

HIGHLIGHTS EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting March 4, 2016

BLM Action: Successful DAC Tour of the El Centro Field Office, December 2015

Contact: Thomas Zale, Field Manager

Status: The El Centro Field Office (ECFO) led a successful Desert Advisory Council (DAC) field tour of public lands on the west side of our field office in December 2015 to highlight the diversity of our staff and partners, and to showcase the wide range of resource values and public land uses we manage on a daily basis. Stops in the Yuha desert centered on renewable energy, transmission, flat-tailed horned lizard habitat, pre-historic geoglyphs, and the Anza National Historic Trail. The impressive new exhibits at the Imperial Valley Desert Museum were the focus of our lunch stop, and we began the afternoon in eastern San Diego County with a presentation by the U.S. Border Patrol at Airport Mesa. Our Recreation and Law Enforcement programs were featured at Lark Canyon in the McCain Valley, and we finished the day at the Carrizo Overlook discussing our outlook towards our future while being bathed in a glorious afternoon light. Thanks to all who presented and all who were able to attend! It was a great day!



Lesson learned? Never follow a canine demonstration– the dog will steal the show every time!

Sustainability

BLM Action: Imperial Solar Energy Center West

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Resources Branch Supervisor

Status: The Imperial Solar Energy Center West project owned by Tenaska, Inc. recently completed construction of their 150 megawatt PV Solar project on private lands. The 230 kV



double circuit gen-tie transmission line across BLM lands was completed in April 2015. Construction on the overall project has been underway since 2014. The transmission line has been energized and clean solar energy is now entering the grid through the SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink 500 kV transmission line for use in San Diego County. At peak times, the project will produce enough electricity to meet the needs of more than 55,000 California homes.

Imperial Solar Energy Center West.

BLM Action: Tule Wind Power Project

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Resources Branch Supervisor

Status: Last summer, Iberdrola Renewables announced a 15-year contract to supply Southern California Edison (SCE) with renewable energy from the Tule Wind Power Project. SCE will purchase the entire output of the 132-megawatt wind farm when construction is completed in late 2017. Engineering and design work is underway and the company expects to begin construction in September 2016. In anticipation of construction, the ECFO recently met with Tribal leaders to discuss the upcoming construction schedule and the opportunities Tribes will have for participating in micro-siting project components and monitoring construction activities. The McCain Valley has a rich archeological record and at least one geological landform to which Indian tribes attach religious or cultural significance. Early involvement of the Tribes will help ensure the protection of these important resources during construction.



Heritage

BLM Action: Abandoned Gold Mining Town Gets A Makeover

Contact: John Johnson, Wilderness Coordinator and Tom James, Archaeologist

Status: The ECFO held its National Public Lands Day (NPLD) event on December 12, 2016, at the Tumco Historic Townsite in eastern Imperial County.



Due to the desert heat in September, we conduct our NPLD events in the cooler months of the year. Over 20 volunteers made the trek about an hour east of El Centro where they eagerly installed several interpretive signs and painted four kiosk / rest area frames. After the work was complete, BLM Archaeologist, Tom James, took the group on a historic walking tour of Tumco providing a colorful, in-depth briefing about the abandoned gold mining town. Tumco is an abandoned gold mining town situated in one of the earliest gold mining areas in California. It has a history spanning some 300 years, with several periods of boom and bust.

BLM Action: Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Monitoring Funds Transferred

Contact: Andrew Trouette, Botanist

Status: Every year, the ECFO, in partnership with the United States Navy, the California State Parks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Arizona Department of Fish and Game, completes Flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*) monitoring of four long term demographic plots in East Mesa, West Mesa and the Yuha Desert. Plans for this summer’s monitoring got underway with the recent execution of the Military Interdepartmental Purchase Request and transfer of \$30,513 from Department of Defense to the BLM to fund the upcoming surveys. The BLM also provides funding to



Flat-tail horned lizard being readied for pit-tagging.

accomplish the monitoring of the demographic plots utilizing an assistance agreement with American Conservation Experience (ACE) to hire interns. Each year, the interns walk over the four plots looking for Flat-tailed horned lizards. When they find one, they use a mark and recapture design to determine population estimates and trends.

Community

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The ECFO continues to manage a successful fee collection program in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA). Fee compliance remains high and averages approximately 88%. Permit sales are about the same as last year. The contractor is performing well and is also selling non-resident OHV stickers for visitor convenience at both Ranger Stations. The fee period will end April 15, 2016, and camping will be free through September 30, 2016.

The ISDRA Subgroup has a meeting planned for March 17, 2016 to continue discussions and review the OHV grants. Tom Acuna, the Subgroup Chair, recently facilitated a special meeting of the Subgroup to begin development of a “shovel ready” project to replace the aging facility at the Cahuilla Ranger Station. The current triple wide trailer serves about 750,000 visitors per year and is need of replacement.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Annual Clean-up

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: This year was the 19th annual ISDRA Martin Luther King, Jr.(MLK), Dunes Clean-up. To encourage public participation, we made the MLK weekend fee-free for visitors. BLM collaborated with the United Desert Gateway (UDG), other partners, and several sponsors to host the event. A total of 1,140 volunteers contributed 4,195 hours to clean the Dunes. After the event, volunteers received a free lunch and participated in a raffle hosted by UDG with prizes such as lighted whips, heavy duty bags, and high quality coolers for their use in the dunes. A great time was had by all!



Volunteers rally for a group photo during the raffle at the Imperial Sand Dunes Annual Cleanup.

BLM Action: ISDRA Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: So far this season, our BLM Park Rangers responded to a total of 261 emergency medical services / search and rescue calls in the ISDRA. This is similar to the number of calls we had responded to by this time last year. Our current staff numbers have decreased to 4 park rangers (2x seasonal, 2x permanent) because some of our seasonal park rangers have accepted positions elsewhere. On February 29, 2016, we are beginning an Advanced EMT (AEMT) course held locally in partnership with the US Border Patrol. One of our seasonal park rangers will participate in the class. BLM staff will instruct the course. This will be the 8th collaborative EMT or AEMT class held between Border Patrol and BLM since 2012. We are applying for a safety grant to fund EMS/SAR in the ISDRA through the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division grant program. Finally, we will begin our hiring process for seasonal park rangers this spring for an anticipated entry on duty for training in mid-August.

BLM Action: Social Media

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The Imperial Sand Dunes Facebook page is coming upon its fourth year of providing visitors with information about the Imperial Sand Dunes. We currently have 7,909 “likes” and our posts receive thousands of views. Most posts include information about current conditions,

dunes safety, ISDRA Subgroup Meetings, OHV news, the historic Plank Road, and other dunes related information. We also share posts of volunteers and staff contributing to the public lands such as cleaning up trash or helping to reunite lost dogs with their owners. We continue to highlight the Discover the Desert initiative through posting desert filming photos and news. Discover the Desert focuses on educating, engaging and informing people about what the desert has to offer. We also work with the BLM National and California State Offices to provide Imperial Sand Dunes stories and highlights for their Facebook pages. "Like" us on [Facebook!](#)

BLM Action: Volunteer Program

Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Volunteers are vital to our program and its success. Time is contributed towards every division within the office, from conducting surveys with the Botanist and Geologist, to Dust Abatement with Maintenance, to being a Campground or Long Term Visitor Area (LTVA) camp host for the Recreation Planner, or even dressing as Seymour, the BLM mascot. In the first quarter, we had over 1,200 volunteers contribute over 7,000 hours of their time to our programs and events, an outstanding accomplishment.

BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Since the beginning of FY-16, the ECFO has received 113 applications for Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for a wide variety of activities, including competitive off-road racing, 4X4 touring, OHV demo rides, and vending goods and services. Of the 113 applications, 10



were for UTV, ATV and motorcycle races sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA) District 38. To date, eight races have been successfully completed with two to go. The great relationships we built with AMA District 38, the racing community, and other local agencies, enable us to work collaboratively to manage safe events.

BLM Action: Partnerships

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Every year, the ECFO works with many partners and sponsors to host events for the public. One notable partner is United Desert Gateway (UDG), who has contributed invaluable time and assistance to make our events successful. In January of this year, UDG helped put on a successful Discover the Desert - Star Wars event which drew a crowd of over 1,000 people who partook of educational booths, a fan art show, and photo opportunities with cosplayers. A free, outdoor showing of the movie, *Return of the Jedi*, partially filmed in the ISDRA, was the

highlight of the event. UDG also donated a Kawasaki UTV for use in maintaining ISDRA facilities.

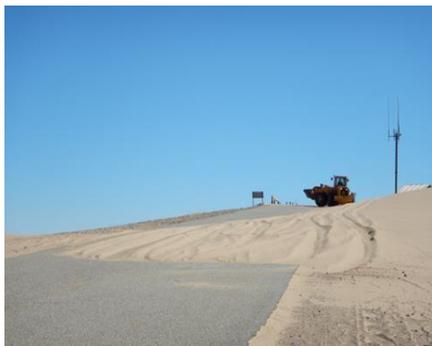


Members of a Star Wars cosplay group gather around the ISDRA entrance sign.

BLM Action: Dunes Maintenance

Contact: Barrett Trost, Maintenance Worker

Status: Our Maintenance crew continues its annual battle with encroaching sand dunes to keep access roads and camping areas open in the ISDRA. With the use of heavy equipment Nathan Yearsley and Barrett Trost remove sand drift from roadways and camping areas caused by heavy winds. Several seasonal employees work tirelessly to maintain the array of carsonite posts that delineate OHV closures for Pierson’s milkvetch. These work efforts help ensure safe access for visitors and staff and provide protection for important natural resource values.



Clearing the roadway to Osborne overlook – before and after.

Law Enforcement

Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Status: The ECFO Law Enforcement team completed our fourth holiday incident of the Winter Season and we are happy to report a down turn in alcohol related incidents and safety violations from last season. We enjoyed many opportunities to take some time with our dining community, providing education and outreach to visitors, including adults and youth, two and four-legged!



Currently, we are working on tidying up our program areas after the whirlwind season. In March, we will close out the 2013-2014 law enforcement OHV grant; continue work on the 2014-2015 grant; and put together the grant proposal for 2016-2017. The law enforcement program utilizes the grant funds for education, outreach, enforcement and equipment needs to support the OHV program throughout the ECFO. This year we will also be looking to make advancements in our technology by installing mobile printers in our patrol vehicles.

April brings about the LE annual in-service training period for the state of California. Each ranger attends a forty hour law enforcement specific training annually to update the rangers on current laws, procedures, and policies as well as to enhance their officer safety skills.

During the summer, we will continue our enforcement and education efforts, moving toward our cooler climate areas where visitation picks up. The McCain Valley will see high visitation this summer as it offers summertime OHV for dirt bikes and small ATVs in a more tolerable climate. We will focus on providing safe and secure riding and camping opportunities in this and similar areas in San Diego County.

We are also preparing for the arrival of six new rangers who will soon be joining the ECFO Law Enforcement Program. Six rangers have been selected and are being brought on board to begin required training as quickly as possible. Most of the new rangers will be required to attend the Land Management Police Training Academy. A couple have already completed an academy and may be able to skip this step. All will be required to successfully complete a Field Training

Evaluation Program which provides on the job training to build proficiency in public safety, officer safety and enforcement skills. Our goal is to produce law enforcement rangers who will excel at what they do.

During the winter months, Wyoming LE Ranger Weisend was detailed to our field office to help us during our busiest time. Ranger Weisend provided excellent service throughout the ECFO. In addition to his patrol duties, he participated in several training sessions, engaged the community during “Coffee with a cop” with the El Centro Police Department. He also conducted outreach in the rural community of Niland playing catch with underprivileged youth. His contributions to our LE Program will be missed as he returns to Wyoming to help serve that community.

BLM Action: California State Director Jerry Perez Tours the ECFO

Contact: Thomas Zale, Field Manager

Status: Over the President’s Day weekend, California State Director Jerry Perez and Associate State Director Joe Stout joined California Desert District Manager Teri Raml and Acting Associate District Manager Daryl Avery on a trip to El Centro. Their itinerary included participation in an all employee meeting and the in-briefing for ISDRA event staff as well as some time in the sand. When the going got tough for some of our visitors, Jerry pitched right in to lend a hand!



The itinerary also included an opportunity to meet members of the ISDRA Subgroup who joined us for dinner at Cahuilla Ranger Station on Friday night.



On Saturday, our group retraced the route of the DAC tour of our west desert described above with added stops at the Ocotillo Wind Energy Project and the Spoked Wheel, an archeological site of special importance to Native Americans.



Representatives of Imperial County, including County Supervisor Jack Terrazas and Manzanita Tribal Chairwoman Angela Santos and Councilman Johnny Elliot joined us for lunch at the Imperial Valley Desert Museum where discussions focused on collaboration and our shared desire to maintain strong positive relationships as we move towards a record of decision for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and other projects of mutual interest.

