

HIGHLIGHTS EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE

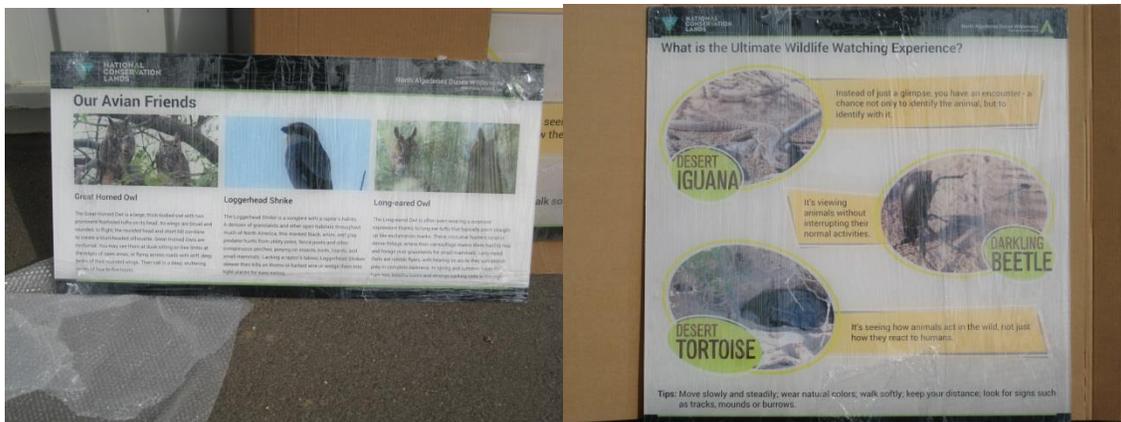
California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting May 20, 2016

Collaboration

BLM Action: Watchable Wildlife Site Upgrades

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist

Status: The El Centro Field Office continues to work proactively with one of its partners, the United Desert Gateway, most recently on the Watchable Wildlife Site project near the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area within the Imperial Sand Dunes. The BLM and the United Desert Gateway, along with local business, The Conveyor Group, designed the replacement wayside and kiosk panels for this educational location. These will be installed prior to the Fiscal Year 2017 season.



BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Subgroup

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup had a meeting on March 17, 2016 to discuss and review the preliminary OHV grants to be submitted by the BLM. 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.

The next ISDRA Subgroup meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at the El Centro Field Office. Discussion will include information from the BLM regarding the 2015-2016 OHV season overview and recreation fees. More information about the ISDRA Subgroup can be found on this website, including meeting dates, minutes, agendas and additional information:

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

Sustainability

BLM Action: Imperial Solar Energy Center West Restoration
Contact: Veronica Vogan, Realty Specialist



Status: The Imperial Solar Energy Center West (C-Solar West) project owned by Tenaska, Inc. recently completed restoration of over 12 acres of land they were intending to use as an access road. However, these lands were no longer needed when they decided to reroute the access road onto their private property. C-Solar West ripped the area to a depth of 12”-18”, spread the existing mulch, and seeded the 12 acres with creosote seeds over the ripped area, thus restoring the area to blend with native lands. In addition, C-Solar West agreed to construct a fence to deter OHV traffic from entering the restored area. This project is now complete.

BLM ACTION: Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Bat Surveys
Contact: Carrie Simmons, Acting Field Manager





The week of April 18-21, 2016, the El Centro Field Office worked with bat biologist Pat Brown to conduct bat monitoring surveys in the Cargo Muchacho Mountains. Volunteers, employees from the California Desert District, El Centro and Yuma Field Offices, and the Bureau of Reclamation came out to assist. Multiple shafts and adits were surveyed at Tumco, American Girl, and in Jackson Gulch area for occupancy. Some of the mines were maternity areas, and most of the bats were pregnant females. Surveys are accomplished by placing infrared lights next to the openings of the mines, and volunteers sit outside the entrance wearing night vision goggles. The monitor then keeps track of how many bats fly in and out of the mine, as well as the relative size of the bats.

The data from these and other assessments will help determine which mines can be backfilled, since they are not occupied, and which mines will need to be closed with special gates due to the presence of bats.

Community

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Outreach Events

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: This season, the El Centro Field Office orchestrated five OHV education and safety outreach programs. Three outreach events were conducted by ISDRA Park Rangers at Oldsmobile Hill, and both the Cahuilla and Buttercup Ranger Stations. The events focused primarily on dunes safety and were orchestrated via face-to-face talks with Park Rangers and a cup of coffee, and an interactive "Fatal Vision" course. Park Rangers set up in front of the Ranger Stations to interact with members of the public and covered all topics from dunes rescues, to answering questions. The "Fatal Vision" outreach course was a great success in which members of the public had the opportunity to experience the dangers of drunk driving. In the course, supervised members of the public wore alcohol impairment simulation goggles and walked through a course marked with cones.



ISDRA Park Ranger hands out UDG to a member of the public during outreach event.



ISDRA Park Ranger explains the Avenza App to members of the public.

Public Service

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

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: As of April 6, El Centro Field Office Park Rangers have responded to 313 emergency medical and rescue calls. In general this change represents less than a 1% difference between the overall totals for calls within the last 4 years however an increase in the severity of injuries encountered has been noted. Trainings are underway for staff to enhance medical and rescue

capabilities in the field. Coordination is continuing with the BLM National Training Center for designating the yearly ISDRA Park Ranger training as the official BLM agency training program for park rangers nationwide. The El Centro Field Office will begin the hiring process for seasonal park rangers during May and June 2016. The training cycle for these park rangers will begin in August in order for staff to be fully qualified and prepared for the next OHV season beginning this October.



Park Rangers with an injured rider in the ISDRA await a helicopter for transport.

BLM Action: Law Enforcement

Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger

Status: The El Centro Field Office Law Enforcement program has moved into the post recreation season as the Imperial Valley begins to heat up. We are closing out another great season and are now moving our focus to other areas such as follow-up work on special recreation permit issues; wildlife gathering permits; and realty trespass cases that have presented themselves throughout the year. Recreation has not completely left the public lands this summer however; our McCain Valley Resident Law Enforcement Ranger will be busy providing public safety to the Eastern San Diego County Areas as the hot weather moves visitors to the higher elevations.

The Law Enforcement 2015 grant has been closed out and we have been implementing our 2016 grant and completing the application process for the 2017 grant. Last year the El Centro Field Office utilized the grant to fund a detail for a senior ranger to augment the local Law Enforcement Rangers. This year we are looking to “outfit” our newest rangers as well as begin automating some of our law enforcement processes in the field.

In addition to the ongoing case work and projects, the El Centro Law Enforcement Rangers will spend the next few months on professional development; attend law enforcement in-service, resource protection training, leadership development and criminal investigator training as mandated by the BLM regulations.

We have also begun the process of integrating new law enforcement rangers into our Field Office. This began with the addition of one Ranger in April who is currently attending Land Management Police Training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. We hope to have two more rangers in the police academy by June and all 6 of our new Rangers on board by the end of the summer. This is an exciting time for our Law Enforcement program with the recent introduction of two new supervisors and six new rangers complementing our historic program.

April marks the 38th anniversary of the inception of the BLM's Law Enforcement Ranger Program; when the first 13 BLM Rangers were sworn in for law enforcement authority in Riverside, California. These Rangers attended the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, as well as a Natural Resource Law Enforcement course at the California Department of Forestry Academy in Ione in 1977 and were delegated by 1978. Rangers were assigned throughout the California Desert Conservation Area which encompasses the El Centro Field Office.

To recognize the recently passed women's history month, Lynell Schalk (pictured below) was one of the inaugural 13 Rangers and was assigned to what was known then as the El Centro Resource Area. Ranger Schalk was the first female ranger and she went on to become the first female officer to serve as Special Agent in Charge for Oregon and Washington.



The El Centro Field Office has a great law enforcement legacy established after the passing of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The Ranger Program has “raised” countless Rangers that have gone on to successful careers throughout the BLM. Today, the California Special Agent in Charge served earlier in his career at the El Centro Field Office as did our current BLM State Chief Ranger. Most notably is the service of our National Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, whose law enforcement career also began in El Centro.

Our six new rangers have big shoes to fill as they join the El Centro family; they are welcomed by a team of Supervisory Rangers that have 16 years of El Centro service and a senior law enforcement Ranger that has been with the El Centro Field Office for 5 years.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The El Centro Field Office continues to manage a successful fee collection program for the ISDRA. The Fee Contractor performed well with no formal complaints. As of February 29, 2016 over 45,000 permits were sold (4,536 Seasonal Permits and 40,946 Weekly Permits). The fee period ended April 15, 2016, and camping will be free through September 30, 2016.

Fee Report for FY15

FY 2015 ISDRA Fee Revenue	\$2,891,234
Total FY 2015 Funds	\$2,891,234

FLREA Section	2015
Maintenance	\$216,290
Visitor Services	\$604,485
Law Enforcement	\$513,582
Fee Program Management	\$575,518
Overhead	\$95,358
FY 2015 Expenditures TOTAL	\$2,005,234

ISDRA Fee Expenditure Categories

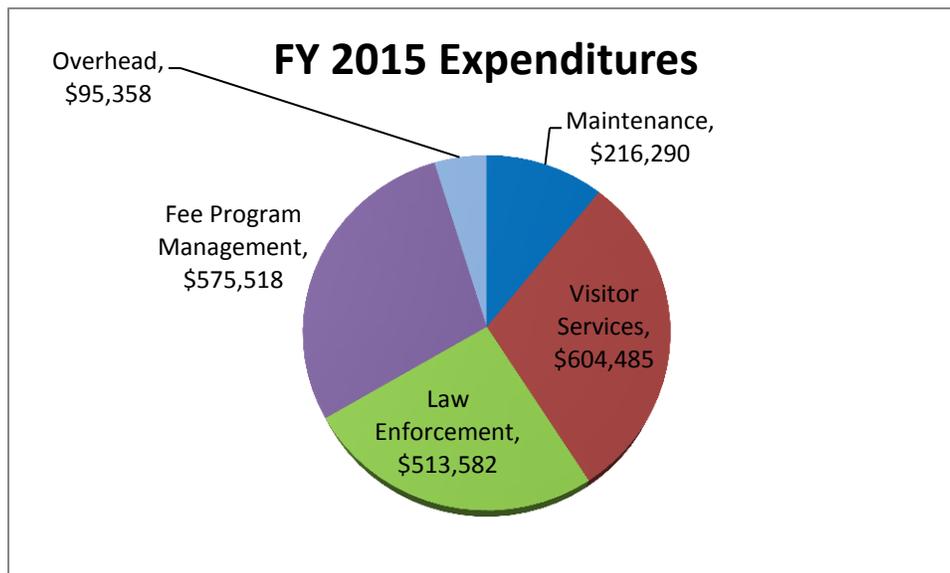
Maintenance –Trash collection, restroom maintenance, road and camping pad grading, sand removal from road and campgrounds.

Visitor Services – Emergency Medical / Rescue Services, dispatch, travel costs for holiday assistance, vehicles, education and outreach, maps.

Law Enforcement – labor, vehicles, and travel costs for holiday assistance.

Fee Program Management – Management and labor for permit program including on and off site sales, website management, printing, mailing, vendor management.

Overhead – Labor, training, and travel.



BLM Action: Visitor Services and Statistics

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: As of April 10, 2016, visitation in the ISDRA reached a total of 751,734. Visitation counts will be collected throughout the summer months and the final end of fiscal year counts will be collected the last week of September 2016. Visitation is expected to decrease from now until September due to the hot summer temperatures. ISDRA Park Rangers, Law Enforcement, and Recreation staff continued to make positive visitor contacts throughout the season. Park Rangers and Law Enforcement Rangers made several camp contacts handing out informative brochures (UDG Guides), maps, Take-It-Outside cards, and sharing information about the Avenza App. BLM Recreation staff and signers also shared valuable information and outreach to OHV riders during the four major holidays in the ISDRA. Recreation staff pre-positioned in areas of high OHV traffic near the critical habitat closures and made positive outreach contacts in which they would educate members of the public on closure boundaries. BLM staff continued to look for proper dune etiquette and good stewards to the land all season long in efforts to reward young riders with a "Dune Guard Card."



Park Rangers Promoting Dune Safety to Young Duners

BLM Action: OHV Grant Program

Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM invited the public to comment on preliminary grant applications submitted for the 2016 OHV grants. Public comments were accepted from March 8 through April 4, 2016. The El Centro Field Office has applied for projects in the categories of ground operations, law enforcement and safety. The office is requesting approximately \$800,000. Final grant applications were due on May 2, 2016. Final awards will be published on June 6, 2016. To review the preliminary OHV grants visit: <http://ohv.parks.ca.gov/> and click on the "Grants" tab.

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. We currently have 8,577 "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. Volunteer time is contributed towards every division within the Field Office, from conducting scientific 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. This fiscal year we have 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: This year to date the El Centro Field Office has received 116 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 116 applications, 16 were for UTV, ATV and motorcycle races sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA) District 38. 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. The El Centro Field Office is currently accepting SRP applications for Fiscal Year 2017 and has already begun reviewing applications for October.



BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits- Vending

Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: As stated above, in Fiscal Year 2016, the El Centro Field Office received 116 Special Recreation Permit (SRP) applications however the majority of these applicants—80 to be exact—are vendors: businesses providing services to the visitors of the ISDRA, Superstition and Plaster City, and the LTVAs. Vendors provide amenities such as septic removal, RV and OHV rentals, and provide items such as firewood, ice, OHV flags, and repair parts and services. The vending

program provides visitors to the El Centro Field Office with convenient and essential services and items, and enhances the overall experience at the ISDRA.

BLM Action: ISDRA Closure Signing

Contact: Barrett Trost, Maintenance Worker

Status: Closures are in effect to conserve the habitat of several plant and animal species found within the dunes, one of which is the federally threatened Peirson's milk-vetch. A crew of seasonal BLM employees sign approximately 9000 acres of closures following the guidance of a GPS down to meter accuracy. Over the last 6 months, the signing crew has installed 7500 signs.



BLM Action: Cahuilla Ranger Station Replacement

Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator

Status: The current Cahuilla Ranger Station located on Gecko Road has seen many seasons throughout its life and just as many changes in the demands that have been placed upon it. A 5-year plan has been submitted to begin preparation for the replacement of the Cahuilla Ranger Station which has been in service since 1989 and is no longer capable of accommodating BLM staff and visitors. The replacement of this Ranger station will be a benefit to both the public and the BLM employees who utilize it.



BLM Action: Osborne Overlook Upgrades

Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator

Status: The El Centro Field Office will begin construction at Osborne Overlook during the summer months of 2016. The construction will replace degraded asphalt and solve drainage issues at the Overlook. Along with these upgrades there will be added space for large RVs and

