

Desert Advisory Council (DAC) Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup Update

Thursday, May 22, 2014

BLM Action: DAC ISDRA Subgroup Update

Contact: Tom Zale, Field Manager, El Centro (Designated Federal Officer)

Status: Teri Raml, has delegated the DFO duties for the ISDRA Subgroup to Tom Zale.

Some members of the DAC ISDRA Subgroup individually requested tours following membership selections. One tour was given to subgroup members Tom Acuna, Ed Stovin, and Karen Brindley. Rebecca Terrazas-Baxter, Representative of Congressman Juan Vargas, also requested a tour and accompanied the group on 4/11/2014 to the dunes.

BLM Action: ISDRA Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: Both ranger stations were closed on April 18 for the summer and will reopen next October.

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.

Education programs - 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) currently has 3,534 likes since it began in September 2012. During the

first week of December, we hit a new record and reached 77,372 people. Discussion/Notification topics have included: outreach, education, road conditions, weather updates, event announcements, wildlife pictures, OHV 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

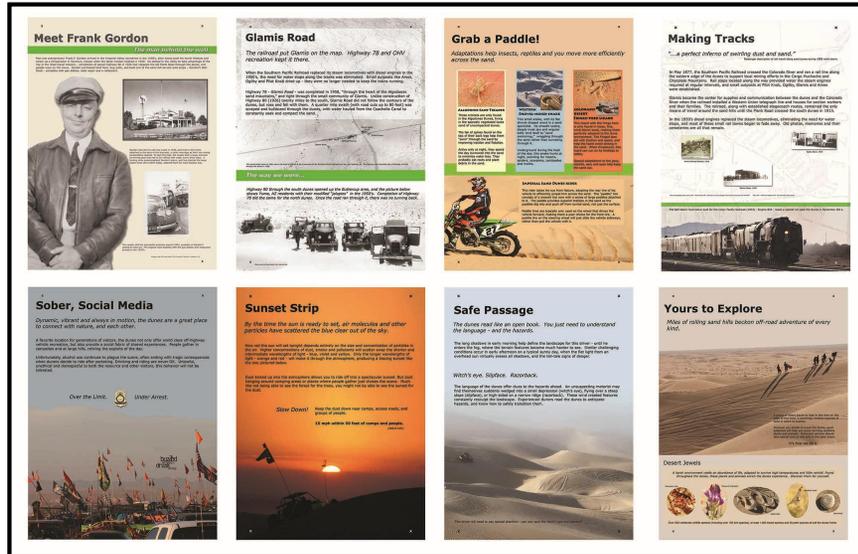


New Dune Guards visit the CRS

Partnership efforts with Kawasaki, United Desert Gateway, American Sand Association and Imperial County provided the resources to update, install, and rehab five 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 update the map to educate next seasons visitors about the implementation of the ROD/RAMP and changes to the open area boundaries.

Each of the new kiosks showcase site specific interpretive panels, a map, and 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 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

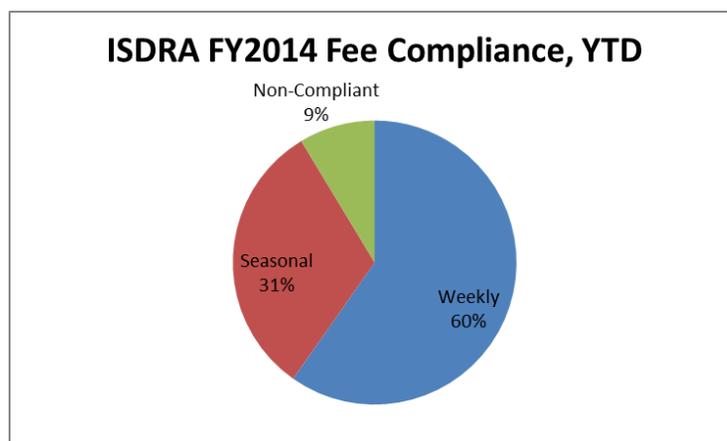
BLM Action: ISDRA Fee Program Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, ISDRA Manager

Status: The ISDRA fee period came to a close on April 15th. 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 (878,000) is down 5% from the same time in FY 2013. 46,472 permits have been sold YTD generating \$2,186,000 in revenues. Permit compliance remains high in the ISDRA. After collecting data on 6,433 vehicles this season, permit compliance is 91%.

Fee compliance monitoring 2014:



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

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 deeper dune locations in the northern (Gecko/Glamis) portions of the ISDRA.

BLM has been 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 ISDRA and seasonal OHV recreation. BLM will also provide input into the updated and revised treatment and response protocols to ensure ISDRA visitors receive high quality emergency medical services.

BLM continues to work with multiple partners and agencies to provide the appropriate level of emergency medical services in the ISDRA, and to ensure BLM EMS/SAR field providers receive the appropriate level of training. These combined efforts and partnerships allow BLM to provide, and maintain, high quality EMS/SAR services to the public.

The 2015 seasonal jobs are currently being advertised on www.usajobs.gov and hiring for the 2015 season is anticipated to begin shortly.

BLM Action: ISDRA RAMP Update

Contact: Neil Hamada, Dunes Manager

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). So far, about 25 miles of signs have been installed.



Sustained 41 mph winds with 68 mph gusts blow while BLM Seasonal EMT Park Ranger Daniel Scott and Paramedic Park Ranger Brian Puckett install closure signs on the Pierson's Milk-vetch Critical Habitat boundary near Patton Valley.

BLM Action: ISDRA Maintenance

Contact: Martin Gibson, Force Account Supervisor

Status: 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 3rd, 2014. Special sign pullers were created and designed by maintenance staff and were on hand during the event to coordinate the safe volunteer experience.



BLM Rangers working together with volunteers removing closure signs.

BLM Action: Volunteers

Contact: Daniel Baca, Park Ranger

Status: A volunteer event was held on May 3rd, 2014 in partnership with the American Sand Association (ASA). This volunteer event focused on the removal of signs for the administrative closures located in the ISDRA. 268 volunteers donated 1,697 hours of labor and helped remove closure signs near Gecko and Buttercup Campgrounds.



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

The 17th annual Martin Luther King Day Clean Up Event was another successful partnership event due to the 900 volunteers, dozens of private sponsors, the United Desert Gateway, and BLM working together. Participants had a great time and were treated to a free lunch and t-shirts.



Volunteers at the January 2014 Clean up event

BLM Action: DAC ISDRA Subgroup Old Business

Contact: Neil Hamada, Dunes Manager

Status: At the last DAC ISDRA Subgroup meeting, held in November 2013, members requested the BLM to follow up on select items. These items included: a dust suppressant report, a one-day permit request, ATV safety classes and the interpretive RTP grants.

Dust suppressant report- Ocotillo Wells State Vehicle Recreation Area is studying different brands of dust suppressants. They hope to have new knowledge from the testing next year. BLM proposes to wait to for the results of the study before moving forward with the application of a dust suppressant on the Wash Road.

One-Day permit request- The ASA and UDG facilitated a discussion with BLM to determine the feasibility of a one-day permit focusing on a core-charge idea discussed in the November Subgroup meeting. The idea was focused on a system where a visitor could purchase a permit at one location, travel through the dunes, and return it to a different location upon leaving the opposite end of the dunes. The second location would return the “Core Charge” amount of the permit to the visitor. The UDG was contacted to see if there were businesses that were open 24 hours along common routes to and from the ISDRA owned by the same person. Upon discussion, no business with the same owner currently exists that sells the ISDRA permits. This would make it difficult to have visitors wanting to purchase permits in one location and return it to a business owned by a

different company. More research would need to be done to address logistical concerns.

There was also discussion about a pilot program selecting the ranger stations, and a few local community businesses, as the sale and return points.

After some discussion the following list of pros and cons were created by the ASA, UDG, and BLM.

Pros	Cons
A day pass could be available to all visitors.	Logistics would be difficult.
Decreased cost of a permit for the visitor staying for a short duration.	Local businesses may be required to provide cash up front for permits.
Good for local community of duners and visitors.	Compliance could be difficult.
Could generate an increase in local vendor revenue.	Must decide what time period the permit would cover (24 hours or just the purchase date?)
	Must clarify the logistics of the core charge refund process, for example, how would businesses verify permit sales from other businesses.
	A change in the permits could alter the fee contract leading to increase in fee collection costs.

ATV safety classes- No grants were requested for ATV classes. BLM remains willing to work with partners if any request a grant next cycle.

Interpretive RTP grants- The Subgroup discussed the possibility of BLM applying for an RTP grant for the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Watchable Wildlife Site. The current panels are faded and unreadable. After some research, the panels are being returned and repaired under warranty. No grant is needed at this time; however, BLM will keep this program in mind if a funding need arises in the future.