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Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

Thanksgiving weekend was again a time to be thankful for the great work provided by our staff. The attendance at our interpretive programs far exceeded the goals we set, and our visitors were all smiles when they used the new restrooms at Pumpkin Patch and other locations throughout the park. All the great visitor experiences can be attributed to the dedicated work by an incredible staff. Thank you to all; you are a valuable asset to Ocotillo Wells and State Parks.

One of my goals as a District Superintendent is to inspire and retain staff. An important aspect of this goal is to help people thrive, even during challenging times for Parks. It is important for all staff to understand how their tasks, and that of other departments, affects the overall visitor experience and the State Parks mission.

To start building a better understanding of what each service does, we completed a team-building exercise, called "shadowing," at the end of the year. Permanent staff members were required to spend one day working with each service. Imagine spending a day counting flat-tailed horned lizards in 115° heat, or cleaning restrooms, or riding in the water truck, or giving out information in the interpretive booth. How about assisting visitors in need on a Friday-night patrol, or gathering GIS data, or installing trail signs, or completing PAPO reviews, or maintaining vehicles—all could be viewed as "walking a mile in another's shoes."

The results were astounding! In the beginning staff claimed this was a good idea because others would get to see how hard they each work. In the end, staff understood that every service works hard and has an important role. If any of these services were missing, the quality of what we provide would be greatly compromised. Staff now knows what it takes to perform the different duties, what challenges they would face if, in the future, they wanted to move into another service, and that none of the services are as easy as they look.

We began shadowing with the permanent staff, but now we are looking at the feasibility of extending this opportunity to seasonal employees. Investing in staff development has great impacts and long-term effects that reach far beyond the staff; it reaches into the lives of the many people who visit our park.

Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan

By Kirk Shea, State Park Superintendent II

On December 1, 2011 the OHMVR Commission voted unanimously to approve the Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan (GP) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). While this sounds like a relatively easy task to perform, drafting the GP and EIR required tens of thousands of hours from District staff, Division staff, AECOM and other private vendors. The journey was not always smooth.

Why does a park need a GP or EIR? Why should we take the time to embark on such a lengthy, and expensive, journey? Besides being required by law, these documents assess the park in its current condition and provide broad direction on how the park should be managed. Should camping be allowed? What about Special Events? How do we work with SDG&E and their three 500 kV electrical towers? Rather than address each issue in a vacuum, the GP gives management a consistent direction on which decisions would best protect the park's resources and provide outstanding recreational opportunities for its visitors.



OWSVRA District staff, OHMVR Division staff, OHMVR Commissioners, AECOM staff, and members of the general public took a tour of Heber Dunes SVRA prior to approval of the Heber General Plan.

In 2007, the GP for Heber Dunes SVRA, Ocotillo Wells SVRA and Truckhaven were started as a single project. Due to a variety of factors, these three General Plans were broken into three separate projects. It wasn't until 2009 that the real work began on the plan for Heber Dunes.

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Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan *continued...*

In 2009 and 2010, AECOM and the OW District held a series of on-site visitor surveys, stakeholder interviews, public workshops, created fact sheets, newsletters and launched a website. During this time, existing conditions were evaluated. Local and regional issues were addressed, recreational facilities and opportunities were determined, significant resource values were assessed (these include geology and soils, climate, air quality, hydrology and water resources, natural resources, cultural resources, aesthetic resources, and auditory resources),



Left to right: Commissioner Eric Lueder, Commissioner Stan Van Velsor, Commissioner Gary Willard, OHMVR Legal Counsel Tim La Franchi, and Commissioner Paul Slavik.

and operational and maintenance functions were evaluated (these include operations, visitor services, utilities, public safety, concessions, accessibility, interpretation, and general support.)

During the entire process we learned some very interesting facts about the Park. The vast majority of visitors to Heber Dunes are Hispanic or Latino and from nearby communities less than 30 minutes away. Approximately one-third of those visitors are under the age of fifteen. Visitors also typically come in small and large groups of families and friends, averaging between five and ten individuals.

After all of this work was compiled, a General Plan and Environmental Impact Report had to be written. This alone was a monumental task. Once completed, the GP was approximately 106 pages and the EIR was 924 pages. Once drafted, both of these documents required extensive proofreading and review by District and Division staff.

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Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan *continued...*

Like a long dream finally coming to an end, a date was set for the OHMVR Commission to meet, discuss and approve the GP and EIR. Heber and OW District staff worked hard to make the park shine. Jaime, Heber's new interpreter, did an outstanding job of creating a brand new interpretive display in the office. Alfredo, Heber Maintenance Worker I, worked long hours

grooming the trails, repairing shade ramadas, and painting sea containers. He completed a long list of items that needed attention. Vic, Heber's Supervising Ranger, besides working with Jaime and Alfredo, prepared to make presentations both at the Commission tour and the meeting. Dan and Adam, OW Heavy Equipment Operators, worked long shifts hauling gravel and grading Heber's trails and Youth Track.



The OW Trails Team installed a new entrance sign and split rail fence.

On November 30, 2011, Heber Dunes staff, OW District staff, Daphne Greene (OHMVR Deputy Director), Phil Jenkins (OHMVR Division Chief), Division staff, five current Commissioners, two prior Commissioners and members of the public met at Heber Dunes for a tour. This was our chance to show the Commissioners what a great Park Heber was and explain the GP and why it was needed. Our tour lasted almost four hours and led us deep into Heber's tamarisk, creosote and dune-covered interior. Over a series of six stops, staff drew a picture for the Commissioners and the public about Heber Dunes' history, its current condition, and the shape it should take in the future. The tour ended with an amazing sunset.

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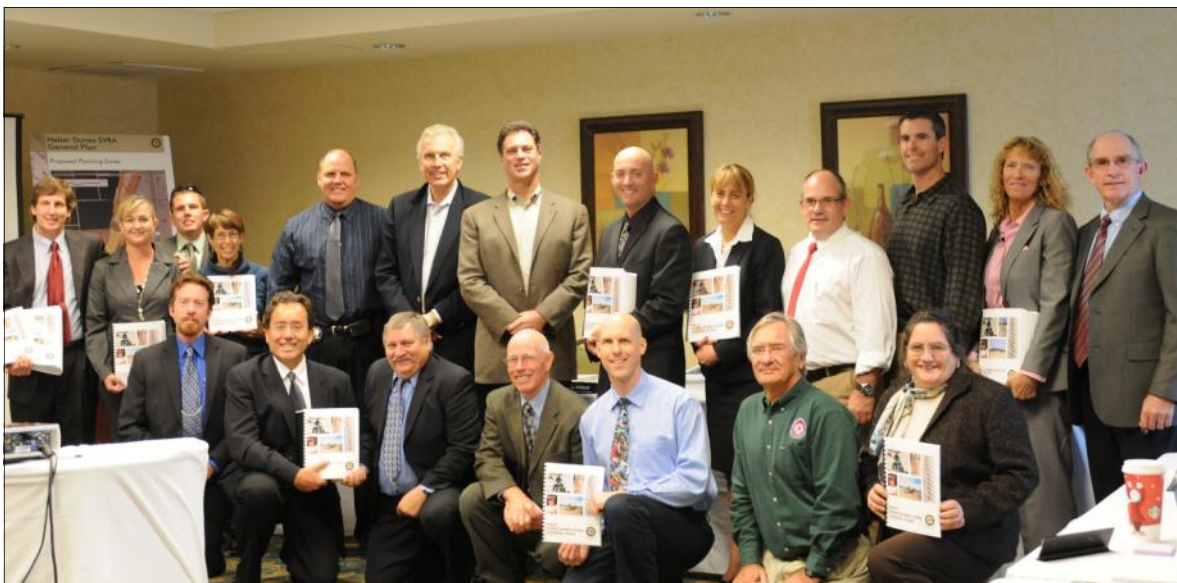
Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan *continued...*

December 1, 2011—the day had finally arrived. The Commission's agenda was relatively short, but Heber's presentation didn't start until after lunch. Kirk started the presentation by discussing why a GP and EIR were needed; Vic spoke about Heber's history and current use, and Michael Page from AECOM spoke about the GP itself. The Commission asked about a dozen questions and unanimously voted to approve the GP and EIR as submitted. Heber Dunes SVRA now had a general plan!



Left to right: OHMVR Commissioners Breene Kerr, Gary Willard, Eric Lueder, Kane Silverberg and Paul Slavik.

With the passing of the GP and EIR, a new chapter is started for Heber Dunes SVRA. Concessions and special events can be pursued, a new trail system can now be designed, and the public will have the opportunity to enjoy a newly-designed day use area that should be operational in the next year. Heber Dunes SVRA, the diamond in the rough, is now becoming the jewel it was destined to be.



Front: Brian Woodson, Rick LeFlore, Glyne Johnson, Vic Herrick, Eric Lueder, Paul Slavik, Tina Robinson
Back: Michael Page, Valarie Yruretagoyena, Jesse Adams, Jaime Mendez, Norb Ruhmke, Breene Kerr, Gary Willard, Kirk Shea, Daphne Greene, Phil Jenkins, Kane Silverberg, Kathy Dolinar, Tim La Franchi.

Ocotillo Wells Annual Holiday Party

By Jennifer Parker, Associate State Archaeologist

2011 was a year of change for the annual Ocotillo Wells holiday party! Instead of the usual potluck, the planning team decided to host a cooking competition! The team created three categories for the challenge: salads, side dishes, and desserts. With that settled, the next task was determining the judges. Since the Iron Chefs were unable to attend, we turned to another group of judges. To our good fortune we were able to get nine famous judges to agree to come to Ocotillo Wells and tickle their taste buds with the creative endeavors of our staff. Our guest judges were as follows:



Where to start?

- Judge Judy represented the core staff (played by Kathy Dolinar)
- Judge Maria Lopez represented the maintenance staff (played by Terra Tuggles)
- Judge Alex represented the admin staff (played by Charles Rennie)
- Judge Mills Lane represented Heber and GIS (played by Vic Herrick)
- Judge Marilyn Milian represented the interp staff (played by Louise Phillips)
- Judge Joe Brown represented the mechanics (played by Adam Asche)
- Judge Wapner represented the resources department (played by Jeremy Collins)
- Judge David Young represented the trails staff (played by Ryan Walasek)
- Judge Larry Joe Doherty represented the rangers (played by Jim Collins)



The judges had their work cut out for them as there were 24 scrumptious entries in the three different categories. While the judges tasted and sampled and pondered over whose was the best, the masses were let loose on the food! The question was—*where to start?* It was like attending a buffet at a Las Vegas casino! Following my passion, I headed straight for the dessert table to claim a piece of the beautiful cheesecake made by Vic. Smart

So much food—can I get a doggie bag?

(Continued on next page...)

Ocotillo Wells Annual Holiday Party *continued...*

move in my opinion! The creativity of the food served this year was amazing. A lot of old family recipes were dusted off and brought to the feast. We were delighted with dishes such as Irish candy, meat candy, Mexican lasagna, pumpkin rolls, Watergate salad, macaroni shrimp salad, yam berry salad, eggrolls, spinach pie, peanut butter pie and much, much more! Of course all of this was brought to complement the main course—deep fried turkey! Every year our own grill master, Dennis Raymond, delights us with several crispy birds that melt in your mouth!



These salsa bowls rank right up there!



I think the award should go to ...

for the best dishes. In the Salad category our two honorable mentions went to Dan for his Macaroni Shrimp Salad and Leon's Watergate Salad, while first place went to Kitty for her German Potato Salad (so good you could eat it with every meal and never tire of it!). The Side Dish category was difficult since there were so many unique foods served, but after considerable deliberation, it was decided. The two honorable mentions went to Brian for Meat Candy and John for Special Beans, and first place went to Hideout

It took the judges some time but decisions were finally made as to whose cuisine reigned supreme, and it was awards time! The first award of the day went to Dennis Raymond to thank him for his years of service as the grill master. He was awarded with some grilling tools, a toy truck, and dozens of overindulged stomachs. Next, it was time for the judges to present the awards



I've got my fork and my secret sauce. Let's grill!

(Continued on next page...)

Ocotillo Wells Annual Holiday Party *continued...*



No Rickey! You cannot steal his prize!

the top prize found in everyone's bag was the extra soft, toilet paper (not from the state park)!

Keeping with tradition, the White Elephant gift exchange followed the feast. However, very few true white elephants were under the tree as many people opted to bring brand new valuable gifts that were sought after and stolen



Is there anymore TP in there?

Chili by Pete! Now for Dessert—so glad I hit that table before the others—what wonderful delights created by our staff (we should open a desert dessert boutique)! Our two runner ups were Jeanette with Key Lime Bars and Vic for his New York-New York Cheesecake. With all those sweets to choose from, the judges decided to award first place to Brian for his Peanut Butter Pie! Everyone enjoyed watching the winners go through their gift bags to see the goodies inside, but I do believe



"If only these came with a ticket to Hawaii!" says First Place winner Kitty.

back and forth.

Traditionally, a white elephant is a valuable, but burdensome, possession of which its owner cannot dispose and whose cost or upkeep is out of proportion to its usefulness or value. In more modern times it has come to mean an object that is no longer of value to the owner. Typically, bringing a true white elephant to a gift exchange can bring one last moment of joy to the owner as they see the reaction of the recipient when they open the brightly-wrapped gift. This year Jim Collins thought that his gift would provide just that—one last laugh! But to his dismay the tables were turned on him when he opened a package containing fuzzy pink

(Continued on next page...)

Ocotillo Wells Annual Holiday Party *continued...*

slippers! When Debbie Rollins opened the camouflage-themed sweater that he brought, Jim didn't get the laugh he expected and the joke was on him. Debbie was very happy with the sweater and plans on wearing it proudly!



"This should satisfy my 32 sweet teeth next time I watch a movie," says First Place winner Brian.

As people were cleaning up (awesome teamwork!) and heading out, they

praised the chefs and commented on what a great time they had—"the best OW party in history," was heard more than once! Unfortunately, all fun things must come to an end...until next year!



"T-time," says First Place winner Pete.



Yeah! I got TP, too!



Are they me?

Trails News

By Brian Woodson, Maintenance Supervisor, Trails

What has the Trails crew has been doing? See below...



Left: While Pete Hernandez looks on, Ryan Walasek works on removing a rock protruding from the trail corridor.

Right: Rocks placed strategically between the trail and the fence serve to deter visitors from operating their OHVs too close to the fence protecting one of our native wildlife watering holes.



Left: Martin Rubalcava uses the come-a-long to keep tension on the fencing that the crew is installing to protect visitors from entering into a hazardous structure area.

(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*

Right: With Anthony Beepath looking on, Joshua McCue holds a section of fencing in position while Martin Rubalcava and a CDC inmate fasten the fencing to the posts.



Right: Josh and Ryan carefully place the new entrance for Heber Dunes onto the concrete anchors.



Left: While Anthony Beepath and Pete Hernandez work on a section of split rail fence in front of the new Heber restroom, Krystal Friel goes to help the Heber staff tidy up around the building in preparation for the OHV Commission meeting.



Right: Martin Rubalcava and Cesar Casillas work together to auger out the footings for one of the new interpretive display event bulletin panels.



(Continued on next page...)

Trails News *continued...*



Left: Joshua McCue uses a carsonite post "starter pounder" to help ease the installation of a new marker on one of our trails.



Right: While Ryan holds the new signs on the post, Pete shows Norb Moeller from the Maintenance Department (shadowing our crew for the day), how to properly mount the new signs using our rivet gun.



Left: Ryan Walasek follows behind Josh and installs the new trail marker post.



Right: Krystal Friel takes her turn on the carsonite starter.

Admin Ledger

By Melony Light, Office Assistant

As the new season began at Ocotillo Wells, November and December were again busy times for the Admin Department.

Charles facilitated Microsoft Outlook training for the Admin staff. As a result, the department utilizes the *Tasks and Calendar* features of Outlook to improve staff organization, communication, and performance. Charles continues to offer Outlook training through the months of January and February. The classes are open to supervisors and field staff in both beginner and intermediate levels. Employees interested in attending class are encouraged to contact their supervisor. In addition, Charles offers training in both beginner and intermediate levels of the Microsoft Excel program.

The Admin staff completed their Team Building exercises. Shadowing in other departments this past year provided Admin with an opportunity to work with field staff within their department's operations. These assignments offered the staff new insights, a better understanding of how other departments contribute to the park, and a renewed sense of teamwork among the departments. During the shadowing exercises, the Admin Department hosted 36 employees—17 of those employees in November and December alone. Leda created a Team Building platform for her department that allowed participants to sit with each staff member individually. This one-on-one interaction provided the employees who shadowed with a profile (or in-depth view) of the Admin duties. Many field staff commented that they learned a lot and were surprised at the amount and degree of responsibility Admin Staff facilitates for the park.

Caitlin Raymond, one of the District's ASI Instructors, led the Admin staff on their ATV proficiency ride. Everyone enjoyed their ride and passed the training. During the ride, the staff had the opportunity to see the new developments in the park, such as the new trail markers, the outstanding condition of the trails, and new restrooms that have been installed in remote areas of the park. Kitty, in addition to her Admin duties, also serves as one of the District's ASI Instructors. From November through March, she teaches ASI training classes for the public two days a month at the Denner Track.

The annual Holiday Party on Dec. 15th, hosted by the Resources Department was the final big activity for the Admin staff, Kitty received a 1st Place Blue Ribbon for her German Potato Salad, which she entered in the "food contest." *Kitty's recipe was handed-down to her through family generations.* It was delicious!



Kitty won First Place for her German Potato Salad at the holiday party!



2011 Happy Holidays!



CORE STAFF...



Left to Right: Steve Quartieri, Tina Robinson, Glyne Johnson, Kirk Shea, Kathy Dolinar, Leda Seals, Norb Ruhmke

AUTO SHOP...



Front Row: Dave Edman, Chad Van Doren, Brenda Raether, Glyne Johnson,
Back Row: Dan Christensen, Adam Asche, Len Paris

ADMINISTRATION...



Front Row: Kathy Dolinar
Second Row: Caitlin Raymond, Charlie Rennie
Third Row: Kitty Gravett, Leda Seals
Back Row: Linda VanStaaveren, Melony Light
Not shown: Delane Hurley

HEBER DUNES...



Left to Right: Olivia Kerns, Kirk Shea, Alfredo Jacobo, Vic Herrick
Not shown: Jaime Mendez, Eduardo Talamantes

Left to Right: Cheryl Gillott, Caitlin Raymond, Jeanette Meleen, Steve Quartieri, Ralph Mergen, Jeff Price, Louise Phillips
Not shown: Ali Barnes, Corri Chase, Ken Conway, Andy Fitzpatrick, Kara Lewandowski, Lesley Manent, Beth Shugan, Sharon Weil

INTERPRETATION...



RESOURCES...



Left to Right: Kirk Shea, Kevin Ponce, Joanna Collier, Steve Chaney, Tina Robinson (front), Margaret Kress, Jeremy Collins, Helen Boek, Don Solleder, Jennifer Parker
Not shown: Joni Bye, Henry Hernandez, Joe Hopkins, Steve Wilcox

TRAILS...



Left to Right: Anthony Beepath, Pete Hernandez, Brian Woodson, Ryan Walasek, Josh McCue, Shay McGhee, Krystal Friel, Cesar Casillas, Martin Rubalcava

VISITOR SERVICES...



Left to Right: Mike Howard, Brittany Veater, Kathy Dolinar, Callan McLaughlin, Kirk Shea, Jim Collins, Norb Ruhmke, Adam Borello, Jesse Adams, Sasha Wessitsh
Not shown: Andy Ahlberg, Ocotillo Wells Desert Lifeguards, Vic Herrick

MAINTENANCE...



Kneeling: Leon Jordan, Chris Perez, Julie Human, Terra Tuggles, Peggy Hurley, Karen Sypniewski
Standing: Chris Dahl, Ricky Lizasuain, John Freaner, Norb Moeller, Maribel Bonillas, Dennis Raymond, Norb Ruhmke, Allison Boyle, Debbie Rollins, Vernon Gringrich
Not Shown: Mike Krechmar, Jeff Smith, Gary Walker

Archaeological Site Stewardship at OW

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist

Our Archaeology Site Stewardship Program started this season with a great Kick-Off Meeting and Field Trip. Combined with Site Stewards from Colorado Desert District, we started the day with a field trip to Obsidian Butte and Salvation Mountain. We concluded the day with a meeting at which Site Stewards had an opportunity to ask questions and receive information for the upcoming season. Our season is underway and current Site Stewards are beginning to monitor their assigned areas.

They are asked to check on their sites at least twice a season—at the beginning and end—to see whether there are any changes from one visit to the next.

Next on the agenda is a Basic Training Course for new Site Stewards this January, where both Colorado Desert District and Ocotillo Wells District will be able to recruit new volunteers. We hope to have more training opportunities in the future, so that Ocotillo Wells can build its Site Stewardship Program and have even more archaeological sites monitored.



Site Stewards and Archaeologists for Ocotillo Wells District and Colorado Desert District at Obsidian Butte.

Obsidian Butte



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The Quarry

By Joanna Collier, Archaeological Project Leader

While district archaeologists were surveying the area around Main Street, they found and recorded two historic sites. One is the quarry itself, used as a source of stone for the road base during the construction of Highway 78. The other site is the foundation of a scale used to weigh trucks leaving the quarry, as well as associated historic trash. Through interviews with locals and further research, archaeologists hope to learn more about the quarry operation and highway construction through what is now our park.

Additionally, the cultural team has been working on updating archaeological site records throughout the park and developing a database of cultural sites with the Park's Geographic Information System (GIS). Use of the GIS system will provide readily-available information for future planning, special events, and the establishment of secondary trails.



Foundation of Quarry Scale.



Artifacts found near Quarry Scale.

Biological Resources

By Kevin Ponce, Environmental Scientist, and Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

Habitat Monitoring System—

The Resources Department conducts Habitat Monitoring System (HMS) surveys at both Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes SVRA. These surveys are a way of monitoring animal, plant and habitat responses to land use by park visitors. As land managers, it is important for the SVRA to provide recreational opportunities while ensuring adequate protection for plants and animals as required in the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Act. Currently, we are surveying for small mammals, reptiles, birds, and vegetation.

Small mammal surveys use aluminum live traps called Sherman traps. These traps are small aluminum boxes with a trap door that springs shut when a rodent or similar-sized animal enters. A resources staff member checks the traps each morning and records animal species, length, weight, and trap location. After all information is recorded, the animal is released back into the desert.



Snake Trap

Reptile pitfall surveys utilize an array of four five-gallon buckets buried in the ground to the rim. A series of wire mesh fencing connects the buckets, acting as a drift fence corralling lizards, snakes, insects and the occasional rodent into the traps. Animals are again weighed, measured and released. OW will be incorporating new metal mesh snake traps into our habitat monitoring surveys this year. These traps are designed specifically for capturing snakes that hunt across the surface of the desert at night. The new traps will be used in our pitfall trapping grids in order to survey the reptiles that are present at OW. In order to keep members of the public safe and because the pitfall grids are

State property, please do not tamper with these traps as they could contain venomous snakes. Bird surveys are based on observation; there is no trapping of birds.

Vegetation surveys are conducted by walking a 100-meter line and recording plant species and size. These surveys give the SVRA an idea of how OHV use affects plant density and species richness. Plants are extremely important to monitor because they provide food, shelter and water to the animals of the desert. Plants also prevent erosion, which can cause dust storms in the arid desert environment.

If you see our trapping areas when you are out and about, please do not disturb them as we often leave the buckets and other materials closed, but in place, to save labor. The surveys will start in late winter and early spring and continue through early summer. Due to budget cutbacks, the previous summer surveys for the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard will be incorporated into the HMS reptile surveys. Also, we will be incorporating surveys with control plots in neighboring properties this year.

(Continued on next page...)

Biological Resources *continued...*

Nursery—

The OW resources staff anticipates the completion of a new Native Plant Nursery at the Toner property this year. This nursery will be used to collect and cultivate native plant species found naturally within OW, such as the California fan palm and creosote. These cultivated plant species will be used for restoring degraded habitats and establishing a seed bank for future use within the park.



Fan Palm

Water Source Monitoring—

Starting in late October, Resources has undertaken a project of recording the levels of the various natural surface water locations in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Prior to this, surface water was evaluated informally for the best spots to put our remote wildlife cameras in the summer. Fluctuations that occurred throughout the year had not been evaluated. The natural seeps are very important to the survival of wildlife at OW. This study will establish a baseline for the natural seeps and water quality in the Park and help the biologists to determine whether or not there are significant changes to water levels or qualities due to the ongoing tamarisk removal project (tamarisk is a non-native invasive plant that uses most of the available water), or potential future water uses by the County’s Salton Sea Landfill, or proposed new geothermal activities. The goal is to ensure that the Park’s modest, but extremely important, water resources continue into the future.



The Resource Department’s primary tool for water source monitoring will be by photograph. On October 27, there was no water beyond the fence in Tule Wash. By October 31, water extended 8 meters beyond the fence, as shown in the above photograph. On November 8, water beyond the fence ran 25 meters, as shown in the photo to the right.



Sahara Mustard

By Steve Chaney, Resources-Senior Park Aide

Or...The Beast That Ate Our Wildflowers

Sahara mustard (*Brassica tournefortii*) is a winter annual native to North Africa, the Middle East, and Mediterranean lands of southern Europe. It was inadvertently introduced into the Coachella Valley in the early 1920's when date palm trees were imported from the Middle East to start our local date farm industry. Sahara mustard is now found in southern Nevada, southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, west Texas and northwestern Mexico.

As of 2010, Sahara mustard is literally taking over large areas of Borrego Valley and is rapidly moving up the canyons and alluvial fans of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and Ocotillo Wells SVRA. It is well adapted to poor soils in very arid habitats, and is even tolerant of saline soils. Literature lists its elevational range as 250 to 2,800 feet, but it has recently been found above 4,100 feet—and there is one record from 7,000 feet. It has been found in OW at 170 feet below sea level.



Photo by Larry Hendrickson

Being a winter annual, Sahara mustard seeds germinate before our native plants and thus rob them of both moisture and nutrients. In wet years Sahara mustard covers the ground almost 100% and can carry fire when it dries. It is a frightful thought that hyperarid desert, including sand dunes, can burn because of this weed. There have already been documented fires in the dunes west of Blythe, California, and the Pinta sands in the Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge.

Sahara mustard, also commonly known as wild turnip, African mustard, and Asian mustard, is a member of the mustard family (*Brassicaceae*). It is an erect

annual herb that can grow from four- to forty-inches tall. The stems branch from the base of the plant and have rough, stinging hairs that make them painful to touch. The leaves smell of cabbage or turnips when crushed.

The basal rosette of leaves grows up to three feet in diameter in favorable environments. The basal leaves can be three- to twelve-inches long, oblong and deeply lobed with lobes further toothed. The stem leaves are much smaller and have bristly, stiff hairs on both sides.

Flowers are small, less than one-quarter inch, with four oblong, pale yellow petals arranged in the shape of an "X." They are bractless with smooth or lightly hairy sepals. The flower petals are

(Continued on next page...)

Sahara Mustard *continued...*

longer than the sepals and spread away from the stem. The plant's flowers or fruits may appear as early as December or January.

The fruits are narrow seed capsules (siliques) that break open when mature and disperse seeds. Each silique has a noticeable beak at its tip.

Well-developed plants may produce between 750 and 9,000 seeds. Sahara mustard may be self-fertile because fruit set is nearly 100 percent on most plants. In the laboratory, 90 to 99 percent of Sahara mustard seeds tested germinated within 48 hours after being moistened. Seeds germinated at temperatures between 61 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dried plants break off at ground level and roll in the wind, thus dispersing seeds like tumbleweeds. Rodents cache seeds and may be capable of moving seeds up to 100 meters from their source. Uneaten caches are capable of germinating, thus spreading the plants. I have also witnessed Harvester Ants carrying seed pods back to their nest. The mucilaginous gel that forms on seeds in contact with water can cause seeds to stick to many surfaces, such as animals, vehicles and people, thus giving another means of dispersal.

Control in the thousands of square miles of remote desert habitat seems almost hopeless. Finding an acceptable biological control agent will be a challenge because many important crop plants are in the genus Brassica (e.g., cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and rapeseed [source of canola oil]). There are also numerous native mustards that might be threatened by a biological agent unless it is extremely host-specific.

With a combination of early spraying of herbicides (Round-up) and hand pulling of plants before they mature, we hope to at least put a dent in the seed base of this invasive beast of a plant.

If you wish to learn more and volunteer to help pull Sahara mustard, contact Steve Chaney at schaney@parks.ca.gov.



Photo by Sam Webb

Visitor Services

By Jim Collins, State Park Peace Officer

As 2011 comes to an end and the New Year begins, we here at the Ranger Station sadly begin to realize that the busy season is about half way over. As all of the Rangers visualize their stacks of incident reports for arrests, minor & major medicals, traffic collisions, and requests for interpretation programs, we begin to wonder how it can already be 2012.

With the great weather that November and December brought us, which seems to be the norm over the past few years, a steady flow of park visitors arrive at our beautiful off-highway paradise, Ocotillo Wells SVRA. So it goes without saying that when the park visitors start arriving in droves, the arrests, medicals, traffic collisions, and Interpretation requests typically follow suit. The last two months of 2011 were fairly typical of past seasons, but every new riding season provides us with plenty of new and interesting events to look back on. With about 100 traffic collisions, 50 arrests, and a couple of interpretation requests over the last two months, there are plenty of interesting events to relate to our faithful *Blowsand Reader* fans.

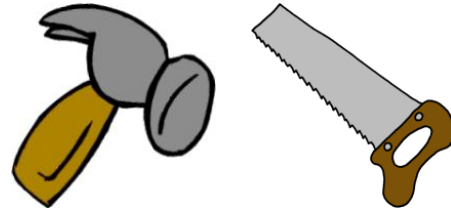
Needless to say that the busiest part of November was the long Thanksgiving weekend. With about 75,000 visitors in the park, the Rangers and Desert Lifeguards were constantly going from incident to incident throughout the weekend. One incident that stands out during that weekend involved a very intoxicated man in Hidden Valley. The man decided he needed a map of the park. He flagged down one of the Rangers. The Ranger stopped to talk to the visitor and immediately realized that the person was intoxicated to the point of being a hazard to himself and the other Ocotillo Wells visitors in Hidden Valley. After 20 minutes of hearing the man talking (and often yelling) things that made no sense, the Ranger decided to take the visitor to jail. As the Rangers left Hidden Valley, a few of the surrounding campers cheered as their drunken neighbor departed the area. The man was not too pleased to go to jail, so he made sure he let the two Rangers know about it the entire 1½ hour journey to the Vista Detention Center. The man decided to give the Rangers something to remember him by—he urinated on the back seat of the patrol vehicle. Luckily, the man was wearing three pairs of pants, and the seat was mostly spared.

December offered equally as many, if not more, interesting events than November. Starting the day after Christmas, people started to arrive at Ocotillo Wells SVRA to try out their new desert toys that they got for presents. With the unusually warm weather, park visitors spent plenty of time out of their camp enjoying the park.

With 2011 in the rear view mirror, we here at Visitors Services are happy that the last two months occurred without too many major issues. We want to thank all the other departments at Ocotillo Wells for making 2011 a great year, and we want to wish everyone a Happy New Year.

OW Maintenance

By Karen Sypniewski, Office Technician



Back on Track... November and December went quickly with a lot going on. During the holidays our park was full of visitors!!! Housekeeping, especially, worked hard these months keeping all the restrooms clean and stocked. For those that shadowed, I am sure you would agree that it takes a lot of time and effort to keep the many restrooms clean and free from litter. Although it seems like an unrewarding job responsibility, it is an extremely important one. The public forms many of their opinions based on the cleanliness of both the restrooms and the camping areas. They also form opinions based on the facilities they have access to, such as the shade ramadas and fire rings. Both of these items require constant upkeep by the maintenance and housekeeping staff—a never-ending task.

As a part of servicing the public, PMW II John Freaner has been working on the restroom water system located at the Youth Track. In the past the water did not seem to circulate well to all showers. The water system is in the process of being revamped complete with new fixtures. The completed project will ensure that campers can take warm showers during their stay here at the park. John was also able to construct a new storage area for the Resources Department to protect their archeological artifact findings.

In addition to the many upgrades and repairs done to both offices and building structures here at Ocotillo Wells, Maintenance staff are also working on constructing decks for the Men and Women's Dorms at Toner. When complete, the decks will be a nice place for employee residents to enjoy on their time off.

As Rickey Lizasuain returns this month you will notice that his work name badge has changed to PMW II. Please help us to congratulate Rick on his promotion!



Congratulations to Rickey Lizasuain on his promotion to PMW II!

Resource Maintenance

By Jeremy Collins, Resources-Maintenance Worker II

The Ocotillo Wells Resources Maintenance crew has been working on a tamarisk eradication project for the past few months. Tamarisk is an invasive plant with deep and pervasive rooting systems that take a great deal of water, essentially starving the native plants and growing thick enough to impair washes and other natural systems. As the New Year approached, we were able to get Phase I of what essentially will be a four-phase contract finished—which means we were able to treat close to 80% of all the tamarisk in the park. By Phase 4, after we have located and mapped all the tamarisk, and possibly extended the contract, we want to have 100% management of the tamarisk in the entire park. Eventually, we would like to manage this ourselves, using very little herbicide.



Tamarisk eradication is currently happening in Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

park volunteers and visitors how to identify and properly eradicate Sahara mustard. Sahara mustard has increased in frequency and competes with native annuals for the desert's limited water supply. It literally covers the native wildflowers that we enjoy in the spring. We will keep you updated on dates and times for volunteers to help pull mustard. Anza-Borrego Desert State Park has this eradication program now and could use volunteers to help save the wildflowers by pulling Sahara mustard.

Along with all this invasive plant removal, we've also been very busy trying to keep up with fence repair. We had some very busy weekends, and there were a few fences that were damaged. We hope to have a couple of fence projects coming up in our near future to help protect more water

The eradication process has been steady and successful so far. You might see workers in the park cutting tamarisk trees and spraying tamarisk bush. Do not be alarmed, we have monitored the work closely. Over the next three to four seasons, you will continue to see the piles of debris. We will be doing our best to get rid of them as we do not want to clutter our park. This will also apply when we begin our Sahara mustard program. Though we are currently removing and managing mustard in the park, we are trying to set up a program to teach

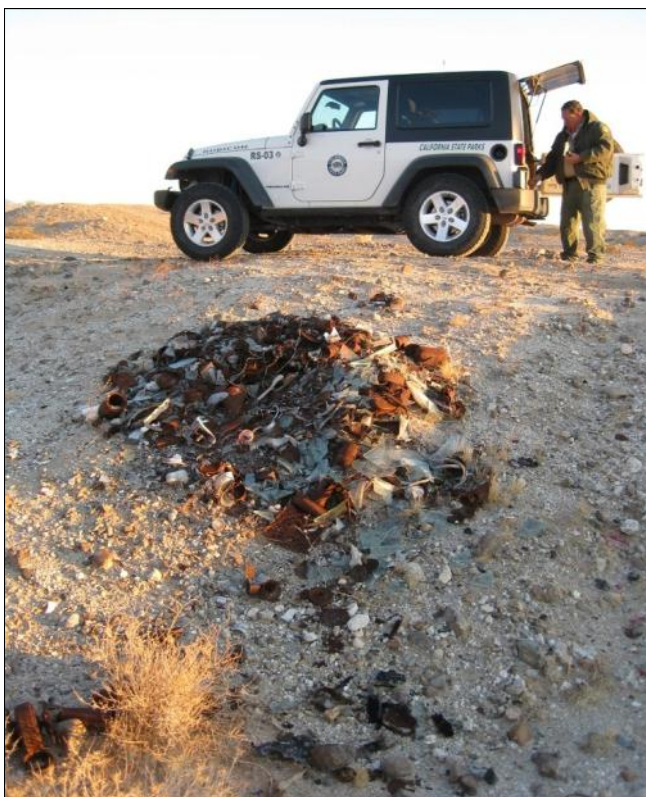
Resource Maintenance *continued...*

sources we found—one in Arroyo Salado, would be very similar to the two fenced areas that already exist. One near Tule Wash will help protect three water sources and is also a beautiful side wash to hike through. Another potential fence project would be located at Gas Domes and would protect a “mud pot” that has popped up next to the small fenced in area at the bottom of the hill.

When we're not repairing fences or removing invasive plants, we like to fill our time cleaning up



Fences are being repaired.



the park by removing piles of trash that have cluttered our trails. Here is a picture of one example. That's what has been keeping us busy for the last couple months, and we hope these improvements allow you to enjoy the natural beauty of this park for years to come. We also hope to use more signage in the future to minimize the need for protective fencing.

Piles of debris left along the trails is being cleaned up.

Interpreter's Corner

By Beth Shugan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation

November and December were outstanding months for the Interpretation Department. Our two new team members—Jeanette Meleen and Ralph Mergen—came up to speed quickly as they assisted with preparations for the big holiday weekends. We continue to grow the selection of programs, 4x4 auto tours, and ATV tours.

Although Thanksgiving weekend was a big weekend for OW, the number of visitors who participated in the interpretive events over the Christmas to New Year's holiday period was

incredible—almost 9500 people! This is up 40% over last year, and shows that our off-highway visitors really are interested in learning more about the desert, both past and present, that they enjoy so much. We had a large crowd of visitors in the park during the week because the weather was warm and the wind was calm!

PROGRAM NAME	ATTENDANCE
Gnarly Beasts of the Past - EZ Up Exhibit (6)	2000
Desert Animals - EZ Up Exhibit (3)	705
Talking Bubbles - EZ Up Exhibit (1)	1075
Talking Pumpkins - EZ Up Exhibit (2)	405
Skulls, Skins, Scat & Tracks EZ Up Exhibit (3)	929
Mobile Visitor Center – Trailer (3)	805
Junior Ranger Programs – Children (7)	127
Junior Ranger Programs – Adults (7)	67
Adventure on the Go – Children (3)	318
Adventure on the Go – Adults (3)	135
Morning Coffee w/Interpreter (2)	122
Roving Interp-a-Kubota (Veggie Oil) (7)	1039
Stargazing (2)	188
Discovery Center Visitors (8)	1495
Off-Highway Tours (2)	37
ASI – ATV Safety Classes (7)	30
Total Attendance	9477

Our Third Annual Roughneck Rendezvous huge geocaching weekend was on January 27 and 28. This huge event has taken months of thought and planning. We added more geocaches this year, and expanded our trading card series to help fill the caches. Watch for an article on this huge event in the next newsletter.

The interp staff offers programs for the public every weekend, but there are three “special event” weekends coming up. Join us if you can.

“Geology Daze @ OW”

Tierra del Sol Jeep Club Desert Safari

“Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies” Astronomical Nights @ OW”

February 18-20

March 2-3

March 23-24

Thank you to everyone who responded to our survey about the *Blowsand Reader*. We received some very good constructive comments, so watch for changes.

Friends of Ocotillo Wells

By Jan Chaney, President

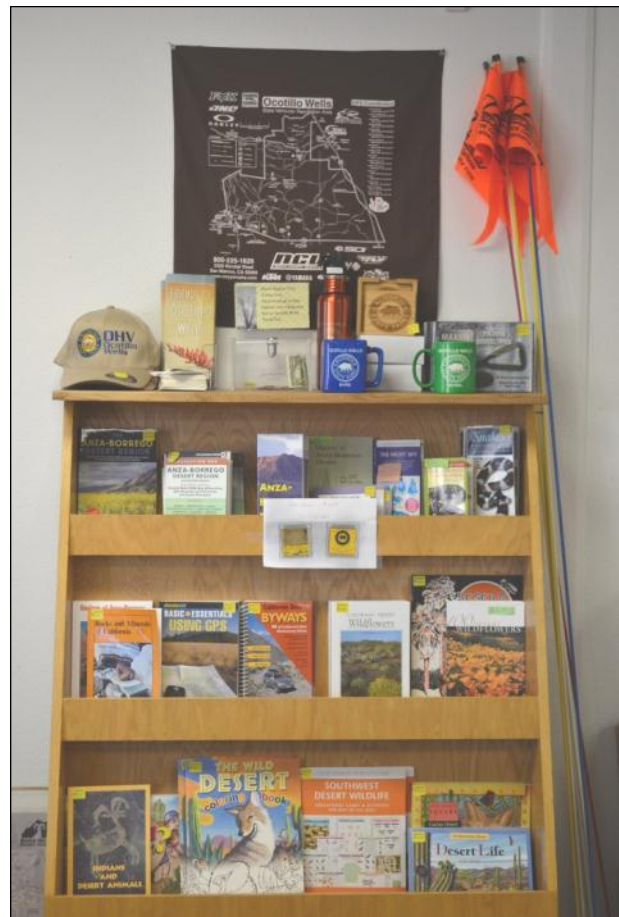


Hello again from the Friends of Ocotillo Wells. We hope you joined us for the Roughneck Rendezvous III geocaching event held January 27th and 28th. It was a lot of fun! The 2012 Geocoins are on the website, and are still available in limited quantities. Once again this year, Print World created a spectacular shirt to mark this year's theme. We still have some of last year's shirts and coins for sale if you are interested.

If you were not aware, we have a display set up in the Discovery Center with many items for sale. There are camp shovels, coffee mugs, wooden coasters, water bottles and carabiner key chains—all which have been

engraved with the Ocotillo Wells and the State Parks logo on them. I must say that they are beautifully done. We also have Park bandanas with Truckhaven area displayed on them, as well as ball caps with an embroidered logo. The book selection is increasing also. Books include GPS 101 to hiking and driving trails to kid's activity books. We hope that when you visit the Discovery Center, you take time to look at the display, and perhaps help support the park by purchasing something. Remember, all proceeds from the sales go to the Friends of Ocotillo Wells, which in turn supports your park. We also have Friends of Ocotillo Wells' membership brochures, as well as information on becoming a volunteer in the park. The mission of the Friends of Ocotillo Wells is to help support the park and to help keep your riding area open for you to enjoy. We cannot do it alone.

Remember—be safe on the trails while having fun!



The Weather Log...



November

High Temperature	Nov 1 st	89.0 degrees
Low Temperature	Nov 9 th	44.6 degrees
Average High Temperature		74.3 degrees
Average Low Temperature		54.1 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Nov 4 th	34 mph
Rainfall for the Month		.45 inches

December

High Temperature	Dec 31 st	76.5 degrees
Low Temperature	Dec 6 th	34.7 degrees
Average High Temperature		65.7 degrees
Average Low Temperature		45.3 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Dec 16 th	30 mph
Rainfall for the Month		.27 inches

Data recorded at the Ocotillo Wells Ranger Station, Ocotillo Wells, California.



Ocotillo Wells District

5172 Highway 78, Box #10
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
Phone: (760) 767-5391
www.ohv.parks.ca.gov