

HIGHLIGHTS EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

February 27, 2015

Sustainability

BLM Action: Imperial Solar Energy Center West

Contact: Nicollee Gaddis, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Status: The Imperial Solar Energy Center West project has nearly completed the 230 kV double circuit gen-tie transmission line for their 150 megawatt PV Solar project. 26 transmission towers cross BLM land along the 5-mile right-of-way. The transmission line is scheduled to be energized February 19, 2015. Construction has begun on the solar plant on private land located adjacent to Interstate 8. The solar plant, which will be built completely on private land, is scheduled to be completed February 2016.



Heritage

BLM Action: Tribal Symposium

Contact: Jeffrey Sahagun, GIS Specialist/Archaeologist

Status: On January 16, 2015, San Diego Gas & Electric Company, ASM Affiliates and the BLM hosted a symposium for the Tribal community at the Imperial Valley Desert Museum (IVDM) on the archaeological findings from the data recovery efforts at the East County Substation Project near Jacumba, California. There were 24 attendees representing the La Posta Band of Kumeyaay Indians along with the San Pasqual, Manzanita, Kwaaymii Laguna, Viejas, and Sycuan. Also in attendance were members of the Kumeyaay Diegueno Lands Conservancy. Attendees were able to view artifacts recovered during excavation which will be curated at the IVDM. There was an opening prayer given by Carmen Lucas of the Kwaaymii Laguna Band and then two

presentations by ASM Affiliates; one on the findings from archaeological site SDI-7074 (with nearly 10,000 year old earth ovens) and a synopsis of the Jacumba/McCain Valley Regional Synthesis. The style of the presentations encouraged a lively discussion of the information presented between the attendees and the presenters.

BLM Action: Prehistoric Olla Returned to the BLM

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

Status: On Thursday, February 5, 2015, a prehistoric olla found on public lands near Ocotillo, California was returned to the BLM. The large painted pot was found in a rock shelter by mountain climbers last year and mistakenly removed without permission. The find was reported to a professor of Ecology at Concordia University in Irvine who then contacted the El Centro Field Office and coordinated the olla's safe return to federal ownership. It will be curated at the local Imperial Valley Desert Museum and on display soon in their permanent exhibit currently under construction.



Community

BLM Action: Volunteer Clean-ups scheduled for March in the Fish Creek and Jacumba Mountains Wilderness areas

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: There are two clean-ups within the El Centro Field Office scheduled for March 2015. Allied Climbers of San Diego will conduct their annual event at the Valley of the Moon area within the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness. A clean-up will also be held near the Fish Creek Mountains Wilderness, just off of Split Mountain Rd. by a group called SOCAL Desert Rendezvous. They will be focusing their attention on target shooting debris. Over the past few years, they have been splitting their time with the El Centro and Palm Springs Field Offices.

BLM Action: Volunteers/Youth Initiative: “Successful Completion of Annual Winter Bat Surveys as part of the BLM’s Abandoned Mine Lands Program”

Contact: Efe Erukanure, Geologist

Status: The El Centro Field Office concluded winter bat surveys held from Tuesday, January 6 to Friday, January 9, 2015. The bat surveys, which are completed regularly in the winter and late spring of every year, are part of ongoing efforts by BLM staff and contractors to monitor certain endangered bat species under the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program. There were a total of ten volunteers who assisted with the bat surveys, among which five were high school students. The El Centro Field Office hopes to use the AML bat survey efforts as part of its youth initiative program, educating high school students on wildlife biology as well as historic mining activities in the area. Some of the high school students are willing to assist with future bat survey efforts over the next one to two years.



High School students packing up scientific equipment after bat monitoring.



Volunteers listening to a short biology lecture.



BLM staff, volunteers and Bat Biologist (Contractor) posing for a group picture before dispersing to different positions for a night of bat monitoring.

BLM Action: Filming

Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Business Support Associate

Status: Currently there is an independent movie production shooting a science fiction film entitled “Everything Beautiful is Far Away” within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. They have been on location since January 8, 2015 and will be wrapping up February 6, 2015.

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

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: Since October 2014, Park Rangers have responded to over 200 medical and rescue incidents within the ISDRA. While call volume is near where it has been in years past, the severity and type of injuries have become more serious. Interagency partnerships and relationships continue to be developed among BLM, Border Patrol, Reach Air Ambulance, Imperial County EMS Agency, and other EMS service providers in Imperial County. Different trainings are being coordinated for this spring time including interagency EMT and Advanced EMT courses taught by BLM staff in El Centro. These courses are being provided jointly through a partnership between BLM and Border Patrol, and serve to increase the numbers and qualifications of federal staff to better serve the public in the deserts of Imperial County.

We are currently preparing for the 2015/2016 season and recruiting staff via www.usajobs.gov. If you know anyone who enjoys OHV recreation, is interested in the BLM mission, and capable of passing an intense search and rescue training class, have them call us at 760-337-4400.



BLM and Border Patrol personnel carry out an injured OHV rider to an awaiting helicopter in the ISDRA.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Between October and December 2014, 33,058 permits were sold generating \$1,581,000 in revenues. Fee compliance remains high at 89% compliant after checking 2,368 individual vehicles.

A fee free weekend was provided to the visitors during the Martin Luther King Weekend. About 30,000 visitors enjoyed the dunes between Friday and Monday, no charge. The fee season will close April 15 and no fees will be charged until October 1.

The fee management contract ends in April and a new solicitation will be announced soon to select a contractor for next season.

Cumulative visitation is 612,000, which is a 5% increase from the same time in FY 2014.

BLM Action: ISDRA Education and Outreach

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The El Centro Field Office continues to work in partnership with the United Desert Gateway (UDG) on several projects.

Plank Road Centennial Discover the Desert Event - Preparations are underway for the Feb. 21, 2015 Centennial Celebration for the Historic Plank Road within the Imperial Sand Dunes. The UDG and BLM recently installed a new road intersection and a parking lot. A new interpretive kiosk is in the works and should be ready in time for the upcoming celebration. It will have three panels about titled: "In The Beginning", "Revitalization", and "Today and Tomorrow".



A small section of recreated plank road has been constructed by BLM. It is located so visitors can park on it to take pictures for their social media postings. #PlankRoad

The Plank Road Centennial is open to the public and the invitation is below:

A SPECIAL INVITATION



Nearly 100 years ago, visionaries cobbled together a road of planks to traverse the nearly impassable Algodones Dunes, now commonly known as the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. With its completion, the Plank Road became the improbable last link in an east-west route that connected Arizona to coastal San Diego.

More than a rough riding, single lane of traffic, the Plank Road was the epitome of adventure. In its wake, legend and lore grew. In 2015, the Plank Road, a section of which is preserved in the shifting sands of the dunes, celebrates its 100th anniversary.

**The United Desert Gateway &
The Bureau of Land Management
Invite you to attend...**

Plank Road Centennial Celebration

Date: Saturday, February 21, 2015

Time: 10 a.m.—12 p.m. (all times are Pacific Time Zone)

Place: Plank Road Historic Site, Grays Well Road off of Interstate 8.
Parking at Buttercup Ranger Station
6808 Grays Well Road, Winterhaven, CA

The public is invited to attend



www.UnitedDesertGateway.org - 760.337.4155

Outdoor Recreation Planner, Michelle Puckett, submitted a proposal to *TreadLightly!* for a custom plastic poster to be developed for the dunes. Of all the entrants, Michelle's project was selected for the dunes and 20 posters were awarded to the BLM. Since arrival, all have been installed throughout the recreation area.



Facebook continues to be a great tool for providing visitors with information about the Imperial Sand Dunes. Currently we have 5,660 likes and have reached nearly 200,000 people through our Facebook posts since December 2014. Posts included information about dunes safety, volunteer events, the historic Plank Road, photos and other dunes related information.

BLM Action: Maintenance

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Signing the critical habitat closure in the dunes and road maintenance continue to be our main duties. A two person team signs the closures about 40 hours per week. Near the end of the Thanksgiving Holiday, visitors reported the dirt road to the Ogilby Camping Area had deep sand drifts and stuck motorhomes. BLM responded, helped all the visitors get out, and brought in an emergency water truck during the night and early morning before the high traffic levels as visitors tried to leave and go home. After the BLM actions, no other visitors were trapped in the camping area. BLM has since graded the area and continues the watering on holidays through fee dollars.

Clean and sanitary toilets continue to be a high priority for BLM and visitors. Through grant and fee dollars, one full time worker, and a few volunteers clean and maintain 62 vault toilets for about 1,000,000 visitors during the year.



Mr. Quiroz, one of our proud veterans, cleans and repairs our restrooms 40 hours a week, and sometimes works a few weeks straight during the busy holidays.

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

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: A combination of law enforcement, maintenance staff, park rangers, and resource staff have been signing and educating visitors on the new closures. BLM partnered with ASA earlier this season and spoke at public meetings in the dunes to educate visitors. There is another meeting planned on March 6.

The new “Geo-referenced” map available on the Avenza cell phone application is very popular. This allows visitors to navigate real time on their phones and comply with the new closure locations. Due to its success, BLM has recently added two more maps covering the rest of Imperial County.

BLM Action: Law Enforcement

Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Status: Law enforcement patrols have been successful in keeping the number of incidents down in throughout the ISDRA. Emphasis in crime prevention focusing on the DUIs, drugs, permits, and closure violations has been high and well received by our visitors. Compliance has been high this year and has led to rangers being more available to provide education and outreach to our visitors. Rangers continue to provide and or assist, with calls for emergency medical assistance and search and rescue. Rangers from El Centro as well as throughout the nation have provided law enforcement and security for three national details in the Imperial Sand Dunes thus far providing over 6500 resource hours to the area. Rangers continue to patrol the West Desert with tremendous impact in the Plaster City and Superstition areas. Concentration has also been given to the many target shooters that visit the Jacumba, Coyote, and Fish Creek Wilderness Areas.

Law enforcement rangers continue to patrol renewable energy project areas such as the Ocotillo Wind and SDG&E projects. Some of the challenges in the areas include off route travel and target shooting from or under power line towers. In the future, strong emphasis will be placed on

the Fish Creek Wilderness Areas following a scheduled volunteer cleanup of the area to ensure that target shooters act within regulations and are leaving no trace.

Law enforcement rangers are currently preparing our California State Parks OHV grant request for the 2016 year focusing on efforts that will allow us handled sustained OHV operations in remote areas.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Volunteers

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: The 18th annual Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Martin Luther King Jr. Dunes clean-up was held on January 17th, 2015. The event was done in conjunction with the United Desert Gateway, and was another great success. A total of 1,290 volunteers came out, participated, and volunteered over 3,638 hours of hard work and labor, in effort to clean up the dunes. Volunteers registered at 8 am Saturday morning at various locations throughout the dunes. Trash was collected until 11:30, and volunteers were greeted with free lunch and raffle prize giveaways. The entire weekend was free of charge and no permit was required in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area.

The Roadrunner Campground host has been fulfilled by Monica Shaw for the remainder of the 2014-2015 dunes season. Monica comes to us from Coos Bay, Oregon, with an extensive background as a retired Park Ranger. Monica contacts visitors, providing them with information about the dunes, as well as educating them on the rules and regulations. Monica also assists Park Rangers with keeping the camping areas clean, with the maintenance of restrooms, and performing other duties as assigned. When Monica is not down here in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, she spends her time in Coos Bay, Oregon as a campground host.

Thomas Gell is midway through his first season as campground host in the Gecko Campground area. Thomas continues to assist with driving the water truck on some major holiday weekends in an attempt to minimize dust levels on the Wash Rd. Thom also continues to maintain restrooms clean, and educate visitors about the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. When Thom is not out busy doing volunteer work, you can find him doing what he loves best, recreating in the Imperial Sand Dunes!

Homer Himes continues to provide hard quality work as the Buttercup Campground Host. Homer recently celebrated his 80th birthday in the dunes, but that has not slowed him down, for he has put in over 1,200 hours of volunteer work only half-way through the season. Homer spends his volunteer time assisting with the repairs, maintenance and re-stocking of restrooms, maintaining the Buttercup Ranger Station, educating the public about the sand dunes, and assisting the Park Rangers with other duties as assigned. You can find Homer spending time with his two dogs and loving family on his days off spending time with his lovely family.

We are continuing to recruit camp hosts to fill vacant positions in several camping areas within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. For more information about campground host positions or volunteering please visit the following link:

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



Volunteers from the Los Angeles area picking up trash near Palo Verde Flats during MLK clean-up



El Centro Field Office Field Manager, Tom Zale, thanking volunteers for coming out and participating in MLK clean-up

BLM Action: Routes of Travel for Eastern San Diego County

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: The Routes of Travel for Eastern San Diego County brochure has just been printed and delivered to El Centro Field Office and now available to the public. Production has been ongoing for over a year which includes route signing and checking for accuracy as well as coordinating with Anza Borrego Desert and Ocotillo Wells State Parks.