



Field Office, Fire and Fuel Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

MAY 2022



Barstow Field Office (BAFO)



Photo: Amargosa Wild and Scenic River

Archaeology and Cultural Resources

Calico Early Man Site

BLM Action: The BLM is completing remediation of remnant archaeological excavation and study features of the Calico Early Man Site to address concerns for public safety. Once the remaining public safety issues are remediated, the site will be re-opened to the public for self-guided tours.

Status: The Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact was issued on August 30, 2021. Contractors began remediation work on January 13, 2022. The installation of cupolas/air gates and backfilling has been completed.

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer, Archaeologist and Jeff Childers, Acting Field Manager

West Mojave Route Network Project 2015 Programmatic Agreement

BLM Action: The BLM continues to implement the 2015 Programmatic Agreement (PA) for the West Mojave Route Network Project.

Status: In FY2021, the BLM completed 1,549 acres of Class III surveys; hosted two virtual Consulting Parties Meetings in March 2021 and September 2021; prepared the FY2021 site documentation, evaluation, and report; developed the evaluation plan; and requested FY2022 funding for Model Analysis and Class I Literature Review (required every five years).

BLM Contacts: Jim Shearer, Archaeologist, and Jeff Childers, Acting Field Manager

Recreation

Johnson Valley Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area

BLM Action: The National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) authorized the Marine Corps to utilize 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 BLM manages the SUA for the remaining 10-months annually.

Partners: Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center

Status: A joint pre- and post-use inspection of the SUA occurred for the military training that took place on April 25, 2022, and May 10, 2022, with no issues identified.

The Marine Corps plan to utilize the SUA in 2023 during the Presidents' Day holiday. During these training periods, the SUA will be temporarily closed to the public, but the adjacent Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area will remain open. The Marines issue a news release as they control when the area is open or closed for military training and the Barstow webpage links to the latest information on Johnson Valley closures.

BLM Contacts: Jeff Childers, Acting Field Manager

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: Issuing special recreation permits (SRP) for a variety of recreation activities and vending.

Status: In FY2022 to date, a total of 129 SRPs were administered by the BAFO, not including the vendor permits for the King of the Hammers. The SRPs included a variety of recreation events (e.g., European scramble, vehicle testing, UTV races, car/truck race, speed timing trials, hare and hound, sand drags, dual sport ride, poker run), most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The BAFO issued several letters of agreement for various events (e.g., LA Police Baker to Las Vegas Race).

BLM Contacts: Chailenn Young, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Nathan Bingham, Outdoor Recreation Planner; and David Kotlarski, Assistant Field Manager

BLM Contacts: Amy Schow, Realty Specialist

Wildlife

Amargosa Vole Demographic and Disease Study, Habitat Enhancement and Population

Augmentation Program

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: A multi-year study of the Amargosa vole in the Tecopa area is being conducted to determine the extent of disease, vole genetics, and vole habitat needs. A captive breeding effort has also been established. These studies have provided information to help guide management actions and prevent the extinction of this highly vulnerable species.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Inyo County Road Department, Purdue University, US Geological Service, University of California (UC) Davis, University of California Berkeley and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: UC Davis/CDFW initiated a range-wide survey of the Amargosa vole last spring / summer. Initial results are concerning due to low numbers of individuals present which are likely drought related.

The BAFO received funding to initiate a “mega-marsh” project with our partners at UC Davis, this project will ultimately lead to the creation of a large marsh complex near “Borehole Marsh” to serve as a refugia / breeding site; this is a multi-year endeavor. In FY2021, BAFO received \$150,000 in funding to initiate planning efforts (UC Davis is contracting this work out). For FY2022, BAFO received \$300,000 to cover the costs of the implementation phase of this project.

After several years of preparation, a marsh has been restored on adjacent private lands and was successfully repopulated with Amargosa voles. This is the first-time voles have been present in this marsh for over 120 years. Monitoring is continuing and potential additional supplementations are being considered.

The BAFO continues to work with the Inyo County Road Department to install a weir at the outflow of “Borehole Marsh.” A second phase of the installation is scheduled for the end of September. Once this project is completed the structure will allow the BAFO to manage the site more efficiently.

In November 2021, BAFO installed 1,000 feet of new post-and-cable near Borehole Marsh to address incursion issues in the area.

UC Davis continues to maintain the captive breeding colony to serve as an insurance population.

The Amargosa Vole Team was awarded the 2020 Recovery Champion Award from the USFWS.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Amargosa River Monitoring Studies / Management Actions

BLM Action: The BAFO is involved in various monitoring studies / management actions associated with the Amargosa River including:

- Amargosa niterwort population monitoring

- sensitive bird species spot mapping/Cowbird Management Program
- tamarisk control efforts
- SCAN monitoring
- fish monitoring
- hydrology studies including US Geological Survey stream gauges
- habitat restoration
- endangered plant studies
- spring studies

Partners: Amargosa Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), The Nature Conservancy, Point Blue Conservation Science, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey

Status: The BAFO continues to implement tamarisk management on the Amargosa River and treated approximately 20 acres in 2021. The BAFO is developing a burn plan to address a large stand of tamarisk which is not suitable for treatment through other means. In February 2022, the BLM Fire Program continued management efforts by treating and retreating approximately 75 acres on the Amargosa River.

The BAFO is working with Point Blue Conservation Science to conduct the 17th year of long-term bird monitoring efforts. Funding has been secured to continue work this year as well.

The BAFO established eight Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River in 2021. In 2022, half of the sites are being re-sampled to establish trend data sets, and four new sites are being established to sample parts of the Wild and Scenic River which were not surveyed in 2021. Three new wetland AIM sites were sampled in 2022 to help support the Amargosa Vole recovery project. Volunteers from Adventure Scientists began collecting water samples for analysis as part of their national Wild and Scenic Rivers Program.

Our partners at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden finished their rare plant survey / mapping effort in 2022 and provided a summary of the BLM-funded two-year project.

The BAFO completed the implementation of the Bring Back the Natives Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in May 2021. This completes a project which was initiated in 2018 to improve habitat for the Amargosa Pupfish and other riparian dependent species. Over 650 trees were planted through a partnership with the BLM West Mojave Native Plants program and Victor Valley Community College. The BAFO is also working with CalTrans to implement additional plantings in the vicinity of this project. In March 2022, BAFO initiated another planting effort with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens which will build upon this initial work. BAFO is currently seeking funding to expand this project.

In April 2021, there was a fire on the Amargosa River near China Ranch involving 31.8 acres (8.8 acres on BLM-managed lands, 23.0 acres on private lands) of prime Least Bell's Vireo habitat. The BAFO is monitoring the situation and working with our partners on habitat recovery

efforts. In October 2021, the BAFO planted 400 trees (cottonwood/willow) as part of the fire recovery efforts in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and another 32 honey mesquite were planted with the assistance of the California Chapter of the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Association. In February 2021, the Apple Valley Fire Crew removed hazard trees from the site. In late March 2022, two volunteers from the Amargosa Conservancy completed spot treatments of invasive date palms on the site. The BAFO worked with the USFWS and Point Blue Conservation Science to initiate bird surveys to inform us as to how the recovery efforts are proceeding – in particular, how the Least Bell’s Vireo populations are responding.

The BAFO initiated a partnership with researchers to study the massive Screwbean Mesquite die-off observed on the Amargosa River. This project will feed into a larger project looking at this issue on a regional scale.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Afton Canyon Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Efforts

BLM Action: The BAFO is continuing a focused wildlife habitat enhancement program on the Afton Canyon portion of the Mojave Trails National Monument, which is largely modeled on the successful program associated with the Amargosa River Wild and Scenic River. The section of the Mojave River flowing through the Afton Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is currently considered “eligible” under the National Wild and Scenic River Act 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 as reflected by the 180 bird species utilizing the region. The BAFO is collecting data to help in the development of the management plan for the Mojave Trails National Monument.

Partners: 3M Corporation, Amargosa Conservancy Point Blue, California Alliance for Tamarisk Biocontrol, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Institute of Technology, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, Mojave Desert Land Trust, Oregon State University, Princeton University, Townson University, University of California, Santa Barbara, and United States Geological Survey (USGS)

Status: The BAFO has been working with the Mojave Desert Land Trust to implement the Women in Science Discovering the Desert (WISDOM) program. Through WISDOM, minority female interns are recruited to collect resource data (bighorn sheep, tamarisk beetle, bird, and Night Skies) from Afton Canyon to enhance their training in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). The BAFO received 2022 funding to continue tamarisk beetle studies associated with this program.

The BAFO, through the Fire and Fuels Program, has continued with tamarisk treatments within Afton Canyon and approximately 200 acres of tamarisk were treated / re-treated this year.

The BAFO continues to work with our partners at USGS and The Living Desert to develop a captive breeding / re-introduction program for the Southwestern Pond Turtle in Afton Canyon.

The BAFO continues to work with Southern California Edison and Brightline to conduct restoration projects in Afton Canyon which will integrate with other on-going restoration efforts.

The BAFO is working with researchers from the California Institute of Technology to deploy a research project looking at natural methane emissions as it relates to climate change. Afton Canyon will be one of the study sites.

Three aquatic AIM Survey points were established in Afton Canyon in 2022.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Team Activities

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: The BAFO is cooperating with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to implement the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The BAFO is providing representation for the BLM on the West Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) to set recovery action priorities.

Partners: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and various county, state, and federal agencies

Status: The RIT has been meeting on a regular basis and is currently focused on discussions about fencing along roads and highways.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Other / Misc.

Apple Valley NCCP/HCP Development

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: The BAFO is working with the Town of Apple Valley and associated permitting agencies on their development of the city's Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP). The BLM's main interest in this process is to work with the Town of Apple Valley to best determine how the NCCP/HCP mitigation requirements can work hand-in-hand with the BLM's management of the surrounding area consistent with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, as amended.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Town of Apple Valley, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: The town is nearing its target date for completion of the NCCP/HCP and the BAFO is engaged in coordination meetings to facilitate this effort.

BLM Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Development of the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP).

Status: The scoping period for the development of the Amargosa River CRMP ended on June 1, 2021. Twelve letters were received, and BLM is considering the substantive comments in the formulation of the Draft CRMP/Environmental Assessment (EA). The BLM anticipates the Draft CRMP/EA will be available for public review in FY2022.

BLM Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist

El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



Photo: Identification of native Croton californicus (California Croton) by Beatrice Linke, Field Botanist

Lands and Realty

Salton Sea Management Program 10-Year Plan and Dust Suppression Action Plan – United States Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment (EA)

BLM Action: The BLM is a cooperating agency for the United States Army Corps of Engineers' programmatic EA, which analyzes and discloses the effects of the proposed implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program's (SSMP) Phase I: 10-Year Plan. The plan implements up to 29,800 acres of aquatic habitat restoration and dust control projects around the perimeter of the Salton Sea. The SSMP Project area is within the ECFO and the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office, with the ECFO serving as the lead BLM office. The BLM anticipates responding to numerous site-specific right-of-way requests submitted by California Department of Water Resources for implementation of dust suppression projects under the SSMP 10-Year Plan.

Partners: United States Army Corps of Engineers (lead agency), Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Service and other state and federal partners.

Status: The ECFO is actively involved as a cooperating agency with the review of the USACE's SSMP 10-Year Plan EA. The draft EA will be posted for public comment in May 2022.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Minerals and Mining

Geothermal Lease Nominations Review

BLM Action: The ECFO will conduct land-use plan conformance, National Environmental

Policy Act (NEPA) and other required reviews of 22 parcels, totaling about 82,000 acres, proposed for geothermal leasing within Imperial County. Once the review is complete, approved parcels will be offered in a competitive geothermal lease sale.

Partners: None

Status: The ECFO is working to complete the initial land-use plan conformance review. Once complete, the ECFO will assist with the NEPA and National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation process.

BLM Contacts: Sylvia Ringer, CDD Project Manager; Regan Watt, CDD Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Ormat Geothermal Exploration at Truckhaven

BLM Action: In 2019, the BLM prepared an Environmental Assessment for the drilling of four geothermal wells at the Truckhaven resource area for lease CACA-055559 held by Ormat. A Geothermal Drilling Permit (GDP) for well #87-6 was reviewed and approved by the BLM on December 31, 2020. Following GDP approval, Ormat completed a seismic exploration program at the project site in April 2021. Ormat has submitted to the BLM a second GDP for the drilling of well #84-6.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services, California State Parks, California State Lands Commission

Status: The ECFO is reviewing a well pad sundry for well #87-6 and the second GDP for well #84-6. Ormat plans to complete all permitting requirements to mobilize and drill both wells concurrently.

BLM Contacts: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Imperial USA Corporation Exploration Plan of Operations

BLM Action: On October 14, 2021, Imperial USA Corporation submitted to the ECFO an amended Plan of Operations (Plan) to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the East Mesquite and Ogilby project segments, located in eastern Imperial County. The project proposes road improvements, 10 test pits for sampling, and 58 drill pads, with an estimated total disturbance of 3.5 acres of public lands. The amended Plan excludes activities within the Indian Pass mineral withdrawal area. The BLM has reviewed the amended Plan and found it to be complete, meeting all the surface management requirements found at 43 CFR 3809.401.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: NEPA will be initiated after the completion of biological surveys, cultural surveys, and all necessary information has been gathered. Cultural surveys began in April 2022 and are expected to be completed in May 2022.

BLM Contact: Mayra Martinez, Geologist

Wildlife and Botany

El Centro Native Seed Collection Effort

BLM Action: In March 2022, the ECFO implemented a native seed and plant material collection project. The ECFO focused on collecting plant species identified as priority species for restoring disturbed areas, such as the San Sebastian Marsh, flat-tailed horned lizard management areas, and wildfire burned areas. The ECFO manages two major ecoregions, the Sonoran Basin and Range and the Southern California Mountains, and collection is occurring in both ecoregions. Collecting native, locally sourced seed and plant material increases the availability of genetically appropriate and locally adapted native plant species.

Partners: U.S. Bend Seed Extractory, Chicago Botanic Garden

Status: The spring collections are underway, helmed by two field botanists and coordinated by the Chicago Botanic Garden. The botanists completed several large collections and smaller collections are being collected from ecologically important species whose populations are not robust enough for large scale collection. All seeds are shipped to the U.S. Bend Seed Extractory in Bend, OR for processing, inventory, and storage. Collection will continue into the summer months, pending viability of local seed.

BLM Contact: Peter DeJongh, Wildlife Biologist

Recreation

Travel and Transportation Management / Off-Highway Vehicle Trail Management

BLM Action: The ECFO completed about a mile of race route trail maintenance in Plaster City Open Area, funded through the Special Recreation Permit OHV race fees. Trail maintenance work included smoothing out whoop-de-dos and deep ruts caused by fast moving long travel trucks. The work was completed with active biological monitoring for flat-tailed horned lizards.

In Jan. 2022, the ECFO completed about three miles of trail maintenance on the Back Country Discovery Trail in the Superstition Mountain Open Area using OHV grant funds. The ECFO is working with the U.S. Navy in the Superstition Mtn. Open Area to improve the signing of the OHV / Navy bombing range perimeter. This summer, the BLM will continue signing the Vinagre Special Management Area OHV routes designated in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act.

Partners: American Motorcycle Association District 38, CA State Parks OHMVR Division, Navy

Status: Active. Work continues through the summer.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

OHV Adopt-A-Trail Partnership, Valley of the Moon

BLM Action: The BLM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tierra del Sol 4x4 Club

Partners: Tierra del Sol 4x4 Club

Status: The ECFO partnered with Tierra del Sol to help manage the Valley of the Moon area in eastern San Diego County. Tierra del Sol will assist in trail clean ups, wilderness monitoring, trail signing, and visitor education. This area is very popular for 4x4 day use and wilderness access for rock climbing enthusiasts.

BLM Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The ECFO works with clubs, businesses, and non-profit organizations on SRPs and Letters of Agreement (LOAs). To date, the ECFO approved 36 vending SRPs, 10 competitive SRPs, nine general SRPs, and 10 LOAs. The ECFO worked with the Quechan Indian Tribe on a Letter of Agreement for their annual Spirit Run from Indian Pass Road to the Quechan Indian Reservation. The Spirit Run occurred on April 16, 2022, with more than 20 participants.

Partners: El Centro Naval Air Facility, Black Bag Project, Quechan Indian Tribe, and San Diego 4 Wheelers

Status: The ECFO continues to work with partners, OHV clubs, and businesses to manage SRPs and agreements that promote responsible and sustainable recreation and the conservation of resources.

BLM Contact: Asdrubal V. Estrada, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Renewable Energy and Transmission

East Mesa Solar Facility Renewable Energy Project

BLM Action: The ECFO received an updated right-of-way application from IP Land Holdings, LLC for a proposed 650 MW solar energy facility on public lands designated as a Development Focus Area (DFA) under the Desert Renewable Energy and Conservation Plan southern Imperial County, California. The project includes arrays of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and appurtenant facilities, including a battery energy storage system, and either a new gen-tie and high-voltage substation or an interconnection to the existing SDG&E 500kV transmission line (Southwest Powerlink). A BLM designated utility corridor encumbers a large portion of the project site. IP Land Holdings submitted a corridor conflicts analysis detailing how the project

would impact future use of the utility corridor.

Partners: Imperial County Planning and Development Services

Status: The ECFO reviewed the third version of the plan of development and provided comments on the IP Land Holdings corridor conflicts analysis. The BLM notified IP Land Holdings of several geothermal lease nominations, which encumber the proposed project site. The ECFO is reviewing how this impacts the proposed East Mesa Solar Facility Renewable Energy Project.

BLM Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist

Other / Misc. Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Updates

No update to this entry since the February DAC report.

BLM Action: ECFO Law Enforcement (LE) staff includes 11 LE Rangers and one Evidence Technician. ECFO LE Rangers conduct patrols of Imperial County from the Riverside County line, to the Colorado River/Arizona state line of BLM lands, eastern San Diego County, and the US/Mexico Border. The LE Rangers patrol these lands to provide a safe and enjoyable experience to the public while recreating, and to verify commercial activities conducted on public lands are done in accordance with applicable regulations and permitted agreements. In 2021, ECFO LE Rangers made 19,320 public contacts while patrolling ECFO public lands with visitation of approximately two million visitors. LE staff collected 781 items of evidence in law enforcement actions, all processed and stored by the ECFO Evidence Technician. LE also conducted 5,480 patrols of cultural and resource areas within the ECFO.

Partners: Imperial County Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, United States Border Patrol

Status: ECFO Law Enforcement staff continue to patrol BLM-managed public land for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public, and the protection of resources, the environment, and BLM staff.

BLM Contact: Camilo Gonzalez, Chief Ranger

Needles Field Office (NFO)



Photo: Mojave Trails National Monument, Sheephole Pass

Grazing

Livestock Grazing Program Activities

BLM Action: The NFO manages three grazing allotments: the Lazy Daisy, Horse Thief, and Clark Mountain. The NFO participates in two annual meetings with the San Bernardino County Range Improvement Advisory Committee to review the need for new maintenance projects for range improvements at each allotment.

Partners: San Bernardino County Range Improvement Advisory Committee

Status: The NFO recently hired a Natural Resource Specialist to help manage the Livestock Grazing program. The new specialist will plan and develop the Horse Thief Corral, renew the Clark Mountain lease, and coordinate the continued management of the Lazy Daisy Allotment within the Mojave Trails National Monument.

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Lands and Realty

Brightline West High-Speed Train, Ivanpah Substation

BLM Action: The BLM is considering an application to construct, operate, and maintain an electric highspeed train from Victorville to Las Vegas by Brightline West. As a part of that

approval, a substation, converter station, and transmission line will need to be constructed near Ivanpah Dry Lake. The BLM determined that NEPA previously prepared by the Federal Railroad Administration is not adequate to authorize these facilities. The NFO will complete a separate environmental assessment to consider the facilities authorization.

Partners: FRA Brightline West, Southern California Edison

Status: The NFO will proceed with an environmental assessment to analyze the impacts of the Ivanpah sub-station and transmission line.

BLM Contacts: John Russell Hansen, Realty Specialist; Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Union Pacific Railroad Tower Replacement

BLM Action: The BLM received an amendment application from Union Pacific Railroad Company for their existing communication use lease site to replace an existing 60-foot guyed tower with an 80-foot self-supporting tower made of non-reflective galvanized steel. This facility serves as an ancillary facility to the Union Pacific Railroad and provides necessary communications to ensure safe operations of the railroad. The current tower was manufactured with an earlier Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA) standard that is no longer applicable. The new tower would bring the communication facility up to current TIA standards and improve communication for the railroad and would be constructed adjacent and northwest of the existing tower. The old tower will be removed after the new tower has been placed and communication equipment is installed and operating.

Partners: N/A

Status: The NFO's interdisciplinary team is close to finalizing review of the application and the appropriate level of NEPA. Union Pacific Railroad has paid for cost recovery. The BLM will complete the internal scoping process once Union Pacific Railroad submits changes to the plan of development and identifies the areas of potential effects.

Minerals & Mining

Castle Mountain Mine Modification to Plan of Operation

BLM Action: The NFO received a proposed plan modification from Castle Mountain Mine to expand the mine operation. Castle Mountain Mine is an open pit gold mine located in the Hart Mining District of San Bernardino County. The expansion of mining will occur on private and public lands within the previous Castle Mountain Mine planning area.

Partners: The BLM continues to facilitate collaboration and consultation with National Park Service.

Status: The NFO is working with Castle Mountain Ventures to perfect the proposed modification. Once complete, the NFO will begin review and consideration of the plan.

BLM Contacts: Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager; Rose Pettiette, Geologist

Emergency Use Authorization for Castle Mountain Mine

BLM Action: The BLM received a request from Castle Mountain Venture (CMV) for emergency use of an alternative water supply for Castle Mountain Mine to remain in compliance with health and safety requirements of federal and state laws. Proposed actions involve transitioning a recently completed but currently idle test well to an operating water supply well. Castle Mountain Mine shares a watershed and road access with the Castle Mountains National Monument and Mojave National Preserve.

Partners: The BLM continues to facilitate collaboration and consultation with National Park Service, as necessary.

Status: The BLM is issuing a temporary authorization for limited use of 300 acre-feet per year. Use is subject to terms and conditions necessary to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation.

BLM Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager; Justin Saiz, Acting Assistant Field Manager; Rose Pettiette, Geologist

Recreation

Amboy Trail and Sign Planning

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: The NFO, to enhance recreation opportunities at Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, proposes to add a trail network with a series of looped trails (8-10 new trails). These looped trails would range from short-to-long in duration to provide a hiking experience for different skill levels. The NFO is developing new signing to warn and educate visitors about hiking in the extreme heat, the importance of packing water, and the time of year to avoid hiking in the area due to extreme heat conditions. Other signing would include maps and trail signs.

Status: The NFO is in the conceptual planning phase, and started an internal review.

BLM Contacts: Ramona Daniels, Outdoor Recreation Planner; Mitch Owens, Assistant Field Manager

Wildlife

Desert Stateline Solar Mitigation

BLM Action: The NFO and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) identified a project that can be completed by Desert Stateline Solar Farm (DSSF) as mitigation for resource impacts caused by the construction of their solar facility. The NFO and the Mojave National Preserve (MNP) had previously agreed with DSSF to conduct their mitigation within the MNP by installing 13.1 miles of desert tortoise fencing on each side of Morning Star Mine Road. It was determined

unfeasible because of multiple washes along the roadside and flooding events, which would cause heavy damage to the fence line.

The NFO has a pending project involving construction of desert tortoise fencing along Goffs Road. This section of road is 24.5 miles in length, entirely within critical desert tortoise habitat, and the entire southern side of the road and the northeastern half are within the MTNM; the second half of the northwestern side of the road is within the MNP.

Partners: USFWS, Mojave National Preserve, Desert Stateline Solar Farm

Status: The BLM is working with Desert Stateline Solar Farm to identify the location of the fence line and what private land parcels the fence intersects. The BLM and Aspen Consultants are providing information on these private land parcels to identify if a right-of-way can be secured.

BLM Contacts: Justin Saiz, Wildlife Biologist

Mojave Springs Restoration and Maintenance Plan for the Needles Field Office

BLM Action: The BLM is required to ensure springs on public land properly function. Many of the springs across the NFO are being negatively impacted by climate change and invasive species. The NFO has reduced invasive species at some springs. The BLM is working on an EA for a treatment plan for the entire NFO.

Partners: The project has support from many conservation-oriented groups and local livestock permittees.

Status: The NFO is surveying springs to identify areas of concern for disturbance. The minimal tool analysis is being completed and reviewed. Portions of the EA are being drafted and field work may start in early fall.

BLM Contacts: Justin Saiz, Wildlife Biologist

National Monuments

Mojave Trails National Monument Managers Report

BLM Action: The NFO has reformatted the yearly Mojave Trails National Monument Managers Report. The new narrative format will now cover thematic projects and events during the year, including accomplishments and partnership events.

Partners: Twentynine Palms Tourism, California Historic Route 66 Association, Mojave Trails Lands Trust, Boy Scouts of America

Status: The report should be available in late fall.

BLM Contacts: Noelle Glines-Bovio, Mojave Trails National Monument Manager

Mojave Trails National Monument Public Engagement Zoom Meetings Update

BLM Action: Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) has reengaged in the preliminary monument planning phase. MTNM staff have awarded a contract through the Department of Interior's Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution (CADR) program.

Partners: N/A

Status: The MTNM held three virtual educational meetings on April 16, 19, and 21. The meetings educated the public on the Mojave Trails National Monument future planning strategy. Topics discussed covered BLM planning policy, presumed key planning issues, information shared during the 2016 BLM Envisioning Sessions, and the draft planning schedule. A draft report on the findings will be available in summer of 2022.

BLM Contacts: Noelle Glines-Bovio, Mojave Trails National Monument Manager

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)



Photo: Santa Rosa and Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument

Renewable Energy and Transmission

The Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) manages more than three dozen individual operational and proposed energy development projects. The following are updates on projects that have occurred since October.

Crimson Solar Project

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Completing authorization of requested need, followed by monitoring compliance of construction.

Partners: Sonoran West Holdings, LLC and Recurrent Energy, LLC

Status: The BLM issued a right-of-way (ROW) grant to Sonoran West Holding, LLC for the battery energy storage system (BESS), substation, access roads, and an operations and maintenance building. Construction started on the BESS September 22, 2021 and is approximately 50% completed. Issuance of a ROW and notice to proceed on construction for the solar facility is pending the proponent finalizing a power purchase agreement. Construction is anticipated to start before the end of 2022.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Brandon G. Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Arica Solar Project and Victory Pass Solar Projects

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Clearway Solar

Status: The Department of the Interior announced the approval of the Arica and Victory Pass Solar Projects on December 21, 2021, via a national press release. With the approval to move forward, construction of the photovoltaic solar projects will begin. Once complete the combined projects will generate a total of up to 465 megawatts of electricity and up to 400 megawatts of battery storage. Together these renewable energy projects will result in an estimated combined infrastructure investment of \$689 million, \$5.9 million in annual operational economic benefit and power approximately 132,000 homes.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team; Caroline Woods, Project Manager /Acting Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Oberon Solar

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Intersect Power

Status: Intersect Power filed a ROW application on September 5, 2019, for a PV project on roughly 6,000 acres of public lands within the DFA near the Desert Center area, the proposed project area was reduced to roughly 2,600 acres. The project currently consists of a 500 MW PV facility located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with an optional battery storage.

The BLM released the Environmental Assessment in August 2021, and the 30-day comment period ended September 14, 2021. Endangered Species Act consultation with USFWS initiated September 9, 2021. National Historic Preservation Act consultation anticipated before the end of September 2021. The project was approved in January 2022 and will generate up to 500 megawatts of renewable energy and have capacity for 200 megawatts of battery storage.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team; Brandon G. Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support

Desert Sunlight Solar

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Granted

Partner: Sunlight Solar LLC

Status: A ROW grant was issued on December 7, 2021, to Sunlight Solar LLC (a subsidiary of NextEra Energy) for construction of a 230-MW battery energy storage system on approximately 94 acres and wholly within the Desert Sunlight project; additionally, it would tie into the existing Desert Sunlight 230-kVgen-tie line and connect to the Red Bluff Substation. NTP was issued on

December 21, 2021. Mobilization to begin the week of January 4, 2022, and construction started February 2022.

BLM Contacts: John Dalton, PSSC Team Leader - Renewable Energy Support Team, and Jessika Peltz, Project Lead/Realty Specialist

Lands and Realty

Santa Ana Wash Congressional Land Exchange (Public Law 116-9 (Dingell Act), Section 1003)

BLM Action: The John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to convey approximately 417.50 acres of public land in San Bernardino County managed by the BLM to the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District). In exchange, the Conservation District would convey up to 369 acres of land to the BLM.

The land to be exchanged lies within the Upper Santa Ana Wash Land Management and Habitat Conservation Plan (Plan) area and hosts nearby cities, county, mining companies, wildlife agencies, and water organizations. The area is regionally important for mineral aggregates, flood control, groundwater recharge, recreation, and habitat for threatened and endangered species. Section 1003 requires the Conservation District to pay all related exchanges costs.

Upon completion of the exchange, and pursuant to the Dingell Act, the Conservation District could continue maintenance, operation, construction, or relocation of, or expansion of, groundwater recharge facilities on the lands conveyed to the BLM to accommodate groundwater recharge of the Bunker Hill Basin if the activities do not conflict with the Plan.

The non-federal lands within sections 9 and 12 of Township 1 South, Range 3 West, are encumbered with easements, leases, and agreements to which the exchange will be subject.

Partner: San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District

Status: Currently in appraisal review with Appraisal and Valuation Services Office.

BLM Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Realty Specialist

Chiriaco Water Facilities Expansion (Chiriaco Summit Water District)

BLM Action: Granted

Chiriaco Summit Water District (CSWD) holds a right-of-way (ROW) grant for the Chiriaco Water Facilities within the Chiriaco community. The ROW is on 2.44 acres and expires in 2038. CSWD received a \$2.9 million state grant from the California State Water Resources Control Board to upgrade the facilities. The state grant funding is subject to CSWD constructing the project by September 2022. CSWD has applied for an amendment to the existing ROW grant that would continue the use of public lands and proposes to replace its antiquated 35,000-gallon steel tank with a 500,000-gallon bolted steel tank, rehab the existing 300,000 open reservoir, and

relocate and upgrade the microfiltration treatment plant from private property to BLM-managed land. Additional upgrades include below-grade and onsite yard piping for connection of facilities and future relocation of a diesel engine-driven fire pump. The ROW amendment would increase the project footprint by an additional 2.5 acres for a total of approximately five acres.

Partner: Chiriaco Summit Water District

Status: On July 16, 2021, the BLM published the final environmental assessment and unsigned finding of no significant impact. The public comment period ended July 31, 2021. The grant was issued September 17, 2021, subject to a reclamation cost estimate, bond, a pre-construction meeting, and the notice to proceed. A meeting was held with CSWD on January 31. NTP pending. The BLM issued a due diligence letter on April 9, 2022, for outstanding ROW requirements.

BLM Contact: Victoria Ramirez, Project Lead/Realty Specialist

Wildlife

San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area, Avian, and Bat Study

BLM Action: The PSSCFO partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized field surveys to assess the potential effects of wind energy turbine repowering on wildlife mortality rates in the San Gorgonio Pass Wind Resource Area. Survey protocols being developed call for the use of canine detection teams. This cooperative study was designed to provide information for use in guiding repowering projects on federal lands throughout the region. The BLM entered its third year of regional surveys in 2022, which will conclude in June 2022. USGS data analysis and results are expected by July 2023.

Partners: USGS, Rogue Detection Teams

Status: Concluding June 2022, with expected analysis and results by July 2023.

BLM Contact: Kristen Lalumiere, Wildlife Biologist

National Monuments

Sand to Snow National Monument Planning

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: The PSSCFO and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are developing a land use management plan for the jointly managed Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM). Both agencies are initiating actions to meet the new responsibilities in managing this national monument. The Monument Manager, Jihadda Govan, is an USFS employee based out of the San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office. In 2016, a joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled and developed an early draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS).

The draft AMS identifies the current and existing baseline management for the SSNM, specifically as it applies to items mentioned in the monument proclamation. The draft AMS is the first step in the planning process for the SSNM Land Use Plan which will provide for the proper care and management of objects of historical and scientific interest for which the monument was designated, and to conserve and protect the cultural, ecological, and scientific resources found within the monument for present and future generations. BLM policy requires a unique set of land use decisions for each national monument.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service

Status: Preparation plan submitted to BLM HQ. Statement of work being drafted.

BLM Contact: Jihadda Govan, Sand to Snow National Monument Manager

Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center Reopens

BLM Action: The BLM Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center was closed on March 16, 2020, due to COVID-19 and California Stay-at-Home orders. On March 11, 2022, the Visitor Center opened to the public with reduced hours of operations due to limited staffing. The Visitor Center is open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, from 8:30 a.m. – 4 pm. The Visitor Center has served over a thousand visitors since reopening, with many visitors looking for information on recreation activities in the area. The Visitor Center has several new outdoor interpretive installations constructed during the closure. The new installations were accomplished through grant funding attained by the Monument’s primary non-profit support partner, Friends of the Desert Mountains.

Partners: San Bernadino National Forest, US Forest Service and Friends of the Desert Mountains

Status: Visitor Center is open with reduced days due to staffing deficiencies. Additional interpretive improvements for the Visitor Center are planned and will be completed in phases based on funds and grants available.

BLM Contact: Dani Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Manager

Other/Misc.

Law Enforcement

BLM Action: The PSSCFO continues year-round law enforcement operations to protect public safety and resources.

Partners: PSSCFO federal law enforcement officers (LEOs) work with more than 20 law enforcement agencies including U.S. Border Patrol, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Drug Enforcement Agency, the counties of Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego, and local jurisdictions within the Coachella Valley.

Status: The BLM law enforcement officers work with other federal, state, and local agencies on a variety of issues, including responding to fellow law enforcement agencies for support with

search and rescue and medical emergencies. The PSSCFO LEOs assist other BLM offices with national events to include high-visitation holiday weekends at the Imperial Sand Dunes in the El Centro Field Office, Saving America's Border Resources (SABR) in Arizona and California, the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), and support fire season through resource orders for wildfires and Emergency Support Function throughout the country during national emergencies. PSSCFO LEOs assisted with a security detail for San Diego Zoo contractors trapping San Bernardino kangaroo rats at the abandoned Inland Shooting Range in Highland, CA. LEO's are gearing up for a busy marijuana season with CAMP conducting certifications for short haul and planning for this season. LE staffing levels for PSSC are at eight LEO's with one in the hiring process.

BLM Contact: Aaron R. Titus, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, PSSCFO.

Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



Photo: Sheep unloading in the El Tejon pasture near Ridgecrest

Archaeology

Haiwee North Dam #2 Coordination

BLM Action: The RFO continues communication with the Timbisha Tribe and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on Haiwee North Dam #2 project which is monitored by archaeological and Tribal cultural monitors under the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding. Continued artifact discovery during construction required additional SHPO and Tribal coordination. Field monitors are included during excavation activities.

Status: Coordination is on-going between the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, California Office of Historic Preservation, and Tribes for unanticipated discoveries on the Haiwee North Dam #2 Project.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Amy Girado, Archaeologist

NAGPRA Collections Compliance

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: Museum collections owned by the BLM are periodically reviewed to ensure compliance with Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). When items are discovered in museum collections that qualify for protection under NAGPRA, the BLM works in conjunction with the facility to conduct consultation with Tribes, and Most Likely Descendants to ensure compliance.

Status: Recent discoveries in four curated collections not previously reviewed under NAGPRA

have been identified and the BLM is in the process of initiating Tribal consultation to ensure that protected items are repatriated respectfully. Tribal notification letters were sent in the summer of 2021. Consultation is on-going with support being provided from the BLM Bishop Field Office.

BLM Contacts Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Amy Girado, Archaeologist

Grazing

Limited Sheep Turnout this Spring

BLM Action: The RFO allowed the turnout of three sheep bands. Range conditions remain suitable for limited ephemeral sheep grazing in Cantil Commons, in a narrow area comprising the Spangler Hills, Searles Station, and west side of the El Paso Mountains near US395.

Partners: Sheep permittee

Status: Sheep grazing authorized yearly between March 1 and May 30, as conditions allow.

BLM Contacts Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Kelso Valley Grazing Permits Renewal Process

BLM Action: The RFO and Bakersfield Field Offices continue to renew grazing permits for remaining portions of the Rudnick Common Allotment and adjacent allotments along the field office boundary. In 2021, A voluntary relinquishment of the Rudnick Common Allotment in the California Desert Conservation Area required this allotment to be reconfigured. Three pastures of the Rudnick Common Allotment remain - Pinyon Wells, Cane Canyon, and Rocky Point. The renewal process on grazing permits for Kelso Peak and Woolstaff Creek begins in May 2022.

Partners: Two BLM grazing permittees currently holding permits on the remaining pastures and allotments.

Status: Notice of Proposed Action (Wilderness) will be released in April 2022. A proposed grazing decision / environmental assessment may be available for 30-day public comment in June 2022.

Contacts: Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Grazing Natural Resource Specialist; Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Lands and Realty - Major Right-of-Ways

California High Speed Rail – Palmdale-Burbank Segment

BLM Action: The RFO awaits the Plan of Development from the California High Speed Rail Authority (CAHSRA) for the Palmdale-Burbank phase. The previous phase of planning, Bakersfield-Palmdale, was completed in summer 2021 with the Final Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement. In 2018, the CAHSRA submitted a right-of-way application to complete the high-speed rail line between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Partners: California High Speed Rail Authority (applicant)

Status: The RFO will continue to process the application by completing a Record of Decision for the alignments on BLM-managed land and may issue a right-of-way over the next year.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Naturgy Candela Development LLC (Yeager Solar)

No update to this entry since the February DAC report, but the project is continuing.

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to construct a 400-megawatt photovoltaic solar facility with Gen-Tie.

Partners: Naturgy Candela Development LLC

Status: The California Desert District and the RFO will continue to process the application.

BLM Contacts: Yvonne Castro, Project Manager; Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist.

Deep Rose Water Pipeline

BLM Action: Proposed completion of a buried water pipeline that supports a geothermal plant on California State Trust Land.

Partners: Applicant

Status: The RFO continues to process an application with completion anticipated in fall of 2022.

BLM Contacts: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist; Cole Dowdy, Realty Specialist; Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Minerals and Mining

Conglomerate Mesa Mineral Exploration

BLM Action: The RFO is processing a modified Plan of Operations submitted by Mojave Precious Metals for exploratory drilling. If approved, four holes would be directionally drilled from each pad for a total of 120 holes located in Conglomerate Mesa in Inyo County. BLM will prepare an environmental document as part of the process for determining if or how the operation may proceed subject to regulation [43 CFR 3809](#). The area has been explored for gold

over the past 40 years and was formerly considered for wilderness designation but has since been released from wilderness consideration by Congress. Additional resources: [Map](#)

Partners: Mojave Precious Metals, Inc., a California subsidiary of K2 Gold of Vancouver, CA.

Status: The current Plan of Operations modification raised resource concerns from the public, Tribes, and other agencies during public scoping, increases surface disturbance to 12 acres, and increases the number of drill locations and holes. Based on these and other factors, the BLM determined additional environmental analysis was needed and is preparing for an Environmental Impact Statement. In the next few months, the RFO anticipates publishing a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS and to hold public scoping meetings.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Randall Porter, Geologist

Exploratory Drilling near Johannesburg and Atolia, CA

BLM Action: The RFO received an exploration plan to drill from Gold Discover Group, LLC to drill approximately 337 shallow holes to gather samples and explore for placer gold in Johannesburg and Red Mountain, near Johannesburg, CA (map at <https://arcg.is/0XHmXS0>). The exploration holes are within designated critical tortoise habitat. If approved, holes would be approximately 8 inches in diameter and drilled into bedrock not deeper than 150 feet. The same company also applied for authorization to mine approximately 70 acres in San Bernardino County, near Atolia, CA. Both projects are required to comply with the NEPA process as part of determining whether or how the operations may be approved under 43 CFR 3809.

Partners: Gold Discovery Group, LLC

Status: An environmental assessment for the Gold Discovery exploration drilling is expected to be completed in FY 2022.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist

Exploratory Drilling near Red Mountain

BLM Action: The RFO received two notices of exploration drilling for the area near Red Mountain, CA. All drill sites are excluded from any Area of Critical Environmental Concern and excluded from the Fremont-Kramer critical tortoise habitat.

Partners: Kelly Mine Investments, LLC

Status: The submitted notices of exploration drilling are not subject to the National Environmental Policy Act but to mitigation measures required by the BLM. The BLM has required mitigation measures for the protection of public lands and resources. The operator is in process of submitting performance bonds to guarantee the performance of reclamation.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Randy Porter, Geologist.

Recreation

Special Recreation Permits

BLM Action: The RFO issued and managed 34 different Special Recreation Permits during the first half of FY2022, and processing six that will occur in late 2022.

Partners: N/A

Status: In April 2022, a new Outdoor Recreation Planner was hired to managed SRPs.

BLM Contacts: Craig Beck, Supervisory Recreation Planner; Aly Heare, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area Fencing Project

BLM Action: The RFO and Student Conservation Association (SCA) crew is nearing completion of a fence line along the southern boundary of the Spangler Hills Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area that was designated as part of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act. The fence spans nine miles along the southern boundary with the Fremont-Kramer Area of Critical Environmental Concern for desert tortoise critical habitat.

Partners: Student Conservation Association

Status: The RFO and SCA expects to complete the fence by the end of May 2022, including appropriate signing in the area.

BLM Contacts: John Thomas, Park Ranger; Katy Meyer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan

BLM Action: The RFO opened a 30-day comment period for the Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River (WSR) on March 15, 2022. The Cottonwood Creek WSR flows through Inyo National Forest and Ridgecrest Field Office in Inyo County, east of Big Pine, CA. With the Inyo National Forest (Inyo NF) as the lead agency for the planning, interested public can provide scoping comments and data through the Inyo NF's website. The BLM's ePlanning site directs readers to the Forest Service website for consistency and to reduce redundancy.

Partners: Inyo National Forest

Status: The comment period closed on April 14, 2022, and the RFO is working with U.S. Forest Service to review comments. The RFO will address public comments and adjusting the plan and environmental assessment accordingly. A decision may be issued in FY2022.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Renewable Energy and Transmission

Reroutes to Pacific Crest Trail Occurring on Sky River Wind Farm

BLM Action: The RFO is working with the Pacific Crest Trail manager, a USFS employee, to create a new easement on private property owned by NextEra. The company owns the Sky River wind farm near Tehachapi, CA.

Partners: U.S. Forest Service, Region 5, Pacific Crest Trail Association, NextEra Inc.

Status: The trail realignments have been completed, aside from some final adjustments.

BLM Contacts: Randy Masner, Civil Engineering Technician; Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager

Wild Horses and Burros

Centennial, Panamint and Slate Range Herd Areas Wild Burro Gather

BLM Action: On April 25, the RFO began a 14–20-day wild burro gather of up to 490 animals in the Centennial, Panamint, and Slate Range herd areas and in the National Park Service’s Death Valley National Park. These areas are not managed to support wild burros and a gather is necessary to address resource impacts and reduce the risk of burro-vehicle collisions.

Partners: U.S. Navy at National Air Weapons Station China Lake, National Park Service – Death Valley National Park

Status: The gather is expected to last 14-20 days.

BLM Contacts: Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager; Alex Neibergs, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

Misc. / Other

The RFO has advertised two biologist positions and resumes are being reviewed.

The RFO hired a Natural Resource Specialist focusing on soil, air, water, and botany. The RFO is working on hiring a geologist.

The Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Regional Corrals are short two position, hampering adoptions. Public viewing remains available by driving the perimeter road.

California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



Photo: BLM firefighter using prescribed fire to restore Stephens' kangaroo rat habitat

Fire Incidents

Fires as of April 2022

BLM Action: There have been 18 fires within the California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP) as of April 2022. Approximately 15 acres burned because of these wildfires; 14 fires burning 8.3 acres on BLM-managed land, three fires burning 0.3 acres on National Park Service lands, and one fire burning 6.5 acres on Bureau of Reclamation lands. The largest fire was the Border 6 Fire in San Diego County in the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office which burned seven acres.

Partners: The CDIFP has cooperative fire agreements with several counties and cities as well as other federal and California State partners. Imperial County Fire, Riverside County Fire, San Bernardino County Fire, Kern County Fire, Redlands Fire Department, Apple Valley Fire Department, Victorville Fire Department, Palm Springs Fire Department, CAL FIRE, the United States Forest Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are some of the partner fire departments we work with the most often.

Status: All fires mentioned are currently out.

BLM Contacts: Paul Gibbs, District Fire Management Officer; Freddie Espinoza, Assistant Fire Management Officer

Fuels Projects

BLM Action: The CDIFP completed fuel treatments using methods such as hand, mechanical, chemical, and prescribed burning to protect natural and cultural resources. Fuels management provides fire suppression personnel opportunities to take action to control wildfires and protect infrastructure and private property. Treatments were used to contain, control, or otherwise suppress seven fires in 2021.

Partners: Partners in both BLM and NPS fuels treatments for 2022 include the California Conservation Corps and the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps to implement treatments to protect Joshua trees in areas modeled to be refugia in the face of a warming and drying climate. Other BLM partners include the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), The Wildlands Conservancy, the Friends of the Desert Mountains, the Ramona Band of Cahuilla Indians, Morongo Band of Mission Indians, and Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The BLM has completed 5,540 acres of fuels treatments to date in FY2022. If fully funded, the plan is to treat approximately 30,000 acres throughout the CDD, Joshua Tree National Park, and Mojave National Preserve. Timing of funding will affect the ability to complete planned treatments. Disaster Bill funding provided for an increase in acres treated. To date, 599 acres have been treated out of a total 905 acres planned for treatment in the Barstow, El Centro, and Palm Springs-South Coast field offices. There are an additional 184 acres planned in Joshua Tree National Park and Mojave Preserve.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, District Fuels Program Manager

Mitigation and Education Projects

BLM Action: The BLM completed 6 of 32 planned community assistance activities this year. Assistance activities help communities withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience into the communities to help in their recovery if a fire were to occur. Mitigation-Education staff worked with cooperators and communities to plan and implement local fuels treatments such as the Sunrise Community Fuel Break in Julian and the North Mountain Fuel Break near Poppet Flats south of Banning. Both treatments have been used repeatedly to protect the two communities from wildfires including the Cedar Fire of 2003 and the Esperanza Fire of 2006, respectively. Maintenance of each is ongoing to ensure their effectiveness. The program has four vacancies, and once positions are filled, additional activities will be completed.

Partners: San Diego County Fire Safe Council and 26 of the community fire safe councils throughout the county. U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies. BLM Mitigation-Education staff have presented training to Fire Safe Councils and community members including the Last Chance Survival simulation and Wildland-urban Interface (WUI) for Fire Safe Councils workshop.

Status: The BLM has completed community assistance activities with education events coming up this spring including the Los Angeles Fair. An additional two WUI workshops are planned

for the spring in San Diego County for residents. Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) updates are also planned.

BLM Contacts: James Gannon, Fuels Program Manager; Jason Winbigler, South Zone Mitigation-Education Specialist

Hiring Updates

Workforce Transformation

BLM Action: The CDIFP is expanding its workforce in mitigation, fuels, and fire prevention. The CDICP is in the process of filling two mitigation-trespass technicians to assist communities, support fire prevention, and support the fire trespass program. The CDD fire program is hiring a biological technician position to assist with the planning and monitoring of fuels treatments. If additional preparedness funds become available, the BLM is planning to achieve an 80/20 split between full-time and part-time fire positions, with the current split at 60/40. Additional funds could be used to staff BLM engines seven days a week instead of the current five days per week.

Status: The BLM and NPS are awaiting funding provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

BLM Contacts: Paul Gibbs, District Fire Management Officer; Freddie Espinoza, Assistant Fire Management Officer