2008 Snow Creek/Windy Point Restoration Project

How the project will sustain OHV Recreation or OHV Opportunities:
The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSC FO) manages 1,500 miles of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) routes on over 1.65 million acres. This field office has successfully undertaken numerous, large-scale desert restoration projects to enhance sustainable OHV recreation. The mandate of multiple use management challenges the BLM to balance the ever-increasing demand for OHV recreational opportunities with conservation efforts in a way that protects valuable cultural, biological and wilderness resources. Resource damage, such as destruction of protected habitat, caused by a limited number of OHV-users has led to the criticism of the entire OHV community. BLM efforts to facilitate responsible OHV recreational opportunities incorporate a multifaceted approach which includes law enforcement; public outreach; signage of legal routes; closure of unauthorized routes; and restoration of lands damaged by illegal OHV activity. Restoration projects are an essential part of this equation because they serve to augment responsible OHV opportunity and demonstrate to the public how OHV dollars support the protection of public land. By restoring natural resources, this project will reduce user conflict, enhance public awareness, and sustain legal OHV opportunities in the local area.

Project location and need:
Windy Point is located within the PSSC FO, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJNM) and the planned Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation (CVMSHC) area. The 3,500-acre project area lies between the base of the San Jacinto Mountains and Highway 111 in Riverside County approximately five miles northwest of Palm Springs, California. Windy Point is highly visible as you head east from Los Angeles to Palm Springs through the San Gorgonio Pass on Interstate 10. From here, visitors can view Mount San Jacinto and access to the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. The Windy Point area is critical habitat for many plants and animals adapted to the unique sandy, windblown soil, including the federally threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard and the federally endangered Coachella Valley milk-vetch.

On January 31, 2001, the BLM designated the Windy Point area closed to all motorized vehicles for habitat protection. The Terms and Conditions of the US FWS Biological Opinion (FWS-ERIV-3066.2, December 24, 2002) regarding the CDCA Coachella Valley Plan Amendment directed the BLM to implement protection measures for the Windy Point area to protect the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard and Coachella Valley milk-vetch from damage caused by illegal OHV use. Despite the issuance of hundreds of citations by BLM law enforcement, illegal OHV activity in this valuable area continues.

Persistent OHV damage has been detrimental to this fragile natural community. OHV damage is affecting the Windy Point population of the threatened Coachella Valley milk-vetch to an unknown degree. Likewise, illegal OHV activity results in

an unknown number of direct takes of individuals such as the threatened Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard. Illegal OHV activity causes removal of vegetation that provides critical species habitat (i.e. shelter, water, food) thus exposing mineral soils susceptible to wind erosion. OHV-created hill climbs on the northern face of Windy Point create vertical stripes of sandy soil devoid of the native vegetation. These sandy stripes are easily visible from both Interstate 10 and Highway 111 and serve to attract people to this "closed" area.

PSSC FO chose this area as a priority because of the critical need to protect special status species habitat. Acquisition efforts have created a larger network of BLM-managed land, but a patchwork of private and BLM property remains. This restoration project is a landscape-level solution that will effectively barricade the entire Conservation Area east of Snow Creek Road, including all of the BLM land and some private land. This restoration project is an assertive, cooperative effort involving the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, Friends of the Desert Mountains, and the Coachella Valley Association of Governments to protect this distinctive and valuable area.

Project Description:
Access to this closed area is limited to two entrance points under the adjacent overpasses of Highway 111 and east from Snow Creek road across private property. Currently no barricades exist at these entrance points. Heavy equipment and field crews will establish physical barriers along the east side of Snow Creek Road and the overpasses to discourage illegal OHV activity and better delineate the closure area. Physical barriers will include post and cable fencing and pipe fencing, which will partly be made of recycled material.

The proposed action would also include the removal of the hill climbs on the northern slope of Windy Point to help prevent continued illegal OHV trespass and restore native habitat, and field crews will restore the entire line-of-sight behind physical barriers. This will discourage future OHV intrusion and facilitate natural processes. Regeneration in the desert is naturally a slow process and requires long-term strategies. Restoration treatments will incorporate methods such as raking, pitting and mulching. These proven methods not only improve water infiltration and soil conditions, but to trap windblown seeds and provide critical shading to growing plants. These methods in conjunction with the collection and distribution of native seed sources at appropriate sites efficiently and economically facilitate natural regeneration.

The development and placement of interpretive signs will inform the public of important boundaries, recreational opportunities and natural resources to support the protection of restoration sites. Law enforcement patrol and monitoring of these sites will encourage OHV compliance.

Land Use and Environmental Compliance:
No restoration will occur on routes currently open and designated for OHV use. Route designation and other closure sites were administratively determined through land use plans, including the 2002 California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (CDCA-CV) and the SRSJNM Plan (2002). Restoration efforts will take place in natural communities from desert scrub and desert wash to dune ecosystems. All restoration sites will undergo cultural and biological ground surveys and site-specific environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). All work will conform to applicable policies, regulations and land use plans. The BLM will ensure access to private property owners and other users. Prior to implementation, the BLM will obtain necessary approvals from California Department of Transportation, Riverside County or other agencies.

Success Criteria and Project Monitoring:
OHV compliance and restored natural conditions improve long-term plant diversity and critical wildlife habitat. Restored sites will receive monitoring for overall effectiveness using GIS-based data collection and photo-point methods established by a workgroup of BLM staff from the California Desert District and the State Office in September 2004. Success criteria implemented will measure site improvement to natural conditions and increased OHV compliance as determined by a reduction in OHV trespass and site damage. BLM sustains site integrity through routine maintenance, staff monitoring, and law enforcement patrols. This grant will fund short-term monitoring and repairs of restored sites; permanent BLM staff will provide long-term site care.

Anticipated Timeline:

Time	Description
June 2008	Begin hiring personnel to prioritize restoration sites and obtain necessary permits.
August 2008	Begin surveying restoration sites for sensitive resources and preparing environmental documentation.
March 2009	Hire contractors and purchase equipment. Begin installing barriers.
October 2009	Hire restoration field crew to begin restoration and monitor physical barriers.
May 2010	All restoration work complete
December 2010	Short-term monitoring and maintenance complete