

**HIGHLIGHTS
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District
Advisory Council Meeting**

September 27, 2014

Sustainability

BLM Action: Renewable Energy

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning

Status: The El Centro Field Office continues to oversee construction on the East County (ECO) Substation project. Two renewable energy projects, Ocotillo Sol and Tule Wind have been authorized but have not yet started construction on BLM lands. A pre-construction kickoff meeting for the ISEC West project (transmission line across BLM and private solar facility) was held on April 9, 2014 and construction began in June 2014.

BLM Action: Minerals Program

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The ECFO signed a Decision Record on August 1, 2014 for a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA) prepared for the Jimenez Mine and Granite Construction Company. The SEA analyzed the potential environmental impacts associated with a modified Plan of Operations for mining activities and amendments to the right-of-way grant for non-mining activities. An amended right-of-way grant shall be offered to Granite Construction in September 2014.

BLM Action: Geothermal Energy Program

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The El Centro field office worked with the BLM CASO to prepare for a geothermal lease sale which was conducted in Sacramento on September 11, 2014. The BLM California State Office offered for competitive sale four parcels totaling 9,859.75 acres of Federal lands in Imperial County, California for geothermal leasing.

Two competitors participated in bidding for the leases. One parcel located in the West Chocolate Mountain Area and two parcels located in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area were sold at the minimum bid of \$2 per acres, while the fourth parcel located within the Truckhaven Geothermal Lease Area was sold at \$15 per acre. The leases will go into effect the first day of the next month after the issuance date. These leases will have primary terms of 10 years and the

BLM will extend the primary terms of the leases on request, if the requirements in the regulations at 43 CFR 3207.10 are met.

The El Centro Field Office processed and approved 45 geothermal sundry notices during the 2014 Fiscal year for surface disturbing activities in support of on-going geothermal production from federal leases on East Mesa. There are currently six geothermal plants on seven leases covering 13,220 acres within the El Centro Field Office. The El Centro Field Office also completed 135 geothermal lease inspections during the 2014 Fiscal year at geothermal well sites (including production wells, injection wells and fresh water wells), and power plants to ensure compliance with all lease and permit terms and conditions.

Heritage

BLM Action: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the La Posta Band of Kumeyaay Indians

Contact: Christine McCollum, Archaeologist
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

Status: The ECFO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the La Posta Band of Kumeyaay Indians that codifies and describes the specific consultation procedures to be followed for both government-to-government consultation as well as information coordination between staffs. The ECFO is currently working on a draft MOU with the Quechan Indian Tribe and will present a draft MOU for consultation with the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation.

BLM Action: Spoke Wheel Restoration

Contact: Christine McCollum, Archaeologist
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

Status: ECFO cultural staff took action to stabilize one significant cultural resource- the area surrounding the Spoke Wheel Geoglyph. The area had recently become popular with OHV enthusiasts even though the area is barricaded with a post and cable barrier. Riders were circumventing the barrier and were recreating nearby the geoglyph. The ECFO cultural staff installed new signs prohibiting OHVs and brushed out OHV tracks to discourage use. The ECFO has plans to install a new post and cable barrier further up the wash at a point that will be very difficult to bypass thereby providing increased protection of this resource. The stabilization and protection of the Spoke Wheel Geoglyph has been and will continue to be undertaken with close coordination with local Native American Tribes.



Jeff Sahagun installing posts deterring off-road vehicles from the sensitive area around the Spoke Wheel Geoglyph

BLM Action: Fundamentals for Managing the Cultural Heritage Program (8100 Training)

Contact: Christine McCollum, Archaeologist
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

Status: BLM El Centro heritage staff attended a week-long heritage program training in Phoenix, AZ in August, along with archaeologists and managers from BLM offices throughout the country. Training presentations included Section 106 triggers, data sharing and management, archaeological law enforcement and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPA).

Community

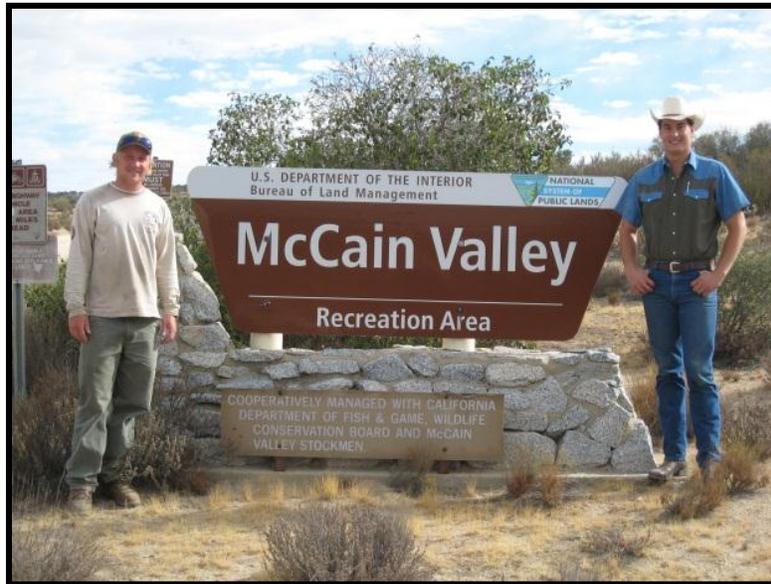
BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits (SRP)

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning

Status: The BLM El Centro Field Office received 13 applications to date for upcoming SRPs for events beginning in September 2014 through September 2015. These include applications for AMA District 38 races within the Plaster City and Superstition Open OHV Areas, a Rocketry event in the Plaster City East Open Area, 4X4 touring events within the Superstition Mountain Open Area and western Imperial County and demo rides with the Imperial Sand Dunes.

BLM Action: Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan (RMP) Implementation
Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: The El Centro Field Office is currently in the midst of a route of travel signing project to implement the Eastern San Diego County RMP thanks to California Off-Highway Vehicle Grant Funds. In just 2 weeks, American Conservation Experience (ACE) interns Garrison Holback and Forrest Mayer have signed 89 routes of travel (55 miles) in Airport Mesa, Table Mountain, Chariot/Rodriguez Canyon, and Buck Canyon (near Ranchita, CA). Two interns from ACE are scheduled to be in El Centro through October 2014.



ACE Interns Garrison Holback (left) and Forrest Mayer (right)

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

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: The ISDRA will have two permanent and six seasonal park rangers for the FY15 season. Of the six seasonal park rangers, four will be returning staff, and two will be new hires.

Newly hired park ranger initial training will begin August 25, 2014 and run for six weeks. Returning staff will begin October 6, 2014 for two weeks of combined refresher training with new hires. The training will consist of: Five weeks of Emergency Medical Technician-Basic; one week of 4x4 and OHV driving and trailer towing; one week of technical rescue training in orienteering, tracking, rope rescue, vehicle extrication, and swiftwater rescue; and one week of rules, regulations, flora and fauna, fees, and other area information, frequently asked questions, and ranger station procedures and preparation.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

Status: The ISDRA fee period came to a close on April 15th. Camping continues to be free through the end of September.

Between October and April, 46,472 permits were sold generating \$2,186,000 in revenues. After the fiscal year is complete and all the data is collected, BLM will provide the annual fee report.

A new fee contractor, Urban Park Concessionaires (UPC) was hired and is working closely with BLM to prepare for the new season.

Both ranger stations will reopen October 17, 2014. Cumulative visitation is 936,000, which is a 6% decrease from the same time in FY 2013.

BLM Action: ISDRA Grants Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

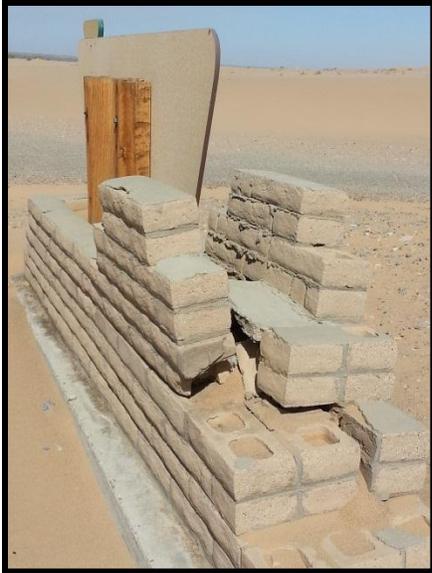
Status: OHV Grants have been approved for the 2014/2015 season. The El Centro Field is receiving three grants: ISDRA Safety (\$139,560), ISDRA Ground Operations (\$143,050), and ECFO Law Enforcement (\$436,050). All three applications total \$718,660 and require \$489,317 in match. The fee program and volunteers allow the BLM to have the sufficient matching funds to apply for the projects.

BLM Action: ISDRA Education and Outreach

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The El Centro Field Office continues to work in partnership with the United Desert Gateway to provide maps, Frisbees, and “Dune Guard” shirts, at the ISDRA for the upcoming 2014-2015 season. This year the Dune Guard program will receive a “facelift” by offering newly designed t-shirts, can cozies, safety flags and safety goggles to safe riders.

Repair of the Roadrunner Campground sign was completed in September through a partnership with the United Desert Gateway. Plans for a new foundation and sign installation are also underway with the United Desert Gateway for a new “Welcome to the Imperial Sand Dunes” sign for visitors entering the recreation area from Grays Well Road.

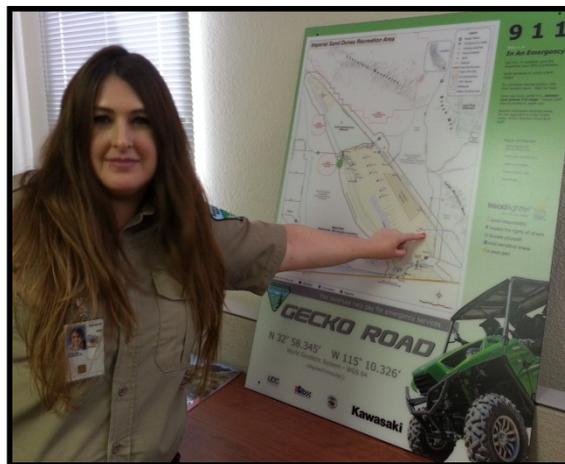


Roadrunner Campground sign before repairs



Roadrunner Campground sign after repairs

All Dunes materials (brochure, kiosk panel, ranger station display, etc.) are being revised to capture new Pierson's Milk-vetch critical habitat closure boundaries. Kiosk panels have been received and will be installed next season. Work continues on updating the new map brochure to educate visitors about the implementation of the ROD/RAMP and changes to the open area boundaries.



Karissa Belvins, BLM Contract Representative, reviewing the new kiosk panels for the dunes.

BLM Action: Maintenance

Contact: Martin Gibson, Maintenance Operations Supervisor

Status: Work continues throughout the El Centro Field Office. Four new kiosks were replaced in the Yuha Desert in support of the Interpretive Program with one more slated to be installed later in September 2014.

Signing in the dunes has been one of the main and on-going themes within the field office and Maintenance personnel were involved in every aspect as the season draws nearer. Preparation for the signing project started in May with the volunteer event with Maintenance personnel enlisting their help full-time in the early weeks of June and continuing to date. The initial task of signing will be done and the job will then go into the “maintenance” phases of replacing any signs that have blown over or covered by blowing sand and winds. Full time maintenance staff played an important role in preparing for the signing volunteer event held on May 3rd, 2014. Special sign pullers were created and designed by maintenance staff and were on hand during the event to coordinate the safe volunteer experience. The process of hiring seasonal staff for sign and restroom maintenance has begun and those personnel should be on staff just prior to the Halloween Incident for the 2014/2015 dunes season.

During the week of September 8-12 older vault toilets at the Hot Springs were replaced with a new double vault toilet. Additionally, a vault toilet was installed on Osborne Overlook. ADA Accessible Parking will be installed at both sites during the month of September.



Staff works hard to remove sand from camping pads off of Gecko Road.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

Status: BLM Park Rangers, maintenance workers, wilderness staff, botanists, GIS specialists, compliance staff, and rangers have worked all summer removing the previous closure signs and signing the critical habitat closures. A special thanks to the BLM Yuma Field Office for their help by sending over three employees to assist in the signing project. All critical habitat closure boundaries have been signed, and crews are now out maintaining and adding additional signs to help improve visibility. A seasonal staff will be hired in October to maintain the signs along the boundary during the visitation season.



Park Ranger, Daniel Baca, lines up a sign to mark the administrative closure boundary.

BLM Action: Volunteers

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: Two volunteer events were held in partnership with the American Sand Association (ASA). These events occurred on May 3rd and June 14th. These volunteer events focused on the removal of signs for the administrative closures located in the ISDRA. A total of 299 volunteers donated 1,861 hours of labor and helped remove closure signs near Gecko and Buttercup Campgrounds as well as the north end of the large closure. The signs are being recycled and used for the critical habitat boundary.



ISDRA Subgroup Vice-Chairman, Ed Stovin, volunteering in the dunes.

We are continuing to recruit camp hosts to fill vacant positions at several camping areas within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. Vacant camp hosts areas include; Gecko Campground, Ogilby, and Dunebuggy Flats. For more information please visit the following link: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/recreation/ohvs/isdra/dunesinfo/volunteers.html>

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement Update

Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Status: El Centro Field Office Law Enforcement staff is in the process of bringing the 2013-2014 season to a close. With a new Chief on board and reduced staffing we are evaluating the effectiveness of past enforcement and outreach to ensure efficient use of our resources for the upcoming season.

Cost Saving Measures:

1. Reduced holiday detail length.
2. Reduced out of state staffing, cuts per diem and travel time. The current size of the details will be maintained for the foreseeable future. This level of staffing is the minimum to maintain a safe environment for the recreating public and also for the staff.
3. Maximize the utilization of Forest Service LE Officers providing short travel distance, minimize overtime and travel costs.
4. Block lodging room rates with local hotels.
5. Optimize the LE vehicle fleet by ensuring the most cost effective vehicles are purchased

Potential Cost Saving Measures:

1. Utilize alternate funding to purchase mission critical equipment
2. Split resources with nearby Field Offices during peak visitation
3. Obtain demonstration/test equipment to maximize enforcement

Staffing continues to be a challenge. It is our goal to ensure the current level of professionalism is maintained; safeguarding our community during the upcoming dunes season. Optimizing Law Enforcement operations efficiently is critical to ensure the public receives the highest level of service they have come to expect.

Moving forward, we hope to fill a Supervisory Ranger position and hire additional Law Enforcement Rangers to better manage the varied needs of the field office. Our goal is to look at graduating students from the local area bringing stability to the Law Enforcement section; unifying the LE team with the local community.

For the 2014-2015 OHV Season we will staff an OHV team during all holiday weekends. This team will focus on the areas which are inaccessible to standard patrol vehicles. During the early, less active visitor hours, Rangers will focus on outreach ensuring that the OHV and camping community is educated on current and new laws and rules as well as identifying the new closure areas.

Rangers have spent most of the summer months managing a heavy administrative load, ensuring that all managed areas are squared away moving into the upcoming dunes season. This included a large project within our field office that took over 960 personnel hours. They also spent a great deal of time assisting other state and local field offices with during the summer months. During this time they receive critical cross training in an on the job environment while also providing essential law enforcement services to other communities during high periods of high visitation.