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**Field Office Reports  
California Desert Advisory Council  
December 2019**



## **Barstow Field Office (BFO)**

### ***Minerals & Mining***

#### **Iron Age Mine Plan of Operation**

BLM Action: Iron Age Mine LLC submitted a Plan of Operation for the removal of the existing iron ore stockpiles at the Iron Age Mine on both unpatented claims and patented lands in the Dale Mining District in the northern Pinto Mountains, San Bernardino County. The Iron Age Mine is an iron ore deposit that has been explored and extensively mined through roughly 1965.

Status: The BLM's interdisciplinary team has reviewed the administrative draft of the environmental assessment. Iron Age Mine LLC is currently analyzing an alternative route into the project site. Cultural and biological surveys are also underway.

Contact: Jamie Livingood, Geologist/AML Coordinator, BFO

#### **Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)**

BLM Action: The BLM secured funding to reclaim the "Schwarz" abandoned mine located in the Silurian Mountains.

Status: Remediation was completed in April. North Wind, the contractor, mobilized on Monday, March 11. Heavy equipment was delivered to the drop-off location and was tracked into the site due to poor road conditions. The majority of the first week of work was centered on preparing and transporting metal debris from the site. North Wind prepared and moved most of the metal debris and equipment. Speedway Auto Dismantling, a subcontractor with a four-person crew, sized metal items and equipment for removal. A 2,000-gallon water truck was present for fire watch during and after any metal cutting requiring open flame or grinding. Statewide Emergency Response brought in a crew to verify hazardous material discovered on site. Nineteen one-gallon glass bottles tested as a strong, commercial grade acid and was packaged and transported to a holding facility for disposal. The second week focused on removal of all remaining debris. The buildings were demolished and debris was moved by an excavator. Ecology transported four loads of debris to the Barstow County Landfill, totaling 240 cubic yards and 112,860 pounds.

Contacts: Jeff Childers, Assistant Field Manager, BFO; and Jamie Livingood, Geologist/AML Coordinator, BFO

### ***Grazing***

#### **Enhancement of Desert Springs**

BLM Action: The Barstow Field Office (BFO) is employing management actions to protect several desert springs, while allowing the use of these resources by cattle and wildlife.

Status: The BFO is completing the environmental review for installing protective fencing around several springs on our active range allotments to provide added protection for these sensitive resources. Water is being piped away from the riparian area and directed to troughs that can be utilized by cattle and wildlife species, such as bighorn sheep. Installation of these protective measures is anticipated to begin in winter 2019.

Which Springs?

Contacts: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO; and Lindsey Freitag, Range Specialist, BFO

### **Allotment Boundary Backlogged Maintenance Projects**

BLM Action: In February, the BFO began backlogged fence and cattle guard repairs on active grazing allotments (see photos below). These maintenance projects are at the request of the permittees. In order to ensure the protection of desert tortoise habitat, public safety, and grazing compliance, the boundaries of these allotments must be operational to enclose livestock. In addition, to ensure the safety of the public and the well-being of livestock grazing, “domestic livestock” signs are being installed at high traffic entrances on open off-highway vehicle routes entering the allotment boundaries (see photos below). The end-product of these projects will ensure public safety and cattle containment within approved areas of the active grazing allotments including Round Mountain, Rattlesnake Canyon, and Ord Mountain. The materials for these projects will come from 8100 funds.

Status: All five of the high priority projects have been completed on the Ord Mountain and Rattlesnake Mountain allotments. Additional lower priority boundary fence and cattle guard projects are ongoing and will be completed on an as-needed basis.

Contacts: Jeff Childers, Assistant Field Manager, BFO; and Lindsey Freitag, Rangeland Management Specialist, BFO

## ***Travel & Transportation Management***

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

BLM Action: On October 4, the BLM published the West Mojave Route Network Project Record of Decision in the Federal Register on October 4, and the end of the appeal period was November 4. The BLM did not receive any appeals.

Concerning the implementation of the WEMO 2015 Programmatic Agreement (PA), the following actions occurred in FY 2019:

- The BLM held two consulting parties meetings on March 13, and September 18, to provide updates on the progress of the implementation of the PA.
- The BLM WEMO Cultural Resource Team completed the required one-percent random sample survey to test the GIS-based archaeological predictive model, which includes 5,082 acres of Class III inventory with a total of 38 newly identified archaeological sites and 15 isolated cultural resources (isolates) that were recorded, as well as 22 previously recorded sites, which were revisited with five requiring site record updates.
- The BLM completed the Historic Trails Context Study Pursuant to Stipulation IV.A(vi)(f)(4)(i) of the PA.
- The BLM submitted a summary of the FY 2018 inventory efforts and proposed determinations

of eligibility to all consulting parties by letter on August 16. Consulting parties were given 30 days to review and comment on the determinations and all comments were forwarded to the California State Historic Preservation Officer.

FY 2019 was the final year of sample inventory, bringing the BLM sample inventory for the West Mojave Planning Area to a total of five percent.

Status: The BLM is proceeding to the implementation phase. Once the travel and transportation management network has assigned route and trail numbers, the signing of the network will commence, new maps will be prepared, and kiosks updated. Pursuant to the approved travel management plans, use of newly designated routes cannot commence until the routes are signed.

In FY 2020, the BLM will conduct ongoing identification and monitoring efforts and will also continue to develop the Evaluation Plan and conduct a Model Peer Review. The BLM will maintain a biannual consulting parties meeting schedule and will continue to provide updates on the implementation activities. The BLM will also continue to consult with Indian tribes in a government-to-government manner.

The next consulting parties meeting is scheduled to take place on March 18, 2020, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., at the BFO.

Partners: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), Fort Irwin National Training Center, Friends of El Mirage, Juniper Flats Working Group, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Transition Habitat Conservancy, United States Forest Service (USFS)

Contacts: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO; and Jeff Childers, Assistant Field Manager, BFO

## ***Recreation***

### **Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area**

BLM Action: In September, the BLM performed road maintenance on more than three miles of Boone Road, one of the primary access roads into the Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area. Road maintenance included the placement of six inches of base rock using funds from an OHMVR grant and the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

Status: The Marine Corps plans to utilize the SUA in calendar years 2020-2021 during the periods of April 30 to May 11, 2020, October 30 to November 9, 2020, April 30 to May 10, 2021, and October 29 to November 8, 2021. 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 Marine Corps did not utilize the Johnson Valley OHV Shared Use Area (SUA) for military training in FY 2019.

Background: On December 26, 2013, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2014 (NDAA) was signed into law, authorizing 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 first closure of the Johnson Valley Shared Use Area for military training took place August 14-21, 2016.

Partners: California Desert District Office (CDDO); Department of the Navy; and the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC)

Contact: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO

### **El Mirage Cooperative Management Area, aka El Mirage Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area**

BLM Action: The Friends of El Mirage continues to operate and maintain the El Mirage Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area, using Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area grants. The BFO meets monthly with the Friends of El Mirage and relies heavily on this partnership to leverage resources for the successful management of this popular OHV area.

Status: FY 2019 Visitation Update. The El Mirage Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area received 96,258 visitors during FY 2019, which is notably less than the 108,000 visitors in FY 2018. This reduction is likely a result of the closure of the lakebed due to the rain and wet conditions, resulting in the cancellation of several Southern California Timing Association special recreation permit events.

Partner: Friends of El Mirage

Contact: Rose Beardshear, Interpretive Specialist, BFO

### **Dumont Dunes OHV Recreation Area**

BLM Action: Visitation at the Dumont Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Recreation Area for Halloween was 15,000. EMS provided assistance to 23 patients, one of which was air evacuated, four were taken by ground ambulance, 18 were released against medical advice, and there were no fatalities. Additionally, the third annual “Trunk or Treat” event on October 26 was a huge success with attendance exceeding 5,000. Many thanks to Jason Ardenski and the Friends of Dumont Dunes for hosting this event.

Status: Visitors to the Dumont Dunes OHV Recreation Area during three of the five major holidays exceeded 30,000 (Note: BLM did not staff two of the holidays due to the government shutdown). Emergency Medical Services (EMS) provided services to 40 patients, nine of which were air evacuated, five were taken by ground ambulance, 24 were released against medical advice, and two were fatalities. Non-life threatening injuries included, but were not limited to, cuts, burns, broken bones, and loss of consciousness. The BLM Law Enforcement Rangers issued a total of 114 citations and 252 warnings with no arrests made. The law enforcement citations and warnings were for various offenses including open container violations, no helmet, and other OHV safety violations.

Partner: Friends of Dumont Dunes

Contact: Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BFO; and Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO

### **Special Recreation Permits**

BLM Action: To date for FY 2020, there are 60 scheduled recreation events, most of which are motorized race events.

Status: A total of 181 Special Recreation Permits (SRP) were administered by the BFO this year. Of these, 143 were vending permits and 38 were for recreation events, most of which were motorized race events, and several were multi-event permits. The BFO also issued 16 Letters of Agreement for various types of recreation events.

Contacts: Debbie Flores, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BFO; and Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BFO

### **Film Permits**

BLM Action: To date for FY 2020, 17 film permits have been administered by the BFO.

Status: A total of 153 film permits were administered by the BFO this year. The majority of the film permits were commercial, but also included non-commercial filming projects for students enrolled in a university related to the filming industry who must complete a class assignment. The most popular shoot locations included the El Mirage, Johnson Valley, and Dumont Dunes Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Areas.

Many thanks to Dan Taylor and Sheri Davis from Inland Empire Film Services. Both Dan and Sheri work tirelessly with the BFO to expedite the processing of commercial film permits within the office.

Contact: Cecilia Franklin, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BFO

### **Desert Discovery Center**

BLM Action: The BLM's Desert Discovery Center is connecting with the community through programs and partnerships. Through the Healthy Cities Initiative, the BLM is working with the community to connect the Desert Discovery Center to their active transportation plan and then further out to access points on public land. Many rural communities, including Barstow, are located near public lands that serve as popular destinations. Creating comfortable linkages, in effect, extends these public lands into their surrounding communities.

Status: The BFO collaborated with Main Street Murals, San Bernardino County, the Barstow Unified School District, and Safe Moves to host the first Healthy Cities event at Crestline Elementary School on Saturday, April 13. The event featured health and wellness activities such as public land recreation opportunities, mobile health clinics, hands-on Earth Day activities, a bike rodeo, cooking demonstrations, yoga, healthy snack giveaways and much more. This event was the kick-start of a larger citywide Healthy Cities Initiative that provides a philosophical framework for an inclusive, participatory process aimed at raising the quality of life for everyone, and creating a truly healthy community.

The 7th Annual Old Spanish Trail Day Celebration was held at the BLM's Desert Discovery Center on October 5, with an action-packed day of hands-on history and was well attended by the community.

Partners: Barstow Unified School District; Main Street Murals; Safe Moves; and San Bernardino County

Contact: Rose Beardshear, Interpretive Specialist, BFO

## **John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Dingell Act)**

BLM Action: Implementation of the Dingell Act.

Status: Due to the March 12, enactment of the Dingell Act (PL 116-9), the field office received mid-year funds, secured materials, and began implementing wilderness boundary signing for the three new wildernesses: Soda Mountain, Avawatz, and Kingston Range Expansion and boundary signing for the expanded Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area. In addition, signed routes associated with the three new wildernesses.

Contact: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO

## ***Lands & Realty***

### **XpressWest High Speed Rail (formerly DesertXpress)**

BLM Action: Brightline Holdings of Miami, FL, proposes to construct and operate a high-speed passenger railroad between Victorville, CA and Las Vegas, NV. The Federal Railroad Agency is the lead federal agency and the BLM is a cooperating agency.

Status: Brightline/Virgin Trains USA LLC purchased the XpressWest and is diligently working on project funding and acquisition of applicable governmental permits.

The FRA has initiated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reevaluation process with cooperating agencies and Tribes regarding Brightline's proposed realignment of the rail within the median of Interstate 15.

Brightline has proposed ground breaking and the start of construction in late 2020. Potential commencement of operations are estimated in 2024.

Partner: Federal Railroad Agency

Contacts: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO; and Joan Patrovsky, Project Manager, California Desert District Office

### **Land Use Permits (Scientific Research and Development)**

BLM Action: Issuing land use permits for scientific research and development.

Contact: Birgit Hoover, Realty Specialist, BFO

Status: In FY 2019, nearly a dozen annual land use permits (LUP) were issued for commercial research and development. Among these LUPs permittees were SpaceX, MMIST, Northrop Grumman, National Aeronautics Scientific Agency (NASA), and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL).

The popular locations for research and development testing are Coyote Dry Lake, Dumont Dunes, El Mirage, and Pisgah Crater in conjunction with the 2020 MARS exploration race and the Department of Defense.

## *Wildlife*

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

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.

Beginning in 2019 and continuing into 2020, BFO partners at UC Davis will conduct detailed marsh studies via drone surveys. The hope is these surveys will provide very detailed information regarding marsh characteristics that will inform and guide management decisions in the future.

Status: Intensive habitat restoration efforts are underway at Borehole Marsh at the recommendation of the Amargosa Vole Team based on previous research done at the site. In support of these restoration efforts, the BFO installed 850 feet of post-and-cable fencing to reduce unauthorized vehicle access to the area and installed a sign to inform the public regarding the sensitivity of the restoration site.

Partners at the Amargosa Conservancy received additional funding to expand Amargosa vole habitat recreation on private lands in the Shoshone area. Two habitat patches were created on private lands adjacent to the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River, which is managed by the BLM. This new funding will add a third patch in proximity to the two marshes. The BLM is coordinating with the Vole Team partners as part of the greater vole recovery efforts, with the goal being that the habitat will be sufficiently developed to allow for re-introduction efforts to start in these habitat patches in 2019/2020.

On September 11, 2017, a 30-acre fire broke out within prime Amargosa vole habitat near the town of Tecopa. After taking immediate fire response actions, BFO partners documented the effects of the fire on vole populations and the short-term recovery of the site. In December 2018, our partners at UC Davis and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), with BLM funding support, produced a report summarizing the recovery of the site following the first year after the fire. This report documents the changes in vole populations and habitat characteristics of the bulrush marsh habitat in the short-term following the fire. The long-term goal being that the BLM and partner agencies will have the ability to track the population and habitat changes over the next five years. These studies are helping the BLM understand how fires may impact this species and the potential utility of using fire as a management tool for future habitat improvement efforts. The BFO received \$50,000 in FY 2019 funds to continue these studies.

In FY 2018, the BLM provided funding for the installation of a permanent check-dam at Borehole Marsh to replace the temporary standpipe to address the ongoing water control issues in the area. UC Davis is working on the final check-dam design, which will be followed by the installation phase.

Additional releases for captive voles into the wild took place in the summer, which involved the installation of three “soft release cages” in two marsh patches. The releases were successful in that all animals persisted after capture – two pairs even had subsequent litters of pups. While this release effort was small in scale, this technique shows promise for use in future release efforts.

Partners: California Desert District Office (CDDO); California State Office and the Washington Office, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); Inyo County Road Department; Purdue University; US Geological Service (USGS); University of California, Davis (UC Davis); University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkley); and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

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

BLM Action: The BFO is involved in various monitoring studies/management actions associated with the implementation of the draft Amargosa River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)/Wild and Scenic River (WSR) Management Plan 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

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

In the fall of 2018, the BFO again contracted with the Farmworker Institute of Education and Leadership Development (FIELD) to continue tamarisk eradication efforts on the Amargosa River. This partnership allowed the BFO to treat approximately 10 acres of tamarisk, adding to our on-going habitat improvement efforts on the river, while also providing valuable vocational training for underserved youth.

To further the hydrological studies relating to the Amargosa River, the BFO is coordinating with our partners to conduct a two-year evapotranspiration (water use by plants) study within the Wild and Scenic River portion of the Amargosa River and adjacent spring discharge areas. The goals of this study are to: 1) improve the quantification of the water budget of the Amargosa River system; 2) help elucidate the characterization of groundwater flow patterns in the region; and 3) provide data to scientifically support a foundation for a Federal Reserve water right for the Wild and Scenic River.

The BFO received \$11,000 in funding to continue fish surveys of the Amargosa speckled dace and Amargosa pupfish along with non-native species. The information is being used to evaluate changes in fish populations in relation to tamarisk removal efforts. These surveys build upon the work conducted in 2017 and 2018.

The BFO received roughly \$6,000 in funding to purchase paddle signs to mark open and closed motorized routes within and adjacent to the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River. Installation of these signs

began in the summer. The intent of this signing is to maintain the route network and to prevent incursions into sensitive habitat.

In June 2018, the BFO initiated repairs on downed fencing around the Critical Habitat Unit for the Amargosa River niterwort to prevent incursions into this sensitive habitat area, but only high priority areas were addressed at that time. The BFO has received funding to conduct additional fence repairs in FY 2020. The BLM State Office and partners conducted surveys for this species during the summer as part of the long-term population monitoring project initiated in 2010.

Partners: California State Office, Amargosa Conservancy; California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); The Nature Conservancy; Point Blue Conservation Science; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF); Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden; United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); and US Geological Survey

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

### **Amargosa River niterwort**

BLM Action: The BFO worked with the National Sign Shop to design and fabricate new portal signs for installation throughout the Amargosa WSR area. The BFO received 10 portal signs and installation began in May.

Status: Our partners at the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden received \$96,000 in funding in addition to \$74,000 in in-kind services provided by the researchers to initiate a three-year study of the distribution and propagation of three federally endangered plant species: the Amargosa niterwort, Ash Meadows gumplant, and the Spring-loving centauray. The study area includes the entirety of the Amargosa River drainage basin and portions of the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River. The BFO received \$32,000 to expand this study to include additional portions of the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River in the survey area in 2020.

### **Amargosa WSR portal signs**

BLM Action: The BFO also worked with the National Sign Shop to acquire four Old Spanish Trail signs for installation within the boundaries of the Amargosa WSR. Installation of these signs was initiated in June.

Status: The BFO worked with our partners at the Amargosa Conservancy on the outreach event “Meet the Amargosa,” which highlighted the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River. The event celebrated the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River’s 10 Year Anniversary and highlighted the recent addition of seven miles of designated river miles to the system.

The BFO received a \$6,600 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to conduct restoration, planting of willows and/or mesquite, over a 0.25 mile (16 acre) section of the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River and work will begin over the next year. Mesquite trees were grown from locally derived seeds by BFO partners at Victor Valley College and volunteers began planting in October. Mesquite trees were grown from locally derived seeds by BFO partners at Victor Valley College and initial tree planting was conducted by volunteers in October.

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

BLM Action: The BFO 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 that flows 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 BFO is collecting data to help in the development of the management plan for the Mojave Trails National Monument.

Status: Afton Canyon has been the focus of several wildlife habitat enhancement efforts over the last several years to include tamarisk removal, natural habitat planting, and barrier fencing. The following activities are being planned and or implemented:

- Bird monitoring
- Northern tamarisk beetle monitoring
- Tamarisk treatment
- Fish surveys
- Western Pond turtle surveys
- Tui Chub and Western Pond turtle re-introduction
- Phainopepla research
- Various insect studies
- Bighorn sheep research
- Public outreach and interpretation

The BFO has been working with the USGS to conduct a feasibility study for the re-introduction of tui chub, a federally endangered species native to the Mojave River, and the western pond turtle on a site in Afton Canyon. As a follow-on effort to the surveys and feasibility study, the BFO has received funding to work with the USGS on a hydrology study to evaluate sites for the potential construction of an artificial pond(s), which would serve as a site(s) for the augmentation of southwestern pond turtles in Afton Canyon. These studies began in March and are ongoing.

Partners: 3M Corporation; Amargosa Conservancy Point Blue; California Alliance for Tamarisk Biocontrol; California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); 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)

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

**Partners from the USGS and Living Desert auguring test holes to evaluate the Piezometer Site**

BLM Action: The BFO received \$96,000 in funding to continue these studies in 2020 and to conduct a study of diseases potentially affecting southwestern pond turtles along the Mojave River, including Afton Canyon. These studies will also provide information regarding potential donor sites for turtles, which may be used in future Afton Canyon population enhancement efforts.

Status: In May, the BFO worked with the USGS to obtain western pond turtle fossils from a site near Afton Canyon. These specimens will be carbon dated to help illuminate the historical context of the western pond turtles use of the Mojave River.

Based on surveys conducted in 2018, no southwestern pond turtles were detected in Afton Canyon. These surveys were limited in scope and there were issues with some of the traps being vandalized, therefore, these results are not considered definitive. Additional surveys were conducted in May, and no turtles were encountered.

The BFO coordinated with BLM fire crews to conduct approximately 142 acres of re-treatment of tamarisk within Afton Canyon in the fall/winter of 2018. The intent was to treat re-sprouts of tamarisk resulting from previous treatment efforts. In addition, the BFO is working with fire crews on a burn plan to remove piles of tamarisk resulting from previous treatment efforts. Tamarisk treatment efforts were continued in this area this year.

To further our active restoration efforts, the BFO partnered with Victor Valley College to grow trees in their greenhouse facilities for out-planting at a future date. Honey mesquite and desert willow seeds were collected in 2017 and transferred to Victor Valley College for processing and greenhouse planting. To date, approximately 500 honey mesquite and 700 desert willows are being cared for at the facility. The BFO partnered with the Mojave Desert Land Trust and held a tree-planting event on April 6, and the District Leadership Team participated in a tree-planting on April 30. This has been a great opportunity for Victor Valley College to provide job skill training at their facilities and for the BFO to involve local citizens in the restoration efforts.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

### **Honey mesquite seedlings at the Victor Valley College greenhouse**

A researcher collected samples of midges (small aquatic insects) in Afton Canyon during the spring as part of her research on the biodiversity and biogeography of this insect group in North America. Midges provide a great indicator of the health of aquatic systems. These collections will help to better understand the distribution of this species group throughout North America and will provide local insights into water quality in Afton Canyon.

During the summer, a National Monument intern deployed motion cameras to document wildlife using the riparian area and to gather information, which will help to inform future management of the site. This project supports the BLMs new WISDOM (Women in Science Discovering Our Mojave) program that seeks to engage minority women with hands-on a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) experience. Three additional WISDOM interns were hired in the fall to assist with this effort and other monument projects.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

### **Bighorn sheep visiting one of the camera sites**

BLM Action: The BFO worked with the National Sign Shop to acquire two Old Spanish Trail signs for installation in Afton Canyon.

The BFO is working with a researcher from Oregon State University to conduct an experiment that will

test the use of bighorn sheep radio collars in rough terrain.

The BFO is also working with CDFW to continue long-term monitoring of bighorn sheep using the Afton Canyon area. Several sheep have been radio collared and their movements are being monitored. This is part of a larger range-wide program that will provide information on sheep movements, which will help to inform management decisions regarding sheep genetics and disease.

The riparian habitat near the Betty Ford crossing has continued to suffer impacts from unauthorized vehicle use. The BFO has received \$10,000 in funding to replace downed post-and-cable fencing and to conduct tree planting to address these impacts.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

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

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

Status: Since 2016, the BFO has submitted three proposed projects: 1) Desert Tortoise Route Signing and Restoration: Lane Mountain Area within Superior-Cronese Critical Habitat Unit; 2) Desert Tortoise Route Signing and Restoration: Newberry/Rodman Area within Ord-Rodman Critical Habitat Unit; and 3) Raven Subsidy Site Removal: Owl Canyon Campground Area Superior-Cronese Critical Habitat Unit. All three projects have been funded through state OHV grants and/or BLM State Office directed funding and implementation of each is underway.

Partners: USFWS; and various county, state, and federal agencies

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

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

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

Status: The California Desert District Office received \$30,000 in end-of-year-funds from the BLM Washington Office to partially fund this project starting in 2017, and Point Blue Conservation Science received nearly \$10,000 in a Sonoran Joint Venture Grant to supplement the budget. The BLM and partners initiated fieldwork in the spring of 2017 by recruiting E-bird volunteers and collecting data in the field. The BFO received \$20,000 in funding to continue this work in FY 2019.

Partners: BLM Needles, Ridgecrest (RFO) and Barstow Field (BFO) Offices; California Desert District Office (CDDO); Point Blue Conservation Science; and Sonoran Joint Venture

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

## **Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan Twentynine Palms**

BLM Action: The BFO is working with the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Combat Center), located in Twentynine Palms to implement a Desert Tortoise Translocation Program in support of large-scale Marine Air Ground Task Force live-fire and maneuver training. The BFO, in coordination with the NFO, worked with the Combat Center in the development of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) which evaluated the potential impacts to sensitive resources from the translocation of desert tortoise from the combat center to surrounding areas, including lands administered by the BLM.

Status: The Draft SEIS was completed and made available for a 45-day public comment period on September 30, 2016. Three public meetings were held between October 25-27, 2016, in Joshua Tree, Palm Springs, and Barstow respectively. The Final SEIS was issued on January 6, 2017. The BLM and DoN issued separate Record of Decisions (ROD) on February 9 and February 10, 2017, respectively. The initial translocations were conducted by DoN in 2018. The BLM continues to work with DoN on the monitoring efforts and implementation of other actions consistent with the ROD and Biological Opinion. This year, the BLM issued a right-of-way to the Marines for the installation and maintenance of post-and-cable fencing and desert tortoise exclusion fencing in sensitive areas within the Ord-Rodman Critical Habitat Unit.

Partners: BLM Barstow Field Office; Department of Navy (DoN); and United States Marine Corps

Contacts: Katrina Symons, Field Manager, BFO; and Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

## **Apple Valley NCCP/HCP Development**

BLM Action: The BFO is working with the City of Apple Valley and associated permitting agencies on their development of the city's Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) and coordination has been on-going since June 2010. The BLM's main interest in this process is to work with the city to best determine how the NCCP/HCP mitigation requirements can work hand-in-hand with the BLM's management of the surrounding area.

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

Partners: California Department of Fish and Wildlife; City of Apple Valley; and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

## **Bighorn Sheep Research Project**

BLM Action: The BFO is working with the California Desert District Office (CDDO) to facilitate the implementation of the research project Enhancing Function of a Fragmented Metapopulation of desert bighorn Sheep, proposed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The effort entails using radio collars and photo traps to evaluate how desert bighorn sheep interact with man-made barriers. Data will be used to identify barriers to sheep migration and help develop strategies for identified barriers where appropriate.

Status: The BFO worked with CDDO staff to develop the NEPA documents required for implementation of this proposed project. Radio collaring efforts were implemented commencing fall of 2018 and tracking studies will continue through 2021. The BFO has been working with researchers from Oregon State University who will develop the second phase of this project and look at three road barriers to bighorn sheep migration and determine if creation of artificial water sources can be utilized to encourage sheep passage under highways.

Partners: California Desert District Office (CDDO); California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW); and the National Park Service

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

### **Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation**

BLM Action: Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is an inclusive partnership dedicated to the conservation of the herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) and their habitats. Its membership includes individuals from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, museums, the pet trade industry, nature centers, zoos, the energy industry, universities, herpetological organizations, research laboratories, forest industries, and environmental consultants. The diversity of its membership makes PARC the most comprehensive conservation effort ever undertaken for amphibians and reptiles throughout the United States.

Status: Wildlife Biologist Chris Otahal was nominated as a member to the Federal Agencies Steering Committee (FASC) as a representative of the BLM. The FASC is comprised of representatives from 12 federal agencies and operates under a Memorandum of Understanding, the purpose of which is to provide a framework for cooperation and coordination in achieving the objectives of the FASC, and in matters relating to the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and their habitats. The committee provides a unified forum to facilitate herpetofauna communication and management among federal partners through the PARC network and assists in implementing the PARC Strategic Plan. The FASC conducts monthly coordination calls and meets annually.

In April, members of PARC met to initiate the development of Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas (PARCAs) in California. BFO staff participated in these early planning meetings. PARCAs are a non-regulatory designation of an area whose purpose is to raise awareness and spark voluntary action by landowners and conservation partners to benefit amphibians and/or reptiles. Areas are nominated using scientific criteria and expert review, drawing on the concepts of species rarity, richness, and landscape integrity. The current effort has been the development of species to prioritize for conservation and to establish draft PARCA delineations. This process is on-going.

The BFO is working with the Washington Office to develop the BLM Strategic Plan for Herpetofauna, a draft plan has been developed and staff is in the process of finalizing the document.

Contact: Chris Otahal, Wildlife Biologist, BFO

## **El Centro Field Office (ECFO)**

### ***Minerals & Mining***

#### **U.S. Gypsum Expansion and Modernization Project**

BLM Action: The U.S. Gypsum Expansion and Modernization Project continues. The Federal Register published the Notice of Availability for the Final Supplemental EIS on December 6. The Record of Decision is anticipated to follow in January 2020.

Status: In 2004, U.S. Gypsum (USG) started the expansion and modernization of their quarry and plant operations near Plaster City, CA. As part of their expansion plans, USG submitted right-of-way applications for water/electric lines and a mining Plan of Operations to the BLM for review and approval. In response, Imperial County and the BLM prepared a joint Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) in 2008. Imperial County certified the EIR and approved portions of the proposed project under their jurisdiction, including a Reclamation Plan, but a downturn in economic conditions alleviated the need for BLM decisions at that time. The BLM is now preparing a Supplemental EIS in cooperation with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Supplemental EIS analyzes additional alternatives and updates technical information in the EIR/EIS. The USACE will use the Supplemental EIS to make a decision on a USG request for permits under the Clean Water Act. The Draft Supplemental EIS was published on July 19, followed by a 45-day public comment period, which closed on September 3.

Contact: Carrie Sahagun, Assistant Field Manager, ECFO

### ***Recreation***

#### **Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR)**

BLM Action: Emergency Medical Services/Search and Rescue (EMS/SAR) training completed

Status: EMS/SAR staff completed their required annual preseason rescue refreshers and field competency exercises to recertify at the rescue technician level. Refreshers included evolutions demonstrating competency in advanced provider emergency medicine, land based search and rescue, swiftwater rescue, vehicle extrication, technical rope rescue, and emergency vehicle operations. Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Ranger Stations opened October 11. As of November 3, BLM EMS/SAR staff have responded to 64 medical and rescue calls, representing an approximate 28% increase compared to the same time last season.

Contact: Brian Puckett, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, EFCO

### **Law Enforcement Activities**

BLM Action: The ECFO Law Enforcement (LE) staff is engaged in the busy winter off-highway vehicle (OHV) season. The ECFO LE staff welcome new K9 Law Enforcement Field Supervisor Mike Carpenter and new Law Enforcement Chief Ranger Camilo Gonzalez. Chief Gonzalez began attending the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia on November 4. The El

Centro Law Enforcement Team has grown with the addition of three new Law Enforcement Rangers who each graduated from the Federal Law Enforcement Academy on October 4. In addition, a new Law Enforcement Ranger will join the ECFO LE Program in the next month.

Status: BLM Law Enforcement Rangers typically focus on resource protection and ensuring the safety of BLM employees and public land users. Employees are on hand to educate, assist, and protect; they exercise their law enforcement authority (i.e. education, warning, citation or arrest) only when necessary. Staff maintains a visible, friendly presence to those who use the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) and only deter visitors who might misuse public resources or threaten public safety.

Chris Rice is continuing as the Acting Chief for the El Centro Law Enforcement Program while Chief Gonzalez attends FLETC. Chris Rice began his LE career in the National Park Service at Glacier National Park in 2007. In 2008, Chris joined the BLM Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office as a Law Enforcement Ranger. Chris entered the BLM K9 Program in 2011 and eventually transferred to San Diego as a Resident K9 Ranger working along the international border with other federal, state, and local agencies to ensure public safety and protection of natural resources.

Contact: Chris Rice, Acting Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, ECFO

### **Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation**

BLM Action: El Centro busy off-highway vehicle season.

Status: The 2019-2020 OHV recreation season kicked off in October with roughly 110,000 visitors to the open areas managed by the ECFO, which is an increase of roughly 14% when compared to the same period last year. Visitation peaked on the weekend of the Polaris Camp RZR, Oct 25-26, in the Imperial Sand Dunes with 74,000 visitors.

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, ECFO

### **Special Recreation Permits (SRP)**

BLM Action: The ECFO is working on processing 32 Special Recreation Permits (SRP) and additional applications are expected throughout the following months.

Status: The ECFO processed and approved 24 special recreation permits (SRPs) to date this fiscal year for activities, including competitive off-road races, trail rides, club outings, and vending of goods and services. These permits allowed visitors to participate in events and receive goods and services to enhance their recreational opportunities.

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, ECFO

### **Outreach**

BLM Action: New signage placed.

Status: The ECFO manages a portion of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail (NHT) and offers informational pamphlets, maps, and an accompanying audio tour for part of the trail ride. Though the trail had signs in place, there were areas that were confusing or signs that had been destroyed by the

harsh summers. This past year, the ECFO received directed funding for the trail, which require the funds be used only for the Juan Bautista de Anza NHT. The ECFO decided to focus on improving public access and ordered hundreds of portal signs, fiberglass markers, and marker decals to place at key access points and along the length of the trail. Several park rangers spent the hot summer months signing almost the entire length of the ECFO managed portion of the trail, placing markers within line-of-sight of each other with the hope that visitors driving the trail could do so without a map or global positioning system (GPS) unit. In the future, the ECFO hopes to organize trips for residents in the Imperial Valley who otherwise would not be able to access the trail.

Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner, ECFO

### **Volunteer Program**

BLM Action: El Centro continues to host events with the help of volunteers.

Status: Several volunteers donated their time this past season, by participating in the annual Martin Luther King Jr. cleanup and/or returning as campground hosts in the ISDRA and at the Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVAs). Other volunteer activities included weekly cleaning of the day use area and hot spring near the Hot Spring LTVA, a cleanup event at Painted Gorge, and the National Public Lands Day event at Kwaaymii Point. The Painted Gorge cleanup was a great event, drawing 34 volunteers including the San Diego Off-Road Coalition (SDORC) and SDMust, supporters of the second amendment, who joined together and volunteered 136 hours and cleaned an area popular for both off-road travel and target shooting. The ECFO thanks all of the 1,048 volunteers who contributed 13,158 hours of their time to maintaining their public lands; their work is invaluable.

Contact: Alexia Williams, Outdoor Recreation Planner, ECFO

### **OHV Grant Program**

BLM Action: Grant applications completed.

Status: The ECFO final grant applications have been approved by the California State Parks, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division. The three grant applications were submitted in late May for the following categories: ground operations, law enforcement, and safety for the 2019-2020 use season. The ECFO requested \$1.68 million in grant funding for OHV. The public may review the OHV grant awards by visiting: <http://ohv.parks.ca.gov/> (click on the “Grants” tab).

Contact: Neil Hamada, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, ECFO

### ***Lands & Realty***

#### **North Gila to Imperial Valley Substation 500kV Transmission Line**

BLM Action: North Gila to Imperial Valley Substation 500kV Transmission Line on hold.

Status: NGIV#2, LLC proposed construction of a 500kV transmission line spanning between the North Gila Substation in western Yuma County, AZ and the Imperial Valley Substation in western Imperial County, CA (see map below). In September, ITC, one of the NGIV#2, LLC partners, notified the BLM of their intent to terminate their role in funding the project. On October 10, the remaining partner,

Southwest Transmission Partners, LLC submitted a memorandum to the BLM requesting the project remain in an active status so work on technical and commercial activities and the California State permitting processes for the NGIV#2 project could continue. As a result, the NGIV#2 Transmission Line Project is on an indefinite hold. The BLM is currently in the process of compiling all records for the decision and case files, through our third party project management consultant Galileo Project. Should the project become active, the BLM is prepared to move forward with continued data compilation and review.

Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist, ECFO

### **Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility Approvals**

BLM Action: Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility Eagle Take Permit and installation of lighting.

Status: The BLM and Ocotillo Express LLC executed an amended Right of Way (ROW) grant authorizing the discontinuation of the on-site biological monitor when there is a US Fish and Wildlife Eagle Take Permit in place and for the installation of new Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulated lighting on wind turbines at the Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility in Ocotillo, CA. The new FAA approved lighting technology will limit the flashing of lights in the evening and only allow flashing when aircraft is in the vicinity. The installation of the new FAA lighting is anticipated to occur in early 2020. The Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility is a wind development project consisting of 112 turbines located entirely on public lands and was approved in 2011.

Contact: Tristan Riddell, Realty Specialist, ECFO

### **Cahuilla Communication Shelter**

BLM Action: Working to secure power.

Status: The ECFO, Imperial County and the Navy are continuing to work together to build a new communications site at the Cahuilla Ranger Station. The BLM contractor worked throughout the summer installing the new communications shelter. The county is continuing to work on securing power with a generator and the Navy has awarded a contract for the 190 foot tower, which is scheduled to break ground in spring of 2020. This project will help better serve communications within Imperial County.

Contact: John Johnson – Environmental Protection Specialist (Wilderness), ECFO

### **McCain Valley Road**

BLM Action: Road Repairs

Status: In August, the ECFO repaired two areas of McCain Valley Road in eastern San Diego County due to winter and spring storm events that reduced the road to one-lane with undercuts of 3-feet or greater, creating public safety issues. BLM staff from the Palm Springs South Coast and California Desert District Offices provided engineering and construction support while El Centro Staff Archaeologist, Kate Crosmer, participated as the cultural monitor for the project. Avangrid, LLC (the right-of-way holder for the wind farm in McCain Valley) provided a contracted specialist for biological monitoring. Cultural and biological monitoring was required as McCain Valley is an area of sensitivity for both resources.

Biological and Cultural ground clearance surveys were conducted prior to the start of work. Archaeological sites within 100-feet of construction activities were designated as environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs) and no activities were allowed to occur within areas flagged as ESAs. The BLM construction crew successfully managed to keep work areas constrained within the existing road shoulders. The two undercut locations of McCain Valley road were brought to grade with the existing road bed using imported fill. Geotextile was also utilized in reconstructing shoulder slopes of the road to minimize the effects of future storm events.

Contact: Kate Crosmer, BLM Archaeologist, ECFO

## *Archeology*

### **Cultural Program**

BLM Action: Completed FY 2019 Cultural Program Annual Review

Status: The ECFO has recently completed the annual review of accomplishments for the cultural program; highlights are reported to the BLM Washington Office and to the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). The ECFO reviewed and processed 60 undertakings this year to include the CSOLAR West/Imperial Solar Energy Center West project, multiple race route surveys, 15 film permits in the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, and upgrades to existing transmission lines. In total, 7,601 acres of BLM land were inventoried at the Class III level; there are 283 newly-recorded cultural properties on BLM land reported this fiscal year.

Contact: Kate Crosmer, BLM Archaeologist, ECFO

## **Needles Field Office (NFO)**

### *Minerals & Mining*

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

BLM Action: The BLM is currently evaluating a proposal by Castle Mountain Venture (CMV) to restart mining operations at the Castle Mountain Mine. This includes re-processing previously excavated material, and the establishment of a replacement groundwater monitoring system. The proposal would result in 5.65 acres of ground disturbance not previously authorized in CMV's existing Plan of Operations.

Status: The BLM conducted a public review period in May for a proposal by CMV that did not include the groundwater monitoring plan. Based on public feedback, and the subsequent receipt of the groundwater monitoring proposal, the BLM has decided to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for a combined proposal for mining and the groundwater monitoring plan. It is expected the proposal and EA will be available for public comment by the end of 2019.

Contact: Mike Ahrens, NFO Manger, NFO

Annual Review 2/28/20

## **Danby Dry Lake Sodium Leasing Update**

BLM Action: The BLM is currently working with two operators, Valley Salt and Salt Products, on Danby Dry Lake sodium leases to correct compliance issues and establish valid Operating Plans.

Status: A dialogue has been established with Salt Products and they continue to work with BLM to correct the identified deficiencies.

The BLM has reviewed a proposed Operating Plan from Valley Salt and requested additional information in order to establish a complete proposal. A change in leadership of the Valley Salt operation has caused a delay in the review and update of the proposed plan however, it is once again underway. Once Valley Salt provides the necessary information to perfect the proposed plan of operations, the BLM will consider it through an appropriate NEPA analysis.

Partners: San Bernardino County, Land Use Services Department - Mining

Contact: Mike Ahrens, NFO Manager, NFO

## ***Grazing***

### **Lazy Daisy Essex to Danby Fence Project**

BLM Action: The NFO is currently working with the Lazy Daisy Allotment to construct approximately 5.5 miles of fencing, which would join two allotment boundary fences ending at Essex and Danby. The new fence is needed to keep cattle off of the railroad tracks and Route 66, which parallels the fence line.

The fence project has been a legacy project for the NFO for over 10 years with on-again-off-again planning sessions due to various reasons. The NFO completed the planning and authorized the fence two years ago, and arranged funding for the project last year. The project will be completed by the time of the next DAC meeting.

### **Crystal Spring Restoration and Range Improvement**

BLM Action: The NFO is currently working on the improvement of Crystal Springs: removing excess large woody debris to undam the water flow paths, repairing the exclosure fence, providing offsite water for livestock, and monitoring the spring for any changes in vegetation and wildlife use, while ensuring cattle are excluded. Three game cameras were set up on September 25, and have already provided valuable data regarding the use of the spring. Wildlife observed include the gray fox, bighorn sheep, coyote, bat species, red-tailed hawk, chukar, and other bird species.

As a National Public Lands Day event, NFO and BLM staff were joined by National Park Service fire crews, the Armargosa Conservancy, and additional volunteers, who teamed up to begin restoration work at the spring. In just one day, eight truckloads of wood were removed from the spring and fenceline. The water flow path increased by over 10 feet by the end of the day. This month, volunteers and the permittee will assist in repairing the exclosure fence and rock cribs, dig a pipeline, install a spring box, establish a trough outside of the exclosure, and remove garbage from the site. An additional camera will be installed at the water trough. The spring will continue to be monitored with game cameras for up to a year.

## ***Lands & Realty***

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

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

Status: The BLM is nearing completion of the Environmental Assessment considering the I-40/Hwy 95 site. The NFO is currently in consultation with the Mohave Tribe who have raised concerns about the need for the project. The NFO is working with industry to better define the need and to clarify the benefit of the project to the public.

Contact: Mike Ahrens, NFO Manager, NFO

## ***Recreation***

### **Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)**

BLM Action: Management of the Mojave Trails National Monument.

Status: Over the summer, Mojave Trails National Monument hosted intern Lis Mota through the Direct Hire Authority for Resource Assistant Internship program. Lis implemented a research project that seeks to better understand the human/bighorn sheep interactions in Afton Canyon. Through a unique partnership with the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) and Conservation Lands Foundation, Lis engaged local university students, with the goal of providing a meaningful natural resource research experience for underserved communities. The pilot program, dubbed “Women in Science Discovering Our Mojave” (WISDOM), has provided valuable insight into the wildlife in Afton Canyon. This partnership leverages public/private funds to build capacity while engaging the next generation of public lands stewards, and serves as a model for other units within BLM’s National Conservation Lands system. MDLT is currently pursuing funding to expand WISDOM for a second year. Learn more about this project on BLM California’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/bureau-of-land-management-california/leveraging-diversity-while-helping-blm-understand-bighorn-sheep-populations-in-m/2793926223965367/>

In response to heat related fatalities the previous two summers, the BLM has developed a safety management plan for Amboy Crater. Amboy Crater is one of the most popular destinations in the Mojave Trails National Monument and features a 1.5 mile long hiking trail, picnic tables and restrooms. Over the winter and spring, the BLM partnered with Mojave Desert Land Trust to improve the quality and condition of the hiking trail. This work included widening the trail to accommodate emergency vehicles and better defining and delineating the hiking trail. The end result is a trail that is easier to navigate and quicker to hike, which will be critical in the hot summer months. At the parking lot and along the trail, the BLM has installed seasonal heat warning signs to discourage hiking in extreme temperatures. In the event a hiker becomes lost in the lava field, the BLM has added high-visibility flagging to the overlook near the parking lot as well as the first shade structure on the hiking trail. This flagging is intended to

help hikers navigate back to the parking lot. The BLM is also installing heat-related illness interpretive panels near the parking lot to inform visitors of proper hydration.

Last Spring, the BLM conducted a Government Performance and Results Act visitor satisfaction survey at Amboy Crater and reached 89 respondents from 18 states. The recently released results highlighted that Amboy Crater is extremely well loved by visitors scoring an overall satisfaction measure of 98 percent. Of survey respondents, 82 percent reported a very good overall quality of experience (the highest rating), 16 percent reported a good experience, and 2 percent reported an average experience. No respondents recorded a poor or very poor experience. Amboy Crater also received positive feedback on facilities, access, recreational assets and staff friendliness.

On October 5, Mojave Trails National Monument staff participated in campfire tales and a star party hosted by the City of Twentynine Palms and the Mojave Desert Land Trust designed to inform the public about the natural and cultural history of the Monument. Just as the sun was setting, Ken Layne, the author/editor/publisher of the *Desert Oracle*, shared interesting local lore over a campfire in the lava fields near the parking lot. Once dark, astronomer Steve Caron from the Twentynine Palms Astronomy Society narrated a stunning tour of the night sky. Two large telescopes helped transport visitors from Amboy to the surface of the moon, Jupiter, Saturn, and numerous nebula.

In March, S.47 - John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act released the Cady Mountains Wilderness Study Area, which means the area is now managed under general BLM management authorities found in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1701 etseq.) and associated regulations and policies, including applicable land-use plans, including the Presidential Proclamation that established Mojave Trails National Monument. As a result, Mojave Trails National Monument has updated the Monument Map, which can be found at: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/mojave-trails-national-monument>.

Contact: Kyle Sullivan, Monument Manager, NFO

## **Community Relations**

BLM Action: BLM is working with MDLT to continue bighorn sheep monitoring at Afton Canyon as part of the WISDOM pilot project. Funding for this round of research will continue through December 2019. MDLT is working to secure funding to continue WISDOM research into 2020, including continued bighorn sheep monitoring as well as measuring light pollution across the Monument.

Status: The BLM has submitted a nomination to list Amboy Crater as a National Recreation Trail. The results of the application will not be known until September 2020. A designation as a National Recreation Trail would highlight the national significance of Amboy Crater, which is an iconic landscape feature along Route 66. This designation would provide another avenue for people to learn about Mojave Trails National Monument and could drive additional tourism and economic opportunity to our local communities.

In July 2018, the BLM entered into a Gateway Community Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Twentynine Palms focused on the Mojave Trails National Monument. The exploding popularity of Joshua Tree National Park (three million visitors in 2017) means community leaders are looking for other opportunities to draw more tourists, lengthen their stay, and generate additional sustainable revenue streams. The city's visitor center is a good place to find information about the Mojave Trails, including

brochures, maps, and recommendations for adventures. This winter, the BLM will work with the communities of Barstow and Needles in an effort to establish Gateway Community partnerships.

Over the summer, the NFO updated the Amboy Crater and dispersed camping brochures. The new brochures will be printed and distributed soon. This winter, the BLM will create a general overview brochure of the Mojave Trails National Monument.

### **Sheephole Wilderness Restoration**

BLM Action: On October 12, the NFO addressed resource issues within the Mojave Trails National Monument and joined forces with over 50 volunteers from the Southern California's Boy Scouts of America California Inland Empire Council. The goal for the National Public Lands Day Event was to conduct signing along 10 miles of trail, close a vehicle trespass into wilderness with fencing and vertical mulching, and clear micro trash from a disbursed camping area adjacent to the Monument.

Both the Scouts from the Order of the Arrow honor unit and the Cub Scouts had a challenging project in store for them. The girls and boys of the Cub Scout packs and their fathers, many of whom serve with the U.S. Marine Corp at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, collected over 600 pounds of discarded tin cans, televisions, shooting debris, and old tires from around the campsite.

The older Boy Scouts and Venturing Scouts moved to a remote location where they restored a linear disturbance within the Sheephole Valley Wilderness and signed a wilderness boundary road. This area is unique for two very special reasons, first, there are large clusters of crytobiotic soil present in the area, and second, it is visited frequently by astronomers visiting the area to enjoy an evening studying the stars. This location is listed as having one of the darkest skies in Southern California.

Status: Overall the project was a huge success and the boys and girls are looking forward to assisting the NFO on another project next year.

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

### ***Renewable Energy & Transmission***

#### **Renewable Energy Projects**

BLM Action: The Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (PSSCFO) is processing and overseeing over three dozen individual operational and proposed energy development projects. California has a mandate to reach 55 percent renewable energy capacity by 2030, and the BLM's priorities include *Making America Safe Through Energy Independence*.

Contact: Janet Cheek, Assistant Field Manager, Energy, Lands and Minerals, PSSCFO

#### **West of Devers Transmission System Upgrade**

Action: Southern California Edison (SCE) proposed to upgrade and adjust 48 miles of existing 220 kilovolt (KV) transmission lines between North Palm Springs and San Bernardino, in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties within a utility corridor occupied by existing transmission lines. The overall project

includes both the removal and construction of transmission line support structures, relocation and reconductoring of transmission lines, and upgrading five substations. None of the substations are on public land. Approximately 3.5 miles of the project crosses public lands managed by the BLM and eight miles crosses Morongo Band of Mission Indians tribal lands. The BLM is the Federal Lead Agency and the CPUC is the state lead agency.

Status: The BLM issued a Final Environmental Impact Study in July 2016, and a Record of Decision (ROD) approving the project with modification on public lands in December 2016. The BLM approved the requested Notice to Proceed (NTP) for construction on public lands in early 2018. Construction on the project commenced in 2018, and started on public lands managed by the BLM in 2019. SCE expects construction to take about 4 years.

Partners: Southern California Edison (SCE); and California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager, PSSCFO

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

Action: Delaney-Colorado River Transmission, LLC (DCR Transmission) was selected as the Project Sponsor by the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) as part of a competitive solicitation process authorized by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The Project would include construction of a new 500 kV transmission line between the Arizona Public Service (APS) Delaney Substation in Tonopah, AZ, and the SCE Colorado River Substation, west of Blythe, CA. DCR Transmission submitted a ROW grant application with the BLM on September 14, 2015. The Project would span approximately 114 miles, including 97 miles in Arizona and 17 miles in California, partially following the existing Devers Palo Verde #1 Transmission Line in an established utility corridor.

Status: The Final Environmental Impact Statement was published September 13, with a signed Record of Decision (ROD) on November 22. Issuance of the right-of-way (ROW) will follow the ROD.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, CA Project Manager, PSSCFO

### **Wind Energy Projects**

BLM Action: PSSCFO oversees about 20 wind energy rights-of-way grants in the San Geronio Pass and Coachella Valley areas including processing ROW applications and assignments, assessing and monitoring cost recovery accounts, completing environmental reviews, bond assessment, and issuing notices and decisions.

Status: As part of on-going monitoring of these rights-of-way grants, PSSCFO is initiating additional studies to assess the impact of these facilities on avian populations. In addition, staff is in the early stages of processing two re-power projects, which involves removing old wind turbines and replacing them with newer turbines that produce more energy per turbine.

### **San Jacinto Wind (SJW) formerly Terra-Gen Repower**

Action: San Jacinto Wind proposes to remove a total of 146 smaller, older generation turbines replacing

them with a total of three larger turbines on the same footprint, consolidating six existing ROW's into one ROW. The larger, newer turbines have a maximum rotor diameter of 384 feet with a base width of 20 feet and a maximum hub height of 309 feet. Total new temporary disturbances will be approximately 62.91 acres, but will result in a total project reclamation of -2.93 acres of reclaimed lands.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager, PSSCFO

### **Mesa Wind Repower**

Status: Mesa Wind proposes to remove a total of 230 smaller, older generation turbines replacing them with a total of 10 larger turbines on the same footprint, consolidating five existing ROW's into one ROW. The larger, newer turbines have a maximum rotor diameter of 427 feet with a base width of 20 feet and a maximum hub height of 309 feet. Total new temporary disturbances will be approximately 62.91 acres, but will result in a total project reclamation of -2.93 acres of reclaimed lands. A total of 10 of the existing turbines will be removed

### **Solar Energy Projects**

BLM Action: The PSSCFO continues to process multiple applications for solar energy projects as part of the District-wide process. Our most recent actions are as follows.

#### **Blythe Solar Power Project**

Technology: Photovoltaic Solar

Megawatts: 485 MW

Right-of-way footprint: 4,318 acres

NextEra Energy holds the right-of-way for the generation of 485 megawatts (MW) of photovoltaic (PV) with the Blythe Solar Power Project consists of three 125 MW units and one 110 MW unit, 230 kV generation-tie line, Operation and Maintenance Building, access road and other related facilities.

Action: A notice to proceed for project construction was issued on March 19, 2015. Phase I (one 125 MW unit and one 110 MW unit) was completed in December 2016. NextEra is currently constructing Phase II (two 125 MW units 3) and 4 of the solar field.

Contact: Dan Ryan, Project Manager, PSSCFO

#### **Palen Solar Project**

BLM Action: BLM issued a ROW grant to EDF Renewables for a 500 MW solar PV energy facility in March, and subsequently amended to adjust the project boundary in November. The BLM issued a full Notice to Proceed on September 7; the project is under construction.

Status: The project would be constructed entirely on BLM lands and consist of three solar fields, a main access road from the Corn Springs off-ramp, and a 230kV generation tie-line extending from the project switchyard to the Red Bluff Substation.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager, PSSCFO

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

Genesis Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources, LLC is authorized to construct and operate the Genesis Solar Energy Project, a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with a total net electrical output of 250 MW.

BLM Action: The Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the project was published in March 2010; public comment period on the Final EIS ended on September 27, 2010; the ROD was issued on November 4, 2010; a Notice to Proceed for site preparation and facility construction was issued on August 24, 2011; and construction was completed in April 2014.

Status: The facility is in full operation. Genesis Solar, LLC has filed a plan to modify the natural gas storage tanks with the California Energy Commission. The ethnographic portion of the Genesis mitigation is complete and has been distributed to consulting parties.

Contact: Brandon Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support, PSSCFO

### **Desert Sunlight Solar Farm**

BLM Action: NextEra is authorized to construct and operate a 4,245 acre 550 MW solar PV power plant project known as the Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF).

The DSSF includes three main components: 1) the Solar Farm site, 2) a transmission line, and 3) a Southern California Edison (SCE) owned and operated substation (Red Bluff Substation). Units 1 and 2 are constructed and operational.

Status: NextEra is continuing to monitor the translocated Desert tortoises until August 2017. At completion, DSSF was the largest solar facility on BLM-managed public lands. DSSF is located six miles north of Desert Center.

Contact: Brandon Anderson, Assistant Project Manager, Project Support, PSSCFO

### **Desert Harvest Solar**

BLM Action: In September 2013, the BLM issued a ROW to EDF Renewable to construct a 150 MW PV project on approximately 1,412 acres, located directly south of the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm near Desert Center, CA. The BLM issued a full Notice to Proceed on September 6, and the project is under construction.

Status: The BLM continues to consult with interested stakeholders, including Native American tribes.

Contact: Matt Toedtli, Project Manager, PSSCFO

### **Athos Solar Gen-Tie**

Intersect Power proposes to construct and maintain a gen-tie line in support of their solar facilities which are located on private land. The gen-tie line will include up to seven miles located on BLM land, within a 100 foot right-of-way. The access roads are mainly located on previously disturbed agricultural lands; the roads will need some improvements. This project is a 220kV transmission line with up to 120 structures north of I-10 in the Desert Center area.

BLM Action: PSSCFO is currently engaged in last review of various resource analysis for Environmental Assessment (EA).

Status: The BLM is and expecting to publish the EA and issuance of the ROW will follow.

Contact: Chelsea Collins, Lead, PSSCFO

### **McCoy (and Arlington) Solar Energy Project**

Action: McCoy Solar, LLC, owned by NextEra Energy, is authorized to construct a 750 MW PV solar project on 7,700 acres of BLM and 470 acres of private lands, located directly north of the Blythe Solar Project, near Blythe, CA.

Status: The BLM issued the ROD on March 11, 2013. The right-of-way grants were issued for Units 1 and 2 on December 2, 2013, and August 12, 2014. Unit 1 is fully operational and Unit 2 (renamed the Arlington Solar Project) has not been issued a NOP.

When McCoy and Blythe were first permitted, they were approved to construct two separate gen-tie lines. When the initial projects were built, NextEra Energy built one set of poles and hung the gen-tie lines for both Blythe and McCoy solar projects. However, NextEra has requested to build the second set of poles approved under the McCoy solar project in order to build Unit 2/Arlington Solar Project of the McCoy Solar Project.

Contact: Dan Ryan, Project Manager, PSSCFO

### **Desert Quartzsite Solar Project**

Desert Quartzite, LLC proposes to construct and operate a 450 MW solar PV energy-generating project known as the Desert Quartzite Solar Project (Project). Desert Quartzite, LLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of First Solar Development, Inc. The facility will utilize First Solar's thin-film cadmium telluride (CdTe) PV modules. The project site is located on BLM lands in eastern Riverside County, approximately 2.75 miles southwest of the western extent of the City of Blythe, CA.

The proposed facility would occupy approximately 3,800 acres of land. The gen-tie line is approximately 2.8 miles long, ending at the Colorado River Substation.

BLM Action: The BLM and Riverside County released a joint Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report on September 27, and the protest period closed on October 28.

Status: The BLM anticipates issuing a ROD in December.

Contact: Brandon Anderson, Assistant District Manager, Project Support, PSSCFO

## **Crimson Solar Project**

Action: Sonoran West Holdings, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Recurrent Energy, LLC proposes to construct and operate the RE Crimson Solar Project. The project is for a 350 MW solar PV installation with integrated energy storage, located on approximately 2,700 acres of land managed by the BLM. Recurrent Energy's proposal includes a low impact design option and a conventional design and optional alternative design components intended to reduce some of the project impacts.

The proposed project is located in unincorporated eastern Riverside County, approximately 13 miles west of Blythe, just north of Mule Mountain and just south of I-10. The project site was formerly proposed by BrightSource Energy for development of a larger project as the Sonoran West Solar Energy Generating Station, with submittal of an SF-299 application for CACA-051967 in 2009.

Status: A Plan of Development for the project was submitted to the BLM most recently in November 2017. The draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report was released on November 1.

Contact: Miriam Liberatore, Project Manager, PSSCFO

## **Blythe Mesa Solar Project**

BLM Action: On August 18, 2015, the BLM issued a ROD approving the issuance of a ROW grant in support of the Blythe Mesa Solar Project, owned by the Renewable Energy Group, Los Angeles, CA.

This 485 MW PV project will occupy 3,665 acres, located on lands under the jurisdiction of the County of Riverside, BLM, and the City of Blythe. The project will likely be developed in phases that extend over several years.

The project includes construction of a 230 kV gen-tie line to connect the solar facility to the Colorado River Substation. The total length of this line would be 8.8 miles; 3.6 miles will be located on private lands within the array site boundary and 5.2 miles will be located off site on 72 acres of BLM managed lands. The solar plant will be constructed entirely on private lands.

Status: In November 2019, the BLM received an amended application.

Contact: Brandon Anderson, Project Manager, PSSCFO

## **Arica Solar Project (Clearway)**

SunPower Corporation filed a ROW application in summer 2016, for a 400 MW PV project on roughly 4,000 acres of public lands near Desert Center, and submitted a Plan of Development on November 21, 2016. The BLM hosted a pre-application meeting with SunPower (previous applicant) on November 21, 2016. Clearway is now the applicant for this project going forward.

The project consists of a 265 MW solar PV project located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with 50 MW storage capacity. The project will consist of two substations and 3.2 miles of 230kV gen-tie from the switchyard to the existing Red Bluff Substation. Gen-tie will be shared with

Victory Pass Solar project.

Action/Status: The second pre-application meeting was held on May 29. This project is in the initial stages of processing.

Contact: Miriam Liberatore, Project Manager, PSSCFO

### **Victory Pass Solar (formerly Jupiter) (Clearway)**

Action: Jupiter Solar filed a Rights of Way application on July 6, 2015, for a solar project on roughly 1,800 acres of public lands near the Desert Center area. Clearway is now the applicant for this project going forward.

The project consists of a 200 MW PV project located eight miles east of the I-10 and SR 177 intersection with an optional 50 MW battery storage. As well as a shared 3.2 mile 230 kV gen-tie line with Arica Solar Project.

Status: Second pre-application meeting was held on May 29, 2019. This project is in its initial stages of processing.

Contact: Miriam Liberatore, Project Manager, PSSCFO

## ***Lands & Realty***

### **Whitewater Recharge Facility (Coachella Valley Water District)**

Action: Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) held a Rights of Way grant for the Whitewater Recharge Facility within the City of Palm Springs. The ROW expired April 2014. CVWD has applied for a new Rights of Way grant that would continue the use of public lands and proposes to recharge up to 511,000 acre-feet per year, on 690 acres of BLM managed public lands. No new construction is proposed.

Status: On November 21, the BLM released the NOI to prepare an EIS. A public meeting will take place from 5:00 -7:00 p.m. on December 5, at University of Riverside, Palm Desert.

## **Land Tenure**

Action/Status: PSSCFO is processing several changes to land ownership or land interests through acquisitions, donations, sales, exchanges, disposals, and withdrawals. These actions must align within the public's interest and be consistent with publicly approved land-use plans. The most recent actions are as follows:

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

BLM Action: The BLM and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians entered into an agreement in 2002, to initiate an assembled land exchange pursuant to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Act of 2000, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The land exchange reduces the extent of checkerboard land ownership within and outside the Agua

Caliente Indian Reservation, thereby facilitating effective and efficient management of public and tribal lands in the National Monument.

Status: The ROD was signed on January 18, 2018 and the patents were accepted by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (ACBCI) on April 23.

Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Realty Lead, PSSCFO

### **Santa Ana River Wash Land Exchange**

BLM Action: The San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (Conservation District) and the BLM entered into an agreement in 2005, to initiate an assembled exchange pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed land exchange would transfer 327.5 acres of federal estate with the Santa Ana River Wash ACEC to the Conservation District and in exchange, the BLM would acquire approximately 310 acres of non-federal land located within the Santa Ana River Wash Area, which would be incorporated into a new ACEC boundary. This action would also require an amendment to the South Coast Resource Management Plan to allow for the exchange. The BLM would also need to amend the Santa Ana Wash ACEC Plan to realign the ACEC boundary. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is proposing to issue an Incidental Take Permit consistent with the Habitat Conservation Plan.

Two public scoping meetings were held to solicit public comment as to the scope of the DEIS/DEIR on March 18, 2015, and public involvement is still ongoing. The BLM is a cooperating agency with USFWS, the lead on the DEIS/DEIR.

Status: With the recent passage of the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Sec. 1003. The Santa Ana River Wash Plan land exchange is authorized. The BLM is engaged with the Conservation District to result in the conveyance of the referenced lands to the respective parties. PSSCFO staff are presently completing the Environmental Site Assessment for both the public and private lands, have an updated title commitment and will be submitting the appraisal request with the Office of Valuation Services (OVS) in early December.

Contact: Victoria Hernandez, Realty Lead, PSSCFO

### ***Recreation***

Southern California is home to more than 23 million residents and hosts millions of visitors each year. As a result, recreation within PSSCFO's desert and coastal regions is high-volume, dispersed, and can be intensive. For the PSSCFO this large visitor base and visitation is both concentrated in a few places and widely dispersed, especially during the cooler months from October through May.

Big Morongo Preserve in Sand to Snow National Monument receives about 80,000 visitors a year. Ladder Canyon and Painted Canyon in the Mecca Hills Wilderness receives about 100,000 visitors a year and is about a half-hour drive to the nearest amenities. Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument gets 200,000-300,000 visitors per year.

BLM Action: To get a more accurate count and determine management needs, the field office has implemented a visitor counting strategy. Nine trail and road counters have been strategically located throughout the busy areas to determine actual visitor use and areas that will need additional analysis to reduce impacts to habitats and natural areas while continuing to provide visitors with a quality outdoor experience.

Status: Currently, this work is coordinated with the PSSCFO's lone outdoor recreation planner, who also administers the PSSCFO's OHV grants "green sticker" program, and oversees the interns. The field office is struggling to manage this visitation pressure with little to no full-time recreation staff. Recently, two permanent full-time park rangers were hired to help with this workload.

#### Breakdown of PSSCFO Recreation:

- The PSSCFO has renewed three commercial Special Recreation Permits for local touring operations in the Coachella Valley and Chiriaco Summit. The businesses are [Desert Adventures](#), [Big Wheel Tours](#), and [ATV Experience](#). These locally owned small businesses introduce hundreds of residents and visitors to BLM managed lands and resources and generate over \$2,000 of fees owed to the BLM annually.
- PSSCFO manages a five year competitive motorbike trial Special Recreation Permit for Southern California Trails Association (SCTA) on BLM managed lands outside Lakeview, CA.
- In partnership with the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (CVMC), new trails and trailheads were constructed to promote additional recreational opportunities within and around the Coachella Valley. These are the Kim Nicols, Pushwalla, and East Indio Hills trails, which are primarily located on conservation lands with some portions on BLM managed land.
- Three Long Term Visitor Areas (LTVA) are currently open for business October through April; hosts are located at each site.
- Corn Springs Campground is open year round.
- Interpretive education programs and hikes are ongoing throughout the year and include special programs such as "Scorpion Night Adventures," "Sand Dune Hikes," and "H.I.K.E in the Indian Canyons."
- Rock hounding is popular at the Mule Mountain LTVA, where there is easy four-wheel drive access to nearby rock hounding sites south of the campgrounds. The historic Bradshaw Trail National Scenic Byway passes between two LTVA campgrounds and provides access to numerous trails, gem and mineral collection sites, and historic stage route and mining areas. The entire area is known as the Wiley's Well Rock hounding area and contains a number of well-known collecting areas with colorful names like Potato Patch, Cornfield, Big Windy, Straw Beds, and Hauser Geode Beds.

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

BLM Action: The PSSCFO hosts a large volume of four-wheel drive traffic across the desert. Staff continues to install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities and sensitive habitat areas. Staff performs BLM ranger patrols to inform the public of OHV designations, provide assistance, and enforce regulations.

Status: Grants were awarded to PSSCFO for ongoing restoration work, outreach, enforcement, and signage conducted in the Mecca Hills, Dos Palmas, Big Morongo ACEC, Coachella Valley Preserve, and eastern Riverside County. The PSSCFO was awarded a grant for FY 2019, through the 2018 grant applications cycle, for law enforcement, operations, and maintenance. Farm Workers Institute of Leadership and Development (FIELD) was awarded an OHV Restoration grant in this cycle to do work in the Big Morongo ACEC for the protection of resources on BLM lands. This work is now underway in its third year and final year of the grant. A new round of proposals were submitted in March for the FY 2020 cycle. Grant funding for law enforcement (\$365,414), education (\$160,064) and planning that will cover three years to develop staging areas and other off highway vehicle issues within the

Meccacopia area (\$488,916) are all pending award.

Contact: Daniel Kasang, Outdoor Recreation Planner, PSSCFO

### **The Steel Peak fencing OHV grant**

Action/Status: Awarded in 2016, this grant was extended another year through December to finish fencing. This project is now complete and highly successful with a beautiful super bloom this spring! A county shooting restriction is now in place and has greatly reduced impacts from target shooting and dumping.

### **Law Enforcement**

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

Status: The office's federal law enforcement officers (LEOs) work in partnership with other federal, state, and local agencies on a variety of issues, including responding to law enforcement and medical emergencies. The PSSCFO LEOs assist other BLM offices for events to include Burning Man in Nevada, as well as the Imperial Sand Dunes in El Centro Field Office.

Contact: Scott Kotlowski, Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, PSSCFO

### **National Public Lands Day**

Action: Currently planning for fall 2020

Status: Last fall, the PSSCFO hosted three National Public Lands Day (NPLD) events; over 210 volunteers participated. The events focused on trash cleanup, trails maintenance, and fire rehabilitation in Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. Through the dedication of staff and volunteer support at these events, the cleans up debris from target shooting, homeless camps, and illegal dumping. These events protect and beautify public lands and provide opportunities for the public to engage, enjoy, and give back.

Contacts: Tracy Albrecht, Interpretive Education Specialist, PSSCFO; and Daniel Kasang, Outdoor Recreation Planner, PSSCFO

### **Interns**

BLM Action: The PSSCFO hosts a variety of intern crews for several different types of projects to educate youth in land management and stewardship of the land. More crews are expected this winter and into 2020.

Status: PSSCFO is currently hosting four recreation American Conservation Experience (ACE) interns and two biologists through BioResource Consultants (BRC). These interns perform critical project work and provide the office with additional capacity. They also get hands-on learning and experience for future employment with the federal government and natural resource management. There has been a reduced number of crews due to funding, furlough, and lack of staff to manage crews.

Contact: Jill Williams, Assistant Field Manager, PSSCFO

## **Volunteers**

BLM Action/Status: The PSSCFO benefits from more volunteer hours than any other BLM-California field office. The office promotes volunteerism in a wide range of public land management initiatives. With limited staffing and funding, volunteers provide mission-critical trails maintenance, public contact, research, monitoring, and education work. This program is mainly focused on management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC/Preserve. Extensive volunteer programs within the monument are developed by the Friends of the Desert Mountains and are outlined on their website: <http://www.desertmountains.org/volunteer.html>

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

Other volunteer efforts are implemented throughout the year, including habitat restoration, public land cleanups, archaeological site monitoring, and facility development and maintenance. In November 2017, the PSSCFO began a monthly bird walk at Dos Palmas Preserve / Desert National Conservation Lands with local birding clubs to begin the process of recording the various bird species in this unique desert riparian habitat.

## **National Monuments**

BLM Action: Repair and or replace fencing within the monument.

Background: Sand to Snow National Monument was designated by President Obama on February 12, 2016. Encompassing 154,000 acres, including just over 100,000 acres of previously-designated wilderness, Sand to Snow National Monument (SSNM) is an ecological and cultural treasure and one of the most biodiverse areas in southern California. The monument supports more than 240 species of birds and twelve threatened and endangered wildlife species and will protect outstanding sacred, archaeological, and cultural sites.

The monument is home to the tallest peak in Southern California – Mt. San Gorgonio, at 11,500 feet and lies at the crossroads of the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts and the South Coast eco-region. Featuring thirty miles of the world famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, the area is a favorite for camping, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, photography, wildlife viewing, and even skiing.

SSNM is jointly managed by the BLM and US Forest Service (USFS) through a Service-First Agreement. Both agencies, together, are initiating actions to meet the new responsibilities in managing this new national monument.

Status: The monument manager, Jihadda Govan, was hired in January 2017 and is an USFS employee based out of the San Bernardino National Forest, Supervisor's Office. A joint BLM-USFS interdisciplinary team was assembled in 2016 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 proclamation. The draft AMS is the first step in the planning process for the SSNM Land Use Plan (Monument Plan).

The Monument Plan will provide for the proper care and management of the 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 the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

BLM policy requires a unique set of land use decisions for each national monument (see BLM Manual Section 6220). If necessary, the Monument Plan may become a stand-alone plan, or amend the USFS Forest Plan and/or the BLM California Desert Conservation Area plan.

The planning effort is currently on hold.

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

### **Feral Cattle Removal**

An estimated 50-120 feral, unbranded cattle have found their way into the SSNM.

**BLM Action:** A plan is being drafted that will be cooperative in nature, involving California Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Wildlands Conservancy, the BLM, the Morongo Tribe of Mission Indians, and the San Bernardino National Forest. The plan is to replace and/or repair cattle exclusion fencing and removing cattle.

**Status:** Removal operations began in the spring and will continue into the spring of 2020 to address the concern. The contract to install fencing has been awarded to Mobilize Green, who is anticipated to begin fencing work in February/March of 2020.

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

### **Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument**

Designated by an Act of Congress in October 2000, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJMNM) encompasses over 280,000 acres of land. Its management plan and FEIS was completed in 2003. The SRSJMNM Visitor Center provides informational services, free environmental education programs, and shaded picnic areas and other amenities for tens of thousands of visitors per year.

BLM Actions: Plans are underway to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and upgrade the Visitor Center and surrounding grounds with a more interpretive look for visitors. Special events and programs are being planned for this special milestone as well as plans to upgrade the Visitor Center and surrounding grounds with a more interpretive look for visitors.

Surveys are on-going to reassess natural and artificial water resources within the monument that were last surveyed in 2014 and are critical to many species, especially Peninsular bighorn sheep.

In the 2018, SRSJMNM added “Agents of Discovery,” a virtual reality educational platform at the SRSJMNM Visitor Center, which is expanding to two additional locations, one in Sand to Snow National Monument and one at California Coastal National Monument. The app targets K-12 age youth with a virtual reality interactive experience that integrates the surrounding physical environment and teaches environmental stewardship.

Partnerships: SRSJMNM was the first service-first monument jointly managed by the BLM and USFS. There are many partners for the SRSJMNM, including the Cities of Palm Springs, Palm Desert, La Quinta, and Rancho Mirage, county-level government, Coachella Valley Assoc. of Governments, Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission, University of California, Riverside, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and Friends of the Desert Mountains.

BLM staff, Friends of the Desert Mountains volunteers and interns have been active in citizen science projects across the landscape. Friends staff and volunteers have also put in over 1,200 hours working with University of California, Riverside researchers to monitor floral and faunal responses to drought within the monument in 2018/2019. These research efforts in collaboration with enthusiastic citizen scientists are critical to managing the landscape and its resources.

Contact: Danielle Ortiz, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Acting Manager, PSSCFO

## ***Wildlife***

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

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

BLM Action: In 2013, the PSSCFO initiated meetings with the wind facility operators to discuss the need for more rigorous avian and bat surveys. Due to a lack of cohesive monitoring data to date, staff continues to have an insufficient understanding of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to bird and bat species from wind energy development. To compensate for this, the BLM has entered into its second year of a regional surveying effort to estimate wildlife abundance and estimates of fatality rates and develop statistical frameworks linking the two.

Status: The BLM has worked collaboratively with the USFWS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Conservation Canines, Rogue Detection Teams and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to develop standardized surveying protocols. These surveys are also designed to meet guidance by the USFWS for developing Bird and Bat Conservation Strategies and Eagle Conservation Plans, which will provide the information needed for permitting and adaptive management.

Surveys started in 2018 and will extend into 2020. The USGS is currently analyzing data collected from year one of the study and has canine detection teams currently out in the field for the second year of this research study.

Contact: Dani Ortiz, Wildlife Biologist, PSSCFO

### **National Bat Week**

The Coachella Valley is home to 20 out of the 21 species of bats in California – making the Coachella

Valley a great place to see bats any time of the year. Bats can be seen flying around every night around sunset, making their way over swimming pools, hiking trails, home, and even golf courses, drawing the interest of residents and visitors in the valley. So much interest that over 3,000 people participated in 2018's "Be a Bat Hero, Bat Week" in the greater Palm Springs area to learn about and support bats!

Action/Status: The PSSCFO organizes events that celebrate Bat Week. These events included guided night hikes with bat detectors, habitat restoration, lectures, and working with a local journalist on a mini documentary on bats in the Coachella Valley.

These staff-led and volunteer programs and contributions are invaluable to effectively managing our public lands by making the public aware of conservation needs and efforts in the local region. Additionally, these special events allow us to promote and collaborate with other agencies and non-profit organizations on conservation efforts.

Contact: Dani Ortiz, Wildlife Biologist, PSSCFO

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

PL 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing potential habitat creation/restoration sites and groundwater from public lands to help meet project environmental requirements. The Dos Palmas ACEC is a focus area for these efforts. Dos Palmas was designated as a California Desert National Conservation Lands area in September 2016 by the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan.

BLM Action: In cooperation with multiple parties, the BLM is implementing an MOU that includes the BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of a 17 acre marsh/aquatic habitat (completed), preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, and long-term management of these projects. This habitat management focuses on protection and enhancement of habitat for the endangered desert pupfish and Yuma clapper rail.

Status: The PSSCFO is finalizing an EA and biological assessment to programmatically manage the Created Marsh Yuma Clapper Rail habitat with prescribed burns.

Contact: Joel Miner, Natural Resource Specialist, PSSCFO

### **Riparian Restoration Activities**

BLM Action: Approximately 2,000 acres are annually inventoried for ecological condition, including stream corridors, mountain and desert oases, and other desert riparian communities.

Riparian assessments review avian riparian species present, noxious weed infestations, disturbances etc. Approximately 250 acres are treated annually; techniques include:

- Manual: hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as Sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, salt cedar, and fountain grass.
- Mechanical: chainsaw, dozer use for removal of salt cedar
- Chemical: herbicide cut stumps of salt cedar
- Biological: excessive aquatic vegetation removal within sensitive desert oasis using sterile grass carp in Dos Palmas ponds. The vast majority of the restoration is with the removal of tamarisk

(salt cedar). Once the salt cedar is removed the existing native seed bank responds quickly re-establishing itself.

- Locations: Numerous locations, including the Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill/ Willow Hole Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); various drainages within the Santa Rosa Mountains, including Boo Hoff, Sheep Canyon, Bear Creek, Cathedral Canyon, and Devils' Canyon.

Status: On-going.

Contact: Kevin Doran, Natural Resources Specialist, PSSCFO

## **Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO)**

### ***Minerals & Mining***

#### **Minerals & Mining Projects**

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

Status: see below

- Perdito Drilling Project, Conglomerate Mesa. Last fiscal year, various environmental groups requested the state director to review the RFO approval for drilling seven exploration holes on Conglomerate Mesa (CACA-56495). The state director has affirmed the RFO authorization for this operation. No group has appealed this decision to the Office of Hearings and Appeals. The operator must provide a financial guarantee (bond) before operations begin.
- Bush Management, Inc. proposes to acquire drill samples from seven sites at the Keystone lode claims in the southern Panamint Mountains (CACA-33965). The Keystone lode claims are accessed by Goler Canyon Road, immediately by the Manly Peak Wilderness and Death Valley National Park. The BLM issued the approval on December, 3, 2018, but the operator has not yet commenced operations.
- The Golden Queen Mine at Soledad Mountain continues to operate south of Mojave. Most of the pit and mineral deposit is on private lands.
- The Briggs Mine is now owned and operated by DV Natural Resources, LLC of Natural Bridge, VA. Excavation has ceased, but some gold continues to be produced from the existing heap leach pad. Bonds are in place. The operator is considering usage of microbes to extract a greater percentage of gold from the existing heap leach pad.
- Global Pumice has requested a new mineral material sales contract at the Makayla 2 location, about a mile east of the Makayla 1 mine site. They have hired a contractor to draft the environmental assessment. The BLM is working with the contractor to complete the EA.
- Sleepy Bear Mining, Fremont Valley: Need to review the bond and determine 5:1 habitat compensation. Both are conditions of approval for any authorized expansion.

- The BLM has approved a two-acre operation at the Snow White #5 placer claim on public lands within Red Rock Canyon State Park. The operator has obtained authorization from Red Rock State Park for the use of sections of the road through the park. The operation has been approved.
- The Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO) has completed an environmental assessment for battery minerals to drill and explore certain locations on the Panamint Dry Lake Bed. The decision was signed on August 9. Environmental groups asked for state director review however, the state director declined the review. The environmental groups then appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), where it is awaiting a decision on a request for a stay. If a stay is granted, the project will not begin until the IBLA has ruled on the case.
- The Rand Mine is in process of reclamation. A DNA is being completed to authorize a minor modification to the reclamation plan. The project will reduce slope angles on the West Valley Waste Rock stockpile with the goal of improving revegetation in the area.
- The BLM issued a mineral material sales contract to Searles Valley Minerals for the East Borrow Pit located on the east side of Searles Lake. Searles Valley Minerals is using the material from the pit for road construction in support of their lake operations.

Contacts: Randy Porter, Geologist, locatable and saleable minerals, RFO; and Brian Ferwerda, Geologist, solid leasable minerals, RFO

BLM Action: BLM oversight of Searles Valley Minerals operations.

- The Ridgecrest Field Office completed NEPA documentation and reports for renewing six sodium leases on Searles Lake. The State Office has issued the lease renewals to Searles Valley Minerals.
- The Ridgecrest Field Office is completing the documentation for renewing three potassium leases on Searles Lake. A categorical exclusion is being completed to satisfy NEPA requirements.

Contact: Brian Ferwerda, Geologist, solid leasable minerals, RFO

### **Abandoned Mine Lands**

BLM Action: Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) inventories are being conducted in conjunction with routes and trails in the Spangler Hills OHV Open area. The AML Program plans to safeguard as many as 30 dangerous mine openings in this region over the next several years to remove potential life threatening fall hazards.

Contact: Sterling White, CDD-Environmental Protection Specialist; RFO Office AML/ Hazmat Position- Vacant, Contact Tom Bickauskas)

Status: Geology, wildlife and archaeology staff is being cross-trained to aide in fieldwork related to AML work.

### CERCLA BLM Action:

The operation to remediate the arsenic issues with the Yellow Aster Mine Site (Descarga-OU2) through the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) processes was completed in April. The Kelly Mine Site (OU1) has undergone interim stabilization in conjunction with the planning for permanent site remediation.

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

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

## ***Grazing***

BLM Action: The Ridgecrest Field Office Grazing Program has been working on grazing permits. Rangeland Health Assessments continue to be a priority. Grazing permits not requiring changes to terms and conditions have been renewed under provisions of Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Three assessments were completed by BLM staff, but have not been released for public comment. Most stream assessment sites remain to be evaluated. Staff are transitioning to a more thorough monitoring protocol, Assessment - Inventory - Monitoring (AIM) over the next two years, which will yield statistically valid land health data, allowing trends to be more easily monitored over time, which will be useful to multiple programs in the field office. Ryan Klausch left the RFO on July 1, and his work has been suspended and transferred to another office, as needed. RFO is in the process of hiring a new Rangeland Management Specialist.

Contacts: Range Specialist, vacant (Tom Bickauskas until filled); Alex Neiberger, RMS for WH&B program, RFO

Status: Seventeen sheep and seven cattle grazing turnout authorizations were processed this spring due to high precipitation and excellent forage. Two grazing applications have been approved for December.

Total spring turnout numbers: 13,458 sheep (to include ewes and yearlings) and 1,610 cattle

## ***Renewable Energy & Transmission***

### **Camino Solar Project**

BLM Action: Aurora Solar, LLC has applied for a ROW grant in a Development Focus Area on federal lands and private lands for a solar energy facility with a maximum generating capacity of 44 megawatts. The Plan of Development is based on a previous application of the Tylerhorse Wind Project, in the same general vicinity of Kern County, where Camino is now proposed. Tylerhorse is no longer under consideration for development.

Status: Preliminary application meetings are ongoing. This is a CEQA/NEPA joint document. NOP has been reviewed. Pending Environmental documents for analysis.

Contact: Paul Rodriguez, Realty Specialist, RFO

### **Sky River, LLC**

Action: Sky River, LLC has applications for the following:

Construction of a new road; currently working on the environmental analysis Decommission of 14 lattice towers in the general vicinity of Pine Tree and North Sky River; currently reviewing the environmental analysis.

Status: Preliminary meetings are ongoing; this is an ongoing discussion of route determination.

Application for a 230Kv gen-tie transmission line from California City to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Jawbone Substation.

Status: Preliminary meetings are ongoing; currently reviewing the environmental.

Contact: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist, RFO

### **Geothermal Leasing Inspections**

BLM Action: The RFO is continuing to administer geothermal leases at Coso. The California State Office has been conducting inspections in support of the RFO due to vacancy of the Petroleum Engineering Technician position.

Status: There are currently three pending non-competitive geothermal lease applications covering roughly 4,460 acres of BLM administered public lands in the proposed Haiwee Geothermal Lease Area (HGLA). A Resource Management Plan Amendment will determine if the area will be available for leasing.

Contact: Matt Wokosin, Petroleum Engineering Technician, RFO

### ***Lands & Realty***

#### **Rights-of-Way**

BLM Action: Numerous ongoing Rights of Way applications from Southern California Edison, LADWP, universities, CALTRANS, communication sites, as well as various private and commercial authorizations are ongoing for the authorization and reauthorization of ROWS.

Status: Pending. Preliminary application meetings, final plans of developments, site visits, along with archeological and biological clearance reports for the authorizations and reauthorizations of ongoing ROWs.

#### Rights-of-Way Actions/Status:

- Mojave Public Utility District application to reroute a new segment of 10-inch a water line to serve the community of Cache Creek. Preliminary meetings are ongoing and currently working on the environmental.
- Sky River Wind LLC, application to construct a segment of the road south of the Norths Sky River Wind Project. Record of Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact Finalized. ROW grant to be issued by the end of 2019.
- Southern California Edison ROW Renewals. Numerous distribution power line ROW renewals through the Ridgecrest political boundary.
- Rand Water District, application to install a new water line along the Ransburg Wash Road and place a new water well. ROD and Finding of No Significant Impact finalized.

ROW grant to be issued December 2019.

- California High-Speed Rail Authority, application to construct a segment of the high-speed rail from Palmdale to Bakersfield California. Preliminary meetings are ongoing and currently working on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Southern California Edison – ROW renewals. Numerous distribution power line ROW renewals through the Ridgecrest political boundary.

Contact: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist, RFO

### **SCE transmission lines upgrades (TLLR)**

BLM Action: SCE transmission lines upgrades (TLLR) to three transmission lines that provide electricity to the Los Angeles area and suburbs. This upgrade will replace the existing metal towers with new towers to handle to power load from the Ivanpah Cool Water, Kramer Inyokern, and control Haiwee Projects.

Status: Pending. Preliminary application meetings for archeological, biological clearances, site visits, and Issuance of Notice to Proceed for geo-technical authorizations.

Contacts: Mark Macowitz, WO Project Manager, RFO; and Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist, RFO

### **LA Aqueduct**

BLM Action: Continuously working with the LADWP regarding the LA Aqueduct at Haiwee Reservoir in Inyo County. The project entails the relocation of a short segment of the LA Aqueduct onto BLM managed lands at the northwest corner of the Haiwee Reservoir as part of the construction of a second north dam. Pending issuance of the ROW.

Status: National Register of Historic Places eligibility evaluation was conducted by the consulting firm AECOM of 30 archeological sites, both prehistoric and historic, that could be affected. Final reports on the research are being completed by the consultant. Consultation continues with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and five tribes.

Contact: Paul Rodriquez, Realty Specialist, RFO

### ***Recreation***

#### **Partnerships**

BLM Action: Twenty two youth volunteers who are part of the Friends of Jawbone restoration crew are finishing on-the-ground restoration of degraded sites within the Ridgecrest Resource Area.

Status: Restoration crews apply their newly acquired skills to improve, protect and maintain existing trails and to erase illegally generated scars on the landscape with techniques such as vertical mulch and barriers. The RFO is extremely grateful for the long-standing partnership with Ed Waldheim and Friends of Jawbone.

Contact: Carrie Woods, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, RFO; and Dana Stephenson, Outdoor Rec Planner, RFO

BLM Action: Partnership with the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC).

Status: Continuance of the long-standing (over 40 year) partnership with DTPC to assist in managing the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.

Contact: Clint Helms, New Wildlife Biologist, RFO; and Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Contract Bio Tech, RFO

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

BLM Action: The RFO currently employs one Resource Intern and two Recreation Interns. Twelve ACE members began working in the Red Mountain and in the Wilderness Areas in November, and will finish in early June. One late season crew is working on restoration at the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. Some of the many tasks these individuals have undertaken include: desert restoration, seed collection, rangeland health assessments, riparian and spring proper functioning condition assessments, cultural resource inventory and recordation, interpretation and outreach, along with NEPA planning.

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

Status: Additional interns may be added or replaced as funding sources are identified who can be managed effectively by permanent staff. Staff is scheduling public events with the intent of educating and informing the public about the many features and benefits that Americans receive from their public lands.

Contact: Carl Symons, RFO

### **Jawbone Station**

For the last eight years, the BLM has partnered with the Friends of Jawbone (FOJ), a local non-profit group, to assist with management plan implementation efforts within the area. The FOJ maintains a staff of between eight and twenty individuals for fieldwork crews. These staff members take on several different tasks including habitat restoration, road and trail maintenance using heavy equipment and hand tools, management area and route signing, recreation facility maintenance, and trash pickup.

BLM Action: The FOJ continues to provide staffing to operate and maintain the visitor center, which is open seven days a week throughout the year from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Status: Visitation to the Jawbone Station and surrounding public lands is picking back up as the temperature cools down and the holiday season should be busy. The visitor center continues to stock unique and appropriate educational books and maps.

Contact: Randy Masner, Recreation; Craig Beck, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief, RFO

## **Special Recreation Permits**

The Ridgecrest Field Office (RFO) special recreation permit (SRP) season is in high gear; typical activities include the issuance of SRPs for motorcycle races, running events, endurance horseback rides, jeep tours, truck races, group outings, vision quests, off-road vehicle education clinics, and vending permits. RFO issues approximately 40 SRPs annually.

BLM Action/Status: From September through the end of December the office will issue and administer 27 SRPs. These permits are for activities such as motorcycle races, four-wheel drive tours, dual sport tours, equestrian endurance rides, ultra-marathon run, mountain bike race, off road vehicle safety clinics, guided motorcycle tours and group outings. A few local vendors sell their products at related events, such as competitive off-highway vehicle (OHV) races in the Spangler Hills OHV Open Area.

Contact: Craig Beck, Outdoor Recreation Planner, RFO

## **Public law 116-9, the Dingell Act**

BLM Action: This new omnibus act affects the RFO with the following changes:

- Creation of one new wilderness area, by converting a Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the Great Falls Basin, and expanded one area, the Golden Valley Wilderness area.
- Designation of Surprise Canyon as a Wild and Scenic River.
- Expansion of Spangler Hills OHV Recreation Area by 31,000 acres.

Status: Implementation of these provisions requires California State Office and Washington Office review and direction.

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

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

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

Status: RFO staff are routinely monitoring and maintaining the trail systems along with improving signing efforts in locations where confusion may still exist. The office continues to maintain information kiosks within each region within the WEMO Plan Area. The public is encouraged to report missing or confusing signs for review/correction/replacement.

Contact: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, RFO

## **State OHV Grants**

BLM Action: The RFO was awarded four grants totaling \$1,566,097 from the Department of Parks and Recreation (CA Parks) Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division for the 2018/2019 grant cycle. The four grants were for ground operations, restoration, development, and law enforcement.

Status: The RFO is extremely grateful to the State of California for these funds. This funding provides for staffing, management, and maintenance that allow the office to provide the numerous activities enjoyed by the public land users, much of which would not be possible without this state funding.

Contact: Craig Beck, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, RFO

### **Law Enforcement**

BLM Action: The RFO's Law Enforcement continues to spend considerable time and effort in patrolling and monitoring the WEMO designated route areas to detect and deter illegal off-road travel activity. A new UTV enables staff to cover more ground, providing more public contact and flexibility in responding to calls. Staff continues to monitor efforts of Special Recreation Permits and patrol the four open OHV areas and the Pacific Crest Trail. Staff also regularly cooperates with DOI, Office of Law Enforcement & Security (OLES), CHP, and County Sheriff's Offices.

Status: All rangers are trained and qualified.

Current staffing: Field Staff Ranger Dengal; Field Staff Ranger Chaidez; Field Staff Ranger Woods and Chief Ranger Watson. Two new rangers have accepted job offers; their start dates are TBD.

Contact: James Watson, Chief Ranger, RFO

### **Wilderness Management Activities**

BLM Action: Wilderness and non-wilderness state parks off-highway vehicle funded restoration crews have arrived at the RFO for the 2019-2020 season.

Status: Both crews have completed restoration training and staffed outreach efforts over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend (see photos below for preliminary restoration and re-touch efforts on Schoolhouse (Heller Rocks) Trail). In December, the wilderness crew will monitor and retreat restoration sites along the Kiavah Wilderness boundary. After Christmas, the crew will move north to finish work in the White Mountains and Sylvania Mountains wildernesses, before moving on to Saline Valley to start restoration work along the east side of the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. Additional California Desert District wilderness restoration crews will help with implementation of the Dingell Act; crews will focus on signing, restoration, and inventory of the new Great Falls Basin Wilderness.

### **Inyo Salt Tram Fire Remediation Project**

BLM Action: Four committed volunteers assisted the BLM in clearing a large salt tram structure of small saplings and trees within the fire susceptible pinyon belt on the east side of the Inyo Crest. This year, the work took place over a three-day period in September. Volunteers camped on the crest and hiked down to the site and climbed back up the 1,500 feet daily to remove trees with loppers and handsaws and to scatter the woody debris.

Status: To date, the RFO has cleared three-and-a-half of the eleven structures proposed for work; this is

an on-going project and prospective volunteers are encouraged to contact Marty Dickes at [mdickes@blm.gov](mailto:mdickes@blm.gov).

### **National Sierra Club Service Outing – Annual Tamarisk Removal in Saline Valley/Inyo Canyons**

Action: For more than 10 years, the Sierra Club has provided volunteers to help with the BLM's on-going tamarisk control project. Volunteers come from across the United States and actually pay to fly to California and camp in Saline Valley for a week to pull, cut, swamp, and assist RFO staff in spraying herbicides. This year volunteers continued to mop up in Hunter Canyon and monitor and retreat sites in McEvoy, Badwater Springs, lower Pat Keyes (between the first two falls), and Willow Creek. This year it took only a half-day to treat the entire Willow Creek drainage. No tamarisk was located in Beveridge Canyon. Next year, volunteers will focus on Paiute and lower Cougar, and with the help of climbers, the falls area in upper Pat Keyes will be restored. Nearly 60 acres were treated, with additional acreage monitored.

### **Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic Comprehensive River Management Plan**

BLM Action: The RFO staff and Inyo National Forest staff are working on a coordinated resource management plan. Work is in the preliminary stages and will not be completed and available for public review until next year.

Status: Wilderness Character Reports have been completed for the Piper Mountains Wilderness and the Sylvania Mountains Wilderness.

Contact: Marty Dickes, ORP/Wilderness Coordinator, RFO

### **Film Permits**

BLM Action: Filming in the Ridgecrest Field Area continues to be busy.

Due to the 7.1 and 6.4 magnitude earthquakes in areas surrounding Ridgecrest in July, filming did slow down and a number of film projects either cancelled or moved to other locations as the Ridgecrest and Trona communities were impacted by the earthquakes.

Some film locations were also affected by the earthquakes; one large pinnacle at Trona Pinnacles lost its "head" due to a rock fall and cracks were made larger in some pinnacles, also the exterior side walls of the mine addit at the Trona Pinnacles caved in, blocking the entrance to the addit. Rock fall affected the access road to Poison Canyon and small canyons in the area previously used for filming are no longer accessible due to cave in, rock fall, or shifted landscape; these areas are still being evaluated.

Productions in June were filmed at different locations throughout the Ridgecrest Resource Area such as, Trona Pinnacles, Spangler Hills, and Jawbone Canyon. These productions included a TV and web commercial for the new Honda Talon side-by-side, an independent movie set in Biblical times, "His Only Son", which included set construction, working animal actors, and actors in extensive wardrobe and make-up, directed by an award winning director, and an episode for an Australian TV Series, "The Dark Tower."

There were no film productions in July, but in August filming picked back up as the area recovered. August through October were filled with production companies filming car commercials, and a number

of independent feature films have been filmed at Cuddeback Dry Lake, Koen Dry Lake, and Trona Pinnacles, and an episode for the HBO TV series “Silicon Valley,” as well as a commercial for United Airlines, and scenes for a the Star Wars fan film, “Kenobi” were shot at the Trona Pinnacles. Also scenes for an episode for the TV series, “ Shelter Me” were shot at the Ridgecrest BLM Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, for an episode of, "The Mustangs: An American Story,” Upcoming film projects include Motor Trend Magazine, a student film production, a music video, and a remake of a feature film. Film inquiries continue to come in almost daily.

Status: Filming continues to be an important use on the public lands within the RFO area and surrounding communities, which highlights the varied natural wonders in the desert landscape.

### **Earthquake-related Activities**

Since the earthquakes, RFO staff have observed PG&E crews and geologists working in multiple areas in Trona and Ridgecrest and also off Hwy 178. In July and August, temporary land use permits were issued to U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and University of California, Riverside (UCR) in coordination with USGS for Deployment of Emergency Seismic Stations after the M7.1 earthquake on July 5, which occurred near Ridgecrest. USGS geologists from Pasadena and Albuquerque, NM, deployed and installed seismic stations in the Randsburg Wash Road Area and off Hwy 178, China Lake, Trona, Ridgecrest, and in and out of buildings and multiple areas. UCR student geologists have installed seismic stations by the railroad tracks and elsewhere. NASA deployed drone targets in the area between Hwy 178 and Randsburg Road to catch ground shake from the air using drone aerial photography. The Southern California Earthquake Center is measuring cracks in the ground. The RFO employees have been notified in the event they encounter crews and/or equipment in the field and to assist them in answering questions as members of the public have reported or inquired about activities they have observed. This influx of people will impact the community for a while, creating a higher demand at hotels, restaurants, grocery stores, banks, etc.

BLM Action: Since the earthquake, RFO staff have issued temporary land use permits to Green Geophysical, contractors for the University of Oregon, who are conducting a study in coordination with NASA for Magneto-Telluric Array Stations. USGS and UCR have requested extensions of their permits, as the area is continuing to experience multiple, smaller earthquakes.

Status: An additional application from USGS to install seismic station on Pinnacle tops is in process.

Contact: Elaine Hanson, Lands and Realty Specialist, RFO

### **Southern California Edison Ongoing Pole Replacement**

Action: SCE is continuing to replace numerous poles on BLM land along roads within the SCE right of way (ROW). SCE poles that may pose public health and safety or wildfire risks will be expedited and replacement facilitated. The new poles are being brought in and set via truck or handset; no new access roads will be constructed for this purpose.

Status: Standard hole excavation depths range between seven and 10 feet with a three feet diameter. The area of soil disturbance will be limited to a radius of five to 10 feet around the pole, as well as light disturbances relating to construction within a general 50 foot radius around the pole. No significant brush removal or trimming is expected to be required of the project.

Contact: Elaine Hanson, Realty Specialist, RFO

## ***Wild Horses & Burros***

The Ridgecrest Corral is currently home to 250 wild horses and burros.

### WHB Actions:

- Adoptions: Approximately 350 animals have found homes through adoptions in FY 2019. The Wild Horse and Burro staff have attended events in Norco, Santa Maria, and Bishop; Ramona is the last event for the spring season.

Staff went to the Norco Horse Affair in October and placed 24 horses and burros in adoptive homes. In partnership with Backcountry Horseman of California, staff placed 30 animals in an hour at the Rendezvous event. In the spring, staff moved roughly 50 animals per month during open house events.

- Gathers: The National program has not yet released this year's gathers. Staff has been advised to expect 500 to 700 head of horses and burros.
- Public Relations: The Ridgecrest Corrals took four weanling burros and four weanling horses to the Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival to greet people and spread awareness of the adoption program. The Ridgecrest Corrals hosts school tours and enjoyed a visit from St Ann's last November, with 30 children learning about the animals and feeding them carrots.

Status: Adoptions continue year round on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month.

### **2020 Adoption Events:**

Jan 17-18, 2020 Redlands WH&B event –

27273 Pilgrim Rd, Redlands, CA 92373 (Sundance Ranch)

Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (adoption), and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (TIP pickup only)

April 17-18, 2020 – Redlands WH&B event

27273 Pilgrim Rd, Redlands, CA 92373 (Sundance Ranch)

Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (adoption), and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (TIP pickup only)

May 22, 2020 – Mule Days

Eastern Sierra Tri-County Fairgrounds, 1234 Sierra St., Bishop, CA 93514

Times TBD – contact Ridgecrest WH&B Corrals for more info at (760) 384-5765 or (800) 951-8720

July 17-18, 2020 – Redlands WH&B event

27273 Pilgrim Rd, Redlands, CA 92373 (Sundance Ranch)

Friday from 10:00 am to 5:00 p.m., Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (adoption), and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (TIP pickup only)

August 7-9 – Extreme Mustang Makeover

Los Angeles Equestrian Center, 480 Riverside Dr., Burbank, CA 91506

Times TBD – contact Ridgecrest WH&B Corrals for more info (760) 384-5765 or

(800) 951-8720

Contact: Grant Lockie, Corral Manager, RFO

### ***Cultural Resources***

BLM Action: The RFO Cultural Program has been working on the Los Angeles Aqueduct and the office continues to work with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) on a major project involving the aqueduct at the North Haiwee Reservoir in Inyo County. This involves the relocation of a short segment of the aqueduct onto BLM managed lands at the northwest corner of the Haiwee Reservoir as part of the construction by LADWP of a second North Dam. National Register of Historic Places eligibility evaluation and Determinations of Adverse Effects have been completed by the BLM and consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and with five Tribes regarding the approval of a Memorandum of Agreement that outlines how the BLM will address a number of Adverse Effects to National Register eligible Historic Properties is currently underway.

Other Important Work Activities:

- Oversight and review of cultural survey reports is being completed by both archeological consultants for Southern California Edison (SCE) and by CDD Archeologists for SCE's on-going deteriorated wood power pole replacement program.
- Continuation of cultural surveys of OHV designated routes and illegal tracks prior to the rehab of these tracks by ACE, SCE, AmeriCorps and Friends of Jawbone work crews in the Jawbone-Butterbredt, Red Mountain, Rand Mountain, and several wilderness areas.

Contacts: Donald Storm, Senior-Lead Archaeologist, RFO; Danny Tyree, BLM Archaeologist, RFO; and Kirsten Carroll, Friends of Jawbone funded Field Archeologist, RFO

Status: The cultural program remains extremely busy.

### ***Wildlife***

BLM Action: The RFO Wildlife Program is working on:

- a continued partnership with Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and together hosted a clean-up and invasive plant species eradication event for National Public Lands Day.
- surveys in the area included: desert tortoise, Inyo California towhee, special status plants, and White Mountain bat surveys
- utilized USFWS programmatic Biological Opinion for routine projects
- continued Inyo California towhee recovery efforts with USFWS, DOD, and CDFW
- DRECP implementation for projects
- WEMO route designation
- Special Recreation Permit biological monitoring

Status: Active

Contacts: Clint Helms, New Wildlife Biologist, RFO; Priscilla Watson-Wynn, Contract Bio Tech, RFO; and Caroline Woods, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, RFO

## **Soil-Water-Air-Botany**

BLM Action: Groundwater Sustainability Agency. In September 2014, then Governor Jerry Brown signed historic legislation requiring California's most critical groundwater resources to be sustainably managed. With the governor's signature, groundwater would be comprehensively managed for the first time in the state's history.

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

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

Status: The Indian Wells Valley Ground Water Authority has released a draft of the Groundwater Sustainability Plan for public and technical review. A public workshop and separate hearing will take place in Ridgecrest in January, 2020. The draft plan is available here: <https://iwvga.org/gsp-chapters>

Contact: Natural Resource Specialist, vacant: (Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager), RFO