

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



March 2016

RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RFO)

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
- Grazing
- 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 two Cultural Resource interns. We have recently hired two new Seeds of Success CBG Interns who will be starting mid-March (5 month obligation). Twelve 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 through 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.

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.

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, 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: The cooler months are our busy season. In the past quarter we have hosted motorcycle races, dual sport motorcycle tours, four wheel drive tours and equestrian rides. 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: Comments period ended 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 received full funding for Law Enforcement, Restoration for the PCT, Restoration, and Ground Operations.

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.

South Park Bridge is targeted for reconstruction with Recreational Trails Program funding. The deadline for submitting RTP grant proposal is March 7, 2016.

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.

Partnerships

BLM Action: Our partnerships recently provided an opportunity for education of restoration crews. On February 22, BLM specialists provided a Natural and Cultural Resource training for 22 members of the Friends of Jawbone Restoration Crews. The training covered desert tortoise awareness, desert wildlife and vegetation considerations, restoration guidelines, and a cultural resource and Section 106 overview. The training provided the on-the-ground restoration crews an opportunity to interact with the BLM staff, ask questions, and understand the reasons for NEPA environmental stipulations.

Contact: Carrie Woods, Biologist; Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Rec Planner; Ashley Blythe, Archaeologist

Status: Restoration crews will apply their skills to improve, protect and maintain existing trails and to erase illegally-generated scars on the landscape with techniques such as vertical mulch and barriers.

BLM Action: Our partnership with Farmworker Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD) carries out ecosystem restoration along with site maintenance and enhancement activities.

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

Status: Throughout the summer and fall of 2015, crews at the Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark continued erasing off road tracks and lining certain areas with rocks to attempt to keep public on the routes and from driving over vegetation.

Restoration efforts at Middle Knob will commence in late spring 2016. Through May 2017, FIELD will send a crew twice monthly to restore and remove impacts from visitation and off route travel.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

BLM Action: All LWC inventories within the WEMO and DRECP Planning Areas for the RIFO have now been completed. These inventories have been posted on the CA State BLM website. You can access them at: www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/wilderness/other_blm_lands_with/ridgecrestlwc.html

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: There are still a few outstanding inventories that need to be completed for areas outside of the WEMO & DRECP Planning areas. These inventories are currently underway. They should be completed by June, 2016.

Below: Golden Valley Wilderness



Wilderness Management Activities

BLM Action: We are deep into our 2015-2016 restoration season. We currently have two crew leaders and 10 restoration interns working along the boundaries of our wilderness areas. These crews are funded by the CA State Parks Off-Highway Vehicle Division. In addition, we also have one OHV Restoration intern also funded by CA State Parks OHV Division. This intern is responsible for providing crew support, coordination, and technical assistance. This year, she will be using tablets and testing new restoration data collection and monitoring protocols developed by Peg Margosian and our restoration interns last year. She will also be responsible for planning and prepping next year's restoration projects.

Our restoration crews spent their first two months monitoring, repairing and finishing up unfinished restoration work in the Golden Valley and Grass Valley wildernesses. The northern boundary of the Grass Valley Wilderness, which now abuts NAWS due to recent base expansions, has never looked so good! They've spent the bulk of their time since then working on the boundaries of the Great Falls Basin Wilderness Study Area and the Argus Range Wilderness. This is the first time that these two areas have been comprehensively addressed. Work in Great Falls Basin is nearly complete. Work in the Argus has just begun and will be completed or mostly completed by the end of next year. The crews' next stops will be the Owens Peak and Kiavah wildernesses. Work in these areas will focus on monitoring and repairing past restoration efforts, and experimenting with more effective techniques to stop erosion on illegal hill climbs. We anticipate that the crews will close their season in the Bright Star and Coso Range wildernesses.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: We are now at the point where we are almost as much engaged in monitoring and maintaining past restoration work as we are in completing new project work. We realize we can't cover all 17 of our wilderness areas and one WSA in just one season. So we will be embarking on cycling through these areas each year, picking up where we left off the season before.

Wilderness Management Activities

BLM Action: The RIFO will be sponsoring an interagency Wilderness Stewardship Training Workshop in Panamint Valley April 4-8th. This training is being organized by the CA State BLM Office with Forest Service and National Park Service participation. We will be camped off of the Surprise Canyon Road. Ridgecrest staff will offer special sessions on wilderness restoration taught by our SCA restoration interns who will be working on a site in the Argus Range, and on exotic plant (tamarisk) removal taught by Alex Neibergs and Marty Dickes at Warm Sulphur Springs. Some of the other sessions planned include understanding the Wilderness Act, wilderness first aid, and how to communicate most constructively with the public.

Contact: **Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator, RIFO**

Status: The training is open to everyone interested in wilderness stewardship, from individuals, to NGO's, to agency staff and wilderness rangers-in-training.

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

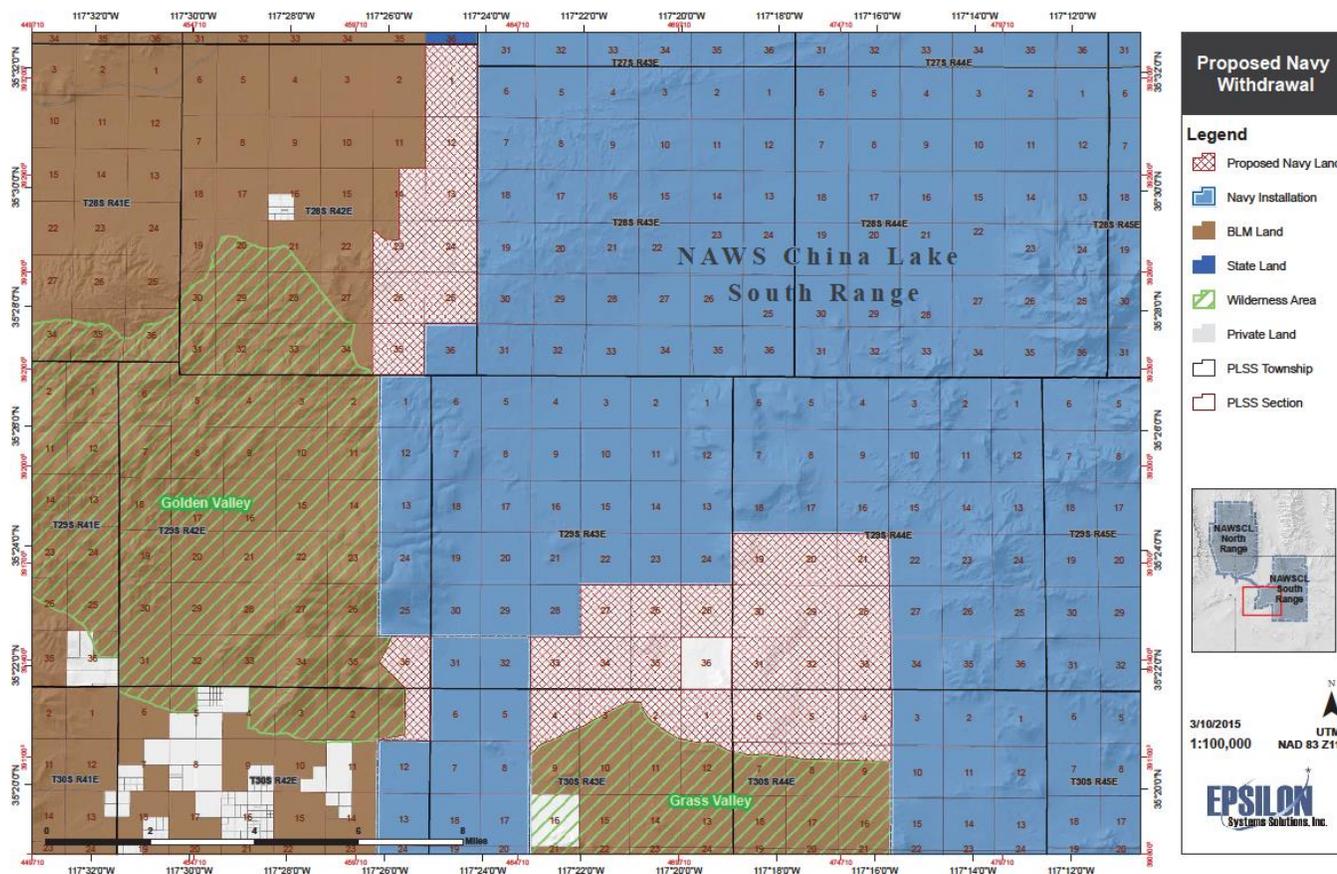
Vacant, Minerals and Realty Chief - under current supervision by Robert Pawelek, Chief - Resources

Non-Renewable Energy

BLM Action: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, signed by the President on 25 November 2015, withdrew approximately 20,000 acres of BLM land, linking China Lake - NAWS South Range with the previously-withdrawn Cuddeback Gunnery Range.

Contact: Robert Pawelek - Chief, Resources

Status: See Section 2841 of the Act and accompanying map below.



Map depicting Defense Authorization Act withdrawal of nearly 30 sections of BLM land near Cuddeback Lake and Christmas Canyon ACEC (pink crosshatch).

BLM Action: Filming continues to be a popular permitted activity. "*Alien Hunter*" an Independent movie filmed at Trona Pinnacles and Poison Canyon has now completed and is out for premier in various cities. Filmed for four days, film crew of 30 plus, including child actors. BLM personnel worked closely with the production company to get this project on the ground in our area. Earlier this year, *Alien Hunter* premiered at the Miami Sci-Fi Int'l Film Festival where, it placed 2nd for Best Cinematography!

In addition, we are pleased that *Alien Hunter* has been accepted into two more festivals - the 32nd Annual Chicago Latino Film Festival (<http://chicagolatinofilmfestival.org/>) and the San Diego Latino Film Festival (<http://sdlatinofilm.com/>).



LEFT: Jeep commercial at Trona Pinnacles. One day shoot in January, film crew of 55 plus. It rained most of the day at the Trona Pinnacles. An observant fan may have caught glimpse of these shots during Super Bowl 50.

Contact: Elaine Hanson – Realty Specialist

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.

BLM Action: Southern California Edison Pole Replacement
 SCE is proposing to replace 27 utility poles near Keeler, Little Lake, California City, and Trona, CA on BLM along roads within SCE Right of Ways (ROWs). For Cerro Gordo, the proposed action consists of the replacement of 19 wood electric distribution poles and associated hardware. Pole 271569S will be brought in and set via truck. The other 18 poles will be brought in and set via helicopter. For the rest of the poles, the proposed action consists of the replacement of wooden electric distribution poles and associated hardware. The new poles will be brought in and set via truck or hand-set. For all pole locations, no new access roads will be constructed.

Contact: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist

Status: The new holes will be dug via machine auger or by hand. Standard excavation depths range between 7 and 10 feet with a diameter of 3 feet. The area of soil disturbance will be limited to a radius of 5 to 10 feet around the pole, as well as light disturbances relating to construction within a general 50-foot radius around the pole. No significant brush removal or trimming is expected to be required of the project.

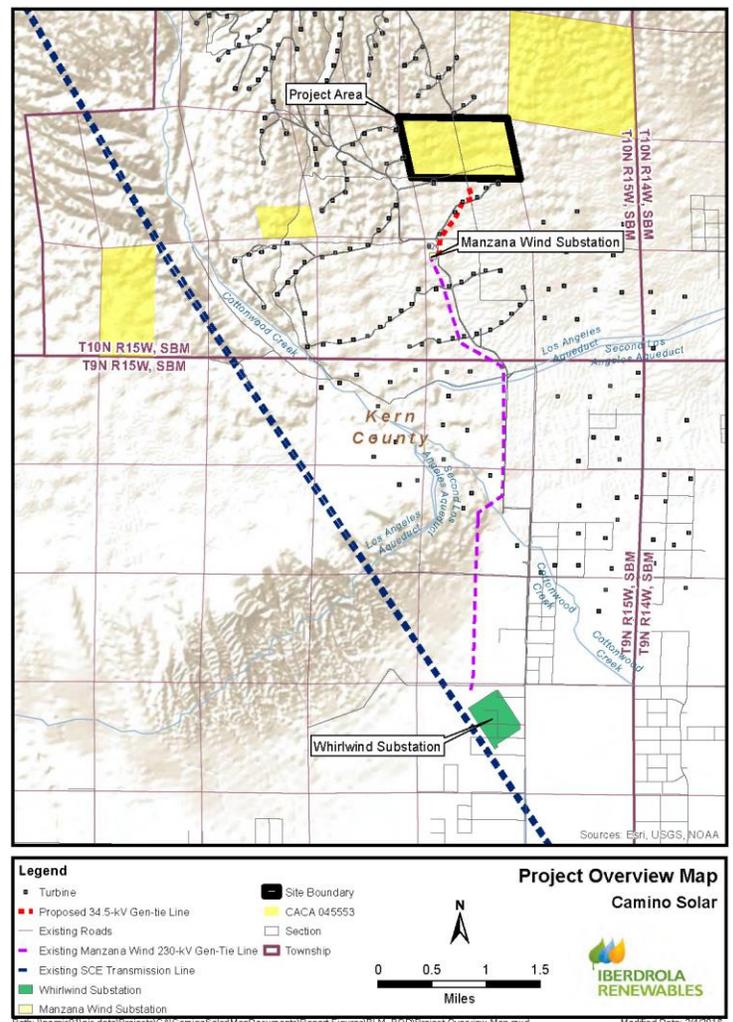
Renewable Energy

BLM Action: Camino Solar Project
 Aurora Solar, LLC has applied for a Right-of-Way grant for a solar energy facility with a maximum generating capacity of 44 megawatts. Their Plan of Development is based on previous work of the Tylerhorse Wind Project, in the same general vicinity of Kern County where Camino is now proposed. Tylerhorse is no longer under consideration for development.

Whereas Tylerhorse would have been constructed on three BLM-administered parcels, only one BLM parcel would be impacted by construction of Camino. Aurora anticipates that permitting and development of Camino would take place in 2016 and that construction would begin in mid-2017.

Contact: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist

Status: Preliminary application meetings are ongoing. NEPA analysis is necessary.



ABOVE: Camino Solar overview map

Geothermal Leasing Inspections

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer leases at Haiwee and Coso. The Haiwee Water Consumption report should be completed by early March.

Contact: Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech

Status: There are currently three pending non-competitive geothermal lease applications covering about 4,460 acres of BLM-administered public lands in the Haiwee Geothermal Lease Area (HGLA). An upcoming Geothermal Lease Sale is planned for October. NEPA documentation for this lease sale will be tiered from the current Environmental Impact Statement.

Minerals: Saleable and Locatable

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

- Silver Standard Resources has selected Pat Gochmour to expedite approval of the Perdito drilling project on Conglomerate Mesa. Mr. Gochmour was previously contracted by Great Bear Resources for the same project. Today's proposal describes entering the previously-reclaimed access route to drill seven sites.
- 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.
- 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

Three cattle permittees currently grazing on BLM allotments: Deep Springs, Rudnick Common, & Oasis Ranch. Approximately 550 cow-calf pairs. Rangeland Health Assessments continue to be a priority. Sheep allotments may have an abbreviated grazing season in March-April timeframe.



ABOVE: Rangeland Health Assessment Team

Contact: Robert Pawelek, Chief - Resources

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 PA was signed on February 5, 2016.

WEMO:

Cultural resources related work for the WEMO Supplemental EIS and the Route Network Project continues with on-the-ground testing of the Archaeological Predictive Model. As required by the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) executed on September 30, 2015, the BLM is developing the Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP), which directs the implementation of the PA. The first of three-times-yearly Consulting Parties Meetings was held in January 2016. A working group meeting for the HPMP will be held in April, followed by another Consulting Parties meeting in May.

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:

- Consulting with USFWS on projects such as Alta East for protection of eagles
- Camino Solar Project
- Hiring the Chicago Land Management-SOS Interns
- DRECP: provided input as requested by state office for biological resources
- WEMO Route Designation Process
- DTRNA: Supporting the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area with mitigation funds and naturalist funding. Land purchases were discussed with DTRNA officials during the annual meeting in January.
- Presenting information and instruction on tortoises and other sensitive wildlife species to the FOJ crews.
- Newest member of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team (USFWS)
- Trona Pipeline Replacement and other ROW clearances



Contact: Caroline Woods – Wildlife Biologist

Status: Extremely busy program as our one biologist is still trying to catch up on everything.



LEFT: Recon for suitable habitat for a replacement pipeline at Searles Valley Minerals.

Wild Horse and Burro Program

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Corrals is currently home to 730 wild horses and burros.

Adoptions: Budget allocation target of 100 animals. Approximately 40 adoptions so far in FY16.

Gathers: NAWS-China Lake/Centennial Herd Area: A total of 68 animals were gathered during a shutdown of range operations over the Presidents' Day Weekend. A subsequent gather scheduled for last weekend of February.

Partnerships:

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 implement the utility of using long-term immunocontraceptives on jennies and surgical vasectomy to reduce reproduction and recruitment of juvenile jacks into the existing burro population.

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: Loren Dunham - Botanist

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.