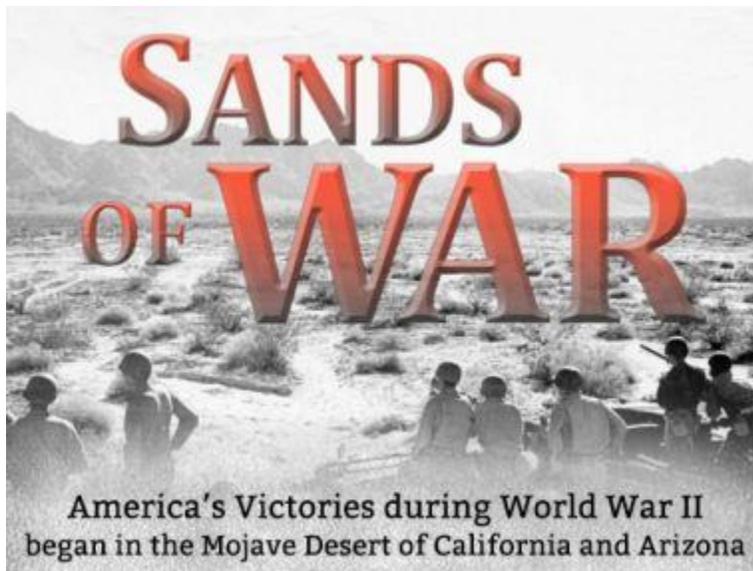
Other volunteer efforts are implemented throughout the year including habitat restoration, public land clean-ups, archaeological site monitoring and facility development/maintenance. These volunteer programs and contributions are invaluable in effectively managing our lands and programs. Of special note, offering high quality environmental education and interpretation programs to the public and schools is dependent on these volunteer contributions.

Contact: John R. Kalish, Field Manager (760) 833-7100

Status: On-going.

On numerous PBS stations across California, Nevada and Arizona, the *Sands of War* documentary was broadcast as a special Veteran's Day salute (November 11, 2015) to those who serve and have served in the military. The documentary is a result of mitigation efforts from the McCoy renewable energy project, located in eastern Riverside County, CA.

The participants that worked on this project are the Bureau of Land Management Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, in conjunction with Full Frame Productions, NextEra Energy Resources, LLC and KOCE PBS Southern California.



[Watch-out for PBS broadcasts of \*Sands of War\* or pick up a DVD at participating locations.](#)