

**Desert Advisory Council**  
**Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup**  
**Meeting Minutes**

*August 21, 2014*

***Attendance:***

Tom Acuna- CA OHV  
Karen Brindley- CA OHV  
Ed Stovin- OHV Organization  
Tom Zale- BLM, Field Manager  
Stephanie Clark- BLM, Chief Ranger  
Neil Hamada- BLM, Supervisory Outdoor Rec. Planner  
Michelle Puckett- BLM, Outdoor Rec. Planner  
Andrew Trouette- BLM, Biologist  
Brian Puckett- BLM, Park Ranger  
Daniel Baca- BLM, Park Ranger

Nicole Gilles- Public, ASA Rep.  
Dick Holiday- Public  
Julio Morales- Imperial Valley Press  
John Woelke- Public  
JJ from JJ tires- Public via phone  
Brian Johnson- Public via phone  
Barry McGwon- Public via phone

***Absent***

Don Wharton- Local Community  
Bob Ham- Local Community  
Chuck Hattaway- OHV Organization  
Jim Bramham- CA OHV

**Welcome, Introductions, and Previous Meeting Minutes- Tom Acuna**

- Meeting called to order at 9:35 A.M. by Tom Acuna.
- Tom Zale, El Centro Field Office Manager and the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) representative, provided a brief update of work and challenges that had occurred since the last time the subgroup met. Imperial County Supervisor Ray Castillo was appointed to the Desert Advisory Committee (DAC), the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is moving forward, extensive work is still being performed by staff from the El Centro Field Office to remove signs and re-sign the critical habitat closure, a dunes map is being produced to work on smart phones, new seasonal park rangers have been hired and training has started, and a new fee contractor has been hired for the 2014-2015 season.
- Tom Acuna noted that the subgroup did not have a quorum to make motions. Subgroup members in attendance agreed to move the approval of previous meeting minutes and the meeting management agenda item to a later time in the meeting when there was a quorum.

### **Subgroup Chairperson Report**

- Tom Acuna thanked Neil Hamada for working with him to prepare for the subgroup meeting and stated that he would like to improve the way subgroup meetings are run and is hoping to discuss Robert's Rules later in the meeting.

### **Review Subgroup Member Terms**

- Tom Acuna stated there are two member terms set to expire in December of 2014. Don Wharton (representing the local community) and Jim Bramham (representing CA OHV). The BLM will be making announcements for these positions later this fall. These announcements will be posted on our BLM websites as well as the ISDRA Facebook page. Applications will be turned in to the El Centro Field Office and forwarded to the California Desert District Office.
- A discussion was held about re-applying as a subgroup participant and additional terms. Subgroup members can serve a total of two- three year terms. Jim Bramham has already served his terms and Don Wharton is currently finishing his first three year term.

### **Public Comment for Items not on the Agenda**

- Barry McGowan asked "What is the time frame for closures in the Gordon's Well area?" Neil Hamada addressed the question with a discussion about the RAMP implementation process. He stated that there are maps available on the ISDRA website that highlight which areas are open. Tom Zale further explained that the closures are part of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan and close critical habitat for Pierson's milk-vetch. He added that the plan was as result of a public planning process that lasted several years and we are enforcing the closures.
  - Barry asked, "So how well will these closures be marked so we know to stay out?" Tom Zale explained that the closures will be marked with fiberglass signs and stickers. Signs have been installed this summer and visitors can download an ISDRA geo-referenced map to see where they are in relation to the closures.
  - Barry asked, "The campers in the Gordon's Well area may be shifting north to Glamis. Has it been discussed about the impact to businesses and other camping area?" Neil explained that the critical habitat originally included more areas dunes paralleling Gecko Road; it was only because of the economic impact analysis that the draft critical habitat polygon in that area was removed.
  - Ed Stovin asked if there were Flat-tailed Horned Lizards in the Imperial Sand Dunes. Tom Zale responded that they are mostly on the west side of the recreation area close to the east mesa. Ed said that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is looking at adding it to the endangered species list. There will be a public comment period during this process 8-12 months from now so maybe

the subgroup can submit comments and he hopes the agency will submit comments.

### **BLM Report**

- Neil Hamada and Brian Puckett provided an Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Update. (*See the update at the end of these meeting minutes*)
- Andrew Trouette gave a brief report on environmental monitoring in the Imperial Sand Dunes.
  - The BLM conducted six Pierson's Milk-vetch transects in the spring of 2014. 2015 monitoring will have six or nineteen transects depending on rainfall and a report will be completed. The BLM continues to collect precipitation data using existing weather stations at both ranger stations. In addition, manual rain gauges obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will be installed and utilized from October to December in case of failure of the automated system.
  - The BLM and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) are developing a monitoring plan and protocol for long term Colorado Desert Fringe-toed Lizard monitoring.
  - A special status plant monitoring plan will begin development in September 2014. The focus will be the Algodones Dunes sunflower and Wiggins' croton.
- Ed Stovin asked if we had any new campground hosts. Neil responded saying BLM has no new campground hosts but are still accepting applications if anyone is interested Homer continues to be the Buttercup campground host.

### **Public Comment Period Regarding the BLM Report**

- Dick Holiday asked if the monitoring protocols include the wilderness areas and Andrew said that BLM will look at the wilderness areas, open area, closed area and across the entire dune system.
- Nicole Gilles asked if the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has been contacted yet in regards to the five year plan review. Andrew responded that he believes the plan included a whole range of species. Nicole stated that when she contacted the FWS they had expressed to her that the 2013 plan was not available yet.

### **Fee Collection Discussion**

Neil began by discussing the need for a new fee contractor in order to continue collecting fees in the Imperial Sand Dunes for the 2014-2015 season. The fee contractor has been secured and is currently working with the BLM to be ready by the Sand Sport Super Show (September 19-21, 2014). Neil stated that visitors will not see much of a change from the previous year. One change will be making the weekly permits a scratch off, rather than a hole punch, for the valid

dates on weekly permits. The season permits will remain a sticker but will vary in size and color.

- Tom Acuna asked if this vendor will improve or will be more efficient. Neil advised that the statement of work is the same and they are providing the same service.
- Karen Brindley asked if the offsite vendors will be the same or expanded. Neil stated that it depends on the vendors and that it changes every year. Vendors must apply to sell permits and they go through the process each year. Most vendors that sell a lot always come back. Karen asked if the list of the vendors is on the website yet. Neil said the website is not up yet, but when it is up, the vendors will be listed.”
- Tom Zale stated that the previous contract was expected to last for five years. But this summer we needed to award a new contract. We worked with the National Operating Center (NOC) and we are optimistic with the new fee contractor. This contract only lasts one year so we will be able to look at the possibility of the cost of one-day permits in the next solicitation.
  - Tom Zale reported that BLM will continue to look at the one-day permits and the approval process needed for them, but will not have them this year. Tom Acuna stated that last year they approved the business plan and it went to the DAC for approval. As a group, the ISDRA Subgroup wanted to continue exploring one day passes.
  - Karen expressed a concern about the administrative cost and how it seems inconvenient if visitors have to return the permit to the place of purchase for a refund. There was a discussion about keeping the visitors in mind for there to be some balance.
  - Tom Acuna reminded the group that law enforcement rangers would have to enforce daily permits, and that having daily visits reduces efficiency. He also said that many campers don’t want to be visited daily from law enforcement, but daily permits would have BLM enforcing daily, and that would be concerning. There is no real easy answer.
  - Tom Zale reported that BLM wants to support our community and the visitors to the dunes. But administratively, BLM has to have a process that makes sense. Neil added that when the public comments from the business plan were submitted, the concern was to keep fees low. He also stated that if BLM modified the program to absorb the cost of including a daily fee, fees could increase, which is the opposite of what the public wants. BLM is trying to keep administration cost as low as possible; any increase in cost would be carried forward to the visitor.

### **Public Comment Period on Fee Collection and One Day Permits**

- Dick Holiday- “We use to talk about the idea of a parking area where people could park and use it as a day use area only. That could relatively solve the problem; they wouldn’t have to pay for the day. Have you totally discounted that point?” Tom Acuna asked what the pros and cons and cons would be for this idea and gave a few examples such as: Pros- you don’t have to visit everyone’s campsite; Con- creating a new area and parking. Neil discussed the idea of designating areas for day use only and said that visitors are likely to continue to want to camp in those areas so it could be an enforcement workload. BLM could install gates but would have to open and close the areas every day, an additional cost. Tom Acuna asked Nicole Gilles what her thoughts were regarding the fee free day use area. Nicole said that it seems the new contractor is experienced and that bidding a fee collection contract both ways is a benefit. From the enforcement standpoint, it is not ideal; there are a lot of people who want to go out to the dunes after work and just jeep around. She said that she doesn’t know how many people would take advantage of right now. Nicole suggested the need for another visitor survey. Karen Brindley suggested trying to sell a select number of day passes on a first come - first serve program but appreciates the enforcement issue. She appreciated the BLM working with future contractors and working towards the best decision. Tom Acuna closed the topic by reminding the group that the number one focus is safety in the dunes, but he understands what visitors want.

### **Discussion and Recommendations to the DAC**

- Chuck Hattaway, representing OHV organizations, sent a cellular phone text to Neil and said he approved the meeting minutes from the previous meeting. The text was viewed by Tom Acuna. The meeting minutes for the previous meeting were approved with a correction to spelling of Karen Brindley’s name.
- A discussion was held regarding future meeting dates for 2015. Karen stated that she would be unavailable the second Thursday of every month due to prior work commitments. Neil suggested to the group that we could look at the same months as the 2014 meetings and he would send out dates via email.
- A recommendation was made to discuss Robert’s Rules at the next subgroup meeting with more members in attendance.
- The next meeting will be held December 11, 2014 at 9:30 a.m., located at the BLM, El Centro Field Office.

**Meeting adjourned at 11:32 P.M.**

# Desert Advisory Council (DAC)

## Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA)

### Subgroup Update

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*Thursday, August 21, 2014*

#### **BLM Action: ISDRA Update**

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** Both ranger stations will reopen October 17, 2014. Cumulative visitation is 936,000, which is a 6% decrease from the same time in FY 2013.

OHV Grants have been approved for the 2014/2015 season. The El Centro Field is receiving 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 and volunteers allow the BLM to have the sufficient matching funds to apply for the projects.

The ISDRA Facebook Page ([www.facebook.com/blmimperialsanddunes](http://www.facebook.com/blmimperialsanddunes)) currently has 3,725 likes since it began in September 2012.

The El Centro Field Office continues 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. This year the Dune Guard program will receive a “facelift” by offering newly designed t-shirts, can cozies, safety flags and safety goggles to safe riders.

All Dunes materials (brochure, kiosk panel, ranger station display, etc.) are being revised to capture new Pierson’s Milk-vetch critical habitat closure boundaries. Kiosk panels have been received and will be installed next season. Work continues on updating the new map brochure to educate visitors about the implementation of the ROD/RAMP and changes to the open area boundaries.



[Karissa reviewing the new kiosk panels for the dunes.](#)

## **BLM Action: ISDRA Fee Program Update**

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** The ISDRA fee period came to a close on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Camping continues to be free through the end of September.

Between Oct and April, 46,472 permits were sold generating \$2,186,000 in revenues. After the fiscal year is complete and all the data is collected, BLM will provide the annual fee report.

A new fee contractor, Urban Park Concessionaires (UPC) was hired and is working closely with BLM to prepare for the new season.

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

**Contact:** Brian Puckett, Park Ranger

**Status:** The ISDRA will have two permanent and six seasonal park rangers for the FY15 season. Of the six seasonal park rangers, four will be returning staff, and two will be new hires.

Newly hired park ranger initial training will begin August 25, 2014 and run for six weeks. Returning staff will begin October 6, 2014 for two weeks of combined refresher training with new hires. The training will consist of: Five weeks of Emergency Medical Technician-Basic; one week of 4x4 and OHV driving and trailer towing; one week of technical rescue training in orienteering, tracking, rope rescue, vehicle extrication, and swiftwater rescue; and one week of rules, regulations, flora and fauna, fees, and other area information, frequently asked questions, and ranger station procedures and preparation.

## **BLM Action: ISDRA RAMP Update - Signing**

**Contact:** Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** BLM Park Rangers, maintenance workers, wilderness staff, botanists, GIS specialists, compliance staff, and rangers have worked all summer removing the previous closure signs and signing the critical habitat closures. A special thanks to the BLM Yuma Field Office for their help by sending over three employees to assist in the signing project. All critical habitat closure boundaries have been signed, and crews are now out maintaining and adding additional signs to help improve visibility. A seasonal staff will be hired in October to maintain the signs along the boundary during the visitation season.



Two volunteer events were held in partnership with the American Sand Association (ASA). These events occurred on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup>. These volunteer events focused on the removal of signs for the administrative closures located in the ISDRA. A total of 299 volunteers donated 1,861 hours of labor and helped remove closure signs near Gecko and Buttercup Campgrounds as well as the north end of the large closure. The signs are being recycled and used for the critical habitat boundary.



**ISDRA Subgroup Vice-Chairman, Ed Stovin, volunteering in the dunes.**

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>