

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE
HIGHLIGHTS for the**

**CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

December 6, 2014

RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RIFO)

BLM Action:

Contact: Carl Symons is the Field Manager and can be reached at 760-384-5400 (main office line).

Status: The Ridgecrest Field Office is extremely busy focusing on priority projects such as:

- Special Recreation Permits
- DRECP
- West Mojave
- Haiwee Geothermal
- Renewable Energy projects
- Central Hazmat and Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)
- Vacancies
- Wild Horse and Burro Program
- Grant Administration
- Mining operations
- Cultural issues

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PUBLIC LANDS

Carl Symons, Field Manager

Youth and Young Adult Employment

BLM Action: Currently and in the last quarter of fiscal year 2014 the Field Office had 28 interns working on various facets of public lands management. Some of the many tasks that these individuals have under taken include: desert restoration, seed collection, rangeland health assessments, riparian and spring proper functioning condition assessments, cultural resource inventory and recordation, interpretation and outreach, along with NEPA planning.

Contact: Carl Symons, Field Manager

Status: These interns and task are projected to continue into Fiscal Year 2015. Additional interns may be added or replaced as task and funding sources are identified that can be managed effectively by the on board permanent staff.

Outreach:

BLM Action: Staff have manned booths to reach out to and inform the public about the BLM at a Career Day event at Cerro Coso Community College and at the first annual Petroglyph Festival held in Ridgecrest on November 14th through 16th.

Contact: Carl Symons

Status: Over the Thanksgiving weekend staff will be conducting outreach at several field locations to inform visitors of use regulations for the public lands and especially the Rand Mountain and Fremont Valley Management Area. Staff is looking at different events that can be attended to further educate and inform the public about the many features and benefits that Americans receive from their public lands.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

James Aragon is the Zone Fire Management Officer

Contact: James Aragon, Fire Management Officer 760-252-6008

Status: Fire is now centralized at the District level.

RECREATION AND WILDERNESS

Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Jawbone Station

BLM Action: The Friends of Jawbone continue to provide the staffing to operate and maintain the visitor center 7 days a week throughout the year 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Additionally, for about the last eight years the BLM has partnered with the Friends of Jawbone (FOJ), a local non-profit group, to assist with management plan implementation efforts within the area. The FOJ maintain a staff of between eight and twenty individuals for field work crews. These staff members take on the many different task including habitat restoration, road and trail maintenance using heavy equipment and hand tools, management area and route signing, recreation facility maintenance, and trash pickup.

Contacts: Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Status: Friends of Jawbone staff and the recreation staff have been continuing maintenance and outreach operations within the Jawbone, Kelso Valley, Rands, Red Mountain, El Paso and Middle Knob areas. Some of the task that these folks have done include: updating designated route signing, installing and maintaining water bars to prevent soil erosion, installation of natural resource protection barriers, and desert habitat restoration.

South Park Bridge

BLM Action: BLM has hired a contractor for the engineering and design work for the South Park Bridge site in South Park Canyon.

Contacts: Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

Status: A site visit was conducted with T & B Engineering, Inc. on October 8, 2014 to discuss alternatives and perform a technical evaluation. The contractor will be working with BLM staff to develop at least three structurally and geo-technically sound

alternatives for keeping the current route open through the location of the existing bridge; meeting the multiple use objectives of the local staff, including to maintain the route as a challenge for 4 wheel drive vehicle enthusiasts. This shall include consideration of approaches on both sides. Alternatives may include bridge reinforcement, bridge replacement or possible rock fill crossing.

If a Bridge is the selected alternative, then the Bridge shall be designed following AASHTO's "Load and Resistance Factor Design Manual" (LRFD) using the HL-93 load as the design load. Design calculations shall be provided to the BLM for review. The Bridge design shall also be load rated following AASHTO's "Manual for Bridge Evaluation" (MBE). The load rating shall use Rating Factors in relation to the HL-93 design load. Load rating calculations will be provided to the BLM for review. The approximate schedule for the project is to develop alternatives and complete designs by the end of the first quarter in calendar year 2015.

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office (RIFO) annually issues numerous Special Recreation Permits for activities on public lands. These activities traditionally consist of motorcycle races, running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, and vending permits.

Contact: Eduardo Duque, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Thus far in FY 2015 the following types of permits and activities have occurred in the RIFO: 1) man versus horse foot race, 2) charity fundraising equestrian ride, 3) mountain bike race, 4) two motorcycle races, 5) four-wheel drive touring, 6) dual sport tour, along with several vending permits in association with the competitive events.

Upcoming events for the first quarter of calendar year 2015 include motorcycle races, endurance equestrian rides, dual sport motorcycle tour, guided four-wheel drive and motorcycle tours, off-road vehicle operator training course, and a Ultra- marathon is planned for tomorrow Sunday, December 7th so run on up to Ridgecrest and join in the fun.

West Mojave Route Monitoring and Route Maintenance

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO continues to perform route monitoring and maintenance of the designated routes and kiosks within our management scope of the West Mojave Planning area.

Protocol Monitoring –BLM RIFO (in conjunction with the Barstow Field Office) completed route monitoring per the Protocol Monitoring plan for year one.

Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: We are still focusing on maintaining and monitoring the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. We continue to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. We are also compiling and analyzing the input provided to the BLM by the public.

State OHV Grants

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office was very successful with its grant request submitted to the CA Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks), Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. For the first time in the recent history the field office was successful in being awarded 100 % of all funding requested in its grant applications. The three grants awarded totaled approximately \$1,246,574.

Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for staffing, management actions and maintenance efforts that result in providing for the many various activities enjoyed by the public land users. Some these actions and efforts would not be possible without this outside funding source.

The grants that were awarded include: Restoration grant (\$626,541) runs July 1, 2014 thru July 30, 2017. Ground Operations grant (\$364,760) runs January 1, 2015 thru December 31, 2015. Law Enforcement grant (\$255,273) runs October 1, 2014 thru September 30, 2015.

Desert Restoration

BLM Action: Desert Ecosystem Restoration to assist in the return of natural diversity within several management areas.

We have four Student Conservation Association restoration crews consisting of 5 persons each working in the Ridgecrest Field Office Area. Two crews are working within the Jawbone-Butterbrecht Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Red Mountain, and the Rand Mountains Fremont Valley Management Areas. Two additional crews are working in the Golden Valley, Grass Valley, Kiavah, Owens Peak, Bright Star and Coso Wilderness areas.

Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/ Specialist

Status: The FY 2014/15 crews will work from October 2014 and end in June 2015.

Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark Management

BLM Action: We have partnered with Farmworker Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD) to carry out ecosystem restoration along with site maintenance and enhancement activities at the Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark.

Contact: Elaine Hanson, Realty Specialist, Carl Symons, Field Manager

Status: FIELD was a successful partner in obtaining grant funding from the CA Parks OHMVR Division to work at the Trona Pinnacles. From about November 2014 through May 2015, FIELD will be sending a crew that averages six people twice monthly to restore and remove impacts from visitation and authorized uses that have happened to the National Natural Landmark.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

BLM Action: We are working to complete Lands with Wilderness Characteristics reviews of public lands located within the DRECP and WEMO planning areas managed by the RIFO.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: Inventories have been completed for the Jawbone, Red Mountain, Ridgecrest, South Searles and Middle Knob WEMO subregions. The Sierra, Darwin, and North Searles subregions are nearly complete. The El Paso subregion is still outstanding. The goal is to complete these reports by the 1st quarter of 2015.

Wilderness Character Monitoring

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO, with the help of the neighboring Bishop Field Office is working on the Wilderness Character Monitoring Report for the Inyo Wilderness. Upon the completion of this report, staff will be working on reports for the Piper Mountains and Sylvania Range wilderness areas.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: Work on these reports has been delayed due to staff being assigned to other priority work.

Wilderness Management Activities

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO has hired two interns to collect data on wildernesses in the Panamint Valley, Argus Range and North Searles region. This data will be used to plan future restoration projects and provide increased baseline data for the wildernesses themselves.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: Interns will be on until May, 2015.

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO has conducted two tamarisk removal service trips, one week-long service trip in Saline Valley with National Sierra Club Outings, and a one day trip in Surprise Canyon with OutdoorLink/Crossroads High School. We cleared tamarisk from over 40 acres of wilderness in the following Inyo Mountain areas: Badwater Springs, Lower Pat Keyes Canyon, Beveridge Canyon, Lower Cougar Canyon, Upper Cougar Canyon, Paiute Canyon, McEvoy Canyon, and Hunter Canyon. We used herbicide but hand pulled seedlings wherever we could effectively do so. Virtually all work in McEvoy involved hand pulling. McEvoy is a new weed site, as is Cougar Canyon above the second falls.

We hand pulled and used herbicide to treat about 50 seedlings and saplings that had come up since we were last in Surprise Canyon about 4 years ago. We covered 9 acres in Surprise Canyon, some above but mostly below Chris Wicht Camp.

Contact: Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator/Specialist

Status: Still plan to retreat Upper Pat Keyes and to inventory and treat more tamarisk above the 1st impassible falls in McEvoy and the 2nd falls in Cougar Canyon.

Wild and Scenic River Management Plan for Cottonwood Creek

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing to collect data to write the management plan for the 4-mile reach of Cottonwood Creek WSR on BLM land.

Contact: Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Coordinating efforts with USFS

LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY

Vacant, Minerals and Realty Chief

Renewable Energy

BLM Action:

Haiwee Geothermal project:

- We are hoping to publish a final EIS this winter with a decision to follow pending BO. On hold, waiting on Final SOL Comments

RE Cinco (Barren Ridge 1)

- Application for a gen-tie line near Jawbone from Private land to substation (Recurrent Energy).

Oro Verde

- The Solar project is located on Edwards Air Force Base and will be connecting to the Wind Hub Substation (SCE). The gen-tie will cross 988 feet of public lands along Oak Creek Road in order to get to the substation. Draft EIS/EIR available for review. Edwards AFB lead for NEPA, Sec 7, and 106.

L H Renewables, LLC

- BLM is closing their type III application and authorizing a type I. Status unknown. No movement.
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Tyler Horse

- The project has been put on hold by the applicant to determine if the mitigation measures associated with the project are too costly to move forward to construction. It has been put on hold since September. They have requested until December 4, 2014 to give BLM a firm answer about their decision.

Contact: Paul Rodriguez – Realty Specialist for Type II & Type III applications
Jeff Childers – For Haiwee, Oro Verde, L H Renewables
Cedric Perry – Tyler Horse

Status: High Priority

Non-Renewable Energy

BLM Action:

R & PP/Sale-Exotic Feline Breeding Compound.

- Pending environmental site inspection (CASO).

Other reviews, etc.

- 04 ROWs to private lands.
- Requesting Communication site plan funding for three plans in FY 15.
- Oasis realignment HWY (Mono County) at CASO for review.
- 02 Optical cables between Bakersfield and Ridgecrest. (Media Com HWY 78, Verizon in Kelso Valley) Staff is conducting final review.
- Maintenance of LADWP Aqueduct. Recapping, Penstock (pipeline) replacement, resurfacing concrete channel and aqueduct realignment.
- Bicycle Path parallel to College Heights Boulevard, Kern County Roads lead.
- SCE pole replacement/renewal.
- Billing and collections
- Two pending land sale proposals
- Trespasses
- Filming permits

Contact: **Elaine Hanson** – Realty Specialist for filming
Paul Rodriquez – Realty Specialist for other ROWs

Status: Normal

Geothermal Leasing Inspections

BLM Action: COSO Geothermal lease

Contact: Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech.

Status: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer these leases.

Minerals

Saleable and Locatable

BLM Action:

: BLM RIFO continues to process minerals sales and small mining claims.

- Dragonfly Drilling Project. Proposal to drill 12 exploration holes by Last Chance Canyon, El Paso Mountains. FONSI and ROD are at State Office for review.
- Appeal to the State Director of the Bronco Drilling Project Decision was dismissed and Stay denied.
- Makayla Pumice Quarry. The Makayla Pumice Quarry (Coso Mtns) is in transition from California Lightweight Pumice, Inc. to Southwest Pumice, Inc.
- Perdito drilling project (Great Bear Resources). The operator proposes to re-drill 7 locations previously drilled by BHP Minerals in 1997. The purpose is to confirm the presence or absence of gold on lode claims located on Conglomerate Mesa. The area is north of Malpais Mesa Wilderness and south of Cerro Gordo ACEC. Operator is working on surveys and Field trip with the Tribes has taken place
- Golden Queen Mine. Located on Soledad Mountain south of Mojave, CA. A majority on private land, with some parts on public lands. EIS/EIR was approved in 1997 for open-pit

mining. Has been idle for many years, but is preparing to open. Staff working to follow-up on terms of decision. Prep work has started and mining will begin in 2015.

- LaPozz Project. In El Paso Mountains. Environmental Assessment is completed & pending final decision. Waiting on California Portland Cement to complete requirements of Kern County Planning (Mojave Ground Squirrel take permit).
- Sleepy Bear Mining. In Fremont Valley. Environment Assessment pending to authorize expansion.
- Snow White Bentonite. Environmental Assessment pending for small, 2-acre operation on public lands within Red Rock State Park. The proposal would average 500-1000 ton/year of specialty clay produced from a previously-mined site.
- Reclamation of the Keystone Mine, south of Goler Wash in the Panamint Mountains.
- Several small prospecting proposals (less than one acre each) in the vicinity of Duisenburg Camp & the El Paso Mountains.

Contact: Randy Porter

Status: Continuing work on other small mining operations.

Abandoned Mine Lands

Sterling White, CDD AML & HAZMAT Lead

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its inventories and contracts for remediation of abandoned mines that can present a public safety hazard will be awarded this summer.

Contact: Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist
Ridgecrest Field Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant

Status: Staff is being cross trained to aide in field work related to AML work.

HAZMAT

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BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its efforts to complete actions to remediate three old burn dumps operated by Kern County prior to 1972. BLM has met with Kern County Waste Management and the State of California Waste Management to develop a plan and time line to upgrade the closure method used on these sites to meet the current environmental conditions. Interim measures would cover fencing and signing to protect the public health and safety. Status is unchanged.

An illegal dumping on BLM land was reported along with pictures.

Contact: Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

Status: BLM Law Enforcement is investigating dumping

CERCLA

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office is continuing with its efforts to complete actions to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) through the CERCLA processes.

Kelly Mine Site (OU1) is undergoing site investigations for stabilization of the interim remediation in conjunction with the potential for permanent site remediation.

Contact: Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

Status: Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) is at the Department for review.

RESOURCES

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

Rangeland Management

BLM Action: Current Projects

Deep Springs water haul sites have been identified. Tribal consultation field trip accomplished in November. Work on the EA due completion by February 28, 2015. Funding is through 8100 (range receipts) funds.

Completed a Rangeland Health Assessment for the Kelso Peak allotment. Working on EA for the allotment. Completion expected by the December 31, 2014.

One cattle permittee grazed on BLM allotments, on Rudnick Common on perennials at greatly reduced numbers (200 down from 500) through November 15.

Contact: Sam Fitton, Natural Resource Specialist

Status: Cattle and sheep grazing have been significantly reduced for the third straight year due to drought and lack of forage.

Cultural Resources

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Cultural Program has been working on:

DRECP:

- Continuing GIS support to CASO and Section 106 review; assisting with local tribal consultation and coordination

WEMO:

- Developing cultural resource specific GIS model for directing inventory in WEMO plan area
- Hired 5 interns through the American Conservation Experience to conduct cultural resource field inventory for WEMO (Shared with Barstow Field Office) Developing a programmatic agreement for section 106 related to the WEMO plan
- Planning programmatic agreement consultation meetings with tribes and interested parties (local governments, friends groups, etc.) for early January

Other Projects:

- Providing expertise support to the CDD RECO for two renewable energy facilities applications. Tylerhorse and RE Cinco
- Formal consultations with the State Office of Historic Preservation and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regarding renewable energy projects.
- Continuing Section 106 support of Mining, Grazing, Wilderness, Realty, Recreation Actions
- Recently completed Annual Report to the State Office of Historic Preservation - 72 undertakings for Fiscal Year 2014, 35 of which included Class III inventory 1,107 acres of BLM administered lands
- Provide support to Bakersfield for the fiber optics line between Inyokern and Lake Isabella. Media com
- On-going coordination with Bishop for the Olancho Cartago 4 Lane Expansion and Reroute of Highway 395. Worked with Caltrans, SHPO, and the Advisory Council to develop a Programmatic Agreement in consultation with Owens Valley Tribes.
- California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP): Working with volunteers who have the capacity to identify recent impacts to cultural sites.

Professional Development

- Cultural Resources Data Sharing Partnership Representative (CRDSP) for BLM California is Ashley Blythe; she provides GIS Support and training to other BLM-CA archaeologists and works with the Washington Office to find funding and staff to further GIS initiatives for Field Offices and the California Office of Historic Preservation
- Field Office Representative to the BLM Preservation Board through 2016 is Ashley Blythe. The Board acts as the staff body for the Directorate, State Directorate, and field organization, to provide oversight for the implementation of the BLM National Programmatic Agreement among the BLM, Advisory Council, and National Conference of Historic Preservation Officers; review problem situations; and assist in development of cultural resource policies for the BLM
- Presentation during BLM-sponsored Symposium at the Great Basin Anthropological Conference in Boise, Idaho in October.
- Submitted abstracts for presentations at the Society for California Archaeology Meeting scheduled for March 2015 in Redding, CA. Coincides with Annual Cultural Resources Meeting required by California State Protocol

Contact: Donald Storm - Archaeologist,
Ashley Blythe – Archaeologist
Danny Tyree – Contract Archaeologist

Status: Extremely busy program.

Wildlife Management

BLM Action: Currently both Wildlife Biology positions in the Ridgecrest Field Office are vacant. The Ridgecrest Field Office Wildlife Program has worked on:

Alternative Energy

DRECP – provided input as requested by state office for biological resources
Alternative energy projects – provided input

WEMO Route Designation – provide input and attend meetings

Restoration of routes: presenting information and instruction on plant identification and tortoise awareness to the SCA crews.

Public Outreach

Websites: continuous update of Ridgecrest BLM website along with submission of news, info, photos to NewsBytes.

DTNA:

Supporting the DTNA and the DTPC Naturalist program.

Quail Forever:

Collaborating with the local chapter to maintain guzzlers and to develop wildlife water sites in the desert.

Working with CDFW to craft protocol for guzzlers in wilderness.

Mineral Project support – Current Projects:

LaPozz Mine –opalized silica deposit –Consultation with USFWS for tortoise done but still need CDFW concurrence.

Mining Exploration Projects- Working on NEPA for Conglomerate Mesa area proposed explorations.

Abandoned mines – assessing habitat use by wildlife- bats, owls, other birds, tortoises, etc.

Range Project support – Current Projects

Riparian fence at Bright Star Wilderness to protect Upper Kelso Creek.

Habitat Management Plan Update for OHV grants

Contact: Vacant – Wildlife Biologist,
Vacant – Wildlife Biologist

Status: Very busy ☺!

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

BLM Action:

Approximately 800 burros and horses are currently at the Ridgecrest Corrals..

Adoptions:

Budget allocation target of 150 animals for FY15.

The Ridgecrest Corrals staff continue to develop innovative adoption ideas. For instance, rather than simple outreach featuring a burro, a mini adoption will be held at the Equine Expo at Pomona in February.

Outreach:

The Corrals staff participated in several community events in the Fall of 2014, including LA County Fair, NAWS-China Lake Community Days and Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival, reaching well over 5,000 individuals.

Gathers:

Currently, wild horse gathers are restricted to federal court orders, followed by extreme emergency situations. In the meantime, several nuisance burro complaints in the Desert have been met with inventive short-term solutions, such as bait-trapping followed by relocation, if and where appropriate.

Contact: Grant Lockie, Corral Manager

Status: Adoptions continue year round by appointment.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wayne Dengal, Chief Ranger

BLM Action: RIFO Law Enforcement is spending considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas including wilderness boundaries and ACEC as well as other closed and limited use areas to detect and deter illegal off road travel activity.

Continuing with monitoring efforts of SRPs.

Patrolling open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail.

Patrolling and monitoring areas of cultural and historical archeological significance.

Participating in national and state priority details as required.

Working on wildland fire incidents and investigations. One investigation ongoing.

Working with Special Agent to resolve ongoing felony investigations

Contact: Wayne Dengal, Chief of Law Enforcement, RIFO

Status: BLM and Public safety continue to be highest priority.