

## DESERT



## REPORT

BY GEARY HUND

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# Planned Energy Corridors May Threaten Public Lands

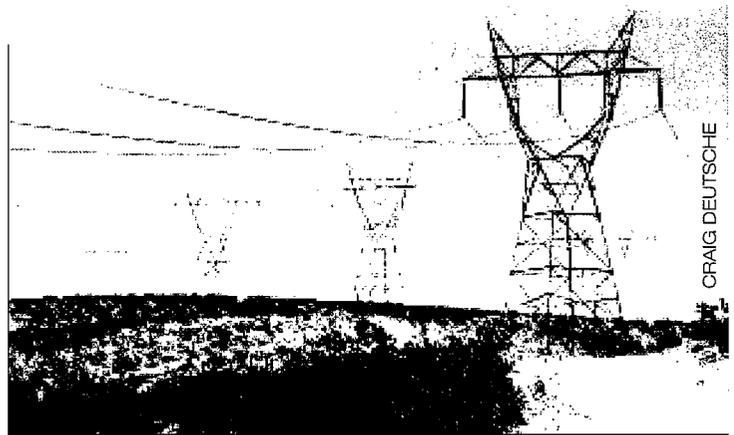
As we bumped along one of three parallel service roads adjacent to three massive electrical transmission lines stretching east and west as far as the eye could see, the specter of many new energy corridors crisscrossing the beautiful Mojave Desert became very tangible and terribly disconcerting — RODMAN AND NEWBERRY MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS TRIP, WINTER 2006

**A**n evaluation by the California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) of maps posted on the California Energy Commission (CEC) website in February of 2006, revealed that industry proposed energy transmission corridors have the potential to impact at least 24 wilderness areas, 23 roadless areas, five wilderness study areas, three proposed wilderness areas, four national park units, and Anza Borrego Desert State Park in California. These corridors were proposed in response to the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

The passage of the Energy Policy Act set in motion a process which could result in impacts to conservation lands throughout the West. Section 368(a) of the new law requires the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the Department of Energy, in cooperation with the Departments of Commerce and Defense, to designate energy transmission right-of-way corridors in 11 western states including California and Nevada. The corridors must be designated and incorporated into the agencies relevant land use plans by September 2007.

The first step toward designation of the energy corridors began within a month of the bill being signed. A Notice of Intent (NOI) for the West-wide Energy Corridor Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) was issued in September 2005. The NOI initiated a scoping period on the content of the PEIS which ended in November 2005.

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CRAIG DEUTSCHE

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## The Impact of Energy Corridors

*Because energy corridors can profoundly affect the land they cross, their siting involves many issues which deserve careful consideration.*



BY TERRY FREWIN

# What We Do "Out There"

One of the questions I'm frequently asked as a desert lover is, "What do you do out there?" In the past, my answer was usually a shoulder shrug because I couldn't answer the question to my own satisfaction. Now, my answer is "I volunteer." Last fall Elden Hughes wrote here of the importance of volunteers to the work of the Desert Committee, the *Desert Report*, and the agencies that manage our deserts. At the risk of redundancy I want to repeat his assertions on how important volunteers are to all of this work, and introduce some of the new volunteers who have stepped in to help.

From Carrizo Plain National Monument to Great Basin National Park, from Black Rock Desert to the Algodones Dunes, there are scores of opportunities for volunteers. Death Valley National Park, Joshua Tree National Park, Mojave National Preserve and all BLM Desert District offices need volunteers; they all face budget constraints and program cutbacks as the regime in Washington continues its attacks on public lands. There is undoubtedly something for everyone. I'm personally interested in a variety of tasks, and prefer those which are out-of-doors. During this past year I have helped out on tamarisk removal, wilderness area monitoring, signing and cleaning up wilderness boundaries and monitoring illegal ORV activities. Once you define your interests, all that's needed is a willingness to help. There is something for you "out there". Guaranteed!

Within the Desert Committee the semi-"official" roles are listed in each *Desert Report*. It doesn't say that every one is a volunteer. That's understood. A key factor in the success of our committee has been the "Administrative" team. The tasks vary from maintaining databases to getting meeting invitations out on time. The majordomo behind this group, indeed, the whole committee, has been Jim Kilberg. Anyone who has attended a Desert Committee meeting has been met by Jim, sign-in sheet in hand and name tag at the ready. Jim is cutting back on some of his jobs so we're looking for volunteers to take on these tasks. We all thank Jim for all his work. We know he will help new volunteers get started, so I encourage anyone who is interested to contact Jim or me. If you're not sure, come to one of the meetings and get a feel of what we are doing. In administrative work I can again say that there is probably something for everyone. This is my very public "Thank You" to Jim for helping me assume my new role in the committee. We can allow him to retire from some of his involvement, but not lose his connection with the committee. I know that Trader Joe's does not want to see him go.

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One of the more important goals of the Desert Committee is getting people out to the deserts. Knowing an area is often critical to voicing support for the area when it is threatened. Of course, the learning experience should be fun. All trips listed on the Outings pages cover a spectrum of recreation, exercise, challenge, study, work and service. Designed and led by volunteers,

*continued on page 13*

BY JIM DEACON  
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## GROWTH AND NEVADA'S GROUNDWATER

# How We're Losing The West We Thought We'd Won

**F**rom the beginning, Nevada, the driest state in the US, has made exceptional efforts to ensure sustainable water use with minimum conflict. Toward that end the Nevada State Engineer was made responsible for allocating water based on principles of prior rights, beneficial use, public interest, and sustainable use. While these principles are admirable, the devil is in the details. For example, under intense pressure to support growth in both Las Vegas and Pahrump Valleys, the State Engineer has awarded rights to more than 300% of the perennial yield in these valleys. Perennial yield is "the amount of usable water from a groundwater aquifer that can be economically withdrawn and consumed each year for an indefinite period of time. (Nevada Division of Water Resources 1992). These allocations have resulted in declining water tables (more than 300 feet in Las Vegas Valley), wells drying up, land subsidence, failure of springs, loss of wetland habitat, and loss of biodiversity.

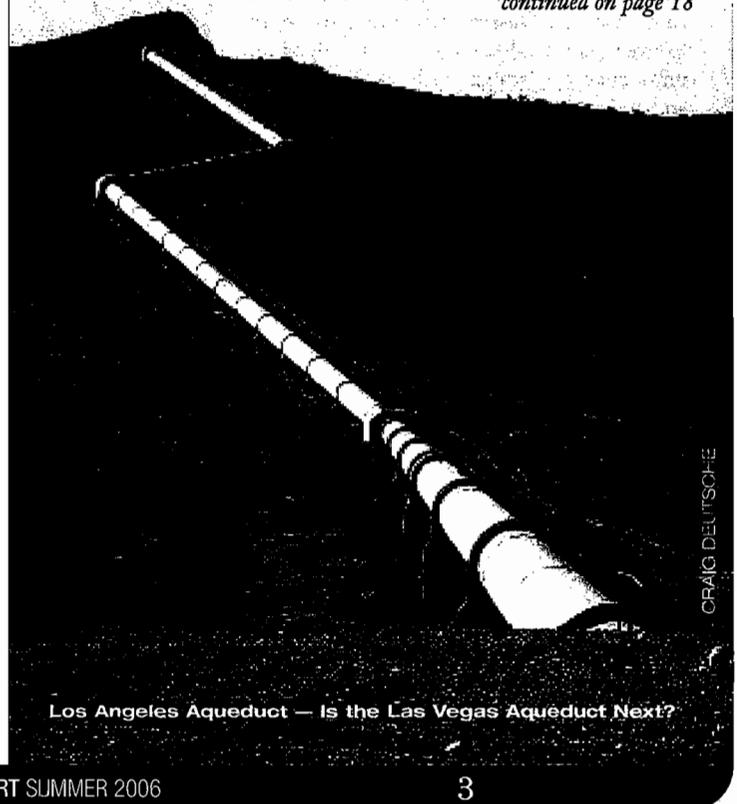
In southern Nevada, after nearly exhausting ground water supplies and its Colorado River allocation, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) is creatively and aggressively acquiring new sources in an effort to make sure that water does not limit growth. SNWA is trying to acquire groundwater from eastern and central Nevada, is advocating modification of rules governing use of Colorado River water and its tributaries, and is saving and trading water with other states and with Mexico. For example the rules for "return flow credit" (SNWA can reuse any Colorado River water returned to Lake Mead) were modified to include credit for "augmentation" flows. Therefore every gallon of groundwater from eastern/central Nevada reaching Lake Mead can be returned to Las Vegas. This powerful incentive to deplete Nevada's groundwater means Las Vegas will net about 1.7 gallons of water for every gallon imported from rural Nevada.

The consequences for rural Nevada, its springs, streams, wetlands and inhabitants are profound! A USGS study published in 1995 attempted to estimate the effects of just the SNWA water project on the ground water table and on spring discharge throughout the area likely to be affected. It *ignored other withdrawals* of water for existing rights and new rights. Depending on distance from wells, the study suggested there was a high probability of ground water levels declining from just perceptible to 1600 feet in over 78 basins extending from Death Valley, California, to Sevier Lake, Utah. As already seen in the Las Vegas and Pahrump Valleys, withdrawals of that magnitude

will produce dry wells, land subsidence, spring failure, loss of wetland habitat and loss of biodiversity.

Compounding the problem is the fact that the SNWA water project is not the only projected source of groundwater removal in this 78 basin area. Existing rights (as of February 20, 2006) amount to about 735,000 acre-feet (102% of perennial yield in this area), and applicants other than SNWA have requested an additional 883,860 acre-feet. Most of the additional applications are in support of satellite communities such as Coyote Springs, the proposed development north of Mesquite, and the Sandy Valley-Pahrump developments. The 180,800 acre-feet for SNWA, requests for satellite communities, plus existing rights, add up to about 1.8 million acre-feet (250% of perennial yield). Though 9 times greater than the 180,800 acre-feet evaluated by the USGS in their 1995 study, this is well within the 300% of perennial yield allocated by the state engineer in Las Vegas and Pahrump valleys. Effects similar to those realized historically can therefore be expected to be similarly devastating.

*continued on page 18*



Los Angeles Aqueduct — Is the Las Vegas Aqueduct Next?

CRAIG DEUTSCHE

# Proposed Transmission Line Threatens Anza Borrego

**M**ost people celebrate spring break by taking a vacation or attending Easter Sunday services.

This year, I decided to go on a 78-mile protest march instead. Over 10 days, I walked the desert portion of San Diego Gas and Electric's (SDG&E) proposed "Sunrise Powerlink," a high-voltage transmission line that would run approximately 130 miles from the Yuha Desert in Imperial County to coastal San Diego.

If approved by the California Public Utilities Commission, this transmission line would cut like a knife through the heart of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. It would forever industrialize the Park's sweeping, untouched landscapes with electrical lines and metal towers as tall as 16-story buildings. The Park's special, rare animals such as the peninsular bighorn sheep and golden eagle would be threatened, its sublime



KELLY FULLER

addition, the company's current easement through the Park would have to be widened, which might cut into designated state wilderness.

The current line is easy to ignore because it is strung on wooden poles 40-50 feet high. The proposed line would require metal lattice towers 150-160 tall. On my desert walk, the only time I noticed sound coming from the current line was during high winds. In contrast, I heard an existing 500 kV transmission line the entire time I walked beside it, even when I was camped near the noisy Plaster City wallboard factory.

At the time of this writing, the State Parks system does not oppose the "Sunrise Powerlink." In a March 2006 letter, District Superintendent Mike Wells stated that State Parks has not made its final decision about

the power line. Conservationists have heard that State Parks is under intense political pressure from the highest levels of state government and is currently not being allowed to oppose the line.

Other concerns arise outside the Anza Borrego State Park. Here the "Sunrise Powerlink" would cut across approximately 40 miles of desert administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. This appears to include about 15 miles of the West Mesa where there are currently no power lines. Installing a transmission line there would mar a large natural landscape and ruin views from the adjacent Fish Creek Mountains and Coyote Mountains Wilderness areas.

Another portion of the route with no existing power lines appears to be adjacent to the Carrizo Impact Area, which is signed "closed" due to unexploded military ordinance but does not have a fence to keep the public out. Currently, this is not a huge problem because the BLM routes of travel in the area are very rough, limiting visitors. However, the improved access road that would be necessary to build and maintain the transmission line would probably increase visitation, increasing the likelihood

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*The proposed line would require metal lattice towers 150-160 tall.*

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quiet marred by the line's soulless, crackling buzz. Archaeological resources and Native American heritage in the Park would also be harmed.

SDG&E's preferred route would enter the Park from the east along Old Kane Spring Road, then join with highway 78 near the Narrows, pass next to Tamarisk Grove Campground, and then exit the Park along Grapevine Canyon Road. The two proposed alternative routes would both run inside Anza Borrego.

Although there is an existing 69 kV power line inside the Park, it serves small rural communities and was never intended to be the electricity "superhighway" SDG&E hopes to build. In

**Top: Existing powerline in Anza Borrego**

that someone would get hurt.

Increased vehicle access has other consequences as well. These include the spread of exotic, non-native plants, by increasing the number of vehicles and people in the area. As I walked I noticed that weedy annuals were much more prevalent in areas that get lots of vehicle traffic than in more remote, less-visited areas.

In addition, increased fire risk goes hand in hand with increased vehicle access, be it a stray spark from an exhaust system or partying teenagers losing control of a bonfire. This poses a real threat to the delicate web of life in the desert, as desert ecosystems are not fire adapted. In many areas throughout the west, the landscape is changing from natural desert flora to non-native grasses due to repeated fires. This type conversion hurts the native wildlife.

All of this potential damage would be easier to accept if the "Sunrise Powerlink" were the only option. But it's not. Independent energy experts have identified other ways of increasing San Diego's electricity supply and moving renewable energy north from Imperial County. Unfortunately, SDG&E has refused to consider these alternatives.

Although SDG&E claims that a primary benefit of the "Sunrise Powerlink" would be access to clean, renewable energy, it seems likely that the line would instead increase our reliance on non-renewable, polluting fossil fuels. For example, the line would not start near a renewable energy facility. Instead, it would originate at the Imperial Valley substation, where transmission lines from power plants owned by SDG&E's parent company, Sempra Energy, come in from just across the border in Mexico. Sempra's Mexicali power plant does not meet all of California's environmental laws, in particular the ones governing emission offsets. (Emission-offset laws require companies to take action that reduces an area's air pollution in order to compensate for the emissions their power plants put into the air.) Air pollution from Mexicali easily blows north into Imperial County, which has one of the worst childhood asthma rates in the state.

Residents and local officials are concerned that the "Sunrise Powerlink" would make Imperial County's air even dirtier than it is now. They fear that Sempra Energy will build more non-compliant power plants just across the border and then ship the electricity into the Southern California market via the new transmission line. Their distrust of Sempra does not seem unreasonable. Sempra was recently ordered to pay \$70 million to the state of California for overcharges and other bad conduct during California's 2001 energy crisis.

Conservationists, consumer advo-

## WHY THE "SUNRISE POWERLINK" IS NOT NEEDED

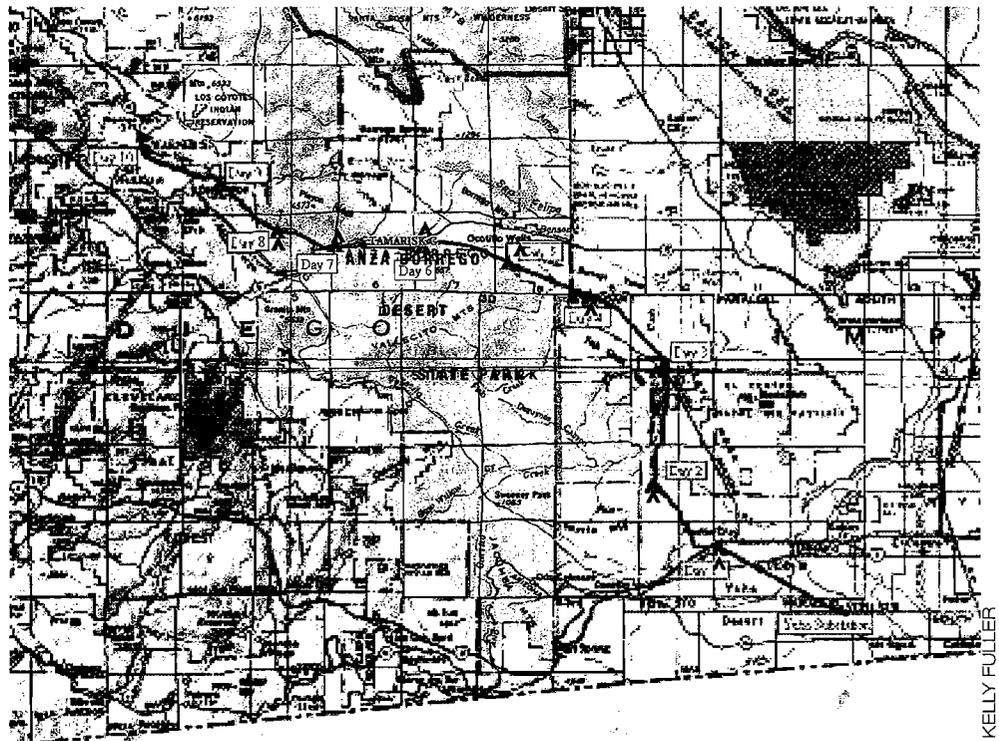
The "Sunrise Powerlink" is not the only possible solution to our region's energy needs. Independent energy experts at Utility Consumers' Action Network (UCAN) and the Border Power Plant Working group have identified other reasonable options.

- Generating more electricity locally by refurbishing San Diego's aging power plants
- Upgrading existing power lines in San Diego and/or northern Baja
- Upgrading existing power lines in Imperial County to transmit renewable energy to the L.A. market
- Increases in energy efficiency, distributed generation, and rooftop solar

cates, and community groups all agree. The "Sunrise Powerlink" is a bad idea. When the California Public Utilities Commission begins public hearings about the proposed line later this year, all alternatives should be explored. Only then will consumers and the environment get a real chance at a smart energy future.

For more information, visit [ucan.org](http://ucan.org), [kdfuller.blogspot.com](http://kdfuller.blogspot.com), and [raasp.org](http://raasp.org). ♦

*Kelly Fuller is the spokesperson on the "Sunrise Powerlink" for the Sierra Club's California/Nevada Desert Committee and the San Diego Chapter.*



Route of Walk and Powerlink. Orange boundary is Anza Borrego Desert State Park.

KELLY FULLER

BASED ON INFORMATION PROVIDED BY  
PHILIP M. KLASKY  
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## NEW LAW PROVIDES TOOLS TO CONTROL OFF-ROAD VEHICLE DAMAGE

# Reigning In ORV Abuses

**I**n a victory for desert residents (of all species), community concerns have led to the adoption of a San Bernardino County ordinance that will provide law enforcement and desert defenders tools to control off-road vehicle (ORV) abuse of private and public lands. The new law, effective July 1, requires riders to carry written permission to ride on private land, requires a special event permit to engage in a "staging" (defined as a gathering of ten people or vehicles for the purpose of riding), and allows neighbors to challenge the permit. The new law also establishes tailpipe noise limits, creates a judicial process by which residents can stop ORV nuisance such as dust, noise, and



TERRY FREVIN

Commission (a citizen advisory group that provides law enforcement and restoration grants) at the behest of the ORV lobby. In addition, recently adopted ordinances in Riverside and other counties face legal challenges from the industry.

The San Bernardino county ordinance is a start, but state-wide legislation is also needed. This might reasonably require the following:

- License plates for identification
- Funds for large format signage and restoration of the land
- Insurance for all ORV drivers and riders
- Establish strong penalties for ORV abuse
- Educate the public about ORV riding restrictions
- Make parents responsible for the actions of minors

Of most importance, ORV violations should be connected to a rider's DMV record, and a guarantee for a steady allocation of ORV law enforcement funding is needed. The goal would be fair and responsible use of the land.. ♣

*Based on information provided by Philip M. Klasky. Mr. Klasky is a teacher, writer, cultural geographer and environmental justice activist who divides his time between San Francisco and Wonder Valley. He is a member of Community ORV Watch [www.orvwatch.com](http://www.orvwatch.com).*

*The Off Road Vehicle lobby  
is well-funded, with sales of vehicles  
skyrocketing due to an aggressive  
advertising campaign targeting youth.*

trespass, and sets strong penalties leading to misdemeanor violations and the possibility of jail time. The unanimous decision by the San Bernardino Board of Supervisors reflects hundreds of phone calls, letters and emails, dozens of dedicated volunteers, a concerted media campaign, and a series of stakeholder meetings to create a fair and effective law.

In spite of progress a number of issues remain that need resolution. The ORV lobby is well-funded, with sales of vehicles skyrocketing due to an aggressive advertising campaign targeting youth. Maps published by ORV groups are sometimes inaccurate in their designation of trails. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Western Mojave (WEMO) plan increases ORV access on public lands and sometimes encourages trespass on private lands by designating ORV routes across private property. Frequently, BLM law enforcement of regulations is weak or non-existent, and Governor Schwarzenegger's administration is attempting to dismantle the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation



CRAIG DEUTSCHE

ORV Damage

## East Mojave Preserve Headquarters

On Saturday, March 25th, visitors to the Mojave Desert joined in two celebrations of railroad culture in the East Mojave. At Barstow's Casa del Desierto, the National Parks Conservation Association sponsored



CHERYL KANDEL

**Caption: Dennis Schramm, Congressman Lewis, and Regional Director John Jarvis at the ribbon cutting.**

a slide presentation by the noted rail historian Alfred Runte, a dramatic photo exhibit by Mark Andrews, and live bluegrass music. At the National Park Service's dedication of the Kelso Depot and visitor center, Congressman Jerry Lewis gave an account of his involvement in securing approximately \$5 million for the restoration. Rob Blair recited cowboy poetry, and over 1500 guests toured the Depot and marveled at its transformation.

## RS2477 Road Claims

In March of this year Interior Secretary Gail Norton released a new policy on how to use the recent 10th circuit court ruling on RS 2477 across the county. The new policy could open claims for right of way in National Parks, Wilderness Areas, Wildlife Refuges, and Wilderness Study Areas. It could permit agencies to set up road maintenance agreements with state and counties allowing them to work on RS2477 claims without a prior determination that the road is a proper claim. The concern is that once they have official agreements to do road maintenance, they will then more easily be able to claim a right-of-way in the future. On April 4 San Bernardino sent a letter to the DOI to inform them of the intent to sue for 14 roads in and along the borders of the Mojave National Preserve claiming them as RS 2477 rights of way.

## Black Rock Power Plant

Sempra Energy has recently decided to abandon its plans to build the Granite Fox Powerplant in the Black Rock Desert of Northwest Nevada. The decision was largely a result of regulations proposed in California which would prohibit the state from buying power from new coal fired power plants. This was a part of California's movement to reduce global warming. The war is far from over; another energy company could purchase Sempra's holdings and move forward with the plan.

## Developments In The Carrizo Plain

A Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Carrizo Plain National Monument is under preparation, but the date for its publication is uncertain. A group of nine environmental organizations, headed by the Wilderness Society, has written a strong letter to the Bureau of Land Management, stressing the legal requirement for a full EIS to accompany the plan, rather than an Environmental Assessment as reported in a preliminary version of the RMP. In another development, an application to sink a test well for oil production in the southern end of the Monument has been withdrawn, largely due to difficulties in meeting the NEPA requirements in the allowed time frame. Mineral rights were not transferred to the Monument at the time of its creation, so the possibility for future applications to drill remains.

## Guzzlers In Wilderness

California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) is pursuing its objective of creating new guzzlers in desert Wilderness Areas - six in the Sheephole Valley Wilderness Area and two in the Orocochia Mountains. These are subject to permits issued by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In accordance with regulations the BLM has issued a Notice of Propose Action for each project and has also completed, with CDFG, an environmental analysis for the Sheephole Valley project. A group of eight environmental organizations, led by the California Wilderness Coalition, has jointly submitted comments opposing the project and requesting more complete studies of the impacts and alternatives to the proposal.

## Paradise Valley Development

The previous (Spring) issue of the Desert Report described an application by Glorious Land Company to develop a 7,200 acre community east of the Coachella Valley and immediately south of Joshua Tree NP. An Environmental Impact Report is currently being prepared following public comments and a hearing held by the Riverside County Planning Commission. More recently, a land exchange which had been requested to facilitate the project has been officially denied by the Bureau of Land Management. Prospects are further clouded by the competing desires of a consortium of power companies that wish to upgrade an exiting transmission line that runs through the proposed development. An array of environmental groups has opposed the project from its inception on a wide array of grounds.

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TRAILS TO RAILS

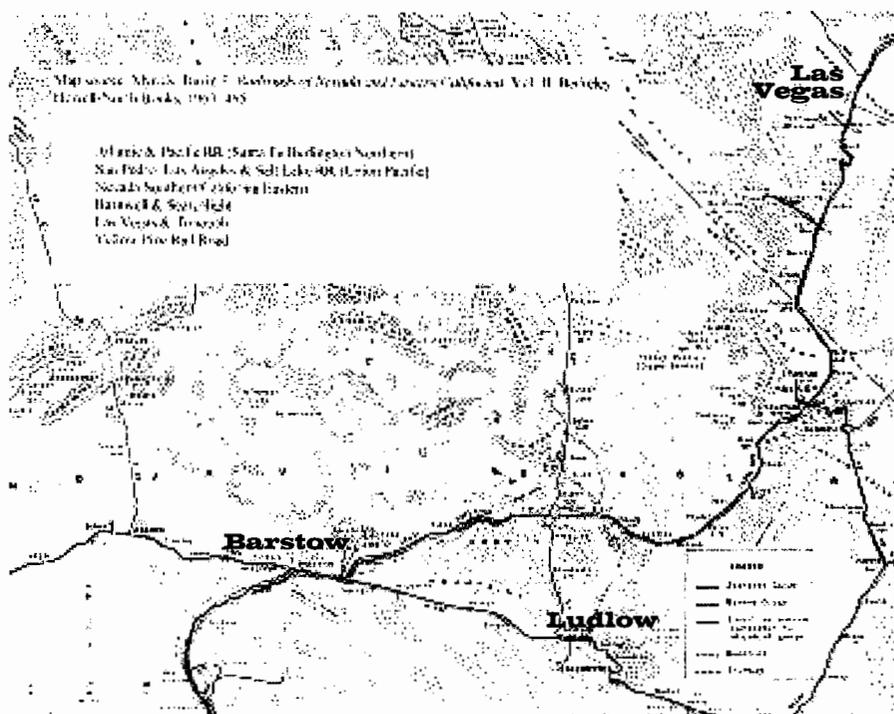
# Opening Of The Mojave Desert

**T**he Mojave Desert is a forbidding place, difficult to travel through and extremely hard to live in. From 17th century Spaniards to 20th century Americans, it remained a place to avoid or to get through quickly, full of menacing plants and poisonous snakes, unbearably hot and dry, and a major obstacle to settlement. History in this desert is largely the story of how people traveled there.

The desert's native peoples were adapted to its harsh demands and survived and even thrived in the desert. In historic times, the Hopis, Mohaves, and Paiutes conducted frequent trading expeditions to the Gulf of California and to the coast, creating a network of trails between permanent water holes. Some of these footpaths developed into the historical cross-Mojave routes known as the Old Spanish Trail, the Mormon Road, and the Government Road. These 19th century mule and wagon trails made it possible for the Spanish, Mexicans, and Americans to traverse the desert.

Permanent settlement was not attempted until the War with Mexico ended in 1848. Then, in 1855, the Latter Day Saints (LDS) Church established a mission in Las Vegas Valley, later opening a lead mine on Mount Potosi, the first lode mine in Nevada and a beacon to hordes of prospectors. Political problems caused the Mormons to abandon Las Vegas in 1857. The prospectors found many valuable minerals. Mining camps sprang up in the most out-of-the-way places, supported by isolated ranches built along the few permanent water sources found in the Mojave. The high cost of transportation shadowed every mining company's balance sheet; even quite rich ore bodies were not profitable, given minimal technical advances and primitive wagons for hauling.

For a few years in the late 19th century, Colorado River steamboats hauled ores out to ships that took them to England, Wales, or eastern U.S. smelters, but still only the richest mines could support the high cost of shipping. In southern Nevada, the great ore bodies of El Dorado Canyon, discovered in the late 1850s, stimulated the growth of a cluster of small mining camps served by river steamers. Indeed, El Dorado Canyon was the



Early Railroads in the Mojave

head of navigation on the Colorado until steamship traffic ceased in the early 20th century. For those few decades, river ports offered a way to reach deep into the desert, but their dominance was challenged with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The Central Pacific Rail Road, now the Union Pacific (UPRR), doomed the LDS settlement of Callville to abandonment and ghost town status in 1867. Founded by the Mormons as a river port in 1864, Callville was to be landlocked Utah's link to the sea, but the railroad rendered the steamers obsolete. Railroads offer mobility and speed of transport which river barges could not match, and the LDS Church switched its attention to cooperating on railroad construction.

The first railroad built through the Mojave Desert was the Atlantic and Pacific Rail Road (APRR) which later became the Santa Fe, and then the Santa Fe Burlington Northern (SFBN) in 1883. Within 25 years of its completion, numerous long and short rail lines blanketed the desert. Long distance wagon roads fell into disuse; the railroad could take people and goods more

quickly, more cheaply and more safely across enormous expanses of formerly inaccessible terrain. The Atlantic and Pacific created the nucleus of communities at watering stations along the rails, some of which were important in the wagon road era. Barstow, near a Mojave River wagon road campsite, and Needles, at a Colorado River crossing, matured into important towns in the western Mojave under the stimulus of railroad commerce.

The eastern Mojave experienced the growth of numerous but ephemeral mining camps, but without affordable, dependable transportation, most bloomed very briefly. Only with the construction of the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Rail Road (SPLA&SLRR, now part of the Union Pacific), completed through the east Mojave in 1905, did the area attract permanent settlements. The railroad bought the old Las Vegas Ranch, whose nucleus was the historic Las Vegas (Mormon) Fort, taking its water and building a town to house its workers.

Once the region was linked by rail to Los Angeles and Salt Lake, economic benefits grew exponentially. Along the line, the railroad stimulated development of quarries, mines and farms. In southern Nevada, shipments of fruits, vegetables, and alfalfa from the Muddy River Valley were hauled to market by the same engines that moved cattle from the Spring Mountain Ranch, gypsum from Blue Diamond, and lead and zinc ore from Goodsprings and Potosi. The relationship between the railroad and the boom in these products is direct and clear. Mine production increased as shipping costs lowered, and small railroad lines were built to connect mining camps with places that could process the ores.

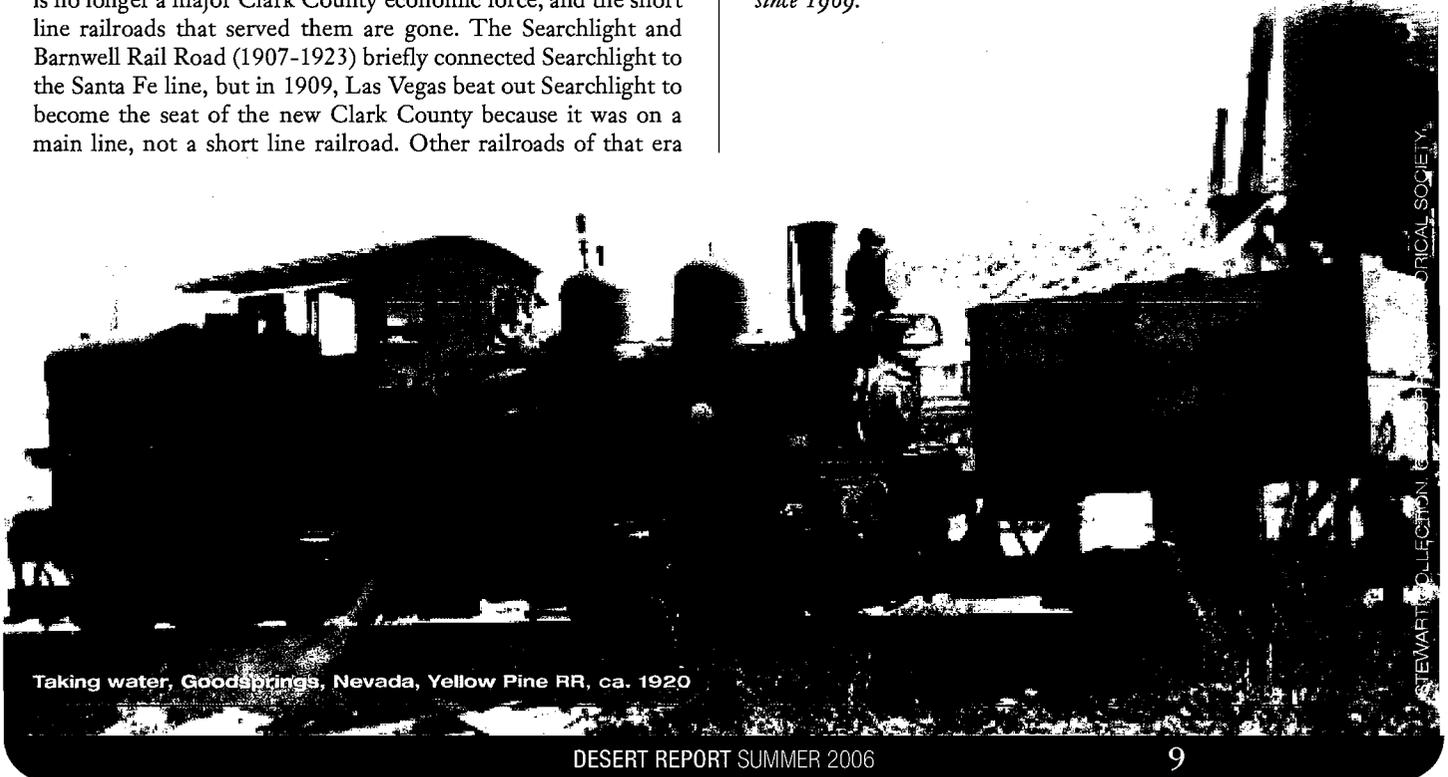
Las Vegas metamorphosed into a valley-filling urban center, no longer dependent on the railroad, and in fact largely ignorant of the role trains once played. Yet in the thousands of square miles outside Las Vegas Valley, traces of the mines and the small camps that served them still remain. Some of these places survive today, although greatly diminished in size and function. Mining is no longer a major Clark County economic force, and the short line railroads that served them are gone. The Searchlight and Barnwell Rail Road (1907-1923) briefly connected Searchlight to the Santa Fe line, but in 1909, Las Vegas beat out Searchlight to become the seat of the new Clark County because it was on a main line, not a short line railroad. Other railroads of that era

were the Las Vegas and Tonopah (1907-1918), the Nevada Southern (also California Eastern, 1893-1923), the St. Thomas Branch (1911-1939) and the Yellow Pine Rail Road, (1911-1930).

It was largely the Yellow Pine Rail Road along with its connection to the SPLA&SLRR that allowed the Goodsprings Mining District to prosper. This district included hundreds of mines, and Goodsprings quickly became a significant community with its own school, commercial district, a mill and even a newspaper. The Yellow Pine Rail Road carried ore from the mines west of Goodsprings to a mill in the town, then down to the main line (SPLA&SLRR) for shipment to smelters. The train served the mines until the Great Depression, when production ceased. Late in the 1930s, the rails were torn up and sold off. Goodsprings' WWII mining boom was served by trucks, not trains.

Today the Yellow Pine RR lives on in the form of an abandoned rail bed, although even this is expected to change. Plans are underway to convert its berm into a Rails to Trails project that will parallel a part of the earliest Old Spanish Trail. Footpaths and wagon trails preceded the railroads, and so it is perhaps fitting that we may someday walk these trails again. It is also fitting that we acknowledge the story of the intervening years. These early railroads were instrumental in opening up the desert in a growing country. Barstow, Needles, Las Vegas, and the entire Mojave Desert between might have remained a "place to avoid" were it not for the rails. This history deserves to be recognized and celebrated. ♣

*Elizabeth von Till Warren has taught history and anthropology at several Las Vegas colleges, including UNLV. She is past president of the Old Spanish Trail Association and also of the Southern Nevada Historical Society. Among her current writing projects is a history of Las Vegas Wash being prepared for the US Bureau of Reclamation in Boulder City, NV. She has been a resident of Southern Nevada since 1969.*



Taking water, Goodsprings, Nevada, Yellow Pine RR, ca. 1920

STEWART COLLECTION  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



# The Impact Of Energy Corridors

**B**ecause energy corridors can profoundly affect the land they cross, their siting involves many issues which deserve careful consideration.

Parks, monuments, conservation areas, wilderness, roadless areas and other conservation lands such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and critical habitat were designated and set aside to protect these values. From the onset it should be a matter of principle to avoid them in siting energy corridors.

The nature and severity of the "on the ground" impacts will vary depending on the type of transmission line and its width, the supporting infrastructure and maintenance requirements. Impacts may be temporary or long term and include:

- Wildlife mortality, including bird collisions with electrical transmission lines;
- Habitat loss and fragmentation;
- Interruption of ecological processes including the alteration of drainage patterns;
- The spread of exotic species along maintenance roads;
- Loss of soil structure from the excavation of trenches for buried utilities;
- Damage to biological soil crusts, desert pavement and other protective surfaces which prevent soil erosion;
- Loss of vegetative cover;
- Degradation of scenic areas;
- Damage to vegetation and wildlife from the use of pesticides in corridor maintenance;
- Damage to archaeological, historic and paleontological resources;
- Loss of recreational opportunities;
- Increased off-road vehicle use resulting in damage to surrounding areas.

Energy corridors have potential socioeconomic impacts. A growing body of research indicates that the environmental amenities provided by conservation lands are an important economic driver in the rural West. Protected public lands strengthen western rural economies. Impacts to conservation lands from the development of energy corridors and related energy projects could have impacts to local economies.

Cumulative impacts are also a concern. Cumulative impacts are defined as the incremental environmental impacts of an action when added to other "past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions." For example, new energy corridors are being proposed by the American Wind Energy Association in the California Desert Conservation Area. The construction of these corridors would help to facilitate the development of industrial wind energy facilities by providing a means of transporting energy to urban markets where none currently exists. The wind

energy facilities would impact many of the same resources as the proposed power lines.

Transmission of energy over long distances is fraught with risks and problems. Electric transmission lines are inefficient, losing energy during transport, oil lines can leak causing massive environmental damage, as recently witnessed in Alaska, natural gas lines can explode, and electrical lines can arc or fall down in wind storms causing wildfires. Energy corridors may be used to transmit energy coming from sources which cause substantial levels of pollution. For example, activists are concerned that a proposed transmission line through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (see related article) may bring energy from power plants in Mexico, plants not subject to the same pollution controls as those in the United States.

The effect of the current federal legislation to designate energy corridors on public lands may undermine earlier planning for the establishment of energy corridors. Decision criteria established in the 1980 Desert Plan for the CDCA included minimizing the number of separate rights of way, encouraging the joint use of corridors, the avoidance of sensitive resources wherever possible, the consideration of wilderness values and consistency with final wilderness recommendations. This effort to determine acceptable "planning corridors" was reportedly comprehensive, involving different parties and regions. Although this earlier planning has not been updated and new information is available, the criteria used are still applicable to proposals in the development of the PEIS. Given the significant impact of energy corridors upon the land, haste should not override thoughtful consideration of the many factors involved.

Properly sited and developed energy facilities and transmission lines can minimize environmental impacts and provide much needed energy. However, the protection of deserts and other natural areas from the effects of energy production and transmission will ultimately depend upon consumers taking action to generate and conserve energy closer to home, actions such as roof top solar energy production, the adoption of a range of energy conservation measures including the use of passive solar design in buildings, and the development of comprehensive mass transit systems. ♦

*Geary Hund is the California Desert and Monuments Program Director for the Wilderness Society.*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please see accompanying article "Planned Energy Corridors May Threaten Public Lands," also by Geary Hund, on page 1.

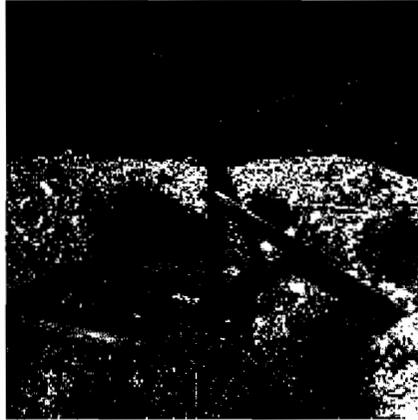
BY TERRY WEINER  
.....

## ANTIQUATED STATUTE FROM 1872

# Still At Risk Without Mining Law Reform

**O**n December 13 2005, as a result of vigorous opposition by a coalition of western senators, business groups, miners, hunters, other recreational users, and conservationists, Representative Jim Gibbons of Nevada dropped the controversial mining provisions that House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo (R-Tracy, CA) had inserted in the House budget reconciliation bill. If these provisions had been approved by the Senate and passed with the budget bill, the law would have lifted an eleven-year moratorium on the patenting or sale of federal lands to mining claim holders. Claim holders would have been able to stake and purchase adjoining lands. The price of federal lands would have increased from \$5.00 an acre to \$1,000 an acre or fair market value. The effect of this would have been to open up hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands to privatization, including 20,000 acres of preexisting mining claims within the borders of our National Parks. Mining companies from the U.S. and abroad could have purchased mining claims in wilderness areas, national preserves and other special places.

Thanks to the outcry of the western legislators, the vigilance of groups like Earthworks, Westerners for Responsible Mining, Great Basin Mine Watch, Sierra Club, and others, a huge takings of the public lands was avoided, but the tense months leading up to the removal of the mining subtitle from the budget bill reminded us once again how very critical it is to work for reform of the 1872 Mining Law. This antiquated statute that was signed into law by Ulysses S. Grant one hundred and thirty four years ago, contains no environmental protection provisions for hard-rock mining, deems mining as the highest and best use of our public lands, prevents the federal government in most cases from stopping ill-advised mines on federal lands, and has left the headwaters of 40% of western waterways polluted by mine waste. In fact, the statute allows extraction of minerals without any royalties to the American taxpayer. This lack of regulation has created more than 500,000 abandoned mines with a cleanup bill in the range of \$32 to 72 billion dollars for hundreds of thousands of mines that dot our western states. Eighty-seven of these abandoned western mine sites are so toxic that they have been designated Superfund Sites. An estimated \$245 billion dollars worth of our publicly owned minerals have been transferred to mining companies.



TISH TULLEY

Congress has attempted to reform the 1872 Mining Law many times during the past 100 years and was thwarted each time by powerful mining interests.

Congressman Nick Rahall (D) of West Virginia has re-introduced mining reform legislation in every Congressional session since 1994, most recently in October of 2005, with his introduction of HR 3968, the Rahall-Shays (R-CT)-Inslee (D-WA) Federal Mineral Development and Land Protection Equity Act of 2005. This important legislation would give public land managers the authority and discretion to protect

environmentally sensitive public land by denying poorly planned mines, would remove mining from the top of the land use hierarchy by promoting a balance of other land uses, establish environmental standards specifically for mining that would prevent "significant, permanent and irreparable damage," prohibit mines that would cause perpetual water pollution, ensure adequate reclamation of the site, require restoration of site to pre-mining conditions in order to protect fish and wildlife, and safeguard surface and groundwater by requiring restoration to pre-mining hydrological conditions. The Rahall/ Shays/Inslee bill would end patenting and establish an 8% royalty. Coal, oil and natural gas extractors currently pay between 8% and 12.5%. The bill would permanently codify the \$125.00 annual claim maintenance fee — currently the only revenue associated with hard rock mining. This bill statutorily enshrines reclamation bonding and requires reclamation bonds with clear cleanup standards and creates a reclamation fund for abandoned hard rock mines on federal lands. The bill also requires more rigorous oversight of mining operations. In particular, in HR 3968, the Secretary must "use all legal powers" to prevent mining in protected areas; the Secretary will stop operations where violations have not been addressed; regular mine inspections would occur at least once quarterly without notice. Violators can be fined up to \$25,000 per violation per day. Citizen suits are authorized and operators that are currently in violation would not receive new permits.

HR 3968 is currently alive in this session of Congress but it is probably not going to be heard in the House Resources (Congressman Pombo's) Committee. In order to keep our local congressional representatives thinking about the importance of reforming the 1872 Mining Law, please send a letter to your

*continued on page 15*

**Top: Abandoned Mine at Skidoo**

BY BRYN JONES  
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## New Face Of CDCA Seeks Balance

**S**ince January of this year, Steve Borchard has been the new Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Desert District Manager, with oversight of the 25 million acre California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). He comes to the position touting an impressive resume. He has a background in soils and watershed management, having graduated from the University of California at Davis in 1976 with a degree in Soil and Water Sciences. He spent much of his career working with the Soil and Conservation Service, but found his most rewarding position at the BLM in northern California. There, he worked as a watershed restoration manager and helped coordinate an effort to restore salmon habitat on the Trinity River. Working with local, state, tribal and federal entities, Borchard removed roads that crossed the river, improving the river bed and restoring native plants.

From 1998-2001, Borchard was the Riparian and Wetlands Program lead for BLM in Washington, D.C. and became the Deputy Group Manager for Rangeland Resources in 2001. Most recently, he worked as a Congressional Fellow to the Senate on public land policy issues.

### Juggling competing interests

Borchard considers one of the biggest challenges in the CDD to be that of striking a balance. Comparing the various competing land uses to a family budget, Borchard recognizes portions of the desert that have already been allocated to certain uses. Much like the expenses that a family has to expend every month on housing, utilities, and the like, certain lands have dictated uses, whether they be recreational areas, military training, wilderness, or protected habitat for plants and animals. Those lands that remain must be managed in a balanced and sustainable way, while at the same time taking into account associated costs before decisions on use can be determined.

There are a number of factors that Borchard views as key in making an informed decision. He believes that a responsible land manager must rely on the technical analysis of a proposed action, including information provided by stakeholders. For him, though, the analysis does not end there. Borchard will also take into consideration the position of all interests that potentially will be impacted and the reality of implementation. A welcome aspect of Borchard's style is that he is an effective listener, quick to return phone calls and requests for meetings.

Possessing a positive outlook, Borchard encourages those who approach him not to tell him why something cannot be done, but rather why it can be done, encouraging an atmosphere where many minds come together seeking creative solutions. Borchard believes that varied interests can find common ground when devising resolutions together. ♦

*Bryn Jones is the Desert Program Director for the California Wilderness Coalition and can be reached at (951) 781-1336 or [bjones@calwild.org](mailto:bjones@calwild.org).*



Steve Borchard, Desert District  
Manager for CDCA

## View From The Chair

*continued from page 2*

these outings are a great way to experience the desert with people who love it. Kate Allen, our new Outings chair and Outings Editor, can provide information needed for putting a trip together.

The voice of the Desert Committee, the *Desert Report*, is a totally volunteer effort. Craig Deutsche, a frequent contributor, and former Outings Chair is the new Managing Editor, and Assignment Editor. We all wish him well; answer please when he calls for help. He welcomes articles from everyone on desert issues. Contact Craig if you are interested in writing or helping on DR in any way.

The two volunteers most identified with the Desert Committee because of their decades-long commitment, Patty and Elden Hughes, were Managing Editor and Assignment Editor for the *Desert Report*. And Elden, of course, was the Chair of the Desert Committee. I don't think enough can be said about the contributions of these two folks. Patty and the people who worked with her have created a quarterly newsletter that is at the forefront of environmental publications. Every issue of the *Desert Report* is a professional publication with informative and topical articles. Elden and Patty made sure of that.

Elden and Patty have stepped down in order to pursue other environmental projects. He will continue to be part of the committee and the legendary Hughes *bons mots* will be ever present at our meetings. Elden has been a very big factor in the successful endeavors of the Desert Committee, and Patty's attention to detail raised the standards for all aspect of the *Desert Report* to the point where it received national recognition from the Sierra Club.

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the environmental movement within the Sierra Club. It is an individual's choice of how he or she wants to make their statement. The Desert Committee and the *Desert Report* offer a lot of choices. My personal choices include pulling tamarisk one day, hiking the next and writing about the experience on the third day — a pretty good weekend volunteering "out there." ♦

## CURBING MERCURY EMISSIONS

# Mercury And Mines In Nevada

**D**espite serious concerns raised by the Mayor of Salt Lake City, along with residents and groups in Utah, Idaho and rural Nevada, the state of Nevada approved a rules package that would allow the highest mercury pollution levels in the West to increase.

Nevada, host of the biggest mercury hotspot in the nation, has been suspected for years of contaminating much of Nevada, as well as downwind western states, with high levels of atmospheric mercury pollution. According to an analysis released by Great Basin Mine Watch in March, the rules allow the worst perpetrators to go on polluting at current levels. The rules do not reduce or even cap emissions, nor do they adequately assess the public's risk of exposure. In fact, based on the forecasted rise in mining activities, mercury emissions levels are expected to increase.

Residents of Idaho, Utah and eastern Nevada, as well as physicians and local public health advocates, are being assured that the fight isn't over and activist efforts to curb mercury emissions at gold mines will continue. Community groups in Utah, Idaho and Nevada will continue to work through the Nevada legislature, courts, markets and other means to ensure that the public's health is protected.

Many western public interest organizations, including the Idaho, Utah and Toiyabe Chapters of the Sierra Club, have sent a letter to call for an overhaul of the rules package. Mayor Rocky Anderson of Salt Lake City wrote to the Nevada State Environmental Commission, calling for the rules to be strengthened:

"While it is not customary for officials in one state to concern themselves in the regulatory practices of another state, recent research on the mercury levels of the Great Salt Lake compels me to write to you," wrote Anderson. He called Nevada's proposed mercury program "insufficient to ensure the quality of life for residents in surrounding states."

"A study completed last year draws a link between mercury in the air and higher rates of autism," Louis Borgenicht, MD, Adjunct Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Utah said to area press. "These levels of emissions would be considered dangerous by any measure. If we can lower children's risk of mercury exposure, and therefore the risk of

serious neurological disabilities, I believe we should."

Scientists have reported that air currents likely carry mercury downwind to Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming and perhaps other states. In Utah, new studies show some the highest levels of mercury ever measured in the waters of the Great Salt Lake, downwind of Nevada's gold roasters. Days before duck hunting season began, Utah officials warned the public not to eat wild waterfowl. Tests showed about 25 times the level that prompted warnings in Florida's Everglades - and with far greater concentrations of toxic methyl mercury. Yet, unlike other mercury-emitting industries, no federal regulations exist to control emissions from the gold mining industry.

The Canadian-owned Barrick Goldstrike Mine in northern Nevada is the single largest source of mercury air emissions in the United States. Four Nevada gold companies produce the same amount of mercury pollution, in fact, as 25 average coal-fired power plants.

Mercury is a severe public health threat, particularly to children. Scientists and health professionals have made sobering connections between mercury and neurological conditions that affect children and unborn babies. According to a 2005 study by the National Institute of Health (NIH), up to 637,000 of the 4



Gold Ore Processing

GREAT BASIN MINEWATCH

million children born in the U.S. each year have been exposed to mercury above the EPA's safety level. Results include delayed onset of walking and talking, and deficits in learning ability. Scientists have also linked mercury to autism. According to the NIH, diminished intelligence of children exposed to mercury in the womb costs the U.S. economy \$8.7 billion a year in lost productivity.

Great Basin Mine Watch's report, "Mercury Rising: An Analysis of Nevada's Mercury Program," calls for a commitment to emissions reductions, and for a monitoring program to be run by the state rather than the industry itself. Overall, the Nevada plan lacks the following critical features:

**A commitment to a meaningful reduction of mercury emissions within 5 years.** The program makes no commitment to reduce or even cap emissions levels. Yet other states, and federal rules governing other industries operating here in Nevada, now require mercury emissions reductions. The technology for these reductions is available and affordable.

**A priority to minimize the public's risk of mercury contamination before considering cost-cutting measures for industry.** As currently drafted, the rules could be weakened if the cost of implementation is considered too great. Yet the draft language does not allow for the rules to be strengthened based on public health or environmental concerns. In order to gain public acceptance, the program must allow for environmental and public health concerns to trigger stronger standards.

**Adequate air monitoring.** Air quality monitoring for mercury is feasible and inexpensive. Yet the Nevada program asks industry to monitor itself, and only once per year. The Nevada program should also monitor in communities as a public safety measure.

**Comprehensive reporting.** Most of the mercury being emitted by mines in Nevada comes from processing of the ore. In order to manage mercury, each company needs to report how much mercury is present in each process and how that mercury is released into the air or captured as a byproduct. Public acceptance and support for the Nevada mercury program will depend on the delivery of clear, accurate, and complete information.

**Fugitive emissions monitoring and control.** There is strong reason to believe that emissions coming from waste rock and dust at gold operations are a significant source of mercury pollution. These "fugitive" emissions must be controlled, and the mercury program needs to report them at each facility.

**Accelerated timeframe.** The program must be accelerated to realize improvements in mercury control sooner. It currently allows existing pollution levels to continue for three years or more. Nevada should assume a much greater degree of urgency in addressing this public health risk.

**Best science & technology.** The state of Nevada should call for an independent analysis, funded by companies that operate here, of available monitoring and control technologies for mercury air emissions. The analysis should look at the monitoring and control strategies employed by other mercury-emitting industries (such as coal-fired power plants and hazardous waste incinerators). Reductions achieved by other industries should be used as a benchmark.

To take action, ask the Nevada Legislature to cap mercury emissions. Contact Great Basin Mine Watch ([www.greatbasin-minewatch.org](http://www.greatbasin-minewatch.org)) for more information. ♦

*Elyssa Rosen is Senior Policy Advisor for Great Basin Mine Watch.*

## At Risk Without Mining Law Reform

*continued from page 12*

representatives or talk to them about becoming a co-sponsor of this bill. Tell them that what is at stake here is the public interest of all Americans. Tell them that reform of the 1872 Mining Law is critical to the health, welfare and integrity of our people and to our drinking water supplies, our air, our wildlife and their habitats. At stake is the national natural heritage of future generations. At stake also is the future of the hard rock mining industry and its ability to produce the minerals that are important to our standard of living.

Two other good mining reform bills worth following were introduced in 2005 by Congressman Tom Udall of Colorado. These bills deal with Abandoned Mines (HR 1265&1266). You should ask your representatives to support these bills.

As an example of why it is so critical to achieve reform of the 1872 Mining Law, in October 2006, Senators Salazar and Allard introduced S1848, which they billed as "Good Samaritan." This bill initially provoked hope for reform because of its short title of 'Cleanup of Inactive and Abandoned Mines Act'. It quickly became clear that this is another bad bill, which we must oppose. It authorizes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to issue permits for mine remediation work and these permits can override any obligations and liabilities associated with environmental laws. Some of the laws affected include the Superfund, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, National Environmental Protection Act, among others.

Astoundingly, on May 10 2006, the actual 134th anniversary of the passage of the 1872 Mining Law, the Bush Administration proposed the "Good Samaritan Clean Watershed Act." This proposal, introduced for the EPA, by Congressmen James Inhofe and John Duncan, hides under the guise of encouraging the clean-up of abandoned mines by limiting the liability from certain environmental laws to innocent parties who volunteer to partially clean-up these sites, while actually serving the purpose of exempting hard rock mines from liability under the Superfund and Clean Water Act. There is no mention of who would pay for these clean-ups. On the introduction of this Bush Administration Act, Velma M. Smith, Mining Campaign Director of the National Environmental Trust states "There are two things needed to clean up mines: more money and better regulation. This bill calls for neither." ♦

*Terry Weiner is a long time desert activist in the San Diego Area. She is currently the Imperial County Projects and Conservation Coordinator for the Desert Protective Council, an environmental non-profit in San Diego.*



**Mine Tailings in Death Valley**

TRISH TULLY

# California/Nevada Regional Conservation Committee Desert Committee

## Outings

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The Desert Committee offers several different kinds of outings. There are carcamps, tours, day hikes, backpacks and service trips; as well as ones that combine two or more of those activities. Outings are not rated, but the degree of difficulty can usually be ascertained from the write-up. For instance, a day hike or backpack will list mileage and elevation gain and perhaps a mention of the condition of trail.

While the main intent of the outings is for participants to enjoy themselves, it is hoped that participants will come to appreciate the desert and develop a desire to promote its protection. For those readers who are not familiar with Sierra Club Outings, the following definitions are offered:

**Lugsoles:** Hiking boot or shoe with incised patterns on the soles - designed to grip trail surfaces better than a smooth sole.

**Carcamp:** Overnight trip involving staying in a camping area that can be driven to. Generally held in developed campgrounds, but can also be primitive camping.

**Primitive camping:** no facilities, in particular, no toilets or water taps.

**Dry camp:** No water available, participants must bring all they need with them.

**Central Commissary:** leader plans the meals and purchases the food. Participants reimburse leader for the cost and carry a share of the food on backpacks.

**Service trip:** Work party in a wilderness or other protected area to help restore the landscape to its natural setting. Examples include removal of invasive species or fences, disguising illegal vehicle tracks or picking up trash.

The listing that follows is only a partial one. For various reasons some scheduled outings do not appear in the Desert Report. For more up-to-date information, check the web at [www.desertreport.com](http://www.desertreport.com). The online outings list is updated every six weeks. If you would like to receive an outings list by e-mail, please contact me through the e-mail address below.

For questions about a particular 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 [kjallen@qnet.com](mailto:kjallen@qnet.com) or 661-944-4056.

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### **Bristlecone Pines & Barcroft Lab**

August 5-6, Saturday-Sunday

Come with us to the beautiful White Mtns to hike the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest on Sat, followed by happy hour, a potluck feast and campfire. On Sunday, the only day of the year it is open to the public, we will tour the University of California's Barcroft Lab at 12,500', followed by an easy hike to Mt. Barcroft (13,040'). Group size strictly limited. Send \$8 per person (Sierra Club), 2 SASE, H&W phones, email, rideshare info to Ldr: Lygeia Gerard, 1550 N. Verdugo Rd. #40, Glendale, CA 91208; (818-242-7053). Co-Ldr: Bill Spreng, (760-951-4520). CNRCC Desert Com/Mojave Group

### **Backpack Southern Sierra**

August 16-20, Wednesday - Sunday

We will travel the PCT trail starting at Kennedy Meadows to Olancho Peak, the highest peak in the southern Sierra. This trip takes us through several life zones from grey pine and creosote bush to above tree line on Olancho Peak at 12,123'. The hike begins at 6100' in the pinyon-juniper zone, which soon gives way to Jeffrey pine forest. After going through some of the largest meadows in the Sierras at 8000', we move into the silvertip fir and Red fir forest. Our highest camp is at 9200'. At the top of Olancho peak are views of the desert, Mt. Whitney and Langley as well as the large Monanche Meadow. Total miles with backpack about 31 miles round trip. Another 7 mile round trip from

the high camp to top of Olancho Peak. Contact leader: David Hardy, Box 99, Blue Diamond, NV 89004, [hardyhikers@juno.com](mailto:hardyhikers@juno.com), (702-875-4549). E-mail preferred. Toiyabe Chap/ CNRCC Desert Com

### **Inyo Crest Service and Hike**

August 19-21, Saturday-Monday

High in the Inyo Mountains the summer temperatures are cool and the views are spectacular. Old mines and history are everywhere. We will assist Marty Dickes in re-signing the Ridgecrest BLM administered portion of this wilderness area. Work may involve some restoration of closed vehicle routes. A hike on Sunday will climb the nearby New York Butte and explore the crest. Roads require 4WD but there may be carpool possibilities. This will be a carcamp with a potluck on Saturday night. Leader: Craig Deutsche, [deutsche@earthlink.net](mailto:deutsche@earthlink.net), (310-477-6670). CNRCC Desert Com

### **Tamarkisk Eradication, carcamp, and hike in Surprise Canyon**

September 2-4, Saturday-Monday

After three previous service trips our outing should deliver the final blow to these invasive weeds. With a flowing stream and shade, this canyon in the Panamint Mountains is a pleasant setting for our work with Marty Dickes, Wilderness Coordinator for the Ridgecrest BLM office. In addition to the extensive min-

ing history of the area, campfire conversation will include concerns about past and future use of the area by off-road vehicles. We work two days and the third is reserved for an exploratory hike to one of several possible destinations. Primitive camping, 2WD vehicles OK. Sign-up and information from leader: Craig Deutsche, (310-477-6670), deutsche@earthlink.net. CNRCC Desert Com

### **Toiyabe Crest**

September 14-18, Thursday-Monday

The Toiyabe Range is the longest mountain range in Nevada, running for over 100 miles. The Toiyabes include the large Arc Dome Wilderness, but the range to the north is still unprotected, although its wilderness qualities are just as fine. We'll sample a little of both parts of the range on this three-day backpack. For more information or to sign up, contact John Wilkinson, 408-947-0858 or johnfw1@mac.com. Limited to 12 people. Loma Prieta/CNRCC Desert Com

### **Service and Hike in Santa Rosa Wilderness**

September 23-24, Saturday-Sunday

Tamarisk is indiscriminant and unrelenting. We will assist the BLM in eradicating this non-native invasive from a part of the Santa Rosa Wilderness Area within the recently created San Jacinto National Monument. Loppers and hand saws are the tools, and a bad attitude toward tamarisk is required. Saturday is for work, and then Sunday is reserved for a recreational hike. Celebrate and serve this monument before it is discovered by the whole world. Justin Seastrand, Wilderness Coordinator for the Palm Springs BLM, will be our mentor. Contact Leader: Craig Deutsche, (310-477-6670), deutsche@earthlink.net. CNRCC Desert Com

### **Cottonwood Campground Tree Planting and Cleanup Work Party**

September 30 - October 1, Saturday-Sunday

Join us for National Public Lands Day by planting cottonwood and oak seedlings at the BLM campground in McCain Valley. Saturday will be a work day, Sunday we'll have several hikes in the area, possibly Sombrero Peak, or the palm grove in Four Frogs Canyon. This is also a critical area of concern because of the potential for a wind farm in the valley. Leader: Larry Klaasen, 619-582-7407, klaasen\_L@juno.com. Asst: Pat Klaasen. SD Chapter/CNRCC Desert Com

### **Service and Celebration on the Carrizo Plain**

October 14-16, Saturday-Monday

In 2001, William Clinton created the Carrizo Plain National Monument under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906. The area is now part of the National Landscape Conservation System, special landscapes managed by BLM. This outing, sponsored by the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society, will celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the Act. On Saturday, we will remove and/or alter barbed wire fencing to benefit prong-

horn antelope. Sunday's celebration will be a hike in a rugged and little-known area of the Caliente Mountains WSA. Those who are able will continue fence removal on Monday. For information, contact Leader: Craig Deutsche, (310-477-6670), deutsche@earthlink.net. CNRCC Desert Com/Wilderness Society

### **Avawatz Mts. and Death Valley Tour of Proposed Wilderness.**

October 21-22, Saturday - Sunday

The area includes rugged mountains, deep canyons, open valleys, bajadas, pristine dry lake beds and rare springs and creeks. Saturday the tour will take us to Sheep Creek in the Avawatz Mts., through some of the "Bowling Alley", which is a Death Valley proposed wilderness addition, and camping at Owlshhead Springs. Sunday will include a stop at beautiful Saratoga Springs for lunch and then a trip to China Ranch with a hike to Amargosa River waterfalls. The roads are dirt and rough at times, so 4-WD is strongly recommended. The camping is primitive, so bring all food for weekend and lots of water. Camera and binoculars also highly recommended. Bryn Jones, of California Wilderness Coalition, will guide the tour with an abundance of information on the area. To sign up contact: Carol Wiley at earthlingwiley@webtv.net. To sign up by phone contact Carol Wiley (760) 245-8734 or Estelle Delgado (760) 241-7327.

### **Pronghorn Antelope Protection**

October 28-29, Saturday-Sunday

Antelope Protection Carcamp (Nature Study/Work Party). With little rainfall and few water sources, the species that live here are both hardy and endangered. Particularly beautiful are the pronghorn antelope, which evolved in these wild, open spaces. Then cattle ranching left a legacy of endless fences - which are deadly to the pronghorn. Join us for a weekend in this remote area removing fencing for their benefit. Work hard on Saturday; take some time Sunday to enjoy the monument. Camp at Selby campground, bring food, water, heavy leather work gloves, and camping gear for the weekend. Potluck Sat night. Alternate date in case of rain: Nov 11-12. Resource specialist: Alice Koch. For more information, contact Leaders: Cal and Letty French, 14140 Chimney Rock Road, Paso Robles, CA 93446, (805-239-7338). Prefer e-mail ccfrench@tcsn.net. CNRCC/Santa Lucia Chap

### **Backpack the Heart of the Soda Mountains**

November 25-26, Saturday-Sunday

North of Interstate 15 and east of Barstow the Soda Mountains are a proposed wilderness area in current legislation before Congress. We will travel a loop route that follows several washes and crosses a low saddle. Although we must carry water, the total distance is about 15 miles and the elevation gains are modest. This is classic desert exploration and should be a suitable introduction for learning desert backpackers. For information contact leader: Craig Deutsche, deutsche@earthlink.net, (310-477-6670). CNRCC Desert Com

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## **Sierra Club Outings Leaders**

Co-sponsor your desert trips with the CNRCC Desert committee. Contact: Kate Allen at kjallen@qnet.com (661-944-4056)

continued from page 3

Existing water right holders are easy to identify. But, within the 78 basin area, there are also four state Wildlife Management Areas, three National Wildlife Refuges, two National Parks, a National Wildlife Range, and a National Recreation Area. At least 20 wetland-dependent threatened or endangered species, 137 endemic spring-dependent species, and 347 species listed as sensitive in the Nevada Natural Heritage Database are found in the basins. The Nevada State Engineer faces unprecedented challenges in his attempts to define prior rights, beneficial use, public interest, and sustainable use.

Of greatest concern are the destructive consequences of groundwater pumping. Some actions that could help include requiring that Las Vegas and satellite communities use state-of-the-art water conservation and that all areas use the best available technology for wastewater treatment and reuse.

A new technology being built by Los Angeles and El Paso will employ membrane treatment plants capable of "recycling" highly

## MEMBRANE TREATMENT

Membrane treatment for water purification would combine microfiltration and reverse osmosis. This latter process involves using elevated pressure to force water through an extremely fine filter capable of blocking/removing dissolved materials from the emerging stream. The input for the process would be highly treated effluent from advanced wastewater treatment plants. Calculations for the proposed Las Vegas plants suggest that 95-97% of the water would be recovered leaving 3-5% of the total volume to be evaporated. 91 to 93% of the dissolved salts would be removed. Disadvantages of the procedure would include finding space for the evaporating ponds and managing disposal of the solid waste (salts) that remains after the evaporation. In addition to benefits of this method outlined in the article, calculations also demonstrate that removal of the salts would achieve a significant reduction in the salinity of the Colorado River downstream. Using Bureau of Reclamation published parameters, advantages to downstream users from this reduced salinity could amount to \$75 to \$125M / yr in 2012 and \$150 to \$250M / yr in 2050 depending upon operating conditions.

treated effluent. Membrane treatment would give us all the water we're now getting from return flow and augmentation credit without the cost of pumping it back into the valley. As a bonus water quality would be much improved, and hormone disruptors and other looming future pollutants would be completely removed from the effluent stream. Perhaps the biggest advantage is that membrane treatment could utilize three local, previously unusable sources of water: shallow saline groundwater, urban runoff, and floodwaters. Collectively these sources are likely to produce more than 100,000 acre-feet annually, perhaps much more.

Conservation and reuse won't eliminate pressure for development of Nevada's groundwater resources. But, if required for both Las Vegas and developing satellite communities, conservation and reuse would reduce demand, and delay the looming wholesale assault on the groundwater. The public still

needs to be educated about the resources being threatened and the alternatives available to supply water to their communities.

Perhaps the assault can be delayed long enough to take advantage of increasingly attractive costs of seawater desalination. Vidler Water Company testified at a recent state engineer's hearing that the Coyote Springs Development has agreed to pay \$6,050 per acre-foot for groundwater which Vidler hopes to supply. SNWA has consistently suggested that cost and technology for desalinated water from California may be an option for the future, but is not practical for present consideration. A recent economic evaluation demonstrated an estimated \$900 per acre-foot cost to SNWA for desalinated water from California. Technology is obviously available and comparison with the cost Coyote Springs is willing to pay makes the desalinated water for Las Vegas look cheap. All of these options need to be evaluated. ♦

*Jim Deacon is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in the Departments of Environmental Studies and Biology, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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## Update On Tejon Ranch

There are several issues swirling around development of the Tejon Ranch, which is the largest contiguous piece of private property in California, at about 270,000 acres.

(1) Tejon Ranch has proposed the development of a new town, east of Gorman and north of Highway 138, which would eventually include 21,000 homes. Plans were submitted to Los Angeles County over a year ago but so far there has been little information released to the public about its progress in the permitting process.

(2) Another project, Tejon Mountain Village, would develop 23,000 acres in Kern County east of Lebec and adjacent to Interstate 5. Approval for this project is required by Kern County, a process that is in the beginning stages.

(3) The Kern/Kaweah Chapter recently lost a lawsuit challenging the adequacy of an Environmental Impact Report for an enlargement of commercial development on the Ranch along Interstate 5 at the base of the Grapevine in Kern County.

(4) In the meantime the Trust for Public Land has negotiated a tentative agreement with Tejon Ranch to either purchase outright or establish an easement on 100,000 acres of the most remote and rugged part of the Ranch. The Sierra Club has expressed concern that the specific parcel under consideration is not adequate for protection of habitat and wildlife corridor in the area.

(5) Finally Tejon Ranch has offered a 500 acre parcel for a Veteran's Cemetery near the intersection of Highway 58 and Highway 223 east of Bakersfield. The Veteran's Administration is in the process of doing an Environmental assessment of that project.

# DESERT REPORT

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All policy, editing, reporting, design and layout is the work of volunteers. To receive Desert Report mail the coupon on the back cover. Articles, photos, letters and original art are welcome. Please submit articles to Craig Deutsche, 2231 Kelton Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90064. by the 15th of the following months: February, May, August, November.

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The Sierra Club California/Nevada Desert Committee works for the protection and conservation of the California/Nevada desert; 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.

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