

## Report: BLM Field Tour (Lavic Siding)

May 20, 2016

by Lisbet Thoresen

June 1, 2016

**K**ATRINA SYMONS is the Barstow **BLM** Field Manager who organized the progressive orientation tour of the newly created **Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)** on May 20th. Each stop focused on a different featured topic. The participants included the eleven **Desert District Advisory Council (DAC)** members and **BLM** field officers from Barstow, Needles, Palm Springs-South Coast, El Centro, Moreno Valley, and Ridgecrest. **Kris Rowe** organized a two-day rockhound round-up to coincide with the tour. In the afternoon, about 35 Rockhounds greeted the **BLM**-led contingent with placards and signs when they arrived at the main Lavic Siding site. Many of the signs were made courtesy of **Janelle Palmer** and **Dower Gervais** of the **Culver City Gem & Mineral Society**.

All told, 66 participants gathered to hear **Kim Campbell Erb** make the Rockhound presentation. **Kim** is an enthusiastic rockhound and former **DAC** member. **BLM** acting District Director **Tom Zale** presented **Kim** with an award in recognition of her service as a past **DAC** member and valued partner with the **BLM**. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of Rockhounds, and her collegial spirit working with the **BLM** has made her a respected and effective advocate.

During the presentation at Lavic, **Kim** introduced past presidents of the **California Federation of Mineralogical Societies (CFMS)**, **Jennifer Haley** and **Richard Pankey**, and past president of the **American Federation of Mineralogical Societies (AFMS)**, **Shirley Leeson**. **Shirley**, who is also **CFMS** historian and incoming **SDMG** president (2016–2018), explained for the benefit of the non-rockhound attendees what **AFMS** is and what it does: it is



**Top.** Rockhounds begin to assemble at Lavic with placards. **Bottom.** Shirley Leeson (center) addresses the crowd. Gathered around her are Tom Zale (far left), John Stewart (left), Kim Erb (center left), Jennifer Haley (center right), and Richard Pankey (right, looking down). Photos by Lisbet Thoresen.

a nationwide organization with a scholarship program for graduate students in earth science. To date, **AFMS** has given scholarships totaling more than a \$ 1.5 million to students.

**Randy Banis**, who is the **DAC** Recreation representative, exhorted rockhounds to write comment letters to the **BLM** about the **MTNM** Management Plan, so that rockhounding will

continue to be a permissible recreational activity within the new monument. To be effective, comments need to be very specific. Travelways and collecting areas should be identified with landmarks, coordinates, and annotated maps will be critical for preserving access to collecting areas. Both **Randy** and **Kim Erb** urged rockhounds to submit the **AFMS** and **CFMS Code** of Ethics into the record at the **DAC** meeting to be held in Barstow the next day.

There were posters, picture albums, and rough and cut specimens available to examine at Lavic, many courtesy of **Adam Dean**, aka the **Agate Hunter**, and his wife **Teresa**. Perhaps, nothing communicated quite so effectively why rockhounds are so passionate about their hobby than being able to see and to handle the beautiful material unearthed from the areas where the tour group was standing. For half the group, hearing the speakers talk about the material

where it is collected and having the opportunity to see it and pick it up was a revelation.

**Adam** is a past Field Trip Co-Chair of the **CFMS** and **Orange Belt Mineralogical Society (OBMS)** Federation Director. He has led field trips to the California desert for 35 years. With great depth of feeling, he spoke about his lifelong love of the desert and collecting. He talked about the values of the rockhound community and the importance of preserving those values for the next generation. He also drew attention to the significance of the unique material found at the collecting areas that are now part of the **MTMN**, noting that it has brought rockhounds from throughout the world to the Mojave Desert for many decades. It is the equivalent of a world heritage site for rockhounds.

Thank you to the tour organizers and everyone who came out to show their support of rockhounding.



**Top.** Bill Depue has been rockhounding in the Mojave Desert for 75 years. He brings some of the fine Cady jasp-agates he has collected to the display table. **Bottom.** The tour group looks at pictures and examples of rough and cut specimens which made the collecting areas in the Mojave Trails National Monument world famous. Photos by Lisbet Thoresen.

**Top.** Kim Erb addresses the crowd. Photo by John Martin. **Bottom.** Adam Dean brought pictures and specimens to share with the tour group. Here, he stands to the side to talk with Mike Ahrens, acting Field Manager of the BLM field office in Needles. Photo by Lisbet Thoresen.

## *Her Contribution Recognized*

by Shirley Leeson

May 29, 2016

**K**IM CAMPBELL ERB burst onto the scene in 2010 asking what she could do to help stop the land grab of our Southern California Desert. She was a fresh breath of air and full of excitement, digging right in and attending the BLM's Desert Advisory Council meetings. These meetings, especially in 2010, were not for the faint of heart, but she continued going, asking questions, button-holing DAC members and BLM advisors and learning what the DAC was all about and their role in giving their opinions on all matters pertaining to the way the Desert was managed.

Let me go back and explain DAC – Desert Advisory Council. To make the public happy, the government decided to create a public forum, getting people from all walks of life who were interested in the desert together to speak on the issues surrounding the public lands in this Desert of ours. Those applying for a position had to be vetted and approved at the Department of Interior level in Washington, D.C. before being seated on the Council. The DAC includes: Recreation, Wildlife, two Elected Officials (usually from the surrounding counties), Renewable Resources, Non-renewable Resources, Tribal Interests, Renewable Energy Industry, Public-at-Large (three current members). Environmental Protection, Transportation/Rights of Way, Non-Renewable Resources, and an additional Public-at-Large position are all vacant.

There hadn't been anyone for some time representing rockhounds. We usually came under 'Recreation,' and that was dominated by the off-road people, who had been doing this for years and were very good at getting heard and their proposals accepted. Randy Banis, an off road supporter was on the Council as a 'Member-at-Large'. He supported Kim's



Acting Desert District Director Tom Zales presents Kim Campbell Erb an award for her dedication and service to the DAC. Photo by John Martin.

desire to be appointed. The length of time was surprisingly fast in government time (or you might say 'desert time'). After calling in favors from rockhounds all over to write letters of support, and from the off-road people, Kim was appointed on December 20th, 2011.

Kim served her time and was well-liked by her peers on the Council and the people she worked with at the various BLM offices. Because of personal reasons, Kim decided not to ask for a second term and resigned from the Council in 2015. But she stayed in touch with many of the people she had met during her tenure on the Council. (Note: with Kim gone, Randy Banis, our off-road friend took over as 'recreation' member). Kim set the tone on how the BLM and the DAC people perceive rockhounds. Because of her, we have a golden opportunity to be a part of the writing of the management of the three new National Monuments in our Desert, and we intend to play a part in that implementation that will include rockhounding for the first time at any National Monuments.

April, 2016. Things were happening so fast, a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* wrote an article about the Aging Rockhounds not being allowed to collect in the desert because of the new Monument Status. But Senator Dianne Feinstein earlier had asked for our support of her desert bills, because she wasn't getting cooperation from the environmental community. After the article in the *LA Times*, a letter from Senator Diane Feinstein was sent to Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior, supporting rockhounding within the Monuments. And a letter came down from the California State BLM Director, Jerome Perez, stating that rockhounding would continue while a management plan for each Monument was being created and rockhounding would be included in the plan.

Kim was called to give a "rockhound" presentation to the DAC committee by Katrina Symons, Barstow Field Manager, at their field tour on May 20th. The tour group visited different areas within the Barstow office perimeter of the

Mojave Trails National Monument prior to the DAC meeting in Barstow, California, on May 21st. Kim's presentation was made at Lavic Siding, a popular collecting site. Word went out to rockhounds throughout Southern California. There was a huge turn-out, which blew everyone away. At the Lavic site, after Kim had spoken about Rockhounds – who and what we we're about – she was presented a special plaque by the acting Desert District Manager, Tom Zale, and Katrina Symons. It was a total surprise to Kim and well-deserved – showing the BLM's recognition of Kim's efforts on behalf of Rockhounds.

All of us at American Lands Access Association (ALAA) can't thank Kim enough and also her husband Jay, who totally supports her efforts, for going the long mile for all of us who love the desert and don't want to be "locked out."

Thanks, Kim Campbell Erb.

### Hauser Geode Beds MOU signed, sealed and delivered

**M**UCH TO THE SURPRISE and delight of the Rockhounds present, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Hauser Geode Beds was signed and received into the minutes during the DAC business meeting held in Barstow, California, on May 21, 2016. The MOU had been lingering since 2000. Meanwhile, the Hauser Beds were in jeopardy of being swallowed up in **Senator Feinstein's** wilderness bills. (The bills did not pass, so **Senator Feinstein** importuned **President Obama** to designate three National Monuments in the California deserts by proclamation, which he did on February 12, 2016.)

The MOU will keep Hauser Beds safe – for the moment. **John Martin**, President of the **California Federation of Mineralogical Societies (CFMS)**, and **Shirley Leeson**, Director and Ambassador for **American Lands Access Association (ALAA)**, signed the MOU on behalf of the Rockhounds. **Carrie Simmons** signed for El Centro BLM as **Tom Zale**, the El Centro Field Manager, looked on.

There are conditions that we will have to meet to keep the MOU in force. View the final draft version of the MOU on the **SDMG** website at:

<http://goo.gl/sR6qyl> (short url)



## Report: Desert District Advisory Council Business Meeting – May 21, 2016

by Lisbet Thoresen  
June 1, 2016

### *The Meeting*

**T**HE DAY-LONG MEETING on May 21st was chaired by Leslie Barrett, who administered the agenda efficiently and with an equanimity that fostered a collegial atmosphere. Approximately 34 attendees were present, including BLM field officers. The BLM field offices in Barstow, Needles, Palm Springs-South Coast, and El Centro submitted reports, available online at: <http://goo.gl/cC3x48> (short url).

Discussions stayed on topic and the presentations engaged much interest and follow-up discussion. They included the Historic Route 66 Corridor Management Plan, the Palen Solar Project, and Bighorn Sheep.

Because the eleven DAC members represent different, sometimes competing interests in the California deserts, past meetings have sometimes been contentious. Several attendees on this day observed not only an absence of rancorous exchange, but also a notable degree of mutual expansiveness and civility. The most spirited comments related to three land use

management plans on the agenda: the West Mojave Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (WEMO SEIS); the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP); and the Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM) Management Plan.

Rockhounding in general, and in relation to the Management Plan for the MTNM, specifically, was not a scheduled agenda topic. However, Rockhounds were provided opportunity to speak during the morning session. Several Rockhound advocates had their comments entered into the official meeting record, including Kim Campbell Erb, Susy Martin, Jennifer Haley, Ruth Hidalgo, Shirley Leeson, and Lisbet Thoresen.

### *Land Use Management Plans*

Several DAC members, notably Mark Algazy, public-at-large representative, and Randy Banis, Recreation representative, were critical of the timelines and procedures for drafting management plans. They criticized arbitrary timeframes for public comment on documents



The DAC members at the business meeting held in Barstow, California, May 21, 2016: (left to right) Mark Algazy, Nathan Francis, James Kenny, Al Muth, Randy Banis, Leslie Barrett, Tom Zale, John Benoit, Robert Burke, William "Billy" Mitchell, and Robert Robinson. Photo by John Martin.

of increasingly voluminous size and complexity. Mr. Algazy noted that BLM documents are written in turgid or technical language difficult for the average person to understand, which directly conflicts with the provision stipulated in the 14th Amendment. Mr. Algazy elaborated at length these points and difficulty of access to documents and relevant reports. Several DAC members excoriated BLM's habitual practice of contriving asynchronous timelines for drafting and reviewing management plans. Frequently, completion of studies or other reports needed to prepare a management plan post-dates the comment period deadline for the parent plan under review. In effect, it puts the cart before the horse.

The Council confronted precisely this problem when it contemplated creation of a MTNM Management Plan sub-group at the May 21st meeting. Barstow and Needles are the two principal offices responsible for administering the MTNM. A team has been assembled from the staff in the two offices to coordinate activities related to the new monument, with Mike Ahrens chairing temporarily until a Manager is designated. The sub-group reports to DAC, which in turn advises BLM. The activities of a sub-group must comport with BLM's Planning 2.0 initiative, which is still under development and perhaps months away from being finalized. Therefore, to avoid potential conflicts, some of which are semantic, the Council agreed to form an informal ad hoc committee. We hope an applicant steps up to represent the rockhounding interests. This topic segued into discussion about Planning 2.0 itself.

The putative objective of Planning 2.0 is supposed to draw upon the most current datasets available and to invite more public involvement in land use planning. Mr. Algazy pointed out that top-down administration from the Federal level contravenes its own mandate concerning the DAC's role in land management planning. Planning 2.0 does not appear to be a vessel for comity with the public when decision-making at all stages of the process by-passes local level input and instead arrogates it to Federal level authority. If anything, Planning 2.0 appears to dilute and discourage public participation, public scrutiny, or accountability to the public. If this gloomy impression, in fact, transpires in the coming months, it should surprise no one that the conflicting

values produced by overlaying Planning 2.0 and the WEMO SEIS onto the MTNM Management Plan may coalesce into a perfect storm of administrative dysfunction and public ire.

To head off a prospective bureaucratic squall, Mr. Banis proposed separating the WEMO Route Network Project (RNP) and Plan Amendment from the Management Plan for MTNM. The Council supported his motion. It is not clear whether or not it will survive a gauntlet of procedural conflicts. Both Stephen Razo, BLM Field Officer, and John Stewart, BlueRibbon Coalition Board Member, cautioned the Council on how it structured a dependent advisory panel and how it drafted recommendations.

### *Renewable energy projects*

No fewer than ten renewable energy projects (solar, wind) are under development in the Desert District counties. Palm Springs Acting Field Manager Douglas Herrema presented a positive status update on the Palen Solar Project, which covers 4,000 acres located 60 miles east of Indio, near Joshua Tree National Park. The beleaguered utility has been under management of three successive owners. Each has gone bankrupt. The Palen design has undergone significant technological revisions of the mirror arrays and high-profile solar tower(s) to mollify critics who have challenged the project's deleterious impacts on the environment, the high cost of operation, and lower than expected generating capacity.

Palen's history repeats a familiar pattern for industrial-scale utility projects, particularly ones sited in the desert. To date, utility-scale projects in the desert have consistently over-promised and under-delivered. In its current incarnation, the solar panels at Palen will be curved "parabolic troughs" that concentrate sunlight on boilers mounted on a solar tower. The panels are touted as being less visually obtrusive and deleterious for birds that are maimed or killed when they dive into the flat panels (mistaking them for bodies of water). It is more difficult to put a positive spin on the profile of the proposed 750-ft. tower against the desert landscape. The heat irradiation produced by both the panels and the tower are also a problem. Reflected light is blindingly intense and panel temperatures reach 900 degrees. The heat emitted from towers at other facilities kill

thousands of birds annually, including golden eagles; although, the exact numbers are disputed by the industry, which is charged with self-monitoring and reporting avian fatalities. On May 19th, a fire erupted due to misaligned mirrors at the Ivanpah photovoltaic solar plant located at the Nevada-California border near Primm. The plant was off-line for several days. This latest problem is not encouraging for Palen. Like other plants, Palen's footprint on the desert floor will be scraped flat and the soil will be impregnated with consolidant so nothing can grow and rainwater cannot recharge the water table.

The responses to the Palen presentation were mostly sanguine. Leslie Barrett remarked that renewable energy technologies were continuously evolving. His comment prompted the author (LT) to comment for the record that the Palen project represented nearly 10-year old technology, while distributed energy has been gaining traction in preference to building industrial scale projects and power links in the desert. The author (LT) asked why, given the technological progress in recent years, the BLM had not entertained distributed energy generation solutions (rooftop solar/point-of-use energy generation) in the DRECP, especially in light of the scathing comment letters it received for excluding them.

DAC member Dr. Al Muth, who is a biologist, responded, saying he agreed about Palen, specifically, and distributed energy, in general. He observed that the Palen plant could not be sited at a worse location, because it blocks a critical sand transport corridor which affects not only local fauna, but also the desert ecosystem over a much wider area many miles away. He pointed out that the DAC was not given the option to recommend or comment about alternative plans not already included in the DRECP. He would have liked to, but financial opportunity values successfully drove the decision to exclude distributed energy options.

Rockhounds had the chance to comment in both the morning session and in the afternoon session, when WEMO SEIS and DRECP were discussed. Kim Erb thanked the BLM for the clear accommodation of rockhounding in the MTNM, which was [published on the BLM website](#) on May

13th. She asked the BLM to include in the final Management Plan clear language that guarantees it in the future. She cautioned that the accommodation is currently discretionary, so it can be revoked at any time. Similar comments by other speakers reiterated appreciation for the actions of the BLM during the interim period, and they all called for explicit language to protect rockhounding in the final Plan. The AFMS and CFMS Code of Ethics were entered into record.

Susy Martin recited a limerick by John Martin, a fitting comment on the solar energy presentation:

**“Rooftop solar in the city  
keeps the desert clean and pretty.”**

The author (LT) submitted a comment letter on the MTNM on behalf of of the San Diego Mineral & Gem Society. A copy of the letter is available on the SDMG website at:

<http://goo.gl/t7urKB> (short url)



Many of the members of the DAC and attendees at the May 21st meeting represent disparate constituencies with different concerns and priorities about land use rights. Historically, different values have been perceived as irreconcilable conflicting values, and they have been debated vigorously – the OHV group or rockhounds at odds with the environmentalists, for example. However, industrialization of the desert now looms as an existential threat to what desert preservation means to just about anyone who loves the desert. And just about everyone seems to recognize it.

It is fortuitous timing that the Council's present composition of temperamentally compatible and mutually respectful personalities, as well as that of some meeting participants, perhaps will ease some longstanding tensions. Several Rockhounds remarked on the palpable warmth and supportive tone they sensed during the DAC Field Tour and business meeting. It may make for unlikely bedfellows, but Rockhounds stand to benefit, especially if they are willing to reciprocate the same spirit of mutual regard they were shown at the DAC meeting in Barstow.