

2008 Quien Sabe/Blythe Planning Project

The Bureau of Land Management Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (BLM PSSC FO) manages 1,500 miles of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) routes on 1.65 million acres of public lands, as addressed through the Northern & Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO) 2002. Eastern Riverside County between the Coachella Valley and Blythe, California, is a high priority for BLM law enforcement and resource departments. The mandate of multiple use management challenges the BLM to balance the ever-increasing demand for Off-Highway Vehicle (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. It is the goal of BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office OHV program to conserve and protect natural resources while still meeting the needs of the recreational community. When route designations are inconsistent between boundaries and a high-level of OHV activity exists, this challenge is even greater and meeting this goal requires planning. Project funding would support the implementation of a site-specific travel management plan, which will involve multiple agencies and landowners within the Quien Sabe Point Region of the Colorado Corridor.

Project Cooperation:

The Colorado River Working Group was developed following the Winter 2006 OHMVR Grant Hearings, and involves partnership projects between five BLM offices, three which manage California Desert District Areas, (Needles, Palm Springs, El Centro) and two Arizona offices which manage California lands on the western side of the Colorado River (Yuma FO, and the Lake Havasu District Office).

The Colorado River Working Group proposed this OHV restoration project, as a cooperative effort between PSSC FO (as lead) and Yuma FO, with involvement of other agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation and the Palo Verde Irrigation District.

Project Location and Need:

The Colorado Corridor and areas adjacent to Highway 95 includes local resorts, utility and transmission sites, mining activity, private property owners, and multiple agency boundaries. The planning area consists of a large network of authorized (open) and unauthorized (user-created trails) OHV routes that extend west from Highway 95 and the Colorado River Corridor towards the Big Maria Mountains, Riverside Mountains and Rice Valley Wilderness Areas (see attached map). The BLM (PSSC and Yuma Field Offices) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) manage this land west of the Colorado River corridor. The area, known for its famous Blythe Intaglios and other pre-historic and historic sites, needs protection from destructive OHV use off authorized routes. The popularity of the

DRAFT – PSSC FO 2008 OHMVR GRANTS

Colorado River has increased the presence of OHV users in this area which subsequently has intensified environmental damage off of authorized routes. Unauthorized OHV travel may also be causing increased soil erosion and soil compaction, impacts to wilderness resources, and fragmentation of critical habitat for a variety of species of special concern including the Mojave fringe-toed lizard (*Uma scoparia*) and the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*).

Currently, the planning area contains numerous unauthorized OHV routes such as user-created hill climbs and parallel routes that stem from authorized routes, and the area is in critical need for improved travel management. Using recently inventoried routes, comparisons between the PSSC and Yuma designated routes revealed major discrepancies in authorized route designation. For example, multiple routes do not match up between BLM Field Office and BOR boundaries. Route maps are inaccurate and route numbers are inconsistent. The lack of uniformity in the designated route system and absence of information signing has led to the creation of an entire network of unauthorized routes created by unaware OHV motorists. The establishment of route designations consistent between the various agencies will support the successful management of both cultural and biological resources within the area and enhance recreational opportunities for the OHV community.

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the BLM is charged with managing public lands in a manner that will “protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values”. In order to meet the current and future demand of OHV activity as well as protecting the valuable cultural, historical, and biological resources, substantial planning between all agencies involved is required. Ideally, restoration of illegal routes would be an appropriate means to decrease the potential for damage to cultural and biological resources; however, restoration efforts prior to adequate planning would prove to be both timely and expensive while ultimately resulting in limited success.

Plan Objectives and Products:

The intent of this project is to develop a strategy to implement route of travel decisions, define approved routes, determine sites requiring physical barriers, assimilate route-numbering systems between jurisdictional boundaries, and develop a public education approach for the area. This plan will provide the necessary stepping-stone from which future OHV travel management, trail maintenance, and restoration of unauthorized OHV damage can occur. This planning process will serve several important functions. First, planning and coordination of authorized routes will enable the BLM to begin providing clear, concise route maps, signs, and informational kiosks for all users. Additionally, this planning process will help land managers begin to address the effects of uncontrolled OHV use and determine specific goals and strategies for the area.

DRAFT – PSSC FO 2008 OHMVR GRANTS

Finally, a consensus of authorized routes will provide the BLM with a baseline of OHV activity to determine future restoration efforts.

Plan relates to sustaining OHV Recreation/Opportunity:

Travel management is an important component to OHV recreation and will provide a baseline for well-defined, signed OHV routes on which to explore the desert. It will also encourage visitors to stay on BLM-authorized OHV route within the project area and thereby improve the overall scenic value and visitor experience. Well-planned and coordinated travel management will reduce user conflict, enhance public awareness, and sustain legal OHV opportunities in the local area.

List of Documents:

NEPA/CEQA, Resource Plan for the Big Maria Mountains ACEC, Memorandum of Understanding with Bureau of Reclamation

Anticipated Timeline:

Time	Description
Year 1	Hire temp/term employees, collect visitor data, sign secondary level routes, develop a team that will conduct meetings with local government agencies and conduct public outreach programs
Year 2	Conduct field studies to determine feasibility of route systems, determine placement of hard barriers, interpretive signs and kiosks, complete NEPA, and complete signing of third level routes.
Year 3	Write the Quien Sabe Point strategy plan draft and complete final environmental review documents; provide opportunity for public review of project, and complete compliance monitoring.