

Field Manager's Report
Barstow Field Office
California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting
Continental Labor Hall, Desert Empire Fairgrounds
Ridgecrest, June 24, 2006

Recreation:

The Barstow Field Office Staff is experiencing a major increase in visitation to Off-Highway Vehicle recreation areas and it is extending into the summer season. This has not been true in the past and as the temperatures raise, the visitor count drops off. We are still experiencing visitors at all of our OHV areas and our campgrounds although to a lesser degree than winter.

Projects completed by the Operations and Maintenance staff include .stabilizing the 1903 building at China Ranch, repairs to access roads in the Juniper Flats area , installing nine new CXT toilets in the Johnson Valley/ Stoddard Valley OHV Areas and planning for an rehabilitation project in the Superior Sub-Region.

The Recreation planning and cost estimates for recreational trails in the Amargosa ACEC Plan have been completed. Plans are for a trail and parking lot at China Ranch, a trail head and parking lot at Tecopa for the North end of the Amargosa River Trail, a trail head (ADA Accessible) at the T&T Railway near the Tecopa Hot Springs Campground, Trailheads and overlooks at Cowboy Canyon, Bonn Mesa, and the Badlands overlook. A turn-out with a kiosk, parking lot and local information signs is also planned at the Tecopa Turn-off from Highway 127.

Wilderness Program (14 Wilderness Areas; 5 WSAs)

Now Underway: Field Monitoring

Since mid-April, the BFO Wilderness Specialist has been driving the boundaries of BLM Barstow's wilderness and WSAs where routes exist to determine the condition of the wilderness areas and the wilderness study areas. Six wilderness areas have been visited completely. Six others, one a WSA, have been visited in part.

The Barstow Field Office is using the collected data from this monitoring to prioritize and determine O&M work needs, whether focused on boundary markers (first-time installation, straightening, replacement, removal, and/or placement of rocks at their bases¹), intrusion evidence (raking and/or brooming out of OHV tracks, scattering rocks in the trail, etc.), and/or trash (cleanup; removal).

Volunteers: The Bureau of Land Management Barstow Field Office will be hosting a Desert Restoration Internship Program this summer. There will be two 4-week sessions with two teams per session--June 19-July 14 & July 17-August 11. The teams will

¹ Markers set and maintained 'plumb', with large rocks set at their bases, seem to get more respect from the public.

consist of 6-8 high school student's age 15 to 18 years old, currently enrolled in a High Desert high school. This program will provide students with an opportunity to practice restoration techniques in a desert environment while learning about conservation, resource management, and environmental stewardship. The team's primary focus will be restoration of closed routes and signing legal trails within the limited use area of Juniper Flats. All participants will be given a daily stipend and receive training in First Aid/CPR, Leave No Trace Ethics, Desert Safety, restoration technique and proper use of tools. A grant from the Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division, California State Parks, is funding this restoration project.

Resources:

Renewable Resources

The Barstow Field Office has issued four more right-of-way grants for wind energy testing. This brings the total to authorized 18 wind study projects. These renewable energy right-of-way grants are each issued for a maximum of up to three years. Public lands included in the grants span from north of Barstow (Mud Hills), south into Johnson Valley OHV area, west of Stoddard Valley OHV area and east to the Silurian Valley. These project areas cover over 136,000 acres of public lands. The authorizations are for testing purposes only and allow the temporary placement of meteorological anemometers. The testing period may be followed by the filing of an application to develop a wind farm site. All grants issued to date are still actively testing; two grants will expire by the end of 2006. The holders of these two grants have advised BLM, they plan to file formal plans for development of windfarms in the fall of 2006 near Apple Valley.

This office has received an application for a 6000 (+/-) acre solar one power plant. An EIR/EIS is underway by a contracted consultant for the California Energy Commission. More information will be forthcoming as we begin the review of the proposal. Another solar plant application is projected but no application has been filed.

Invasive Weeds

Restoration teams have treated at least 100 acres of an estimated 600 acres of tamarisk infestation. The majority of the work is occurring in the Amargosa in cooperation with local Shoshone residents, the Nature Conservancy and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). We currently have two California Conservation Crews overseen by BLM personnel working in the Amargosa to eradicate tamarisk. The difficult terrain and extreme heat makes the work, cutting, removal and applying herbicide to the stumps very time consuming.

Grazing

Renewal of grazing leases for cattle and sheep is underway. Additionally, implementations of the WEMO grazing prescriptions have been initiated. Anticipate proposed grazing decisions by late summer.

Juniper Flats Sub Region Trail Restoration Implementation

With the passage of the West Mojave Plan and route designation, a Student Conservation Association (SCA) Desert Restoration Corp crew was contracted and began trail restoration efforts in mid-March through mid-May in the Juniper Flats area. This SCA restoration team consisted of six members including a crew leader. During the two month period, approximately 13 trails encompassing 3.09 miles were reclaimed. Additionally, over 35 live plants were successful transplanted into the area.

Trail Restoration efforts by the BLM staff have begun through biological and cultural surveys of WEMO identified routes. At this time, approx. 15% of the routes have been surveyed focusing within the ACEC. These surveys have discovered several new single track routes which have been add and logged into the inventory. Signing of designated open routes is projected to commence around June 23rd, 2006. BLM hand crews and heavy equipment will be utilized beginning at the end of June for trail reclamation in the ACEC.

Ord Mountains Trail Restoration

Over 50 % complete of the trail repairs have been completed and efforts will continue while Juniper Flats Restoration program kicks off.

Other Resource Issues:

An increase in unauthorized uses i.e. dumping of refuse and hazardous materials has been observed. Within in a six week period, eight unauthorized uses were reported. Some are being resolved through criminal prosecution while the majorities have no identifiable responsible parties. When a responsible party is located, administrative or civil cost recovery and restitution is being aggressively pursued.

The Wild Springs Environmental Assessment (EA) is out for public review regarding the concrete basin and pipeline near Tecopa/Shoshone. Public comments must submitted be by June 30, 2006.

Resolution of downhill drainage of limestone upon public lands from a mining operation in Lucerne Valley is underway. This is a multi-agency (state & federal wildlife agencies) and the County of San Bernardino investigation. These agencies and BLM are working with local municipals and residents on critical concerns resulting from the impacts to residential water.

Law Enforcement:

The Barstow Field Office has hired a new Chief Ranger. The new Chief started work on May 14, 2006 and is getting acquainted with the issues concerning the law enforcement program. With the Chief Ranger in place the office is continuing the hiring process for three new Law Enforcement Rangers, one of which has already been accepted by an LE Ranger from Joshua Tree National Park. The other two positions are in the final selection process and a tentative selection should be offered by the week of June 19, 2006.