

**HIGHLIGHTS  
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting  
October 15, 2016**



**Preparations are underway for the 2016-2017 visitor use season. The BLM places a high priority on providing opportunities for safe, family-friendly recreation in America's Great Outdoors!**

## Collaboration

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Subgroup**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup held a meeting on August 4, 2016 to discuss the 2015-2016 OHV season overview and to review the final OHV grants to be submitted by the BLM.

The next ISDRA Subgroup meeting is scheduled for December 15, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at the El Centro Field Office. Discussion will include information from the BLM regarding the 2016-2017 OHV season.

## Community

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Education and Outreach**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** Staff from the El Centro Field Office recently attended the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Sand Sport Super Show, the world's largest sand sports trade show and expo. The event provides a great opportunity to reach thousands of sand enthusiasts, and each year ECFO staff is on hand to provide show-goers the latest information regarding the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA). This year, new ISDRA maps and information about Avenza PDF Maps, the mobile map app, were distributed and discussed with visitors at the booth.

During the 2016/2017 season, BLM will continue the education efforts and has a goal to schedule at least five OHV safety educational events. The events will be advertised on the BLM Facebook page as well as the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area webpage. Topics may include impaired driving, navigation, natural resource issues and OHV laws and regulations.





Top: the ECFO display at the 2016 Sand Sport Super Show. Bottom left: Park Ranger Brian Puckett converses with show-goers.

**BLM Action: “The Real Housewives of Orange County” Filming Permit**

**Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Realty Specialist**

**Status:** On March 30, 2016, taping of an episode of the Bravo TV series *The Real Housewives of Orange County* within the ISDRA occurred via a film permit with the ECFO. The BLM monitored the participants’ activities and BLM Park Rangers/EMTs responded to an off-highway vehicle accident that occurred during filming. The episode aired on the Bravo Channel on September 5, 2016 and highlighted the great work of the ISDRA Recreation Staff.



BLM ECFO Park Ranger Brian Puckett responds to the scene of the crash during filming of *The Real Housewives of Orange County*.

## Public Service

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

#### **Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger**

**Status:** Five seasonal park rangers were hired this for the upcoming dunes season and reported for duty on August 8, 2016. These park rangers are currently undergoing an intensive 10-week training program that will prepare them for the job to come. Along with the general park ranger training, they will complete an emergency medical technician course, courses in basic and advanced off-road vehicle operation, technical search and rescue, radio communications, and helicopter operations. This training is instructed by local BLM staff and portions of it are conducted jointly with the US Border Patrol.

The ECFO has been working together very closely with the BLM National Training Center (NTC), who has recognized our park ranger training program and is providing support for this class along with future trainings. The August cohort will be in the inaugural BLM National Park Ranger training course.

Ranger Stations are scheduled to open October 14, with all park ranger staff being operational at that time.



**US Border Patrol and BLM staff work together to complete a training scenario in the ISDRA.**

### **BLM Action: Law Enforcement**

#### **Contact: George Masner, Acting Chief Law Enforcement Ranger**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office Law Enforcement program is preparing for the upcoming 2016-2017 recreation season as the Imperial Valley begins to cool down, and has already observed an influx of visitors to the area.

In the summer months we continued our enforcement and education efforts toward our cooler climate areas where visitation picks up once the heat sets into the valley. The McCain Valley area has seen high visitation during the summer as it offers OHV for dirt bikes at a tolerable climate. We focused on and provided safe and secure riding and camping opportunities in this and similar areas.

Preparation for the 2016-2017 dunes season includes bringing all of the LE equipment in for service and maintenance. We must maintain our ATVs, UTVs, and Sand Rails to ensure availability during the busy season. All of our equipment is utilized non-stop for the season—we lose the ability to take it out of service for maintenance due to the high visitation.

We are also in the process of growing our Law Enforcement Team by hiring new supervisory, senior, and entry level field rangers. These newest members of our team will help us meet the mission of the BLM and the goals and objectives of the El Centro Field Office for protecting cultural and natural resources, managing recreation, and providing public safety.

One of the new Law Enforcement Rangers joins us from the Recreation staff and continues to work at ECFO until his departure to attend the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy (FLETC) in October. Two new rangers successfully completed all of their performance requirements and were sworn into office on August 11 and August 29, 2016. They are both now participating in the Field Training Evaluation Program (FTEP) and will return sometime in November. We are eagerly awaiting the arrival of three more new rangers.

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 over 16 years combined law enforcement experience, most of which were here in El Centro. The Chief Supervisory Law Enforcement Ranger with the El Centro Field Office for 2 years was also here for the welcoming, but recently vacated her position with the El Centro Field Office for the BLM Las Vegas Field Office in Nevada.



**Alexander Stewart's swearing in ceremony at the El Centro Field Office on August 11, 2016. Pictured from left to right are: Robert Hermes, Daniel Baca, Stephanie Clark, Alexander Stewart, California BLM State Director Jerome "Jerry" Perez, Carrie Simmons, and Thomas F. Zale.**



**Robert Hermes' swearing in on August 29, 2016. Pictured left to right are: Carrie Simmons (Acting Field Manager at the time), Robert Hermes, and former Chief Law Enforcement Officer Stephanie Clark.**

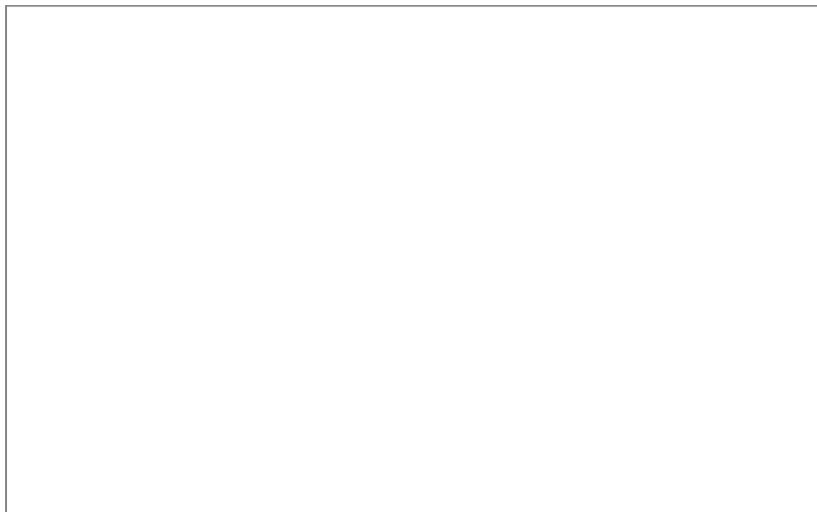


**Alexander Stewart during his swearing in, led by BLM California State Director Jerome "Jerry" Perez.**

**BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update and Visitation  
Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The fee season closed April 15, 2016 and was reestablished on October 1. Since October of 2015 there were 3,341 Seasonal and 43,172 Weekly permits sold—about the same during the same timeframe last season (3,091 Seasonal and 43,544 Weekly). Pre-season permit sales began mid-September and a final 2015-2016 annual report will be produced near the end of the first quarter.

As of September 18, 2016, visitation in the ISDRA reached a total of 860,664 visitors. Visitation counts were collected throughout the summer months and the final end of fiscal year counts will be collected the last week of September 2016.



**BLM Action: OHV Grant Program****Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office was successfully awarded \$845,017 in OHV grants for the 2016-2017 season. The ECFO applied for projects in the categories of Ground Operations, Law Enforcement and Safety. To review the final 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 9,333 “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 in ways such as cleaning trash or helping 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 of the cultural, historical, archaeological, environmental, and recreation opportunities within the desert. We also work with the BLM National and California State Offices, providing Imperial Sand Dunes stories and highlights for their Facebook pages and other social media networks. "Like" us on Facebook!

**BLM Action: Volunteer Program****Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** There are many jobs and activities that BLM employees would love to do, but which prioritizing pushes to the backburner. This is where volunteers step in and step up. This fiscal year, we have had volunteers contribute their time in multiple forms throughout the field office, from setting up and breaking down the Star Wars event at Buttercup in January, inventory of items needed for the dunes season during the summer months, to general office duties—cleaning cubicles, shredding paper, and answering phones at the front desk. Volunteer involvement at the ECFO is very much appreciated. We would like to thank our 1,200+ volunteers for their 7,000+ hours contributed to helping our office work towards its mission!

**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office received and permitted 117 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 117 applications, 16 were for UTV, ATV and motorcycle races sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA) District 38. The great relationships we have 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 continues to accept SRP applications for Fiscal Year 2017.



**Left: A participant of a Trial Run event in Lark Canyon of McCain Valley. Right: Competitors in an event in the West Desert prepare for their race.**

**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits- Vending**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** As stated above the El Centro Field Office received 117 Special Recreation Permit (SRP) applications in the 2016 fiscal year, 80 of which are vendors: businesses providing services to the visitors of the ISDRA, Superstition and Plaster City, and the LTVAs. Vendors provide services such as septic removal, repairs, and Off-Highway Vehicle rentals, and items such as firewood, ice, and whips. 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: Osborne Overlook Upgrades**

**Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator**

**Status:** Osborne Overlook road repair and improvement was commenced in September to replace degraded asphalt and solve drainage issues at the overlook. The ECFO estimates the work to be completed on or around October 28, 2016. Along with these upgrades there will be added space for large RVs and busses to turn around. When completed, visitors will have paved parking and a well-marked camping area.



The maintenance crew is hard at work repairing Osborne Overlook.

**Sustainability**

**BLM Action: Assignment of Ocotillo Switchyard to SDG&E**

**Contact: Veronica Vogan, Realty Specialist**

**Status:** The Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility (OWEF) project owned by Pattern Energy recently assigned the switchyard portion of the project to the San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E). The switchyard consists of approximately 30 acres, including approximately 14 of which are for future expansion.



Pictured above is a portion of the switchyard at the OWEF.

**BLM Action: Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Monitoring**

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

**Status:** Another season of flat-tailed horned lizard monitoring was successfully conducted this past spring and summer. Four interns participated in the annual biological surveys of fifteen years and counting, and contributed important data that helps prevent the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The El Centro Field Office monitors demographic plots in East Mesa, West Mesa and the Yuha Desert. The demographic plots use a “mark and recapture” design to determine population estimates and trends.

The monitoring program advances the Department of Interior Secretary’s priority of Youth in the Great Outdoors, a project that utilizes youth organizations to complete work through Assistance Agreements. This year’s monitoring was accomplished by the American Conservation Experience (ACE).



[ACE interns conduct annual flat-tailed horned lizard monitoring.](#)

**BLM Action: Tule Wind Energy Project to begin construction**

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

**Status:** On April 10, 2012, the BLM issued a right-of-way grant to Tule Wind LLC for the Tule Wind Project located in San Diego County, California. This project will generate up to 132 megawatts of energy via a maximum number of 67 wind turbines on public and private lands. Avangrid Renewables, parent company of Tule Wind LLC, held a ground breaking ceremony on August 31, 2016 at Rough Acres Ranch in McCain Valley in anticipation of beginning construction this fall. The BLM has received a limited Notice-to-Proceed request from Tule Wind and is currently finalizing its review in anticipation of authorization.

**BLM Action: Resources welcomes new Wildlife Biologist**

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

**Status:** The Resources and Planning Division of the El Centro Field Office is happy to welcome new staff member, Camden Bruner. Originally from Denton, TX, Camden received a degree in Wildlife Management and Conservation from Humboldt State University. He started his career as a zookeeper and has worked with a wide variety of animals in captivity before transitioning to jobs focusing on wild animals and their habitats. Camden previously worked as a biologist for the City of Arcata and at the state level as a technician for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Camden started his federal career with the BLM almost two years ago in Medford, Oregon focusing on spotted owl and great gray owl survey and management in addition to monitoring other species of concern including bats, eagles, peregrines, and wolves. In his free time he is an extremely avid birder and is often hiking or traveling to see new species.



Camden conducting spotted owl surveys in Oregon.