

PUBLIC LANDS ROUNDTABLE MINUTES

Meeting Location: BLM Ridgecrest Office

Minutes of: August 22, 2024

Called to order at: 6:04pm by Chairman Mark Dunn

Pledge of allegiance was led by Arzell Hale.

A MOTION was made by Arzell Hale 2nd by Will Liebscher to approve the July 25, 2024 minutes. They were approved as sent.

PLRT MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Kayla Browne, Mark Dunn, Arzell Hale, Charlie Hattendorf, Will Liebscher, Mark Mason, Hector Villalobos, BLM reps present were: Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager, Melissa Browne, Law Enforcement, and Mitch Sylvester, Fire Division Section Chief.

Guests: George Croll, and 3 Kern County Sheriff's.

BLM UPDATES: by Dana Stephenson, Assistant Field Manager, R/C BLM

+ Dana is substituting for Tom Bickauskas who is out on leave. Dana introduced Mitch Sylvester as the new BLM Fire Division Section Chief. He has been in fire for 24 years now, our coverage area is quite large. We have higher fire danger due to the wet winter which increased the fuel loading, so we've brought in crews from other areas to help bolster our response. It's been fairly successful so far. The BLM has not had a fire get too big. I know the forests have been struggling so far.

BURROS: Dana report that the corrals have approximately 895 animals. We're doing adoptions the first and third Fridays of every month, and she is working the front desk up there. She did adopt out 1 Burro and 1 Horse. She said it wasn't the albino white Burro. They are continuing to do emergency gathers down in the Pichacho in the El Centro Field Office. We have Wild Horse & Burro staff heading that way today to hopefully trap the final burros up there, so we can finish that round-up, then hopefully continue over in the Needles Field Office to finish that gather over there.

STAFFING: We have a new Biologist that we have hired, who will hopefully be starting Octoberish timeframe. We've made a selection on a Geologist through the grad program, and so we're waiting for them to accept that, and I know that Tom has told you that they have made a selection of a new Field Office Manager for Ridgecrest and they may be starting in September timeframe. The District Manager hasn't announced it yet.

PROJECTS: We are briefing our new State Director, Joe Stout; he was acting and is now our permanent.

OHV TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS: Melissa Browne reported that we did have a fatality today in the Rodamacher's. A mountain bike rider had an accident; Kern County is taking the lead on that. It was a solo accident.

FIRE PREVENTION: Mitch Sylvester is leading the Fire Prevention Patrol something about campfires fire assignments

PIPELINE RIGHTS-OF-WAYS: They are still going through the NEPA process; they've got their part to do, exploration of the area, but we're still working with IWVGA, and we still have to work with Fish & Wildlife ... they're still going through the mitigation. George asked, do you have any idea when they are to submit their EA? It's a working document right now. George asked because they request that they [IWV Water District] be a cooperating agency on that NEPA project. The water is going to come to the Water District and the water district customers are going to pay for most it. We made a request but haven't heard anything in a while. Tom probably knows more about that. George said he talked to Max and also that the IWVWD would like to propose an alternative and would like to be involved in that as well, _____ is going to pay for the whole thing. Dana replied that everything will go through E-planning ... that's a great resource and it will go out for public comment as well. We're still a ways away from finishing up that EA. Still need to finish the CDFW, Section 106 done, Section 107 done, and those take time. George just wanted to know where they are as the IWVWD is a little late in the game asking to be a cooperating agency. The only hold up with that Dana could see is that it doesn't go on any land George: it goes onto my property and into my tank. Dana: where the pipeline is actually located ... George: yes, it goes onto my property and into my tank that's on my property. We'll have to get an update from Tom.

QUESTIONS for DANA:

MINING: Charlie: Regarding the mine Dragonfly, that in 2015 the Center for Biodiversity requested they have cease and desist ... like their request to drill in the El Paso's was denied. So, this guy came into Bickle Camp asking about the water in Bickle Camp, and when I heard this, I said "No, you're not going to get any water." There is a well there, and the jurisdiction on water does the State have jurisdiction that is not percolating out of the ground under public land? Is that a State thing? Dana: State Water Board. Charlie: If the water is on a mining claim on public land, if there's a spring, I don't have access to it for purposes of using that water, because you have to have the water rights. Water rights only come through ownership of the land, correct? Dana: Yes! Charlie: The precondition is that you have to own the land before there was any question to water ownership.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: George asked who has jurisdiction strings of our solar and we're off line because they stole our copper wire recently. It's outside the city limits ... is that County Sheriff. One of the Sheriff's asked "Where exactly at?" George: Out near 14, one of our solar fields out by our wells. It was answered, yes the County. George asked for any suggestions to keep copper thieves out of your solar fields? Lights & cameras might help, but if they want your stuff, they're going to take your stuff.

ACTIVITIES: Dana reported we are having night races again this weekend. DP4 are having night races and Rebel Youth which is a women's navigational training. They've been coming here yearly, and then they have a Rebel Rally that goes across Nevada and throughout California; they have a great event, so that's going on right now. Rebel Youth practices how to drive out in the desert, changing tires. One of our staff took it and said it was amazing. The DP4 race is out in the Spanglers ... it's a night race.

NEW BUSINESS:

KERNCREST AUDOBON SOCIETY: Hector reported that they had an exciting meeting last night. Every month we have a field trip. I don't have the list, and they're not going to be just local. Probably in October we'll have a bird watching trip up at the college, pending on what's going on with the streets. The streets and parking lot are torn up right now. We're also going to have programs at the Maturango Museum probably starting September 19th. KerncrestAudobon.org.

TRAP RANGE: Mark reported that this year has been kind of a weird year. Up by the trap range in Trona, by the West End Plant, I have seen probably 20 Horned Toads, and I have seen only one in the last 15 years. This year they have been very plentiful.

BIOLOGIST: Charlie reported that he plants a small garden every year, and the plants have done well, but has had a lack of produce. There has been a lack of pollination, that he has seen no bees, no flies. They have paper wasps, but not bees. We've not had any squash, no strawberries. This is about private property, not a BLM problem, but I guess I need to ask if I can raise bees? _____ said that you would have to go through the Kern County Agricultural Department.

Adjourned at: 6:31pm

NEXT PLR MEMBERSHIP MEETING will be 9/26/24.

Respectfully submitted, Mary Grimsley

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