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## **Public Comment Period Extended for Furnace Creek Road Route Designation**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is extending the public comment period until Aug. 31, 2011 on determining the appropriate vehicle route designation for Furnace Creek Road in Mono County. The BLM will use those comments in conducting an environmental analysis for the appropriate designation of the off-highway vehicle route that leads to the recently designated White Mountains Wilderness. In 2009, Congress passed legislation designating the wilderness, and closed 8.5 miles of the Furnace Creek vehicle route on the Inyo National Forest to vehicles. That left about two miles of the route undesignated on BLM land within a narrow 60-foot wide non-wilderness corridor. The original OHV route in the Furnace Creek corridor was washed out by floods in 1982. However, vehicles continued to access the corridor on < routes and the BLM and U. S. Forest Service closed the area to this use in 2003 because it was causing impacts to riparian habitat and water quality. The BLM has been trying to address damage to riparian resources and wilderness characteristics through a redesign of a suitable route. The wilderness designation limits engineering changes to the road to within the 60-foot non-wilderness corridor.

“The corridor is not wide enough to accommodate the engineering provisions necessary to mitigate vehicle damage to the stream and riparian area,” said Hector Villalobos, Field Manager for BLM’s Ridgecrest Field Office. “Essentially, the wilderness designation changed Furnace Creek Road from a substantial through-route to upper destinations on the Forest to a short, primitive access route to a wilderness trailhead at the BLM-Forest Service boundary. This new analysis will help us determine what our options are now for managing what remains of the route.”

The initial range of alternatives and a map can be viewed at: <http://blm.gov/crjd>. Comments may be submitted by e-mail to [furnacecreek@blm.gov](mailto:furnacecreek@blm.gov). Upon completion of the EA, the BLM will hold an additional 30-day public comment period before issuing a decision regarding designation of the Furnace Creek road.

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