

**HIGHLIGHTS**  
**PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**  
**California Desert District**  
**Advisory Council Meeting**  
**March 2014**

**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:

Devers-Palo Verde #2 500 kV Transmission Line Project:

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

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

**Status:** This project involved a proposed 500 kV electrical transmission line originating west of Phoenix, AZ and ending near Hemet, CA, using an alignment through Kofa Refuge in Arizona and following Interstate 10 through California. Final EIR/EIS was issued in November, 2006 and the project was approved by the CPUC. The BLM Record of Decision was pending resolution of issues involving project approval by the Arizona Corporation Commission which had rejected the project on May 30, 2007. The project is in the final construction phase.

West of Devers Transmission System Upgrade

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

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

**Status:** 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).

Wind Energy:

**Project proponent:** Various.

**Status:** We oversee 21 wind energy rights-of-way grants in the San Geronio 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.

We are expecting two proposals for re-power of existing turbine facilities from Brookfield Energy and Ogen. Ogen is proposing to use new “shrouded” technology which may have a positive effect in reducing avian mortality.

Solar Energy:

**Project proponent:** various.

**Status:** We are processing 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 has been submitted to reduce the acreage of the project, change the technology from concentrating solar trough to photovoltaic with a reduction from 1,000 to 485 megawatts. The project is submitting new DEIS and FEIS documents with the Draft EIS being published on February 7, 2014 and the public comment period closing on March 24, 2014. **Palen Solar Power Project**

The Palen Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was 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. The Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the project was published on April 7, 2010. The Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published on May 13, 2011 beginning the 30 day public comment/protest period.

The Record of Decision was not issued due to the bankruptcy filing by Solar Trust. The project was subsequently purchased by BrightSource Energy under the Solar Trust bankruptcy auction, a right-of-way application and a plan of development has been received and a full EIS review has been initiated. BrightSource Energy is proposing a technology change to concentrated solar tower for this site. The POD indicates two 750' towers with a combined generation capability of 500 MW and identifies the project as Palen Solar Energy Generating System (PSEGS). A Supplemental Draft EIS was released for this project on July 26, 2013. The public comment period for the Supplemental Draft EIS was extended to and ended on November 14, 2013. The anticipated date for issuance of the Final Supplemental EIS has not yet been established by the BLM due to additional review issues required by the California Energy Commission (CEC) prior to their final vote on the issuance of a license. It is anticipated that the final vote will take place in April 2014. After this CED final vote, BLM will establish the next steps for completion of its EIS process.

### **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 8/24/2011; and construction is well underway. A recently proposed re-route of the generation tie-line, connecting the project with the Colorado River Substation, has been finalized. Operation of the Unit 2 portion of the project is nearing completion and full project operation is expected in April, 2014.

### **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 1/13/10, the public comment period for the draft EIS ended 11/26/10, the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published on 4/15/11; the Record of Decision signed on August 8, 2011 and project construction is approximately 85% complete.

### **Rice Solar Power Project**

Rice Solar Energy, LLC is permitted to construct a 150-MW solar-powered electrical generation facility in Rice Valley, located in eastern Riverside County, California, approximately 40 miles northwest of Blythe. This solar generation facility is located on the site of a former airfield (Rice Army Airfield) that was used during World War II as part of General Patton's Desert Training Center. The 1,410 acre project uses concentrating solar "power tower" technology to capture the sun's heat to make steam, which would power traditional steam turbine generators. The solar generation facility, on private lands, contains the power block, a central receiver or tower, solar fields which consist of mirrors or heliostats to reflect the sun's energy to the central tower, and a thermal energy storage system. A 10 mile electrical transmission line is authorized on BLM lands. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) are agency leads for the project; BLM is a cooperator. The CEC approved the project on December 15, 2010. An abbreviated Final EIS was released by WAPA on August 5, 2011 a Record of Decision approving the BLM portion of the project was signed December 8, 2011 and the BLM right-of-way for the electrical transmission line was granted on April 13, 2012. On January 28, 2013, SolarReserve received approval from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to sell power from this project under an amended 25-year power purchase agreement (PPA) with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E). This action will allow this project to proceed; however, no schedule has been announced.

### **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 obtain a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and has not settled outstanding issues with the shared gen-tie line for power distribution to the Red Bluff sub-station. Required documentation for a Notice to Proceed (NTP) has not been submitted to BLM as of this date.

### **McCoy Solar Energy Project**

McCoy Solar LLC, owned by Nextera Energy, proposes 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 12/21/2012 and the Record of Decision issuance was March 11, 2013. Preliminary geotechnical studies and pre-construction clearances are underway at the project site.

## **Rio Mesa Solar Electric Generating Facility**

BrightSource Energy suspended work on this project in January, 2013, without issuing plans for a possible resumption in the permitting process. BrightSource had proposed construction of a 500 MW solar complex on 5,750 acres of mostly private lands located 13 miles southwest of Blythe, California. This project involved mirrors to focus solar energy on 760 foot tall solar receivers (power towers). Portions of the access road and generation tie line would be constructed on BLM lands. The project was being processed jointly between the BLM and the California Energy Commission. A Notice of Intent to prepare a Draft EIS was published on August 29, 2012 and the 30 day public scoping period of 30 ended September 28, 2012. The draft EIS was in preparation, however, this project has now been placed on hold by BrightSource.

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

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

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

**Status:** On-going

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

**BLM Action:** Install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities in the Palm Springs Field Office. Conduct restoration work to repair OHV intrusions into closed areas and off designated roads/trails. Perform BLM Ranger patrols to inform the public of OHV designations, provide assists and enforce regulations.

BLM has submitted five new grant proposals for FY 15. No public comments were received on our proposals. We have lost our OHV grant coordinator position. We may have to withdraw most of the FY 15 grants if the position is not filled.

**Contact:** Cheryl Martinez, Supv., Lands, Minerals & Recreation 760-833-7100

**Status:** Grants were provided to BLM Palm Springs in 2008-14 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. Five new grants were submitted for FY 15.

## **Santa Rosa/San Jacinto Mountains Recreation Trails Planning**

**BLM Action:** Preparation of a coordinated recreation trails plan that provides recreational opportunities and minimizes risk of impacts to the federally-listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep.

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

**Status:** Due to the mix of land ownership, this trails plan was conceived as a collaborative effort, and is part of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) process. In coordination with the local jurisdictions through the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), BLM jointly conducted public scoping sessions and coordination meetings to obtain public input based on two goals: 1) provide opportunities for trail use, and 2) minimize risk of impacts to the federally-listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep from recreational activities. Interim measures are in place, promulgated from the Biological Opinion for the California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002).

The Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement (EIR/EIS) for the CVMSHCP and trails plan was released for a 90-day public comment period in November, 2004. Public meetings were held in November, December, 2004 and January, 2005. The comment period was extended for one month to March 7, 2005. Numerous comments were received opposing a proposed trail permit system. Comments were addressed in the Final EIR/EIS with the proposed trail plan being modified to the satisfaction of most respondents.

The CVAG Executive Committee released the Final EIR/EIS to the various signatory agencies in early February 2006 for approval. About four months later, the City of Desert Hot Springs rejected the CVMSHCP. Since the plan requires approval of *all* permittees for it to take effect, CVAG initiated preparation of a recirculated draft plan, including the trails plan, along with a recirculated draft EIR and supplemental final EIS. The recirculated draft plan, which excludes lands within the City of Desert Hot Springs, was released for a 60-day public comment period in mid-March 2007.

On September 10, 2007, the CVAG Executive Committee released the Final Recirculated CVMSHCP and Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS to the various signatory agencies for approval. The trails plan element is essentially the same as proposed in the February 2006 Final EIR/EIS. The CVMSHCP was approved October 1, 2008. In 2012, revision of the trails plan was initiated by CVCC; approval is anticipated in 2014. The BLM is in coordination with CVCC on this revision and anticipates issuance of a separate NEPA analysis and

decision. [A major amendment to the CVMSHCP is in progress to bring the City of Desert Hot Springs under the plan.]

### **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:** Holly Roberts, Associate 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.

### **Route Signing**

**BLM Action:** All primary routes within the NECO planning area are signed with 4 x 4 steel posts consistent with the CDD sign policy. All major intersections have kiosks with maps. Secondary roads in the NECO area are not funded or signed at this time. Routes within the Coachella Valley planning area are not signed due to intermix of public and private lands, (i.e. locked gates, low mileage of public route segments, not useful to the public.) The South Coast planning area is not signed but route inventory and designation for the Border Mountains area of San Diego County is being done as part of the on-going South Coast Resource Management Plan Revision.

**Contact:** Cheryl Martinez, Supv., Lands, Minerals & Recreation 760-833-7100

**Status:** On-going.

### **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:** Holly Roberts, Associate 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. More information on this draft plan revision and public comment 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:** Holly Roberts, Associate 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. The final document is anticipated to be released in spring, 2014.

### **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 Kalish, Field Manager (760) 833-7100

Status: On-going.

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

**BLM Action:** The BLM and the Tribe entered into an agreement in 2002 to initiate and complete 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 environmental assessment CA-060-0010-0005—which addressed environmental effects of the proposed land exchange—for public review and comment. Comments were received from 144 individuals, ten organizations, and three governmental entities. Based on public comments and upon further internal review, it was determined that preparation of an environmental impact statement is 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 will be addressed in the EIS, as well as the extent to which those issues and impacts will be analyzed in the NEPA document. About 125 members of the public attended the scoping meetings. Additional scoping comments were submitted to the BLM by mail and email. Preparation of the draft EIS began soon thereafter.

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

**Status:** The administrative draft EIS is in preparation. Release of the draft EIS for public review and comment is anticipated in spring 2014.