

**West Mojave Plan
Task Group 2
March 21, 2002
Green Tree Inn, Victorville**

Attendees

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Mike Ahrens	BLM Barstow	Peter Kiriakos	Sierra Club
Jim Arbogast	CORVA	Paul Kober	CORVA
Jim Atkins	VV 4 Wheel	Carol Landry	Public Lands/ Use
Marie Brashear	CDC, SPCW	Sophia Merk	Public
Paul Condon	Consultant	David Matthews	Public
Jeri Ferguson	Cal 4-Wheel Drive	William Moring	DVMC
Jennifer Foster	Public Lands/ Use	Doug Parham	WSBCLA
Ken Foster	BCHC Borrego Spr.	Darrell Readmond	ETI
Margaret Grams	Public	Ron Schiller	High Desert MUC
Mary Grimsley	Gear Grinders	Debbie Stevens	AVTREC
Al Guzman	District 37	Robert Strub	Trona
Harold Johnson	BLM Barstow	Barbara Veale	People for USA
Ted Kalil	VValley 4 Wheelers	Jim Wilson	Lost Coyotes MC
		Hector Villalobos	BLM Ridgecrest

West Mojave Team: Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks

Introductions

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:05 PM and introductions were made. Haigh asked the group to review the meeting notes from the February 19, 2002 and e-mail any changes to him. Haigh explained the process the Bureau of Land Management will use to designate routes, and indicated that the settlement agreement with the Center for Biological Diversity requires that the Record of Decision for the West Mojave Plan, including route designation, be signed by June 30, 2003. Haigh indicated that the focus of this meeting will be to gather input on criteria to apply to the route designation process.

Criteria for Designation of Motorized Vehicle Access Network

Les Weeks provided an update on the route survey. Weeks indicated that: Red Mountain, Fremont and Kramer subregions are completed; the 4-wheel drive crews have finished the Superior subregion but motorcycle routes still need to be surveyed; there is one more day worth of 4-wheel drive work remaining in the Newberry- Rodman and Coyote subregions; the

Ridgecrest and El Paso subregions are 98% complete with some minor work remaining; and approximately 200 miles of the backbone 4-wheel drive routes have been surveyed in the El Mirage subregion.

Weeks referred to a handout, the 3/21/02 Draft West Mojave Route Designation Guidelines document, and explained that its content reflects interviews and contacts with stakeholders as well requirements contained in the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the 1980 California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan. Weeks went through the Guiding Requirements (page 1 and 2 of the document). The following points were made during the discussion of this item:

- Doug Parham asked that open routes be kept more than five miles away from residences.
- Ron Schiller indicated that language in the CDCA Plan states “determine which routes in Class L or M need to be closed or limited.” He stated that the approach needs to determine whether there is a resource reason to close a route, and if not, the route should remain open. Schiller stated that you need to start with a recognized inventory and justify the closures rather than develop a network from the ground up.
- Margaret Grams indicated that there is a need to address public safety concerns. A “redundant” route may be needed as alternate access in the event of flooding or other event.
- Marie Brashear stated that there has to be a nexus between the road closure and whatever resource problem you are trying to fix; otherwise the route should stay open.

Les Weeks continued his presentation and went through the suggested general and specific goals for the route designation process outlined on page 2 and 3 of his hand-out. The following points were made during the discussion:

- Doug Parham indicated that we must assume development will occur on the private lands and mitigate for land use conflicts in areas where public and private land intermix.
- Paul Kober asked that staff consider future off highway vehicle (OHV) recreation needs in line with a report recently published by California Department of Parks and Recreation which indicates a 6 to 9 billion dollar economic impact in the state from OHV recreation. He noted that the sport is growing faster than the general population.
- Peter Kiriakos stated that significant population growth will continue to degrade public resources unless they are protected. He indicated there is a need to provide for a “reasonable” amount of OHV activity, and a need to consider the cumulative biological effects of the “spider web” of routes on the resources, not just the route by route direct impact.
- Ron Schiller indicated that it is too difficult to establish recreational goals for each type of activity as too many exist. He asked who “visualizes” what the network will look like, and who determines which recreational type is preferred over another. He indicated that staff should simplify the process and look at the resource issues and correct where there is a conflict.

- Mike Ahrens commented that recreation is a resource, and we need to know as much as possible about it. Les Weeks added that in some areas the recreational resource may “trump” the biological resource.
- Marie Brashear said that there is no way to know who wants to use the desert for what purpose. She indicated that the network needs to be based on the reasons why a route needs to be closed. Bill Haigh responded that we need to recognize that there is a certain lack of data in all areas. Haigh noted that you need to do your best to gather the pertinent data, move forward with decisions, and be flexible in adjusting to what you don’t know.
- Jim Arbogast stated that local residents should be heavily involved in a working group on route designation.
- Ron Schiller asked that staff investigate other alternatives to route closure (e.g., seasonal limits), and indicated that these should be exhausted prior to closure of a route.
- Doug Parham stated that private property owners also need to be contacted and involved in the route designation process.

Les Weeks presented “points to consider” in the route designation process as outlined on pages 4 and 5 of his hand-out. The following issues were raised during the discussion of this section:

- Peter Kiriakos noted a need to consider the cumulative biological impact of routes.
- Jeri Ferguson indicated that the current management of a route needs to be considered. For example, why close a route if BLM funds were recently spent to install a barrier?
- Doug Parham asked that motorcycle routes be distinguished from other types of OHV routes on the ground (for example, with signage).
- Jim Wilson asked that the historical usage of an area be considered.
- Paul Condon asked that seasonal closures be considered. For example, can routes near raptor nests be closed only during nesting season?
- Jeri Ferguson noted that differentiating between motorcycle and other routes may make the process too complicated.
- Peter Kiriakos reminded the group that federal laws do not permit roads in wilderness. He indicated that the effort should focus on cleaning up the existing inventory, not on adding new roads.
- Jim Arbogast noted that the population is increasing while recreational opportunities are going down, and expressed concern that this will create safety problems.
- Jim Atkins questioned how enforceable route closures will be.
- Marie Brashear indicated that the open areas identified in the 1980 CDCA Plan were included to meet the needs of a certain segment of the public and to provide areas where large numbers of people could gather. Harold Johnson and Mary Grimsley concurred that individuals using the open areas are looking for a different experience than those using the network outside the open areas.
- Doug Parham suggested having the limited use areas opened to street licensed vehicles only.

Les Weeks continued his presentation and discussed the suggested order of designation as outlined on page 5 of the hand-out. The following points were made in response to his presentation:

- Margaret Grams asked that public safety be considered. Peter Kiriakos stated it would be too open ended to say we need alternate routes everywhere.
- Sophia Merk stated there is a need to consider soil classifications, and to consider the ability to enforce route closures.
- Doug Parham suggested using volunteers to assist in enforcement. Jeri Ferguson cautioned that volunteers lack law enforcement authority.
- Marie Brashear stated that the budget for BLM enforcement needs to be increased, and expressed concern that the current fiscal year budget for enforcement was reduced by the California State BLM office. She also noted that there needs to be language in the plan that clearly allows for helicopter landings and emergency vehicle use of routes even if closed.

Break 7:30 to 7:45

Bill Haigh described the proposed approach to designating routes. Haigh noted that the intent is to develop a vehicle access network that is compatible with the recovery of the tortoise. He explained that staff has the following data available for this effort:

- 1) Detailed field surveys of the DWMA's and some other areas.
- 2) Denver air photo inventory for the remaining previously identified subregions (Class L and critical tortoise habitat areas).
- 3) Field inventories conducted during the 1980s for the route network designated in 1985 and 1987, and for ACEC route networks.

Haigh indicated that the tortoise DWMA areas will receive top priority in the designation process. The Class L areas with Denver inventory would be the next priority, followed by the Class M areas. Haigh noted that the actual designation would be accomplished by West Mojave Team and BLM staff. Haigh asked that the group designate a subcommittee to work with staff on a periodic basis.

The following points were made:

- Bob Strub asked that public meetings be held in the Searles Valley area to receive public input on the proposed network.
- Jim Wilson asked that "C" routes (competition routes) outside of the open areas be considered. Hector Villalobos acknowledged that this issue needs to be resolved during this effort.
- Paul Kober asked that the language in the Rand Management Plan regarding dual sport events be corrected (i.e., the comma issue). Haigh indicated this issue would be reviewed. Some discussion took place regarding the status of the Rand plan and whether a route

designation effort needed to be accomplished for this area. Hector Villalobos indicated that routes were designated in the Rand Plan. He noted that there are other tasks associated with that plan that still need to be implemented.

- Jeri Ferguson asked that any known “language” problems in existing plans be brought to Bill Haigh’s attention so they can be corrected through this effort.

Les Weeks discussed the need to identify criteria and invited input. This criteria will be a more specific list of what people want to consider in the route designation process (page 6, section C1 of hand-out). The following points were made:

- Add frequency and season of use. (Ron Schiller)
- Consider destination and connectivity (e.g., loops). (Paul Kober)
- Consider the condition of trails, and maintenance of trails. Provide for some long distance trail rides. (Jim Wilson)
- Consider access to trailheads. (Darrell Readmond)
- Identify level of difficulty of routes on signs. The following names of Forest Service personnel were provided as contacts on how the Forest Service has dealt with this issue: Cam Lockwood, Greg Hoffman, and Don Trammel. (Jim Arbogast)
- Consider historical use patterns (poker rides, etc.). (Ron Schiller)
- Consider private property access. Ensure that the land ownership data base used for the effort provides sufficient detail to allow for adequate consideration of this issue. It was noted that in order to sell private property, it must have access. (Marie Brashear)

Weeks presented an approach to the route designation process as noted on page 5, section V of his hand-out. Weeks discussed the process to be used to identify routes as “parallel” or “duplicate” routes (page 6, B). Weeks indicated that how “duplicate” is defined is very important to the process. The following comments were made in regard to this issue:

- Marie Brashear and Paul Kober asked that the route inventory and other layers be made available on CD to those who ask. Bill Haigh acknowledged that these would be made available.
- Doug Parham raised the issue of whether designation of routes would occur on private property. It was clarified by Bill Haigh and Mike Ahrens that routes designation will occur on public lands only. However, where a primary route crosses over private lands, particularly in checkerboard areas, it would be shown in a distinct manner with an indication that an easement may need to be acquired. Parham asked that staff avoid designating routes on either side of private property to avoid a “defacto” designation on private land.
- Jennifer Foster indicated that some duplicate routes, particularly in rugged terrain may be necessary for safety reasons to allow for passing (i.e., split trails).
- Debbie Stevens questioned whether it is possible to tell if a route is a duplicate route unless it is viewed in the field.
- Barbara Veale stated that if a duplicate route is present, there was probably a reason the

- route was needed or it would not have been created in the first place.
- Jim Atkins noted that sometimes duplicate routes are created to avoid “whooped-out” sections of roads.
 - Paul Condon noted that some duplicate routes are needed to ensure access on a year round basis.

Les Weeks noted that Mike Ahrens has proposed a different approach than the one outlined by Weeks on Page 5, item V, of the hand-out. Mike Ahrens indicated that the goal for route designation is not to manage routes, but rather to manage the use of the routes. Ahrens recommended the following sequence in designating routes:

- 1) Determine what the principle routes are (i.e., which ones provide the access where people want to go).
- 2) Consider the MAD map (biological resources). Is it possible to move a principle route, or should the route take precedence over the biological resource?
- 3) Consider private property access and commercial needs.
- 4) Consider duplicate routes.
- 5) Move to the secondary routes and focus any reduction needed for biological resources on these routes.

Bill Haigh clarified that BLM staff, West Mojave Team biologists, and invited experts (including assistance from county government), would form the core team doing the route designation. Haigh would like to see a subcommittee of Task Group 2 formed to interface with the core team and to report back to Task Group 2. Haigh explained that one reason for staff doing the actual work is to ensure compliance with the Federal Advisory Council Act.

Debbie Stevens asked whether the results of the designation process could be provided gradually to the public as soon as it is produced. Marie Brashear indicated that she wants to see maps. Haigh indicated that the maps will be provided for public viewing as soon as they are developed, and within the limits and priorities of staff’s map production capability. Jeri Ferguson asked that as areas are completed they be posted in the BLM Riverside, Barstow and Ridgecrest offices. Bob Strub asked that the mapping in North and South Searles be presented to the public in that area.

Paul Kober stated that the team working on the route designation needs to be balanced, and is concerned that it is weighted too heavily on the side of biologists.

Ron Schiller and Jeri Ferguson asked that the Group be kept advised of what subregions the route designation team is working on. Bill Haigh indicated he would e-mail notices to the Task Group regarding the schedule for route designation. He suggested that a small working committee be formed to help provide oversight. A Route Designation Oversight Committee was designated as follows: Jeri Ferguson, Paul Kober, county person (to be named), Ron Schiller, Chuck Williams, Ileene Anderson, Jim Wilson, and Ken Foster.

Next Meeting

The next meeting date was set for Wednesday, April 24th from 6:00 to 9:00 PM.

Jim Wilson Presentation

Jim Wilson passed out a map entitled “A Recreational Plan for the West Mojave, Post Red Mtn. and Fremont Route Surveys.” Wilson indicated that he would like to preserve a heavily used recreational area located south of Cuddeback Dry Lake and the Grass Valley Wilderness area as an OHV park. He would also like to see a single tract trail network established through the Red Mountain and Fremont subregions for access to services and to enhance the wilderness experience for dual sport events. He would also like to see “C” routes (competition routes) created in the area south of Summit Diggings.

Wilson indicated that the area proposed as an OHV park has been used for 35 or more years. For the past 10 years there has been heavy motorcycle use in this area, and there is dispersed camping occurring throughout. He indicated that areas are needed to train people to ride, and that this area is ideal for that purpose. He feels such a designation would help take the pressure off of other areas.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.