Baja is nearly lost. It has been extremely difficult witnessing the dramatic changes taking place on the Baja California peninsula over the last few decades. I first began traveling in Baja with my family in the late 1960’s. My father Pedro Quintanar, an avid Baja explorer and sportfisher, would constantly review maps in search of new sites for us to explore. My family’s first trip from San Diego, California, to Cabo San Lucas in 1969 predates completion of the paved transpeninsular highway, Mex-1. In the years since then the pristine ecosystems of the peninsula have been, and still are, under attack.

Our two favorite close-range destinations included Punta Cabras on the Pacific Coast and the Sierra de Juarez mountain range. The dirt road to Punta Cabras passes near the wonderful and rare stand of Erendira Pines. Our arrival at the small coastal point and surfing beach would always include a visit to our friend Tacho and La Morra’s home to “catch up” and deliver supplies. This stretch of coast has been transformed by improved roads, large-scale agriculture, and the sale of coastal lands.

Trips to the Sierra de Juarez were made via two beautiful routes. One through the Valle de Ojos Negros via Mex-3 highway, followed by dirt roads through the logging town of Asserradero, or via a northern off-road route from El Condor off of Mex-2 highway. Both routes feature traveling through a beautiful and unique patchwork of vegetation known as “Mediterranean Mosaic,” that includes red shank chaparral, manzanita, canyon/oak woodlands, juniper/mixed pinion pine forests, and Jeffrey Pine forest. Our destinations included visits to Laguna Hanson (Laguna de Juarez on Mexican maps), and the stunning canyons of the Sierra de Juarez’ steep eastern escarpment. Proposed massive wind energy, mining, and hydrologic projects currently threaten to industrialize Baja California’s northern “sky island” mountain ranges. (“Protecting the Sky Island – Sierra San Pedro Martir,” Desert Report, June, 2010)

The Northern Sky Islands: the Sierra de Juarez and the Sierra San Pedro Martir

The Sierra de Juarez and Sierra San Pedro Martir granitic mountain ranges are located in northern Baja California, Mexico. These mountain ranges were formed during the Cenozoic period (approximately 92 million years ago) when plate tectonic movements caused breaks along faults. These massive formations were forced upward resulting in a number of mountain ranges in California and Baja California. The mountain ranges generally have relatively gentle western slopes and very steep eastern escarpments.

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PRODUCING THE DESERT REPORT

We Need Volunteers

The organization of the Desert Report will be changing significantly after the March 2011 issue. After five years I shall be resigning as editor and publisher. It is time for me to undertake new projects and for new ideas to surface with this newsletter. The assignment has been occasionally frustrating and often very rewarding. I appreciate both the assistance I have received and the kind words that have been sent. Beyond the physical layout of each issue, which has been done graciously by Jason Hashmi, the task of producing the Desert Report essentially involves three functions. Previously these tasks have fallen upon one person, but a more manageable arrangement would separate the responsibilities as follows:

1. **Editor** who solicits articles and manages content. This person determines (in consultation with others) which topics will appear in an issue, and then contacts persons to write. When articles arrive they are evaluated, they receive some initial editing, and then they are sent to others who help with copy editing. When significant changes are made, the editor consults with the original author about the final form of the story. Photos, captions, credits, and author bios are a part of each article. The editor is also responsible for obtaining material for the Current Issues section.

2. **Publisher** responsible for fund raising. As the financial situation for the Desert Report has changed in the past year, it has become necessary to raise monies independent of traditional Sierra Club sources. This is a new endeavor, and while a number of options exist, it will be the job of the publisher to implement the strategy that evolves.

3. **General Manager** to handle circulation matters and the detailed record keeping for the publication that goes beyond determining content. This is a traditional “office job.” This is the person who insures that copies go to persons and organizations who are either directly interested or who need and ought to be informed about desert issues.

We need volunteers for these three responsibilities. While previous experience might be nice, it is certainly not a requirement. Beyond computer literacy, it is a willingness to spend time and an interest in learning that will be sufficient. These positions are (predictably) unpaid, but there are very real, but intangible rewards. The best of these is learning that a particular story has reached someone who is, or has become, interested and has decided to act on its message. I can answer questions and provide more information for persons interested in helping. (craig.deutsche@gmail.com)

Producing Desert Report is an adventure. Please step forward.

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**DESSERT COMMITTEE MEETING**

The fall meeting of the Desert Committee will be held November 13 and 14 at the Whitewater Preserve (near Palm Springs) with Pat Flanagan as chair. The winter meeting will be held jointly with the CNRCC Wilderness Committee in Shoshone, California, with co-chairs Terry Frewin and Vicky Hoover. As always we encourage local citizens in the area to attend as many of the items on the agenda include local issues. E-mail Tom Budlong at tombudlong@roadrunner.com or call (310-476-1731) to be put on the invitation list.

**THANK YOU**

Many individuals have contributed to the Desert Report during the past six months and their support is both essential and appreciated. The SPONSORS of the Desert Report with contributions of $100 or more during this period are:

- Tom Budlong, Los Angeles
- Bill James, Las Vegas, NV
- James Pompy, Sacramento, CA
The efforts to protect wild horses from the controversial practice of mustangling, as dramatized in the John Huston film, “The Misfits,” was headed by Wild Horse Annie (Velma Johnston) which led to the first federal wild free-roaming horse protection law in 1959, the Wild Horse Annie Act. In 1971, the United States Congress further protected the wild horse heritage and passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act without one dissenting vote. Congress recognized wild horses and burros as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West which continue to contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.”

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service are tasked with protecting, managing, and controlling wild horses and burros under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, as amended, to ensure that healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands under multiple use and sustained yield principles of our nation’s resources, such as recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness and scenic quality, as well as scientific and cultural values.

Mustangs and burros have few natural predators aside from mountain lions, and their herd sizes can multiply rapidly, which may lead to degradation of rangeland and competition with wildlife species and authorized livestock for forage and water. The BLM estimates that 38,400 wild horses and burros (about 33,700 horses and 4,700 burros) are roaming on BLM-managed rangelands in 10 western states based on the latest data available, compiled in February 2010.

One of the BLM’s key responsibilities under the 1971 law was to determine the herd areas that wild horses and burros utilized at the time the Act was enacted. These areas of public rangelands were identified in land-use plans. Appropriate management levels (AMLs) were assigned based on the area’s land-use objectives and suitability for the management of wild horses and burros. The areas upon which wild horses and or burros would be managed are referenced as herd management areas (HMAs).

To achieve and maintain AMLs, the BLM and Forest Service conduct live-capture programs to gather animals using water/bait trapping or helicopter-assistance techniques. A capture plan identifies the objectives of the gather and for wild horses identifies the age, sex, herd characteristics and which mares, if any, will receive fertility control and be released back into the HMA.

Wild horses and burros captured and removed from a herd area or HMA are transported to a holding and preparation facility where they are placed into the BLM’s National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program. One such facility is the Ridgecrest Regional Wild Horse and Burro Holding and Adoption Facility about 150 miles northeast of Los Angeles. These facilities provide for the appropriate care and needs of the removed animals, which are then placed into the adoption program. Although burros are readily ad-

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Horses being counted in a population census in Fish Lake Valley, north of Dyer NV, part of the Fish Lake Valley HMA (NV) and the Piper Mountain HMA (CA) conducted in February 2010.
Planning For Death Valley’s Wilderness And Backcountry

At 3.1 million acres, Death Valley National Park’s designated wilderness is nearly 1 million acres larger than any other national park in the lower 48 states. This vast expanse provides unrivaled opportunities for solitude, quiet, reconnection, and reprieve from the stress and rapid pace of daily life. Trips into Death Valley’s wilderness reveal horned lizards, fields of mariposa lilies, kit foxes, and seemingly endless high elevation, multi-hued mountain ranges separated by deep valleys. Death Valley also has an 800-mile backcountry road system that provides access to this wilderness—but also fragments it.

Across the country, national parks that manage designated wilderness are required to complete a wilderness plan. Death Valley initiated this public process in March 2009 by opening a 60-day public comment period to gather input. This following September, Death Valley Superintendent Sarah Craighead re-opened the process in response to comments submitted during the initial period expanding the scope to include review of a Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan. Conservation voices were largely absent from the initial comment period and the intent was to raise awareness and encourage action!

The re-opening and expansion of this process now includes pertinent issues such as the management of backcountry camps, cabins, and roads. Death Valley has since received significant public input calling for increased motorized vehicle access, the re-opening of closed roads, and the re-opening of wilderness areas to motorized traffic. To ensure the protection of park resources, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPORA) and members of the public requested inventories of backcountry sites. These inventories will help determine the condition of resources. NPCA also called for the protection of sensitive habitats, plants and animals, and the management of natural soundscapes to ensure that Death Valley’s wilderness experience is protected.

Throughout this process the park has invited groups with jurisdictional authority to join the planning team. Inyo, Nye, and Esmeralda Counties each signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Death Valley as cooperating agencies in this process. As such the counties will contribute by researching the socio-economic impacts of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and by contributing action alternatives.

Be assured, Death Valley National Park will not (and can not) re-open roads closed by Wilderness Legislation, but as the process moves forward, it remains important that your voice be heard. The Environmental Assessment and the Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan are expected to be released in late 2011. Public comments will be collected online through the Planning Environ-
Current threats to wilderness

- Seasonally high-volume, recreational usage of the Cottonwood-Marble loop. This scenic hike travels through sensitive riparian habitat. Bushwhacking across the stream has destroyed wetland plant life, and excess human waste, due to high traffic, is impacting the area.
- Seasonally high-volume recreational usage of the Telescope Peak Trail and Wildrose Peak Trail. This is causing damage to sensitive soils, and the accumulation of human waste remains an issue in these sensitive habitats.
- Illegally dumped trash in wilderness areas. Retaining mining-era historical and cultural resources while simultaneously removing debris remains a challenge.

Current threats to backcountry experience

- Insufficient inventories and management of mining sites and features—any inventory must include an assessment of bat populations and the installation of bat-gates for both resource protection and public safety.
- Unauthorized construction or remediation including: road openings, road-repair work, road-roughing, or restoration of historic cabins or buildings.
- Lack of prioritization of road repairs to ensure access to backcountry resources and maintain the character of the backcountry and wilderness experience.

Innovations to the wilderness and backcountry planning process meriting support

- Geospatial analysis for wilderness character: Death Valley is planning to utilize the “Keeping it Wild” program. This program is an interagency strategy to monitor trends in wilderness character across the National Wilderness Preservation System. This process will be used to take periodic measurements of wilderness along established parameters; to assess the impact of actions and alternatives using a consistent, science-based process; and to improve the overall stewardship of wilderness. More information is available at: http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr212.pdf.
- Stewardship program for wilderness and backcountry: Death Valley hopes to engage advocates for wilderness and backcountry sites to become site stewards. The stewardship process could include photo-documentation, some data-collection, and reporting on the status of the sites sponsored. This inclusive process will connect those who care deeply for the well-being of the resources to actively participate in their continued care and maintenance, in a consistent and directed manner, to the benefit of the resource and those who protect it.

Planning for the preservation of this vast Death Valley Wilderness is an arduous task and maintaining it will be yet another. You are all invited to step forward and become stewards.

David Lamfrom is the Cal Desert Field Representative for NPCA’s Cal Desert Field Office. David is a relative newcomer to the Cal Desert and pursues his passions of conservation, wildlife photography, hiking, and herpetology throughout the Mojave.
In early spring of this year, 2010, Teresa “Teri” A. Raml became district manager for the 10.5 million acre California Desert District. Her most recent position, before arriving at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office in Moreno Valley, was in the Arizona State BLM office where she was manager of a program to identify previously disturbed lands suitable for renewable energy development. Trained as a wildlife biologist Ms. Raml served previously in a number of positions with the U.S. Forest Service in several western states. In 1999, she transferred to the BLM to become the field manager for the Klamath Falls Resource Area in Oregon, and subsequently became the Phoenix District manager in 2003.

I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Raml at her Moreno Valley office on July 20th. The occasion was a formal discussion with a number of persons concerning off-road vehicle management. I was impressed that Ms. Raml listened carefully, acknowledged that she was unfamiliar with many details that appeared during the meeting, and took extensive notes on the matters that were presented. Citizens can not expect that the BLM will always do what they wish, but it is reasonable to expect land managers to listen before reaching a decision. Ms Raml set a high standard for this in the meeting.

It is best to let Ms Raml introduce herself in her own words. She has graciously agreed to answer a number of questions about her new responsibilities and her hopes in carrying them out.

What is there about the CDCA that makes it unlike other areas administered by the Bureau of Land Management?

The CDCA is a 25-million acre expanse of land in southern California designated by Congress in 1976 through the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. About 11 million acres are administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

It is managed differently from other BLM lands. When Congress created the CDCA it recognized its special values, proximity to the population centers of southern California, and the need for a comprehensive plan for managing the area.

Congress also stated the area would be managed on the concepts of multiple use, sustained yield, and maintenance of environmental quality. Congress directed BLM to prepare and implement a comprehensive, long-range plan for the management, use, development, and protection of the public lands within the CDCA.

The final result was a plan that met all of Congress’ requirements and that balanced the diverse public demands and needs. The CDCA Plan was approved by both outgoing Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus in 1980 and incoming Secretary of the Interior James Watt in 1981.

Each of the five field offices within the CDCA has responsibility for their particular area. What then is the role of the CDD office.

The District Office role is to provide the strategic umbrella to the 11 million acres we manage. We do that primarily in the following areas: 1) regional outreach 2) strategic planning 3) budgeting 4) quality assurance, and 4) scarce skills.

What experience do you bring to your present position that will be helpful?

With over 30 years of experience in federal land management, about half of that as a manager, I have plenty of experiences to draw from. My most recent assignments in Phoenix, Arizona have given me some insights in regards to renewable energy and managing public lands in the urban interface. Working with partners in different locations and with different interests will also be helpful – I know that together we can accomplish wonderful things that far outlast my individual impact.

What do expect you will need to learn in this job?

So much! I have lots to learn about almost every aspect of BLM’s unique management challenges and opportunities in southern California.

What do you consider to be the greatest threats or challenges faced by the CDCA?

The greatest threat would be the public not being involved in our land management planning and project planning processes. We manage millions of acres of public lands near millions of people that are unaware of their lands and their opportunities to become involved in planning and in projects. Our challenge – and I am speaking of all the managers and resource specialists in the Desert District – is to meet our workload demands and also to coordinate...
with our colleagues in resource management, maintain good relationships with our partners and to find the time reach out to build new partnerships.

How can these challenges be best addressed?

Good question! In addition to good old fashioned priority setting and focusing our resources on the most critical needs, it also takes active involvement (the gentle and sometimes not-so-gentle prodding) of stakeholders, partners, and the general public to meaningfully engage them in our processes and projects. We need to ensure that our decisions are well vetted and result in a balanced approach that supports our multiple use mandate.

What priorities have you set for yourself as manager of the Desert District?

My first priority has been to meet people, including California BLM employees, and learn about their programs, projects, issues and interests. I have been here for a little over 4 months and I am still making the rounds. Just by the nature of this job, a variety of issues come my way for resolution. I also intend to turn my attention to areas where we can increase our capacity to accomplish work with and through others (aka partnerships).

When the public becomes involved in early stages of land management planning they are less inclined to protest or litigate the results. How would you like to see the public engaged in these matters?

We make every effort, as the law requires, to provide the public every opportunity to review, comment, and in some cases...protest or appeal our actions during our public land management decision process. We like to see the public involved at our public meetings during the development of an environmental document, and we always welcome public input at any time on issues they may have concerning their public lands.

We provide the public a great opportunity, called News Bytes, on our state web site to keep up with all land management actions in the state plus items of interest that touch all of our public land multiple use challenges. You can find News Bytes at www.ca.blm.gov, and you can subscribe to it to receive a weekly edition on your home computer. The BLM is also now available on Facebook, You Tube, and Twitter so the public really has all kinds of access to us and we hope the public takes advantage of these opportunities.

In what other ways might the public assist the BLM in carrying out its mission?

The most important way the public can assist the BLM is by becoming involved from providing comments during a plan amendment management process to becoming a volunteer.

I certainly hope you have had time to get out of the office and visit some of the lands for which you are responsible. What are the places that you have found especially attractive?

I will have to get back to you on that – I have been on a few field trips but unfortunately so far, I have mostly viewed the impressive landscapes that we manage from a vehicle window. Cooler weather is coming!

I would like to offer you the last word. Is there anything more you would like to impart to those reading this article?

In an earlier question, I discussed what I believe is the critical challenge of getting people engaged in public land management. I have personally experienced people’s lack of familiarity with the BLM and their public lands when I am asked “what do you do?” I invite your readers to share their experiences of first learning about public lands managed by BLM and specifically the California Desert District.

Craig Deutsche is Managing Editor for the Desert Report.
“Habitat destruction and the spread of alien species have been ranked as the two greatest threats to biodiversity. Off-road vehicles contribute to both of these.”


It seems that everyone, from agency personnel to off-road enthusiasts to environmentalists, agrees that monitoring motorized vehicle trails on public lands is an important task. Improper or illegal off-road travel causes resource damage, creates conflicts between user groups, and leads to restrictions on legal motorized use of our public lands. When it comes to actually getting the monitoring done, however, things seem to fall apart. Lack of budget, lack of time, lack of commitment, lack of personnel—lots of lack. Given these challenges, what can we do to promote and guarantee the proper monitoring of OHV trails and routes?

One very effective way is through the Healthy Lands Project (HLP, online at www.healthylands.org). HLP offers a suite of services found nowhere else: a complete package of field mapping, monitoring, and web display resources that combines expertise in law, regulation, and policy with in-depth knowledge of field monitoring methods. Using the HLP protocols, volunteers and paid staff are able to develop clear, consistent, and reliable descriptions of conditions on motorized routes on public lands.

HLP has developed peer-reviewed and attorney-approved methods and forms for gathering field data. Our monitoring forms are dynamic documents, and we work with partners to help tailor our process to their needs. After the data is gathered, we integrity check and geolocate the data points and enter the information into our database. Once entered, the information becomes available on our Web interface. The interface includes topographic and Google Satellite mapping technology, and it allows users to generate reports and a re-monitoring kit, which includes coordinates and thumbnail photos for repeat monitoring.

HLP provides a complete training course that helps monitors understand and use our data gathering protocols; it also helps them recognize and record subtle impacts to resources and recreational experiences. We train monitors to observe land conditions using techniques and guidance based on years of combined experience in roadless area inventory and off-road vehicle monitoring and advocacy.

All this provides an opportunity for volunteers from partner organizations to get out on the land and better understand the issues and impacts associated with off-road vehicle use. This leads to a deeper appreciation for wild lands and quiet recreation, and an increased ability to interact effectively with land management agencies. The list of partner organizations is long so only four will be indicated here as examples: American Hiking Society, Utah Wilderness Coalition, Ogden Sierra Club, Wild Earth Guardians.

HLP currently has data online from past and current projects in Arizona, California, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming, and we are developing projects in New Mexico and Idaho. You can view that information through the website listed above. You’ll be asked for a username and password; those are jackie714 and 582vitis, respectively. Examples of the collected data are in the sidebar with this article.
ter meet the agencies’ needs while continuing to serve our core conservation partners. We plan to create a strong partnership that strengthens HLP’s reputation as the premier source of off-road vehicle monitoring information in the western United States.

The future of HLP lies in increasing partner participation and in ensuring that land management agencies are aware of the breadth, depth, and quality of the information provided. We will be working with our conservation partners and with the agencies to collect and maintain high quality information to meet current and future needs for travel route monitoring.

Gary Skiba holds a B.S. in Wildlife Management and an M.S. in Wildlife Biology. After a 23-year career with the Colorado Division of Wildlife that focused on endangered species management, he became the Director of the Healthy Lands Project. Gary lives near Durango, Colorado, with his wife, three dogs, a horse, and two sometimes ornery burros.

Great Old Broads

HLP was developed by Great Old Broads for Wilderness (www.greatoldbroads.org), a non-profit, public lands organization that uses the voices and activism of elders to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands. We at Great Old Broads and HLP base our activism on lifetimes of adventures and experiences bringing a broader perspective and valuable insights to wilderness discussions. Great Old Broads was founded in 1989 in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Today our wrinkled ranks have grown to include men and younger women (Broads-in-training), though the majority of our membership continues to be older women committed to protecting wilderness areas.

There are particular advantages to being old and gray (besides the senior citizen discount). We’re an anomaly in the environmental activist area, and the press and others are curious as to what we have to say. Our approach in this endeavor is the use of a sense of humor and our well-aged grace. Our message on behalf of wilderness may be similar to that of other organizations, but Great Old Broads has the ability to attract the public’s interest and attention in ways that other groups cannot. Correspondingly, because we are both older and (presumably) wiser, people give greater deference to our message than to younger environmentalists.

If you’re a Great Old Broad, we need you. Please join us.
The Imperial Valley, in the eyes of renewable-energy entrepreneurs, presents an ideal location for expansion: plenty of sunshine, great location. The perilous state of the valley’s ecosystem reveals an altogether different picture. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says the valley is in severe noncompliance for airborne particulate matter smaller than 10 microns (PM10). The industrialists’ “Energy Capital of the World” could turn out to be a dry Cuyahoga River of air pollution through destructive land use.

Governor Schwarzenegger strengthened the push for renewable energy on November 17, 2008, when he signed an executive order requiring that 33 percent of the electricity sold in the state come from renewables by 2020. Since then additional orders and memorandums from the governor’s office and the Department of the Interior have added weight to the effort to develop renewable energy facilities.

No environmental organization disputes the need for alternatives to fossil fuels. However, in the rush to meet the 2020 deadline, some organizations and agencies have seen almost all renewable projects as good choices, without taking a look at the effects their multiplication will have on overall air quality. Project after project in the same valley will stir up ever more dust particles. A big-picture view of the Imperial Valley’s future – given the push for multiple industrial plants – is hazy at best.

Many environmental organizations have definite policies concerning the siting of alternative energy facilities which apply to the Imperial Valley air shed. For example, The Sierra Club Board policies on siting energy projects and Air Quality state:

Under Air Quality, three scales of impact on air quality must be considered:

1. Local scale: EPA ambient air quality standards and non-degradation standards must be met and potential future growth must be allowed for.
2. Sub regional scale: Cumulative impacts on the order of air quality control regions or air basins must be considered such as result from persistent air flows.
3. Regional Scale: Long-range transport of pollutants must be considered on the order of several states or air basins. In addition, impairment of visibility must be addressed in preventing the degradation of air quality--- Adopted by Sierra Club Board of Directors 1977

Air Quality Problems in Imperial County are severe and have been reported previously. (“Air Quality: An Issue in the Desert,” Desert Report, Sept 2009) It has the highest rate of childhood asthma hospital admissions in California. In 2003, children ages 0-14 years, were admitted to the hospital due to asthma at a rate which is more than three times the state average. Approximately 85% of these admissions were Latino children. A study conducted by the California Department of Public health entitled the Border Asthma and Allergies Study or BASTA found that of all students surveyed (3,224) about one in five had been diagnosed with asthma at some time. In the four years since the BASTA survey children are still three times more likely to be admitted to the hospital in Imperial County than in the rest of the state (Environmental Health Investigations Branch, CA Department of Public Health)

In addition, a large number of BASTA children surveyed who had never been diagnosed with asthma reported they had breathing problems such as wheezing. The undiagnosed asthma levels may be between 2% and 23%, based on how asthma symptoms are reported. There are also many scientific publications which correlate the development of cardiovascular disease with increases in fine particulate matter.

In December 2009 the EPA Region 9 sent a letter to the California Air Resources Board (ARB) calling Imperial County’s continued violations of the federal PM10 standard inexcusable. The EPA analysis also demonstrated how a number of critical measures adopted by Imperial County for the State Implementation Plan (SIP) do not meet the standards of other California air pollution control districts. Indeed, the reduction of the current PM10 levels are critical for the health and safety of the human population of Imperial County. The
senior population may be particularly affected on a long-term basis by the levels of Air Quality in Imperial Valley.

This situation was clearly expressed by Louis Fuentes, Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, Imperial County, in a letter to the other supervisors. Parts of this letter are extracted below:

“Recent reports that have been published by the American Lung Association on our children’s health and our rates of asthma and respiratory illnesses are certainly not made up or “skewed.” They are real. These are facts. The California Department of Public Health also released their BASTA report on the same high rates of respiratory illnesses recently. Both of these reports came after the Board approved the SIP.”

“When it comes to protecting our own community’s health, our “house” if you will, and there is an opportunity to enhance the programs we have in place that effect our children and senior citizens health, it is our duty to do so. As I understand it and have heard since I was appointed in November, the issue of Air Quality and protecting our citizen’s health is the primary reason behind the County’s lawsuit against the IID [Imperial Irrigation District] and the QSA [Quantification Settlement Agreement which allocates Colorado River Water]. Why should this be any different…”?

“...Litigation is not the answer; it is regrouping and presenting revised amendments.”

Renewable energy projects such as Solar Two and wind energy facilities will not be the only contributors to fine particulates in the valley. Also on tap are Wind Zero—a military-style training facility, the Sunrise Powerlink which will require clearing land and grading access roads, the inevitable drying up of most of the Salton Sea, the Mesquite Landfill east of the Algodones Dunes, truck terminals for cross-border traffic, extensive—and currently permissible—burning of agricultural fields, the dirt roads traveled by workers on drainage canal roads, off-highway recreational vehicle traffic, and geothermal plant development, as well as urban growth both north and south of the border.

In summation, much of Imperial Valley except for state parks and wilderness lands is proposed to have significantly increased ground disturbance despite already being severely out of air quality compliance. Additionally, the siting of projects which increase health hazards to a poor population raises questions of environmental justice.

Imperial County has an opportunity to plan a resilient future by accepting that the air ecosystem is at a critical tipping point. An improved State Implementation Plan is a means to reduce the current threats. Alternatively, the region can continue, illegally, down the road of unlimited development which, in the words of Ed Abbey, is the culture of the cancer cell. 

Fred Cagle, PhD and PA, is former board member of the Desert Protective Council, is a Sierra Club life member, and serves on the Governor’s Advisory committee for the Salton Sea. Professional commitments have included environmental and occupational medicine. His principal interests now are in effecting changes in ecosystems health and justice.

Wild Horse And Burro Legacy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

opted, among the much larger number of wild horses, many are not able to find homes.

Wild horses that are not adopted because of age or other factors are cared for in long-term holding pastures leased by the federal government. These pastures—in Oklahoma, Iowa, Kansas, and South Dakota—have more abundant forage than the HMAs of the dry public lands of the West. They are designed to provide wild horses with humane, life-long care in a natural setting.

In January 2005, an amendment was attached to an appropriations bill before the United States Congress by former Senator Conrad Burns dubbed the “Burns Rider.” This modified the adoption program to allow the sale of captured horses that are “more than 10 years of age,” or that have been “offered unsuccessfully for adoption at least three times.”

In June 2009, the House of Representatives passed H.R.1018, the Restore Our American Mustangs Act (ROAM) which would amend the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act to:

1. Remove outdated limits on the areas where horses can roam freely, allowing the BLM to find additional, suitable acreage;
2. Strengthen the BLM’s wild horse and burro adoption program;
3. Require consistency and accuracy in the management of wild horse and burro herds;
4. Allow more public involvement in management decisions;
5. Facilitate the creation of sanctuaries for wild horse and burro populations on public lands;
6. And prohibit the killing of healthy wild horses and burros.

Because there is a much larger pool of captured horses than prospective adoptees, a number of efforts have been made to reduce the number of horses in holding facilities. For example, the BLM is teaming up with the Mustang Heritage Foundation in promoting a Trainer Incentive Program in which a trainer can pick up a mustang, gentle it, find an adopter within 90 days, and the trainer receives $700 for his or her efforts. Also through the Mustang Heritage Foundation, in its Extreme Mustang Makeover competition, trainers have 90 days to train their mustangs, followed by competition events for prize money. At the Extreme Mustang Makeover finale, the mustangs are adopted through competitive bid. For more information about these programs, please go to: www.mustangheritagefoundation.org.

Recently, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and the Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey urged Congress to authorize seven wild horse preserves, including two facilities already owned and operated by the BLM. The agency would work with private groups on the remaining reserves, which would be located in states in the Midwest and East. More information on Secretary Salazar’s initiative may be found at: www.blm.gov/wyo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/national/initiative.html. And to stay current with BLM’s Wild Horse & Burro program, please visit www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov or the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Facebook page.

Alex Neiberg is originally from Pullman, Washington. He has been with BLM since 1988 and with the WH&B program since 1993. His current position is Rangeland Management Specialist in the Ridgecrest BLM office. He has an adopted BLM burro by the name of Weasel.
The Sierra Club has a long and storied history of fighting for the protection of the nation’s wildlands and special places. Starting with the effort to preserve Yosemite in the 19th century, the Echo Park battle in the 1950’s to preserve the integrity of the National Park units on the Colorado River, and the Alaska National Interest Lands legislation during the Carter administration the Club has always taken the position that preservation of wildlands, open spaces, and intact ecosystems is the Club’s highest priority.

With the advent of anthropogenic global climate change as one of the major conservation issues of the 21st century it appears that this goal may have changed. The Club staff appears to have adopted the position that saving the earth from climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions is their primary task and that promotion of utility scale solar and wind generated electricity is essential to accomplish this. Hence, the Club is supporting a number of questionable renewable energy projects in the deserts of the Southwest.

It is appropriate to weigh carefully the benefits that might be expected from this means of energy production against the benefits that may derive from the protection of wildland habitat that has been the Club’s traditional concern. It is the opinion of this writer that the balance has not been properly evaluated.

Those of us who live in and/or love the desert areas are dismayed at the Club’s apparent willingness to sacrifice relatively intact desert ecosystems for questionable gains in the effort to limit human caused greenhouse gas emissions. The problem of carbon based greenhouse gas emissions is one of huge magnitude. Take the Club’s stated goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 80% by the year 2050 (based on 2005 emission levels): total elimination of all fossil fuel fired power plants in the U.S. would only cut emissions by 40%, half of the goal. The other 60% of carbon dioxide emissions are due to fossil fuel consumption for transportation, heating, and industrial uses.

The technologies being promoted for large scale solar thermal electricity generation (with the exception of parabolic trough technology) are only in their infancy and have no track record of utility scale use. Furthermore, the maximum output of these plants is being touted as comparable to the output of fossil fuel electric generating facilities with no mention of the difference in capacity factors. A typical fossil fuel fired power plant can operate at 90% or more of maximum capacity on a 24/7 basis while solar powered plants operate at about 25% of maximum capacity (calculated on an annual basis).

The footprint of solar energy generating facilities is another major issue. In order to produce the same number of megawatt hours of electricity as a 1000 megawatt rated fossil fuel fired generating plant a solar energy generating facility needs about 40,000 acres of land.*

These facts make it clear that unless commitments of almost

* These facts make it clear that unless commitments of almost

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The many benefits of decentralized generation of electricity (often referred to as distributed generation or DG) make it the preferred alternative for meeting California’s clean energy mandates. By “preferred” we mean that it should receive the highest priority because it offers the greatest potential benefits while minimizing risks to the environment from placing large utility-scale solar or wind power plants in remote areas. By decentralized (or distributed) generation we mean local electrical generation from dispersed, small-scale generators, usually rated at 20 Megawatts (MW) capacity or less and situated on vacant land or existing structures close to the point of electricity consumption.

A variety of California programs offer the opportunity to develop distributed generation, including:
• The Million Solar Roofs Program provides $3 billion to help fund 3000 megawatts of customer-owned “rooftop” solar electric generation by 2016.
• The Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP) provides incentive payments to small energy projects, such as solar, wind, microturbines, and fuel cells.
• The Renewable Electricity Standard (RES) is a governor’s executive order (S 14-08) that requires all utilities to get 33% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020; this is likely soon to be supplanted by SB 722 that would write this target into law.
• The California Air Resources Board (CARB), under a state mandate from AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, approved a Scoping Plan that includes building 4000 megawatts of new Combined Heat and Power systems by 2020 to help meet greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

The implications of decentralized energy resources include more than just the limited scope of electric power generation in California. They have potential far beyond just helping meet the state’s current mandate of 33% renewables by 2020.

The case for decentralized generation is based on the following factors:

Cost Effectiveness: Electricity generated from decentralized sources can be cost effective compared to developing similar renewables in a remote location. For example, even though remote solar projects may enjoy some economy of scale compared to solar projects in urban areas, this advantage is relatively narrow, and may be lost entirely when environmental and transmission costs are factored in. At the same time, a large recent reduction in the price of solar panels makes solar energy much more economical than it was even a few years ago. Similarly, decentralized wind generation avoids transmission costs and is easier to connect to the grid, which offsets a significant portion of the benefits of economy of scale that large wind farms have.

Feasibility: There are enough potential sites for new renewable generation to meet California’s 2020 renewable energy target.
unimaginable land areas are made for solar energy production the contribution that deserts can make to altering the course of climate change will be very, very minor. Given this situation it is appropriate to ask what contribution these habitats might make in adjusting to the expected climate changes which are certain to occur to some degree. In this matter the relatively pristine condition (mostly undisturbed) of these desert areas is of major significance.

It is widely recognized that if native species, both plant and animal, are to survive the expected changes it will be necessary to many of them, perhaps most, to migrate either upward or northward or both. This necessarily means that there must be uninterrupted corridors where animals may travel where floristic habitat may be established along the journey. Indeed, this principle is fundamental to the Club’s “Resilient Habitats” campaign. Because the deserts of California and Nevada are largely undisturbed these corridors already exist, for the most part. They do not need to be created; it is only necessary to insure that they are not interrupted or destroyed.

Given the land area required for production of solar generated electrical power, and given the extreme modification of land that these projects require it is inevitable that they will greatly compromise the ability of plant and animal communities to adjust to the changes which they are powerless to prevent.

It is the opinion of this author that the best uses for desert habitat in the face of climate change have not been properly evaluated. Indeed, the need for habitat protection – the traditional concern of the Sierra Club – has not been decreased by the specter of climate change, rather it has increased in importance. Other avenues exist to combat greenhouse gas production (distributed renewable generation, conservation, efficiency) but there are no alternatives for preserving the diversity of life on our planet. It is time to think more carefully about where we have been and where we are going.

*It generally takes about 10 acres of land for the production of one megawatt of solar generated electricity. (10 acres/Mw)x1000Mw/(0.25(capacity factor)) = 40,000 acres,

John Hiatt, a desert activist living in Las Vegas, Nevada, is a member of the CNRCC Desert Committee and is a board member of Friends of Nevada Wilderness.
ity supply, as a multiplicity of small sources means that that likelihood of large capacity going offline at once is small. In addition, decentralized generation provides a means of avoiding the market manipulations that have caused brownouts and power shortages in the past.

As a renewable energy strategy for California and the nation, decentralized or distributed generation addresses the compelling need for a rapid transition away from fossil fuels within a policy framework that promotes broad economic, environmental, and equitable community development. Emphasizing cost-effective local renewable energy resources departs from the business-as-usual paradigm of capital-intensive energy development benefiting narrow economic interests at the expense of broader community interests.

DG provides an alternative to the energy industry’s vision of paving thousands of square miles of desert with industrial-scale solar arrays or depending on distant forests of wind turbines that would send power across a vast superhighway of transmission lines. An alternative vision—and one that a growing number of states and communities are embracing—is to prioritize development of in-state and local resources for the benefit of local communities.

Achieving this vision will require overcoming the idea that building an “energy sprawl” in remote and natural places is essential for practical or economic reasons, or for saving the earth. A misguided attempt to clone the urban sprawl that plagues our cities and suburbs would model our new energy system upon the problem that renewable energy is intended to solve. Rapidly scaling up decentralized generation requires strong and effective policies, such as feed-in tariff payments for decentralized generation (FITs), support for Community Choice energy programs (CCAs), as well as a re-orientation of laws and agencies to support renewable energy secure communities (RESCOs).

Even though remote solar projects may enjoy some economy of scale compared to solar projects in urban areas, this advantage is relatively narrow, and may be lost entirely when environmental and transmission costs are factored in.

Energy activists DON’T believe that meeting clean energy and climate goals can or should be done with only distributed solar photovoltaics (PV). Indeed, some industrial scale, renewable energy facilities will be needed to reach California’s energy goals. Energy activists DO believe that a combination of Distributed and Local Resources, including Conservation (reducing wasted, unnecessary, misdirected, or even destructive energy services), Consumer Efficiency (more efficient Electronics, Appliances, Motors, Lighting, etc.), Generation Efficiency (Combined Heat and Power - CHP/Cogeneration), Local and Distributed Renewable Generation (including Photovoltaics, Bio-fuel, Wind, Small Hydro, etc.), combined with other Distributed Energy Technologies (e.g., Geothermal Heat Pumps, Energy Storage, etc.), will go a long way to reducing the demands upon California’s deserts to contribute. Most of these elements of a robust distributed energy system are already California’s adopted policy.

A broad combination of local resources is far greater, is far more economical, is far more rapidly achievable, is far more broadly applicable, and is far more reliable than photovoltaics alone. It is also more consistent with Sierra Club policy, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) Climate Scoping Plan to implement AB 32 and the California Loading Order; and it makes much more sense from the perspective of strategic planning and power system engineering/design. This plan would free up transmission line capacity to make it much easier to deliver remote renewables to urban areas to meet the balance of need for renewable energy, while minimizing the need, cost, and delay for new transmission lines.

Where renewable energy production in the desert becomes a necessity, the critical considerations are a) to avoid biologically and culturally sensitive areas, b) to develop sources that have a minimal footprint for the amount of energy produced, and c) for land-intensive development such as solar and wind, to use sites in the desert where energy development would have minimal impact, such as disturbed lands near existing roads and transmission corridors.

Al Weinrub and Robert Freehling are members of the Energy-Climate Committee, CNRCC Sierra Club California.
The year is 12,000 BC. It’s summer on the open grasslands of the Carrizo Plain, and a familiar scene unfolds in the distance. A pronghorn antelope doe grazes while two young fawns play at her side. She lifts her head quickly to scan. Then, in an instant, all three bound off together, leaving only their telltale, heart-shaped hoof prints in the dry soil.

Today, thousands of years later, we are fortunate enough to witness this same scene take place on the Carrizo Plain - at least for the present. Historically, pronghorn (Antilocapra americana) thrived on the Carrizo, a quarter of a million acre national monument located along the southwestern edge of California’s San Joaquin Valley. In the 1800s, the California gold rush and the agricultural expansion of the rich central valley brought a surge of settlers to the area. The pronghorn, which were hunted for meat and displaced by anthropogenic needs, became locally extinct by the turn of that century. The land was plowed, the cattle were run, and over time even the pronghorns’ small, heart-shaped hoof prints slowly began disappear.

In the late 1980s, several hundred pronghorn captured in northeastern California were relocated to the Carrizo. Initially the reintroduced population increased, but over the next twenty years the population experienced fluctuation and overall decline. Today it is estimated that no more than 30 pronghorn remain on the monument. What caused this substantial decline? Was it predation, poor habitat, water availability, or simply dispersal from the area?

In a collaborative research study between the Bureau of Land Management and the US Geological Survey, we are investigating potential causes of this population decline. Specifically, we are studying fawn survival and how it is affected by predation, habitat use, health, and diet. Why study fawns, you ask? Fawn survival is widely considered one of the most important factors affecting pronghorn population dynamics. Indeed fawn mortality throughout North America is naturally high - somewhere between 50-70%, but on the Carrizo it may be as high as 85%. Through our research we are collecting and analyzing information to better explain the causes of high fawn mortality and overall population decline.

Throughout the year we collect information on habitat use, survivorship, diet, and forage availability, but most of our fieldwork is conducted in the spring when fawns are captured at about 2-4 days of age. The process of trapping fawns takes place even before birth. Pregnant does will disperse from the herd to isolate their future young from potential predators. We use this cue to identify and monitor the females until their newborn fawns can be located. Because does will leave their young for hours to forage, we are able to capture and process fawns without being seen by the mother. Blood samples and body measurements are taken, and GPS (Global Positioning System) collars are attached to each individual.

These lightweight GPS collars, which use satellites to automatically collect and store fawn locations, are a central component of our project. The collars expand to accommodate neck growth and

Top: Author preparing to place a lightweight GPS collar on a newborn pronghorn. Above: Room to run - one of the survivors

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Ruby Pipeline Decision Challenged

Citing the threats to wildlife habitat and undisturbed lands, the Sierra Club has challenged the recent approval by the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of a right-of-way across northern Nevada for the Ruby pipeline. This week the Sierra Club appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the Department of the Interior.

The Ruby pipeline would carry natural gas across 358 miles of the state through largely undisturbed land and wildlife habitat. The Sierra Club is proposing an alternate route along existing roads, railroads and already approved utility corridors which would add only 55 miles to the pipeline length.

The approved pipeline route would impact an estimated 800 cultural sites, important breeding sites for sage grouse, cross 60 streams and clear a 115-foot wide swath through a mostly natural landscape. The Sierra Club does not oppose a gas pipeline across the state, but is seeking to stop construction of the Ruby pipeline along the proposed alignment until route changes can be made to minimize its consequences.

Update on Impending Energy Projects

The following are six energy projects which are closest to receiving final approval. It is the number and diversity of these efforts which are notable, and with others which are following closely, the cumulative effects are immense. Details about these may be found by clicking the Current Issues button in the on-line Desert Report (www.desertreport.org).

Name: Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System (solar thermal power tower)
Location: Eastern San Bernardino County, California, near Primm, Nevada.
Date EIS published or expected: BLM- Final EIS Proposed California Desert Conservation Act Plan Amendment out August 6, 2010, plus 30 days comment period.

Name: NextLight (now First Solar) Silver State (thin-film photovoltaic)
Location: Clark County in Ivanpah Valley, Nevada.
Date EIS published or expected: Draft EIS out April 16, 2010, plus 45 days comment period.
End of comment period: BLM- Final EIS due out early September, and ROD may be simultaneous. May be September 10, 2010.

Name: Granite Mountains Wind Energy Project
Location: San Bernardino County near Lucerne Valley.
Date EIS published or expected: Final EIS/EIR due out soon. End of comment period: Unknown, may be 30 days after release of FEIS.

Name: Imperial Valley Solar Project (Stirling dish)
Location: Imperial County, California near Ocotillo Wells.
Date EIS published or expected: BLM - Final EIS and Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment released July 28, 2010. This notice initiates a 30-day protest period for the proposed amendment to the California Desert Plan, a necessary step before the project could be approved. Details on filing a protest can be found in the Federal Register Notice or in the Final EIS, available online at http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/elcentro/nepa/stirling.html CEC- Last evidentiary hearing August 16, 2010, then PMPD will be released. End of comment period: BLM- August 26, 2010. Also deadline for IBLA protests. CEC- unknown, probably in September.

Desert Renewable Energy Plan Underway

In late 2008 Governor Schwarzenegger signed an Executive Order that mandated a 33% renewable energy generation goal for electric utilities by 2020. And because the desert has been targeted for vast solar energy development, it ordained that a Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) be developed to “streamline and expedite the permitting processes for renewable energy projects, while conserving endangered species and natural communities at the ecosystem scale.”

Various state and federal agencies and transmission operators entered into agreements to join the DRECP (including BLM). Then, this spring a “Stakeholder” Committee of agencies, desert counties, industry reps, enviros, plus a Native American was designated to meet monthly and provide input to the process. The goal is to identify low habitat value areas where renewable energy projects are permitted to “take” sensitive and endangered species, while conserving enough intact habitat in perpetuity to ensure long-term persistence of native desert biota.

Encompassing 25 million acres of private and public land, the DRECP dwarfs any habitat plan to date. Clearly, this is an ambitious and critically important undertaking, with a target of issuing take permits by mid 2012.

As with any habitat plan, sound science is the sine qua non. And so far, the DRECP has done a credible job of enlisting expert biologists to provide sound biological guidelines for the plan. See draft guidelines, plan boundaries, and other specifics at drecp.org.

The question is: will the DRECP stay a science-driven plan or not? The answer will be critical to the future of the desert. Stay posted, or join a Stakeholders meeting and weigh in at public comment. It’s your desert too.

By Joan Taylor, Friends of the Desert Mountains appointee to DRECP
It's June in the Great Basin, and as usual, I long for a walk in the crystalline morning, under a deep turquoise sky. A walk along a desert river, in the shade of cottonwood trees, offers inspiration and a chance to revisit the Truckee River, the subject of a book I wrote ten years ago. Back then, a severe drought lasting from 1987-94 held everyone's attention as the Truckee dried up in the summer of 1992.

The Truckee River is bank-full this year thanks to a wet winter. The winter of 2009 brought snowstorms through Memorial Day, when Sierra ski resorts reopened, treating visitors to fresh powder. Snowmelt feeds the Truckee River, and recharges this ecosystem on which some four hundred thousand people in Reno and Sparks depend. In this high desert, seven inches of precipitation might fall in a year, making the Truckee even more of a lifeline. This modest river provides shelter for migratory birds and waterfowl, as well as water for human needs and agriculture.

The Truckee River rises in California and flows from its alpine origin in Lake Tahoe to the alkaline Pyramid Lake in the Nevada desert, a hundred miles to the north and east. The river descends a rugged canyon, flanked by Ponderosa pine and Fremont cottonwood trees as it loses elevation through the Truckee Meadows and flows into the Nevada desert. The river's rich history dates back to the ancient Lake Lahontan. Its surrounding meadows and river banks offered a resting place for nineteenth-century California-bound emigrants as well as earlier travelers, the Paiute and Washoe, who have found sustenance in the arid lands east of the Sierra Nevada for thousands of years.

Hunter-gatherers, the Paiute and Washoe Indian tribes traveled the length of the Truckee River harvesting rice grass, pinon nuts, and what explorer John Fremont would call the “salmon trout,” the abundant native Lahontan cutthroat trout that traveled upstream to alpine lake waters to spawn. Pyramid Lake Paiute culture centers on the waters of the Truckee River and Pyramid Lake, home to another fish, the prehistoric cui-ui, found only in Pyramid Lake. That species was nearly decimated by 1967; it recovered and still travels upriver from Pyramid Lake's depths to spawn.

In contrast, the species of Lahontan cutthroat trout that Fremont enjoyed was extinct by the 1940s. Overfishing and obstruction in the river, such as diversion dams and sawdust, brought about its demise (*The Truckee River Chronology*). Each of these fish facts epitomizes the effects of white settlement on the Truckee River. Dams that were built for irrigation and power generation, as well as the logging, milling, and mining that accompanied the Comstock silver boom near the Truckee River brought about “unparalleled” environmental degradation on this once-pristine waterway as early as the mid-19th century (*The Truckee River Chronology*).

The Truckee River is both geographically and historically significant. The river drains inland, flowing not to the Pacific, but east, to a desert “sink,” Pyramid Lake. The river's historical significance is marked by its distinction as the first western river to be dammed for irrigation through the federally-funded Newlands Project. At the turn of the twentieth century, Nevada legislators argued for this project's funding with their claim that water flowing to Pyramid Lake, an inland sink on tribal land, was “wasted.” The water from the Truckee would better serve the state if it could be used for agriculture, they reasoned. Completed in 1905, Derby Dam has diverted water from the Truckee to the farms in the nearby Lahontan Valley for irrigation. In what we now may view as a corruption of the Jeffersonian ideal, the imposition of an agrarian economy onto a landscape of unprecedented aridity inaugurated the transformation of the Truckee River. For most of the twentieth century, nearly fifty percent of the river's waters were diverted for irrigation. Effects on the entire ecosystem have been, not surprisingly, numerous. Some of those effects—the losses of native species of fish and birds, for example—are irreversible. Other effects, like the channelizing and straightening of the river, are being remediated along stretches of the Truckee.

This century-old impetus to dam, divert, or channelize the Truckee River reminds us of how the nineteenth-century mindset privileged human needs over nature. While we are more aware today of the enormous ecological costs of such thinking, the Truckee River demonstrates how far we've come and what we've yet to learn.

My walk today takes me to the urban Truckee River pathway, through Idlewild Park, not far from downtown Reno. There I can revisit the crooked mile, as it's called, where the path along the river veers around huge, old cottonwoods, some of their gnarled trunks four feet across. Here the quiet rushing sounds of water over rocks in the river offers deep solitude. Despite my love for isolated dirt trails, this asphalt stretch of the path along the Truckee River me-
The Truckee River, west of Wingfield Park, Reno, NV, July 18, 2010

and loss of habitat,” (email 7/20/10). Trout are one of the species (rainbow trout), dams, which are barriers to movement, said. Fish need cool water and vegetation. Erwin noted: “Lahontan cutthroat trout are a threatened species, and there are habitat problems in the Truckee River.”

I stop to watch the river, standing under cool shade, just as pair of kayakers comes into view. I envy their swift progression as they glide effortlessly on the sparkling water’s surface. They are headed to the whitewater park downtown, a place that helps us understand the trade-offs we are making today in “using” the Truckee River.

The Whitewater Park at Wingfield, as it’s formally called, opened in 2003, after four years of planning, funding, and construction. Funding for the park came from a state recreation bond and contributions from several casinos. The impetus for the project was to make this recreation resource, as officials termed the river, usable.

The park features a half-mile kayak course, with a redesigned riverbed that creates whitewater. Grassy areas for picnicking surround the river. An amphitheatre holds countless music events, particularly in the summer during Reno’s “Art Town” Festival. This part of the river, with its bridges and walkways to get down to and across the water, is the “happening place.” Hundreds of people spend the day floating on the river itself or sunning on its banks. They lounge on smooth boulders, thanks to seven tons of rocks that were brought in during construction. The new walkways and the easily navigated banks allow anyone to access to the river. A few signs warn of hazards, telling people to wear life jackets, helmets.

This modest desert river now flows through eleven “drop-pools” to create class two (or three, depending on flow) whitewater and the play spots or “surf holes” that make this a whitewater park. Organizers of the Reno River Festival, a kayak racing event, say the river has been made safer for human use; the river flows over the “smooth, compacted river bottom free of foot entrapments and other dangerous underwater obstacles,” according to the festival website.

What is safer for humans to use may not be so great for the fish that must pass through the drop pools or for the waterfowl that are routinely chased by people and dogs frolicking in the water. Indeed, the many people careening through the rushing water made me wonder how the nonhuman inhabitants have coped with the changed river. I asked Kathleen Erwin at the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife how the whitewater park has impacted fish. I learned that making the drop pools in the river required smoothing and rebuilding the channel with concrete. This grouting, “stops the river’s sinuous and natural undercutting of banks,” Erwin said. Fish need cool water and vegetation. Erwin noted: “Lahontan cutthroat trout have been listed as threatened for almost forty years. Threats [to fish] in the Truckee River include non-native fish species (rainbow trout), dams, which are barriers to movement, and loss of habitat,” (email 7/20/10).

Loss of habitat, she explained, is the primary negative effect of grouting in the river: “Grouting or armoring of any river is undesirable as it usually results in forcing a river’s power to the opposite side, thus causing even more damage [during a flood]…. Rivers need to move and spill over banks to diffuse flood events,” (email, 7/20/10). Erwin pointed to the “Living River” plan that the Truckee Meadows Flood Management Project developed to help officials make preparations for flooding and restore parts of the river. The plan “includes a variety of flood protection measures…[such as] a river parkway with graded benches and terraces designed to slow flood waters, levees and flood walls that protect buildings adjacent to the river…” (http://truckeeflood.us).

This very park has, I remember, been severely flooded at least in Reno: once in 1986 and again in 1997. Both floods were precipitated by warm winter storms that brought rain and melted a substantial snowpack at higher elevations. Both floods sent a torrent down the Truckee and flooded much of downtown Reno. And both floods, like two earlier ones in the 1950s, demonstrated that this modest desert river could take out bridges, running at a near-record 18,200 cfs in January of 1997 (Truckee River Chronology*).

The whitewater park initiated several good outcomes for the downtown area, like removing a dangerous dam from the river and making swimming safer (chalk one in the good column). Few people swam in the Truckee (on purpose) before this park was built. Now, people have somewhere to cool off on hot summer days in Reno; they can buy a hot dog or snow-cone, rent a raft, visit a coffee house or pub, or listen to music under the stars; chalk another one in the good column.

A flotilla of stuff drifts listlessly downstream, interrupting my thoughts: a couple of shoes, unmatched, five beer cans, and several plastic bags. I watch as people on air mattresses tumble giddily into the drop pools. Few wear lifejackets, and almost no one wears the recommended helmet. Plenty consume alcohol and disregard the posted rules. Chalk one in the bad column.

A family, father, mother, and toddler, become a textbook illustration of river physics: their raft flips and for a moment, the suction keeps it upside down. The father (not wearing a life jacket) holds the baby who does. They emerge unharmed.

The river has much to teach us about living in balance and weighing the trade-offs we make. Once damned and drought-impaired, the Truckee River sparkles today and flows more freely than it did ten years ago. We continue to ask much of this river, the life-line in the desert. Perhaps we will learn to see this and other gifts of nature as more than just scenery. *

*References mentioned in the article as well as additional material can be found at www.desertreport.org, in the “Notes” section.

Mary Webb lives in Reno, Nevada, and published “A Doubtful River” (U of Nevada Press, 2000) with collaborating photographers Robert Dawson and Peter Goin. She is Director of the Core Writing Program, and teaches composition and literature in the English Department at the University of Nevada, Reno.
Following is a list of desert trips. Outings are not rated. Distance and elevation gain can give you an indication of the suitability of a trip, but the condition of the trail, or lack of a trail, can change the degree of difficulty. An eight mile, 900’ elevation gain hike on a good trail would be easy to moderate, the same hike cross-country could be strenuous. If you have not previously participated in a desert outing, it is recommended that you call the leader and ask about the suitability of the trip given your conditioning.

For questions concerning an outing, or to sign up, please contact the leader listed in the write-up. For questions about Desert Committee Outings in general, or to receive the outings list by e-mail, please contact Kate Allen at kj.allen@wildblue.net or 661-944-4056.

The Sierra Club requires participants to sign a standard liability waiver at the beginning of each trip. If you would like to read the Liability Waiver before you choose to participate, please go to http://www.sierrachub.org/outings/chapter/forms, or contact the Outings Dept. at 415-977-5528 for a printed version.

For an updated listing of outings, visit the Desert Report website at www.desertreport.org and click on Outings.

Sierra Club California Seller of Travel number is CST 2087766-40. (Registration as seller of travel does not constitute approval by State of California.)

**SERVICE AND HIKING IN THE CARRIZO PLAINS**
**Sept. 24-26, Friday-Sunday**
This is an opportunity to visit and to assist an outstanding and relatively unknown national monument. There will be an optional and scenic hike high in the Caliente Mountains on Friday. Others may join us for National Public Lands Day on Saturday when we will participate with other volunteers restoring one of the historic homesteads in the center of the Plain. On Sunday, we will tour a number of the historic, prehistoric, and geologic sites in the Monument. Leader Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Com

**BLACK ROCK DESERT DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY CAR CAMP**
**Sept. 24-26, Friday-Sunday**
Join retired photographer Graham Stafford on a photographic and exploratory journey into the Black Rock Desert. We will visit some of the beautiful areas including natural hot springs. All levels of photographers accepted. Beginners encouraged. Graham will spend individual time with each participant and his or her camera. He will cover basic and advanced areas of digital photography. View some of his work on his website at www.grahamstafford.com. For more information contact leader Graham Stafford at graham@grahamstafford.com. CNRCC Wilderness Committee

**DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TRIP**
**Oct. 1-3, Friday-Sunday**
Wilderness restoration in Butte Valley. Come enjoy working and camping in this beautiful and remote area at the southern end of the Panamint Range. Meet Friday afternoon and drive to work site – high clearance vehicle required. May start work on Friday if time permits. Saturday will be a workday, followed by an appetizer/dessert potluck in the evening. Work half a day on Sunday. (Project and location may change.) Bring work gloves, camping equipment, and food and water for the weekend. High clearance vehicle required. Leader: Kate Allen, kj.allen@wildblue.net, 661-944-4056. CNRCC Desert Com

**DEATH VALLEY DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY CAR CAMP**
**Not yet scheduled**
Join retired photographer Graham Stafford on a photographic and exploratory journey into Death Valley. We will visit Eureka, Mesquite and Ibex Dunes. Beginners encouraged. Graham will spend individual time with each participant and his or her camera. He will cover basic and advanced areas of digital photography. 4WD high clearance encouraged, but 2WD vehicles with good tires okay. No low sport-type vehicles. View some of his work on his website at www.grahamstafford.com. For more information contact leader Graham Stafford at graham@grahamstafford.com. CNRCC Wilderness Committee

**OCTOBER SERVICE IN THE CARRIZO PLAINS**
**Oct. 23-24, Saturday-Sunday**
Pronghorn antelope will not jump fences to escape predators but rather attempt to crawl under. Our service on Saturday will either remove or modify several sections of fence to facilitate this mobility. Sunday will be, at the choice of the group, either a hike in the Caliente Range or else a tour of popular viewing areas in the plains. This is an opportunity to combine carcAMPing, day-hiking, exploring, and service in a relatively unknown wilderness. Leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Com

**GHOST TOWN EXTRAVAGANZA**
**Oct. 30-31, Saturday-Sunday**
Spend Halloween weekend visiting the ghosts of California’s colorful past. Join us at this spooky desert landscape near Death Valley. Camp at the historic ghost town of Ballarat (flush toilets & hot showers). On Saturday, do a challenging hike to
Pronghorn Of The Carrizo Plain

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

detach when the fawn is approximately 4 months old. We then collect the collars, download the locations onto a GIS (Global Information System) model and run analyses to reveal relationships between survival and habitat use. Our project marks the first ever use of GPS collars on pronghorn fawns and has allowed us to collect information on a scale that has not been possible in the past. We can look at microhabitat, nocturnal activity, and even see how fawn movements change with age. Most importantly, we are able to make more accurate observations on how fawns utilize their habitat.

There are many hurdles that pronghorn fawns face during their first year of life. Cover for hiding, forage availability, and even the anthropogenic effects of fences and roads all play significant roles in fawn survival. However, one of the most intriguing ecological issues facing Carrizo pronghorn will be their response to the pressures of a low-density population. Pronghorn utilize birth synchrony as an anti-predation tactic, such that by having all of their fawns during a short period of time, a herd can effectively “swamp” local predators with more prey than it is possible to consume. However, within low-density populations, not enough fawns are available to saturate predator consumption rates, and the birth synchrony strategy may be rendered ineffective. With increasingly lower population densities, this may be the most critical factor facing Carrizo pronghorn.

The pronghorn is a species which has survived Pleistocene predators and ice-age extinctions, only to be eradicated from California in less than a century. Repopulation efforts are evidence of our desire to protect and restore the species. However, the fate of these animals ultimately lays in our ability to utilize current research to understand and address the challenges they face. With greater understanding and wise management the numbers seen in the early days of California may once more be realized. We will find more than heart-shaped footprints, and the sight of a doe running with her fawns will again become commonplace.

Diego Johnson works for the US Geological Survey in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management. He has worked with pronghorn for four seasons, both in California and Wyoming. Beyond his pronghorn experience, Diego has worked with bighorn sheep, caribou, harpy eagles, goshawks, spotted owls, and a variety of other wildlife. He is currently pursing his graduate education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

DIEGO JOHNSON

A three day old fawn

guest town Lookout City with expert Hal Fowler who will regale us with eerie tales of this wild west town. Later we’ll return to camp for Happy Hour and a special holiday potluck feast, followed by a midnight visit to the infamous Riley townsite before heading home. Group size strictly limited. Send $8 per person (Sierra Club), 2 large SASE, H&W phones, email, rideshare info to Leader: Lygeia Gerard, P.O. Box 294726, Phelan, CA 92329, 760-868-2179. CNRCC Desert Committee

NOVEMBER SERVICE IN THE CARRIZO PLAINS
Nov. 20-21, Saturday-Sunday
Pronghorn antelope will not jump fences to escape predators but rather attempt to crawl under. Our service on Saturday will either remove or modify several sections of fence to facilitate this mobility. Sunday will be, at the choice of the group, either a hike in the Caliente Range or else a tour of popular viewing areas in the plains. This is an opportunity to combine carcamping, day-hiking, exploring, and service in a relatively unknown wilderness. Leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670. CNRCC Desert Committee

CARRIZO PLAINS FENCE REMOVAL
Dec. 4-5, Saturday-Sunday
Our work parties to remove barbed wire fences on the Carrizo Plain NM are opening up the Plain for the benefit of pronghorn antelope and other wildlife. Here is another chance to destroy fences. Meet at 0900 Saturday morning at Goodwin Visitor’s Center or join us Friday night at Selby campground. Potluck dinner and campfire Saturday. Bring fence tools if you have them, heavy leather work gloves, long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and clothing appropriate for the weather. Bring everything you need, including water, as there are no stores on the Carrizo. Resource specialists; Alice and Bob Koch. For more information and to sign up, contact leaders: Cal and Letty French, lettyfrench@gmail.com, 805-239-7338. CNRCC Desert Com/Santa Lucia Chapter

HOLIDAY SERVICE IN CARRIZO PLAIN
Celebrate the end of one year and the beginning of the next in one of our new national monuments. The Carrizo Plain, west of Bakersfield, is a vast grassland, home to pronghorn antelope, tule elk, kit fox, and a wide variety of birds. A welcome hike Dec. 28, three and a half days of service modifying barbed wire fencing, and a full day for hiking and exploring are planned. Use of accommodations at Goodwin Ranch included. Limited to 14 participants, $30 covers five dinners. For more information, contact leader: Craig Deutsche, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670, or co-leader leader Melinda Goodwater, m_goodwater@sbcglobal.net, 408-774-1257 CNRCC Desert Committee

NPS/Dr. CG

DESERT REPORT SEPTEMBER 2010
These ranges are connected via lower elevation connective saddles that are vitally important genetic and migratory pathways. There are large areas of pristine ecosystems in these mountain ranges as a result of inaccessibility.

Baja's northern mountain ranges are recognized as high elevation “sky islands.” This is due to the fact that ecosystems and species within each “island” are separated from related species in adjacent mountain ranges by hotter and drier lower elevation desert lands. The isolation has permitted genetic drift among species resulting in endemics and subspecies. In the Sierra San Pedro Martir, endemic subspecies include 20 subspecies of birds, as well as 5 species and 8 subspecies of mammals. In the Sierra Juarez, a total 404 species of vertebrates have been identified, including 11 amphibians, 58 reptiles, 75 mammals (21 bat species), and 260 species of birds. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the species catalogued in the Sierra Juarez are listed/protected nationally or internationally, including bald and golden eagles, California condors, big horn sheep, and Quino Checkerspot butterflies. The unique diversity of flora and fauna make the Sierra Juarez and Sierra San Pedro Martir among the most import forest areas in Mexico.

The Sky Island Threat

On September 9, 2009, U.S. based Sempra Energy’s subsidiary Energia Sierra Juarez (ESJ) submitted its environmental impact permit application and associated documents to Mexico’s environmental ministry, Secretaria de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT). The ESJ wind project includes a 700,000-acre general project area, 1,000 wind turbines capable of producing 1,250 MW of energy (Sempra has publicly stated that ESJ will operate at 30% capacity), transmission lines, substations, and 900-kilometers of roads. The wind turbines under consideration for the ESJ project are 410 feet in height from base to blade tip and are known bird hazards. The Manifestacion de Impacto Ambiental (MIA), environmental impact assessment, fails to identify turbine manufacturers or specifications, turbine locations, roads, and is equally dismal in accounting for flora and fauna. Not a single insect is accounted for in the MIA, including the US Federally listed Quino Checkerspot butterfly. The document also fails to adequately account for, identify impacts to, and address mitigation for Peninsular Bighorn Sheep, Gold and Bald Eagles, California condors, the Sierra Juarez Juniper, and other endangered or listed species.

The proposed ESJ wind project is part of a very concerted effort by Sempra Energy to locate energy infrastructure in Baja California designed to serve the California market. One-hundred percent (100%) of the energy produced by ESJ will be exported to California. Sempra’s ESJ project and related facilities include the Costa Azul liquified natural gas (LNG) facility located 14-miles north of Ensenada, the Baja Norte Pipeline, and the Termoelectrica de Mexicali (an export only power plant located meters from the US-Mexico border near Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico). These fossil fuel facilities in Baja are in turn driving environmentally harmful impacts in California, specifically the $1.9 billion Sunrise Powerlink transmission project and eliminating in-basin renewable energy solutions. In a true colonial-mercantilist manner, Sempra’s facilities in Baja California are not designed to serve Mexico, but to extract natural and energy resources while causing massive damage to Mexico’s environment.

On July 22, 2010, Mexico’s environmental ministry, SEMARNAT approved the ESJ environmental impact permit despite the document’s glaring deficiencies. We are awaiting publication of SEMARNAT’s ESJ approval in order to analyze its decision and act to defend one Baja California’s last pristine ecosystems. As disturbed lands in our hemisphere continue to shrink, the ones remaining become more and more important. They are a heritage that once lost cannot be recovered. They belong to us all.

A resident of San Diego, California, Aaron Quintanar has been a lifelong Baja explorer, surfer, and sportfisher. In 2002, he worked with Rodrigo Jara in filing the successful legal challenge against the Escalera Nautica project. Among his more recent conservation efforts, he led the effort to permanently protect the southern shore of Laguna San Ignacio, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the last pristine gray whale birthing lagoon on the planet.

Learn More

If you would like to donate, help, learn more, or get involved contact: Aaron Quintanar, Border Power Plant Working Group, 1946 Sixth Avenue, San Diego, CA 92101. Tel. 619.231.5923 Email: Aqsurf@aol.com. Additionally, a number of references to material in this article are available by going to www.desertreport.org and clicking on the "notes" button at the top. These include posts by both commercial interests in Baja development as well as arguments opposing the projects.
All policy, editing, reporting, and graphic design is the work of volunteers. To receive Desert Report please mail the coupon on the back cover. Articles, photos, letters and original art are welcome. Please contact Craig Deutsche (craig.deutsche@gmail.com, 310-477-6670) about contributions well in advance of deadline dates: February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1.

OUR MISSION
The Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee works for the protection and conservation of the California/Nevada deserts, supports the same objectives in all desert areas of the Southwest, monitors and works with governments and agencies to promote preservation of our arid lands, sponsors education and work trips, encourages and supports others to work for the same objectives, and maintains, shares and publishes information about the desert.

DESERT FORUM
If you find Desert Report interesting, sign up for the CNRCC Desert Committee’s e-mail listserv, Desert Forum. Here you’ll find open discussions of items interesting to desert lovers. Many articles in this issue of Desert Report were developed through Forum discussions. Electronic subscribers will continue to receive current news on these issues—plus the opportunity to join in the discussions and contribute their own insights. Desert Forum runs on a Sierra Club listserv system.

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By return e-mail, you will get a welcome message and some tips on using the system. Please join us! Questions? Contact Jim Dodson: jim.dodson@sierraclub.org (661-942-3662)

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