

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Bureau of Land Management**

[CA-610-01-1610-DL]

**Notice of Extension of the Public Comment Period for the Draft Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement**

**AGENCY:** California Desert District Office, Riverside, CA., Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that the Bureau of Land Management has extended the public comment period an additional 30 days for the Draft Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Environmental Impact. Comments must be submitted or postmarked by July 9, 2001. The ninety-day notice of availability of draft Northern & Eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was published in the **Federal Register** on March 12, 2001.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dick Crowe, California Desert District, 6221 Box Springs Blvd., Riverside, California 92507; phone (909) 697-5216.

Dated: May 29, 2001.

**Alan Stein,**

*Assistant District Manager.*

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**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR****Bureau of Land Management**

[CA-670-01-1610-DL]

**Motor Vehicle Use Restrictions: Coyote Mountains, CA**

**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

**ACTION:** Pursuant to Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 8364.1 the Bureau of Land Management will seasonally close routes of travel on Public Lands in the Coyote Mountains of western Imperial County to motorized vehicle use.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that from January 1 to June 30 each year the BLM will close sections of BLM routes T670130 and T670214 located in the Coyote Mountains of Imperial County to access by motorized vehicles. The proposed closure is to provide interim protection for the Peninsular Bighorn Sheep (PBS), PBS habitat, and other resource values by reducing

disturbances caused by motorized vehicle use authorized under the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, as amended. By taking interim actions as allowed under 43 CFR part 8364.1, the BLM contributes to the conservation of endangered and threatened species in accordance with 7(a)(1) of the ESA. BLM also avoids making any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources which would foreclose any reasonable and prudent alternative measures which might be required as a result of the consultation on the CDCA plan in accordance with 7(d) of the ESA.

The closure will remain in effect until BLM receives a biological opinion from the Fish and Wildlife Service on the effects of the CDCA Plan on PBS and implements any applicable terms and conditions, reasonable and prudent alternatives, and/or reasonable and prudent measures of the opinion that require implementation.

The sections of the routes subject to this seasonal closure, and the other routes that will consequently be closed, exist in portions of sections 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35 and 36, Township 15 South, Range 9 East; of sections 1 and 2, Township 16 South, Range 9 East; and of section 6, Township 16 South, Range 10 East, SBM. The following motorized vehicles are exempt from this order: (1) Fire, military, emergency or law enforcement vehicles when used for emergency or patrol purposes; (2) vehicles whose use is expressly approved by the Authorized Officer; (3) vehicles used for official purposes by employees, agents, or designated representatives of the Federal Government or one of its contractors. These closures shall be in effect year-round beginning no sooner than thirty (30) days from the date of this notice, until completion of programmatic consultation between the BLM under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and implementation of any applicable terms and conditions, reasonable prudent alternatives and/or reasonable prudent measures. Closure of these routes also will prevent motorized vehicle use of other BLM routes labeled T670121, T670128 and T670129 that are only accessible via the closed portions of BLM routes T670130 and T670214. Non-motorized uses (e.g., hiking, bicycling, horseback riding) of closed sections on any of the roads described above are not affected by this order. Trails developed primarily for non-motorized use are also not affected by the seasonal closure.

BLM routes T670130 and T670214 are accessible from Painted Gorge Road.

Painted Gorge Road is a county-maintained road extending from Evan Hewes Highway to the foothills of the Coyote Mountains (approximately 4-5 miles in length). BLM routes T670130 and T670214 fork off the termination of Painted Gorge Road and continue into the Coyote Mountains, both routes leading to Carrizo Peak. The closure of these two routes will prevent access to Carrizo Peak from Painted Gorge Road.

Two gates will be installed by BLM to prevent access by motorized vehicles, located as follows:

1. Along route T670130 at UTM coordinates 595590.03 E; 3631014.84 N. These UTM coordinates correspond to a point within the NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of section 6, T. 16 S., R. 10 E., SBM.

2. Along route T670214 at UTM coordinates 594895.87 E; 3632292.29 N. These UTM coordinates correspond to a point within the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of section 36, T. 15 S., R. 9 E., SBM. Any person who fails to comply with this order may be subject to the penalties provided in 43 CFR 8360.0-7.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On March 18, 1998, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) declared through publication of a final rule that the Peninsular Bighorn Sheep occupying the Peninsular Ranges of southern California are endangered pursuant to the ESA of 1973, as amended. The current population of bighorn sheep in the United States' Peninsular Ranges approximates 335 animals distributed in eight known ewe groups (subpopulations) from the San Jacinto Mountains south to the Mexican border.

On March 16, 2000, the Center for Biological Diversity, and others (Center) filed for injunctive relief in U.S. District Court, Northern District of California (court) against the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) alleging that the BLM was in violation of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by failing to enter into formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the effects of adoption of the California Desert Conservation Area Plan (CDCA Plan), as amended, upon threatened and endangered species. On August 25, 2000, the BLM acknowledged through a court stipulation that activities authorized, permitted, or allowed under the CDCA Plan may adversely affect threatened and endangered species, and that the BLM is required to consult with the FWS to insure that adoption and implementation of the CDCA Plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of threatened and endangered species or to result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat