



# Field Office, Fire and Fuel Reports DESERT ADVISORY COUNCIL

DECEMBER 2024





## **Barstow Field Office (BAFO)**



*Photo: Amargosa Wild and Scenic River by Jim Shearer, BLM*

### *Archaeology and Cultural Resources*

#### **Old Spanish National Historic Trail**

BLM Action: The BLM nominated a segment of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail known as Emigrant Pass for the National Register of Historic Places.

Partners: Old Spanish Trail Association

Status: The nomination has been reviewed. In FY2024, BLM completed about 130 acres of Class III surveys along the trail. Quarterly consultation with the Old Spanish Trail Association is ongoing. In November 2024, the BLM held an event with the Old Spanish Trail Association, Tecopa Chapter, known as the Mojave River Chapter, to celebrate 14 years of invaluable data and findings collected by the Chapter. The extensive collection of data was transferred to the BLM and National Park Service to preserve historical resources and support public land education for future generations.

### *Wildlife*

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

BLM Action: Since 2011, BAFO has been engaging with several partners to conduct studies and develop management strategies to prevent the extinction of the Amargosa vole and ultimately move the species towards recovery. The BLM continues to work with partners to achieve a down-listing of the species from endangered to threatened status.

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Inyo County Road Department, Purdue University, U.S. Geological Service, University of California Davis, University of California Berkeley and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: The BAFO received funding to initiate a “mega-marsh” project with UC Davis to create a large marsh complex near “Borehole Marsh” to serve as a refugia/breeding site. Planning efforts are continuing for this multi-year project. Preliminary hydrology, archeology and wildlife surveys have been completed. Based on these studies, a site for the “mega-marsh” has been chosen and a conceptual site design is being prepared by the University of California Davis. The site is on lands managed by California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

### **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 U.S. Geological Survey stream gauges, habitat restoration, endangered plant studies and spring studies.

Partners: Amargosa Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Transportation, The Nature Conservancy, Point Blue Conservation Science, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey.

Status: The BAFO continues to implement tamarisk management on the Amargosa River. The BAFO is developing a burn plan to address a large stand of tamarisk not suitable for treatment through other means. The BAFO received \$30,000 to continue tamarisk removal efforts along the Amargosa River in FY24. In 2021, the BAFO established eight assessment, inventory, and monitoring (AIM) study sites on the Amargosa River. In 2024/2025, several of these sites will be re-sampled.

In 2024, the BAFO received funding to expand the Shoshone restoration project and is working with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens to implement a three-year project to install and maintain approximately 1,000 additional honey mesquite trees in the Shoshone site. As of October 2024, roughly 500 honey mesquites have been grown-out from local seeds and additional seedlings are being established. The seedlings will eventually be planted on site and maintained by the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens for the first year.

### **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. 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 BAFO is collecting data to help develop 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, USGS, Department of the Navy at China Lake, University of California Davis, California State University, University of California Riverside, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Urban Nature Research Center, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Mojave National Preserve.

Status: In October 2024, the BAFO initiated a restoration project with the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens to install approximately 100 willows on a site where tamarisk trees had been removed. Initial grow-out of the willows is underway and the BAFO anticipates planting the willows in the fall/winter of 2024.

The BAFO has been working with the Mojave Desert Land Trust to implement the Women in Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) program. Through WISDOM, minority female interns collect resource data from Afton Canyon to enhance their training in science, technology, engineering, and math.

In 2024, interns collected data to inform the development of the Mojave Trails Management Plan and feed into larger citizen science programs. In 2024, studies included documenting dark night skies, bumblebees, and tamarisk beetles. The BAFO is coordinating with the Mojave Desert Land Trust to continue this program in 2025. To date, 47 interns have engaged in this program.

The BAFO continues to work with partners at USGS and The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens to develop a captive breeding / re-introduction program for the southwestern pond turtle in Afton Canyon. With funding from BAFO, the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is upgrading their head start facility and developing an implementation plan for the species.

### *Rangeland Management*

#### **Round Mountain Virtual Fencing Project**

BLM Action: The BAFO received funding to initiate a virtual fencing project for the Round Mountain cattle allotment in the Juniper Flats area. This technology will help reduce conflict between OHV riders and ranchers, and wildlife and fences. The technology allows cattle to wear collars that connect to base stations and signal boundaries.

Status: Installation is planned for completion in early 2025.

## El Centro Field Office (ECFO)



*Photo: Summer interns from American Conservation Experience, Student Conservation Association and Chicago Botanic Garden in front of +50 lbs of Senegalia greggii (Catclaw Acacia) collected in Milpitas Wash for future restoration projects.*

### *Cultural Resources*

#### **Avi Kwa Suen Traditional Cultural Property Study**

**BLM Action:** In consulting with the Quechan Indian Tribe for the Oro Cruz Project, the ECFO was informed of a potential Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) in the area. The BLM applied for funding to conduct a TCP study and create a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This study will help the ECFO understand the area's significance to the Quechan people and aid in future management decisions.

**Status:** The funding was granted, and a contractor was hired to conduct the study. The Quechan Indian Tribe and contractor started fieldwork to identify the boundaries and the significant qualities of the TCP in October 2024.

### *Minerals and Mining*

#### **Western Mesquite Mines Inc., Rainbow East Exploration Plan of Operations**

**BLM Action:** The BLM received a plan from Western Mesquite Mines, Inc. to conduct exploratory drilling activities at the Rainbow East project site in eastern Imperial County. The project proposes new access roads, road improvements, and 22 drill pads. All activities at the project area will disturb about two acres of public land. The BLM has reviewed the plan and found it to be complete and meets all the surface management requirements.

**Partners:** Imperial County Planning and Development Services

**Status:** The BLM and Imperial County Planning and Development Services are reviewing a contract proposal to prepare a joint California Environmental Quality Act/National Environmental Policy Act document.

## *Recreation*

### **Ocotillo Wells Resource Management Plan Land Use Plan Amendment/Ocotillo Wells State Vehicle Recreation Area General Plan Update**

BLM Action: The BLM is participating in the state-led revision of a 1982 General Plan update for the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA), an off-highway vehicle park operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks). State Parks is the California Environmental Quality Act lead. The environmental impact report/environmental impact statement will include analysis of the State Park's Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) Act application submitted to the BLM for the BLM-managed lands in the SVRA.

Partners: California Department of Parks and Recreation

Status: The BLM and State Parks are reviewing baseline data and plan to submit a notice of intent/notice of preparation in 2025.

### **Visitor Services Unit/ Emergency Medical Services (EMS)**

BLM Action: In September, the ECFO attended the 2024 Sand Sports Super Show and made over 2,000 public contacts related to the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area and other public lands managed by ECFO. Cahuilla and Buttercup Ranger Stations officially opened for the season on October 18, 2024. Camp RZR was held November 1-2 and attracted about 122,000 visitors to ISDRA with BLM EMS staff responding to 79 emergency medicals and rescue calls.

Partners: Imperial County Emergency Medical Services, American Medical Response ambulance, Reach Air, Mercy, El Centro Regional Medical Center, Pioneer Memorial Hospital, BLM Alaska Fire Service, BLM Law Enforcement Operational Medical Unit, El Centro and Yuma Sector Border Patrol, Homeland Security Investigators.

Status: The ECFO is hiring two additional off-highway vehicle park ranger/ EMTs.

### **El Centro Field Office Business Plan**

BLM Action: The ECFO updated the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Business Plan.

Partners: American Sand Association and various OHV recreation organizations

Status: The ECFO opened a 30-day public comment period on the draft business plan to adjust recreation permit fees in Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area.

## *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

### **Perkins Renewable Energy Project (East Mesa Renewable Energy Project)**

BLM Action: Intersect Power, LLC (IP) filed for a solar energy development right-of-way for a proposed 1,150-megawatt solar energy facility on public lands in southern Imperial County. The

project includes arrays of solar photovoltaic panels and facilities and a battery energy storage system. On September 24, 2024, the Perkins Energy Project was determined to be covered by Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST-41). The Executive Director of the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council made an entry for the project on the Permitting Dashboard on September 25, 2024. "FAST-41," is aimed at improving the timeliness, predictability, and transparency of federal environmental review and authorization processes for covered infrastructure projects. Since being placed on the Fast-41 Permitting Dashboard, the BLM has provided notice to all potential cooperating agencies requesting their participation.

Partners: California Energy Commission

Status: The BLM continues to coordinate with IP on pre-NEPA related data gathering and is in the process of reviewing the most recent plan of development submittal (Version 9). IP filed its application with the California Energy Commission in February 2024.

### **Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility – Turbine Blade Replacements**

BLM Action: Pattern Energy will begin replacing blades and other components on all 112 turbines as part of regular maintenance. The blade replacement work will be done in two phases with the first phase from January 2025 through March 2025 and the second phase beginning in fall of 2025 through the second quarter of 2026. Actual completion dates may vary based on environmental survey findings and contractor productivity.

Status: The BLM is reviewing Pattern Energy's work plan and is preparing to issue a notice to proceed, which will authorize the proposed maintenance work.

### **Geothermal Lease Sale**

BLM Action: The ECFO received a request to review nominated parcels proposed for a geothermal competitive lease sale. The BLM will conduct an environmental analysis of 26 nominated parcels (approximately 43,662 acres) for potential geothermal leasing in Imperial County.

Status: The BLM is drafting a decision of NEPA adequacy (DNA) for the leasing of the parcels. Cultural and biological reports have been prepared and are being reviewed. A Class 1 cultural report has been prepared and is under a 30-day review period by Tribes and consulting parties.

Partners: Bureau of Reclamation

## *Wildlife and Biological Resources*

### **Biological Interns**

BLM Action: The ECFO hired three wildlife interns for flat-tailed horned lizard demography and occupancy surveys and to assist with collecting, uploading, and analyzing data and a bat acoustic monitoring project to monitor abandoned mine land sites, analyze acoustic data and create maps

for future efforts. Six interns were hired through American Conservation Experience to help complete flat-tailed horned lizard surveys. The BLM assisted California Department of Conservation with harp netting and genetic sampling of BLM-sensitive bat species in eastern Imperial County.

Partners: Student Conservation Association, American Conservation Experience, Chicago Botanic Garden, Department of Defense/ U.S. Navy, North American Bat Monitoring Program, California Department of Conservation, Interagency Coordinating Committee.

Status: Approximately 200 flat-tailed horned lizards were found on all four demography plots and 21 plots were confirmed occupied by flat-tailed horned lizards of the 30 occupancy plots surveyed. A total of 20 operational size (80,000) native seed collections were completed in the summer. Three NABat priority grid cells were surveyed via stationary acoustic monitoring stations and over 200 gigabytes worth of sound files recorded. All interns successfully completed their terms of service.



## Needles Field Office (NFO)



*Photo: Giant nolina shade cattle in the Tecopa Pass Special Recreation Management Area*

### *Lands and Realty*

#### **The Equinox Solar Project**

Boulevard Associates LLC proposes to construct a 500-megawatt photovoltaic solar facility on approximately 600 acres of BLM-managed public land southwest of Sandy Vally, NV, designated as development focus area lands through the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. Transmission and battery energy storage associated with the Equinox Solar Project would be accomplished via Nevada and includes Nevada public lands.

Status: The Equinox Solar Project has been redesigned to include an alternative that conforms with the California Desert Conservation Act, as amended.

#### **Middle-Mile Projects**

In July 2021, the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative, a partnership among several entities, was signed into law. The initiative partners the BLM, California Department of Technology, and California Department of Transportation, who is supporting efforts to construct the middle-mile broadband network by installing physical fiber optic infrastructure needed to carry data at high speeds over long distances. The ECFO received two applications for the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative. Both projects fall within the Caltrans existing rights-of-way.

BLM Action: The NFO originally received six applications for rights-of-way associated with the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative.

Status: There are now five active projects, since one application has been withdrawn by the applicant. The NFO has reviewed the associated plans of development and submitted comments. Additional reviews will be conducted once Caltrans has submitted draft NEPA documents associated with the projects.

## **Master Operations and Maintenance and Consolidations (MOMAC)**

The Master Operations and Maintenance and Consolidation Project is a program that will streamline the day-to-day interactions of the BLM and energy transmission utilities by implementing a standard operations and maintenance plan and consolidating right-of-way grants for existing facilities. In January 2020, BLM California, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), and Southern California Edison (SCE) entered into an agreement to initiate a pilot project to streamline standard right-of-way processes through possible consolidation of authorizations and implementing a standardized operation and maintenance plan.

BLM Action: The BLM has received an application from SCE to consolidate all right-of-way grants in the NFO to implement the SCE right-of-way grants into the MOMAC program.

Status: The NFO has reviewed GIS data related to their rights-of-way and has provided comments to SCE.

## **Braavos LLC Chubbuck Mine Conveyor and Loadout Facility**

BLM Action: The NFO received a right-of-way application from Braavos LLC (Braavos) to improve and utilize an existing open access road NS585, and construct, operate, and maintain a conveyor line belt and rail load-out facility for transferring mined material from the Chubbuck Mine, on private lands owned by Braavos.

Status: The NFO has reviewed the application and draft environmental assessment and will submit comments and feedback for the proponent to address.

## *Minerals & Mining*

### **Castle Mountain Mine Modification to Plan of Operations**

BLM Action: The NFO received and reviewed a plan modification from Castle Mountain Mine to expand and extend the life of the mine operation. Castle Mountain Mine is an open pit gold mine in the Hart Mining District of San Bernardino County. The expansion of mining will occur on private and public lands in the existing Castle Mountain Mine Plan boundary. The operator has submitted a right-of-way application for a pipeline and powerline that would involve lands managed by the BLM Nevada Las Vegas Field Office.

Partners: National Park Service, San Bernardino County

Status: The BLM determined the revised plan modification is complete and requires preparation of an environmental impact statement. The BLM is finalizing memorandum of understandings with the county, third-party contractor, and Las Vegas Field Office. After completion of preliminary steps, the BLM will publish a notice of intent.

## **MP Materials Geophysical Investigation**

BLM Action: The NFO received a proposal from MP Materials to conduct geophysical surveys adjacent to their Shadow Valley Well System. Several of the existing wells were constructed more than forty years ago and need replacement. The geophysical surveys will help MP identify a new water source to sustain current production volumes. The current action involves non-invasive techniques to decipher hydrogeologic properties of the shallow subsurface. The proposed action will not involve any ground disturbing activities. If successful, the study may support future water supply wells. A new proposal and environmental review will be required prior to any construction taking place.

Partners: San Bernardino County

Status: The BLM determined the revised proposal is sufficient. Given the nature of the study, the BLM has determined no additional review is necessary and issued a letter of acknowledgement to the operator. MP anticipates completing the project by the end of the year.

### **Shadow Valley HAZMAT Site**

BLM Action: The NFO secured a contract to clean-up a legacy 3809 occupancy case. From 1990 to 1994, an abandoned mill site was turned into a clandestine drug operation with reports of explosives, chemical spills, and illegal adolescent content. Chemical analyses of soils revealed pH levels ~14. The clean-up will involve removal of approximately 150 55-gallon drums, solidified sulfuric acid, contaminated soils, and industrial material. Once removal is complete, the BLM will initiate a revegetation program to restore the site to suitable desert tortoise habitat.

Status: The BLM has obligated funds to an environmental contractor to assist in cleaning up the site. The clean-up will occur in two phases, with phase 1 tentatively beginning in 2025.

### *Recreation*

#### **Wilderness Inventories 2024**

BLM Action: The NFO has completed five-year reports for all 18 wilderness units. These inventories are completed to identify positive or negative changes in wilderness values.

Partners: Society of Wilderness Stewardship

Status: Collection of data has been completed and drafts are being reviewed.

### *National Monuments*

#### **Mojave Trails National Monument Planning process**

BLM Action: The BLM will begin reviewing a draft environmental assessment.

Partners: Bureau of Reclamation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, CSLCC, U.S. Marine Corps, National Park Service, San Bernardino County, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## **Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO)**



*Photo: Dos Palmas Preserve by Bob Wick*

### *Renewable Energy and Transmission*

The PSSCFO manages more than three dozen individual operational and proposed renewable energy development projects.

#### **Crimson Solar Project** *(no updates to this entry since the August 2024 DAC report)*

BLM Action: The BLM issued a right-of-way grant to Sonoran West Holding, LLC for the solar facility, battery energy storage system, substation, access roads, and an operations and maintenance building. The applicant applied to add a second gen-tie to the project west of the Colorado River Substation.

Partners: Sonoran West Holdings, LLC and Recurrent Energy, LLC *(no updates to this entry since the August 2024 DAC report)*

Status: The BLM is reviewing the second gen-tie application and issued a limited notice to proceed for geotechnical activities. Cultural and paleontological fieldwork is ongoing to refine pre-construction plans before construction is approved. The right-of-way holder completed construction of the battery energy storage system in October 2022.

#### **Desert Quartzite Solar** *(no updates to this entry since the August 2024 DAC report)*

BLM Action: An amended right-of-way for reduced footprint was issued in March 2022 and a phased notice to proceed was issued in January 2023. Construction began in February 2023 and is ongoing. Southern California Edison's application to build the dedicated 34.5kV line was approved.

#### **Lycan Solar and Redonda Solar** *(no updates to this entry since the August 2024 DAC report)*

BLM Action: The BLM conducted preliminary meetings and has approved fieldwork to collect resource data needed to develop preliminary engineering and plans required for public scoping.

Partner: EDF Renewables (Lycan) and Clearways (Redonda)  
Status: Preliminary review

### *Natural Resources*

#### **Partnerships – The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens**

BLM Action: The PSSCFO partnered with local natural resource organizations on several proposed projects to benefit multiple species and their habitats. The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens will conduct a two-phase project starting with native plant seed collection for propagation and display purposes to support preservation and restoration efforts and visitor/scientific education. Phase II involves re-planting the propagated plants to improve degraded desert tortoise habitat and forage sites in the Orocochia Mountains.

Status: The PSSCFO issued a collection permit for both projects through 2024. The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens will need to apply for a new collection permit for 2025.

#### **Partnerships - The Southern California Mountains Foundation, Urban Conservation Corp.**

BLM Action: Through a five-year funded grant, the PSSCFO recently partnered with The Southern California Mountain Foundation – Urban Conservation Corp. to support several proposed projects for the benefit of multiple species, their habitats and local youth. Urban Conservation Corp. will support and conduct proposed habitat enhancement projects in multiple Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Sand to Snow National Monument, Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, and critical habitats in western Riverside and San Diego counties. Experienced youth crews will receive general field and first-aid training and specific performance training to use hand and mechanized tools, like chainsaws, sprayers, brush clearers, and GPS to capture, record and accurately report accomplishments. Youth crews will learn how to record survey data through data sheets and electronic collection devices for site evaluation and management purposes.

Status: The PSSCFO is in the second year of a five-year funded grant agreement from October 2023 - October 2028. The BLM will continue to support the priority project planning and training process. Projects completed in August include pinyon and ribbonwood dead tree removal, 1.17 miles of trail maintenance at Shannon Trail, site maintenance, irrigation installation at the visitor center, and illegal bike trail decommissioning and restoration.



## Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)



*Photo: Salt storage area at Searles Valley Minerals in Trona, CA. Salt and brine products are extracted under the BLM as part of the solid leasable minerals program. Photo by Tom Bickaaskas, BLM.*

### *Grazing*

#### **Cactus Flat Loading Trap Range Improvement Project**

BLM Action: The RFO is preparing an environmental assessment to authorize a proposed range improvement project to help the permittee round up cattle at the end of his grazing season in the Lacey-Cactus-McCloud allotment. The project is a corral with a loading chute.

Partners: Lacey-Cactus-McCloud Permittee, Steve Stewart

Status: The RFO will begin scoping in Spring 2025.

### *Lands and Realty - Major Rights-of-Ways*

#### **Indian Wells Valley Ground Water Authority Imported Water Pipeline**

BLM Action: The RFO received two applications from Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority, one for 98 geotechnical boring locations for the proposed 24-inch buried water conveyance pipeline from California City to Ridgecrest and one for a buried pipeline and associated infrastructure. The pipeline would be 50.6 miles in length with 20.6 miles on public lands and 30 miles on private and state lands.

Partners: Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority, employing contractor Provost & Prichard Engineering Group.

Status: The RFO is preparing an environmental assessment /environmental impact report with the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority. Scoping comments are being addressed including a second alternative adding an additional 25 miles of existing water pipeline for eventual upgrade, which do not cross BLM-managed lands.

## **Southern California Edison – Control to Silver Peak Transmission Line**

BLM Action: The RFO received an application to upgrade two existing 55-kilovolt transmission lines across 62 miles of the Control-Silver Peak line to meet transmission line safety and reliability requirements.

Partners: Southern California Edison, USDA Forest Service

Status: The project is on pause while a NEPA contract is reissued and Southern California Edison reviews details for an alternative route.

## *Minerals and Mining*

### **Exploratory Drilling by Mojave Precious Metals, LLC at Conglomerate Mesa**

BLM Action: Mojave Precious Metals submitted an amendment to their existing, approved plan of operations. The proposed plan modification requests exploration access via overland travel, which would disturb up to 15 acres at up to 30 locations with a total of 120 boreholes.

Partners: Mojave Precious Metals, Inyo County, Death Valley National Park, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: The RFO has reviewed public scoping comments and is preparing an environmental impact statement and has drafted alternatives. A public comment period on the draft environmental impact statement is planned for 2025.

### **Exploratory Drilling by Gold Discovery Group LLC**

BLM Action: The BLM approved a plan of operation for Gold Discovery Group, LLC to explore for placer gold in the area surrounding Johannesburg, Red Mountain, and Atolia. The approved activity allows the operator to enter and gather samples of material from 32 unpatented placer mining claims, drive a drill rig along routes to those claims, drill 293 sample holes, refill and plug the same holes with the excess material, and rake tire tracks upon completion.

Partners: Gold Discovery Group, LLC

Status: To date, 122 holes have been drilled. Reclamation of drill sites and vehicle tracks are progressing. A biological monitor has been on-site for all equipment movement.

## *Recreation*

### **G24 Off-Highway Vehicle Grant Applications and Awards**

BLM Action: The RFO successfully applied for five grants during the G24 Off-Highway Vehicle Motor Vehicle Recreation Division's grant application cycle. Categories awarded were for ground operations, restoration, education, law enforcement, and planning.

## **Interns - American Conservation Experience Emerging Professionals in Conservation Members, Great Basin Institute Recreation Technicians and ACE OHV Restoration Crew**

BLM Action: Two American Conservation Experience (ACE) Emerging Professionals in Conservation members started work in September 2024, with a third expected in November 2024. These members will assist with off-highway vehicle restoration and biological monitoring efforts in the RFO. Two Great Basin Institute recreation technicians have been working to perform off-highway vehicle trail maintenance. A 12-person crew started work in October completing desert restoration projects. The crew members will work to restore habitat in the Fremont-Kramer Area of Critical Environmental Concern and on the boundary of several wilderness areas into Spring 2025.

Partners: American Conservation Experience, Great Basin Institute, and American Conservation Experience

## **Pacific Crest Trail Inventory and Assessment Monitoring**

BLM Action: The RFO completed field inventory of approximately 50 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail in October 2024. This is the first National Scenic Historic Trail inventory completed by BLM California and is essential to protect the nature and purpose of the trail.

## **California Desert Protection Act Art**

BLM Action: In celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and National Public Lands Day, the RFO partnered with seven artists from the local High Desert Plein Air group. These talented artists used their chosen medium to capture beautiful wilderness areas around the field office. Artists' works are on display in the RFO public room.

## *Wild Horses and Burros*

### **Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral**

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Corral remains open to the public with adoptions on the first and third Fridays of each month from 8 a.m. - noon. The RFO team is in process of setting-up the online corrals. Currently, 20 burros will be in the auction from Nov. 12-19 on the [Wild Horse and Burro Online Corral](#). The Piute Mountain Herd Area emergency burro gather was completed on October 9 with 49 burros removed. There is still a small population of burros utilizing Fenner Spring, with very limited water. Monitoring of the spring and burro population will continue and determine the need for future actions. The Palo Verde and Picacho State Recreation Area nuisance burro removal was completed on September 13 with 99 burros removed.

Status: The corrals are at the 1,000-animal capacity due to gathers in late 2024.

## *Wildlife*

### **South Oasis Windmill Russian Thistle Project**

BLM Action: The RFO continues work on a multi-year project to treat noxious weeds and restore rangelands with native plants to improve wildlife habitat quality and forage production for cattle in the South Oasis allotment. About 130 acres of Russian thistle dominate the landscape.

Partners: National Park Service Lake Mead Inter-Regional Invasive Plant Management Team, Deep Springs College (permittee of South Oasis allotment), Sierra Club

Status: The RFO participated in a service trip with Sierra Club in July 2024 and in three days about 15 volunteers and staff removed 4,000 pounds of Russian thistle. Another Sierra Club service trip is planned for June 2025.

### **Remediated Mine Bat Detection Surveys**

BLM Action: The RFO conducted surveys on the Black Dog, Marigold, and Val Verde closed mine sites to determine if native bats utilize the old mines. The mines were remediated over the past decade with metal gates and cupolas to protect the public and bat species living in mine openings. The goal of the project is to assess how many bat species continued to live in closed mine openings.

Status: Additional surveys are planned for 2025.

### **Inyo California Towhee Joint Surveys**

BLM Action: The RFO coordinated with the Naval Air Weapons Station at China Lake to survey for the federally listed Inyo California towhee across BLM and U.S. Navy lands. The survey efforts contribute to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's evaluation of the Inyo California towhee's listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Partners: Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Status: All surveys have been completed for 2024. More surveys are planned for Spring 2025.

## California Desert Interagency Fire Program (CDIFP)



*Photo: Eastern Kern Job Fair in November 2024. Photo by Craig Owen, BLM*

### *Fire Incidents*

#### **Fires as of November 13, 2024**

BLM Action: There have been 108 fires on lands protected by the CDIFP as of November 13, 2024. These fires burned approximately 8,500 acres of BLM-managed lands. The unit responded to an additional 282 fires that threatened but were stopped short or burning CDIFP protected lands.

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

Status: All the fires mentioned above are out.

### *Fuels Projects*

BLM Action: Fuels treatments are planned and implemented to meet a variety of objectives ranging from community and infrastructure protection to habitat restoration and invasive plant management. Using methods such as hand, mechanical, chemical, and prescribed burning, the unit completes these treatments to protect lives, property, and natural/cultural resources. Fuels management also provides fire suppression personnel opportunities to control wildfires and protect infrastructure and private property.

Partners: Partners on the BLM and National Park Service (NPS) fuels treatments for 2024 include the California Conservation Corps, the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency (RCHCA), and the Ramona Band of Cahuilla Indians. The NPS is using the Ancestral Lands and California Conservation Corps as well as contractors 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 (SBVWCD), California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), The Wildlands Conservancy, the Center for Natural Lands Management, the Cleveland National Forest, the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County, the Ramona Band of Cahuilla, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Status: The CDIFP received funding to treat 10,444 acres in FY24. The unit completed 10,454 acres of fuels treatments in FY24. In addition to community protection in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas, Joshua tree refugia areas were treated to provide clearance for individual trees during potential fires. Prescribed fires were managed to restore habitat for Stephens' kangaroo rat in western Riverside County and to restore marsh habitat for Yuma Ridgway's rail at the Dos Palmas Preserve. These projects were completed in coordination with partners such as the RCHCA, SBVWCD, and others.

### *Mitigation and Education Projects*

BLM Action: The BLM completed 55 community assistance activities in FY24. Assistance activities help communities withstand the effects of wildfires and build resilience in the communities if a fire were to occur. Nine mitigation-education activities were completed in FY24.

Partners: California Fire Safe Council (FSC), San Diego County FSC, Border Agencies Fire Council, and 28 of the community fire safe councils throughout the unit, U.S. Forest Service, CAL FIRE, and various local government agencies.

Status: Since August, three mitigation-education activities were completed in Inyo and Mono counties and in the Morongo Basin with Joshua Tree National Park.

### *Hiring Updates*

#### **Workforce Transformation**

BLM Action: The California Desert District is planning a job fair December 12-14, 2024, in Apple Valley. The job fair will help fill temporary summer firefighter positions on engines and helicopters for 2025.