

State of California - The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
Division of Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation

APPLICATION FOR STATE OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE GRANT

See Manual for Instructions

PROJECT NUMBER:
State's Use Only

OR

APPLICANT (Name and Address): Title: BLM-EI Centro Field Office Address: 1661 S. 4 th St. City: El Centro State: CA Zip 92243	PROJECT TITLE (4 Words Maximum) Yuha / West Mesa Restoration FY2003
VEHICLE TYPE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> M/C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ATV <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4WD <input type="checkbox"/> OSV <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DB	AMOUNT REQUESTED (Total Grant Amount) \$584,000.00 (round to \$1,000)
NEAREST CITY: _____ Ocotillo	COUNTY NUMBER (S) _____
COST BY SUB-ACTIVITIES (C&E): Restoration \$463,000.00 Enforcement \$ 82,500.00 TOTAL C&E \$583,500.00	ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION (Check): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complete <input type="checkbox"/>
APPLICANTS AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE AND CONTACT PERSONS (TYPE DO NOT SIGN) 1) <u>Greg Thomsen</u> <u>Field Office Manager</u> <u>(760) 337-4400</u> Authorized Representative Title Phone Number 2) <u>Dallas Meeks</u> <u>Outdoor Recreation Planner</u> <u>(760) 337-4453</u> Project Administration/Coordination Contact Title Phone Number	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (State specifically what you will do with the requested funds)

This grant application requests funding for rehabilitating unauthorized routes within the West Mesa Area. Funds are requested to support a twelve-member crew utilizing contract labor from the California Conservation Corp Crew (CCC), a restoration ecologist from the Environmental Careers Organization (ECO), and an Outdoor Recreation Planner to oversee the project and direct the follow-up monitoring of the restoration work. The El Centro Field Office will: (1) Install trail markers on approved routes (pending completion of the WECO Plan) and "Closed Route" signs on unapproved routes; (2) Erect new protective barriers and/or fences around sensitive archaeological and cultural sites within the Yuha Desert Area of Critical Environmental Concern; and (3) Prepare interpretative and informational literature to inform the public about the West Mesa Area, its allowed uses, and the need for visitors to stay on the approved routes to preserve habitat for flat-tailed horned lizards (FTHL), the Peninsular bighorn sheep, and sensitive archaeological sites.

The undersigned understands and does hereby promise that soil survey/monitoring, wildlife habitat survey/management and OHV law enforcement programs/activities will be complete and/or implemented, as applicable, pursuant to Section 5090.53 of the Public Resources Code

I certify that this project conforms with appropriate land use plans, CEQA, and all other required environmental documentation

SIGNED: _____
Authorized Representative Only Date

II. DESCRIPTION OF OHV OPPORTUNITIES

Map of the Project Area

Refer to the project area map on the following page.

Description

The West Mesa Area (hereafter the Area), which includes the Plaster City Open Area and the Superstition Mountain Open Area, is located within a two- to three-hour drive from Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, San Diego (CA) and Tucson and Phoenix (AZ). The Area is a popular and highly valued recreation resource that provides, in addition to OHV use, other recreational opportunities including hiking, horseback riding, wildlife and scenery viewing, picnicking, photography, nature study and environmental education, camping, sightseeing, and driving for pleasure. There are also unique destinations such as the De Anza Trail and special natural areas such as the Crucifixion Thorn Natural Area. Also, opportunities abound to visit rare archaeological sites such as the Yuha Geoglyphs, or intaglios, and fossil-bearing outcrops such as the Yuha Desert Shell Beds and Fossil Canyon. However, the steadily increasing population growth in southern California and western Arizona metropolitan areas and the expanding popularity of OHV recreation have resulted in a major increase in visitation to all recreation areas, including the West Mesa Area.

The West Mesa Area consists of 1,240 miles of open routes, 41 miles of limited route. It has two OHV Open Areas, Plaster City and Superstition Mountain, and two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), the Yuha Basin and the West Mesa. The Area is bounded on the west by three federally designated wildernesses: Fish Creek, Coyote, and Jacumba. The increase in use of West Mesa Area has resulted in proliferation of off-route driving in limited-use areas such as the ACECs and in development of unapproved routes. The results are threats to National Register Eligible cultural and archaeological resources and loss of habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii* – FTHL) and the Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis cremnobates*). Work would start in the Yuha ACEC and expand to the other areas of concern as funding is available.

In addition, the US Border Patrol initiated “Operation Gatekeeper” (USBP) in 1994 to control and deter traffic of undocumented aliens into metropolitan areas. The traffic was displaced into eastern San Diego County and remote desert regions of Imperial County. USBP apprehensions for the El Centro Sector rose from approximately 66,000 in 1996 to over 300,000 for 1999. Increased vigilance has resulted in an increased threat to natural and cultural resources, impacts to landscape naturalness and special features within federally designated wilderness areas, soil compaction from cross-country USBP vehicle and foot travel, development of unapproved roads and trails, and an increased amount of litter and abandoned vehicles.

The purpose of this grant application is to: (1) address the increased recreation demand and other uses within the West Mesa Areas by restoring the vegetation on unapproved OHV routes; (2) install directional signs and barriers where needed and install kiosks at key entry points; (3) protect sensitive archaeological resources with new fencing; (4) develop an informational brochure about the area, the natural and cultural resources, and allowable recreation activities.

Rehabilitation will occur principally in the Yuha Basin ACEC. The West Mesa ACEC will receive thorough signing. Specific sites refer to the Route of Travel Environmental Assessment.

Visitor Demand

Annual visitation in FY 2001 for the West Mesa Area is estimated at 141,904 visitors. The visitation within the Yuha Desert, Plaster City, and West Mesa Areas mirrors the use patterns of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA). Thus the peak visitation times are the six major holiday weekends between October and April: Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas/New Year's Day, Martin Luther King, President's Day, and Easter.

Vehicle Types

The vehicles used in the West Mesa Areas include: sand rails, dune buggies, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, 4WD pickups, 2WD pickups, sport utility vehicles, and custom-built off-road vehicles.

Volunteer Programs

During FY 2002, the El Centro Field Office organized work parties of volunteers from a variety of groups and clubs: the Sierra Club, the Desert Protective Council, the USBP, the Student Career Association (SCA), and the general public. The purpose of the work was to restore habitat for the Peninsular bighorn sheep and the FTHL and to eradicate invasive plant species such as tamarisk species (*Tamarix* spp.). The number of active volunteers assisting in the rehabilitation efforts differs from event to event. Most events have between ten and twenty participants, and the events only last one day usually.

The El Centro Field Office also has a network of volunteer archaeological site monitors under the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP). These monitors watch over threatened and sensitive archaeological sites and features. The CASSP program currently has one active volunteer working in the West Mesa Area. The volunteer monitors the Yuha Geoglyphs three times a year. A new outreach effort to expand on the CASSP program is scheduled for September 21-22, 2002.

Long-Term Use

The increase in visitor use of the YUHA Desert ACEC in particular, with corresponding increase in off route travel coupled with inadequate law enforcement present due to staffing shortages, is a threat to the sustainability of OHV recreation in the area. Due to the situation mentioned above there is an increasing demand by the environmental community for the BLM to control the problem or close the YUHA Desert ACEC until the problem can be addressed. The Yuha ACEC is critical habitat for the FTHL, a species being considered for listing by the USF&WS as threatened, and is home to numerous sensitive archeological and cultural sites. The FTHL and Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat and the presence of cultural and historical sites coupled with uncontrolled off route travel presents a threat to the continue use of OHVs in this area. With funding of this grant the BLM will be able to move proactively forward in resolving these issues.

Facilities Schedule

There are no restrictions regarding access to staging areas and roads within the main West Mesa Area. Painted Gorge, located on the east side of the Coyote Mountains, is a popular camp area

that is closed to vehicle traffic during the peninsular bighorn sheep lambing season between Dec 31 and July 1.

III. O & M DELIVERABLES

With funding, this grant will address impacts to natural and cultural resources from increased human use in the West Mesa Area. This will be accomplished by installing open and closed route signs and kiosks, by fencing threatened National Register-Eligible archaeological sites, by rehabilitating unapproved routes and installing barriers, where appropriate, and by developing interpretive brochures which will include maps showing the approved routes. The initial work indicated above will start in the Yuha Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Facility Repair and Servicing

Not Applicable to This Grant Application

Volunteer Use and Coordination

To expand the role of volunteers in restoration of desert ecosystems in the Area, the El Centro Field Office will hire a term-appointed Ecologist. One task for the Ecologist is to engage service organizations, interested recreation groups, and the general public in the design, preparation, implementation, and monitoring of restoration projects throughout the Area. In addition, where tamarisks have taken hold on BLM lands to the detriment of native species and ecosystem functions, especially hydrological function, volunteers will assist the Ecologist in routing these non-native species and preparing sites for restoration efforts.

The photographs on the following two pages are examples from the Area in need of restoration projects.

The field office will also renew efforts to expand its network of volunteer archaeological site monitors under the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP).

Refer also to the section on Trash Collection below for additional volunteer programs.

Site Administration and Direct OHV Program / Grant Administration

Not Applicable to This Grant Application

Trash Collection

With increased human presence in the Area from OHV-related and other sources, the quantity of trash building up in the Area has exceeded the current capacity of infrastructure and BLM staff to keep the desert environment free of trash. BLM park rangers will arrange clean-ups every other month beginning in November through April and recruit volunteers among the recreation communities and other interest groups concerned with environmental quality of the Area. Volunteer groups made up from members of the Sierra Club, Desert Protective Council, and USBP have already assisted the BLM in addressing this issue.

First Aid Equipment & Supplies

Not Applicable to this Grant Application

Design and Printing for Brochures and Maps

Grant funds are requested to design and produce interpretative and informational brochures. The purpose of the brochures is to inform OHV enthusiasts and other visitors about the unique features of the West Mesa Area: the diverse natural and cultural resources, traditional and modern uses of the land, the locations of approved routes, and allowable activities of interest to OHV-recreation visitors.

Construction of Physical Barriers and Other Traffic Controls

Approximately ten miles of barriers will discourage OHV activity on unapproved routes as determined by the Western Colorado Routes of travel (WECO). These barriers will be left in place after restoration work of the routes is complete to reduce future off-route travel. Barriers will be removed after the restoration sites are sufficiently unrecognizable as past routes. Restoration Project signs will be installed to help inform the public and to help keep vehicles off the sites.

Trail Maintenance

Trail maintenance will not be applicable to this grant until the WECO travel designation is finalized. Currently, the Environmental Assessment (EA) is in progress with a completion date set for January of 2003. The number of miles of trails to be maintained will depend on which alternative is selected. Currently there are approximately 1240 miles routes considered "open", 41 miles of routes considered "limited", and 250 miles of routes considered "closed". Once the routes of travel has been finalized, trail maintenance on the approved routes will consist of eliminating excessive widths of the routes, parallel routes, excessive rutting, and installation of route markers.

Routine Visitor Monitoring and Surveys

Not Applicable to This Grant Application

Minor Trail Relocation

Not Applicable Until the Route Closures are Specified

Mitigation and Protection for Cultural Resources

BLM will install approximately twenty miles of fencing around sensitive archeological and cultural sites to improve their protection and install additional signs. Interpretative brochures will be developed to help inform and educate the public on these unique resources.

Purchases of Tools and Equipment Exceeding \$250

Not Applicable to This Grant Application

Kiosks, Signboards, Regulatory, and Directional Signs

Approximately 100 "Closed Area" or "Closed Route" signs are needed to guide OHV drivers away from unapproved routes. Additionally, signing (updating) of approved routes will occur when the WECO travel designation EA is completed. Completion is court ordered by the end of January 2003.

V. LAW ENFORCEMENT PLANS

Maps of Patrol Sectors and Management Hotspots

Law Enforcement Issues

The West Mesa Area has unique and complex law enforcement and legal concerns stemming from the unique terrain, geopolitical position, and growing OHV visitation. Managing the area is difficult because the number of people fluctuates widely during the year. Although most visitors are family-oriented and have a good time while visiting, a small percentage of people cause most of the problems for law enforcement.

The BLM operates under multiple constraints for law enforcement. The Agency must increase enforcement directed at growing crowds in the Superstition Mountain OHV Open Area and the Plaster City OHV Open Area, to enforce laws without greatly impacting the quality of use enjoyed by most of the visiting public. Much lawless behavior stems from young adults and juveniles who traverse the area in two-wheel drive vehicles. Often, they are not considered part of the mainstream OHV community. They arrive in the Area to be part of a growing group that seeks a “party” and thus create numerous law-enforcement infractions. Principal infractions are:

- Driving under the influence of a drug or alcohol
- Assaults on the public and on Federal employees
- Under-age drinking of alcohol
- Use of illegal or controlled substances
- Traffic violations, principally speeding, double riding, riding ATV’s without a helmets, unregistered vehicles, and equipment violations
- Resource violations, principally littering, destroying a natural feature and dumping hazardous materials (by-products of methamphetamine operations, waste oil, paint cans)
- Possession of stolen vehicles or other property
- Interfering with lawful uses of visitors
- Parking and camping violations
- Violations of closures and in limited-use areas

The area is replete with cultural and archeological sites, some concentrated and some isolated. Destruction and theft of cultural resources protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act occurs too frequently.

These sites are under constant bombardment from smugglers bringing into the United States drugs and illegal immigrants, from the USBP while attempting to deter or apprehend smugglers, from illegal OHV use, and from willful destruction.

The remoteness of the area and its proximity of the US-Mexico border and to several major highways in the area means that the USBP must cover the area extensively. Area visitors are also able to spread out more than in any other portion of the El Centro FO resource area. Law enforcement officers therefore have difficulty monitoring illicit activity. The open desert terrain also permits individuals to identify BLM Rangers and their vehicles in enough time to avoid being caught.

The major ecological issues specific to OHV recreation use in the Area are:

- Vegetation destruction
- Illegal OHV hill climbing
- Travel by vehicles of all types off of approved routes
- Willful destruction of restoration project sites .

The BLM El Centro FO has historically had insufficient staff to deal with law enforcement in the West Desert. At times the Area has had no one to patrol. Non-holiday weekends are relatively quiet, although with the various closures to public lands in surrounding areas, visitors are steadily increasing. The ranger staff now consists of twelve permanent rangers. Five of them still need to attend requisite training.

Holiday visitation peaks six times a year. The Area draws crowds of over 100,000 on Thanksgiving weekend, taxing the already limited resources dedicated to the Area. Hiring staff needed to handle the peak busy times is not feasible; therefore, the El Centro FO borrows staff from several Federal, State, and local agencies from across the United States to assist in enforcement. Assistance sometimes has to come from as far away as West Virginia in response to needed law enforcement on holiday weekends

Many times those detailed officers are unfamiliar with the area, its terrain, regulations, and local policies. The FO also has difficulty providing enough vehicles for visiting Rangers. Officers coming from afar sometimes feel that the resources in their home areas are left unprotected when their law enforcement staffs are detailed to the area during holiday weekends. The cost of travel for the detailed rangers is high.

Solutions

The main solution has always been and remains to increase the coverage by law enforcement officers during the entire OHV season. When the new Rangers have completed training, the ECFO will have four or five Law Enforcement Rangers assigned to the Area on a regular basis.

The El Centro FO will continue to work with OHV user groups to develop effective means of solving problems created from the growing visitor crowds such as crowd control, personal safety, and health emergencies.

Details of enforcement of the laws and regulations appear in the following sections.

Spark Arresters

Officers look for spark arresters during normal patrol checks of OHV vehicles.

Registration

Rangers will continue normal patrol checks. All violators are cited, and stolen vehicles are recovered. BLM administers two “amnesty” days each year. These amnesties are pre-arranged times when visitors can bring their OHVs to Cahuilla Ranger Station on Gecko Road without fear of citation for failing to register their vehicles. Amnesty days are coordinated with the CHP and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Employees from both agencies are on hand at the Station to complete OHV registration paperwork and provide vehicle identification stamps.

Noise

The El Centro FO presently has a decimeter (a pocket-sized decibel reader), but no ranger is currently certified to operate it. Funds for training and certification are sought to certify several ECFO rangers in decimeter use. Once certified, rangers will use the decimeter as part of their normal patrol.

Damage to Resources

Regular law enforcement patrols focus on littering, destruction of natural features, dumps of hazardous materials or waste, and destruction of vegetation. Increasing the number of law enforcement officers on all weekends is vital for successful detection and prosecution. Resource protection is ranked in the priority-one category of holiday weekend plans.

Trespass

Increased presence of law enforcement staff is necessary to prevent illegal entry into closed areas. Acquisition of two Dual-Sport motorcycles this year from Demo Fee funds will provide better surveillance of all areas and enhance the ability to deter incidents and catch violators. Increased law enforcement is necessary to make improvements over past performance.

The enabling legislation that designated the Wilderness Areas is the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA). This Act allowed for continued motorized use by California Fish and Game to monitor and maintain wildlife guzzlers inside the wilderness. The CDPA also allows USBP to continue border operations inside wildernesses. All these activities impact the wilderness values of solitude and naturalness.

DUI

The El Centro FO has an outstanding record for DUI enforcement and will continue that effort in coming years. BLM continues to move toward insuring that all local and many visiting Rangers possible are trained in DUI detection and enforcement. Continued patrols on motorcycles and 4x4's are planned for tracking down DUIs.

Search & Rescue

The main responsibility of search and rescue resides with ICSO. However, BLM Park Rangers and LE Rangers regularly respond initially to search requests. ICSO does not have the resources to provide the services that the BLM can muster. If BLM staff cannot locate a person, the staff

contacts the ICSO. ICSO sends a deputy to assess the situation and, if needed, they will call out De Anza Search and Rescue Volunteer Team, a rescue team sanctioned by Imperial County. The volunteers have several ATVs, 4x4s, and a bus-converted base station. The Team cannot handle the volume of calls the BLM responds to.

Emergency and Agency Phone Numbers

In an emergency, visitors can contact the BLM 24/7 telephone number at the Federal Interagency Communications Center (909-383-5651), Imperial County 911, or, on the weekends, the Cahuilla Ranger Station dispatch (760-344-3919). During the holidays, we set temporary ranger stations at Buttercup (760-996-3378) and Dunebuggy Flats (760-996-0052) with cell phones. In addition to holiday operations, BLM is considering establishing telephone numbers that would go directly to our incident dispatch.

Law Enforcement Staff and Their Classification

After the completion of LE training, the BLM will employ five full-time law enforcement rangers, one for the Yuha area, one for the eastern San Diego County area, one for the Julian area, one floating Ranger, and one Supervisory Ranger.

Patrol Schedule

At this time the El Centro FO has a staff of seven delegated law enforcement rangers and will have on hand by the beginning of the OHV season five trainees to conduct regular patrols in the entire resource area. Three rangers plus one “floating” ranger are assigned to the Area as their regular patrol sector. During the OHV season, at least three rangers will patrol the area during the week in eight- to ten-hour patrols. On weekends, up to four rangers will be in this area on eight- to ten-hour patrols. Shifts may vary from early morning to late at night. During major holidays, the area will be patrolled approximately twenty hours each day

Signs

Signing is done in cooperation with the recreation staff and paid for out of fees and appropriated funds.

Educational Materials

The El Centro FO Rangers regularly patrol in the Area to educate and inform the visitors of the laws and regulations and to enforce them when necessary. An element of the visitors is increasing who appear to believe that they can do whatever they want, without regard to the consequences to themselves or others. From this, the need to develop an educational program was identified and aimed at raising the level of awareness of the rules, regulations, and safety concerns.

Several of the Rangers are developing better ways of disseminating that information to visitors through the Internet and through partnerships with the various user groups and businesses that focus on the Area. And finally, the Law Enforcement program is looking for creative options to implement education outreach regarding law enforcement. Options such as visitor involvement, alternative forms of punishment for certain violations, and involvement in the Junior Ranger program are under consideration.

V. CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Over the last two decades, the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan of 1980 as amended in 1999, has been the overall guidance for conservation management of BLM lands in the California Desert. The California Desert District Regional Standards for Public Land Health as recommended by the California Desert District Advisory Council are being applied.

Soils Map

Map of Threatened and Endangered Species Ranges

Road and OHV Trail Map

Baseline Survey and Description

Soils

The Area is part of the Imperial Valley and lies on the west side of the ancient Lake Cahuilla (Zimmerman 1975). Soils here are formed in stratified alluvial materials and vary greatly in texture and thickness of layers. This nearly level plain takes in the basin floor east of the Coyote and Fish Creek Mountains, and includes the lower parts of the watersheds of Coyote Wash, Carrizo Creek, and San Felipe Creek. Between the central part of the West Mesa and the old lakebed are low uplands known as the 'Superstition Hills and Superstition Mountain.

On the West Mesa are remnants of old dissected fans that have slopes as much as three percent. The fan sediment is the parent material of Antho, Laveen, Niland, and Superstition soils. Large areas of the West Mesa are sandy sediment deposited by intermittent streams from the mountains to the west. Carsitas and Vint soils formed in the recently deposited sands, and Rositas and Superstition soils formed on older, more stable sandy deposits. Playas and areas of moderately fine- or fine-textured basin deposits are the source materials of Glenbar, Holtville, and Imperial soils. At the edges of the playas and basins and in areas of deep eolian dust deposits are the silty materials in which the Indio soils formed.

On the West Mesa a network of intermittent streams carries storm runoff water eastward. The main drainage ways south of Superstition Mountain are Coyote Wash, Yuha Wash, and Pinto Wash. These discharge through the constructed drainage network of the Imperial Irrigation District into the New River. North of Superstition Mountain the drainage of Carrizo Wash discharges into San Felipe Creek, which outlets directly into the Salton Sea.

Vegetation

Psammophytic scrub occurs on Superstition Mountain, most frequently between active dunes in bowls (depressions). As dunes shift, the bowls shift as well. This habitat is classified under the California Desert Plan as a very sensitive unusual plant assemblage (UPA). The soils are made up of fine Rosita sands. The dominant species are longleaf jointfir (*Ephedra trifurca*) and Colorado Desert buckwheat (*Eriogonum deserticola*).

Common animal species include mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), cliff swallow (*Petrochelidon (Hirundo) pyrrhonota*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), round-tailed ground squirrel (*Spermophilus tereticaudus*), desert kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys deserti*), and black-tailed jack rabbit (*Lepus californicus*). This habitat has the following special status species: Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizard (*Uma notata*) and flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcalli*) Federally Proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Creosote bush scrub generally occurs on alluvial fans and at edges of the dunes. This vegetation association contains creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*), goldenhills (*Encelia farinosa*), and burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), and numerous annuals that appear when rainfall is sufficient. Creosote bush scrub is associated with the three special-status species of vertebrates indicated above.

Common associated species include desert iguana (*Dispsosaurus dorsalis*), zebra-tailed lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides rhodostictus*), western whiptail lizard (*Cnemidophorus tigris*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), lesser nighthawk (*Chordeiles acutipennis*), kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*), round-tailed ground squirrel, and black-tailed jack rabbit. The Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizard and flat-tailed horned lizard, Federally Proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act, are associated with this vegetation community.

Desert Dry Wash Woodland – Desert Dry Wash Woodland occupies areas where rainfall drains distant mountain ranges. Plants commonly associated with this habitat are blue palo verde (*Parkinsonia florida*), desert ironwood (*Olneya tesota*), smoketree (*Psoralea argophylla*), and, to a lesser degree, western honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa* var. *torreyana*). Shrubs associated with this habitat are creosote bush and goldenhills.

Desert Dry Wash Woodland is habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard (proposed for Federal listing) and also has the following vertebrates: side-slotted lizard (*Uta stansburiana*), western whiptail lizard, zebra-tailed lizard, sidewinder rattlesnake (*Crotalus cerastes*), Gambel’s quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), mourning dove, ladder-backed woodpecker (*Picoides scalaris*), verdin (*Auriparus flaviceps*), white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) (winter only), kit fox, white-tailed antelope squirrel (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*), black-tailed jack rabbit, and desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*).

Listed & Sensitive Plants and Animals

Tables 1.1-1.2 represent status species that are known to occur, or are likely to occur in the proposed project area. Following table 1.2 is a brief description of each wildlife species relationship to the proposed project area.

Table 1. Vascular Plants of Management Concern

COMMON NAME	SPECIES	FEDERAL STATUS	STATE STATUS	BLM STATUS	HABITAT
Wiggins' croton	<i>Croton wigginsii</i>	none	rare	sensitive	psammophytic scrub, active dune
sandfood	<i>Pholisma sonorae</i>	none	none	sensitive	psammophytic scrub, active dune

Table 2. Vertebrate Animals of Management Concern

COMMON NAME	SPECIES	FEDERAL STATUS	STATE STATUS	BLM STATUS	HABITAT
desert tortoise	<i>Gopherus agassizi</i>	threatened	threatened	threatened	creosote bush scrub, desert dry wash woodland (potentially)
Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizard	<i>Uma notata notata</i>	sensitive	none	sensitive	psammophytic scrub, active dune
flat-tailed horned lizard	<i>Phrynosoma mcalli</i>	proposed for listing	none	sensitive	creosote bush scrub, microphyll woodland, psammophytic scrub, active dune.
rosy Boa	<i>Charina trivirgata</i>	none	none	sensitive	creosote bush scrub, microphyll woodland
Peninsular bighorn sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>	endangered	threatened		mountainous, alluvial fans, washes, valley floors.

Monitoring Program

Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard

During the winter of 2002, BLM Resource specialists will analyze current data for impacts and population numbers for the flat-tailed horned lizard. Transects will then be set up to measure pre- and post-rehabilitation treatments to determine recovery through presence or absence of this species.

Colorado Desert Fringe Toed Lizard

The majority of habitat for this species in the project area is located on Superstition Mountain on fine Rosita sand. Transects will be set up in the winter of 2002-2003 to collect baseline data on the current disposition of this species. Current data do not exist for this locality.

Desert Tortoise

Data do not currently exist for the desert tortoise on the west side of the Salton Trough, but this species may be present. In the winter of 2002-2003, a database search will be conducted to determine whether there are any sightings or surveys for this species in the project area.

Rosy Boa

Current data suggest that the rosy boa likely occurs in the project area. During the winter of 2002-2003, resource staff will determine the feasibility of surveying this secretive species for baseline data gathering purposes.

Management Objectives for Conservation Activities

Management objectives for the Resource Protection Program are to:

1. Sustain populations of all native taxa in the West Mesa Area.
2. Reduce and mitigate negative impacts from OHV recreation to biota.

3. Restore species habitats and ecosystem functions, that may become impaired in the course of OHV recreation, to increase populations of threatened and endangered species and species of special management concern to the BLM.
4. Eliminate noxious non-native plant species strategically.
5. Curb or curtail unnaturally high rates of soil erosion stemming from OHV recreation for conserving the sustainable fertility of desert.
6. Have the BLM comply with Federal and California legal mandates for biodiversity conservation, air quality, and water quality.
7. Reduce spillover edge effects from OHV recreation into wildernesses to the west and in special habitats within the West Mesa Area.

Resource Protection Program

BLM natural resources staff people are devising management responses to address potential impacts from human activities, including OHV recreation, to sensitive species such as the flat-tailed horned lizard and Peninsular bighorn sheep.

Management Process for Environmental Review and Response

Wildlife and Habitats

BLM Natural Resource Specialists, John Willoughby (BLM Botanist), Chris Knauf (BLM Wildlife Biologist), Gavin Wright (BLM Wildlife Biologist), and Jim Weigand (BLM Ecologist) condense and review conclusions in report form annually. This assessment determines any adverse impacts. If adverse impacts are identified, the evaluation team makes recommendations to Greg Thomsen, the Field Manager. On a case-by-case basis, the Field Manager determines what measures are necessary to correct the adverse activities or impacts. Corrective measures are specific to the issue to meet the BLM mission which is “to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the Public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations”.

Soil Conservation Plan and Schedule

Not Applicable.

Inventory of Features (new areas only)

Not Applicable

Toxic or Hazardous Site Survey (new areas only)

Not Applicable

Initial Investigation of Impacts (new areas only)

Not Applicable

Initial Evaluation of OHV Recreation on Water Quality (new areas only)

Not Applicable

Literature Cited

Zimmerman, Robert P. 1981. Soil Survey of Imperial County, California, Imperial Valley Area. United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with the University of California Agricultural Experiment Station and the Imperial Irrigation District.

VI. DETAILED COST SUMMARY

A.					
1) STAFF (non-law enforcement)	Salary/hr	Term/Days	Total Cost	BLM Contributed	Grant Request
Outdoor Rec. Planner	\$25.48	2,080 hrs	\$ 53,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 35,000
Term Park Ranger	\$20.20	2,080 hrs	\$ 42,000	\$ 12,000	\$ 30,000
Staff Archeologist	\$25.48	200 hrs	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 0
2) CONTRACTS		Frequency	Total Cost	BLM Contributed	Annual Cost
10-Ca. Conservation Corp (CCC)	\$15.00	1944 hrs	\$292,000	\$ 0	\$292,000
1-CCC Supervisor	\$24.70	1944 hrs	\$ 49,000	\$ 0	\$ 49,000
3) MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT					Annual Cost
Safety gear			\$ 60,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 10,000
Vehicle (CCC)			\$ 30,000	\$ 0	\$ 30,000
Phone, mailbox, tools, supplies (CCC)			\$ 17,000	\$ 0	\$ 17,000
Subtotal		annually	\$548,000	\$ 85,000	\$463,000

B. LAW ENFORCEMENT					
1) STAFF	Salary	Term/Days	Total Cost	BLM Contributed	Grant Request
1 Supervisory Rangers	\$29.73	2,000 hrs	\$ 60,000	\$ 40,000	\$ 20,000
2 Sector Rangers	\$26.21	4,000 hrs	\$105,000	\$ 45,000	\$ 60,000
832 PC Training		4 Rangers	\$ 2,000	\$ 0	\$ 2,000
DUI – blood / urine testing			\$ 500	\$ 0	\$ 500

Subtotal Law Enforcement			\$167,500	\$ 85,000	\$ 82,500
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C. CONSERVATION

1) PLANT & WILDLIFE SECTION OF WHPP	Salary	Term/Days	Total Cost	BLM Contributed	Grant Request
1 ECO	\$14.00 hr.	52 weeks	\$ 38,000	0	\$ 38,000
2) SOIL SECTION OF WHPP					
Subtotal Conservation			\$ 38,000	0	\$ 38,000
Total A, B, C			\$753,500	\$170,000	\$583,500

D. INDIRECT ADMIN. (10% or less)

TOTAL Grant Request					\$583,500
TOTAL ROUNDED					\$584,000

COST SUMMARY 2002/2003

Costs by OHV Recreation Area

Expenditure Type C	Field Office	Unit A	Unit B	Unit
Staff	\$183,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
Contracts & Services	\$341,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
Materials & Supplies	\$ 19,500.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
Vehicles	\$ 30,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
Equipment	\$ 10,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
SUBTOTAL	\$583,500.00	\$0	\$0	\$0
Administration (10%)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TOTAL=	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Request (Rounded)	\$584,000.00	\$0	\$0	\$0

TOTAL REQUEST = \$584,000.00

Agency Contribution = \$170,000.00 \$0 \$0 \$0

AGENCY TOTAL = \$170,000.00

Previous Year's Request = \$0 \$0 \$0 \$0

Previous Year's Request Total = \$0

Last Year's Allocation = \$0

PROJECT EXTENSION JUSTIFICATION

Not Applicable

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Secondary to the O & M Grant for the ISDRA

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

The California Desert Plan with Amendments is the most overarching NEPA authority for BLM management of the Imperial Sand Dune Recreation Area. The CDCA Plan divided the California Desert District (CDD) into planning units for designating the appropriate “Multiple Use Class” derived from considerations of the natural resources, desired uses, and management direction. A general explanation of the natural resources and management direction can be found in Chapters 2 & 3 of CDCA and the following listed plans.

Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Rangewide Management Strategy (1997)
Jacumba Outstanding Natural Area Recreation Activity Management Plan (1980)
Yuha Desert Wildlife Habitat Management Plan (1983)
Yuha Desert Management Plan (1985)
Yuha Basin ACEC Management Plan (1981)
Jacumba Mountains Complex Wilderness Plan (draft)
West Side Route of Travel Project (draft)

Please see attached EA: CA 0670EA2000-059

CEQA

Item 1 – Evaluation of the impact of this project on wetlands, navigable waters, and sensitive habitats

No wetlands or navigable waters exist in the Area. This grant provides to the public information about sensitive species and their habitats and creates barriers to vehicle travel into sensitive habitats for Peninsular bighorn sheep and flat-tail horned lizard.

Item 2 – Existing or potential cumulative impacts, if any, of this project being completed in the same place over several years

The potential cumulative impacts from this resource protection grant will be positive: to sustain OHV recreation in the West Mesa Area, to minimize impacts from OHV recreation to sensitive species and their habitats, to generate better stewardship of the Area on the part of the general public, and to build closer relations between the volunteer community and BLM resource managers.

Item 3 – The possibility that the proposed activities will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances such as steep slopes or highly erodable soil

Proposed activities will assure that the sites with steep slopes or highly erodable soil are closed temporarily for restoration purposes or, if results from restoration cannot sustain managed OHV recreation, remain closed seasonally or permanently. Sand storms originating from the area are likely to diminish over time when routes are closed and restored, either naturally or with plantings.

Item 4 – The potential damage to scenic resources within the view shed of a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway

There is no potential damage to scenic resources of any kind. No officially designated state scenic highway is found in the area.

Item 5 – The proposed project area listing as producing hazardous materials (Cortese list)

None of the activities proposed here will produce hazardous materials.

Item 6 – Substantially adverse changes in the significance of historical or cultural resources

The intent of this grant application is to prevent or substantially reduce adverse changes in the significance of historical or cultural resources.

VIII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Notification for Public Meeting with Date, Time, and Location

The following was released to the public on June 14, 2002:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has scheduled an open house to obtain public comments on the Off-Highway Vehicle grants being submitted to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Division.

The Open house will be held at the BLM California Desert District Office in Riverside on Tuesday, June 25th, from 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The district office is located at 6221 Box Springs Blvd., Riverside, CA 92507.

Public comment is needed on all grants being submitted to California State Parks by the BLM California Desert District's five field offices as part of the grant application process. BLM staff will be available to discuss/provide information specific to the grant applications

Members of the public may also contact the following BLM representatives directly to obtain a copy of the OHV grant proposal submitted by their office: John Bierk, Needles Field Office (760) 326-7000, Craig Beck, Ridgecrest Field Office (760) 384-5400, John Kalish, Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office (760) 251-4800, Neil Hamada, El Centro Field Office (760) 337-4451, Dallas Meeks, El Centro Field Office (760) 337-4453.

If you cannot attend the meeting and would like a copy of a grant proposal, please call the appropriate BLM office for a copy. If you have any additional questions on grants, please call Ira Long at (909) 697-539.

List of Groups Invited to Attend

Individual e-mail messages were also sent to:

Harriet Allen, Jimarbo@aol.com, george.barnes@sierraclub.org, Danafbell@cs.com, offroad4fun@integrity.com, pdavi@parks.ca.gov, Rdenner1@aol.com, KingGlamis@aol.com, erin@corva.org, JustinC@cts.com, FIDEL@ORCOFFICE<fidel@tecate.off-road.com>, Greg Gorman@telegic.com, Jerferg@aol.com, daphnegreene@twende.com, bobham1@earthlink.net, nhkc@mindspring.com, edieharmon@juno.com, LIBERTYM@mindspring.com, elden.Hughes@sfsierra.sierraclub.org, desertguy1@aol.com, ljoydy@aol.com, klusman@syix.com, lland@parks.ca.gov, Rdenner1@aol.com, Rwmskm@aol.com, jim@jmcgarvie.net, demeyer@mail.telis.net, lauramitchel9@yahoo.com, Kristin_Munjko@ahm.honda.com, Krosewitz@aol.com, Carla Routt<LBMPtopper@aol.com>, John Elliott<103500.1331@compuserve.com>, Ron Schiller<schiller@ridgecrest.ca.us>, Don Amador<112531.1311@compuserve.com>, Ken Harris<docharris@prodigy.net>.

Process of Incorporating Public Comments and Summary of All Letters of Support and Opposition

As of this time we have not received any letters of support or opposition. However we expect to receive letters between the submission of this application and the December Commission meeting. These letters will be forwarded to the Division as soon as possible.

Project Accomplishment Report

Agency	BLM-ECFO		
Unit	Yuha/West Mesa Desert		
Time Period	09/01/01 thru 06/01/02	Date	07/12/02

OHV Grant #OR- _____ **Grant Title** _____

I. OHV Opportunity

Acres of land available for OHV and OSV recreation	N/A
Acres of land available for trails only OHV recreation	~511,400
Acres of land available for open OHV recreation.	~39,680
Miles of motorcycle trail	~1280
Miles of ATV trail	~1280
Miles of 4 wheel drive routes	~1280
Miles of level 2 type roads	-----
Total miles OHV routes	~1280
Acres available for open snowmobile use	N/A
Miles of groomed snowmobile routes	N/A
Miles of ungroomed snowmobile routes	N/A
Miles of unmarked snowmobile routes	N/A
Total miles of OSV routes	N/A

II. Conservation activities

1. Miles of OHV routes repaired.	20
2. Miles of volunteer routes closed and rehabilitated.	0
3. Acres of "open" land closed and rehabilitated.	0

III. Volunteer information

1. Volunteer hours contributed.	1760
2. Estimated value of volunteer labor	\$26,000

IV. Visitor assistance information

1. Number of OHV visitors (any portion of a day is one visitor)	141,904
2. Total number of OHV visitors contacted/assisted	~650
3. Number of OHV injury accidents	0
4. Number of OHV related fatalities	0

V. Law Enforcement	Citations	Warnings	Arrests	Compliance	# Contacts
Registration	21				21
Spark arrester	1				1
Noise					
Resource damage	8				8
Trespass on private lands					
Wilderness intrusions					
Other: explain below	40 Minors in possession of alcohol/drugs. Vehicle violations.		11 (DUI)		41
Total	70				70

Description of Annual Accomplishments

In 2001/2002 the BLM worked with the California Conservation Corp in restoration efforts within the Yuha ACEC. This work has helped to reduce parallel routes, excessive route widths, and trash in the area. Crews also worked to repair damaged fences and signs.

This work was not funded by the OHMVR Commission.

SECTION X. EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

List by Field Office: El Centro Field Office

Make	Model	Year	VIN/ID. No.	Miles	Hours
Honda	TRX250X	1988	JH3TE1300JK103797		
Honda	TRX250X	1988	JH3TE1306JK103898		
Honda	TRX250X	1988	JH3TE1305JK103875		
Yamaha	YMF350 Warrior	1993	JY43GDAO5PA097679		
Yamaha	YMF350 Warrior	1993	JY43GDA02PA097682		
Yamaha	YMF350 Warrior	1993	JY43GDA02PA095274		
Case	821B Loader	1994	JEE0040780		

APPENDIX A:

EA Number: CA-067-EA2000-059

El Centro Resource Area
California Desert District
Bureau of Land Management

Environmental Assessment

for

Desert Restoration and Implementation

Environmental Assessment

California Desert District

El Centro Resource Area

CA-067-EA2000-059

Need for Proposed Action:

The Yuha Desert Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) has been used for OHV recreational use for many years. BLM is proposing changes in management policies to curtail the proliferation of illegal routes in the area. Many unauthorized routes exist already throughout the desert and need to be re-vegetated and/or rehabilitated to discourage continued use. Rehabilitation of roads would also help local flora and fauna reoccupy the area and increase in population numbers. This is especially important for the continued preservation of the Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard and to reduce damage to archaeological sites.

In FY 2001 BLM would undertake several rehabilitation projects, by raking, sweeping, placing of vertical mulch, and ripping illegal routes, other restoration activities include road signing, placement of informational kiosks, fencing of sensitive archeological sites, and removal of trash from several locations. Additional projects such as rehabilitation of illegal camping sites, planting vegetation, and seeding, may be undertaken in the future depending upon availability of staff and funding.

Signing of approved routes and the placement of informational kiosks would provide visitors with the necessary information with which to remain on the approved routes. Installation of fencing around selected threatened archeological sites would help to reduce impacts to these sensitive areas. The addition of a selected number of off-road pull-outs for Border Patrol use, would decrease impacts to sensitive habitats. They would enable Border Patrol to turn around with their road drags in tow, or give them a place to drop their drags off-road, without causing additional resource damage.

Description of Proposed Action:

The proposed rehabilitation/restoration would be performed in the area known as the Yuha Desert. The Yuha Desert is located between interstate 8 on the north down to the U.S./Mexican border on the south and bordered on the west by the Jacumba Wilderness and on the east by the agriculture fields.

The intention of the proposed action is to begin restoration of illegal routes, trails, and hill climbs throughout the Yuha area. Restore damage caused by Border Patrol dragging activities and create areas for Border Patrol vehicles to pull into along a selected number of roads in the Yuha area. The restoration process would utilize a variety of methodologies and strategies. In addition, all of the routes that are designated as open would receive a Carsonite fiberglass post every third mile and at intersections. Metal channel posts with limited use signs attached to them would also be placed at all the portal points and several informational kiosks would be constructed and placed at the main portals into the Yuha Desert Region. Additional activities would include trash and debris removal from areas along the two highways and in heavily used camping localities.

The benefits of these actions include restoration to undisturbed surface of illegal routes, closed routes, persistent tracks, and hill climbs. Impacts due to Border Patrol dragging activities would be reduced. Moreover, there would be more opportunities to educate the public regarding places of destination and rules and regulations for the Yuha ACEC. Vehicular traffic would be more likely to stay on existing, signed routes.

Restoration techniques are described in detail in the Desert Restoration Task Force document "Desert Restoration Techniques". Planting and campsite rehabilitation have already been done in the Yuha. Files exist on monitoring and planting, campsite rehabilitating success. In summary, planting should be

accomplished with plants that have been raised at least 6 months in tall pots. Plants should be weaned off regular watering and pruned before planting. Planting is accomplished by auguring a hole, planting the individual, removing the tall pot, creating a small dike around the plant to hold water and catch fine soils and seeds, and finally, watering the individual. Best success comes from planting in the winter through spring.

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans:

The proposed action is on public lands designated as Multiple Use Class L (Limited) in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan of 1980, as amended. Lands designated as the Yuha Basin Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) would also be affected. This plan is in conformance with the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, Yuha Basin ACEC Management Plan, Yuha Desert Management Plan, and the Flat Tailed Horned Lizard Range Wide Management Strategy of 1997.

Preparing roadbeds:

In general, we expect to encounter two types of roadbed treatment. One type would be in sandy soil where there has not been any appreciable compaction of soil. In these cases, berms may be moved to remove evidence of the previous road, the roadbed planted with plants and/or seeded with native plants, and fertilizer or organic matter may be added. The second type of treatment would be for roads that have evidence of severe soil compaction that would prevent vegetation from growing in the road- bed. In these cases, depending upon the severity of the compaction, a ripper pulled behind a tractor and/or a spring-tooth pulled behind an ATV or small truck may be used before further treatments are done as described above. For those tracks that are minor, light raking would be done to break up the linear aspect of the track and the placement of vertical mulch to help disguise the illegal track.

Rehabilitation *outside* of roadbeds:

Impacted areas outside of the road- beds would be lightly raked using a basic leaf rake to remove tracks. In some cases the disturbed areas would be imprinted/dimpled to allow better catchment of rain seeds. Dead and down vegetation may also be added to help disguise the impacted area.

All activities would be planned to minimize disturbance to the areas for wildlife habitat and cultural resource sites. Areas to be rehabilitated would be chosen to avoid wildlife burrows whenever possible. In those instances where burrows can not be avoided, provisions would be made to flush or otherwise remove wildlife such as Flat-tailed Horned Lizards before beginning surface disturbing activities. Areas to be rehabilitated would also be inventoried by a qualified archeologist to ensure that significant cultural resources would not be affected by surface disturbing activities. Site specific project files, including treatment and monitoring information, would be maintained for each area to be rehabilitated.

Border Patrol Pull Outs:

These area, identified by both Border Patrol(BP) and BLM staff, would be delineated using tall carsonite signs with the letters “ BP “. This would indicate to the BP and BLM that this is where the drags should be dropped and/or stored.

No Action Alternative:

No rehabilitation work would be done. No signing of approved routes would be done. Normal removal of trash and debris would be performed. No informational kiosks would be placed. This alternative is not compatible with the above mentioned management plans.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT:

<u>Critical Element</u>	<u>Affected</u>		
	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>INITIAL</u>
Air Quality			
Water Quality			
ACEC			
Cultural Resources			
Flood Plains			
Nat. Amer. Rel. concerns			
T&E Wildlife		x	
T&E Vegetation			
Noxious/Invasive Weeds			
Wastes, Hazardous/solid			
Wetlands/Riparian Zones			
Wild & scenic Rivers			
Wilderness			
Recreation			

BOTANY:

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT:

Seven species of sensitive plants are known to occur in the Yuha Desert. All are considered California Native Plant Society List 2 species meaning that they are rare in California but more common elsewhere. No state or federal threatened or endangered plant species occur in the Yuha Desert.

The most prominent species is crucifixion thorn (*Castela emoryi*). Two areas have been set aside to protect this species; the Crucifixion Thorn Natural Area, southwest of Highway 98 and BLM Route Y286, and the Crucifixion Thorn Unusual Plant Assemblage just north of the U.S.-Mexican border in Skull Valley. It also occurs in small scattered populations throughout the Yuha Desert on BLM and private lands.

The other six sensitive species occurring in the Yuha Desert are brown turbans (*Malperia tenuis*), Baja California ipomopsis (*Ipomopsis effusa*), hairy stickleaf (*Mentzelia hirsutissima*), slender wooly-heads (*Nemacaulis denudata* var. *gracilis*), rock nettle (*Eucnide rupestris*), and Harwood's milk-vetch (*Astragalus insularis* var. *harwoodii*).

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

The closing and rehabilitation of illegal routes, hill climbs, and campsites would allow native vegetation to re-establish itself in these areas.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

All rehabilitation sites would be examined before disturbing activities begin to ensure that these sensitive species are not affected. In most cases, shrubs would be avoided by surface disturbing activities because this is consistent with project goals.

NOXIOUS AND INVASIVE SPECIES:

Weeds commonly occur in disturbed areas such as in and along dirt roads. This is due to the destruction of native vegetation allowing a seed bed for the faster-growing weeds to out-compete native species. Roadsides also receive more water in the form of rain run-off facilitating the growth of weeds. Additionally, vehicles are known to spread weed seed from infested areas to non-infested areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

Initially rehabilitating roads may actually increase the spread of annual and perennial weeds as the ground disturbance will facilitate weed seed germination particularly if the work is done in a wet year. Over time, however, native species may out-compete annual weeds because no new seed will be transported in by vehicles and ground disturbance will cease. It is more difficult for native species to out-compete perennial species such as tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.). Tamarisk is a fast-growing deep-rooted tree that invades springs, washes and other riparian areas. Its seeds are spread by wind and water; it may become established in rehabilitated routes in and along washes.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

The rehabilitated areas should be periodically monitored for weed infestation. Tamarisk should be removed if it becomes established in wash areas. Infestations of annual weeds should be hand-pulled if possible. Large infestations may be sprayed with herbicide if necessary.

WILDLIFE:

The proposed action would beneficially impact wildlife of the area in several ways: 1) vehicle mortality would be reduced 2) vegetative cover would return increasing the food base and available shelter 3) soil compaction would be less improving the quality of the habitat for burrow construction 4) spread of exotic plants from vehicles would lessen. Cryptic species that tend not to flee such as the flat-tailed horned lizard would be particularly benefited. These species tend to be crushed by vehicles because they freeze rather than flee when threatened. Snakes, which may often sun themselves on illegal routes of travel, would also benefit from reduced mortality.

The increased plant cover associated with route rehabilitation would lead to a greater food base for insects which in turn would benefit insectivorous snakes, lizards and birds. Tertiary predators such as hawks, coyotes and bobcats would then benefit from the increased food base of small insectivorous animals. Thus a beneficial ripple effect would be created throughout the wildlife community.

Potential adverse impacts include localized surface disturbance in areas of planting, seeding and roadbed preparation. A small number of ant nests and small animal burrows would be disturbed or destroyed in treating roadbeds and manipulating berms. However, there would be no significant impacts to flat-tailed horned lizards or their habitat. Burrowing owls occur in the area, their burrows could be impacted by crushing the burrow or its entrance, trapping individuals in the burrow, or killing nestlings. However, such mortality is unlikely

Common wildlife of the area include the following species:

Snakes

Sidewinder (*Crotalus cerastes*)
Shovel-nosed snake (*Chionactis occipitalis*)
Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*)

Lizards

Desert iguana (*Dipsosaurus dorsalis*)
Flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*)
Side-blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*)
Zebratail lizard (*Callisaurus draconoides*)
Banded gecko (*Coleonyx variegatus*)

Birds

Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californicus*)
Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)
Black-tailed gnatcatcher (*Polioptila melanura*)
Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*)
Horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)
Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
Lesser nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*)
Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

Mammals

Round-tailed Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus terticaudus*)
Kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*)
Coyote (*Canis latrans*)
Bobcat (*Felis rufus*)

Invertebrates

Various species of beetles, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, true bugs and soil microbes.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:

Habitat destruction and degradation that results from use of un-designated roadways would continue. Wildlife populations would continue to suffer from levels of use and the increase of use that could probably follow if no actions are taken.

ARCHEOLOGY:

Affected environment:

The project area includes many historic properties including prehistoric and historic trails and prehistoric geoglyphs. In 1982 the area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Yuha Basin Discontinuous Archaeological District. Despite recognition of its importance, no systematic inventory

has been done. In other words, we know there are many important historical properties in the area, but we have little data on the exact number, type or location.

Environmental effects:

The Desert Restoration and Implementation project will reduce continuing impact to historic properties by reducing off road travel and restoring the area to historic conditions. Long term positive impacts are assured, but rehabilitation work can negatively impact sites. Because of this danger there are some requirements that must be met before on the ground work begins.

Mitigation measures:

Before any ground disturbance begins, the actual rehabilitation locations must be field checked by archaeology staff and results documented. Even though work is planned for previously disturbed areas, it is common for historical properties to survive a great deal of surface disturbance only to be inadvertently destroyed by rehabilitation efforts.

Field checks and documenting prior to the actual undertaking will allow the agency to fulfill the Section 106 requirements in accordance with Section V of the State Protocol Agreement (1998) between the BLM, California and the California State Historic Preservation Officer and 36 CFR Part 8000 of the NHPA.

WILDERNESS:

There would be no impacts to wilderness characteristics from the proposed project. All actions would occur outside of designated wilderness and wilderness study areas. The Jacumba Mountains WA is adjacent to the proposed actions, but would not be directly impacted.

RECREATION:

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT:

This proposed action should benefit recreational opportunities in the Yuha Basin by closing and rehabilitating illegal routes and providing visitors with a well-signed and approved route system. New informational kiosks would provide visitors with necessary information such rules, regulations, places to see, and a map of the approved route system. Fenced sensitive Archeological sites would protect the site, but still allow visitors to enjoy them.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

This proposed action should produce positive environmental effects by reducing soil disturbance, plant destruction, and wildlife disturbance.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

1. All routes to be open would be verified through the approved routes of travel. Any routes that are signed that are not in the final approved routes of travel would be rehabilitated.
2. Archeology, Botany, and Biology specialist would be consulted before rehabilitation and to determine optimum placement of informational kiosks.

Residual Impacts:

No residual impacts other than the minor adverse impacts and the major positive impacts described above are likely to occur. The former primary and secondary productivity of the area would be partially restored.

Cumulative Impacts:

Further restoration projects of this type are likely to occur in the future as funding allows. These projects will restore some of the biological productivity of the area lost to human impacts. These human impacts include OHV use, illegal immigration, border patrols, illegal vegetation and herb collecting, drug smuggling, power lines, roads, highways, agriculture and occasional residences. The level of these human impacts is likely to increase as the human population of the Valley grows.

PREPARERS:

Dallas Meeks, Park Ranger
Margaret Hangan, Archeology
Kellie Green, Archeology
Gavin Wright, Biology
Deborah Sebesta, Botany
Brian Murdock, Wilderness

REVIEWED BY: Glen R. Miller, Environmental Coordinator

Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action would not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

It is my decision to implement the proposed action with the following mitigation condition:

1. Mitigation measures listed under Botany, Archeology, and Recreation are to be adhered to.

Greg Thomsen, Field Manager
El Centro Field Office

Date