

## **HIGHLIGHTS BARSTOW FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting  
October 2016 Meeting**

### **Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study, Habitat Enhancement, and Population Augmentation Program**

**BLM Action:** In 2011, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducted a preliminary study to determine the current distribution of the Amargosa Vole in the Tecopa area. A multi-year set of studies is being conducted to further determine the extent of disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. A captive breeding effort has also been established. These studies have and will continue to provide information to guide management actions to help prevent the extinction of this highly vulnerable species.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office (BFO), California Desert District Office, California State Office and Washington Office  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)  
US Geological Service (USGS)  
UC Davis  
UC Berkley  
Purdue University  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)  
Inyo County Road Department

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** Aggressive habitat restoration efforts are being undertaken at Marsh 1 at the recommendation of the Amargosa Vole Team based on previous research done at the site. We have received \$8,000 from the State Office to move forward on this habitat enhancement project which is referred to as the “Big Fix”. Work on this project was initiated in March 2016. In April, 20 volunteers spent a week at Borehole removing dead wrack from the marsh. They removed 65 cubic yards (13 dump truck loads) of material. Water levels are now being manipulated to provide optimal growing conditions for the recovering marsh and to minimize potential adverse effects to marshes downstream of Marsh 1. Our partners have also been removing cattail populations which are attempting to invade the marsh. The restoration efforts have continued to receive positive press, including a nice video from Outdoor Nevada – a program shown on Nevada PBS (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a0tV63xjSs>).

Our partners at the Amargosa Conservancy will receive additional funding to expand Amargosa Vole habitat re-creation on private lands in the Shoshone Area. Two habitat patches have been created on private lands adjacent to the Amargosa Wild and Scenic

River that is managed by BLM. This new funding would add a third patch in close proximity to these two marshes. BLM is coordinating with the Vole Team partners on this effort as part of the greater vole recovery efforts.

The BFO worked with the BLM State Office to secure additional funding to expand the earlier genetics work to support the captive breeding program. To this end, BFO received \$65,000 in directed funding for FY 2015-2016 to be used to refine genetic testing of each vole in captivity and sequencing the entire genome for the vole. The individual testing will be used to help inform the release of captive voles into the wild (identify individuals with unique genetics) and the full sequencing will help us evaluate the taxonomy of the species and help evaluate the species susceptibility to disease. Researchers at Purdue University are conducting the sequencing for the project. As of September 2015, Purdue has concluded microsatellite testing on field and captive voles, and full publication of the data will be led by a researcher working on a master's degree at UC Berkeley. Additionally, Purdue completed a genetic map of the entire genome for one vole in April which will allow researchers to look for unique genes which may be present in the vole. BFO has also received funding (\$50,000) to expand trapping effort to see if we can find unusual genetic characteristics in more remote populations to incorporate into the breeding colony and to track individuals released into the wild from the breeding program. Trapping (involving over 600 live traps) was initiated in December 2015 in support of this study.

Recent research coming out of UC Davis indicates that the bulrush which serves as the vole's sole food source is extremely low in nutritional value. In fact, the researcher states that "no animal he is aware of can survive with such a meager diet and indeed, nutritional analysis of bulrush tissues reveals it has less to offer as a sole source diet than bamboo, the famously minimalist diet of the panda." Based on these findings, researchers are using next generation sequencing to describe the entire community of gut bacteria to figure out how voles can accomplish this feat. This research could have significant implications as to how to prepare voles for release into the wild after being reared in captivity.

BFO received \$25,000 from the FY2016 National Conservation Lands Research Support Program to allow UC Davis to investigate inter-marsh movements of Amargosa Vole populations to better manage this endangered species.

BFO received \$64,000 from BLM Washington Office end of year funds for general support of habitat work and maintenance of the breeding colony in Davis.

Team members have three abstracts accepted for inclusion in the Natural Areas Association Conference to take place at Davis, California, in October relating to vole management in the context of climate change. A genetics paper titled: *Following the rivers: historical reconstruction of California voles Microtus californicus (Rodentia: Cricetidae) in the deserts of eastern California* was published in the Biological Journal of the Linnean Society in May. This article was based in part using genetic material collected as part of the Amargosa Vole research program and helps elucidate how various populations of California Vole have developed over time.

## **Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies/management actions associated with the implementation of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Management Plan including:

- 1) Amargosa Niterwort Population Monitoring
- 2) Sensitive Bird Species Spot Mapping / Cowbird Management Program
- 3) Tamarisk Control Efforts
- 4) SCAN Monitoring
- 5) Fish Monitoring
- 6) Hydrology Studies

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
BLM, California State Office  
Amargosa Conservancy  
The Nature Conservancy  
Point Blue Conservation Science  
US Geological Survey  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

**Contacts:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The list above represents a summary of the various management studies / management actions which are being carried out in support of the draft Amargosa River ACEC/WSR Plan. These projects are multi-year and BLM is currently working with partners to secure out-year funding for these programs.

On April 1, the BFO in cooperation with our partner Point Blue Conservation Science initiated the 11<sup>th</sup> year of intensive Spot Mapping (surveys for breeding bird territories) on the Amargosa River. These surveys are creating an extensive database documenting changes in the breeding bird populations in association with our on-going tamarisk treatments and cowbird management programs. BFO also received an additional \$10,000 in end of year funds from the Washington BLM Office to continue this work in the spring of 2017. These efforts have been featured as a “Partnership Spotlight” on BLM’s new Science Partnership Resources Website at <http://web.blm.gov/sciencepartnerships/>

BFO received \$12,000 in FY 2016 to continue tamarisk treatment (10 acres) on the Amargosa River. The BLM Fire/Fuels Management Program also treated an additional 66 acres in FY 2016. BFO is also working with the Amargosa Conservancy to treat an additional 6 acres as part of their trail grant. This will bring our total treatment for this year to 82 acres.

Additionally, BFO is working with partners at Point Blue and the Nature Conservancy to secure a Section 6 Grant to conduct active restoration (tree planting) on private lands adjacent to the Amargosa ACEC/WSR to help jumpstart habitat improvements following tamarisk treatment. To date, most of the recovery of habitat following tamarisk treatment has been through passive restoration – letting natural processes regrow natives after treatment – with some success. Actively planting after tamarisk treatment will expedite habitat improvement efforts.

BFO received \$10,000 in FY 2016 to conduct additional fish surveys in September 2016 on the Amargosa River. These surveys will allow some follow-up work with monitoring habitat improvements associated with the Desert Fish Habitat Program grant looking at the response of Amargosa Pupfish and Amargosa Speckled Dace to tamarisk treatment. A draft report was received by BFO documenting the pre-treatment fish conditions in 2014 and this will serve as a baseline for comparing post-treatment fish conditions. Early results of this effort were published in a Fisheries and Aquatics Program Blog post entitled: *Enhancing Habitat for Rare Endemic Fish on the Amargosa River in California*.

BFO is working with The Nature Conservancy to conduct a “Bio-Blitz” sometime this fall. This event involves coordinating a weekend of intensive surveys of plants and animals in the area with the intent of documenting as many resources as possible. This event will involve professionals from several institutions as well as “Citizen Scientists.”

### **Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is beginning a focused wildlife habitat enhancement program for the Afton Canyon Area of Environmental Concern (ACEC) largely modeled on the successful program associated with the Amargosa River Wild and Scenic River. The section of the Mojave River which flows through Afton Canyon ACEC is currently considered “Eligible” under the National Wild and Scenic River and is managed to maintain the Scenic, Recreational, Geologic, Fish and Wildlife, Historic, and Cultural Outstanding and Remarkable Values on which this determination was based. The canyon has also been designated a Watchable Wildlife Area due to its high biodiversity such as the 180 bird species that utilize the area. Afton Canyon is also part of the newly designated Mojave Trail National Monument and data being collected will help in the development of the management plan for this monument.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
Point Blue  
United States Geological Survey (USGS)  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)  
Living Desert Zoo Gardens  
Amargosa Conservancy

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The ACEC has been the focus of several wildlife habitat enhancement efforts over the last several years such as tamarisk removal, natural habitat planting, and barrier fencing. The following activities are being planned and or implemented in FY 2016:

1. Bird Monitoring
2. Northern Tamarisk Beetle Monitoring
3. Tamarisk Treatment
4. Fish Surveys
5. Western Pond Turtle Surveys
6. Tui Chub and Western Pond Turtle Re-introduction

To this end, BFO has committed \$17,373 to conduct bird spot mapping surveys this year to collect baseline data on breeding birds in Afton Canyon. Also, as part of these efforts, presence /absence surveys will be conducted for the tamarisk beetle to determine if they are present on site. The beetle has been found upstream of the Afton site, so it will be interesting to see if the beetle moves onto the site on its own.

BFO is working with the USGS to conduct Western Pond Turtle Surveys in Afton Canyon. In 1999, researchers estimated that 15-23 Western Pond Turtles inhabited Afton Canyon. Subsequent flooding seems to have eliminated this population though Western Pond Turtles had not been observed in the canyon since the 1999 surveys following a series of flooding events with the exception of a possible sighting in 2015. Based on approximately 125 hours of trapping efforts in April 2016, the site still appeared unoccupied. Additional follow-up surveys were conducted by USGS in May and no turtles were detected. However, a juvenile Western Pond Turtle was photographed in Afton Canyon on April 16, 2016 which is very encouraging.

BFO worked with the BLM State Office to obtain funding (\$30,000) to contract with USGS to conduct a feasibility study for the re-introduction of Tui Chub (a federally endangered species native to the Mojave River) and the Western Pond Turtle on a site in Afton Canyon.

Work continues with the Living Desert Zoo Gardens to explore the possibility of establishing a breeding facility for Western Pond Turtles to act as a source of turtles for re-introduction purposes.

BFO also received FY16 funding to survey the canyon for fish species utilizing the site to assess current fish populations. Approximately 2.0 km of surveys were conducted by contractors in September. A full report is forthcoming.

BFO received funding from the BLM State Office to conduct 10 acres of tamarisk treatment in Afton Canyon. Additionally, BLM Fire/Fuels Management Program has plans to burn 23.3 acres of tamarisk in the canyon this fall.

Based on surveys conducted by Point Blue in June 9 and field reports from researchers in

the area it appears that the Northern Tamarisk Beetle (a non-native bio-control which was released further upstream by a researcher in the area) may have established itself in Afton Canyon. We will be monitoring the situation to see how the population changes over time and their effect on tamarisk.

BFO staff is conducting repairs of post-and-cable fencing which has been damaged by vandalism and recent flooding events around the riparian areas within the canyon. These fences are designed to protect sensitive resources from unauthorized OHV use.

BFO is working with the Amargosa Conservancy to have biodiversity outreach days highlighting the Afton Canyon. One biodiversity day was held in September and two will be held in October.

### **Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the USFWS to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

**Agency:** BLM  
USFWS  
Various County, State and Federal Agencies

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) met on December 8, 2015 to discuss in detail the recommendations coming out of the RIT process. Review and discussion of RIT Priority Recovery Actions for FY 2016 was one topic at the meeting. One of the Priority Recovery Actions proposed by BFO was considered in the top five for the Mojave Desert Region. This project would provide funding to conduct route signing and restoration in and around Lane Mountain. This activity would benefit both the desert tortoise and Lane Mountain Milkvetch. The BFO received Fiscal Year 2016 funds (\$100,000) and recently contracted with Versar to implement this project in the Coolgardie Subregion. Additional end of year funding from the BLM Washington Office was received along with Fiscal Year 2017 funds (\$120,000) to support this project.

The last in-person RIT meeting took place April 26 in Palm Springs and was attended by BFO staff. The meeting Goals and Objectives were as follows:

- Review RIT process and interconnection with the Management Oversight Group
- Identify, refine, and develop recovery project concepts
- Learn how to upload projects into the Recovery Action Tracking Tool
- Nominate representatives to fill gaps in RIT rosters

The next RIT meeting is scheduled for October 25, 2016.

## **Wildlife Water Projects**

**BLM Action:** High Desert Quail Forever has identified seven wildlife guzzlers in and around the El Mirage OHV Area which have fallen into disrepair over the years and are no longer functional. The organization has approached BFO to coordinate the rehabilitation of these facilities which will support huntable bird species as well as other wildlife. Additionally, the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep has identified one wildlife water in the Cady Mountains for replacement.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
High Desert Quail Forever  
Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep

**Contact:** Zachary Pratt, Recreation Branch Chief, Barstow Field Office  
Chis Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** BFO is currently working with Quail Forever and the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep to implement actions in the last quarter of 2016 and in 2017.

## **Mojave Ground Squirrel Study**

**BLM Action:** Researchers working on Mojave Ground Squirrel have recently developed a model which depicts potential changes in the range of this species under conditions projected under climate change scenarios. Trapping surveys have been proposed in several locations within the BFO area which are designed to help validate these models.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office, Desert District Office and California State Office

**Contact:** Chis Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** BFO is helping coordinate the on the ground implementation of the survey effort. Surveys for 2016 have been completed and a report is forthcoming. The BLM State Office has secured funding for continued surveys in FY 2017, 2018 and 2019.

## **Desert District Bendire's Thrasher Population Study/Migrant Bird Surveys**

**BLM Action:** This is a joint project between the Needles, Ridgecrest, and Barstow Field Offices in partnership with Point Blue Conservation Science. The goal of this project is to obtain greater understanding of the breeding status of the Bendire's Thrasher and use of riparian areas by migrant birds throughout the California Desert District. This project will rely heavily on a Citizen Science component for obtaining field data through the online E-bird Program.

**Agency:** BLM Needles, Ridgecrest and Barstow Field Offices  
BLM District Office  
Point Blue Conservation Science  
Sonoran Joint Venture

**Contact:** Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The California Desert District Office received \$30,000 in end of year funds from the BLM Washington Office to partially fund this project starting in 2017 and Point Blue Conservation Science received a Sonoran Joint Venture Grant (just under \$10,000) to round out the budget. BLM and its partners intend to initiate field work in the spring of 2017 by recruiting E-bird volunteers.

### **Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan**

**BLM Action:** The BFO is working with the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California on implementing their Desert Tortoise Translocation Program in support of large-scale Marine Air Ground Task Force live-fire and maneuver training. The BFO, in coordination with the Needles Field Office, has been working with the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center) in the development of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) which evaluates the potential impacts to sensitive resources from the translocation of desert tortoise from the Combat Center to surrounding areas, including lands administered by BLM. The Draft SEIS evaluates three alternative implementation strategies for the Desert Tortoise Translocation Program. Since many of the desert tortoises are proposed to be moved to lands administered by BLM, we are a cooperating agency on the Draft SEIS. Based on clearance surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015, an estimated 998 adult tortoises and 497 juveniles will need to be translocated.

**Agency:** BLM Barstow Field Office  
Department of Navy (DON), United States Marine Corps

**Contact:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The Draft SEIS has been completed and was made available for a 45-day public comment period on September 30, 2016. Three public meeting are scheduled as follows: (1) October 25, 2016 from 5:00 to 8:00 PM at Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Street, Joshua Tree, CA 92252; (2) October 26, 2016 from 5:00 to 8:00 PM at Palm Springs Convention Center, 277 North Avenida Caballeros, Palm Springs, CA 92262; and (3) October 27, 2016 from 5:00 to 8:00 PM at Barstow Harvey House, 681 North 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Barstow, CA 92311.

BFO will continue to coordinate with the DON as the SEIS moves forward to a final document.

## **Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise Proposed Withdrawal**

**BLM Action:** The BLM filed an application for withdrawal of 10,094.03 acres of public lands for habitat conservation of the Lane Mountain Milkvetch, a federally listed endangered species located within San Bernardino County, California.

**Agencies:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ventura Office

**Contacts:** Katrina Symons, Barstow Field Office, Field Manager  
Liz Easley, California State Office, Lead Realty Specialist  
Joan Patrovsky, Barstow Field Office, Realty Specialist

**Status:** In August 2014, a notice was published in the Federal Register, temporarily segregating 10,094.03 acres of public lands from location and entry under the Mining Law, subject to valid existing rights for a two-year period.

The Lane Mountain Milkvetch is a federally listed endangered species found within two conservation areas known as Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise. This species has a limited geographical range. The USFWS listed this species in October 1998 under the Endangered Species Act. The primary threat contributing to listing of the Lane Mountain Milkvetch is alteration and destruction of habitat.

The Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise areas were designated as Areas of Critical Concern (ACEC) by the California Desert Conservation Area Plan amendment referred to as the West Mojave Plan. These ACECs contained about half of the known locations of the individual Lane Mountain Milkvetch plants and 45% of its habitat.

The Coolgardie area is a popular recreational mining location. BLM has established casual use mining guidelines to monitor and to the extent possible, prevent unnecessary or undue degradation to public lands. Recreational mining is permitted under 43 CFR 3809.5 as defined under "casual use." Recreational mining cannot involve the use of mechanized earth moving equipment or explosives. This activity may only cause negligible disturbance to be considered casual use. No impact to this activity is expected from approval of the withdrawal.

A detailed analysis was completed by BLM which included a mineral potential report and an environmental assessment (EA) with a Finding of No Significant Impact.

The withdrawal of 10,094.30 acres of public lands within the Coolgardie Mesa and West Paradise ACECs from future mineral entry was forwarded to the Washington Office in July 2016 with an anticipated decision by November 2016.

### **Lucerne Valley Wind Testing**

**BLM Action:** Pacific Wind Development, LLC, a subsidiary of Iberdrola Renewables, Inc., has a Type II wind data collection grant on public lands located north of the Town of Apple Valley, California.

**Agencies:** BLM, Barstow Field Office  
US Fish and Wildlife Service

**Contacts:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The right-of-way was issued to Pacific Wind Development in February 2016. The grant includes placement of up to four meteorological towers within the reserved project study area of 21,971.31 acres. Meteorological towers are in place and collection of wind speed data is on-going.

### **DesertXpress High Speed Rail**

**BLM Action:** In December 2011, BLM issued a right-of-way grant to DesertXpress, LLC to construct, operate and maintain a high speed passenger rail across public lands from Victorville, CA to Las Vegas, NV. The passenger rail would be constructed along or near Interstate 15. The Federal Railroad Agency (FRA) is the federal lead agency.

**Contacts:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The holder has been progressing to obtain applicable governmental permits, contract and initiate field surveys and financial implementation plans toward a five year phased development; Phase 1 – complete design and obtain pre-construction permits by fall 2017 or early 2018. Phase 2 – construction may begin potentially by fall 2018 and followed by Phase 3 – testing and commissioning of the passenger rail in 2020.

The DesertXpress rail is proposed to interconnect with the High Desert Corridor Project (Palmdale to Apple Valley). The High Desert Corridor Final EIS/EIR was released in June 2016. The California Department of Transportation District 7 is proposing to construct a new freeway/expressway/high-speed rail connecting the City of Palmdale in Los Angeles County with the town of Apple Valley in San Bernardino County. The proposed transportation facility is approximately 63 miles long. More information on this project can be obtained at <http://www.dot.ca.gov/d7/env-docs/docs/hdc/>

### **CalNev Pipeline Re-alignment Project**

**BLM Action:** CalNev Pipe Line, LLC (CalNev), filed an application to amend their right-of-way (Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, LP) proposing to construct a 16-inch-diameter pipeline

to expand the capacity of the CalNev Pipeline System. The CalNev Pipeline Expansion Project will involve the construction, operation, and maintenance of a new 16-inch-diameter pipeline and ancillary facilities from an existing facility in Colton, California to an existing facility in Las Vegas, Nevada. The proposed pipeline would parallel two existing system pipelines for most of the route

**Contacts:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Mark Massar, District Biologist, California Desert District

**Status:** On July 13, 2016 the applicant notified BLM of their intent to withdraw their application.

### **Lucerne Valley Solar**

**BLM Action:** The applicant, Celtic Energy, LLC, filed an application for a 45 megawatt solar photovoltaic facility to be constructed and operated on approximately 516 acres of public lands in Lucerne Valley.

**Contacts:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Joan Patrovsky, Realty Specialist/Project Manager, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** An application and draft plan of development (POD) have been filed. Funding to process the application has been requested. The site was previously analyzed under the Chevron Energy Solutions FEIS in October 2010.

### **Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Path 46 Project**

**BLM Action:** BLM is processing a right-of-way (ROW) application to address insufficient ground-to-conductor clearance for transmission lines in order to comply with the California Public Utilities Commission's (CPUC) General Order 95 and/or the National Electrical Safety Code (NESC) Clearance Code Requirements as mandated by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The existing McCullough-Victorville (MCV) Lines 1 and 2 and the Mead-Victorville (MVL) Line 1 were installed in the 1930s to transmit power from Hoover Dam to Los Angeles. In most cases, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) intends to comply with the code clearances by grading the ground surface of the area underneath the transmission lines to achieve height consistency with NERC/FERC requirements. LADWP has revised the initial proposed action of grading, tensioning of the power lines, or raising the towers to meet NERC and FERC height clearance requirements and avoid sensitive resource impacts. The revised proposed action now includes blading 69 sites of the original 70 sites with acceptable mitigation. The new proposed work consists of reducing surface area grading and limiting all human traffic along a trespassed disturbance previously thought a travel road. LADWP is proposing to conduct the work in late 2016. A visit to the site was conducted in April

and protective measures were identified.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office

**Contact:** Jose M Najar, Realty Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** Administrative biological and cultural reports are being finalized. Anticipate the publication of an environmental assessment in the first half of Fiscal Year 2017.

### **California Historic Route 66**

**BLM Action:** Barstow to Needles Corridor Management Plan (CMP)

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office, Needles Field Office, and California Desert District Office

**Contact:** Doran Sanchez, Partnership Outreach/Development Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The California Historic Route 66 Association (CHR66A) in sponsorship with the BLM California Desert District hosted a Route 66 Tourism and Economic Development Symposium at the Ramada in Barstow on May 18, 2016. The sold out event featured guest speakers from across the United States who shared their expertise regarding how they used Route 66 revitalization projects to increase community tourism and economic development opportunities.

On Monday, July 11, the Barstow City Council approved the Barstow Route 66 Downtown Specific Plan, a component of the City's update of its General Management Plan. The Barstow Plan adopted numerous marketing/tourism recommendations outlined in the Route 66 Corridor Management Plan.

Utilizing lessons learned from the symposium and "Next Steps" outlined in the Barstow Route 66 Downtown Plan, local citizens formed the Barstow Route 66 Association (BR66A) in July 2016. The BR66A includes members of the Barstow City Council, Chamber of Commerce and Business District, CHR66A and the BLM.

The group's first project included steam cleaning the sidewalks between Barstow Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, in preparation of the City's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Main Street Mural Program and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Route 66 Festival on October 15, which also will celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of Route 66 in November 1926.

BR66A members painted the facade and side of a main street office building on Saturday, September 24. Sponsors donated the paint and painting materials. Additional revitalization projects will be scheduled in the following months.

## **Congressionally Designated Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area**

**BLM Action:** Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office and California Desert District Office  
Department of Navy, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

**Contact:** Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** In July 2016, the Marine Corps notified BLM of their plans to utilize the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area for military training from August 1-30, 2017 and of the associated temporary closure.

BACKGROUND: On December 26, 2013 the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) was signed into law, authorizing the Marine Corps to occupy the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area (SUA) for two 30-day periods annually during which time the area would be closed to the public.

The Marines have established a project website to obtain additional information:  
<http://www.29palms.marines.mil/Staff/G5CommunityPlansPAO/JohnsonValley.aspx>

The Marines have also developed a mobile app for Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area to alert the user to the SUA temporary closures for military training and when the user approaches/crosses into an area permanently closed to public access. The mobile app can be obtained at the previously mentioned project website. This website also has a “How To” guide and video for the mobile app.

Additionally, the Marines have posted a video on training at the Combat Center: <http://www.29palms.marines.mil/UnitHome.aspx>. This video is useful for understanding the military training that occurs at MCAGCC.

### **Special Recreation Permits**

**BLM Action:** Fiscal Year 2016

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office

**Contact:** Debbie Flores, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Barstow Field Office  
Zachary Pratt, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, Barstow Field Office  
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Cecilia Franklin, Volunteer Coordinator, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** For Fiscal Year 2016, a total of 172 Special Recreation Permits (SRP) were administered by the Barstow Field Office (124 vending permits and 48 recreation related permits). Most of the recreation related SRPs entailed motorized race events. There was a total of 83 SRP recreation events in Fiscal Year 2016, with several being multi-

day events. Most of the vending occurred within the Dumont Dunes OHV Area and Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area.

### **Film Permits (Commercial and Non-Commercial)**

**BLM Action:** Fiscal Year 2016

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office

**Contact:** Cecilia Franklin, Volunteer Coordinator, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** For Fiscal Year 2016, a total of 98 film permits were administered by the Barstow Field Office, including non-commercial filming projects to students enrolled in a university related to the filming industry that must complete a class assignment. The most popular shoot locations include El Mirage, Johnson Valley, and Dumont Dunes OHV Recreation Areas.

### **Recreation Fee Sites**

**BLM Action:** Dumont Dunes OHV Area

**Contact:** Zachary Pratt, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, Barstow Field Office  
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

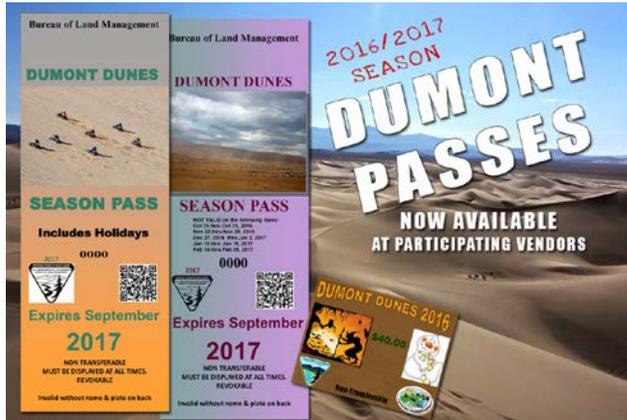
**Status:** The Dumont Dunes Subgroup, under the authority of the California Desert District Desert Advisory Council, continues to provide input to the BLM regarding issues pertinent to the Dumont Dunes OHV Area. The next meeting will be held at Dumont Dunes on Saturday, November 26 at 10:00 a.m. near the visitor center. The subgroup will introduce themselves, give an update, recruit for new subgroup members and allow for public comment.

The subgroup also decided on a safety message for duners arriving and departing the Dumont Dunes OHV Area. Stay Safe, Stay Alive entrance sign was created with photos from the Dumont Dune Rider webmaster, Pete Greep. His photos were also used on this year's season pass that includes the holidays.

The BLM Barstow Field Office is gearing up for the upcoming OHV season. A contract for vault toilet cleaning has been awarded to James "Jimmy" Lynn of Lynn Construction. He is a fellow off-roader and has done some other BLM contract work throughout the California Desert District.



Season Passes are now available at the Barstow Field Office and through participating vendors.



**BLM Action:** El Mirage Cooperative Management Area

**Contact:** Rose Beardshear, Interpretive Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** So far in Fiscal Year 2016 El Mirage Cooperative Management Area has had 77,591 visitors which is a 42% increase from our 2015 visitation.

The Friends of El Mirage continue to work on their 2015/2016 OHMVR grant for operations and maintenance in the El Mirage Cooperative Management Area. The BLM Barstow Field Office continues to meet monthly with the Friends of El Mirage and relies heavily on this partnership to leverage resources for the successful management of this popular OHV area. Currently they are focused on lakebed maintenance and operation of the visitor center.

Next step for the El Mirage Visitor Center is a contract to secure a vendor to develop a schematic design for the Visitor Center exhibits. A statement of work for the contract process is near completion. Once a budget is determined, the procurement process can move forward.

On October 22, 2016, the BLM and the Friends of Desert Discovery Center are hosting a Mad Hatter Safe-TEA Party at the El Mirage OHV Area located at 20471 Mountain View Rd., El Mirage, CA 92301. Activities begin at 11:00 a.m. with community partners set up for a day focused on desert safety and preparedness. Partners include Friends of Desert Discovery Center, San Bernardino County Search and Rescue, San Bernardino County Fire, El Mirage Improvement Association, California State Parks, Community Emergency Response Team of Phelan, and Forever Wild. McGruff the Crime Dog will be on hand to keep kids safe as they participate in various safety game booths. Attendees will receive a SAFE-TEA passport while they travel to various displays featuring topics such as Tread Lightly, desert safety and wildlife, emergency response, fire prevention, and search and rescue just to name a few. Come on out and

meet the Mad Hatter and his crazy costumed companions while enjoying a day of stewardship and safety.

### **Desert Discovery Center**

**BLM Action:** The BLM Barstow Field Office is working with the California Chapter of the Old Spanish Trail Association to make the Desert Discovery Center (DDC) a place where the public can learn about the Old Spanish National Historic Trail (OSNHT) while offering a broad range of recreational experiences that are related to the trail route and trail resources. The DDC will also interpret Route 66 and the newly designated Mojave Trails National Monument.

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office, California Desert District Office, California State Office  
Old Spanish Trail Association, California Chapter  
Desert Discovery Center Partners

**Contact:** Rose Beardshear, Interpretive Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** California's 4th annual Old Spanish Trail Day Celebration kicks off at the BLM's DDC on October 1, 2016 with an action-packed day of hands-on history that engages the entire community. Activities are scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Co-sponsored by the DDC partnership and Old Spanish Trail Association, the event is expected to draw over 1,000 people who will enjoy a full day of mule packing, flint knapping, pioneer cooking, folklorico dancing, gem wrapping, and a variety of other activities. Pioneer presenters and living history characters will take the crowds back in time to the 1800's where they will share stories and hands-on activities of life along the Old Spanish Trail.

The DDC will be closed for renovation through a capital improvement project from October 15, 2016 to mid-January 2017. Programs will continue off-site at the BLM Barstow Field Office, Barstow Library and the Mojave National Preserve Headquarters.

### **West Mojave Plan, Route Rehabilitation, Monitoring and Signing**

**BLM Action:** West Mojave (WEMO) Planning and Implementation

**Agencies:** BLM  
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP)  
State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)  
United States Forest Service  
Transition Habitat Conservancy  
Friends of El Mirage  
Farm Workers Institute of Education and Leadership Development  
Juniper Flats Working Group

**Contacts:** Edythe Seehafer, WEMO Project Manager, Barstow Field Office  
Craig Beck, WEMO Assistant Project Manager, Ridgecrest Field Office  
Carl Symons, Field Manager, Ridgecrest Field Office  
Katrina Symons, Field Manager, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** On August 12, 2016, the BLM and Plaintiffs jointly filed a status report and stipulated motion for an order setting the schedule on BLM's motion for enlargement of time for completing the revised California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan Amendment and Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) route designations for the West Mojave planning area.

A Status Conference was held on August 18, 2016, and the Court directed the Parties to meet and confer on a time line and proposed interim resource protection measures prior to BLM filing an enlargement motion. Also on August 18, 2016, the Court issued an order setting the schedule for BLM's motion for enlargement of time (September 15, 2016), Plaintiff's cross-motion for interim resource protection measures and responses to the motion for enlargement of time (October 13, 2016), BLM's response and reply (November 10, 2016), Plaintiffs' reply (November 29, 2016) and hearing on BLM's motion for enlargement (December 13, 2016).

In conformance with the Court's direction at the conclusion of the August 18 status conference, the Parties conferred by conference call on September 8, 2016.

On September 15, 2016, BLM filed a Notice of Motion and Motion for Enlargement of Time to complete the revised CDCA Amendment and OHV route designations for the WEMO planning area. The relief requested by the motion is an order providing that: (1) BLM publish the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the new Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) and Draft Travel Management Plans (TMP) by January 2018; (2) BLM publish the NOA of the Final SEIS and Proposed TMPs by April 2019; and (3) issue the WEMO Plan Amendment Record of Decision (ROD) and TMP RODs by October 2019.

BLM continues Phase I (aerial map GIS review) for establishment of the ground-disturbance baseline for the WEMO planning area as described in the Record of Decision for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan issued on September 14, 2016. Phase II (field verification) for establishment of the ground-disturbance baseline commenced in August 2016 and is anticipated to be completed by June 2017.

In August 4, 2016, BLM issued a Draft Historic Properties Management Plan (HPMP) for a 45-day review and comment period which ended on September 19, 2016. BLM received two comment letters. Public comment was incorporated, as appropriate, and on September 30, 2016, BLM submitted a Proposed Final HPMP to the California State Historic Preservation Office for concurrence by that Office.

Pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement (PA) that was signed in September 2015, BLM held the third of three annual WEMO Consulting Parties meetings on September 14, 2016. In addition to providing

the Consulting Parties an update on the WEMO PA implementation, the meeting provided another opportunity to comment on the Draft HPMP.

BLM continues field-testing of the archaeological resources Sensitivity Model using field crews to gather on-the-ground inventory data to cycle back into the model. During this last quarter, cultural resource inventory crews have surveyed an additional 1,489 acres, bringing the total field-testing in fiscal year 2016 to 5,060 acres.

The BFO continues work with partners and volunteer groups (e.g., Transition Habitat Conservancy, Juniper Flats Working Group, Friends of El Mirage) to implement signing of open routes, route closures, monitoring and restoration efforts in support of the West Mojave Plan.

### **Grazing Lease Renewals**

**BLM Action:** Grazing lease renewals

**Agency:** BLM, Barstow Field Office

**Contact:** Anthony Chavez, Rangeland Management Specialist, Barstow Field Office

**Status:** The BFO will be preparing environmental documents in Fiscal Year 2017 to respond to applications for renewal of expiring livestock grazing leases. The need for this action is established by the Taylor Grazing Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Fundamentals of Range Health (43 CFR 4180), and the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, as amended.

A Project Scoping Report for the renewal of a 10-year grazing lease for the Ord Mountain Allotment was issued on September 23. The end of the public comment period is October 24, 2016.

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
for the  
CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT  
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING**

**October 2016**



Trona Pinnacles, September 26, 2016  
Photo by John Thomas, Park Ranger

**RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE (RFO)**

**BLM Action:** Ridgecrest Field Office overview

**Contact:** Carl Symons is the Field Manager and can be reached at 760-384-5400 (main office line).

**Status:** The Ridgecrest Field Office is extremely busy focusing on priority projects such as:

- Special Recreation Permits
- Film Program
- DRECP and renewable energy
- West Mojave Route Network
- Haiwee Geothermal
- Grazing
- Central Hazmat and Abandoned Mine Lands
- Youth Initiative
- Wild Horse and Burro Program
- Grant Administration
- Cultural and Biological
- Mining operations

## CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PUBLIC LANDS

Carl Symons, Field Manager

### **Youth and Young Adult Employment**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office currently employs two Cultural Resource interns and two Recreation Interns. Twelve ACE members will begin work in the Red Mountain and Rands Mountain in mid-November. Some of the many tasks that these individuals have undertaken include: desert restoration, seed collection, rangeland health assessments, riparian and spring proper functioning condition assessments, cultural resource inventory and recordation, interpretation and outreach, along with NEPA planning.

**Outreach:** Interns routinely conduct outreach at several field locations to inform visitors of use regulations for the public lands and especially the Rand Mountain and Fremont Valley Management Area.

**Contact:** Carl Symons

**Status:** Additional interns may be added or replaced as funding sources are identified that can be managed effectively by the on board permanent staff. Staff is scheduling events that can be attended to further educate and inform the public about the many features and benefits that Americans receive from their public lands.

## RECREATION AND WILDERNESS

Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

### **Jawbone Station**

**BLM Action:** The Friends of Jawbone continue to provide the staffing to operate and maintain the visitor center 7 days a week throughout the year 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Additionally, for about the last eight years the BLM has partnered with the Friends of Jawbone (FOJ), a local non-profit group, to assist with management plan implementation efforts within the area. The FOJ maintain a staff of between eight and twenty individuals for field work crews. These staff members take on the many different task including habitat restoration, road and trail maintenance using heavy equipment and hand tools, management area and route signing, recreation facility maintenance, and trash pickup.



Above: Mr. Bob, Jawbone's Semi-Official Ambassador

**Contacts:** Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief

**Status:** Visitation to the Jawbone Station and surrounding Public Lands picked up with the enjoyable Spring time conditions. Generally visitation drops off as we go through the summer months but we still see people stopping in on their travel up north into the Sierras and further north along Highway 395 and beyond. When you are in the area stop in and see what guide books and maps you might need that you cannot find other places.



On September 28<sup>th</sup> at the OHV leadership meeting, Ed Waldheim was presented a letter from the State Director Jerry Perez thanking Ed for all his hard work and dedication. Thanks Ed!!

### Special Recreation Permits

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office (RIFO) special recreation permit (SRP) season is ongoing. Some of the activities that we issue SRP's for are motorcycle races, running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, off-road vehicle education clinics, and vending permits.

**Contact:** Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** On September 24<sup>th</sup> the RIFO conducted third party monitoring pilot program with the help of District 37 and the El Centro Field Office. During the Shamrock Motorcycle race we had four volunteers out along with one BLM representative to monitor the race. This was a good first step to incorporate third party monitoring into the SRP program.

The RIFO is entering into the busy SRP season. On our plate are dual sport motorcycle tours, four wheel drive tours, off road vehicle safety clinics, group outings, equestrian endurance rides and a truck race. A few local vendors sell their products at related events, such as competitive OHV races in the Spangler Hills OHV Open Area.

**LEFT:** Two of the volunteers monitoring during the start of the race.



## **West Mojave Route Monitoring and Route Maintenance**

**BLM Action:** The West Mojave Route Network Project (WMRNP) is a travel management planning effort covering 9.24 million acres in the West Mojave area of the California desert. Approximately 3.1 million acres in the planning area are public lands managed by the BLM. The WMRNP supplements the 2006 West Mojave Plan. The planning area covers the western portion of the Mojave Desert in southern California including parts of San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Kern, Inyo, and a small portion of Riverside Counties.

The BLM RIFO continues to perform route monitoring and maintenance of the designated routes and kiosks within our management scope of the West Mojave Planning area.

**Contacts:** Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** We made a big push in the Rademacher Hills area of the Ridgecrest subregion to further clarify the designated routes with in the area. We are routinely monitoring and maintaining the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. We continue to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. Staff has initiated the planned Protocol Monitoring for year three.

## **State OHV Grants**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office submitted three grants to the Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) for the 2015/2016 grant cycle, Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division. The RIFO was awarded all three grants which were Law Enforcement, Restoration, and Ground Operations. The total amount awarded for all three grants was \$1,427,542.00.

South Park Bridge was submitted in September 2016 through the RTP; was awarded by the Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) and we are now starting the documents to enter into contract to replace the bridge.

The 2016/2017 Grant Cycle is beginning in January and the RIFO is gearing up to put in for the grants. We will be attending the annual Grant Workshop in Ontario on January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Contact:** Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Recreation Planner

**Status:** The BLM RIFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for staffing, management actions and maintenance efforts that result in providing for the many various activities enjoyed by the public land users. Some these actions and efforts would not be possible without this outside funding source.





**Birds Springs Before and After**

### **Partnerships**

**BLM Action:** Twenty two youth -- members of the Friends of Jawbone Restoration Crews – are finishing up on-the-ground restoration of degraded sites within the Ridgecrest Resource Area.

**Contact:** Carrie Woods, Wildlife Biologist; Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Rec Planner

**Status:** Restoration crews apply their newly acquired skills to improve, protect and maintain existing trails and to erase illegally-generated scars on the landscape with techniques such as vertical mulch and barriers.

**BLM Action:** FIELD: Our partnership with Farmworker Institute of Education & Leadership Development (FIELD) carries out ecosystem restoration along with site maintenance and enhancement activities.

**Contact:** Elaine Hanson, Realty Specialist; Carl Symons, Field Manager

**Status:** Restoration efforts at Middle Knob began in late spring 2016. Through May 2017, FIELD will send a crew twice monthly to restore and remove impacts from visitation and off route travel.

### **Lands with Wilderness Characteristics**

**BLM Action:** All LWC inventories within the WEMO and DRECP Planning Areas for the RIFO have been completed. These inventories have been posted on the CA State BLM website. You can access them at: [www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/wilderness/other\\_blm\\_lands\\_with/ridgecrestlwc.html](http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/prog/wilderness/other_blm_lands_with/ridgecrestlwc.html)

**Contact:** Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** The remaining inventories outside of the WEMO & DRECP Planning areas are currently underway.

### **Wilderness Management Activities**

**BLM Action:** We have completed our 2016 restoration season. We had two restoration crews (10 interns) working along the boundaries of our wilderness areas. All of this work is funded through grants received from the CA State Parks OHMVR Division. The interns were responsible for providing crew support, coordination, and technical assistance, along with planning and prepping for next year's restoration projects.

Our restoration crews have worked along the Golden Valley, Grass Valley, Argus Range, Owens Peak and Kiavah Wilderness's and the Great Falls Basin Wilderness Study Area. We anticipate that the crews will close their season in the Bright Star and Coso Range wildernesses.

**Contact:** Martha Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator

**Status:** We are now at the point where we are almost as much engaged in monitoring and maintaining past restoration work as we are in completing new project work. We realize we can't cover all 17 of our wilderness areas and two WSAs in just one season. So we will be embarking on cycling through these areas each year, picking up where we left off the season before.

### **LANDS, MINERALS AND REALTY**

Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Rec Planner

**BLM Action: Film Permits:** Filming in the Ridgecrest Field Area continues to be quite busy. In the last few months a number of productions have been filmed in various locations. These include a music video with Rhianna and the song "Sledgehammer", was premiered in the Star Wars film, as well as some scenes filmed at the Trona Pinnacles. Another music video by popular artist, Mo, performed "Final Song" at Trona Pinnacles and a nearby dry lake bed.



Also, a number of 2017 car commercials, various types of commercials for the UK, French TV, as well as for the Internet. Also independent movie productions for the US and Russian TV have been filmed recently.



As more production companies are using drones for filming of some scenes, the BLM is keeping up with the new regulations for filming with drones. New legislation recently signed by Governor Jerry Brown, AB 1941, gives independent commercial producers a voice by allowing them a seat on the California Film Commission.



Productions have also recently been filmed at Wildrose Road area, Fossil Falls, Cinder Mountain areas and Olancho Sand Dunes.

**Status:**

We also continue to receive numerous phone calls and emails from production companies requesting information about filming on public lands and types of permits needed.

## Non-Renewable Energy

### BLM Action: Right-of-ways

Numerous ongoing right-of-ways (ROW) applications from SCE, LADWP, Universities, Counties, Verizon, etc., are ongoing for the authorization and reauthorization of ROWS.

**Contact:** Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist

**Status:** Pending:  
Archeological and biological clearance  
Preliminary application meetings  
On site visits  
Authorizations and Reauthorizations

**BLM Action:** Southern California Edison Pole Replacement:  
SCE is proposing to replace 27 utility poles near Keeler, Little Lake, California City, and Trona, CA on BLM along roads within SCE Right of Ways (ROWs). For Cerro Gordo, the proposed action consists of the replacement of 19 wood electric distribution poles and associated hardware. Pole 271569S will be brought in and set via truck. The other 18 poles will be brought in and set via helicopter. For the rest of the poles, the proposed action consists of the replacement of wooden electric distribution poles and associated hardware. The new poles will be brought in and set via truck or hand-set. For all pole locations, no new access roads will be constructed.

**Contact:** Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist

**Status:** The new holes will be dug via machine auger or by hand. Standard excavation depths range between 7 and 10 feet with a diameter of 3 feet. The area of soil disturbance will be limited to a radius of 5 to 10 feet around the pole, as well as light disturbances relating to construction within a general 50-foot radius around the pole. No significant brush removal or trimming is expected to be required of the project.

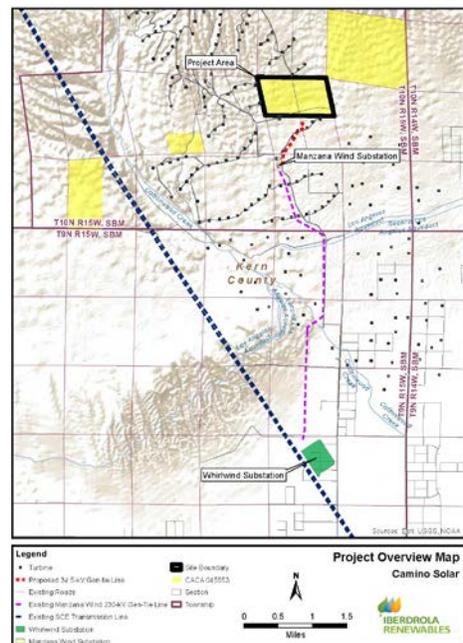
## Renewable Energy

**BLM Action:** Camino Solar Project:  
Aurora Solar, LLC has applied for a Right-of-Way grant for a solar energy facility with a maximum generating capacity of 44 megawatts. Their Plan of Development is based on previous work of the Tylerhorse Wind Project, in the same general vicinity of Kern County where Camino is now proposed. Tylerhorse is no longer under consideration for development.

Whereas Tylerhorse would have been constructed on three BLM-administered parcels, only one BLM parcel would be impacted by construction of Camino. Aurora anticipates that permitting and development of Camino would take place in 2016 and that construction would begin in mid-2017.

**Contact:** Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist

**Status:** Preliminary application meetings are ongoing. NEPA analysis is necessary.



## Geothermal Leasing Inspections



**BLM Action:** BLM RIFO is continuing to administer leases at Coso.

**Contact:** Mike Lystad, Petroleum Engineering Tech

**Status:** There are currently three pending non-competitive geothermal lease applications covering about 4,460 acres of BLM-administered public lands in the proposed Haiwee Geothermal Lease Area (HGLA).

**LEFT:** Coso Hot Springs, old stone-walled hotel

## Minerals: Saleable and Locatable

**BLM Action:** BLM RIFO continues to process minerals sales and small mining claims.

- Silver Standard Resources has selected Pat Gochmour to expedite approval of the Perdito drilling project on Conglomerate Mesa. A telephone meeting was held in May to discuss the environmental assessment to be written by a contractor with BLM supervision. The proposal involves entering a previously-reclaimed access route to drill seven sites on Conglomerate Mesa.
- The Golden Queen Mine at Soledad Mountain continues to operate south of Mojave. It has poured its first gold bar. Most of the pit and mineral deposit is on private lands.
- CR Briggs Mine declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Excavation has ceased at the Briggs Mine, but gold continues to be leached and produced from the heap leach pad. A sale was held and a bid accepted for the Briggs Mine May 2, 2016. Further details on this reorganization are pending.
- Sleepy Bear Mining, Fremont Valley: Need to review bond and collect 5:1 habitat compensation. Both are conditions of approval for any authorized expansion.
- A small prospecting plan for testing/sampling placer materials was approved for a site in the Jawbone Canyon Open Area.
- An environmental assessment is pending for a 2-acre clay mining operation at the Snow White #5 placer claim on Public Lands within Red Rock Canyon State Park.
- The California State Office is processing an extension of Public Land Order 7260 for the continued reservation of BLM public lands within Red Rock Canyon State Park. A patent is likewise in process for transfer of those public lands to Red Rock Canyon State Park that no longer are encumbered by mining claims.

**Contact:** Randy Porter - Geologist

**Status:** Continuing work on other small mining operations.

## Abandoned Mine Lands

**BLM Action:** AML inventories are currently being conducted in conjunction with routes and trails in the Rand Mountains. The AML Program plans to remediate (safeguard) dangerous mine openings in this region over the next several years to remove potential life threatening fall hazards.

**Contact:** Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist  
Ridgecrest Field Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant

**Status:** Staff is being cross trained to aide in field work related to AML work.

#### **CERCLA**

**BLM Action:** Continuing efforts to complete actions to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) through the CERCLA processes. Kelly Mine Site (OU1) undergoing stabilization of the interim remediation in conjunction with the potential for permanent site remediation.

**Contact:** Peter Graves, CA State Office Program Lead- Hazmat & AML

**Status:** Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga- OU2) is at the Department for review.

#### **RESOURCES**

Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

#### **Rangeland Management**

**BLM Action:** Grazing:  
Rangeland Health Assessments continue to be a priority, due to permit expirations February 2018.

**Contact:** Robert Pawelek, Chief - Resources, Loren Dunham, Contract Range Tech

**Status:** All grazing turnouts are subject to range condition assessments prior to turnout due to drought.

#### **Cultural Resources**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office Cultural Program has been working on:

##### **WEMO:**

Cultural resources related work for the WEMO Supplemental EIS and the Route Network Project continues with on-the-ground testing of the Archaeological Predictive Model. A Consulting Parties meeting was conducted in September.

##### **NLCS Rock Art Proposal:**

Public lands in the American West are seeing an increase in both vandalism and visitation impacts to archaeological sites. Rock art sites are particularly visible and vulnerable to both intentional acts of vandalism and inadvertent damage from visitation. The Ridgecrest Field Office manages one of the highest concentrations of rock art sites in the Great Basin; many of these sites occur within units of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS).

A complete and professional documentation is a prerequisite for successful management of these finite resources. Western Rock Art Research has a proven record of partnering with both the Ridgecrest and Bishop Field Offices and other agencies to produce exquisitely detailed and professional documentation of rock art sites and to raise public awareness of the cultural values contained on Public Land through education and outreach. This research would address gaps in previous recordation efforts in NLCS units. The data generated will inform management decisions

and assist with public education of the cultural values contained within NLCS units.

#### LA Aqueduct:

The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office continues to work with the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power on two significant projects involving the LA Aqueduct at the Haiwee Reservoir in Inyo County. One project involves the physical relocation of a short segment of the LA Aqueduct onto BLM managed lands at the northwest corner of the Haiwee Reservoir as part of the construction by LADWP of a second North Dam. During the past six months eligibility evaluation excavations were conducted by the consulting firm AECOM of six prehistoric archeological sites that could be affected by this relocation. A draft report on the findings and recommendations is expected.

#### Haiwee Penstock:

The LADWP is also proposing the replacement of the 10,000 foot long Haiwee Penstock located on the south side of Haiwee Reservoir. A hydraulic flow incident several years ago caused damage to the structure and LADWP would like to replace it for preventative maintenance purposes. A cultural resource survey of both LADWP and BLM lands identified 19 archeological sites with the combined LADWP-BLM project construction zones. During the past six months the consulting firm Garcia and Associates conducted eligibility evaluation excavation at all 19 sites. An interesting part of this research was the use of an excavator to dig a series of small trenches 20 feet deep in an attempt to ascertain whether the Pleistocene Owens River alluvial gravels would be affected by the proposed construction of the new penstock. No such types of geologic deposits were encountered, but this activity did contribute important data about the geomorphological formation of the locale.

**Contact:** Donald Storm - Archaeologist  
Danny Tyree – Archaeologist  
Liz Negrete-Gonzales – Contract Archaeologist

**Status:** Extremely busy program.

#### Wildlife Management

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Field Office Wildlife Program is working on:

- Assisting District with revising the BA to help with USFWS consultation for Haiwee Geothermal
- Camino Solar Project
- Directing the Chicago Land Management-Seeds of Success Program Interns and Program
- DRECP: provided input as requested by state office for biological resources
- WEMO Route Designation Process
- China Lake & USFWS: Assisting in delisting protocol for Inyo California Towhee
- DTRNA: the Naturalist program is going strong at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.
- ROW clearances including Southern California Edison, LADWP, Caltrans etc.
- Assisted in setting up Mohave ground squirrel surveys by Dr. Phil Leitner .
- AML clearances for plants and wildlife
- Outreach at the Murray Middle School Career Day
- Much more...

**Contact:** Caroline Woods – Wildlife Biologist

**Status:** Active...very active ;)



**ABOVE:** Inyo California Towhee, a candidate for delisting! Photo Courtesy Alan Vernon

### **Wild Horse and Burro Program**

**BLM Action:** The Ridgecrest Corrals is currently home to 600 wild horses and burros.

**Adoptions:** Budget allocation target of 100 animals. Approximately 200 animals were adopted in FY16. The Wild Horse and Burro staff will be offering several venues in the coming months including San Dimas, Temecula and Paso Robles.

**Gathers:** Ridgecrest staff have been participating in several simultaneous burro gathers over the past several weeks. Operations are ongoing at Molycorps Mine, Chemehuevi Indian Reservation, Park Moabi (Colorado River), Fort Irwin Army Base, and the NASA Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex.

**Census:** A population survey was conducted on the NAWS-China Lake in May. The purpose of the flights is to provide guidance and instruction to the US Navy in locating, counting, assessing the age/health of individuals and identifying individual animals on the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station.

**Contact:** Grant Lockie, Corral Manager;  
Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

**Status:** Adoptions continue year round by appointment. Paso Robles adoption TBA soon.

## Soil-Water-Air-Botany

### BLM Action: Groundwater Sustainability Agency

In September 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed historic legislation requiring California's most critical groundwater resources to be sustainably managed. With the governor's signature, groundwater will be comprehensively managed for the first time in the state's history.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) gives local agencies the powers needed to manage groundwater in a sustainable manner over a long-term horizon. The act requires that Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) be established and that Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) be developed for medium- and high-priority basins.

The Indian Wells Valley (IWV) GSA was formally established in September. GSA-Eligible agencies reported on efforts thus far to form a Groundwater Sustainability Agency, including discussion of a draft Joint Powers Authority Agreement.

For general information about the SGMA, go to [www.water.ca.gov/cagroundwater/](http://www.water.ca.gov/cagroundwater/)

**Contact:** Robert Pawelek, Resources Branch Chief

**Status:** Since IWV has been officially announced by the DWR as a Critically Overdrafted Basin the designation affects the deadline for managers in the basins to prepare their GSP by Jan. 31, 2020 instead of Jan. 31, 2022 for basins that are not critical. From the map at left, one can see that the Indian Wells Valley basin is in critical overdraft.

The US Navy and BLM are Associate (non-voting) Members of the GSA.

Critically Overdrafted Groundwater Basins – January 2016 — Southern Region



### BLM Action: Seeds of Success Program

Continue native seed and tissue collections to support restoration of desert tortoise habitat.

**Contact:** Caroline Woods -Wildlife Biologist, Loren Dunham - Contract Range Tech

**Status:** Active/ongoing

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wayne Dengal, Chief Ranger

**BLM Action:** RIFO Law Enforcement is spending considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas including wilderness boundaries and ACEC as well as other closed and limited use areas to detect and deter illegal off road travel activity. BLM and Public safety continue to be highest priority.

Continuing with monitoring efforts of SRPs.

Patrolling open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail.

Participating in national and state priority details as required.

Coordinating with DOI, CHP and County Sheriffs to resolve ongoing felony investigations

**Contact:** Wayne Dengal, Chief of Law Enforcement, RIFO

**Status:** We are pleased to have hired one Ranger who will be soon be headed to FLETC to undergo four months of federal LE training. Two other active vacancies are pending. Current staffing: Ranger Chaidez, Ranger Woods, Ranger Bleinshroth and Chief Ranger Dengal.

**HIGHLIGHTS  
EL CENTRO FIELD OFFICE**

**California Desert District  
Advisory Council Meeting  
October 15, 2016**



**Preparations are underway for the 2016-2017 visitor use season. The BLM places a high priority on providing opportunities for safe, family-friendly recreation in America's Great Outdoors!**

## Collaboration

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Subgroup**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Subgroup held a meeting on August 4, 2016 to discuss the 2015-2016 OHV season overview and to review the final OHV grants to be submitted by the BLM.

The next ISDRA Subgroup meeting is scheduled for December 15, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at the El Centro Field Office. Discussion will include information from the BLM regarding the 2016-2017 OHV season.

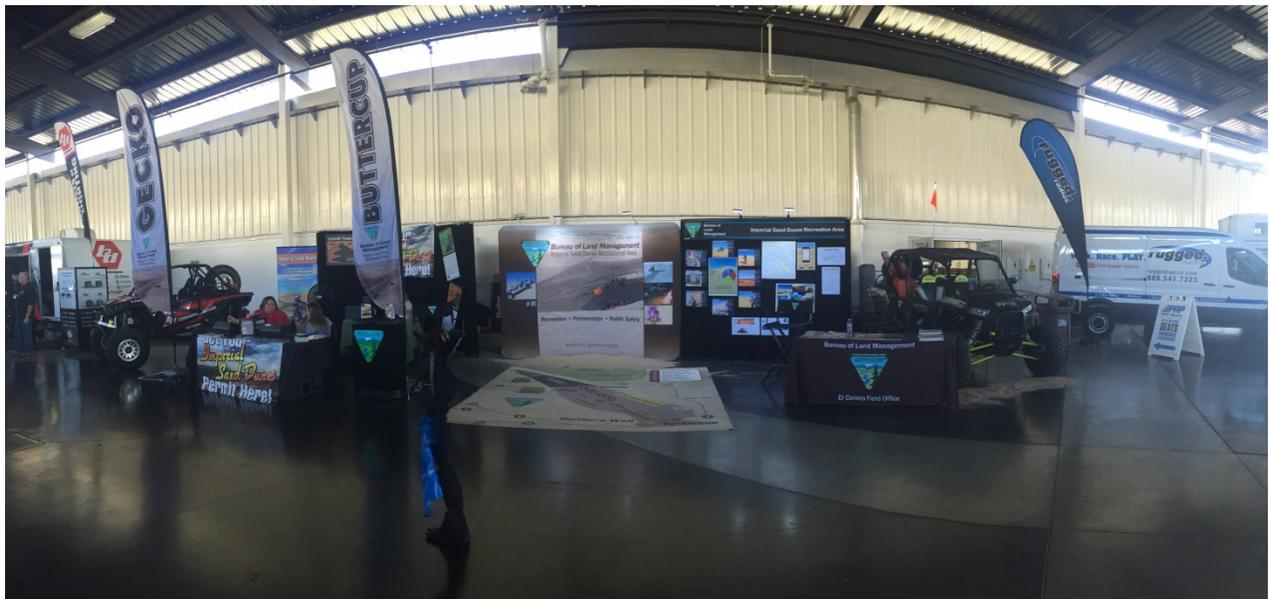
## Community

### **BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Education and Outreach**

**Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** Staff from the El Centro Field Office recently attended the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Sand Sport Super Show, the world's largest sand sports trade show and expo. The event provides a great opportunity to reach thousands of sand enthusiasts, and each year ECFO staff is on hand to provide show-goers the latest information regarding the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA). This year, new ISDRA maps and information about Avenza PDF Maps, the mobile map app, were distributed and discussed with visitors at the booth.

During the 2016/2017 season, BLM will continue the education efforts and has a goal to schedule at least five OHV safety educational events. The events will be advertised on the BLM Facebook page as well as the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area webpage. Topics may include impaired driving, navigation, natural resource issues and OHV laws and regulations.





Top: the ECFO display at the 2016 Sand Sport Super Show. Bottom left: Park Ranger Brian Puckett converses with show-goers.

**BLM Action: “The Real Housewives of Orange County” Filming Permit**

**Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Realty Specialist**

**Status:** On March 30, 2016, taping of an episode of the Bravo TV series *The Real Housewives of Orange County* within the ISDRA occurred via a film permit with the ECFO. The BLM monitored the participants’ activities and BLM Park Rangers/EMTs responded to an off-highway vehicle accident that occurred during filming. The episode aired on the Bravo Channel on September 5, 2016 and highlighted the great work of the ISDRA Recreation Staff.



BLM ECFO Park Ranger Brian Puckett responds to the scene of the crash during filming of *The Real Housewives of Orange County*.

## **Public Service**

### **BLM Action: ISDRA Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)**

#### **Contact: Brian Puckett, Park Ranger**

**Status:** Five seasonal park rangers were hired this for the upcoming dunes season and reported for duty on August 8, 2016. These park rangers are currently undergoing an intensive 10-week training program that will prepare them for the job to come. Along with the general park ranger training, they will complete an emergency medical technician course, courses in basic and advanced off-road vehicle operation, technical search and rescue, radio communications, and helicopter operations. This training is instructed by local BLM staff and portions of it are conducted jointly with the US Border Patrol.

The ECFO has been working together very closely with the BLM National Training Center (NTC), who has recognized our park ranger training program and is providing support for this class along with future trainings. The August cohort will be in the inaugural BLM National Park Ranger training course.

Ranger Stations are scheduled to open October 14, with all park ranger staff being operational at that time.



**US Border Patrol and BLM staff work together to complete a training scenario in the ISDRA.**

### **BLM Action: Law Enforcement**

#### **Contact: George Masner, Acting Chief Law Enforcement Ranger**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office Law Enforcement program is preparing for the upcoming 2016-2017 recreation season as the Imperial Valley begins to cool down, and has already observed an influx of visitors to the area.

In the summer months we continued our enforcement and education efforts toward our cooler climate areas where visitation picks up once the heat sets into the valley. The McCain Valley area has seen high visitation during the summer as it offers OHV for dirt bikes at a tolerable climate. We focused on and provided safe and secure riding and camping opportunities in this and similar areas.

Preparation for the 2016-2017 dunes season includes bringing all of the LE equipment in for service and maintenance. We must maintain our ATVs, UTVs, and Sand Rails to ensure availability during the busy season. All of our equipment is utilized non-stop for the season—we lose the ability to take it out of service for maintenance due to the high visitation.

We are also in the process of growing our Law Enforcement Team by hiring new supervisory, senior, and entry level field rangers. These newest members of our team will help us meet the mission of the BLM and the goals and objectives of the El Centro Field Office for protecting cultural and natural resources, managing recreation, and providing public safety.

One of the new Law Enforcement Rangers joins us from the Recreation staff and continues to work at ECFO until his departure to attend the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy (FLETC) in October. Two new rangers successfully completed all of their performance requirements and were sworn into office on August 11 and August 29, 2016. They are both now participating in the Field Training Evaluation Program (FTEP) and will return sometime in November. We are eagerly awaiting the arrival of three more new rangers.

Our six new rangers have big shoes to fill as they join the El Centro family; they are welcomed by a team of Supervisory Rangers that have over 16 years combined law enforcement experience, most of which were here in El Centro. The Chief Supervisory Law Enforcement Ranger with the El Centro Field Office for 2 years was also here for the welcoming, but recently vacated her position with the El Centro Field Office for the BLM Las Vegas Field Office in Nevada.



**Alexander Stewart's swearing in ceremony at the El Centro Field Office on August 11, 2016. Pictured from left to right are: Robert Hermes, Daniel Baca, Stephanie Clark, Alexander Stewart, California BLM State Director Jerome "Jerry" Perez, Carrie Simmons, and Thomas F. Zale.**



**Robert Hermes' swearing in on August 29, 2016. Pictured left to right are: Carrie Simmons (Acting Field Manager at the time), Robert Hermes, and former Chief Law Enforcement Officer Stephanie Clark.**

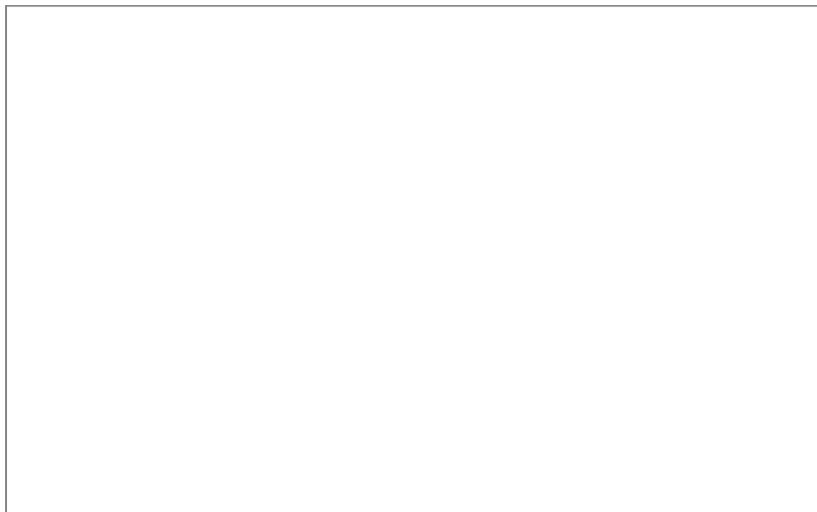


**Alexander Stewart during his swearing in, led by BLM California State Director Jerome "Jerry" Perez.**

**BLM Action: Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Fee Program Update and Visitation  
Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The fee season closed April 15, 2016 and was reestablished on October 1. Since October of 2015 there were 3,341 Seasonal and 43,172 Weekly permits sold—about the same during the same timeframe last season (3,091 Seasonal and 43,544 Weekly). Pre-season permit sales began mid-September and a final 2015-2016 annual report will be produced near the end of the first quarter.

As of September 18, 2016, visitation in the ISDRA reached a total of 860,664 visitors. Visitation counts were collected throughout the summer months and the final end of fiscal year counts will be collected the last week of September 2016.



**BLM Action: OHV Grant Program**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office was successfully awarded \$845,017 in OHV grants for the 2016-2017 season. The ECFO applied for projects in the categories of Ground Operations, Law Enforcement and Safety. To review the final OHV grants visit: <http://ohv.parks.ca.gov/> and click on the “Grants” tab.

**BLM Action: Social Media**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The Imperial Sand Dunes Facebook page is coming upon its fourth year of providing visitors with information. We currently have 9,333 “likes” and our posts receive thousands of views. Most posts include information about current conditions, dunes safety, ISDRA Subgroup Meetings, OHV news, the historic Plank Road, and other dunes related information. We also share posts of volunteers and staff contributing to the public lands in ways such as cleaning trash or helping reunite lost dogs with their owners. We continue to highlight the Discover the Desert initiative through posting desert filming photos and news. Discover the Desert focuses on educating, engaging and informing people of the cultural, historical, archaeological, environmental, and recreation opportunities within the desert. We also work with the BLM National and California State Offices, providing Imperial Sand Dunes stories and highlights for their Facebook pages and other social media networks. "Like" us on Facebook!

**BLM Action: Volunteer Program**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** There are many jobs and activities that BLM employees would love to do, but which prioritizing pushes to the backburner. This is where volunteers step in and step up. This fiscal year, we have had volunteers contribute their time in multiple forms throughout the field office, from setting up and breaking down the Star Wars event at Buttercup in January, inventory of items needed for the dunes season during the summer months, to general office duties—cleaning cubicles, shredding paper, and answering phones at the front desk. Volunteer involvement at the ECFO is very much appreciated. We would like to thank our 1,200+ volunteers for their 7,000+ hours contributed to helping our office work towards its mission!

**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits**

**Contact: Michelle Puckett, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** The El Centro Field Office received and permitted 117 Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) for a wide variety of activities, including competitive off-road racing, 4X4 touring, OHV demo rides, and vending goods and services. Of the 117 applications, 16 were for UTV, ATV and motorcycle races sponsored by the American Motorcycle Association's (AMA) District 38. The great relationships we have built with AMA District 38, the racing community, and other local agencies enable us to work collaboratively to manage safe events. The El Centro Field Office continues to accept SRP applications for Fiscal Year 2017.



**Left: A participant of a Trial Run event in Lark Canyon of McCain Valley. Right: Competitors in an event in the West Desert prepare for their race.**

**BLM Action: Special Recreation Permits- Vending**

**Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner**

**Status:** As stated above the El Centro Field Office received 117 Special Recreation Permit (SRP) applications in the 2016 fiscal year, 80 of which are vendors: businesses providing services to the visitors of the ISDRA, Superstition and Plaster City, and the LTVAs. Vendors provide services such as septic removal, repairs, and Off-Highway Vehicle rentals, and items such as firewood, ice, and whips. The vending program provides visitors to the El Centro Field Office with convenient and essential services and items, and enhances the overall experience at the ISDRA.

**BLM Action: Osborne Overlook Upgrades**

**Contact: Nathan Yearsley, Engineering Equipment Operator**

**Status:** Osborne Overlook road repair and improvement was commenced in September to replace degraded asphalt and solve drainage issues at the overlook. The ECFO estimates the work to be completed on or around October 28, 2016. Along with these upgrades there will be added space for large RVs and busses to turn around. When completed, visitors will have paved parking and a well-marked camping area.



The maintenance crew is hard at work repairing Osborne Overlook.

**Sustainability**

**BLM Action: Assignment of Ocotillo Switchyard to SDG&E**

**Contact: Veronica Vogan, Realty Specialist**

**Status:** The Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility (OWEF) project owned by Pattern Energy recently assigned the switchyard portion of the project to the San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E). The switchyard consists of approximately 30 acres, including approximately 14 of which are for future expansion.



Pictured above is a portion of the switchyard at the OWEF.

**BLM Action: Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Monitoring**

**Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning**

**Status:** Another season of flat-tailed horned lizard monitoring was successfully conducted this past spring and summer. Four interns participated in the annual biological surveys of fifteen years and counting, and contributed important data that helps prevent the need for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The El Centro Field Office monitors demographic plots in East Mesa, West Mesa and the Yuha Desert. The demographic plots use a “mark and recapture” design to determine population estimates and trends.

The monitoring program advances the Department of Interior Secretary’s priority of Youth in the Great Outdoors, a project that utilizes youth organizations to complete work through Assistance Agreements. This year’s monitoring was accomplished by the American Conservation Experience (ACE).



[ACE interns conduct annual flat-tailed horned lizard monitoring.](#)

**BLM Action: Tule Wind Energy Project to begin construction**

**Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning**

**Status:** On April 10, 2012, the BLM issued a right-of-way grant to Tule Wind LLC for the Tule Wind Project located in San Diego County, California. This project will generate up to 132 megawatts of energy via a maximum number of 67 wind turbines on public and private lands. Avangrid Renewables, parent company of Tule Wind LLC, held a ground breaking ceremony on August 31, 2016 at Rough Acres Ranch in McCain Valley in anticipation of beginning construction this fall. The BLM has received a limited Notice-to-Proceed request from Tule Wind and is currently finalizing its review in anticipation of authorization.

**BLM Action: Resources welcomes new Wildlife Biologist**

**Contact: Carrie Simmons, Assistant Field Manager for Resources and Planning**

**Status:** The Resources and Planning Division of the El Centro Field Office is happy to welcome new staff member, Camden Bruner. Originally from Denton, TX, Camden received a degree in Wildlife Management and Conservation from Humboldt State University. He started his career as a zookeeper and has worked with a wide variety of animals in captivity before transitioning to jobs focusing on wild animals and their habitats. Camden previously worked as a biologist for the City of Arcata and at the state level as a technician for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Camden started his federal career with the BLM almost two years ago in Medford, Oregon focusing on spotted owl and great gray owl survey and management in addition to monitoring other species of concern including bats, eagles, peregrines, and wolves. In his free time he is an extremely avid birder and is often hiking or traveling to see new species.



Camden conducting spotted owl surveys in Oregon.

# HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

## California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

October 15, 2016

### Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)

**BLM Action:** On February 12, 2016 the President designated the Mojave Trails National Monument comprised of 1.6 million acres of land located primarily in San Bernardino County, the majority of which is managed by the Needles Field Office, but also overlaps into the Barstow Field Office. Additionally there is a small area encompassing Camp Granite Mountain within Riverside County managed by the Palm Springs Field Office.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office is the primary point of contact.

**Contact:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** The Needles Field Office has selected a Monument Manager for the MTNM. The Manager, Kyle Sullivan is currently the Public Affairs Officer for the Front Range District Office in Colorado. Kyle brings a wealth of BLM experience to the California Desert and the MTNM. In an effort to make the MTNM Manager accessible to the majority of the public and our partner groups, Kyle will be located in our Moreno Valley District Office. While Kyle is already working with us, he will not officially report until mid-November.

The MTNM team is working to develop a “next steps” document that will outline the next steps in the MTNM planning process which will take place over the next six months. The document would then be updated periodically so that we would always be looking six months or better ahead. The document is meant to help guide the MTNM Planning Team.

The Mojave Desert Land Trust in Partnership with the Native American Lands Conservancy and COFEM held a moonlight event at the Cadiz Dunes. The event was well attended and offered the three diverse groups an opportunity to enjoy a common value, the Mojave Trails National Monument. The Amargosa Conservancy in partnership with the Latino Access Foundation held an event in Afton Canyon. These are each new activities specifically spurred by the designation of the MTNM, and we understand that each group anticipates a series of these events highlighting the MTNM.

The Blue Ribbon Coalition is proposing to hold an educational OHV event at Park Moabi which is located along the Colorado River and is managed by the Lake Havasu Field Office. To the credit of the BRC, they recognize that if they stage an event there for OHV enthusiasts, there will likely be a “spillover” of OHV use on to lands managed by the Needles Field Office potentially including the MTNM. The BRC prepared an operations plan that outlined the steps

they will take to ensure that the use remains casual and does not lead to unacceptable impacts. The NEFO will enter into a Letter of Agreement to confirm the actions outlined in the Operations Plan and their commitment to minimizing any impact.

### **Castle Mountain Mine Re-opening**

**BLM Action:** The NEFO has been contacted by Castle Mountain Mining Company (CMMC) about the possibility of re-opening the Castle Mountain Gold Mine. The mine was operated by the Viceroy Mining Company from approximately 1991 through 2001. The NEFO has been in informal consultation with the CMMC since December 2013. CMMC has indicated that they do want to pursue re-opening the mine and that we can anticipate a proposed Plan of Operations (POO) soon. Indications are that the proposed POO will be to initiate operations within the previously authorized foot print of the mine.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contact:** Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manger

**Status:** NewCastle Gold has continued with previously authorized exploratory drilling all located within the mining area. NewCastle has indicated that they may request a third phase of exploratory drilling. The assess road to the mine washed out numerous time this year due to monsoonal storms. NewCastle has requested permission to replace culverts and other water control features in the road to prevent this in the future. BLM is considering the proposal and anticipates approval.

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### **Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System**

**BLM Action:** Solar Partners', LLC have constructed the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System, a concentrated solar electrical generating facility capable of generating 370 megawatts (MW) of renewable power. The project is located in the Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada, and consist of three power plants, Ivanpah 1, Ivanpah 2 and Ivanpah 3. Shared facilities include a substation and natural gas pipeline. The three independent power plants and shared substation are co-located on approximately 3,671 acres of Bureau administered public land.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contacts:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

### **Interconnect Towers, LLC.**

**BLM Action:** Interconnect Towers, LLC (ICT) have submitted applications to construct communication sites along I-40 and I-15. The proposed locations are Blind Hills, Ash Hill, Halloran Springs, Nipton, I-40/HWY 95 junction, and I-40 near Park Moabi Rd. The proposed projects would potentially provide increased cell phone and emergency response services in areas currently deemed as limited

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office

**Contacts:** Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

### **Abandoned Mine Lands**

**BLM Action:** The NEFO is actively pursuing inventories, prioritization and closures of abandoned mines that may present a public safety hazard.

**Agencies:** BLM, Needles Field Office with support from the California Desert District and California Department of Conservation

**Contact:** Sterling White, CDD AML  
Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

**Status:** Bat surveys and other natural and cultural resource surveys are being conducted as funds and staffing allow for the development of a NEPA document and a possible contract for the closures. Much of the inventory work and bat surveys are accomplished by contractors, staff, and volunteers.

### **Partnerships**

Chicago Botanical Garden – The NFO will be partnering with the Chicago Botanic Garden’s Conservation and Land Management Internship to host 4 interns this spring. Two interns will be working on the Seeds of Success program. The program collects native plant seeds which are stored for use in research, restoration, or reclamation projects. Two other interns will be working on an OHMVR Grant-funded Invasive and Sensitive plant inventory project. This work will be the last season of a three year project that is focused on the inventory of invasive and sensitive plant species adjacent to NEMO and NECO roads and trails.

Amargosa Conservancy - The NFO and the Amargosa Conservancy (AC) are working together in protective and conservation efforts at Crystal Springs, Wildhorse Spring, and Horse Thief Springs in the Kingston Range. AC has provided cleanup efforts and are “eyes and ears” for the field office in this remote area.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden (RSABG) – the RSABG helps with sensitive plant inventory and SOS collections in remote portions of the NFO, and partners with NFO SOS interns to complete large seed collections.

California Trail Users Coalition - The NFO has entered into an agreement with the California Trail Users Coalition (CTUC) to extend their successful map series to include the NFO. This includes the development of a three map series covering our jurisdiction. The project is funded through a grant from the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division.

All three maps covering the Needles Field Office jurisdiction have been completed and are now available through the CTUC, and the Needles Field Office. The NFO has also initiated a distribution network utilizing local RV Resorts along the Colorado River.

All maps use a comprehensive route network, developed by staff based on the designated open route system for the map series. This network highlights long distance touring opportunities and access to recreational points of interest. The routes are marked; those with assigned names have been marked with stickers showing the names and numbers that correspond to labels on the maps.

Native American Lands Conservancy (NALC) – The NFO is partnering with the NALC to support the management of the Old Woman Mtn. Wilderness and the adjacent NALC Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The NFO supported the NALC in the development of an OHMVR restoration grant to provide restoration and barriers along the borders of the Old Woman Mtn Wilderness and the

Old Woman Mtn Preserve. The grant will be administered by the NALC.

Research Institutions – The NFO supports research proposals through timely submissions of research permits and letters of support for funding proposals within the NFO. This year, the NFO has provided logistical support to researchers from the University of California – Davis, the San Diego Zoo, USGS, Point Blue Conservation Science, Cornell University, the California Academy of Sciences, and others, to facilitate relevant and timely research in the region.

Outreach – The NFO has provided multiple outreach events to the Chemehuevi Native American Tribe, including presenting at their winter festival, at an event for visiting students, and at an Earth Day event in 2016. They are also about to host a SCA wildcorps crew, who is doing ongoing restoration on a road in wilderness.

**HIGHLIGHTS**  
**PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE**  
**California Desert District**  
**Advisory Council Meeting**  
**October, 2016**

The Palm Springs Field Office is carefully working through the implementation of the Desert Renewable Conservation Plan (DRECP) with the various energy applications, recreation and monument planning.

**Energy Projects**

**BLM Action:** The BLM continues to process several energy related proposals. Due to the current energy situation, considerable policy emphasis is still placed on expediting processes and timelines. The following is a summary of the major energy related proposals:

**West of Devers Transmission System Upgrade**

**Project proponent:** Southern California Edison (SCE);

**Co-lead:** California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

**Status:** Southern California Edison (SCE) is proposing to upgrade and adjust the routes of the following existing 220 kV transmission lines between the communities of North Palm Springs and San Bernardino, in incorporated and unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties: Devers-El Casco (30 miles), El Casco-San Bernardino (14 miles), Devers-San Bernardino (43 miles), Devers-Vista No. 1 and No. 2 (45 miles), Etiwanda-San Bernardino (3.5 miles), and San Bernardino-Vista (3.5 miles). Of the overall 48-mile length of the transmission corridor, approximately 6 miles would cross the reservation Trust Lands of the Morongo Band of Mission Indians and approximately 1 mile is on BLM-administered public lands. The BLM lands are located east of the City of Banning and west of the City of Desert Hot Springs in Riverside County.

In addition to the transmission line improvements, substation equipment at Devers, El Casco, Etiwanda, San Bernardino, Timoteo and Tennessee and Vista Substations would be upgraded to accommodate the project changes to transmission and sub-transmission systems. The project would consist of the upgrade and removal of 48 corridor miles of 220 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, relocation of 66 kV and 12 kV lines, and associated telecommunications and substation upgrades in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The BLM is the lead Federal agency for the preparation of this EIS in compliance with the requirements of NEPA. The CPUC is the lead State of California agency for the preparation of this EIR in compliance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The CPUC held 4 scoping meetings in the project area in May, 2014 and the BLM held one scoping meeting in July, 2014. The Draft EIS/EIR was released on August 7, 2015 for a 45 day comment period. Public meetings were held on August 26 and September 1, 2015. The CPUC held evidentiary hearings on the Project on November 16 & 17, 2015 as part of their proceedings leading to a decision on the project. An additional hearing on the project was held on December 7, 2015. The CPUC released their FEIR on December 11, 2015 in order for this analysis to be brought into their proceedings. The BLM will issue the Final EIS as these proceeding are

concluding and a CPUC proposed decision on the project is being released. Separating the BLM's EIS and CPUC's EIR will allow for BLM to utilize these proceedings to make a more informed decision on an agency preferred alternative.

The BLM identified a preferred alternative in the Final EIS based upon feedback on the Draft joint EIR/EIS from the public and cooperating agencies. The BLM preferred alternative is the Proposed Action with incorporation of the Tower Relocation Alternative and the Iowa Street 66kV Underground Alternative. The Final EIS Federal Register Notice of Availability (NOA) published in the Federal Register August 8, 2016. The USFWS is working on completing the Biological Opinion. A Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared by BLM on the proposed project after the USFWS finalizes the Biological Opinion.

### **Ten West Link Transmission Project**

**Project proponent:** Delaney-Colorado River Transmission, LLC (DCR Transmission), is a joint venture company owned by Abengoa Transmission & Infrastructure, LLC, and is an affiliate of Starwood Energy Group Global, Inc. DCR Transmission was selected as the Project Sponsor by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) as part of a competitive solicitation process authorized by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Order No. 1000 (Transmission Planning and Cost Allocation).

**Status:** The Project would include construction of a new 500 kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the Arizona Public Service (APS) Delaney Substation in Tonopah, Arizona, and the Southern California Edison (SCE) Colorado River Substation, west of Blythe, California. DCR Transmission submitted a right-of-way grant application with BLM on September 14, 2015. The Project would span approximately 114 miles, including 97 miles in Arizona and 17 miles in California, largely following the existing Devers Palo Verde #1 Transmission Line in an established utility corridor. Public open houses were held in November, 2015. Three public scoping meetings have taken place and the project is in the early stages of processing.

### **Wind Energy:**

**Project proponent:** Various.

**Status:** We oversee 20 wind energy rights-of-way grants in the San Geronio Pass and Coachella Valley areas including processing R/W applications and assignments, assessing and monitoring cost recovery accounts, completing environmental reviews, and issuing notices and decisions. As part of on-going monitoring of these rights-of-way grants, we are initiating additional studies to assess the impact of these facilities on avian populations. In addition, we are in the early stages of processing two re-power projects.

### **Solar Energy:**

**Project proponent:** various.

**Status:** We continue to process multiple applications for solar energy projects as part of the District-wide process. Our most recent actions are as follows.

## **Blythe Solar Power Project**

The Blythe Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with four adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatt (MW) capacity each for a total capacity of about 1,000 MWs. The BLM Record of Decision was issued October 25, 2010 followed by the right-of-way grant on November 4, 2010. Solar Trust of America filed for bankruptcy prior to any significant project work commencing. The project was subsequently sold to Nextera Energy under the Solar Trust bankruptcy auction.

An amendment to the existing ROW authorization was submitted to reduce the acreage of the project and change the technology from concentrating solar trough to photovoltaic with a reduction from 1,000 to 485 megawatts. The Draft EIS published on February 7, 2014 and the public comment period closed on March 24, 2014. The final EIS/Record of Decision was issued August 1, 2014 and the Right-of-Way Grant was issued August 12, 2014. A notice to proceed for project construction was issued on March 19, 2015. Phase I of the project is estimated to be completed in November 2016.

## **Palen Solar Power Project**

The Palen Solar Power Project, proposed by Solar Millennium, LLC (later Solar Trust of America), was for a concentrated solar trough electric generating facility with two adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatts (MW) each for a total capacity of 500 MW. A joint BLM Draft Environmental Impact Statement and California Energy Commission (CEC) Staff Assessment for the project was published on April 7, 2010. The Final BLM EIS was published on May 13, 2011, however, a Record of Decision was not issued due to a bankruptcy filing by Solar Trust of America. The project was subsequently purchased by BrightSource Energy during a Solar Trust bankruptcy auction. BrightSource Energy then proposed a technology change for project involving two concentrated solar towers with a combined generation capability of 500 MW. BrightSource submitted a right-of-way amendment application to the BLM and an Amendment Petition to the CEC involving using solar towers in lieu of the original concentrated solar trough technology.

A BLM Supplemental Draft EIS was released for this amended project on July 26, 2013 while the CEC proceeded with their permitting process. Release of the Final BLM Supplemental EIS was being timed to correspond with the CEC decision on this project. On September 26, 2014, however, BrightSource (Palen Solar Holdings, LLC) withdrew their Amendment Petition to the CEC involving the proposed use of the solar tower technology. On September 29, 2014, the CEC issued an order terminating their proceedings on this proposed amendment. The partnership between BrightSource and Abengoa Solar on this project has been terminated with the project being acquired by EDF Renewable Energy.

EDF Renewable Energy submitted an application and Plan of Development, dated December 22, 2015, for a 500 MW photovoltaic solar generating facility. The project would be constructed entirely on BLM lands within the original project footprint and consist of a single solar field with two smaller adjacent solar fields, a main access road from the Corn Springs off-ramp, and a 230kV generation tie-line extending from the project switchyard to the Red Bluff Substation. The BLM is in the early stages of processing this application and the draft supplemental EIS is scheduled to be published December 2016/January 2017.

## **NextEra - Ford Dry Lake (Genesis) Solar Project**

Genesis Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC, is authorized to construct and operate the Genesis Solar Energy Project consisting of a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with a total net electrical output of 250 MW. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the project was published in March, 2010; public comment period on the Final BLM EIS ended 9/27/10; the BLM Record of Decision was issued November 4, 2010; a Notice to Proceed for site preparation and facility construction was issued on August 24, 2011; and construction was completed in April, 2014. The facility is in full operation. Genesis Solar, LLC has filed with the California Energy Commission a plan to modify the natural gas storage tanks. The Ethnographic portion of the Genesis mitigation is complete and being distributed to consulting parties. For more information contact George Kline at 760-833-7135.

## **Desert Sunlight Solar Farm**

First Solar Development, Inc. is authorized to construct and operate a 4,245 acre 550-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant project known as the Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF). The DSSF includes three main components: 1) the Solar Farm site, 2) a transmission line, and 3) a Southern California Edison (SCE) owned and operated substation (Red Bluff Substation). The Notice of Intent was published January 13, 2010, the public comment period for the draft EIS ended November 26, 2010, the Notice of Availability for the Final EIS was published on April 15, 2011; the Record of Decision signed on August 8, 2011, project construction is complete and the project formally commissioned on February 9, 2015. A request for additional 50 acre feet of water annually was filed in November, 2014. This variance was approved on August 31, 2015 with the environmental assessment and decision record posted on our office website.

## **Rice Solar Power Project**

The BLM permitted Rice Solar Energy, LLC to construct a 10 mile electrical transmission line that would connect a private land, 150-MW solar-powered electrical generation facility to a Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) managed substation. This project was located on the former Rice Army Airfield in Rice Valley, eastern Riverside County, California, approximately 40 miles northwest of Blythe. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) were agency leads for the project; BLM was a cooperator. The CEC approved the project on December 15, 2010.

An abbreviated Final EIS was released by WAPA on August 5, 2011 and a Record of Decision approving the BLM portion of the project was signed December 8, 2011. The BLM right-of-way for the electrical transmission line was granted on April 13, 2012. However, on October 28, 2015, the BLM accepted Rice Solar Energy, LLC's request to relinquish their rights to the electrical transmission line permitted on public lands. Rice Solar Energy, LLC made its final rental payment for 2015 and the BLM is taking actions to terminate this right-of-way grant and close the casefile.

## **Desert Harvest Solar**

EnXco proposes to construct a 150 MW photovoltaic project on approximately 1,280 acres located directly south of the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center, California. A Notice of Intent was published on September 15, 2011 with a scoping period that ended October 17, 2011. The draft EIS on the project was released on April 13, 2012 with public meetings in the communities of Desert Center and Joshua Tree on May 14, 2012. The Final EIS has been published and the ROD issued on March 13, 2013. As of this date, the project has not obtained a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and has not settled outstanding issues with the shared gen-tie line for power distribution to the Red Bluff sub-station. Required documentation for a Notice to Proceed (NTP) has not been submitted to BLM as of this date. The applicant requested and received through BLM an extension of one (1) year to commence construction of the project and the extension date expires in September 2017.

## **McCoy Solar Energy Project**

McCoy Solar LLC, owned by Nextera Energy, is authorized to construct a 750 MW photovoltaic solar project on 7,700 acres of BLM and 470 acres of private lands located directly north of the Blythe Solar Project, near Blythe, California. The comment period on the Draft EIS ended August 23, 2012. The Final EIS for the project was issued on December 12, 2012 and the Record of Decision issued on March 11, 2013. The right-of-way grants were issued for Units 1 and 2 on 12/2/13 and 8/12/14. Unit 1 is fully operational and Unit 2 has not been issued a notice to proceed.

## **Desert Quartzsite Solar Project**

Desert Quartzite, LLC proposes to construct and operate a 300 megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) energy-generating project known as the Desert Quartzite Solar Project (Project). Desert Quartzite, LLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of First Solar Development, Inc. The facility will utilize First Solar's thin-film cadmium telluride (CdTe) photovoltaic modules. The Project Site is located on BLM lands in eastern Riverside County, approximately 2.75 miles southwest of the western extent of the City of Blythe, California. The facility footprint will occupy approximately 2,453 acres, and the 600-footwide Gen-Tie Line study corridor occupies approximately 205 acres. The Gen-Tie Line is approximately 2.8 miles long ending at the Colorado River Substation.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the project was published in the Federal Register on March 6, 2015. Public meetings were held in Parker, Arizona and Blythe, California in March, 2015. An admin draft of the joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (BLM/Riverside County Planning Department) has been completed. BLM/Riverside County/FWS completed their review of the document and provided their input to Desert Quartzite. First Solar is in the process of revising the Plan of Development (POD) which may affect the analysis and could result in further edits to the DEIS/DEIR. Desert Quartzite estimates that the completion of the POD would be mid Oct 2016. Once the revised POD is reviewed, the DEIS/DEIR can be completed.

## **Crimson Solar Project**

Sonoran West Holdings, LLC (Applicant), a wholly owned subsidiary of Recurrent Energy LLC, proposes to construct and operate the RE Crimson Solar Project a utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) and energy storage project that would be located on lands managed by the BLM. The project would be located on 2,900 acres of public lands and would generate up to 350 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy using photovoltaic technology, with up to 350 MW of integrated energy storage capacity.

The proposed Project is located in unincorporated eastern Riverside County, approximately 13 miles west of Blythe, just north of Mule Mountain and just south of I-10. The Project site was formerly proposed by BrightSource Energy for development of a larger project as the Sonoran West Solar Energy Generating Station, with submittal of an SF-299 application for CACA-051967 in 2009. A modified Plan of Development for the project is currently proposed and was submitted to BLM in January, 2016. This project is in the early stages of consideration by the BLM.

## **Blythe Mesa Solar Project**

On August 18, 2015, the BLM issued a Record of Decision approving issuance of a right-of-way grant in support of the Blythe Mesa Solar Project, owned by the Renewable Energy Group, Los Angeles, California. This 485 MW photovoltaic project will occupy 3,665 acres located on lands under the jurisdiction of the County of Riverside, BLM, and the City of Blythe. The project will likely be developed in phases that extend over several years.

The project includes construction of a 230 kV gen-tie line to connect the solar facility to the Colorado River Substation. The total length of this line will be 8.8 miles; 3.6 miles will be located on private lands within the array site boundary and 5.2 miles will be located off site on 72 acres of BLM-managed lands. The solar plant will be constructed entirely on private lands. No initiation of construction has begun.

For additional information on these and the other pending projects, see:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/cdd.html> and  
[https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa\\_register.do](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do)

**Status:** On-going

## **Land Exchange with Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians**

**BLM Action:** The BLM and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians entered into an agreement in 2002 to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would reduce the extent of checkerboard landownership within and outside the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, thereby facilitating effective and efficient management of public and Tribal lands in the National Monument.

In July 2010, the BLM released an environmental assessment to the public addressing environmental effects of the proposed land exchange. Comments were received from 144 individuals, ten nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. Based on public comments and upon further internal review, it was determined that preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) was necessary to address potentially significant effects of the proposed land exchange.

Two public scoping meetings were held in March, 2012 to identify issues, impacts, and potential alternatives that should be addressed in the EIS. About 125 members of the public attended the scoping meetings. Additional scoping comments were submitted to the BLM by mail and email.

The draft EIS, released to the public on December 29, 2014, analyzes the exchange of certain federal lands (5,799 acres) for properties owned by the Tribe (1,470 acres) within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. This draft EIS describes and analyzes alternatives based on varying amounts of public lands to be exchanged for Tribal lands, as well as the no-action alternative. Lands would be exchanged on an equal value basis between BLM and the Tribe pending outcome of the land appraisal. The comment period for this draft EIS closed on Sunday, March 29, 2015. The draft EIS is found under the heading “Other Ongoing Projects” at:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings.html>

Comments on the draft EIS were received from 469 individuals, nine nongovernmental organizations, and three government entities. The Environmental Protection Agency rated the preferred alternative as *Lack of Objections*, which means it did not identify any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through informal consultation, concurred with BLM’s determination that the proposed project is not likely to adversely affect Peninsular bighorn sheep or its designated critical habitat, least Bell’s vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher, or desert tortoise.

The administrative review draft of the final EIS has been prepared. BLM’s publication of a joint Notice of Availability (NOA) for the final EIS and Notice of Decision (NOD) will occur upon completion of review of the exchange package by the Washington Office. It is estimated the review process will be completed by November 2016 at which time the NOA/NOD would be published in the Federal Register and would launch the 45-day protest period.

**Status:** On-going.

### **Land Exchange with Hester Granite Company**

**BLM Action:** The BLM and Hester Granite Company (Hester) entered into an exchange agreement in 2014 to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would transfer 40 acres of Federal sub-surface (mineral) estate to the private surface owner (Hester) and in exchange, the BLM would acquire

approximately 589.74 acres of non-Federal land located within the newly designated Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM).

Hester owns the surface estate of a 93.7 acre quarry along with all of the respective sub surface estate; except for the subject 40 acre portion which contains a mineral reservation (subsurface estate) to the U.S. by patent. The patent created a 40 acre split estate where the private landowner (Hester) owns the surface estate and the U.S. owns the subsurface estate (minerals). The patent did not include surface entry or public access to the U.S. minerals and the parcel is surrounded by private lands in a residential/commercial area. Mineral trespass has been ongoing concern because the split estate is located within a privately owned quarry operation. The proposed exchange would dispose of the difficult to manage split estate while facilitating the reduction of checkerboard land ownership pattern for improved management efficiencies of public lands.

Public involvement concerning the exchange was pursued by the BLM with the issuance of a Notice of Exchange Proposal in December 2014 followed by a 45 day comment period. Only two comments were received; one comment was in support of the exchange and the other noted a concern about their existing rights on a non-Federal parcel. All comments were considered during the evaluation of issues in the NEPA-Environmental Analysis and Decision Record.

**Status:** The exchange decision package is currently being reviewed by the BLM Washington office for final determination. It is estimated that the review process will be completed by November 2016 at which time the Notice of Decision (NOD) would be published in the local newspaper(s) to initiate a 45-day protest period.

### **Off-Highway Vehicle Green Sticker Grant Program**

**BLM Action:** We continue to install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities in the Palm Springs Field Office. Perform BLM Ranger patrols to inform the public of OHV designations, provide assists and enforce regulations.

**Status:** Grants were provided to BLM Palm Springs in 2008-17 for ongoing restoration work, outreach, enforcement and signage conducted in the Mecca Hills, Dos Palmas, Big Morongo ACEC, Coachella Valley Preserve and eastern Riverside County. The BLM Palm Springs Office is currently working through the 2016 grant applications for law enforcement and restoration at the Steele Peak area. A public meeting was held on January 29, 2016 regarding the 2017 grant proposal cycle.

### **Water Projects: Implement Canal Lining Projects as part of PL100-675**

**BLM Action:** PL 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing potential habitat creation/restoration sites and groundwater from public lands to help meet project environmental requirements. The Dos Palmas ACEC is a focus area for these efforts.

**Status:** In cooperation with multiple parties including the Coachella Valley Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, US Bureau of Reclamation, FWS, and DF&G; the BLM is implementing an assistance agreement that includes BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of 17 acre marsh/aquatic habitat (completed), preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, acquisition of up to 875 acres of additional lands within the ACEC, and long-term management of these projects. This habitat management focuses on protection and enhancement of habitat for the endangered desert pupfish and Yuma clapper rail.

### **Riparian Restoration Activities Update – Palm Springs South Coast Field Office**

**BLM Action:** Approximately 2,000 acres are annually inventoried for ecological condition including stream corridors, mountain and desert oases, and other desert riparian communities. Riparian Assessments review avian riparian species present, noxious weed infestations, disturbances etc.

Approximately 250 acres are annually treated; techniques include:

- Manual: Hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as Sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, Salt cedar.
- Mechanical: Chainsaw, dozer use for removal of Salt cedar
- Chemical: Herbicide cut stumps of Salt cedar
- Biological: Excessive aquatic vegetation removal within sensitive desert oasis using sterile Grass Carp in Dos Palmas ponds. The vast majority of the restoration is with the removal of Tamarisk (Salt cedar). Once the salt cedar is removed the existing native seed bank responds quickly re-establishing itself.
- Locations: Numerous locations, including ACECs Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill/ Willow Hole; isolated oasis within the Santa Rosa's including Boo Hoff, Blasdel Canyon, Bear Creek, Magnesia Springs, Cathedral Canyon drainages etc.

**Status:** On-going.

### **San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area, Avian and Bat Surveys.**

**BLM Action:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for land management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands. This responsibility includes protecting migratory birds and promoting their conservation on public lands as directed by Executive Order 13186 and a 2010 Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

In 2013, the Palm Springs South Coast Field Office initiated meetings with the wind facility operators to discuss the need for more rigorous avian and bat surveys. Due to a lack of cohesive monitoring data to date, we continue to have an insufficient understanding of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to bird and bat species from wind energy development. To correct for this, the BLM will now implement a regional surveying effort to estimate abundance and mortality rates. The BLM has worked collaboratively with the USFWS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized

surveying protocols. These surveys are also designed to meet guidance by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for developing Bird and Bat Conservation Strategies and Eagle Conservation Plans which will provide the information needed for permitting and adaptive management.

A third party contractor, working directly for BLM, has been selected to gather data through avian point counts, line transect surveys, golden eagle point count surveys, ground-based fatality surveys, and bat acoustic surveys. The U.S. Geological Survey will assist BLM by analyzing the data and producing peer reviewed publications.

Status: Surveys will begin February 2017.

### **National Monuments**

**BLM Action:** Sand to Snow National Monument was authorized by President Obama on February 12, 2016:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/12/presidential-proclamation-establishment-sand-snow-national-monument>

Encompassing 154,000 acres, including just over 100,000 acres of already congressionally-designated Wilderness, Sand to Snow National Monument is an ecological and cultural treasure and one of the most biodiverse areas in southern California. The new monument supports more than 240 species of birds and twelve threatened and endangered wildlife species and will protect outstanding sacred, archaeological and cultural sites including an estimated 1,700 Native American petroglyphs.

The Monument is home to the regions tallest alpine mountain, at 11,500 feet, and lies at the cross-roads of the Mojave, Colorado and Sonoran Deserts. Featuring thirty miles of the world famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, the area is a favorite for camping, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, photography, wildlife viewing, and even skiing.

Sand to Snow National Monument is jointly managed by the BLM and US Forest Service. Both agencies, together, are initiating actions to meet these new responsibilities in managing this new national monument. Rebecca Wong was the interim acting monument manager, located at the San Bernardino Forest Service offices. Rebecca led an effort to begin the early phases of planning through public listening sessions. Another acting monument manager, Jihadda Govan, will be located at the San Bernardino Forest Service offices, while the permanent position is advertised.

Status: Planning and signs

### **Volunteers**

**BLM Action:** The office promotes volunteerism in a wide range of public land management initiatives. This program is mainly focused on management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC/Preserve. Extensive volunteer programs within the Monument are developed by the Friends of the Desert Mountains and are outlined on their website: <http://www.desertmountains.org/volunteer.html>

Extensive volunteer programs within the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve are developed by the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and are outlined on their web site: <http://www.bigmorongo.org/a8Volunteer.htm>

Other volunteer efforts are implemented throughout the year including habitat restoration, public land clean-ups, and archaeological site monitoring and facility development/maintenance. This year, September 24<sup>th</sup> there were approximately 75 volunteers at the Big Morongo Preserve National Public Land Days event. Three friends groups attended along with a representative from Congressman Ruiz's office.

These volunteer programs and contributions are invaluable in effectively managing our lands and programs. Of special note, offering high quality environmental education and interpretation programs to the public and schools is dependent on these volunteer contributions.

Status: On-going.