

RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE
HIGHLIGHTS for the
CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

December 2015

RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RIFO)

BLM Action:

Contact: Carl Symons is the Field Manager and can be reached at 760-384-5400 (main office line).

Status: The Ridgecrest Field Office is extremely busy focusing on priority projects such as:

- Special Recreation Permits
- Film Program
- DRECP
- West Mojave
- Haiwee Geothermal
- Renewable Energy projects
- Central Hazmat and Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)
- Youth Initiative
- Wild Horse and Burro Program
- Grant Administration
- Mining operations
- Cultural issues

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PUBLIC LANDS

Carl Symons, Field Manager

Youth and Young Adult Employment

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office currently employs three Cultural Resource interns and one in Range Management. Twelve new SCA members are now working on various facets of public lands management. Some of the many tasks that these individuals have undertaken include: desert restoration, seed collection, rangeland health assessments, riparian and spring proper functioning condition assessments, cultural resource inventory and recordation, interpretation and outreach, along with NEPA planning.

Status: These youth are tasked to continue into Fiscal Year 2016. Additional interns may be added or replaced as funding sources are identified that can be managed effectively by the on board permanent staff.

Outreach: Interns routinely conduct outreach at several field locations to inform visitors of use regulations for the public lands and especially the Rand Mountain and Fremont Valley Management Area.

Contact: Carl Symons

Status: Staff is scheduling events that can be attended to further educate and inform the public about the many features and benefits that Americans receive from their public lands.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Karen Kufta, Acting Zone Fire Management Officer

BLM Action: Awaiting orders to support wildland fire operations as needed.

Contact: Karen Kufta - Acting Fire Management Officer

Status: Fire is centralized at the District level.

RECREATION AND WILDERNESS

Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Jawbone Station

BLM Action: The Friends of Jawbone continue to provide the staffing to operate and maintain the visitor center 7 days a week throughout the year 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Additionally, for about the last eight years the BLM has partnered with the Friends of Jawbone (FOJ), a local non-profit group, to assist with management plan implementation efforts within the area. The FOJ maintain a staff of between eight and twenty individuals for field work crews. These staff members take on the many different task including habitat restoration, road and trail maintenance using heavy equipment and hand tools, management area and route signing, recreation facility maintenance, and trash pickup.

Contacts: Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Status: Visitation to the Jawbone Station and surrounding Public Lands are picking up now that the warm summer months are gone. We are expecting a very busy holiday season of visitors. When you are in the area stop in and see what guide books and maps you might need that you cannot find other places.

South Park Bridge

BLM Action: BLM submitted a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant application to fund the removal of the existing South Park Bridge and its replacement with a retaining wall type structure.

Contacts: Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Status: We are currently waiting to see if our grant application was successful and if so when we may expect to see the funding available so that we can begin the development of a contract for the work.

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office (RIFO) special recreation permit (SRP) season is ongoing. Some of the activities that we issue SRP's for motorcycle races, ultra marathon running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, off-road vehicle education clinics, and vending permits.

Contact: Eduardo Duque, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: So far this fall we have hosted motorcycle races, dual sport motorcycle tours, four wheel drive tours, equestrian rides, and a mountain bike race. Upcoming in the next few months are more motorcycle races, the LA-Barstow to Vegas dual sport ride, equestrian endurance rides and the annual Ultra Marathon.

West Mojave Route Monitoring and Route Maintenance

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO continues to perform route monitoring and maintenance of the designated routes and kiosks within our management scope of the West Mojave Planning area.

Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: We continue to work on maintaining and monitoring the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. We continue to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. Staff has initiated the planned Protocol Monitoring for year two.

West Mojave Route Network Project

BLM Action: The West Mojave Route Network Project (WMRNP) is a travel management planning effort covering 9.24 million acres in the West Mojave area of the California desert. Approximately 3.1 million acres in the planning area are public lands managed by the BLM. The WMRNP supplements the 2006 West Mojave Plan. The planning area covers the western portion of the Mojave Desert in southern California including parts of San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Kern, Inyo, and a small portion of Riverside Counties.

Contacts: Ashley Blythe – Archaeologist, Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: On September 25 the comment period was reopened for another 120 days. Comments are due by January 25, 2016 related to matters considered in the WMRNP.

State OHV Grants

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office was very successful with its grant request submitted to the CA Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) for the 2014/2015 grant cycle, Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. The Ridgecrest Field Office received 4 out of the 5 grants that were submitted. The four grants awarded totaled approximately \$1,293,229.00. The Ridgecrest Field Office did not receive the South Park Bridge Development Grant, but did receive full funding for: Law Enforcement, Restoration for the PCT, Restoration, and Ground Operations.

Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for staffing, management actions and maintenance efforts that result in providing for the many various activities enjoyed by the public land users. Some these actions and efforts would not be possible without this outside funding source.

The grants that were awarded include: Restoration grant (\$615,914.00) runs July 1, 2015 thru July 30, 2018. PCT Restoration (\$38,308.00) Runs through October 1, 2015 thru October 31, 2018. Ground Operations grant (\$387,061) runs thru December 31, 2016.

Desert Restoration

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for: Law Enforcement, Restoration for the PCT, Restoration, and Ground Operations. The Ridgecrest Field Office submitted the Development Grant for the South Park Bridge through the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) in September.



Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The grants that were awarded include: Restoration grant (\$615,914.00) runs July 1, 2015 thru July 30, 2018. PCT Restoration (\$38,308.00) Runs through October 1, 2015 thru October 31, 2018. Ground Operations grant (\$387,061) runs thru December 31, 2016.

Field Office staff participated in the 2015 Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival in November. It was a great turn out and our booth was a hit! We had a spinning wheel trivia game that really got the attention from the crowd. We also had numerous hand outs and goodies for both the adults and kids. It always good to get out and have some positive interaction with the public.

Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark Management

BLM Action: Our partnership with Farmworker Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD) carries out ecosystem restoration along with site maintenance and enhancement activities at the Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark.

Contact: Elaine Hanson, Realty Specialist, Carl Symons, Field Manager

Status: Through May 2017, FIELD will send a crew twice monthly to restore and remove impacts from visitation, off route travel, and authorized uses that have happened to the Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2015, crews continued erasing off road tracks and lining certain areas with rocks to attempt to keep public on the routes and from driving over vegetation.



Just a few of the off route tracks FIELD Crew is working to eliminate within the Trona Pinnacles.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

BLM Action: We are working to complete Lands with Wilderness Characteristics reviews of public lands located within the DRECP and WEMO planning areas managed by the RIFO.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: Inventories have been completed for the Sierra, Jawbone, Red Mountain, Ridgecrest, South Searles, North Searles, and Middle Knob WEMO Sub-regions. The Darwin and El-Paso Sub-regions are nearly completed.

Wilderness Management Activities

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO led a successful volunteer tamarisk removal trip with the CA/NV Sierra Club Desert Committee. We worked in Willow Creek (Inyo Mountains) for two days, hand-pulling small seedlings and saplings, and spraying small infestations and larger saplings that were resistant to hand-pulling. Volunteers found the “mother tree” up the north fork of the drainage in wilderness and treated it before the trip concluded.

A small group also mopped up a small infestation in upper Cougar Canyon between the first two falls. The change in Cougar Canyon has been remarkable since we started removing weeds there in 2007. Native vegetation is now moving into places where there once was a wall-to-wall monoculture of tamarisk.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: We are currently working to prepare for this October’s weeklong National Sierra Club Volunteer Service Trip Outing. Our plans are to be back in Willow Creek to continue the work and to retreat Upper Pat Keyes and sites above the second falls in Cougar if resources and conditions permit.

Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for Cottonwood Creek

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing to collect data to write the management plan for the 4-mile reach of Cottonwood Creek WSR on BLM land.

Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Coordinating efforts with USFS

LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY

Vacant, Minerals and Realty Chief - under current supervision by Robert Pawelek, Chief - Resources

Non-Renewable Energy

BLM Action: Filming continues to be a popular permitted activity

- Fifteen film permits processed and issued this quarter.
- Two film permits in processing stage.
- Communication site inspections on numerous locations within the Ridgecrest Field office boundary.
- Billing and collections
- Trespasses

Contact: **Elaine Hanson** – Realty Specialist for Film Program
Paul Rodriquez – Realty Specialist for all other ROWs

Status: We also continue to work on numerous phone calls and emails from the public requesting information about public lands and types of permits needed.

Geothermal Leasing Inspections

BLM Action: COSO Geothermal lease

Contact: Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech.

Status: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer these leases.

Minerals: Saleable and Locatable

BLM Action: BLM RIFO continues to process minerals sales and small mining claims.

- Dragonfly is approved. Protests/appeals from affected interests taken until December 3, 2015.
- Perdito Project at Conglomerate Mesa: Silver Standard Resources has replaced Great Bear Resources. Waiting on their submission of a Plan.
- Golden Queen Mine on Soledad Mountain south of Mojave, CA, Plan of Operation submitted.
- Sleepy Bear Mining, Fremont Valley: Need to review bond and collect 5:1 habitat compensation. Both are conditions of approval for any pending authorization.
- Gold Slayer Placer: Time to write/release EA for 0.9 acre gold operation by Last Chance Canyon.
- Talc mining operation by Willow Creek Camp in Saline Valley, and the "Devil Dog Placer" east Duisenburg. Expect to convert two long-standing notice cases to plans of operation.
- Tip Top lode claim north of the White Mountain ACEC: Claimant wishes to construct a 1/4-mile access so he can bring truck to old tailings pile and workings.

Contact: Randy Porter - Geologist

Status: Continuing work on other small mining operations.

Abandoned Mine Lands

BLM Action: AML inventories are currently being conducted in conjunction with routes and trails in the Rand Mountains. The AML Program plans to remediate (safe guard) dangerous mine openings in this region over the next several years to remove potential life threatening fall hazards.

Contact: Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist
Ridgecrest Field Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant

Status: Staff is being cross trained to aide in field work related to AML work.

CERCLA

BLM Action: Continuing efforts to complete actions to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) through the CERCLA processes.

Kelly Mine Site (OU1) undergoing site investigations for stabilization of the interim remediation in conjunction with the potential for permanent site remediation.

Contact: Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

Status: Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) is at the Department for review.

RESOURCES

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

Rangeland Management

BLM Action: Current Projects

Deep Springs and South Oasis Allotments: Russian thistle has consumed the windmill site, and was the topic of discussion at a workshop held at Deep Springs College in November. Improving the situation will be of benefit to the permittee, to the range program, and to the wilderness program.

Three cattle permittees currently grazing on BLM allotments: Deep Springs, Rudnick Common, & Oasis Ranch. Approximately 550 cow-calf pairs.



Deep Springs College Student Cowboy learns the ropes

Rangeland Health Assessments have been completed on several of the northern allotments.

Rudnick Common (Canyons Pasture mitigation): proposal for relinquishing up 8400 acres (1:3 mitigation ratio) for RE Cinco Solar, exclusive of private inholdings via Conservation ROW issued to CDFW. Environmental Assessment available online.

Contact: Sam Fitton, Natural Resource Specialist, retired on November 27, 2015.

Status: All grazing turnouts are subject to range condition assessments prior to turnout due to drought.

Cultural Resources

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Cultural Program has been working on:

DRECP:

Provided support to CASO in review and consultation with Tribes for the DRECP Phase I National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA). The proposed final PA was sent to Consulting Parties the week of November 23, 2015.

WEMO:

Cultural resources related work for the WEMO Supplemental EIS and the Route Network Project has focused on the development of National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA).

The BLM, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the California Office of Historic Preservation executed the Programmatic Agreement on September 30, 2015 during a signing ceremony in Sacramento, California. This ceremony included Julianne Polanco, California State Historic Preservation Officer, Wayne Donaldson, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic

Preservation, and James Kenna, former State Director for the California Bureau of Land Management. The BLM has invited 64 additional tribes; federal, state and local agencies; and organizations and individuals with demonstrated interest in the cultural resources as Consulting Parties to the PA.

To date, 24 of these parties have elected to sign the Agreement as Concurring Parties. The BLM will begin the next phase of the PA and consultation process, the development of the Historic Properties Management Plan, with a Consulting Parties meeting in January 2016.



West Mojave Plan Signing Ceremony September 30, 2015, Sacramento, CA. Front Row (L-R) Julianne Polanco, California State Historic Preservation Officer; Wayne Donaldson, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; Jim Kenna, California BLM State Director. Back Row (L-R) Ashley Blythe, Archaeologist, Ridgecrest Field Office; Jim Shearer, Archaeologist, Barstow Field Office; Brendon Greenaway, Associate State Archaeologist, California Office of Historic Preservation (Photo Courtesy of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation)

Contact: Donald Storm - Archaeologist,
Ashley Blythe – Archaeologist
Danny Tyree – Contract Archaeologist

Status: Extremely busy program.

Wildlife Management

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Wildlife Program is working on:

- Robber’s Roost Grazing Relinquishment-Mitigation Project
- Trona Pipeline Replacement
- Consulting with USFWS on projects such as Alta East for condors and eagles
- Mentor the Chicago Land Management-SOS Intern
- Presenting BLM guidelines at the Tortoise Handling Workshop
- DRECP: provided input as requested by state office for biological resources
- WEMO Route Designation Process
- DTRNA: Supporting the DTNA and the DTPC Naturalist program.
- Quail Forever: Supporting local chapter to maintain wildlife water development sites
- Supporting with Rangeland Health Assessments

- Presenting information and instruction on tortoises and other sensitive wildlife species to the SCA crews and other contractors, etc.

Contact: Caroline Woods – Wildlife Biologist

Status: Extremely busy program as our one biologist is trying to catch up on everything. We are grateful to Amy Fesnock, BLM State Lead and Kim Marsden, District Natural Resource Specialist, for assisting us last year.

Right: Sam Merck and Carrie Woods perform tortoise outreach at local women’s shelter



Wild Horse and Burro Program

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Corrals is currently home to 665 wild horses and burros.

Adoptions:
Budget allocation target of 100 animals.

Partnerships:
Memorandum of Agreement with NAWS-China Like signed off in November 2015 by Carl Symons, RFO Field Manager and MK Rich, Rear Admiral, Commander, Navy Region Southwest. This MOA delineates the partnership between BLM and the Navy, and includes administration of fertility control measures for wild horses and burros gathered on NAWS lands.

Fort Irwin environmental personnel, New Mexico State University, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratory are collaborating with the Ridgecrest WH&B program to explore the utility of using long-term immunocontraceptives and surgical sterilization procedures to reduce reproduction and recruitment of juvenile jacks into the existing burro population.



The Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Staff participated in the Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival in November, and simultaneously held an Open House at the Corrals that weekend. Several festival-goers who visited the BLM’s booth in Downtown Ridgecrest heard about the Open House and took a side trip up to the Corrals for a visit. We managed to adopt four horses over the weekend thanks to the partnership with the Petroglyph Festival.

Contact: Grant Lockie, Corral Manager; Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

Status: Adoptions continue year round by appointment. Paso Robles adoption TBA soon.

Soil-Water-Air-Botany

BLM Action: Continue native seed and tissue collections to support restoration of desert tortoise habitat

Contact: Marcus Lorusso - BLM Contract Botanist, Loren Dunham - CLM Intern

Status: Active/ongoing

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wayne Dengal, Chief Ranger

BLM Action: RIFO Law Enforcement is spending considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas including wilderness boundaries and ACEC as well as other closed and limited use areas to detect and deter illegal off road travel activity.

Continuing with monitoring efforts of SRPs.

Patrolling open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail.

Participating in national and state priority details as required.

Coordinating with DOI, CHP and County Sheriffs to resolve ongoing felony investigations

Contact: Wayne Dengal, Chief of Law Enforcement, RIFO

Status: BLM and Public safety continue to be highest priority.
Current staffing: Ranger Chaidez, Ranger Woods and Chief Ranger Dengal.