

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE
HIGHLIGHTS for the**

**CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

May 10, 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 applications
- Mining operations
- Cultural issues

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Don Washington, Fire Management Officer

Contact: Don Washington, Fire Management Officer 760-384-5423

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 the visitor center, provide maintenance of OHV routes, campground areas, facilities within the Jawbone Butterbredt OHV area. They also performed these duties in other OHV areas, to include the Rands, Red Mountain, El Paso, Middle Knob, and Kelso Valley areas.

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

Status: Friends of Jawbone staff and the recreation staff has been continuing maintenance and outreach operations. Moose Anderson days clean-up effort was very successful with 66 volunteers filling two full roll off dumpsters with trash and a trailer full of tires.

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, ultra marathon 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 2014 the following types of permits and activities have occurred in the RIFO: 1) backcountry camping, hiking, Passover event and vision quest outing, 2) man versus horse foot race, 3) equestrian events, 4) mountain bike race, 5) Motorcycle races, 6) a truck race, 7) four wheel drive touring, 8) and a multi-year permit to the local running club to host monthly events.

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 will be starting to conduct route monitoring per the Protocol Monitoring plan in the third quarter.

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 BLM RIFO, with the help of several partners, submitted four state OHV grant proposals for FY 2014. The three grants totaling approximately \$1,246,574 and are in the Ground Operations, Law Enforcement, and Restoration categories.

Contact: Dana Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for many of the on-the-ground activities enjoyed by the public land users would not be possible.

Grants have been finalized and sent back to State Parks for their evaluation and potential awards

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 within the Jawbone-Butterbrecht Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), Rand Mountains Fremont Valley Management Area, Kiavah Wilderness, and the Grass Valley Wilderness.

Contact: Dana Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Martha Dickes, Wilderness Specialist

Status: The FY 2014 crews will work from November 2013 and end in June 2014.

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

Status: Year to date Approx. 312,000 acres have been inventoried. Jawbone, Red Mountain, Ridgecrest, South Searles, Middle Knob are completed and almost completed with the Sierra. Darwin, El Paso, North Searles are still to be done. Reports should be completed by the 4th quarter of FY 2014.

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 Pipe Mountains and Sylvania wilderness areas.

Contact: Martha Dickes, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Field work should begin this spring. Reports should be completed by end of fiscal year 2014.

Wilderness Management Activities

BLM Action: The BLM RIFO, with the help of the Outdoor Link and Cross roads High School conducted a service clean-up project in the Bright Star wilderness. Work consisted of rehabbing incursions, defining access hiking trail to reduce cross country travel and removing approximately 300 bowling balls.

Sand Canyon Environmental Education Program (SEEP) organizes field trips for 11 elementary schools totaling over 500 students to learn about desert environments. This year the program added a Junior Ranger program to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act where participants earn a certificate and patch.

Contact: Martha Dickes, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Activities were completed by June 1, 2014.

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 Jacobs, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Status: Coordinating efforts with USFS

LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY

Jeff Childers, Acting Lands, Minerals and Realty Chief

Renewable Energy

BLM Action:

Haiwee Geothermal project:

- We are hoping to publish a final EIS this summer with a decision to follow pending BO.

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.

L H Renewables, LLC

- This is for a proposed wind energy project for a total capacity of 208-325 MW. This is along HWY 14 in the Freemont Junction area and within the transmission corridor.

Tyler Horse

- Published the DEIS in April

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:

DTNRA- Desert Tortoise Natural Research Area withdrawal

- Working with Desert Tortoise Committee/CASO Cadastral/WO staff. Should have packet to State Office in May.

R & PP/Sale-Exotic Feline Breeding Compound.

- Pending ESA (Spring) and Appraisal

Other reviews, etc.

- 04 ROWs to private lands.

- 07 Communication site plans review pending
- 02 ROW amendments for CALTRANS Freeman Gluch,
- Oasis realignment HWY (Mono County) Letter of Consent issued.
- HWY 14- expansion of 2 lanes into 4 lanes in certain locations.
- 02 Optical cables between Bakersfield and Ridgecrest. (Media Com HWY 78, Verizon in Kelso Valley)
- 20 other type of ROWs pending.
- Filming permits

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

Status: Normal

Leasable Minerals

BLM Action: BLM RIFO is continuing with its lease to Searles Minerals (SVM)

- BLM conducts inspections once a month and verifies production verification
- Products are Soda ash, Borax, Salt.
- 8,634,125 paid as royalty to the Federal Government.
- Bird rescue program has a mitigation plan for bird rehabilitation.

Contact: Kathleen Cox, Geologist

Status: BLM RIFO is continuing to administer the lease.

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.

- Recently authorized: CDM Mining Claim, EMI Mineral Exploration, and Minerals Sales to California Light Weight Pumace, Sanford Stone sale and transfer to Sydney Peak Stone.

Mining / Prospecting cases pending at Ridgecrest Field Office (not in any particular order):

Sleepy Bear Mining. In Fremont Valley. Environment Assessment pending to authorize expansion.

KAT Bentonite. In the Summit Range along the Trona-Johannesburg Road. Environmental Assessment FONSI and ROD is done for a 30-acre pit, and approval for a sale of clay materials.

Red River Creek. Application for a ½-acre excavation on the floor of Cuddeback Dry Lake bed. Pending field trip inspection and NEPA conformance.

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.

Golden Queen Mine. South of Mojave, CA. EIS/EIR 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.

Big Dyke lode claim. Between Randsburg/Johannesburg. Operator wishes to prospect underground workings, placing support generator and trailer on surface. (no excavation) Pending environmental documents (cultural) from Operator.

Betty Jean Placer. Prospecting operation on moderate use lands west of Red Mountain. Application to move/adjust prospecting location.

Snow White Bentonite. Environmental Assessment pending for small, 2-acre operation on public lands within Red Rock State Park.

Dragonfly Drilling Project. Proposal to drill 12 exploration holes by Last Chance Canyon, El Paso Mountains. Draft Environmental Assessment is at State Office for review.

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 is for staff is planned.

Several field inspections have been completed including the Keystone mine in Goler Wash in the Panamints for which BLM is drafting a cleanup order.

Working on several Mineral Material sales. (Trona, Fremont Valley, Panamints)

Contact: Randy Porter

Status: Continuing work on Bronco, Dragonfly proposals, Kat Bentonite Material Sale, and other small mining operations .

Abandoned Mine Lands

Sterling White, CDD AML & HAZMAT Lead

BLM Action: The Ridgcrest Field Office is continuing with its inventories (features along roads in the Rands completed and El Pasos are in progress), and contracts for remediation of abandoned mines that can present a public safety hazard will be awarded this summer.

The Mojave Project (Whitmore/Gum Tree) Draft EA is currently available for public review and comments on our web page. Comments are due by Friday May 30th. Solid waste (trash) is planned to be removed in the fall. The construction of wildlife-friendly gates is also expected to begin in the early fall. Backfills will be scheduled for a later date to accommodate bird nesting and bat maternity season.

Bellflower Complex is a solid waste clean-up and removal action project that addresses the remediation of 15 AML site features for public health and safety (Ridgecrest Sub-region). The mine site is within 5 miles of the City of Ridgecrest, is heavily used and is the recipient of much vandalism. This is a continuation of the Rademacher Hills Trails AML Remediation project. This site was completed in November 2013. BLM utilized a Forest Service AML Force Account Crew to complete the work. The crew removed over 200-yards of solid waste. Installation of bat gates was completed with help from the CA-Department of Conservation.

The Blue Rock Mill Site lies within the Piper Mountain Wilderness and has been the focus of a multi-year, multiple phase clean-up and removal action for hazardous materials. This final action addresses the rehabilitation of the site by remediating the physical safety hazards and restoring the site to conditions more suitable to wilderness characteristics. This site received funding and the work is currently being scheduled.

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

Status: During the past year, the Ridgecrest Field Office has worked with the CDD Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) coordinator, to issue a contract for the remediation of 18 features in the Rademacher Hills (Ridgecrest Sub-region). Several bat gates will be constructed and the remainder of the features will be backfilled. This project was completed in April 2013.

NEPA for the Bellflower Complex and the Blue Rock Mill Site is completed.

Outreach for the Mojave project began in February 2012. The NEPA for this project is in progress.

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.

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

Status: Cooperative planning is in progress with Kern County Waste Management and the State of CA Waste Management.

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: The time critical work at OU-2 was completed in Oct/Sept 2013 and at the Kelly Mine Feb. 2014.

RESOURCES

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

Rangeland Management

BLM Action: Current Projects

Since April 1, one PFC assessment has been performed in response to WEMO.

Deep Springs water haul sites have been identified and have had cultural and biological surveys done. Work on the EA started in March and planned completion by September 30, 2014. Funding is through 8100 (range receipts) funds.

Invasive plant removal was completed in Rudnick Common Allotment w/Fire staff (8100 fund allocation).

Cottonwood Creek (Fish Lake Valley) cooperative agreement for fence maintenance with Friends of the Inyo (\$3k/yr, already paid for FY14). Range fence to exclude cows from Wild and Scenic River.

As of May 1, four cattle permittees are grazing on BLM allotments, two on Rudnick Common grazing ephemeral (annual grasses and forbs), one each on Deep Springs and White Sage grazing on perennials (grazing 50% or less of capacity).

Staff assessed new sheep-grazing applications on a case-by-case basis. Five permittees were issued permits for ephemeral (annual grasses and forbs). One at Cantil Common, one at Spangler Hills and one at Tunawee allotments are still grazing. One permittee at Cantil Common and one at Hansen Common have removed their animals as of end of April. All grazing operations are closely monitored by Range and Law Enforcement staff.

Working on a Rangeland Health Assessment for the Kelso Peak allotment Prior to completing an EA for the allotment. Completion expected by September 30, 2014.

Contact: Sam Fitton, Natural Resource Specialist
Jeff Gicklhorn, 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:
Focusing efforts on the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) and the West Mojave Plan Court Remediation (WEMO).

- DRECP: Consolidating CA GIS Data for Cultural Resources to provide to contractor for further analysis. Section 106 compliance will occur after specific project proposals are received in accordance with the appropriate CFRs and regulations.
- WEMO Route designation, cultural resources GIS review, and field inventory
- Developing a programmatic agreement for section 106 related to the WEMO plan
- 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.
- Ten screened exemption determinations for minor NEPA actions under the provisions of the BLM-SHPO Protocol Agreement.
- Issued 5 Field Work Authorizations for Archeologist-consultants doing field work on BLM lands.
- 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
- Cabin Management Plan: Working to secure funding for Section 106 recordation and evaluation of historic structures in the field office. Physical protective measures to protect cultural resources.
- California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP): Working with volunteers who have the capacity to identify recent impacts to cultural sites.
- The BLM Protocol with the California Office of Historic Preservation and Nevada State Historic Preservation Office has been revised and renewed as of February 10th, 2014.
- California BLM annual cultural resources meeting was held in Visalia Ca. on March 18th-20th.
- Provide support to Bakersfield for the fiber optics line between Inyokern and Lake Isabella. Media com
- Provide support to Bishop for the Olancho Cartago. Reroute of highway 395.

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

Status: Extremely busy program.

Wildlife Management

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

Alternative Energy

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

Began Biological Assessment

Public Outreach

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

Sand Canyon Environmental Education Program – Bird and plant stations

Public events

Planned and/or participated in events such as Ridgecrest Wildflower Festival, Moose Anderson Days, and DTNA work day to disseminate information about wildlife and recreational opportunities on BLM lands.

DTNA:

Supporting the DTNA and the DTNC Naturalist program (Desert Tortoise Preserve committee and their efforts to conserve the tortoise. Withdraw for DTNA should be completed soon.

Quail Forever:

Collaborating with the local chapter to maintain guzzlers and to develop wildlife water sites in the desert. Current projects are Cow Heaven water tank replacement, and Willow Spring Habitat Improvement (Kelso Valley area).

Working with CDFW to craft protocol for guzzlers in wilderness.

Brochures:

Distributed brochures to Lone Pine Death Valley Visitor Center, the Maturango Museum and at BLM events. The topics of the brochures are hiking in exceptionally beautiful BLM areas, wildflowers, butterflies, desert tortoise.

Mineral Project support – Current Projects:

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

Sleepy Bear Mine- in the Rands within tortoise Critical Habitat (DWMA). Will require an EIS and a new Biological Opinion. Work in progress

We are distributing the BLM brochure that explains the dangers of open top pipes to birds as we find them.

Mining Exploration Projects- Working on NEPA for Last Chance Canyon and Conglomerate Mesa area proposed explorations. Bronco NEPA almost complete

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 and species monitoring- current projects

Towhee habitat monitoring: repaired protective fences

Spring bird surveys with the Kerncrest Audubon Society in Sand Canyon and Indian Wells Canyon will be conducted starting next month. All data will be entered into “e-bird” available to researchers, the public, and land-use planners.

Habitat monitoring and input for Wilderness Characteristic reports coordinated with wilderness staff.

Habitat Management Plan Update for OHV grants

News:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently published an announcement in the Federal Register a proposal to remove the Inyo California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis eremophilus*) from its current listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act based on successful recovery efforts by the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, BLM, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Contact: Shelley Ellis – Wildlife Biologist,
Carrie Woods – Wildlife Biologist

Status: Very busy ☺!

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

BLM Action:

Approximately 640 burros and horses at the Ridgecrest Corrals.

Adoptions:

Internet Adoption: Ridgecrest participated in an Internet Adoption event in April. Six horses were adopted.

Extreme Mustang Makeover, Norco, CA: Mid-May 2014, 32 horses will be available for adoption via an auction at the event. Another 12 will be trailered down for a traditional adoption.

Budget reductions have drastically reduced the adoption target for FY14. Ridgecrest has adopted 85 animals in FY14.

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.