



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

690 West Garnet Avenue

P.O. Box 581260

North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260



IN REPLY REFER TO:
1610P
CA660.41

OCT 07 2002

Dear Reviewer:

Enclosed for your review is the Proposed California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Plan) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). It is also available for review via the internet at www.ca.blm.gov/palmsprings. The Coachella Valley Plan will update the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 1980 California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan. BLM prepared this document in partial fulfillment of its responsibilities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. To understand the full management picture as the Proposed Plan Amendment applies to the CDCA, the reader is referred to the CDCA Plan. While the Coachella Valley Plan will amend some aspects of the CDCA Plan, other elements remain largely unchanged.

The public devoted substantial effort to providing in-depth review and input on the Draft Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). BLM received 23 comment submissions, which, in addition to comments from three public meetings in July 2002, express over 200 separate comments. BLM has addressed these comments and utilized them in making substantive changes in the document, strengthening the EIS, and ensuring consistency with other concurrently developing plans (e.g., Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, the Habitat Conservation Plan for Tribal lands of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, and other amendments to the CDCA Plan). BLM appreciates those of you who took the time to provide comments. Your efforts have resulted in a stronger and clearer plan.

In its June 2002 publication and release of the Draft CDCA Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for public review and comment, BLM included the Draft Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Trails Management Plan to benchmark progress made to date in consultation with local jurisdictions and wildlife agencies, and to illustrate alternatives under consideration as part of the efforts to support sheep recovery. The draft document indicated that the trails management plan is being prepared as an element of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP), and BLM decisions for the trails management plan would be issued upon completion of the CVMSHCP. Many of the public included comments about this trails management plan along with their comments on the CDCA Plan Amendment. Comments on the trails management plan are not addressed in this document. Instead, these comments will be analyzed and used to refine the alternatives to appear in the draft CVMSHCP. Response to these comments will be included with the draft CVMSHCP, and the public will have another opportunity to submit comments.

The planning area covers approximately 1.2 million acres of which 28 percent (about 337,000 acres) is managed by BLM. Public scoping, held at the beginning of the planning process, identified several issues. The focus of these issues includes 1) recovery of species federally listed as threatened or endangered, (2) conservation of other species and habitats, and 3) public land access and resources uses. The scope of decisions applies only to BLM-managed lands in the planning area, although they were developed in close coordination with other jurisdictions. Certain decisions, such as those regarding the designation of motorized-vehicle routes and designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the eastern portion of the planning area, are being made through the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan (NECO Plan) where the planning areas overlap.

The DEIS described and analyzed a Preferred Alternative and three additional alternatives. As a result of public comments, internal review, and discussion and consultation with other agencies and entities, the Proposed Plan/FEIS was developed. The Preferred Alternative in the DEIS was revised and renamed the Proposed Plan in the FEIS.

NEPA allows you an opportunity for further administrative review of the FEIS through a plan protest to the BLM Director if you believe the approval of a proposed decision would be in error under 43 CFR 1610.5-2. Careful adherence to the above CFR guideline will assist you in preparing a protest that will assure the greatest consideration of your point of view. If you wish to protest the Proposed Plan, you must do so in writing within 30 days from the date that the Notice of Availability of the document appeared in the Federal Register as filed by the Environmental Protection Agency. Written protests must be filed with the Director on or before November 18, 2002. The Cover Sheet located at the beginning of the Coachella Valley Plan contains the complete procedural, timeframe, and mailing instruction details for filing a protest.

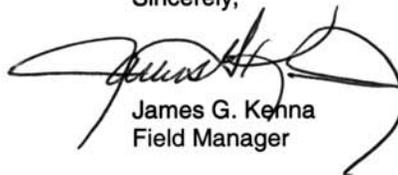
Plan approval will be documented in a Record of Decision that will be made available to the public and mailed to all interested parties. Land use plan implementation usually involves on-the-ground management actions and permitted uses which require further analysis and decision making, including public involvement, and allows for appeal of decisions under applicable regulations.

In recent months BLM has implemented a number of temporary land use decisions, some as a result of a lawsuit filed against BLM by three advocacy groups. According to court stipulations nearly all of these interim decisions, to the extent that they apply within the planning area, will end when the Record of Decision is signed.

Throughout the planning process, BLM has strived to create as open a planning process as possible, such that opportunities for public input were not limited to the minimum requirements set by the BLM planning regulations and NEPA. This planning process was deliberately designed to engage and involve local government, State agencies, other federal agencies, and Indian tribes to a very high level. The collaborative planning process is described in Chapter 5. The goal was an open process that allowed the public to be involved in decisions based on an objective assessment of the issues involved.

Thank you for your interest in the management of your public lands.

Sincerely,



James G. Kenna
Field Manager

Proposed
California Desert Conservation Area Plan
Amendment
for the
Coachella Valley

and

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Prepared by
Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
California Desert District
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

October 2002

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Pool", is written over a solid horizontal line.

Mike Pool
State Director, California

**Proposed
California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment
for the Coachella Valley and
Final Environmental Impact Statement**

Location: Riverside County, California

Lead Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
California State Office
California Desert District
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

Project Location: (portions of) Riverside and San Bernardino Counties,
California

For further information contact: Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management
690 West Garnet Avenue; P.O. Box 581260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258
(760) 251-4800

Abstract: The Proposed Plan for the Coachella Valley amends the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 1980 California Desert Conservation Area Plan. The Proposed Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement 1) provides for multiple use and sustainable development of the public lands while making progress towards healthy, properly functioning ecosystems, 2) provides for the recovery of federal and state listed species, 3) manages sensitive species to avoid future listing, 4) provides recreational opportunities on public lands, 5) makes available mineral and energy resources on public lands, and 6) facilitates land management consistency, management effectiveness, and cost efficiency across jurisdictional boundaries through collaboration with local governments of the Coachella Valley, State and other Federal agencies, Indian tribes, and private entities. The planning area is approximately 1.2 million acres of which 28 percent (about 337,000 acres) is managed by BLM.

Protest procedures,
timeframe, mailing: See next page. **Written protests must be filed with the Director on or before November 18, 2002.**

Filing Protests Procedure, Timeframe, and Mailing

The elements of a properly prepared protest are described in 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-2 Protest Procedures:

(a) Any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the approval or amendment of a resource management plan may protest such approval or amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process.

(1) The protest shall be in writing and shall be filed with the Director. The protest shall be filed within 30 days of the date the Environmental Protection Agency published the notice of receipt of the final environmental impact statement containing the plan or amendment in the FEDERAL REGISTER. For an amendment not requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the protest shall be filed within 30 days of the publication of the notice of its effective date.

(2) The protest shall contain:

(i) The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest;

(ii) A statement of the issue or issues being protested;

(iii) A statement of the part or parts of the plan or amendment being protested;

(iv) A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and

(v) A concise statement explaining why the State Director's decision is believed to be wrong.

(3) The Director shall promptly render a decision on the protest. The decision shall be in writing and shall set forth the reasons for the decision. The decision shall be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested.

(b) The decision of the Director shall be the final decision for the Department of the Interior.

Mailing address for filing a protest:

Regular mail

U.S. Department of the Interior
Director, Bureau of Land Management (210)
Attn: Brenda Williams
P.O. Box 66538
Washington, D.C. 20035

Overnight mail

U.S. Department of the Interior
Director, Bureau of Land Management (210)
Attn: Brenda Williams
Telephone (202) 452-5045
1620 "L" Street, NW, Rm 1075
Washington, D.C. 20036