

HIGHLIGHTS BARSTOW FIELD OFFICE

**California Desert District
Advisory Council Meeting
May 2014**

Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study – Habitat Enhancement Program

BLM Action: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducted a preliminary study in 2011 to determine the current distribution of the Amargosa vole in the Tecopa area. During those surveys an unknown “orange fungus” infestation was found on many voles. A multi-year study is being conducted to further determine the extent of the fungus infection, the probable vector for the spread of this unknown disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. This is a collaborative study between the BLM, CDFW, US Geological Service, and UC Davis.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office (BFO), California Desert District Office, California State Office and Washington Office
CDFW
US Geological Survey (USGS)
UC Davis
UC Berkley
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: In response to the precarious nature of the Amargosa Vole, the Amargosa Vole Team (AVT) was chartered through the Desert Managers Group (DMG) in April 2013. The purpose of the AVT is to provide a collaborative forum for BLM, USFWS, CDFW, and researchers to plan, coordinate and implement actions that would prevent the extinction of the vole and ultimately result in its recovery. Chris Otahal is co-chair of the AVT along with Russ Scofield from the Desert Managers Group.

The BFO in partnership with UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS has secured a \$25,000 NLCS Research Support Program grant to support Amargosa Vole conservation efforts. The funding will support a pilot translocation project from a sustainable source subpopulation into nearby marshes using a soft-release approach with monitoring to track animal movement, population size, disease, genetic structure, and impacts of predators and competitors prior to, during and post translocation efforts. The BFO is currently finalizing permitting requirements for implementation of this

project with field work anticipated to commence this summer if vole population conditions are favorable and permitting issues have been resolved.

Also, as part of the NLCS Research Support Program grant, a study has been initiated by BLM and its partners to help determine the best way to manage bulrush habitat in the marshes associated with the Amargosa Vole.

The BFO is also working with UC Davis, UC Berkeley, and USGS on developing a Section 6 Grant Proposal to provide funding for Amargosa Vole habitat creation on private lands in Shoshone (a location where voles were found historically but are now extirpated) and research into a potential captive breeding program for the vole. The BFO recently conducted a field visit to the proposed site to work with partners to set the permitting groundwork for this proposed project. While the Section 6 grant has not been secured, it is a high priority endeavor for which funding will be pursued by other means if the Section 6 grant is not successful.

The BFO is also moving forward on a small habitat enhancement project to help secure and expand existing vole habitat in the “borehole” area in Tecopa. BLM is working with the CDFW and Inyo County to install a standpipe structure to prevent drawdown in water levels and degradation of vole habitat in this marsh over the summer months. This will help provide security of this population while the AVT finalizes design and permitting needs associated with installing a permanent check-dam to allow for long-term management of the site (check-dam funding of \$50,000 is a directed allocation from the BLM Washington Office).

The UC Davis team recently published an article in the Journal of Parasitology regarding results from the ongoing disease study titled: Severe Ulceronecrotic Dermatitis Associated with Mite Infestation in the Critically Endangered Amargosa Vole (*Microtus Californicus Scirpensis*). The UC Davis team has also recently published an article in the journal Ecology and Evolution titled: An *Ixodes minor* and *Borrelia carolinensis* enzootic cycle involving a critically endangered Mojave Desert rodent based on these studies. The USGS team is preparing a report for BLM summarizing the demographic work to date (draft has been received) and is working on two journal manuscripts. Chris Otahal authored an article discussing this program which appeared in the River Management Society Journal and later (slightly revised) as a BLM NewsBytes Extra.

UC Davis has established a small breeding colony of Owens Valley voles to help determine the feasibility of a captive breeding program for the Amargosa vole in case this option becomes necessary. UC Davis is using the Owens Valley vole as a surrogate for the Amargosa vole to work out techniques for vole propagation in captivity.

UC Davis has also initiated a predator study for the marshes used by the Amargosa vole. The researchers have established several photographic “trap” sites which are

documenting the predators using the area. The researchers are also keeping visual records of predators on site.

Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions

BLM Action: The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies / management actions associated with the implementation of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Management Plan including:

- 1) Amargosa Niterwort Population Monitoring
- 2) Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program
- 3) Tamarisk Control Efforts
- 4) SCAN Monitoring
- 5) Fish Monitoring

Agencies: BLM, Barstow Field Office
BLM, California State Office
Amargosa Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy
Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO)
US Geological Survey
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
UC Davis
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The list above represents a summary of the various management studies / management actions which are being carried out in support of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Plan. These projects are multi-year and BLM is currently working with partners to secure out-year funding for these programs.

The Ventura USFWS Office secured a \$162,000 grant through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Federal Endangered Species Act Traditional Section 6 Program which will support the Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program for the 2013 and 2014 field seasons and provide funding to produce a multi-year summary report of the program to date. The Amargosa Conservancy secured funding to expand monitoring to include Willow Creek for the 2014 effort – this is an area which has not been covered under previous survey efforts. The Nature Conservancy, Amargosa Conservancy and PRBO, in coordination with BLM, recently submitted a Neotropical Bird Grant application which would expand upon our ongoing tamarisk removal and bird monitoring program to include monitoring of Willow Creek and fund focused surveys for Yellow-billed Cuckoo (a species being

proposed for listing by the USFWS) along Willow Creek. Bird surveys are anticipated to commence starting in May 2014.

Through a partnership with USFWS, the Barstow Field Office secured a \$35,712 grant through the USFWS's Desert Fish Habitat Partnership Program (DFHP) to support Phase 1 (2013-2014) of the Tamarisk Removal/Habitat Enhancement program targeting habitat improvements for the Amargosa Speckled Dace and Amargosa Pupfish (this funding includes support for on-going fish monitoring as well as habitat improvements). There have been some implementation timing issues and the DFHP committee has agreed to extend the grant period to cover the Phase 2 portion (2014-2015) of this project. The BLM California State Office has provided additional fisheries funding for FY 2014 in support of this project to conduct one mile of fish surveys on the Amargosa River. This will provide follow-up data to the baseline surveys carried out in 2010. Field work and surveys by USGS are anticipated to begin in June 2014.

An article written by Chris Otahal appeared in the River Management Society's Spring 2014 Journal which discusses the results of the tamarisk removal / cowbird management program on sensitive bird species in the Amargosa River ACEC/WSR.

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

BLM Action: The BFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the USFWS to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

Agency: BLM
USFWS
Various County, State and Federal Agencies

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: In December 2012 there was a multi-agency meeting in which the ground work for the production of the Recovery Action Plan was discussed. The Recovery Action Plan (v.1) was provided in March 2013 for initial RIT and management review. BFO staff attended a Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) meeting in Las Vegas on March 11, 2014. The primary focus of this meeting was updating managers on RIT efforts undertaken to date and for managers to discuss the direction and next steps for the RITs.

Roy Averill-Murray and Cat Darst from the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office presented an overview of the RITs and development of regional recovery action plans. An overarching theme of the group's discussion was to take advantage of the RITs to

coordinate and leverage projects to benefit recovery of the Mojave desert tortoise. The recovery action plans are intended to be living documents that serve as a tool to facilitate on-the-ground implementation of recovery actions. Nothing obligates actions to be implemented by agencies or precludes alternative actions to address threats to the desert tortoise. The RITs will regularly engage with the MOG to report on progress. The next version of the recovery action plans (i.e., version 2) should include a “report card” on the progress of recovery implementation.

The MOG agreed that, rather than endorsing each recovery action specified in the recovery action plans, it approves Recovery Action Plans (version 1) as part of a working process. The MOG concluded specifically, the RITs should:

- Strive for resolution/consensus on those actions where there was formal dissent for revision in version 2.
- Consider how to broaden stakeholder involvement without sacrificing RIT function.
- Develop high-priority project proposals and then look for partnerships to leverage resources for projects.
- Report to the MOG in a year on which conflicts have been resolved and how project proposals are being implemented or have been fleshed out. The RITs should identify priority issues that require MOG direction, shared resources, or assistance in clearing roadblocks or resolving potential conflicts.

To assist the RITs, the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office (DTRO) agreed to:

- Release (post on the DTRO website) Recovery Action Plans (version 1) to the public with language in the introduction that clearly states the intent that each is a working document.
- Establish a mechanism (e.g., dedicated email address) for stakeholder input
- Add a section on the MOG endorsement of the RIT process and direction to move recovery action plans towards version 2; clearly state that this does not imply an endorsement of specific recommendations.

West Mojave Plan, Route Rehabilitation and Signing

BLM Action: The BFO is working with the Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC) on two projects to implement signing of open routes, route closures, and restoration efforts in support of the West Mojave Plan, as well as enhancing habitat for sensitive resources in the BFO area.

1) Black Mountain: BFO has received funding from the Renewable Energy Action Team (\$50,000) to address Golden Eagle mitigation requirements associated with the Abengoa Solar Project near Harper Dry Lake. The objective of this action is to enhance the habitat of the Golden Eagle nesting pair impacted by the solar development through signing open routes and restoring incursions identified during the West Mojave Route

Monitoring efforts in the Black Mountain Subregion.

2) Coolgardie Mesa: BFO has received funding from Fort Irwin (\$76,000) to address Lane Mountain milk-vetch issues. The objective of this action is to enhance the habitat of the Lane Mountain milk-vetch through signing open routes and restoring incursions identified during the West Mojave Route Monitoring efforts in the Coolgardie Mesa Subregion.

Agencies: BLM, Barstow Field Office
BLM, California State Office
Fort Irwin
Transition Habitat Conservancy

Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office
Mickey Quillman, Resources Branch Chief, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BFO is working with THC to develop Scopes of Work for both of these projects and anticipate starting work in the Coolgardie Mesa Area in May 2014.

Silurian Valley Wind and Solar Facilities

BLM Action: Processing two separate applications filed by Iberdrola Renewables:

1) A 200 MW wind farm (67-133 turbines) including a new project substation with an overhead 287-kV transmission line involving 15,849 acres of public lands. Key issues are visual landscape, impacts to historic trail and railroad, golden eagles and DOD flight corridor (curtailment plan required). Project is required to comply with the Bald and Golden Eagle Act.

2) A 200-MW solar PV project, including a new project substation with an overhead 1.5 mile 287 kV interconnection line on 7,218 acres of public lands. Solar proposal lies within a variance area per the Solar PEIS Record of Decision (ROD). Solar Variance determination is required by Solar PEIS; requires BLM National Director's concurrence to process further.

Both projects propose potentially connecting into the LADWP Mead-Victorville 287kV line (Boulder corridor). Project Feasibility, System Impact and Facility studies for both projects have not been completed – interconnection is unconfirmed. Proposed projects would be located 10 miles north of Baker, CA and east of State Scenic Highway 127 (between Silurian Dry Lake and the historic Boulder Utility Corridor).

Agencies: BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District
National Park Service (NPS), Death Valley National Park and Mojave National Preserve
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Pacific Region and Ventura Office
State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
Department of Defense (DOD)
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

Contacts: Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office
Jeff Childers, Project Manager, Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO)

Status: **Wind:** Revised Plan of Development (POD) received and deemed adequate to complete the application. Application has been forwarded to the California Desert District RECO for environmental processing. DOD advises curtailment agreement would be required with applicant to avoid impacts to R-2508 flight corridor. Project area is transected by the National Historic Old Spanish Trail and historic Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad; historic visual landscape and cultural concerns; potential golden eagle and avian corridor concerns; and concerns have been raised by NPS, USFWS, Tribes and SHPO.

Solar: The proposed project location lies within a Solar PEIS variance area which requires two meetings with government entities and a public meeting. Filing requires BLM California State Director determination if processing application is warranted per Solar PEIS Record of Decision. The BLM California State Director may choose to deny or must acquire BLM Director's concurrence to proceed with processing. The BLM Director may agree to process or can deny application.

Pre-application meetings with BLM and government agencies have been completed. SHPO, NPS, USFWS, CDFW and Tribal concerns received. BLM has requested various cultural/archaeological field studies and Ethnographic literature review to adequately consider the effects of the solar proposal to render a variance determination.

A public meeting was held on March 27, 2014 in Barstow for the applicant to present their project and begin a 30-day public comment period. On April 16, 2014, the BLM agreed to an additional 30-day extension to the public comment period which ends on May 28, 2014.

North Peak Wind Farm

BLM Action: EON Climate and Renewables, Inc. filed an application for a 120 MW wind farm. This proposed project consists of up to 42 wind turbines, access roads, an off-site operations office, and a project substation with a 220kV interconnection line to the SCE Desert

View Substation. Location borders the Towns of Apple Valley and Lucerne Valley, San Bernardino National Forest, Juniper Flats and the OMYA Mine.

Agency: BLM, Barstow Field Office
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
County of San Bernardino
California State Fish and Wildlife, Natural Resources Division

Contact: Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office
Frank McMenimen, Project Manager, Palms Springs/South Coast Office

Status: A revised Plan of Development was received and deemed complete. Meetings with BLM and other Federal, State and local agencies have been conducted. Concerns include cultural, visual landscape, eagles and wildland urban interface. Application is on hold awaiting applicant's agreement and initial deposit of funds for costs to be incurred. Applicant is awaiting SCE interconnection study findings and developer costs for gen-tie connection to Desert View substation. It is anticipated that the application will be forwarded to CDD RECO for environmental processing upon reimbursement account establishment. The Notice of Intent for EIS is projected for Fall 2014/Winter 2015.

California Historic Route 66

BLM Action: Needles to Barstow Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

Contact: Doran Sanchez, Partnership Outreach/Development Specialist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BLM, in coordination with the California Historic Route 66 Association (CHR66A) is preparing a CMP for the segment of the historic Route 66 within the BLM California Desert District that extends from the western city limits of Barstow, California to five miles east of Needles, California. CMP information is available at <http://www.route66ca.org> and follow the link.

The CHR66A, Lardner-Klein and BLM CDD have scheduled four webcasts to continue soliciting public comments on preparation of the CMP. Names, addresses and emails of the DAC, local tribes and key stakeholders were provided to Larkner-Klein, who in coordination with the CHR66A and the BLM, will provide ongoing notice/outreach to the public regarding the web-casts, which will be held 10:30 a.m. to noon (Pacific Daylight Time) on the following dates to address specific topics:

April 28, 2014: Route 66's Intrinsic Qualities and their Stewardship

May 22, 2014: Visitor Experience

August 28, 2014: Transportation

October 23, 2014: Marketing and Heritage Tourism Development.

The CHR66A and Lardner-Klein formed an Ad Hoc Committee to develop strategies to maximize outreach and effectiveness of the web-based meetings. The Committee includes representatives from each of the communities, organizations, agencies, and individuals who expressed interest in participating on the committee during the public scoping meetings.

Congressionally Designated Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area

BLM Action: Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area

Contact: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BLM is working cooperatively with the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), Twentynine Palms, California, to implement the withdrawal and reservation of public land in the Johnson Valley OHV Area identified in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-66) (NDAA 2014). The NDAA 2014 also established the “Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area” which includes a Shared Use Area (SUA) to be managed for recreational and natural resources conservation purposes ten months of the year and for military purposes two months of the year.

A public meeting will be held May 7, 2014 at the Yucca Valley Community Center, Yucca Valley, CA from 6 – 8 PM. This is an information meeting regarding land use changes in the Johnson Valley area.

Mining - Locatable Minerals

BLM Action: Iron Age Plan of Operation

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The BFO is reviewing a Plan of Operation (Plan) for reprocessing iron ore material first mined in 1904-1908 at the Iron Age Mine. The mine produced ~1300-1400 tons of iron ore (hematite) in 1951 and as a result, left large waste rock piles that the current proponent is proposing to re-work. The property has been idle since early 1952. Concentrating/milling the ore will be conducted on approximately 3 acres of the patented Iron Age 2 mining claim with ore being brought in from both the patented Iron Age 2, Iron Age 3 mining claims, as well as BLM administered Easy Pickens 1 and Easy Pickens 2 mining claims (CAMC 260830 & 260831 respectively). Approximately 2.3 million tons per year; 920,000 tons of product and 1.4 million tons of waste rock/low

grade ore that doesn't meet spec will be backfilled into the current quarry on the patented claims using conveyors and or trucks. Water well will be drilled on-site for all dust emission controls and a dust palliative may be applied on the haul road to reduce daily water demand. It's estimated that 9 million gallons of water annually will be pumped and each year thereafter, 3.6 million gallons for "make-up" due to evaporation and product loss (due to wet milling of the iron ore). No wastewater will be generated as a result of excavation or plant operations. Thirty to sixty, 50 ton haul trucks per day will haul ore to two mill sites just south of Highway 62 where the ore will be stockpiled for highway legal trucks to haul to market.

BLM Action: New Deal Mine Plan of Operation

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The proponent has submitted a Plan of Operation to conduct a bulk sample in a previously excavated mine shaft to determine concentration of valuable minerals. BLM has received information needed from the proponent to start the NEPA process (schedule is pending).

BLM Action: Calico Exploration Plan of Operation

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: BLM has reviewed the Plan of Operation for the drilling program proposed near the Calico Mountains. BLM is consulting with the USFWS on the biological aspect of the project and awaiting their concurrence with BLM's biological assessment.

BLM Action: California Blue Mine Plan of Operations

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: BLM has placed proponent in "Noncompliance" due to operations conducted outside original authorized Plan of Operation (Plan). In order to be removed from "Noncompliance", BLM is requiring a revised plan of operation and an environmental assessment. The proponent is working with both the BLM and their consultants to complete these requirements.

Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program

BLM Action: Silver Reef Mill Site Remediation

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: The abandoned Silver Reef Mill Site was determined to contain asbestos debris used in shingles, siding, and other materials. During April 7 – April 11, 2014, a BLM contractor was onsite and remediated the asbestos waste by collecting it and shipping it to a proper disposal facility. Project is complete.

BLM Action: Calico Mountains AML Remediation

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist, Barstow Field Office

Status: Over the last several years, the BFO has been remediating AML features. This process includes inventorying, prioritizing, securing funding, and completing environmental studies. Approximately 35 AML features have been remediated either by constructing wildlife friendly gates, backfilling, or using expanding foam. On May 16, 2014, the BLM will be conducting bat surveys at future AML sites identified for closure.