

Application: OHV Dos Palmas Fence Restoration

Project Description for Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program - 2010/2011

Agency: BLM - Palm Springs South Coast Field Office

A. List of Restoration Activities

The Salt Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) was established by the California Desert Conservation Act, 1980 (CDCA) through a partnership between The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the BLM for the protection of washes, seeps and springs which provide habitat for several special status species. In 1998, through a cooperative planning effort with BLM, TNC, US FWS, Biological Resources Division of the U. S. Geological Survey, California Department of Fish and Game, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the Salt Creek ACEC was expanded into the Dos Palmas ACEC with a mission to safeguard the ecological sustainability and natural diversity of this unique ecosystem. The land in and around the Dos Palmas ACEC is non-contiguous BLM property, intermixed with Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and privately-owned property. In cooperation with these partners, the BLM has been actively acquiring lands and restoring Dos Palmas ACEC to its natural conditions by managing the water regime, removing noxious plant populations such as Salt Cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*), and re-establishing native plant species. The BLM spends roughly \$500,000 per year on restoration and management of the ACEC.

Biological resource values within the ACEC include desert fan palm oasis woodland, desert dry wash woodland, mesquite bosque, stabilized desert sand fields, desert saltbush scrub, desert sink scrub, and freshwater marsh. The ACEC provides habitat for special status species, including the desert pupfish, Yuma clapper rail, California black rail, flat-tailed horned lizard, yellow bat, and the Palm Springs pocket mouse. The ACEC contains prehistoric and historic cultural resources that are representative of the prehistory and history of Riverside County. Cultural resources include Native American archaeological sites focused around the shorelines of ancient Lake Cahuilla, historic grave sites, and the Bradshaw Trail with its associated Dos Palmas stage stop.

An estimated 96,000 off-road vehicles are registered in Riverside County, ranking it the third highest in the state. With an additional 150,000 vehicles registered in the surrounding counties, the sustainability and natural diversity of the Dos Palmas ACEC and adjacent Federal lands are increasingly being impacted by the continued increase in off-highway vehicle activity. Recent passage of an OHV ordinance in Riverside County and enforcement against illegal riding on private lands by the county sheriff, combined with the lack of legal or desirable riding areas, has diverted an increasing amount of OHV traffic to public lands. While most of the off-highway use at Dos Palmas originates from local OHV enthusiasts who reside in North Shore, Coachella and Indio, off-highway enthusiasts from as far away as Los Angeles and San Diego spend long weekends at Drop 31 just to the west of the ACEC, using the site as a base camp or staging area to ride out into the surrounding desert. Increasingly, Dos Palmas ACEC is experiencing damage

from OHV activity and its associated disturbances including erosion, spreading of invasive weed seeds, and habitat degradation. More recently, vandalism has occurred within the restoration areas, to water transfer systems and site facilities. A human-caused fire in April of 2008 from party goers in the main oasis burned over 450 acres of the unique oases habitat.

Using grant funds from the OHMVR, the BLM proposes to construct approximately 20,500 linear feet (3.9 miles) of t-post and four-strand wire fencing, and to erect signage on BLM and BOR property along the northeast and western buffers of the ACEC, where there has been continuous resource damage from OHV traffic. Construction activities will occur along the outer perimeter of the ACEC and away from the seeps and springs that are associated with most habitat concerns. The fence would be built to current BLM standards, including but not limited to wildlife-safe fence design and engineering specifications for strength and durability. Ground disturbance for fence construction would be limited to pounding T-posts into the ground approximately two (2) feet deep and installing brace panels every 200-400 feet. Some manual brush removal by use of loppers and handsaws within a five (5) foot disturbance zone along the immediate pathway of the proposed fence would be required during fence installation. Vegetative disturbance would be minimal due the low density of vegetative cover in much of the proposed project area. This project would augment fencing that was installed along the northeast boundary of the ACEC in 2008 with a California Desert District grant awarded from OHMVR.

The extensions of existing fencing would provide a comprehensive barrier to unauthorized OHV use and serve to better achieve the above-stated objectives.

B. Describe how the proposed Project relates to OHV Recreation and how OHV Recreation caused the damage:

Unauthorized OHV use in the Dos Palmas area has resulted in reduced vegetative cover and soil disturbance as well as negative impacts to wildlife and culturally sensitive areas within and around the ACEC. The increase in OHV use also increases the frequency of trespass into private lands owned by the San Diego County Water Authority that are managed as part of the ACEC. OHV users regularly gain entry into the pools associated with the palm groves that have been set aside for wildlife habitat and restoration mitigation through the washes and old dirt roads. Unfortunately, the ease of access to the area allowed by OHV use promotes undesirable weekend parties, trash, vandalism, and most recently, human-induced fire. Numerous attempts have been made to sign the boundaries but signs are either ignored or torn down as soon as they are installed. Although the majority of the riders are aware they are riding in a closed area, due to the flat and numerous unauthorized routes that have been created, many conscientious riders unknowingly enter and ride within the ACEC as well.

The proposed fence line is designed to reduce damage that is occurring to natural and cultural resources from OHV traffic within an area that is managed for resource protection and restoration. This project will not have a negative effect on OHV recreation since it will be fencing an area that is not designated open to authorized OHV riding by the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Land Use Plan (2002). The installation of the fence and signage will provide a clear boundary between open and closed riding areas, therefore reducing conflicts

between OHV riders, law enforcement and restoration activities as well as permitted recreational uses within the ACEC such as hiking, wildlife viewing and photography. The reduction in unauthorized routes and access would improve the area's visual resource values and provide a more natural setting for primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities. Signage installed along the fence line would provide an educational opportunity to explain the significance of the ACEC and invite OHV riders to park their vehicles and bikes and continue into the site to explore the area on foot. Installation of the fence and signage, in conjunction with increased law enforcement patrol and educational efforts will serve to enhance the OHV riders' experience in this section of the desert.

C. Describe the size of the specific Project Area(s) in acres and/or miles

The proposed fence line to be constructed is 14,000 linear feet (2.7 miles) in length, and, in conjunction with existing fence lines, would help protect the entire 15,153 acre Dos Palmas ACEC. More directly, the proposed fence line, which will be constructed along the northwest and western buffer area around the ACEC, will protect approximately 7,000 acres.

D. Monitoring and Methodology

Site monitoring of the project will include regular patrols of the fence line to check for vandalism and intrusions. Monitoring report forms will be completed by law enforcement, restoration and recreation personnel on a regular basis. Photo documentation of any vandalism to the fence line or information signs will be provided. The project site will also be monitored for compliance and frequency of use by OHV riders who park their vehicles and continue into the ACEC on foot to explore the area.

Photo documentation: Photo documentation for the project will consist of pre- and post-construction photos. Additional post-construction photos and compliance monitoring will take place periodically for the next three years.

Data on Monitoring Prescription: Initial monitoring will include general information such as date, time, location, photo reference, and site characteristics including current OHV use and frequency. Follow-up monitoring will document the success or failure as well as any persistent disturbance by OHV traffic.

OHV compliance: Follow-up monitoring will document success of the project in terms of OHV rider compliance by documenting the reduction and/or elimination of intrusion into the ACEC. Compliance monitoring will track success of the fence project based on evidence of OHV use. If vandalism and trespass is absent, then the project will be considered successful. If OHV intrusions continue into the ACEC, it will be considered unsuccessful, and additional measures will be explored to obtain OHV compliance. Any intrusions into ACEC by OHV users will be reported to the recreation planner or project supervisor as soon as they are observed.

E. List of Reports

F. Goals, Objectives and Methodology / Peer Reviews

G. Plan for Protection of Restored Area

The constructed fence line will be patrolled on a regular basis by law enforcement rangers, on-site restoration crews and the recreation planner as part of the monitoring component of the project. If damage or vandalism occurs to the fence, repairs will be made as soon as the damage is documented to reduce further damage or intrusion. Reflective decals will be placed on the fence line where old roads or trails cross the ACEC boundary to reduce vehicle collision at night.

Information signs will be posted at predetermined intervals with an emphasis placed on areas of previous intrusion by OHV activity. Signs will include standard carsonite signs with strip decals on designated routes to indicate authorized versus non-authorized routes near the fence line and along the ACEC boundary. Larger 12" by 18" informational signs will be installed in areas of past intrusion to describe the significance and importance of the ACEC and the damage that OHV activity can cause. This type of sign will also invite OHV riders to park their vehicles and continue to explore the ACEC on foot.