

**SOUTH COAST RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVISION  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**

**Planning Issues**

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to revise the South Coast Resource Management Plan (RMP). The South Coast RMP provides guidance for the management of approximately 300,000 acres of BLM administered public lands in portions of five Southern California counties: San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, and Los Angeles.

The BLM invites the public to participate in this planning effort. Citizens are requested to help identify issues or concerns and to provide input on BLM's proposed planning criteria. The following summarizes the existing plan, management concerns, and anticipated issues.

**BACKGROUND**

In 1994 the BLM completed the South Coast RMP to provide guidance for managing public lands in the South Coast Resource Area of Southern California. This planning area encompassed 296 parcels of public land totaling 129,000 acres and an additional 167,000 acres of non-federal surface with federal mineral estate scattered throughout Los Angeles, Orange, southwestern San Bernardino, western Riverside, and western San Diego Counties. The boundaries of the South Coast Resource Area have not changed since 1994 and the planning area will remain the same for this proposed plan revision.

The South Coast RMP addressed five major issues: 1) land tenure adjustment and use authorizations, 2) special status species (threatened, endangered, and sensitive), 3) open space, 4) recreation and public access, and 5) oil and gas leasing and sand and gravel development.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the plan revision is to update the South Coast RMP to: 1) ensure consistency, to the legal extent possible, with the various multi-species planning efforts and partnership agreements BLM is working to establish throughout the South Coast region, 2) re-evaluate management direction in light of new information and change in circumstances, 3) assess the impact of BLM management on threatened and endangered species listed since 1993 through formal consultation with the USFWS, 4) assess the energy related needs of the region and meet the objectives of the President's energy plan, and 5) address issues raised in scoping.

**ANTICIPATED PLANNING ISSUES and MANAGEMENT CONCERNS**

The issues and management concerns presented below are preliminary and based on the best information known to date. Preparation of this RMP will afford many opportunities for collaboration with local, State, Federal and Tribal governments and land management agencies, public interest groups, and public land users. As a result, these issues and concerns may need to be modified and perfected to reflect public comments and concerns raised during formal scoping.

## Planning and Land Management Issues

Potential issues include:

- Conflicts between intensive recreation use and habitat conservation.

Numerous habitat conservation plans have been developed to protect biodiversity and special status species while allowing continued growth. Success of these programs depends on adequate management and protection of the habitat preserves, which include BLM public lands. As open space close to urban areas, these habitat preserves are also seen as a recreation resource by many urban and rural residents. Some forms of recreation, such as use of off highway vehicles, target shooting, and hunting, are occurring but may be incompatible with the conservation goals of the habitat preserves.

- Conflicts between intensive minerals/energy production and habitat conservation, visual resource management, and rural homeowners.

The rapid and continued growth in the South Coast planning area has put an increased demand on the need for sand and gravel, energy production, and energy transmission corridors. Much of the public land that contains these resources, or is available for transmission corridors, is also valuable for habitat conservation and as open space providing natural scenery in the urban landscape.

## Management Concerns

Several management concerns require attention. These include:

### Habitat Conservation Planning

Southern California is among the richest areas of biodiversity in the United States. This biodiversity, coupled with declining habitat in one of the nation's largest and fastest growing urban areas, has resulted in more federal and state listings of threatened or endangered species than any other region of the country. To allow for continued urban growth, several counties and cities have developed large-scale multiple species habitat conservation plans (HCPs) that meet the Section 10 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for "incidental take" permits. This process designates habitat preserves to promote recovery of listed species and avoid listing of new species. The local jurisdictions then receive conditional permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for new development. Public lands managed by BLM and other Federal and state agencies are important as "core habitat areas" of the HCPs. Public lands in the South Coast planning area are identified as critical to the maintenance and success of the HCPs. The HCPs which include BLM managed public lands are as follows:

#### ***San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program***

The Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), covering over 80 species and intended to preserve over 170,000 acres of habitat, was signed in 1997. The MSCP identified over 24,700 acres of public land as the Otay/Kuchamaa Cooperative Management Area and as a "core area" of the MSCP. In an MOU between BLM, local governments, and state and Federal wildlife agencies, the BLM agreed to cooperate in the design, land acquisition, and management of the MSCP to promote biological diversity. Since 1994, the BLM has acquired over 6,000 acres of sensitive habitat in support of the MSCP. San Diego County has also developed two more versions of the MSCP which will cover the entire county. Management of these new Federal lands and MSCP designations are not addressed by the 1994 SCRMP.

### ***Stephens Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan***

In May of 1996, the FWS, BLM, Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game (CDFG), and the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA) signed an implementing agreement for the *Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Habitat Conservation Plan* (SKR HCP) which provides for authorization under both the Federal and California Endangered Species Acts to permit development of SKR habitat outside the core reserves, and to establish seven SKR core reserves throughout western Riverside County. BLM is responsible for managing three of these reserves in partnership with local jurisdictions, FWS, and CDFG.

The core reserves in western Riverside County will require special management attention to effectively deal with intense urban-interface issues and to maintain the integrity of threatened and endangered species habitat within the reserves. The public has requested access to these reserves for recreational purposes. Public access is critical to ensuring continued community support for these reserves. At the same time, recreational activity will need to be managed to maintain threatened and endangered species habitat.

### ***Western Riverside County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan***

Riverside County, as the lead agency, adopted a multiple-species habitat conservation plan for western Riverside County in collaboration with the local jurisdictions, State and Federal agencies, and public/private interest groups in 2004. The BLM is a partner and a key land manager, providing a portion of the proposed preserve system land base. This plan will incorporate the SKR reserves previously established. BLM will be responsible for managing additional core reserves in western Riverside County, and some adjustment in existing management responsibilities may occur in order to improve the effectiveness of BLM and other HCP managing agencies.

### ***Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan***

Since 1997, the BLM has participated with the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (SBVWCD), local jurisdictions, mining companies, and the State and Federal wildlife agencies to develop a land use plan that addresses mining, water conservation, and sensitive species habitat conservation in the Santa Ana River Wash between the cities of Redlands and Highland. Within this same area, BLM manages 755 acres of public lands as the Upper Santa Ana River Wash Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The SBVWCD has proposed a land exchange with the BLM, within the ACEC, to facilitate this plan. Lands in the ACEC are not available for exchange under the current RMP.

## **Energy Resources**

### ***Oil and Gas***

Both the Riverside-San Bernardino and the Los Angeles-Orange County Management Areas have identified oil and gas potential. There are numerous oil and gas leases. To meet the goals and objectives of the President's Energy Plan, a greater emphasis should be placed on future management actions for oil and gas leasing, development, and stipulations for protection of sensitive resources.

### ***Wind Energy***

Many utility districts and private utility companies have expressed an interest in developing additional wind energy resources. Wind energy is currently produced on public lands outside the South Coast planning area. Potential sites for wind energy within the South Coast planning area have been identified by interested developers. The potential for wind energy and related impacts to natural resources is not adequately addressed in the SCRMP.

## ***Energy Transmission***

One of the greatest land management issues in Southern California is energy demand, and how to transmit energy to communities from outside the region. Existing utility corridors are nearing capacity and new transmission routes and corridors are being proposed by state and local utilities and planning agencies. Identifying new transmission corridors presents many challenges given the rapid development of the region and the need to conserve habitat for sensitive species. Public lands in the South Coast planning area are seen as preferred routes in order to avoid existing and planned residential areas.

## **Rights of Way and Communication Sites**

Numerous rights of way (ROW) have been issued throughout the South Coast Planning Area. Many ROWs issued are for communication sites on mountain tops. New ROWs are desired, often for lands identified for open space or habitat conservation.

## **Federal Mineral Estate**

The BLM is responsible for managing large tracts of Federal mineral estate, or “split estate,” throughout the South Coast Planning Area. On split estate lands, the surface is privately owned, or may be managed by state or local governments, while the minerals belong to the United States. The 1994 SCRMP designated the Federal mineral estate as available for extraction. The proposed plan revision will re-evaluate the suitability of the sub-surface estate for mineral extraction given the changing surface land uses, such as from rural to urban, and the importance placed on open space and habitat protection.

## **Land Health Standards**

As part of the Bureau’s Performance Plan, BLM offices are required to establish comprehensive standards for land health through the land use planning process. The South Coast RMP revision would establish land health standards for BLM-managed public lands in the plan area. Land health standards shall consider such factors as air and water quality, soil erosion, invasive/noxious weeds, native, threatened and endangered species, watersheds and ecosystem processes.

## **Grazing Allotments**

Grazing will be evaluated in this plan revision, in part to meet the objectives of the Stephens kangaroo rat core reserve system and MSHCP in western Riverside County, and the MSCP in San Diego County. The grazing program will also be re-evaluated to update the list of active/vacant grazing leases and authorized seasons of use. Rangeland health standards will be incorporated into the grazing program through this plan.

## **Land Transfer to Indian Tribes**

In coordination with officials from the County of Riverside, the BLM is collaborating with the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Mission Indians and the Ramona Band of Mission Indians with regards to their request to assume responsibility for managing cultural resources on four parcels of BLM-managed lands. One proposal would make these parcels of public land available for transfer to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to be held in trust for the Pechanga and Ramona Indians. Only Congress can actually authorize the land transfer. BLM had identified these parcels for retention in the 1994 SCRMP.

## Fire Ecosystems

BLM lands in the South Coast Planning Area are playing a greater role in the maintenance of both the human and biological elements of the ecosystem. The role of fire in this process needs to be identified as it relates to fire hazard reduction and for maintaining fire dependent ecological processes.

Fuels management in the planning area is directed at the reduction of hazardous fuels around communities to protect life and property. BLM is currently a working partner with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to make Federal lands part of this overall fire protection strategy. Several projects are planned for fuels treatment around communities in Riverside and San Diego Counties.

The multi-species core reserve system established by the local jurisdictions for the protection of threatened and endangered species habitat also incorporates BLM-managed public lands. Strategies will be developed to protect these areas from wildfire while at the same time, consider the use of prescribed fire as a tool to maintain habitat for these species.

## Threatened and Endangered Species

Prior to completion of the South Coast RMP in 1994, BLM initiated formal and informal consultation with the FWS to address seven threatened and endangered species within the South Coast planning area. The FWS and BLM developed means and measures documented within the RMP to avoid impacts to the following listed species: California condor, slender-horned spineflower, least Bell's vireo, unarmored three-spine stickleback, and Santa Ana River woolly-star. Since 1994, there have been several newly listed species within the South Coast planning area which need to be addressed through consultation with the FWS in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

The proposed plan revision will not amend the majority of the decisions, goals and objectives established in the 1994 SCRMP, and the terms and conditions established by the two aforementioned Biological Opinions shall remain in effect, unless modified by the FWS. BLM shall initiate consultation with the FWS to address species listed since 1994 and for proposed decisions in the SCRMP revision.

## National Landscape Conservation System

Since 1996, the BLM has managed many new special or protected areas as directed by Congress or through Presidential proclamations. These special designations include national monuments, national trails, wilderness, and wild and scenic rivers. The BLM has established the National Landscape Conservation System to coordinate management of these areas.

### *Wilderness*

In 1999, the Otay Mountain Wilderness was established by Congress. This 18,500 acre wilderness is located in southwestern San Diego County on the US-Mexico border. Management of the Otay Mountain Wilderness was not addressed in the 1994 SCRMP.

There are also three wilderness study areas in the South Coast Planning Area; Hauser Mountain, Beauty Mountain, and Agua Tibia. The BLM has acquired several large parcels of land adjacent to WSAs. There is significant public interest for BLM to manage additional areas for wilderness characteristics.

### ***Wild and Scenic Rivers Studies***

The 1994 SCRMP completed an eligibility study and potential classification of eligible river segments within the South Coast Planning Area. Out of this analysis, two rivers were studied in more detail. The San Luis Rey River was eliminated from further consideration for failing to contain outstandingly remarkable values worthy of designation. The Santa Margarita River, however, was recommended as eligible and potentially classified as a wild river. This SCRMP Revision will conduct a suitability study for the Santa Margarita River. For public lands acquired since completion of the 1994 SCRMP, an eligibility study and potential classification analysis will be conducted. If new eligible river segments are found, a suitability study will also be conducted.

### ***California Coastal National Monument***

The California Coastal National Monument was established through Presidential Proclamation in 2000. The national monument includes several thousand rocks and islands off the coast of California and stretches the entire length of the state. Five Field Offices, including Palm Springs-South Coast, are responsible for some management activities on portions of the national monument. The BLM completed a Management Plan for the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM) in 2005. Management decisions made in the CCNM Management Plan will be incorporated by reference in the SCRMP, but will not be discussed further in the plan revision.

## **Cultural Resources**

Overall program guidance will be provided in the SCRMP revision to address new priorities for land uses within the South Coast planning area and for protocols established with the State Historic Preservation Office and local Tribes. In coordination with local Tribes, the BLM will identify any sites and traditional cultural properties in need of protective measures to be established through the land use plan.

## **U.S. – Mexico Border**

### ***Border and Homeland Security***

Public lands are adjacent to the U.S. – Mexico International border in the South Coast Planning Area. These public lands include special designations and sensitive resources, including the Otay Mountain Wilderness and the Kuchamaa ACEC. The BLM works closely with the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Continued cooperation and planning is needed to meet the goals and objectives of both agencies, while protecting resources along the border.

### ***Cross-border Conservation Initiatives***

Public and private lands on both sides of the international border are critical to protecting and enhancing natural and cultural resources. Wildlife corridors and cultural landscapes that cross the border have been identified by government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The BLM has worked with Pronatura (a Mexican NGO), The Nature Conservancy, and others to develop joint management strategies for these lands.