

***DAC meeting report:
Progress and process on managing
desert public lands***

Lisbet Thoresen
Public Lands Representative for SDMG
Chair, PLAC-South, CFMS

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THE DAC BUSINESS MEETING held in Riverside on October 15th was a full day of good presentations and productive discussion focused mostly on Phase II (implementation) of the **Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)** and the Management Plan process for the **Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)**. It was a good meeting, so it was a pity so few members of the public were present to provide comments (fewer than 20 total, with perhaps four Rockhound advocates, six if one counts one geologist and one paleontologist who came to petition for access to the Marble Mountains fossil beds). The good news in that, perhaps, was that people who had a lot to say were given the opportunity to visit the podium and speak numerous times. **Chair Leslie Barrett** graciously disregarded the clock to allow lengthy comments and repeated rejoinders from the public. The detailed report of the day's agenda and discussion can be found on the **SDMG** website at:

www.sdmg.org/blmdocs/dac-report-2016-10-15.pdf

Several agenda items at the October 15th meeting were directly relevant to Rockhounds. They are summarized below. Among them was a presentation on **DRECP** by **Russell Scofield**, BLM Natural Resource Specialist. The Management Plan process for **Mojave Trails National Monument** was outlined by **Mike Ahrens**, BLM Field Officer, Needles. The bureaucratic morass of **Land Use Plan Amendments (LUPAs)** and the processes guiding them are becoming increasingly complicated, with overlaps and conflicting directives. This issue was visited several times throughout the meeting, because it touched on almost every topic and planning effort under discussion.

I. DRECP – Next Steps

Field Officer Scofield has been tasked with overseeing implementation of **DRECP** with the local counties. He is currently working on the First 100 Days Plan – the start date was signing of the

**Attend the next
District Advisory Council (DAC)
meeting**

-- February 2017 --

(Date and location TBA)

Check the BLM website in early February for meeting location, exact date and agenda –

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/rac/dac.html>

Record of Decision, Sept 14, 2016. The First 100 Days Plan is a schedule of actionable items, then priorities, budget, and scoping. **Mr. Scofield** wants to reach out to special interest groups (Stakeholders) as part of his commitment to public engagement. After his presentation, several Rockhound advocates self-identified as Stakeholders, and we welcomed dialogue with him. We spoke about the significance of **Mojave Trails** to Rockhounds and the importance of accommodations for collecting being written into the Management Plan.

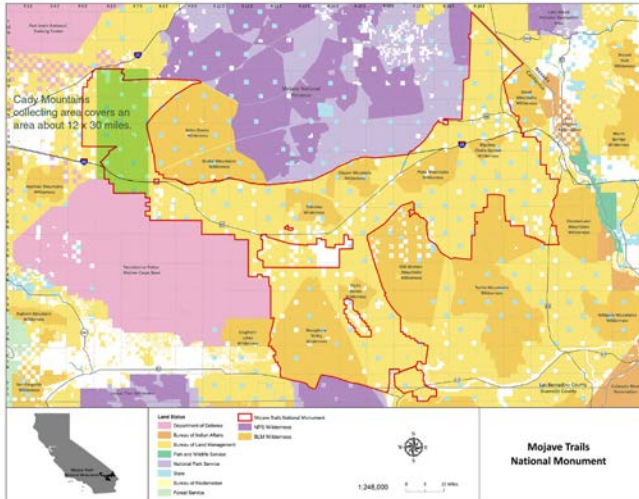
The next **DAC** business meeting will be held in February 2017. A good turnout of Rockhounds would make a strong impression on **Mr. Scofield**, who by that date, will have completed his First 100 Days Plan.

Look for **DAC** meeting details to be posted on the BLM website at: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/rac/dac.html> (and **SDMG** website) in early February. Coming to the **DAC** meetings – strength of numbers – enhances the credibility of the Rockhound community as a committed Stakeholder. It shows **BLM** that we are serious. Let's make a good first impression with **Mr. Scofield** and reciprocate his gesture of inclusiveness by showing up at the next **DAC** meeting.

II. MTNM – Management Plan

BLM FO Mike Ahrens (Needles) presented an outline of the Management Plan process. While it was not explicitly stated, it seems apparent that the **BLM** is intent on completing a Final Plan for the monument within the three-year window allowed by law (the clock started running down on February 12, 2016). Between **Mr. Ahrens** and **Mr. Scofield**, **BLM** is committed to engaging public input during the Plan drafting process. The presentation made by **Mr. Ahrens** stimulated lively discussion and elicited many comments from the public. Rockhound advocates

took the opportunity to log into the record the values and concerns our community attaches to **MTNM**. It is the second largest monument in the system, so given its size and the number of collecting areas within its footprint, I asked **BLM** to set a comment period of reasonable duration (more than 60 days).



Mojave Trails National Monument. BLM map. The main rock collecting areas in the Cady Mountains are within the monument. They are distributed over an area of about 12 x 30 miles (green rectangle, upper left).

I asked **BLM** to accept the authority of mindat.org URL's with locality titles/descriptors in comment letters from Rockhounds. **Stephen Razo** confirmed that appending a list of sites with URLs would be acceptable, but with the caveat that the body of the letter should contain a few localities with details that exemplify the quality of information given in mindat.org. **BLM** also agreed to accept GIS-compatible files (e.g. kml) as attachments for site locations – **BLM** is willing to import the location layers into its existing digital route maps. If Rockhounds can provide site coordinates, we are alleviated of the burden of also having to provide route information in our comment letters. If you are GIS-challenged, don't worry, you can forward your site locations to **Lisbet Thoresen** (editor@sdmg.org), and she will get them into the BLM-approved format.

DAC member Mark Algazy referred to recreational Rockhounding as "Mining," which prompted me to point out that the term "Mining" should not be used interchangeably with Rockhounding or rock collecting, because the activities have different environmental impacts.

Recreational activity should not be conflated with Mining as being substantially the same, and therefore subject to the same proscriptions or regulatory constraints.

This is not a trivial point. We will be hearing more about Disturbance Caps (DCs), which is a measure of the intrusion or harm imposed by human activity on the environment. **BLM FO Katrina Symons** (Barstow) is currently preparing a Disturbance baseline study, which will be released in May-June, 2017. DCs will be calculated for all the different activities in the desert, and they accrue cumulatively against the activity overall. DCs are not segregated and measured as locality-specific impacts.

Clearly, Rockhounds stand to lose a lot, if our DCs are lumped together with commercial mining. It should also be apparent that high disturbance measured in a single area can skew the overall scoring or cap. That scoring will redound to all collecting areas in aggregate. It will make no difference in terms of access that one area is measured lower than another area.

III. Untangling a confusing array of LUPA directives, processes, and implementation

A variety of programmatic and administrative planning efforts have a role in managing desert public lands. They are all supposed to comport with the **Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)**, which just passed its 40th anniversary and whose intent is to balance multiple uses with "sustained yield" (stimulate development of economic opportunities that benefit local communities). However, **DRECP** and **West Mojave Route Network Project (WMRNP)**, in particular, have guidelines or processes that conflict with **FLPMA** and not infrequently with one another. Indeed, the **DRECP** has internal inconsistencies within itself.

Concerns over conflicts between them were pointed out repeatedly by **DAC** members and the public. So, part of the meeting was spent grappling with how best to address the inconsistencies and conflicts, not compound them going forward, and keep them better aligned with the spirit of **FLPMA**.

A motion passed to create a Sub-Group which will engage public participation on implementation of the **DRECP** vis-à-vis **MTNM**. (Some of the discussion and public comments on this subject are found in my [October 2016 DAC report](#).)

The same concerns were voiced over **Planning 2.0**. This initiative is designed to unify land use policy into a coherent master Framework. It will remove decision-making on land use policy from local counties to the Federal level. The driving impetus is to spur renewable energy projects and build a power grid to deliver electricity to load centers across state lines. Recreation (Rockhounds, that's us) and other Stakeholder values (including historical, cultural) are far down the priority list after renewable energy development. Because **Planning 2.0** is under development currently, it is something of a black box, but experienced observers anticipate still more egregious conflicts looming between **Planning 2.0** and **FLPMA**. Prompted by public comments, **BLM** will schedule a **DAC** meeting presentation in the near future, the working title is "Planning 2.0 for Dummies."

Friendly climate for Rockhounds

I stepped up to the podium perhaps five or six times to respond to points raised by **DAC** members or **BLM** presenters at the October meeting. Whenever comments about amateur Rockhounding were made, there were follow-on comments of support from **DAC** members, **BLM** field officers, and from other attendees. For constructive comments entered into the record on behalf of Rockhounds, special thanks to **DAC Chair Leslie Barrett**, members-at-large **Mark Algazy** and **Randy Banis**, **John Stewart** (Blue Ribbon Coalition, California Four-Wheel Drive Association), and **Gerry Hillier** (Federal Lands consultant to San Bernardino County). Thanks also to **BLM FO Katrina Symons**, Barstow, and **FO Mike Ahrens**, Needles, who offered excellent suggestions on resources to help us draft an effective comment letter for **MTNM**.

The Takeaway: A blueprint for writing comment letters

We'll do the work, but we need your club or organization to sign on.

As our members may be aware, a comment letter on the Management Plan for the **San Gabriel Mountains National Monument (SGMNM)** was submitted jointly by **SDMG** and **CFMS** on October 17th. Much of that letter addresses precisely the issues and questions covered at the October 15th **DAC** meeting. As we look forward toward drafting a comment letter for **MTNM**, the **SGMNM** letter will be our model – it's available online at:

<https://goo.gl/h2DP1n> (short url)

The **SGMNM** letter addresses several key topics:

- Exposition of Rockhound values and the importance of the monument to our community.
- Identification of specific problems or concerns with the language of the draft Management Plan.
- Definition/clarification of terms, e.g. amateur Rockhounding versus Mining.
- List of collecting areas, which consists of providing detailed information for several collecting areas as exemplified in mindat.org AND an appendix of a longer list of vetted sites found in mindat.org, providing URLs, site titles/descriptors, and materials.
- **And most important, the letter has other organizations as signatories lending their support to our shared values.**

Your input is needed. If you can contribute data to the **MTNM** letter (or any other letter in the works), please contact **Lisbet Thoresen** at editor@sdmg.org. Ask your club to be a signatory to the **SDMG-CFMS** letter. Even if you or your club do not go collecting in the region covered in our comment letter, be a signatory – you are endorsing universal Rockhound values applicable not only in the public lands you visit, but also in public lands throughout the U.S.

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The BLM California newsletter

*Thank you to the Signatories
of the San Gabriel Mts NM comment letter*

American Federation of Mineralogical Societies

Diamond Pacific Tool Corporation

North Orange County Gem & Mineral Society

Oxnard Gem & Mineral Society

Palomar Gem & Mineral Club

Rocky Mountain Federation of Mineralogical Societies

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