

HIGHLIGHTS EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

May 9, 2015

Sustainability

BLM Action: Peirson's Milk-vetch Monitoring in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area

Contact: Andrew Trouette, Botanist

Status: Six plots were monitored in spring of 2015. The monitoring protocol was developed through coordination between the BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service Carlsbad Field Office. Peirson's milkvetch is named for Frank Peirson, an early California plant collector who was the first to prepare a scientific collection of the plant back in 1927. In the United States, the plant is known only from the Algodones Dunes (Imperial Sand Dunes), and in nearby Mexico from a limited area of dunes within the Gran Desierto, in the northwestern portion of the state of Sonora.



BLM botanists monitoring a plot in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area

Heritage

BLM Action: Discover the Desert Heritage Outreach

Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning

Status: On Saturday, March 7, 2015, the El Centro Field Office participated in the 2015 Arizona Archaeology Expo held at the Yuma Quartermaster Depot State Historic Park. The Expo provided visitors from the local area, around the country and Canada a special opportunity to

learn more about why it is important to preserve nonrenewable archaeological resources and historic places. They also learned what archaeologists, historians, and tribal members do in their jobs and just how rich and diverse the desert of the southwest is. Educational activities included lectures, demonstrations, and exhibits. The El Centro Field Office highlighted the Discover the Desert theme by passing out route maps of the El Centro Field Office and featuring information and photos of the historic Plank Road, which recently celebrated its 100th birthday. A big hit with the many children at the Expo was the button making activity at the El Centro booth. The children were asked questions about what types of animals one might find in the desert and then colored their own button.



[BLMer Jeff Sahagun educates attendees about the El Centro Field Office's cultural resources.](#)

Community

BLM Action: Volunteer Clean-up in the Fish Creek Mountains Wilderness

Contact: John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

Status: The BLM authorized a volunteer clean up near the Fish Creek Mountains Wilderness, just off of Split Mountain Road in Imperial County by the outdoor recreation organization, SOCAL Desert Rendezvous. They focused their attention on target shooting debris. Over the past few years, this group has been splitting their time between the El Centro and Palm Springs Field Offices. This year, although hot and windy, they had over 100 volunteers, hauled out over 15 pick-up truck loads of trash equaling 1.6 tons! Trash was collected along a two mile stretch of road and was completed in three hours.

BLM Action: ECFO Route Maps Phone App

Contact: Jeffrey Sahagun, GIS Specialist

Status: The El Centro Field Office is excited to announce that BLM route maps for Imperial and San Diego Counties have gone mobile! There are currently four geo-referenced pdf maps available: The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, Western Imperial County Routes, Eastern Imperial County Routes, and Eastern San Diego County Routes.

These maps are available for free download at The App Store for iOS and Google Play for Android (just select your device's icon). Then search for the Avenza PDF Reader App and download the Avenza app to your smartphone or tablet. Next, search the Avenza store (the shopping cart icon) for BLM California and download the BLM El Centro Field Office route maps you want.

These maps will use your phone or tablet's GPS for easy navigation (cell coverage is not needed). The app renders maps quickly and features multi-touch gestures. You can pan, zoom, use GPS to locate yourself on the map, drop placemarks, add attributes, and measure area and distance. For more information go to Avenza's website at www.pdf-maps.com or contact Jeff Sahagun at jsahagun@blm.gov or 760-337-4435.

BLM Action: "Arms and the Dudes" Film Permit

Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Business Support Associate

Status: Currently there is an independent movie production constructing a set for an upcoming movie shoot entitled, "*Arms and the Dudes*" directed by Todd Philips of the Hangover series. Jonah Hill will star in the production. The movie tells the true story of young men during the Iraq War who exploit a little-known government initiative that allows small businesses to bid on U.S. Military contracts and who were able to secure a \$300 million deal to arm the Afghan Military. Set construction is occurring within the Superstition Mountains Open OHV Area and filming will take place in mid-April. Restoration of the site is to be completed by May 1, 2015.

BLM Action: ISDRA Education and Outreach

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Plank Road Centennial Discover the Desert Event - On February 21st the BLM, United Desert Gateway, and community partners celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Plank Road. The event commemorated the visionaries who cobbled together a road of planks to traverse the nearly-impossible-to-cross Imperial Sand Dunes. The Plank Road became the unlikely last link in an east-west route that connected Arizona to coastal San Diego. Construction began on the first Plank Road in 1915. The idea for a road made of wooden planks was conceived by Edwin Boyd, the County Supervisor of Holtville. The project, in large part, was undertaken due to the influence of Ed Fletcher, the first Road Commissioner of San Diego County. Fletcher raised the money and made arrangements for lumber to be donated to the project. Many of Ed Fletcher's descendants were in attendance for this Centennial event. The event featured presentations by Desert Advisory Council and California Off-road Vehicle Association (CORVA) Member Randy Banis, Imperial County Supervisor Ray Castillo, BLM California State Director Jim Kenna, and CORVA co-founder Bob Ham. Rebecca Terrazas-Baxter represented Congressman Juan Vargas and presented a Congressional Proclamation to BLM El Centro Field Manager Tom Zale and BLM CA State Director Jim Kenna. Master of ceremonies and BLM California Desert District Manager Teri Raml was happy to welcome Bill DuBois, who sat on his dad's lap in a Model T as

it rode on the original Plank Road. Years of planning and coordination with the United Desert Gateway, culminated at the new and improved Plank Road area off of Gray's Well Road. A new parking lot allows visitors to access the historic site along with new interpretive panels and a replica of Plank Road where visitors can drive and take a photo of their adventure.



The crowd gathers under a canopy in the new parking lot, which will accommodate additional visitors who wish to see the preserved section of Plank Road.



A small section of recreated plank road has been constructed by BLM. It is located so visitors can park on it to take pictures for their social media postings. #PlankRoad



A Model T sits on a replica Plank Road, down the hill from the preserved section of the original



Jim Kenna unveils the new Plank Road informational kiosk with Imperial County Supervisors Ray Castillo and Jack Terrazas. The BLM also unveiled a new Kiosk, featuring information about the past, present, and future of the plank road and surrounding area.

Facebook continues to be a great tool for providing visitors with information about the Imperial Sand Dunes. Currently we have 5,741 likes and have reached over 65,000 people through our Facebook posts in March 2015. Posts included information about dunes safety, volunteer events, the historic Plank Road, photos and other dunes related information.

BLM Action: Preliminary OHV Grants

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The Bureau of Land Management invited the public to comment on proposals it has submitted for the 2015 Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Proposal. Public comments were accepted from March 3 through April 6. The El Centro Field Office has applied for projects in the categories of ground operations, law enforcement, restoration and safety. The office is requesting approximately \$1,000,000. Final grant applications will be due on May 4, 2015.

BLM Action: ISDRA DAC Subgroup Vacancies

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert District Desert Advisory Council (DAC) announced an open application period for membership on its Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) subgroup. Applications for the BLM DAC ISDRA subgroup were due April 3, 2015.

The BLM is looking to fill five vacant positions for the ISDRA subgroup. Persons interested in serving on the subgroup should meet at least one of the following qualifications pertaining to the ISDRA in eastern Imperial County: be a user or stakeholder; reside in a neighboring community; or have knowledge of or experience with the ISDRA. Expertise with California off-highway vehicle (OHV) interests, Arizona OHV interests, local government, commercial filming, biological or natural history scientific expertise, or residence in a neighboring community is also recommended.

The subgroup meets at least three times per year, once before the recreation season, once during the season, and once after the season. The next meetings will be held on May 21, 2015, August 6, 2015, and December 17, 2015 at the El Centro Field Office beginning at 9:30 a.m. All meetings are open to the public.

BLM Action: BLM Announces Intent to Prepare Environmental Review for Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM published a Notice of Intent (NOI) on February 9th to conduct an environmental review for the Ocotillo Wells Recreation Area in Imperial County.

The BLM will prepare an environmental impact statement to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of resource and recreation management at the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) and a proposed amendment to the BLM California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan. The California State Parks, who manage the SVRA through a Memorandum of Understanding, will jointly prepare an environmental impact report for their General Plan update.

Publication of the Notice of Intent initiates a public scoping period which ended April 6, 2015. During the scoping period, the BLM solicited public comments on planning issues, environmental concerns, potential impacts, alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be included in the analysis of the proposed action.

Public meetings were held in Temecula on Wednesday, March 18 and at the Ocotillo Wells SVRA Visitor Center on Saturday, March 21. The BLM will use the public scoping comments received to prepare the draft environmental documents to be available for public review in 2015.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Between October 2014 and March 2015, 38,276 permits were sold generating \$2,360,000 in revenues. Fee compliance remains high at 89% compliant after checking 3,548 individual vehicles. Cumulative visitation is 817,000, showing no increase from the same time in FY 2014.

The fee season will close April 15 and no fees will be charged until October 1. The fee management contract ends in April and a new solicitation will be announced soon to select a contractor for next season.

BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)

Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

Status: Ranger stations are scheduled to close on Sunday April 12. EMS/SAR call volume is at or near where it was last fiscal year. Different trainings are being coordinated this spring including interagency emergency medical technician (EMT) and Advanced EMT courses taught by BLM staff in El Centro. These courses are being provided jointly through a partnership between BLM and Border Patrol, and serve to increase the numbers and qualifications of federal staff to better serve the public in the deserts of Imperial County.



BLM Park Rangers and the U.S. Border Patrol carry an injured rider to an awaiting helicopter.

We are also currently preparing for the 2015/2016 season and recruiting staff via www.usajobs.gov. If you know anyone who enjoys OHV recreation, is interested in the BLM mission, and capable of passing an intense search and rescue training class, have them apply online and select El Centro, California as a desired location. Hiring will be done over the summer months with training beginning in the early fall.



BLM Park Rangers reward young riders for safe riding!

BLM Action: El Centro Field Office Participates in ISDRA Tours

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM recently participated in two tours of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area requested by the American Sand Association (ASA). The first tour the BLM participated in was with the ASA and the United State Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The tour helped familiarize new staff and managers at the USFWS with the Peirson's Milk-vetch critical habitat boundaries. The second tour requested by the ASA was with Congressman Juan Vargas to highlight and show Representative Vargas the ISDRA.

BLM Action: Maintenance

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Clean and sanitary toilets continue to be a high priority for BLM and visitors. Through grant and fee dollars, one full time worker, and a few volunteers clean and maintain 62 vault toilets for about 1,000,000 visitors during the year. Signing the critical habitat closure in the dunes and road maintenance continue to be our main duties. A two person team signs the closures about 40 hours per week.

BLM Action: Law Enforcement**Contact: Stephanie Clark, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger**

Status: Activity has been high these last winter months with Law Enforcement Rangers closing out the ISDRA 2014-15 season and readying themselves for the upcoming summer months. The team is working with Ocotillo Wind to provide better enforcement and management of the area to the organization in their restoration efforts. Many of the route signs will be replaced and high trafficked routes will receive additional signs to help direct visitors in unclear areas.

Target shooting has been a focus these past few months culminating in an area clean-up by a volunteer group the weekend of March 21. Rangers were out advising the public of the clean-up and educating them on responsible target shooting activities. The Fish Creek Wilderness Boundary from the Anza Borrego State Park is a highly utilized area that suffers from the impacts of irresponsible shooters. Also, many visitors in target shooting areas like the Davies Canyon area have been educated on responsible target shooting as it is being discovered that cross route target shooting has become an issue. Rangers continue to demonstrate the multi-use activities to the target shooters; many are unaware of the other recreation activities offered in the area.

Rangers continue to support the California Desert Conservation Area through enforcement of the camping regulations. Campers in excess of the 14 day limit are being directed to the four (4) local Long Term Visitor Areas: Pilot Knob, Tamarisk, Imperial Dam, and Hot Springs. They are also redirecting campers within our areas of critical environmental concern. By lessening the long term impact of visitors we will preserve the desert for future generations and ensure the natural growth of wildlife. The El Centro Field Office law enforcement personnel will be participating in an upcoming restoration project of one highly impacted area, ridding it of many disturbances made over the past few years.

During the summer we will continue our enforcement and education efforts, moving toward our cooler climate areas where visitation picks up over the summer. We have already and will be participating in many details in other field offices to gain valuable training and to support our national events in other locations. We will continue projects to streamline our unit, identifying cost effective ways to work efficiently with less overhead.