

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

December 17, 2015

Attendance:

Subgroup

Tom Acuna, CA OHV
Bob Ham- Imperial County
Karen Brindley- CA OHV
Ed Stovin- OHV Organization
Dick Holiday- CA OHV
Charla Teeters- Local Community (via phone)
Nicole Gilles- Local Community

Public

Douglas Wright (via phone)

Absent

Chuck Hattaway- OHV Organization

BLM

Tom Zale – Field Manager
Neil Hamada - Recreation Chief
Steph Clark - Chief Ranger
Michelle Puckett- Outdoor Recreation Planner

Welcome, Introductions, Agenda and Previous Meeting Minutes - Tom Zale

- Previous meeting minutes approved.

Public Comment for Items not on the Agenda

- No public comment was received.

BLM Report

- See attached report
- There was a discussion about substantial electrical issues to the main powerline to Cahuilla Ranger Station. It is being worked on and the BLM is currently waiting for approvals to move forward with the repairs.
- There was a discussion and question about how many stakes the BLM has placed around the Pierson's Milk-vetch critical habitat closures. BLM does not know the exact number of stakes because many of them have been collected and recycled from the previous closures.

- There was a discussion about the trash left by visitors in the ISDRA after holiday weekends. BLM informed the Subgroup that Rangers prioritize litter enforcement and do issue citations to visitors, especially during the time periods when visitors are packing up to leave at the end of the weekend. We have also had fines reduced to community service and had citizens pick up about four truckloads of trash. The trash in the dumpsters is collected by a contractor, hauled off site, and then the recyclables are sorted out as part of the contract. The Subgroup reported folks are “shaming” visitors on social media for littering to help with the litter education efforts.
- A discussion was held regarding the Special Recreation application process, and fees, to educate the group about the requirements for competitive, commercial, and group events in the dunes due to the illegal events that have occurred. BLM assured the group that most of the events could be processed and approved; rather than be shut down, if the applicants applied for a permit, acquired insurance, and paid the fee.
- There was more discussion about the law enforcement program. BLM discussed and described the registration and DUI check point process for the group, and discussed how BLM enforces the 10 foot no camping and space saving rules. BLM also advised the group that the BLM is excited to announce several new Rangers are in the process of being hired.

Public Comment Regarding the BLM Report

- None

Subgroup Discussion

- A discussion was held regarding the 2015-2016 priorities for the ISDRA. A new facility at Cahuilla Ranger Station was discussed as a high priority. Discussions has occurred with the BLM engineering department about extending the footprint to include the turnaround area to the south of the station and to make safe RV parking available to the public. Storage facilities would be needed for BLM emergency vehicles and possible overnight quarters. Radio communication infrastructure improvement is already underway as a partnership project with the Navy. Discussion with the engineer indicates a rough cost at about \$6,000,000. BLM has submitted requests for funding in the past. BLM would like to have all the pre-work completed to have a shovel ready project if funding would become available and would like help by having an organization apply for a planning grant. Past experience with Buttercup Ranger Station provides a good example of how collaboration with a partner, and several funding sources, can help complete the project. A separate, dedicated meeting is needed to discuss further. Meeting set for Jan. 29, 2016.
- There was continued discussion about BLM priorities and how the Subgroup can help. BLM focused the Subgroup on the management actions in the Imperial Sand Dunes

Recreation Area Management Plan (ISD RAMP). The group discussed a need to review the ISD RAMP, get feedback from their constituents, and report back at the next meeting.

Public Comment Regarding the Subgroup Discussion

- Douglas Wright - Why do the Wash Road checkpoints take so long? BLM response - We are trying to improve the process. BLM got into the line to see how long it was taking and got through relatively quickly, however, that area has traffic issues. It was hard to determine whether or not it was from the BLM checkpoint or just busy weekend traffic. BLM is reconsidering the checkpoints on Wash Road on the day of exodus to reduce the impact to visitors.

Subgroup Discussion

- There was a discussion about holding back-to-back Desert Advisory Committee and ISDRA Subgroup meetings to improve attendance in the future.
- BLM advised the group that there has been a request to extend Flat-tailed Horned Lizard hearing to the State and these are usually granted.
- BLM briefed the group about a potential donation of land on SR78 to develop a parking area for access to the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness. This could increase safety by reducing the number of people that walk across the highway to access the wilderness and would also be more visible than the current Watchable Wildlife Site.
- The Subgroup requested detailed information about the fee contract and the BLM advised the group that a Freedom of Information Act request would be needed and have to be submitted to the BLM National Operations Center (where the contract is managed).
- There was a discussion about camping east of the railroad tracks, that fees are collected in the area, and questions about the type of recreation that is occurring there. The group wanted to know the visitation levels in the area but BLM did not have visitor count data for the area.

Meeting adjourned at 12:35 P.M.