

Sign Implementation Strategy
West Mojave Planning Area
Barstow/Ridgecrest Field Offices

I. Background

On January 29, 2011 Judge Illston issued a remedy order in the case Center for Biological Diversity v. US Bureau of Land Management, C-06-4884 (SI).

“(1) Within 60 days of this order, the BLM should provide the Court with a detailed implementation plan for signing all open routes in the WEMO. The signing should be completed within 180 days of the date of this order.”

Through this item, the court ordered the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop a plan to sign all open routes, and to complete the signing of the open routes in the West Mojave (WEMO) area within 6 months of the order. This document addresses the plan to install signs.

This plan addresses the remedy timeline, the scope of the signing to be done, the process that is being used including overall priorities and specific strategies for each of the field offices affected by the order.

Before development of the WEMO Plan, signing had been completed using the 1985/87 route network and has been ongoing since then. Between September 2001 and March 2002, 13 field crews inventoried nearly 8,000 motorized routes within the Western Mojave desert. This information updated data collected by BLM field survey crews in the 1985/87 inventory. Both of these data sets were supplemented by data digitally collected by aerial photography (taken in 1995/96) covering most public lands within the planning area. Additional surveys were performed in specific subregions in response to public comment. This data was used to develop the 2003 WEMO route network.

Since 2003 and before the court issued the remedy order, the BLM had already identified WEMO implementation needs based upon the 2003 Decision Record. BLM received a funding grant from the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVR) for implementing its sign plan. Signing has been an ongoing activity since 1985/87 and was accelerated after the approval of WEMO Route Designation Environmental Assessment in 2003.

III. West Mojave Sign Implementation Project Summary

The West Mojave planning area consists of approximately 3.2 million acres of public lands. Approximately 5,098 miles of roads and trails make up the WEMO designated route system for the Barstow and Ridgecrest Field Offices.

Since the Record of Decision for the Final WEMO Plan, BLM has adjusted its signing strategy to reflect the updated route designation decisions. Existing staff have been redirected and supplies have been acquired to accomplish WEMO route signing needs. GPS, general field safety, and OHV and other equipment training have been conducted to ensure consistency and data quality and accuracy of signing information as well as the safety of all field staff.

To implement the court ordered remedy sign plan, BLM identified the following components: priority setting, process, staffing, training, project supplies and equipment inventory, and project funding. The information from this signing effort would then be used to develop the route network maintenance plan, to identify locations for additional informational kiosks and generate updated maps of the designated route network.

Barstow Field Office Subregion Priorities

Sub Region	Biological	Wilderness	WSA	Cultural Resources	Proximity Urban Area	Degree of Readiness	Total
1.Afton Canyon	5	5	5	5	2	5	27
2.Joshua Tree	5	5	1	5	5	5	26
3.Calico Mountain	4	3	1	5	5	4	22
4.Cronese Lake	2	5	5	5	2	2	21
5.Ord Mountain	5	4	1	5	4	1	20
6.Newberry/Rodman	4	5	1	5	3	1	19
7.Black Mtn	3	5	1	5	3	1	18
8.Coolgardie	4	5	1	2	4	1	17
9.Pisgah Crater	4	4	1	5	1	1	16
10.Rattlesnake	3	5	1	3	2	2	16
11.Juniper Flats	3	1	1	4	4	2	15
12.Broadwell Lake	3	4	4	1	1	1	14
13.Harper Lake	1	5	1	2	4	1	14
14.Fremont Peak	3	3	1	2	3	1	13
15.Wonder Valley	2	5	1	1	3	1	13
16.El Mirage	3	1	1	2	4	1	12
17.Johnson Valley	3	4	1	1	2	1	12
18.Kramer Hills	4	1	1	2	2	1	11
19.Stoddard Valley	4	1	1	1	2	1	10
20.Mitchell Mountain	2	2	1	2	1	1	9
21.Iron Mountain	2	1	1	1	1	1	7

Ridgecrest Field Office Subregion Priorities

Subregion	Biological	Wilderness	WSA	Cultural Resources	Proximity Urban Area	Degree of Readiness	Total
1.Sierras	4	3	0	5	3	5	21
2.Red Mtn	5	2	0	5	3	5	20
3.El Paso	4	1	0	5	5	5	20
4.Ridgecrest	4	0	0	3	5	5	17
5.Jawbone	3	2	0	5	1	5	16
6.S Searles	3	0	0	3	3	5	14
7.N Searles	3	1	1	3	3	3	14
8.Darwin	1	3	0	5	1	1	11
9.Middle Knob	4	0	0	3	1	1	9
10.Rands	2	0	0	3	1	3	9
11.Lancaster	1	0	0	3	1	1	6

Staffing

For the 28 staff members assigned to the signing teams, all other job priorities have been set aside or deferred in order to satisfactorily accomplish the court order. Their existing duties are described below.

Members of the signing team include 1 recreation/wilderness branch chief, 1 outdoor recreation planner, 5 park rangers, 6 force account³ team members (this includes the entire Barstow Field Office force account team), 1 geologist, 10 fire fighters, and 2 natural resource technicians, 2 sub-contractors.

The Recreation & Wilderness Branch Chief is responsible for monitoring the Pacific Crest Trail, monitoring and preparing a legal description for the Cottonwood Creek Wild and Scenic River, monitoring the Piute Mountain Fire Rehabilitation project, for overseeing and managing the Recreation Branch Employees, and managing the program's budget.

The outdoor recreation planner is responsible for developing the Amargosa Wild and Scenic River Plan, administration of OHV grants, coordinating partnerships with local schools, government and businesses for environmental education of children, both locally and regionally, and representing BLM on the planning team for the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, designated by Congress in 2009.

Typically park rangers are responsible for implementation of fee collection at 2 designated Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) fee sites, safety and cleanliness of campgrounds and weekly cleaning of 50+ vault toilets, administration of the wilderness program including required monitoring, sign replacement and special recreation permit monitoring, and monitoring and repair of OHV exclusion fences. They are responsible for the upkeep and stocking of more than a dozen public information kiosks and cleaning and maintaining visitor facilities at the Trona Pinnacles National Natural area.

The force account team is responsible for 5 major construction projects: Sawtooth Campground development, Owl Canyon storm damage repair, Mule Canyon road storm damage road repair, and Dumont Dune OHV Area fencing to protect adjacent fringed toed lizard habitat, designated wilderness, and the cultural and riparian ACEC, and completing the reconstruction of the Bird Springs Pass road. They also maintain 232 miles of existing open routes to prevent route proliferation and maintain all infrastructure including remote visitor centers, signing boundaries of designated open areas, and are also responsible for maintaining trail systems.

The geologist, in addition to regular public response and plan processing duties, is responsible for identifying and overseeing remediation (closure by one of several techniques requiring technical evaluation) of abandoned mine lands on 3.2 million acres.

The 10 firefighters take on many of the park ranger duties already mentioned and provide emergency medical services throughout the field offices. They also perform abandoned mine land hazard feature inventory and wild horse and burro facility maintenance. Normally during this time of year, they would be completing required annual training to prepare them for the upcoming current year fire season.

³ Force Account employees are primarily responsible for construction and heavy equipment operation for large scale capital improvement projects. They also support other BLM field offices on similar projects.

VI. Training

It was determined that additional training was needed to ensure efficient and safe use of all equipment. Prior to training, the knowledge of the signing and implementation crews varied widely in terms of competence with existing pieces of equipment. Global Positioning System (GPS) training using the Trimble units was conducted to assure technical competence of users to ensure consistency in data collection, reporting, and eventually mapping can be completed to protocol.

All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and motorcycles provide access to remote sign sites. An auger is a hand held earth drill that is needed to perforate hard surfaces (e.g. compacted clay soils) for sign placement when a post pounder is not adequate. In order to meet safety standards for operation of equipment, ATVs, motorcycle, and auger training were conducted. In addition risk assessments have been completed and tail gate safety meetings have been conducted to ensure safe operation in the field. In order to work in remote locations in the desert, a minimum of two individuals are required on each field team to ensure a safe working environment.

Training was completed as follows:

GPS	February 22, 2011, 1:00	Barstow Field Office	All team members
ATV/Motorcycle	February 24, 2011, 8:00	El Mirage	All team members
GPS	February 25, 2011, 10:00	Barstow Field Office	All team members
Auger	March 7, 2011, 8:30	Barstow Field Office	All team members
GPS	March 9, 2011, 9:00	Ridgecrest Field Office	All team members

Equipment Inventory On-Hand Needed for Signing	
Item	Inventory
Trimble GPS Units	11
Hand Auger	8
Post Pounders	23
Cameras	11
ATVs	10
Motorcycles	7
Vehicles	14

All of this equipment and vehicles serve all of the needs of the two field offices. For the duration of this project, all other activities which require this equipment or vehicles will be deferred.

Based on previous purchases, additional supply/equipment needs have been identified. These are summarized below.

Additional Supplies and Equipment Required for Court Ordered Signing	
Item	Need in Addition
Open Route Signs	4,000
Hand Auger	5
Cameras	2
Trimble GPS/software	4 (1 replacement)
Utility Vehicle	1

Additional inventory will be purchased as needed.

ii.

Appendix A2 – Ridgecrest Priority Ranking Criteria

Sub-Region Priority Matrix

Sub Region	Biological	Wilderness	WSA	Cultural Resources	Proximity to Urban Area	Degree of Readiness	Total
Red Mountain	5	2	0	5	3	5	20
Sierras	4	3	0	5	3	5	21
El Paso	4	1	0	5	5	5	20
Ridgecrest	4	0	0	3	5	5	17
South Searles	3	0	0	3	3	5	14
North Searles	3	1	1	3	3	3	14
Darwin	1	3	0	5	1	1	11
Middle Knob	4	0	0	3	1	1	9
Rands	2	0	0	3	1	3	9
Jawbone	3	2	0	5	1	5	16
Lancaster	1	0	0	3	1	1	6

Biological

Sub Region	Priority Level	Rationale
Red Mountain	3	Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat (DWMA) with relatively high OHV use occurring.
Sierras	4	High Number of sensitive species due to riparian areas, some OHV use, high public profile, medium desert tortoise value.
El Paso	4	High desert tortoise value with a number of sensitive species, OHV use increasing with off-route intrusions increasing.
Ridgecrest	4	Medium to high desert tortoise value, high public profile with proximity to town, increasing OHV use.
South Searles	3	Medium Desert Tortoise value, some OHV use with proximity to the town of Trona.
North Searles	3	Medium to high Desert Tortoise value, some signing, restoration completed in Great Falls Basin, low to medium OHV use.
Darwin	1	Low number of sensitive species, low OHV use, low desert tortoise value.
Middle Knob	4	Kern Buckwheat protection needed through signing and restoration, off-route incursion
Rands	2	Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat (SWMA) with medium OHV use occurring but much restoration/signing already completed.
Jawbone	3	High number of sensitive species due to different ecosystems and riparian areas, medium to high desert tortoise value, high OHV use occurring, a lot of fencing/restoration/signing already completed.
Lancaster	1	Some Mojave Fringed-Toed lizard habitat, but hard to sign/enforce/monitor due to checkerboard pattern of public lands, medium desert tortoise value.

Sub Region ranked on five point scale: 5 = highest priority, 1 = lowest priority

Biological Rating Criteria

Used relative scale – a low number does not equate to site being free of concerns.

Considerations

- a. Number of potential listed species present - not based on a strict accounting, but on professional judgment
- b. Number of potential sensitive species present - not based on a strict accounting, but on professional judgment
- c. Areas with current management issues ranked higher than other areas - i.e., areas with more illegal OHV activity ranked higher
- d. Areas with greater short term future threat ranked higher - i.e., areas with imminent development potential ranked higher

Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas

Sub Region	Wilderness	WSA	Rational for Rating
Sierras	3	0	Near Owens Peak & Sacatar Trail Wildernesses, contains the Short Canyon & Sand Canyon ACECs, No WSAs
Red Mountain	2	0	Close proximity to Golden Valley Wilderness, no WSAs
El Paso	1	0	Close proximity to El Paso Wilderness, no WSAs
Ridgecrest	0	0	No Wilderness or WSAs
Jawbone	2	0	Close proximity to ACECS, no WSAs
South Searles	0	0	No Wilderness or WSAs
North Searles	1	1	Close proximity to ACEC & Great Falls WSA
Darwin	3	0	Near Darwin Falls & Argus Wildernesses, no WSAs
Middle Knob	0	0	No Wilderness or WSAs
Rands	0	0	No Wilderness or WSAs
Landcaster	0	0	No Wilderness or WSAs

Ratings:

- 5: Areas containing a Wilderness or WSA. May contain numerous ACECs
- 4: Areas bordering a wilderness subregion. Shares boundary with a single wilderness or WSA, Close proximity to wilderness or WSA but does not share a boundary. Close proximity to ACEC.
- 3: Close proximity to wilderness, WSA or ACEC
- 2: Contains an ACEC
- 1: Close to ACEC or WSA
- 0: No Wilderness or WSAs

Cultural

Subregion	Cultural Resources	Rational for Cultural Importance
Red Mountain	5	Large quantities of prehistoric and historic mining sites.
Sierras	5	Major prehistoric settlements at mouth of canyons & riparian zones.
El Paso	5	Last Chance Canyon NRHP District & hist mining sites.
Ridgecrest	3	Large quantities of prehistoric and historic mining sites.
South Searles	3	Pleistocene lake terraces-high potential for early sites.
North Searles	3	Pleistocene lake terraces-high potential for early sites.
Darwin	5	Coso Range, Rose Valley, Coso Hot Springs, Fossil Falls NRHP Districts.
Middle Knob	3	Large numbers of small prehistoric lithic scatter and campsites.
Rands	3	Large numbers of small prehistoric lithic scatter and campsites.
Jawbone	5	Large quantities of prehistoric and historic mining sites.
Lancaster	3	Large quantities of prehistoric and historic mining sites.

Ranking Criteria

- 1: Little known of cultural importance.
- 3: Fair Amount known of cultural importance
- 5: A Great degree of cultural importance, which includes sites and districts eligible for inclusion or listed in the National Register of Historic of Places, and/or sites of importance to Native American Tribes.

Sub-Region Priority Matrix for Proximity to Urban Areas

Sub Region		Rational for Importance
Sierras	3	Remote, visitors from OHV areas, requires route signing for resource protection. 3 wilderness moderate visitation
Red Mountain	3	Remote, visitors from OHV areas, requires route signing for resource protection. 2 wilderness moderate visitation
El Paso	5	Large area with visitation from Ridgecrest, Inyokern, and overflow from OHV areas on the fringes. Some wilderness visitation, lots of shooters, lots of mining claims.
Ridgecrest	5	Large urban influence from locals in Ridgecrest, and overflow from Spangler open OHV area. Lots of AML sites, mining claims, and shooters.
Jawbone	1	Remote but heavy OHV use, however the area has been signed and is being maintained.
South Searles	3	Remote but has overflow from OHV areas, requires route signing for resource protection.
North Searles	3	Remote but has visitors from small community of Trona and overflow from OHV areas, requires route signing for resource protection.
Darwin	1	Remote, few roads, small amount of visitors
Middle Knob	1	Remote, few roads, small amount of visitors
Rands	1	Remote but close to small communities, lots of OHV use but signing has been completed and is being maintained.
Landcaster	1	Remote, but close to small communities, some OHV use of Pacific Crest (hiking) trail.

Ranking Criteria – Proximity to Urban Areas

- 5- A rating of 5 indicates that proximity to urban areas is such that it tends to increase visitation and urban problems tend to overflow into the areas within the sub-region. These areas may be near cities or off-highway vehicle areas or other places that tend to be a destination.
- 4- Near urban areas but draws people to a lesser degree. Tends to not necessarily be a destination.
- 3- Somewhat near urbanization but requires additional drive time or specialized vehicle
- 2- Area is mostly in remote locations and requires knowledge of the area and a specialty vehicle
Area is remote and requires a very seasoned driver and vehicles capable of negotiating rough , rocky and/or soft surface roads or area has been signed and is being maintained
- 1 – Area is very remote and requires a very seasoned driver and vehicles capable of negotiating rough, rocky and/or soft surface roads.

Priority Criteria Degree of Readiness

Degree of Readiness Ratings are based on a scale of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, by completeness of routes per subregion. Completeness is determined by the extent that it is possible to correct linear features to reflect ground condition without further field reconnaissance, and that the background files have been prepared and clipped to the WEMO subregion boundaries.

5 rating 100% complete.

4 rating 75% complete.

3 rating 50% complete.

2 rating 25% complete.

1 rating 0% complete