

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

Resources

Geology

Geothermal: We recently initiated a formal conference with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for continuing operations at the existing Ormat East Mesa Geothermal Plant. The conference opinion was requested because Flat-tailed horned lizard is current being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. A Statement of Work is being prepared for the Truckhaven Geothermal Leasing EIS.

Mineral Materials: Permits for sand and gravel are being issued to meet public demand from existing pits with current SMARA plans. There are still plans to hold a competitive sale for several hundred thousand cubic yards of sand and gravel. The vacant geologist position has been filled. In the near future, BLM will complete a preliminary archeological screening of the area. If the area is suitable, a competitive auction will be held. Prior to any disturbance, an EA and other environmental studies will be completed as a requisite part of the proposed sale.

Locatables: Gold is up to around \$600 per ounce. The Mesquite mine continues to operate their leach pad, and is contemplating restarting operations under their existing approval some time in the coming year. Activity from small "hobby" miners should be limited during the summer.

Wildlife

We are currently analyzing data and compiling reports on FTHL, Fringe-Toe, Bird, and Butterfly monitoring. We conducted winter and spring bird point-count monitoring in the Imperial Sand Dunes. We will be monitoring FTHL in the East Mesa Management Area this summer. We have been coordinating with FWS on our current projects in relation to the proposed listing of FTHL. We have been coordinating with Sterling energy systems and SDG&E on proposed energy development projects. We have conducted tamarisk removal in the Jacumba Wilderness Area and are coordinating with Sempra Energy and Intergen in removing tamarisk in the West Mesa FTHL Management Area and San Sebastian Marsh ACEC.

We started a riparian restoration project in Cottonwood Campground and have planted and watered cuttings. We are currently writing an environmental assessment for the construction of 2 big game guzzlers in the Indian Pass Wilderness Area. We are working with contractors to inventory Quino Checkerspot Butterflies in the McCain Valley and Table Mountain Areas.

Botany

Sensitive Plant Surveys in the Imperial Sand Dunes have been completed for the 2006 field season. Peirson's Milkvetch (*Astragalus magdalenae* var. *peirsonii*) was the target species being monitored, but Algodones Dunes Sunflower (*Helianthus niveus* spp. *tephrodes*) was also monitored. Field surveys took place beginning in March and were finished at the end of April. A new method was used for the 2006 monitoring. Monitoring cells that were visited during 2005 field surveys and contained Peirson's Milkvetch were revisited during the 2006 monitoring. 735 individual cells were revisited, with the 735 cells scattered randomly among all of the management areas in the Imperial Sand Dunes. Aerial overflights were also conducted as a part of the 2006 monitoring effort. Overflight photos were taken of each management area. Photos were taken of the 735 cells that were visited during the 2006 monitoring and overlaid with a grid system that allowed quantification of tracks in each cell. All of the data has been collected for this process and is now being analyzed at the BLM California State Office.

Tamarisk removal is an on going project that will continue to be chipped away at as staff time and funding are available. Target areas include all Wilderness Areas, Chariot Canyon and San Sebastian Marsh.

Soil, Water, Air

We are currently working on a Dust Control Plan to be submitted to the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District this summer. Imperial County is in Non-attainment for PM-10 emissions. We have been working closely with Imperial County Air Pollution Control District to come up with a Dust Control Plan that will help both agencies.

Rangeland Management

Two allotments in Eastern San Diego County (McCain Valley – In-Ko-Pah and McCain Valley – Tierra Blanca) continue to be active. We have received several applications to graze on other allotments in Eastern San Diego County. Processing of these applications is currently on hold pending completion of the Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan.

Wilderness Program

The desert hike program has been completed for the year. Although this year's hikes were well publicized, public participation was light, and it is likely that the hikes won't be conducted next year.

To date, one clean-up has been completed in the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness (Valley of the Moon) where 25 volunteers helped remove three pick-up loads of trash. Two signing projects, one in the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness (completely signed all 4 sides), and one in the Indian Pass / Picacho Peak Wilderness with the Sierra Club, have

been completed. We have monitored 117,479 acres, and conducted tamarisk removal on 20 acres.

Realty Program

Acquisitions

Processing of the 1,800-acre land donation from The Conservation Fund is almost completed. This land, referred to as Cottonwood Canyon, is located near the Mason Valley area off Highway S-2 in eastern San Diego County and consolidates public ownership of two larger blocks of public land - the Sawtooth Mountains Wilderness Study Area and the Oriflamme Mountains. In addition to exceptional scenic quality, these donated lands include the Cottonwood Canyon and Salt Creek riparian areas; diverse terrain and vegetation; habitat for numerous sensitive plant and animal species including Peninsular bighorn sheep. The area also contains cultural and historical resources including a traditional Native American travel route between the Luguna Mountains and Colorado Desert and remains of early settlers' cabins and stone corrals.

Land donation projects "on the horizon" include: 1) the San Sebastian Marsh/San Felipe Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern, working with The Conservation Fund funded by Resources Legacy Fund Foundation; and 2) the East Mesa Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management Area habitat mitigation related to the Drop 2 Reservoir project and the Arizona State Highway/Arizona Department of Transportation project.

Proposed purchase of Desert Tortoise habitat with compensation funds continues as willing sellers are located and workload permits. Currently, preparing offer for 654.94 acres within a multi-species Wildlife Habitat Management Area in eastern Imperial County.

A few privately-owned parcels of land within the Jacumba Mountains Wilderness Area and North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area were recently acquired this fiscal year working with the Riverside Land Conservatory with funding from Resources Legacy Fund.

Rights-of-Way

Stirling Energy - Solar power generation plant to produce 900 MW of power. If approved, approximately 36,000 solar concentrating dish systems would be installed within an area of approximately 6000 acres.

SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink Project - SDG&E proposes to construct a new 500 kV transmission line west from the Imperial Valley Substation (north of Hwy 98) to a new substation to be located in central San Diego County. The proposed route would cross approximately 35 miles of BLM administered land in Imperial County. This route would also cross Anza Borrego Desert State Park in San Diego County.

Imperial Irrigation District Green Path Project - IID is upgrading its transmission system for the dual purpose of increasing its system reliability and export capabilities of renewable resources from the Imperial Valley to load centers outside the IID's service area. The project includes the upgrading of existing systems from 161 and 92 kV lines to double circuit 230 kV transmission lines and associated substation facilities; a new 230 kV line and associated substation facilities

North Baja Pipeline Expansion Project - Amendment to existing right-of-way for a single 30-inch natural gas pipeline. The Expansion Project would reverse the current system's flow direction and build a second pipeline within the existing 50-foot right-of-way, extending from the U.S./Mexico border northwest of Yuma, AZ, through Riverside and Imperial Counties to the Ehrenberg Compressor Station to an interconnect with SoCal Gas Co pipeline system in Blythe, CA. NBP also proposes a new pipeline lateral from the Ogilby site to the Imperial District substation, located northeast of the City of El Centro.

Applications for wind energy testing facilities include proposals from Clipper, BioRenewable, RENEWergy, and Wind Hunter.

Other right-of-way actions include at grade railroad crossings for the Mesquite Regional Landfill. The railroad right-of-way was granted in early 90's, but never constructed. The railroad ROW crosses a recreation area with designated open routes. We are currently working with the grant holder to identify conflicts, resolutions and required process for construction of railroad spur between the landfill and Union Pacific railroad.

The United States Gypsum Company Expansion/Modernization Project Draft EIR/EIS is available for public review. Imperial County Department of Planning and Development is the lead agency. BLM's main involvement in the overall project is a R/W application to replace the existing water pipeline from Plaster City to U.S. Gypsum's water well near the community of Ocotillo. The comment period on the EIR/EIS has been extended to July 17, 2006.

R/W application recently submitted by US Marine Corps Air Station Yuma to construct and operate a communication site facility on Black Mountain in eastern Imperial County.

R/W application recently submitted by University NAVSTAR Consortium, Inc. to construct and operate Plate Boundary Observatory project on public lands in southwest Imperial County.

Processing of R/W grants to four separate sand and gravel operators almost completed for the Ocotillo Bypass Road and Jimenez Lane realignment.

Working with Anza-Borrego Desert State Park to address public access needs for both BLM and State Park lands in the Rancho Vallecito and Sawtooth Mountains Wilderness Areas.

Five-year compliance recently completed for six sanitary landfills patented to Imperial County and San Diego County under the Recreation & Public Purpose Act.

Other Actions

BOR/IID All American Canal Realignment Project - Most of the project occurs on BOR withdrawn lands, however, BLM is working with BOR/IID to identify access, material and mitigation needs that may occur on BLM administered lands outside of the withdrawn lands.

Working with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers on Technical Project Planning for a Military Munitions Response Program Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study draft Work Plan for the former Borrego Maneuver Area in accordance with the Formerly Used Defense Sites program. This area, used in the early 1940's, includes some public lands in the vicinity of Ocotillo Wells north of Highway 78 and west of Highway 86.

Borderland Management Task Force -working with Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other regulatory agencies for the identification of issues/resolution/process for DHS activities on BLM administered land along the International Border.

NEPA

We are making rapid progress towards completing an administrative draft of a Resource Management Plan for Eastern San Diego County. We are working with a contractor (RECON) to assist us with this effort. A Socio-economic workshop will be held in Julian, CA on June 15, 2006, as a part of this planning effort.

Administrative

The following personnel actions are being conducted:

1. Geologist: Walter "Buzz" Todd has been selected as the new Geologist replacing James Blair. He reported to duty on May 30, 2006.
2. Recruitment actions for an Engineering Equipment Operator, a Law Enforcement Ranger, and an Environmental Coordinator are being processed in the State Office.
3. Recruitment actions for the Recreation Staff Chief and a vacant outdoor recreation planner/park ranger will be reinitiated immediately following completion of an internal assessment of our existing table of organization. Dallas Meeks is currently acting as the Recreation Staff Chief.
4. Selections have not yet been made on the vacant Chief Ranger and Supervisory Ranger Positions. Clark Beene is currently acting as the Chief Ranger.

5. **Wildlife Biologist:** We are not anticipating filling a second wildlife position at this time. Three Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) employees are currently on-board, and a fourth reports for duty on June 19, 2006. These ECO employees will be completing a variety of natural resource-related work assignments.

Law Enforcement

We currently have 9 delegated Law Enforcement Rangers on board, and an additional two who will complete law enforcement training by the end of this summer.

ISDRA: The 2005 – 2006 Season has come to an end. As mentioned at the last DAC meeting, the 2005 – 2006 dunes season saw a decrease in the number of Law Enforcement contacts.

West Side: Visitor use in open areas has continued to expand. On the 4 major holidays, it appears through public contacts that people who have traditionally used Glamis are shifting their activities to the west side. Non-holiday use of the west side appears to be increasing as well.

East Side: Route proliferation continues to be a concern for Law Enforcement. We believe that increased signing will make it easier to take appropriate enforcement actions with individuals who are off approved routes of travel.

Over the past several months we have dramatically increased our number of patrols in the East Mesa area in an effort to combat illegal dumping. Due to these patrols, we have seen a decrease in the number of new dumping sites. With our current staffing levels, we should be able to maintain a higher law Enforcement presence on East Mesa for the foreseeable future.

Recreation

Recreation – Imperial Sand Dunes:

Dunes Management: Full implementation of the Recreation Area Management Plan continues to await final resolution of lawsuits brought by both environmentalists and recreationists. In the meantime, annual visitation has reached 1.2 million, with more than 190,000 on Thanksgiving weekend. The successful law enforcement coalition that we have developed with the Imperial County Sheriff's Office (ICSO) in recent years, continues to produce positive results. More than 100 officers and 50 emergency medical technicians worked at the dunes during this year's holidays, and as noted above, there was a decrease in the number of Law Enforcement contacts during the past year.

Fee Collection: We are continuing to work cooperatively with ICSO to modify the existing assistance agreement for fee collection in order to ensure collection of the

maximum amount of revenues without increasing the fees. We are also working to increase education among visitors and increase compliance on all weekends through better permit availability and law enforcement citations. To date, we have collected over 3.2 million dollars in fees during FY-06.

Vendor Permitting: During FY-06, vending permits have generated \$192,000 of revenue in addition to the fees noted above. This is about a \$27,000 increase over the previous year. The vendor fees fund the management of the vendor program and operations and maintenance in the Dunes.

Recreation – Non Dunes:

LTVA: Visitation to El Centro's LTVA sites (Hot Springs, Tamarisk, and Pilot Knob) for FY-06 was slightly less than last season. Permits sold: Long Term - 206 and Short Term - 697. All three sites had hosts this season as opposed to only two sites last season.

Permits: We have issued 14 Special Recreation Permits (SRP's) since the beginning of the fiscal year.

Signing and Restoration: To date, 95% of all designated routes within the Western Colorado Routes of Travel Planning area (WECO) have been signed.

Restoration of closed routes using a Student Conservation Association crew was continued this year for a third consecutive year. As a result, 90% of the closed routes within the Yuha ACEC have been restored and the restoration crew started work within the West Mesa area. Grant money has been received to continue restoration work for another year and to fund Archeological surveys of the areas that will be restored.