

HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

May 21, 2016

Mojave Trails National Monument

BLM Action: On February 12, 2016 the President designated the Mojave Trails National Monument comprised of 1.6 million acres of land located primarily in San Bernardino County, the majority of which is managed by the Needles Field Office, but also overlaps into the Barstow Field Office. Additionally there is a small area encompassing Camp Granite Mountain within Riverside County managed by the Palm Springs Field Office.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office is the primary point of contact.

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: As the MTNM spans a large portion of two Field Offices we have put a team together comprised of staff from each office. The work of the MTNM will be coordinated and completed by this team. The team will ultimately be chaired by the MTNM Manager, but is currently being chaired by myself until that position can be filled.

One of the team's first endeavors was to design the image sign for the MTNM. The sign was unveiled at the Celebration for the three Monuments at the Wildlands Conservancy White Water Preserve on May 5, 2016. The sign includes an illustration banner on top which will serve as the MTNM Brand.

As noted above a Celebration for the three new National Monuments (Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountain) was hosted by the Wildlands Conservancy at their White Water Preserve. The Celebration was attended by a host of dignitaries from the DOI, BLM, local governments, and partner groups. Amongst the many activities included in the day was the unveiling of the three new monument signs.

The Department of Interior has a program called the Collaborative Incentive Program (CIP) which provides funding and expertise to projects that have complex and divergent public interest to support outreach and collaboration. The MTNM competed for support from this program and has been support from the CIP. The design of this support has not yet been determined but will likely include a situational assessment to help identify potential interest and then hopefully a few visioning and or focus groups meetings. This of course would be coordinated with the DAC Sub-Group should one be established.

Castle Mountain Mine Re-opening

BLM Action: The NEFO has been contacted by Castle Mountain Mining Company (CMMC) about the possibility of re-opening the Castle Mountain Gold Mine. The mine was operated by the Viceroy Mining Company from approximately 1991 through 2001. The NEFO has been in informal consultation with the CMMC since December 2013. CMMC has indicated that they do want to pursue re-opening the mine and that we can anticipate a proposed Plan of Operations (POO) soon. Indications are that the proposed POO will be to initiate operations within the previously authorized foot print of the mine.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manger

Status: With the advent of the designation of the Castle Mountain National Monument, the future ownership and jurisdiction of the surrounding lands is now resolved which brings a certain amount of clarity to the parameters in which the mine will operate. Castle Mountain Mining has indicted intent to move forward in the media.

Since the last DAC meeting the Castle Mountain Mining Company Ltd. has undergone a name change and is now referred to as NewCastle Gold Ltd. They have also expressed interest in resuming previously authorized exploration drilling within the previous claim area. At the time of this article, BLM was reviewing it's previous authorization and considering their request.

First Solar Stateline Solar Farm

BLM Action: Desert Stateline, LLC, now owned in partnership with Southern Power and First Solar Development, Inc. (First Solar) constructing a 300-megawatt alternating current solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating project known as the Stateline Solar Farm. The PV generating facility (Solar Farm), the corridor for the Project's 220-kilovolt (kV) generation interconnection (gen-tie) transmission line, and the access road is to be located in western Ivanpah Valley, east of Interstate 15 and northeast of the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System project. The project connects to the Southern California Edison (SCE) regional transmission grid via SCE's Ivanpah Substation.

Agencies: California Desert District Renewable Energy Action Team and Needles Field Office

Contacts: Greg Helseth, Project Manager
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: Project construction continues at the Stateline Solar site. All of the pre-construction grading is complete as is construction of all of the vaults. BLM and First Solar are currently working to coordinate the completion of the several off site mitigation measures including restoration of approximately 30 routes of travel, restoration and development of

recreation improvements near Whisky Pete's, and highway fencing along the Morning Star Mine Rd within the Mojave Preserve.

Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System

BLM Action: Solar Partners', LLC have constructed the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System, a concentrated solar electrical generating facility capable of generating 370 megawatts (MW) of renewable power. The project is located in the Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada, and consist of three power plants, Ivanpah 1, Ivanpah 2 and Ivanpah 3. Shared facilities include a substation and natural gas pipeline. The three independent power plants and shared substation are co-located on approximately 3,671 acres of Bureau administered public land.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: The long awaited 50 miles of Desert Tortoise Highway Fencing is currently under construction. The ISEGS project was required to fence 50 miles of highway as off-site mitigation for impacts to the Desert Tortoise. This proved to be a complicated undertaking both in design and coordination with all parties. The I15 section between Nipton Rd and Yates Well Rd is complete and the I40 sections from Hwy 95 to Goffs Rd are under construction.

Interconnect Towers, LLC.

BLM Action: Interconnect Towers, LLC (ICT) have submitted applications to construct communication sites along I-40 and I-15. The proposed locations are Blind Hills, Ash Hill, Halloran Springs, Nipton, I-40/HWY 95 junction, and I-40 near Park Moabi Rd. The proposed projects would potentially provide increased cell phone and emergency response services in areas currently deemed as limited

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: NEFO continues to work with ICT to complete environmental analysis of the proposed projects. Some of these projects are located within the newly designated Mojave Trails National Monument and will need to be considered under that new designation. The DAC can anticipate a request for public comments and likely a public meeting on these proposals as the project matures.

Abandoned Mine Lands

BLM Action: The NEFO is actively pursuing inventories, prioritization and closures of abandoned mines that may present a public safety hazard.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office with support from the California Desert District and California Department of Conservation

Contact: Sterling White, CDD AML
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: Bat surveys and other natural and cultural resource surveys are being conducted as funds and staffing allow for the development of a NEPA document and a possible contract for the closures. Much of the inventory work and bat surveys are accomplished by contractors, staff, and volunteers.

Partnerships

Chicago Botanical Garden – The NFO will be partnering with the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Conservation and Land Management Internship to host 4 interns this spring. Two interns will be working on the Seeds of Success program. The program collects native plant seeds which are stored for use in research, restoration, or reclamation projects. Two other interns will be working on an OHMVR Grant-funded Invasive and Sensitive plant inventory project. This work will be the last season of a three year project that is focused on the inventory of invasive and sensitive plant species adjacent to NEMO and NECO roads and trails.

Amargosa Conservancy - The NFO and the Amargosa Conservancy (AC) are working together in protective and conservation efforts at Crystal Springs, Wildhorse Spring, and Horse Thief Springs in the Kingston Range. AC has provided cleanup efforts and are “eyes and ears” for the field office in this remote area.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) – the RSABG helps with sensitive plant inventory and SOS collections in remote portions of the NFO, and partners with NFO SOS interns to complete large seed collections.

California Trail Users Coalition - The NFO has entered into an agreement with the California Trail Users Coalition (CTUC) to extend their successful map series to include the NFO. This includes the development of a three map series covering our jurisdiction. The project is funded through a grant from the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

All three maps covering the Needles Field Office jurisdiction have been completed and are now available through the CTUC, and the Needles Field Office. The NFO has also initiated a distribution network utilizing local RV Resorts along the Colorado River.

All maps use a comprehensive route network, developed by staff based on the designated open

route system for the map series. This network highlights long distance touring opportunities and access to recreational points of interest. The routes are marked; those with assigned names have been marked with stickers showing the names and numbers that correspond to labels on the maps.

Native American Lands Conservancy (NALC) – The NFO is partnering with the NALC to support the management of the Old Woman Mtn. Wilderness and the adjacent NALC Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The NFO supported the NALC in the development of an OHMVR restoration grant to provide restoration and barriers along the borders of the Old Woman Mtn Wilderness and the Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The grant will be administered by the NALC.

Research Institutions – The NFO supports research proposals through timely submissions of research permits and letters of support for funding proposals within the NFO. This year, the NFO has provided logistical support to researchers from the University of California – Davis, the San Diego Zoo, USGS, Point Blue Conservation Science, Cornell University, the California Academy of Sciences, and others, to facilitate relevant and timely research in the region.

Outreach – The NFO has provided multiple outreach events to the Chemehuevi Native American Tribe, including presenting at their winter festival, at an event for visiting students, and at an Earth Day event in 2016. They are also about to host a SCA wildcorps crew, who is doing ongoing restoration on a road in wilderness.