**Desert Managers’ Group Meeting Notes 3 March 2022**

**(Teleconference) CH 1**

The Desert Managers’ Group held a conference call on 3 March 2022 in lieu of an ‘in person’ spring meeting once again due to restrictions from the ongoing Corona Virus Pandemic. The last meeting for the DMG was also a telecon conducted 26 August 2021. The meeting was facilitated by Marine Corps Installations West (MCIWEST) G-7/Marine Corps REC, Mike Hamilton. The agenda for the meeting was kept to a minimum, concentrating on the continued communication and sharing of information until the next scheduled ‘in person’ meeting scheduled for October 2022. The meeting was well attended and representation from almost all agencies except Cal Department of Fish and Wildlife, Cal Transportation, and Cal Parks along with the counties were dialed in.

Though no formal presentations were provided a wealth of information and the opportunity to reconnect with various agencies made the meeting a success. A summary of the Agency Roundtable Discussions and Updates follows and is listed by agency.

**Agency Roundtable Discussions and Updates**

**Department of Interior**

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) California Desert District (CDD)**

Acting Director, Greg Miller provided an overview for the CDD Office.

(1) BLM is working on several durability agreements and is also engaged in some land acquisitions to enhance conservation and habitat connectivity.

(2) Planning for the National Monuments is currently underway.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Barstow Field Office**

Acting Field Office Manager Jeffery Childers presented an overview for the District.

(1) OHV Season is winding down and the office is working on submitting OHV grant applications to the State for Razor road.

(2) Restoration crews are in the field working in the North Eastern Mojave (NEMO) subregion.

(3) Barstow Field Office is revising business plans working with NTC Fort Irwin and MCAGCC Twentynine Palms.

(4) The Office has a rock climbing EA in progress.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Palm Springs Field Office**

Field Office Supervisor Tim Gilloon provided the overview on their issues.

(1) The Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office is continuing to conduct monument planning for the ‘Sand to Snow’ and ‘Mojave Trails National Monument’.

(2) Palm Springs BLM is also working on the review of the ‘Oberon - Victory Pass Renewable Energy Project.

(3) The office is also working on submitting OHV grant applications to the State for Dos Palmas and Coachella.

(4) The Palm Springs Office continues to be involved with the Salton Sea renewable and restoration efforts in coordination with the El Centro BLM Field Office.

(5) The Office has approved the Slaughterhouse Canyon proposal for the competitive sale of mineral materials on a 119-acre site of public subsurface estate about four miles north of Lakeside in San Diego County.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Needles Field Office** – Not available for the call.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) El Centro Field Office** – Not available for the call.

**Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ridgecrest Field Office** – Not available for the call.

**National Park Service**

**Mojave National Preserve**

The Preserve Superintendent, Mike Gauthier, provided an overview of the Preserve updates.

(1) An intensive law enforcement initiative is underway to slow drivers down and provide better road safety on the roads in the Preserve. Many sections of the highway are still awaiting maintenance and road repairs.

(2) Preserve is in the process of reviewing fees for entry and camping with more information to follow.

**Death Valley National Park**

The Acting Park Superintendent, James Woolsey provided an overview of the Park’s updates while Mike Reynolds is on detail as the Acting Deputy Regional Director for the Park Service.

(1) Death Valley with an estimated population of 3,000 – 4,000 Burros in the Park is continuing to work on burro roundup and removal.

(2) The Park hosted a very successful dark sky festival the weekend of 26-27 February.

(3) Death Valley Park visitation has returned to pre-COVID levels and visitation numbers are at record levels.

**Joshua Tree National Park** – Not available for the call.

**US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)**

The Palms Springs Fish and Wildlife Division Supervisor, Mojave Desert Division, Brian Croft provided the following updates for the call.

(1) The Palm Springs FWS Office has new management additions to the Office; Rollie White, Assistant Field Supervisor, and Vince James, Division Supervisor, Colorado Desert Division.

(2) The Service is reviewing listing actions for the Joshua tree. A review in August 2019 found that the species was not warranted for listing. This finding was challenged by the Wild Earth Guardians and the FWS was remanded to conduct further analysis on the species beginning in September 2021. The service is are currently working to revise their Species Status Assessment to support a new finding that should be published early next year.

(3) The Desert tortoise Recovery and Sustainment Partnership Initiative highlighted Fort Irwin’s Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) Biological Opinion (BO) completed on 13 December 2021. The results for this BO this will provide a greater mission flexibility for training and operations. The review covers training in NTC’s Western Training Area and commits to section 7(a)(1), installation recovery support for the desert tortoise.

(4) Additionally the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) RASP 5-year implementation plan is expected to be finalized in March or April of 2022. This plan will guide DoD funding resources for recovery under the RASP program

(5) The NFWF Request for Proposals (RFP) released in January - closes March 31. NFWF will accept proposals to carry out actions under the 5-year plan with $2.1 million dollars in DoD funds from installation contributions and the REPI program.

(6) Inyo California towhee. The decision on a 2013 proposed de-listing rule is expected in 2023. Towhee Surveys has had funding for survey efforts in 2022 in conjunction with BLM and NAWS China Lake to build off of surveys done in 20l9 and 2020.

Towhees have been given a consideration as a DoD Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) priority species with a draft RASP species action plan for the towhee being reviewed by Navy HQ. Approval could mean higher prioritization of DoD funding for towhee management both on and off of China Lake.

(7) Mohave tui chub Management. Mohave tui chub management consultation - recently completed a biological opinion with China Lake to cover improvements in habitat and management for this species at the refugia population on the installation.

(8) Raven control work. FWS continues to implement the actions identified in the 2008 raven management EA that DMG helped to move forward. Annual monitoring and removal efforts for identified predatory Ravens continues across all tortoise critical habitat units in California. Efforts have expanded control techniques to include things like egg oiling. 2022 marks the 5th year of intensive egg-oiling. In combination with ongoing point count surveys, FWS will be able to measure treatment effectiveness.

(9) Pronghorn Endangered Species Act Section 10(j) actions. The California Sonoran Reestablish Team had a meeting on the Chuckwalla Bench in February 2022 to fine tune the placement of the intended release pen that will support soft releases. The San Diego Natural History Museum has completed their review of the Sonoran pronghorn 10(j) Federal Register Notice. Planning to release the draft 10(j) in the Federal Register December 2023.

(10) General Conservation Plan. FWS is developing a desert tortoise General Conservation Plan to streamline ESA incidental take permitting on private lands within the CA portion of the species range.

(11) Renewable Energy Work, the Palms Springs FWS Office is continuing work on several renewable energy projects with the BLM along I-10 corridor. The FWS is working on BLM renewable energy transfer funds to support the added workload that is anticipated to meet current administration’s renewable energy goals.

**Department of Agriculture**

**San Bernardino National Forest**

Jihadda Govan, Mojave Trails National Monument Coordinator provided an overview of current Forest Service issues.

(1) The Forest Service Office has a lot of personnel changes with several new joins in the office to include a new Forest Biologist, Kyle Prichard.

(2) The office is also working on submitting OHV grant applications to the State for their OHV areas.

(3) The Forest Service is engaged in the initial planning for Wild and Scenic River designations for ‘White Water, Cherry Dee, and Holcomb Creeks’. More info on the ‘White Water and Deep Creek’ projects can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61613>. Minimum NEPA action anticipated will be an Environmental Assessment (EA).

**Department of Defense**

**Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)**

Eric Negrete was on for the ACOE and provided the following update.

The gap or noncontiguous boundary between NTC Fort Irwin and Death Valley NP called ‘the bowling alley’ has now been closed and the boundaries made contiguous. There was good discussion on options to mark the boundary which leads into live fire ranges on the Irwin side.

Concerns on fencing as an OHV and wildlife hazard – as well as a lucrative target for scrappers were discussed. Federal land markers, i.e. paddles or signage were considered as well as continued public education were also discussed. MCAGCC utilizes a free phone app that OHV and others can use which identifies range boundaries on the base and alerts the user.

More to follow on this subject.

**Air Force REC IX Office.**

David Bell and Lauren Dempsey were on the call for Air Force but had no updates.

**Edwards Air Force Base** – Not available for the call.

**Army REC IX Office** – Not available for the call.

**National Training Center, Fort Irwin**

NTC Fort Irwin had input from two representatives for the DMG. Chad Utz\_ G3 Force Integration Management Analyst for the National Training Center (NTC) & Fort Irwin provided the following.

(1) NTC Ft Irwin is undertaking a Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) for the renewal of withdrawn lands from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of a combined 110,000 acres, with ~70,500 in the Western Training Area (WTA), and remaining amounts are in the Eastern and Southeastern areas of NTC. NTC is working with BLM to submit the renewal application in FY24 to Congress and to obtain approval to be placed in the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

(2) NTC continues to work with US. Geological Survey (USGS) and US. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for desert tortoise relocation and environmental mitigation project to prepare for training to take place by 2025 in the WTA. NTC has completed a new Biological Opinion with USFWS, signatures were obtained from both organizations in December 2021.

Dave Housman, NTC NEPA Planner was also able to provide the following additional information for NTC Ft Irwin.

(3) A Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) Biological Opinion for Fort

Irwin was completed DEC 2021 in support of Desert Tortoise Management.

(4) A Programmatic Agreement (PA) for cultural resources and an updated Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan (ICRMP) for NTC are both still in progress.

(5) NTC’s updated Integrated Resource Management Plan (INRMP) and associated EA are also currently being drafted.

(6) An installation-specific Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is being developed for the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the ‘Integrated, Adaptive Management of the Common Raven on Department of Defense Lands in the California Desert’.

(7) Fort Irwin with the assistance of the Society for the Conservation of Bighorn Sheep installed a wildlife guzzler on the installation in February.

(8) USGS tortoise studies on our withdrawn lands and off-installation future translocation sites continues. BLM is providing input on potential translocation sites.

**DOD Region IX/Navy Region Southwest**

DoD REC IX, Mike Huber provided updates for the Region along with Jessica Palmer, Navy Region Southwest (N40), DoD Governmental Affairs.

(1) DoD Region IX/Navy Region IX submitted 30x30 Information survey to the State of California and continues to work with the state on this initiative. More info can be found at the website [30x30 | California Nature](https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/30x30).

(2) Aging Infrastructure continues to be an issue that requires funding and may increase environmental risk factors in the near future if not resolved.

(3) Federal EO 14008 implementation is another issue to be aware of as the region works to comply. More info can be found at the website [EO 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (2021) | Department of Energy](https://www.energy.gov/nepa/articles/eo-14008-tackling-climate-crisis-home-and-abroad-2021).

Jessica Palmer highlighted the ongoing issues with the Mojave Air Quality Management District.

(4) The MAQMD Title V changes have effected MCLB Barstow and NAWSCL. The two Installations have received draft permits that include a revised Title V reporting timeframe, with the Compliance Certification and Semiannual Monitoring Reports deadlines changed from 90 days at the end of the reporting period to 30 days at the end of the reporting period. This reduction in schedule creates a significant compliance challenge for the environmental staff and Responsible Official certifications to be completed in the allocated time as required by Rule 1208. Response from MQAMD is still pending.

**NAWS China Lake**

Julie Hendrix, Natural Resources Specialist.

(1) The Air Station is still in recovery from the 2019 earthquake. They have received $2.3 Billion in MILCON for construction and rebuilding and as per last call, it will be at least 3-5 years (over $2 billion in MILCONs).

(2) Mohave ground squirrel monitoring and surveying continues on the Installation.

(3) NAWS China Lake is continuing to work on wild burro roundup and removal actions.

(4) China Lake is also continuing to conduct Raven Management in support of Desert Tortoise conservation efforts per the Raven EA.

**MCLB Barstow** – Not available for the call.

**Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms**

CPLO Director,Erin Adams briefed updates and issues for MCAGCC.

(1) Recovery and Sustainment Program for the Desert Tortoise:  Project team is currently working on the implementation plan which will provide strategies and identify resources required to conserve the Mojave Desert Tortoise as committed to by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Defense in the Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) initiative.

(2) Johnson Valley Shared Use Area (JVSUA) and the Resource Management Group (RMG), co-chaired by MCAGCC and BLM Barstow, continues to manage the land use changes and resources of the JVSUA for both military use and public recreation.  The JVSUA will be closed for critical military training from 29 April through 9 May.  NOTE the JVSUA will no longer be closed during the previously scheduled dates of 18 October – 1 November – the USMC elected to cancel the closure due to changes in scheduled training and in order to support maximum public use of JVSUA.  Future closure dates planned are:  17 – 23 February 2023, and 25 August – 4 September 2023.

(3) Management of the Common Raven on DOD Lands in CA Desert – FINAL Programmatic EA:  MAGTFTC and cooperating agencies have prepared a Final Programmatic EA and MAGTFTC-specific FONSI for the integrated, adaptive management of the Common Raven on DOD lands in the CA desert (6 installations).

**Non Governmental Conservation Agencies**

**Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT)**

Kelly Herbinson, Joint Executive Director for MDLT provided updates.

(1) The Mojave Desert Land Trust announced new leadership for the organization – Cody Handford and Kelly Herbinson are now the Joint Executive Directors for the MDLT effective from November 2021.

(2) The MDLT is continuing land acquisition throughout our service area.

(3) The MDLT is also working to expand their native plants nursery and seed bank.

(4) Additionally the organization is applying for a NFWF grant to contribute to restoration work in the West Mojave.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next meeting is scheduled as a two day forum for 18-19 October 2022 at the Mojave National Park HQs, Barstow, CA.

The final document will be posted on the DMG Website at [Desert Managers Group Home - DENIX (osd.mil)](https://denix.osd.mil/dmg/home/).

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