

**HIGHLIGHTS  
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting**

**May 10, 2014**

**Sustainability**

**BLM Action:** Renewable Energy

**Contact:** Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager, Resources

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office is currently overseeing construction on the East County (ECO) Substation project. Three renewable energy projects, Ocotillo Sol, Tule Wind and ISEC West, have been authorized but have not yet started construction on BLM lands. A pre-construction kickoff meeting for ISEC West was held on April 9, 2014 and the BLM anticipates construction on the transmission line to begin in May/June 2014. The Record of Decision for the approximately 100 acre San Diego Gas & Electric Ocotillo Sol solar project located next to the Imperial Valley Substation within the Yuha Basin Area of Critical Environmental Concern was signed on April 7, 2014.

**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 2014. This was the first year implementing the BLM's new annual monitoring protocol for the federally endangered Peirson's milk-vetch. The monitoring protocol was developed through coordination between the BLM and US Fish and Wildlife Service Carlsbad Field Office. Botanical Interns from the BLM Ridgcrest Field Office assisted in the monitoring effort along with El Centro Field Office staff. 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.



Biologists traverse one of the six Peirson's Milk-vetch plots

## Heritage

**BLM Action:** California State Protocol Implementation of the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act

**Contact:** Christine McCollum, Archaeologist  
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

**Status:** The new (February 2014) State Protocol Agreement requires that the public be informed about decisions made on various National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents. A new column has been added to the BLM El Centro Field Office public NEPA Lister web page that tells the public about the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 Findings of the cultural resources staff and authorized officer for various NEPA reviews of proposed projects including Categorical Exclusions, Determinations of NEPA Adequacy, Environmental Assessments, and Environmental Impact Statements.

**BLM Action:** Imperial Valley Desert Museum Approved as a Curation Facility

**Contact:** Christine McCollum, Archaeologist  
Jeffrey D. Sahagun, Archaeologist/GIS Specialist

**Status:** The Imperial Valley Desert Museum (Desert Museum) has been approved as a federal repository for archaeological collections from the Sunrise Powerlink Project and the Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility Project, two projects located on BLM lands. This multi-year effort was achieved as part of a sustained commitment and partnership between the BLM, the local tribal communities and the Desert Museum to recurate BLM collections, keep new collections in the local community and develop important educational programs for residents and visitors to the Imperial Valley.



**Prehistoric Olla found during construction of the Sunrise Powerlink.  
This artifact is now curated and will be on display at the Imperial Valley Desert Museum.**

**BLM Action:** Award of funds to develop a Field Office wide Potential Fossil Yield Classification System

**Contact:** Christine McCollum, Archaeologist

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office was recently awarded \$15,000 from the Washington Office of BLM for a paleontological resources mapping project in support of the BLM's Natural and Cultural Resource Protection Mission Area. This project will involve the compilation of a paleontological localities database, including areas of paleontological sensitivity in the El Centro Field Office management area, based on the BLM's Potential Fossil Yield Classification system.

**BLM Action:** Anza National Historic Trail

**Contact:** Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

**Status:** Phase II of the Anza National Historic Trail work continues, with the replacement of the remaining 4 obsolete kiosks in the Yuha Basin Area of Critical Environmental Concern, and the installation of a new kiosk at Route 191/Hwy 98 underway. Interpretive panels will include route maps and site specific interpretation in an effort to help protect the valuable historic and prehistoric character along the trail. Interpretive text is written and translated, kiosks are purchased, and contract illustrations are in progress.



Anza Phase II: Artwork on "Mile-Long Expedition" panel.

## Community

**BLM Action:** Pacific Crest Trail Interpretive Kiosk

**Contact:** Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger  
John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office is installing an interpretive/informational kiosk along the Pacific Crest Trail in San Diego County, CA, where Rodriguez Canyon and the trail intersect. Interpretive panels will include site specific interpretation of the area, as well as hiker route information.



Site location of kiosk.



Hikers take a break near kiosk site location.

**BLM Action:** Coyote Mountain Wilderness Interpretive Kiosk

**Contact:** Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger  
John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office intends to remove the dilapidated kiosk at the Wind Caves Trailhead. A replacement kiosk will be located along S2 at its intersection with Route 093 (route to access Wind Caves Trail). The kiosk will provide hiking information, immediate area limited use off-highway vehicle route information, and site interpretation. The kiosk will help celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and its installation will be a National Public Lands Day (NPLD) site project (November 15, 2014).



Kiosk to be removed.



**BLM Action:** Special Recreation Permits (SRP)

**Contact:** Dallas Meeks, Recreation Planner

**Status:** The BLM El Centro Field Office received 18 applications for SRPs for events beginning in September 2013 through September 2014. Nine of the applications are for AMA District 38 races within the Plaster City and Superstition Open OHV Areas, two for Rocketry events in the Plaster City East Open Area, one for an Equestrian event within McCain Valley and one for a 4X4 touring event within the Superstition Mountain Open Area. In addition, the El Centro Field Office received one application for a “rock crawling” event for the Devils Canyon

trail and one application for a bicycle event; parts of which run through Chariot Canyon in Eastern San Diego County.

The El Centro Field Office approved an application for the SCORE Imperial Valley 250 event which included both a motorcycle and quad race as well as a car and truck race. The event took place on April 26 in the Superstition and Plaster City Open OHV areas. Careful planning by the El Centro Field Office and the Imperial County Planning Department, Sheriff, the El Centro Police and California Highway Patrol as well as other local agencies and volunteers contributed to a safe event. BLM law enforcement officers contacted 852 individuals and issued 304 warnings and only 42 citations. The local community reports that, in their view, the SCORE Imperial Valley 250 was a huge success and made a substantial contribution to our local economy.



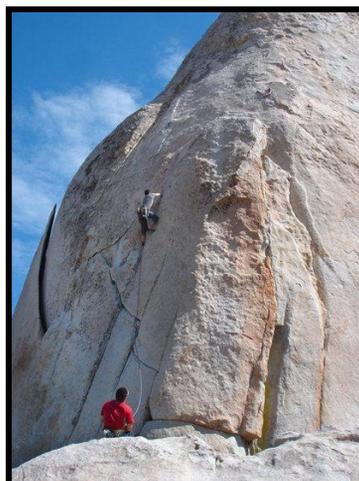
**SCORE Imperial Valley 250 race contestant in action!**

**BLM Action:** Wilderness Partnerships

**Contact:** John Johnson, Environmental Protection Specialist/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with rock climbing group Allied Climbers of San Diego (ACSD). ACSD utilizes areas within the BLM El Centro Field Office to climb and hold their annual public lands clean-ups.

Underway currently is development of a pocket guidebook for climbers, and improvement of climbing areas.



**Climber with a spotter below**

**BLM Action:** Hiking Program

**Contact:** Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

**Status:** Hikes continue to be popular, with at least one hike per month, to various wilderness locations in the El Centro Resource Area. To date, 112 hikers have joined a Park Ranger to discover America's Great Outdoors and celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act, almost tripling attendance from last year. Only one hike remains for the season, finishing up over Memorial Day Weekend (Calling all Kids! Blacklight the Night!).



Tumco Interpretive Hike

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

**Contact:** Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

**Status:** ISDRA Park Rangers responded to 315 calls YTD in FY14, down 3% from the same time last season. There were notable increases in rescue sand rail utilization, helicopter utilization, remote area search and rescues, along with a shift in injury patterns towards less accessible deeper dune locations in the northern (Gecko/Glamis) portions of the ISDRA.

BLM staff have been nominated and appointed to multiple interagency task forces lead by the Imperial County Emergency Medical Services Agency to help redesign the local EMS system to include provisions for austere areas and seasonal OHV use and to update and revise treatment and response protocols for field providers.

BLM is continuing to work with multiple partners and agencies to provide increased levels of service and training for BLM EMS/SAR field providers and to better the EMS/SAR services provided to the public.

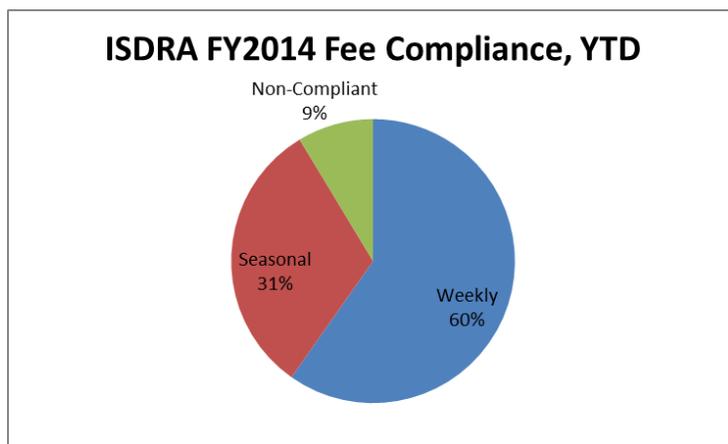
The 2015 seasonal jobs are currently being advertised on [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov) and hiring for the 2015 season is anticipated to begin shortly.

**BLM Action:** Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

**Status:** The ISDRA fee period came to a close on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Camping is free through the end of September. The new fee management contract is closing out the season with permit vendors and preparing for the 2014/2015 season.

Cumulative visitation (863,000) is down 6% from the same time in FY 2013 however, 44,719 permits were sold generating \$2,235,000 in revenues. Permit compliance remains high in the ISDRA. After collecting data on 6,433 vehicles this season, permit compliance is 91%.



**BLM Action:** ISDRA Grants Update

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

**Status:** OHV Grant Projects have been submitted for the 2014/2015 season. The El Centro Field Office has applied for three grants: ISDRA Safety (\$139,560), ISDRA Ground Operations (\$143,050), and ECFO Law Enforcement (\$436,050). All three applications total \$718,660 and require \$489,317 in match. The fee program allows the BLM to have the sufficient matching funds to apply for the projects.

**BLM Action:** ISDRA Education and Outreach

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

**Status:** Park Rangers successfully offered a total of 21 outreach programs at both north and south dunes locations. To date, 484 visitors have attended the programs. These programs included: "Fatal Vision," GPS 101, sound testing, terrain hazard, etc. to educate the visitor to the hazards associated with drinking and riding, terrain hazards, how to use GPS in an emergency. These outreach programs emphasize OHV safety, new ROV laws, RAMP, and the fee program through new outreach programs in the ISDRA schedule throughout the season.

The ISDRA Facebook Page ([www.facebook.com/blmimperialsanddunes](http://www.facebook.com/blmimperialsanddunes)) currently has 3,499 likes since it began in September 2012. During the first week of December the ISDRA Facebook Page hit a new record for the ISDRA Facebook page and reached 77,372 people. Discussion/Notification topics have included: outreach, education, road conditions, weather updates, event announcements, animal pictures, safety reminders, and more.

The El Centro Field Office will continue to work together with the United Desert Gateway to provide maps, Frisbees, and “Dune Guard” shirts, at the ISDRA for the upcoming 2014-2015 season.



Young duners show off their new safety frisbees



New Dune Guards visit the Cahuilla Ranger Station

**BLM Action:** ISDRA Kiosks

**Contact:** Joya Szalwinski, Interpretive Park Ranger

**Status:** Partnership efforts with Kawasaki, United Desert Gateway, American Sand Association and Imperial County provided the resources to update, install and rehab 5 kiosks in the dunes, with the project completing in February, 2014. The map panel on the Wash 4 kiosk was stolen within the first month.

A decision approving the ROD in April 2014 necessitates every dunes map product (brochure, kiosk panel, ranger station display, etc.) be revised to capture new closure boundaries protecting PMV critical habitat. Work has begun to this new map as a tool for implementation of the ROD/RAMP.

Each kiosk showcases site specific interpretive panels and a map to orient visitors to the dunes, and also features a panel with an educational panel. These are the panels shown in the lower half of the graphic below (drinking and riding, dust, terrain hazards and resource protection). Site specific and identifying maps will stay with the kiosk, but the educational panels will travel throughout the dunes over the years. This will give visitors around the dunes an opportunity to see them all.



Interpretive panels located in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area

**BLM Action:** Maintenance

**Contact:** Martin Gibson, Maintenance Operations Supervisor

**Status:** Work continues throughout the El Centro Field Office. As the sand dunes season wraps up seasonal and emergency maintenance workers have ended their season. Vault toilet maintenance will continue to be completed by full time maintenance staff and Park Rangers. Full time maintenance staff played an important role in preparing for the signing volunteer event held on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. Special sign pullers were created and designed by maintenance staff and were on hand during the event to coordinate the safe volunteer experience.

The 2015 seasonal jobs are currently being advertised on [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov) and hiring for the 2015 season is anticipated to begin shortly.

**BLM Action:** Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) Update

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Assistant Field Manager, Recreation

**Status:** The United States District Court, for the Northern District of California, has concluded that BLM complied with the Clean Air Act, Federal Lands Policy and Management Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act, thereby granting summary judgment in favor of the BLM on April 3, 2014. The agency is beginning the implementation of the Final RAMP / Record of Decision (ROD) by removing the signs for the administrative closures (49,300 acres) and signing the new closed OHV areas protecting Pierson's Milk-vetch critical habitat (9,046 acres).

**BLM Action:** Volunteers

**Contact:** Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

**Status:** A volunteer event was held on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 in partnership with the American Sand Association (ASA). This volunteer event focused on the removal and reinstallation of signs for the administrative closures located in the ISDRA. Volunteers helped by removing closure stakes near Gecko Campground and Buttercup and by reinstalling stakes of the critical habitat closure near the US/Mexico border.

We are continuing to recruit camp hosts to fill vacant positions at several camping areas within the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area. Vacant camp hosts areas include; Gecko Campground, Ogilby, and Dunebuggy Flats. For more information please visit the following link: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/recreation/ohvs/isdra/dunesinfo/volunteers.html>

Camp Host, Homer Himes, is going on his third year working full-time while living year around at the Buttercup Ranger Station. Homer provides hard quality work maintaining the facility, gathering vehicle counts, and assisting park rangers with duties as assigned. Homer plays a vital role in keeping the restrooms and campgrounds clean utilizing his side by side that was donated by partners. He also greets the constant flow of visitors at all hours of the day throughout the year, providing them with information about the area, OHV safety, and the historic Plank Road.



Homer Himes, Buttercup Ranger Station Camp Host

**BLM Action:** Law Enforcement

**Contact:** Sal Nieblas, Law Enforcement Supervisor

**Status:** Stephanie Clark has been selected as the new Chief Ranger for the El Centro Field Office. Stephanie comes to us from the United States Park Police, a division of the National Park Service. She has 15 years of law enforcement experience and has held positions as a patrol officer, patrol sergeant, special events coordinator, shift commander, station commander, and force training manager. She also has 20 years military experience from the US Coast Guard and later the US Air Force and is an Iraq War veteran. She is originally from Las Vegas, NV and has lived all over the states and overseas.

The high visitation season is over in the ISDRA. Law enforcement patrols' emphasis is prevention of crime while being proactive with an emphasis on DUIs, drugs, permits, and closure violations. Rangers continue to provide and or assist, with calls for emergency medical assistance and search and rescue. The ISDRA is patrolled year round.

The west desert of El Centro has seen an increase of off-highway vehicle recreationists from the all the way to the Riverside County line. Rangers are providing OHV education to large groups of families.

Law enforcement rangers continue to patrol renewable energy project areas such as the Ocotillo Wind and SDG&E projects. Some of the challenges in the areas include off route travel and target shooting from or under power line towers.

Rangers are busy with a variety of investigations involving resource damage, dump sites, narcotics, special recreation permits, and wilderness violations. Law enforcement has also sought the assistance and cooperation of other law enforcement agencies.