

HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Report

December, 2018

Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)

BLM Action: On February 12, 2016, Presidential Proclamation 9395 (81 FR 8371) established the Mojave Trails National Monument within an area managed under the California Desert Conservation Area Plan. This monument contains approximately 1.6 million acres of Bureau of Land Management managed public lands. The proclamation established a three year timeframe to develop a management plan for the Monument. The management plan will provide a comprehensive management approach to the objects and values for which the Monument was designated. Development of a single management plan would provide management goals, objectives and allowable uses of the area that may or may not have been analyzed or addressed in existing documents.

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

Contact: Kyle Sullivan, Monument Manager

Status:

Monument Review

Mojave Trails National Monument was included in the Executive Order (13792) reviewing National Monuments created under the Antiquities Act since 1996 that are larger than 100,000 acres. The final report, released December 5, 2017, did not recommend changes to Mojave Trails. The report did call for an ongoing review of monuments to ensure that while continuing to protect objects, the proclamations prioritize public access; infrastructure upgrades, repair and maintenance; traditional use; tribal cultural use; and hunting and fishing rights. Since the review, public planning processes for the Monument have been placed on hold, including Tribal Consultation, Cooperating Agency invitations and meetings, public meetings (including scoping meetings), and Resource Advisory Council subgroup meetings.

Mojave Trails Subgroup

At the February 2017 meeting, the Advisory Council stated their desire to develop a sub-group focused on assisting the BLM with the Mojave Trails planning effort. The DAC approved a list of 24 positions to solicit applications in order to establish a balanced subgroup with expertise in many areas, including utility right-of-ways, motorized recreation, Native American tribes, local communities, state agencies and other interests. The nomination period lasted until April 10, 2017 and the BLM received approximately 20 applications. No action has been taken since that time.

Community Relations

The Bureau of Land Management recently signed a Gateway Community MOU with the City of Twentynine Palms focused on Mojave Trails National Monument. Since that time, the city has developed a Tourism Business Improvement District that accrues fees from a 1.5% sales tax on all hotel rooms sold within city limits. This funding will be used to develop visitor information, brochures, maps, potentially kiosks, and other information/outreach materials. In addition, the exploding popularity of Joshua Tree National Park (~3 million visitors in 2017) means that community leaders are looking for other opportunities to draw more tourists, get them to stay longer, and generate more sustainable revenue streams. In July and September 2018, the BLM hosted two workshops for travel and tourism providers in Twentynine Palms to provide information about the BLM and Mojave Trails.

The BLM is interested in establishing similar partnerships with the cities of Barstow and Needles.

Next Steps

Mojave Trails is positioned to be on the leading edge of visitor engagement. The Monument is exploring opportunities such as a virtual visitor center, a student-driven research program, and gateway partnerships with adjacent communities. If you are interested in contributing to the success of these programs, please contact Kyle Sullivan.

Castle Mountain Mine Re-opening

BLM Action: The NEFO has been contacted by New Castle Gold about the possibility of re-opening the Castle Mountain Gold Mine. The mine was operated by the Viceroy Mining Company from approximately 1991 through 2001. NewCastle has requested a third phase of exploratory drilling, and anticipates a proposal to reopen the mine in 2019.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manger

Status: The Castle Mtn Venture completed a broad array of natural and cultural resource surveys during 2018. The surveys are in support of not only the Phase III Exploratory Drilling program, but also recently proposed Run of Mines (ROM) modification to the current plan. The BLM consider this updated data in its authorization of the Phase III Exploratory Drilling program.

The ROM is intended to restart the mine by reprocessing material previously thought to be of too low of grade to be profitable to process. BLM is currently reviewing the Draft Proposed ROM and working with CMV to the proposal for consideration.

Danby Dry Lake Sodium Leasing Update

BLM Action: After a review of our files and inspection of two Sodium Lease operations on Danby Dry Lake NFO has determined that, the operations are not current with the approved Administrative Record. The two operations, Salt Products and Valley Salt do not appear to have authorized Plans of Operation, Reclamation Plans, State/County Permits and Reclamation Bonds.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office
San Bernardino County, Land Use Services Department - Mining

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Needles Field Office Manager

Status: A complete review of the existing Administrative Record and an inspection by a certified Mineral Mines Inspector has been completed and documented. As Salt Products is currently not in full operation, NFO has shared the discrepancies with them to begin a dialog regarding the correctness of our Administrative Record. If the discrepancies are accurate, NFO will work with Salt Products to bring the operation into compliance.

Valley Salt has provided BLM with an updated Proposed Plan of Operation. BLM has reviewed the Proposed Plan is working with Valley Salt to perfect it. Once Valley Salt provides the necessary information to perfect the proposed plan of operations, BLM will consider it through an appropriate NEPA analysis.

First Solar Stateline Solar Farm

BLM Action: Desert Stateline, LLC, now owned in partnership with Southern Power and First Solar Development, Inc. (First Solar) operating a 300-megawatt alternating current solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating project known as the Stateline Solar Farm. The PV generating facility (Solar Farm), the corridor for the Project's 220-kilovolt (kV) generation interconnection (gen-tie) transmission line, and the access road is to be located in western Ivanpah Valley, east of Interstate 15 and northeast of the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System project. The project connects to the Southern California Edison (SCE) regional transmission grid via SCE's Ivanpah Substation.

Agencies: California Desert District Renewable Energy Action Team and Needles Field Office

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: The facility is now fully operational and in production. NFO is currently working to coordinate completion of two off-site mitigation measures required through the Stateline Solar FEIS and Biological Opinion. The two projects are providing tortoise fencing along 13 miles of Morning Star Mine Rd. within the Mojave Preserve, and restoration and recreation improvements on public land adjacent to the facility and Whisky Pete's casino.

Interconnect Towers, LLC.

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

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Contacts: Mike Ahrens, Field Manager

Status: During 2018 the NFO authorized communication sites at Ash Hills, Halloran Springs, and Nipton Rd/I15 NFO continues to work with ICT to authorize the I40/Hwy 95 site. ICT has indicated that it will withdraw the I40/Park Moabi site due to resource concerns.

Partnerships

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

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

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

All three maps covering the Needles Field Office jurisdiction have been completed and are now available through the CTUC, and the Needles Field Office.

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

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

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