



Public Lands Round Table

"Keeping Public Lands in Public Hands"

Ridgecrest, CA.

<https://plrt.info>

SUBJECT: Request to Authorize Hiring Critical Positions at the Ridgecrest BLM

FROM: The Public Lands Roundtable

TO: Congressman Vince Fong

The Public Lands Roundtable is a non-profit organization representing over 18 groups, agencies and organizations as well as the general public. This diverse group was founded to provide public input to the Ridgecrest BLM office and help mediate differences between competing interests and uses of public lands managed by BLM. Our diverse representatives include members from industry, environmental groups, natural resource advocates, archaeological resource management, threatened and endangered species protection, hunting and wildlife advocates and off road land use.

Such a diverse group rarely coalesces in agreement around any single issue, however, in this case, virtually all representatives agree that our local BLM is failing to support numerous activities related to all of the above activities through the lack of several critical positions with specific duties and skills.

Our request is for Congressman Fong to advocate for relief from the current hiring freeze for the following positions at the Ridgecrest BLM office and allow the office to both fill current vacancies in these positions as well as future vacancies as they arise. Vacant Position are noted. 47% of authorized positions are currently vacant.

The positions are as follows.

- Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist (one position Vacant)
- Supervisory Outdoor Recreations Planner (one position Vacant)
- Planning and Environmental Coordinator (one position Vacant)
- Wildlife Biologist, (Two positions, two vacancies)
- Natural Resource Specialist (Air, Water and Soil) (one position Vacant)
- Archeologist, (two positions both filled)
- Engineering Equipment Operator (one position Vacant)

Outdoor Recreation Planner (one of three vacant)
Wild Horse and Burro Facility Staff, WG 5001-08, GS 301-09 and 11, GS 303-07 (Two of 5 Vacant)
Geologist, GS-1350- 09 or 11 (all three positions vacant)
Budget Analyst (one position Vacant)
Chief Law Enforcement Officer and other law enforcement personnel. (one of

For each listed position a justification is provided as Attachment #1

The following organizations of the PLRT would greatly appreciate your support for our local BLM office and the Public Lands they manage.

- China Lake Astronomical Society
- Audubon Society
- California Breakfast Burritos
- Gear Grinders Off Road Club
- Marturango Museum
- Searles Valley Minerals
- IW Gem and Mineral Society
- Pleistocene Foundation
- Ridgecrest City Council
- Kern County Supervisors district 1 and 2
- Jawbone Station OHV Area
- Quail forever
- Desert Tortoise Coalition
- National Public Lands News
- Friends of the Inyo
- Stewards of the Sequoia
- Indian Wells Valley Water District
- Members of the Public

We would also like to invite you or one of your local representatives to present your priorities and accomplishments as our congressional Representative at one of our monthly meetings. You can contact our current Chair George Croll at crollg@msn.com or via phone at 805-878-3020.

Respectfully Submitted by the Public Lands Roundtable

Attachment #1

Vacancy Priorities

Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist; and Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner

Justification: These positions are considered very high priority vacancies due to the high demand for processing and approving permits, plans of operation, and leases for projects and use of the public lands managed by the BLM. Permits, plans of operations, and/or leases are required for: organized recreational events, cattle and sheep grazing, mining exploration and development proposals, mineral or land leases, reality actions (i.e., land leases for wind farms, rights-of-way (ROW) for roads and transmission lines), film and movie shoots, and miscellaneous land uses as conservation and maintenance projects, archaeological/paleontological and other science research projects. The BLM Ridgecrest Field Office processes numerous permits every year. These supervisory positions are responsible for assigning lease management and permit processing to specialists, ensuring the quality of the work, and that the work is accomplished, and approvals are done in a timely manner. The use of the BLM public lands directly and indirectly contributes to the economy of the Ridgecrest community.

Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Justification: This vacancy is a critical priority position due to required regulatory and environmental reviews for issuing permits for recreational events, grazing leases, plans of operations for mineral leases and mining and exploration proposals, lands use rights-of-ways and other proposed land uses such as film and movie permits, and conservation and maintenance projects. This position ensures that the appropriate level of environmental review is conducted by the appropriate specialists; appropriate mitigation measures are applied to ensure compliance with BLM regulations and approved land use management plans.

Wildlife Biologist, Natural Resources Specialist (Air, Water, and Soil), and Archaeologist (if a vacancy occurs)

Justification: These specialist positions are critically needed for identifying potential impacts of proposed projects and other uses of BLM land. Environmental reviews are necessary for proposed recreation events, cattle and sheep grazing, conservation, and maintenance projects. These subject experts are required for virtually any project and land use large or small to help develop, if necessary, mitigation measures to proceed; and to monitor compliance. The Ridgecrest BLM Field Office probably processes more than 100 permits per year. The lack of any of these experts in the area impacts virtually every activity of the interest groups who are members of the PLRT. Not having the expertise of these specialists locally may result in project or event cancellations, approval delays, and lack of compliance.

Engineering Equipment Operator; Outdoor Recreation Planner; and Park Ranger

Justification: The recreational use of Ridgecrest BLM managed land explodes during the fall, winter, and spring seasons. It is estimated that tens of thousands of people will be hiking, bicycling, OHVing, dispersed camping, and RVing on Ridgecrest BLM public lands. In addition, it is estimated that fifty or more organized recreational events will be permitted, everything from equestrian, mountain biking, motorcycling, and four-wheel OHV events. The public will be recreating in areas classified as open OHV areas, designated routes and trails areas, and wilderness areas. The equipment operator's responsibility is to help maintain the hundreds of routes and trails, fences, kiosks, and signs to help the public comply with the designated areas and recreate in a responsible manner. The recreation specialist and park ranger are also responsible for the above. In addition, they help educate the public about designated areas. The Ridgecrest BLM also works with countless volunteers and interest groups who help maintain the designated areas. The recreation planners and park rangers help coordinate this work with the volunteers who work tirelessly to help maintain our public lands.

Wild Horse and Burro Facility Manager; and Wild Horse and Burro Specialist and other staff

Justification: The BLM Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro (WH&B) Facility houses and cares for about 800 animals gathered from public land in California and other western States. An important aspect of the gathers is to determine where gatherings are needed, how many animals to remove, and how to round them up in a safe manner. The animals require feeding and medical care, and preparation for public adoption. The facilities require constant maintenance: fence and holding pens repair, and waste management. These vacant positions are key to the management of the gathers, proper care of the animals, and maintaining the WH&B facility. Failure to properly staff this facility would be viewed as cruelty to animals.

Geologists (Geothermal, Leasable Minerals, Hard Rock and Mineral Materials)

Justification: These specialist positions are also critically needed for identifying potential impacts of proposed projects and other uses of BLM land. The geologist positions are responsible for identifying potential impacts from proposed plans of operation for mineral exploration, mining, and mineral development and production projects on mining claims, mineral leases, and mineral material (i.e., sand, gravel, and other rock materials) sales sites on BLM managed lands. The geologist helps develop mitigation measures to proceed and to monitor compliance for virtually any project and land use large or small. The Ridgecrest BLM Field Office geologist is also responsible for providing oversight for geothermal leases on BLM managed land in cooperation with NAWS, China Lake, which also leases federal land for geothermal production to the Coso Operating Company. The Coso site is one of the top producers of geothermal electrical power in the U. S. Ridgecrest BLM geologist would also provide oversight for federal mineral production leases which are mined Searles Valley Minerals, Inc. Raw minerals are mined and used to produce various chemical products, and lithium. The BLM requires royalties to be paid by the companies based on the production of these leases. A percentage of the royalties are returned to the local communities. Schools in these communities have benefited from these royalties.

Budget Analyst; and Administrative Assistant

Justification: The administrative staff consists of only three staff members; two critical positions are vacant. The staff members are responsible for keeping the lights on and the office doors open. They collect the fees generated by permits, mineral sales, leases, rentals, royalties, and other sources; and they are responsible for making bank deposits. They develop purchase requests for staff and purchase office supplies, materials, equipment, and pay for service contracts for the office. In addition to these duties, they maintain office records.

Chief Law Enforcement Ranger; and Field Staff Law Enforcement Ranger

Justification: Last but not least. The Ridgecrest BLM Field Office manages about 1.8 million acres of public land. The public land extends from the western boundary of Death Valley NP to the eastern Sierras; southwest to the Tehachapi wind farms and south to LA County: north, including parts of the Inyo and White Mountains, and Saline Valley to the boundary with Nevada. This huge area is patrolled by the Law Enforcement Rangers, if they are not detailed (which they often are) to other areas and duties. It is critical to have a full contingency of law enforcement officers to respond to many emergencies, accidents, fires, and various unlawful acts such as trespasses, theft, and vandalism. Without the Chief Law Enforcement Ranger, it will be difficult to set priorities for the Ridgecrest BLM against other competing law enforcement priorities.

