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Editor: Larry Hogue

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### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's the best of times, it's the worst of times. This old maxim succinctly summarizes the current state of our landscape in America as a whole, and our revered desert lands in particular. Never has there been a greater need for defenders of wild arid places than right now. And never has your Desert Protective Council been more active in defending these places. I'm proud to tell you about a number of our remarkable successes and future challenges, and hope you'll continue your support of our worthy organization.

Through our capable and enthusiastic Imperial County Projects Coordinator and staff person, Terry Weiner, we continue to be deeply involved in Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) policy at the highest levels in the state of California. Today OHVs are perhaps the greatest single threat to the integrity of southern California's desert ecosystems. Terry regularly confers with our conservation partners and policy-makers at multiple levels in helping to craft a regulatory structure that allows reasonable use of these recreational vehicles while recognizing the need for strict control, given their enormous impact on fragile lands.

Through our intervention, and the efforts of one of our principal grantees – the Center for Biological Diversity – California's largest sand dune system, located in Imperial County, will have its central core kept free of OHVs. We have made protection and oversight of the Algodones (Imperial) Dunes a major priority. OHV groups have aggressively sought to open up the entire southern portion of the dunes to motorized vehicular access, effectively excluding all other uses and endangering several threatened species.

With crucial funding from DPC's Mesquite Fund, the long-awaited completion of the interior exhibits at the Imperial Valley College Museum in Ocotillo are at hand. Once further resources are identified to pay for staffing, the museum will open its doors to the public as a major gateway institution of learning right along the major Interstate 8 corridor. Without our funding the museum would still be languishing as an empty shell of a building.

In the near future, I hope to report to you concerning our growing cooperative links to Imperial Valley College. We intend to foster a new corps of student conservation leaders from within this group of long-time residents in the Imperial Valley itself.

On top of all this, DPC is increasingly a major player in the highly controversial proposed Sunrise Powerlink project. This unnecessary and ill-advised development would involve construction of huge electrical transmission towers through sensitive desert lands in Imperial county and cut right through the heart of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Several of your Board members, as well as Terry, are spending time and energy in fighting this potentially disastrous project, one which could very well set disturbing precedents should it be constructed as planned. Plus, with further resources from our Mesquite Fund, DPC is sponsoring activist work through a coalition of like-minded conservation and community organizations opposing the Sunrise Powerlink proposal.

It's been a year of growth, success, and also challenges for DPC. In 2007, we expect to work on recruiting both new regular members and new board members. We have also recruited Larry Hogue to edit *El Paisano* and the accompanying Ed Bulletins, and we promise you four issues of each this year.

By the time you read this, your DPC renewal form should be on its way to you. Please renew your membership, and make as generous an additional contribution as you can. With your support, DPC will continue to grow and continue its long tradition of protecting America's deserts. As always, I solicit your ideas and opinions on the issues highlighted in this issue, and more. Exciting times lie ahead and your Board of Directors is here to serve you.

*Nick Ervin, President*

**COMING IN 2007: MONTHLY UPDATES  
TO OUR WEBSITE. CHECK IT OUT AT:  
[www.dpclnc.org](http://www.dpclnc.org)**

*Advocacy*

## THE DESERT CAHUILLA ACQUISITION: PROTECTION OR DESTRUCTION?

In late September, the Trust for Public Land officially transferred its option on the 4,000-acre Freeman properties east of Anza-Borrego to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, thus completing the Desert Cahuilla Acquisition. Unfortunately, what we once hoped would be a conservation dream has become a nightmare.

As reported in previous issues of *El Paisano*, the DPC had pledged to help the Anza-Borrego Foundation acquire this area as an addition to the state park. The area's scenic badlands, designated critical habitat for the endangered Peninsular Bighorn sheep, and wealth of Native American sites make the area well worth the protection afforded by state park status. The acquisition of this beautiful area, north of Highway S22 and west of Highway 86 in Imperial County, would have marked an important first step into land conservancy for the DPC.

Unfortunately, State Parks Director Ruth Coleman denied the transfer to Anza-Borrego due to a lack of management funding, and the OHV Division of State Parks stepped in to both acquire the land and provide management through its OHV trust fund. This move forced us to withdraw our funding because we believe that our mission to preserve the wild beauty, the biological resources and the rich cultural and fossil heritage of the area would not be served by opening the area to OHVs. Congressman Bob Filner had also obtained Federal Highway funds for the purchase, but these also were withdrawn once conservation ceased to be a priority for the acquisition.

With the completion of the acquisition, the situation on the ground has deteriorated. Usually, when State Parks acquires property, the area is closed for as much as two years while the department develops a management plan. This was the case in both the Sentenac Cienega and Lucky 5 acquisitions in Anza-Borrego. Unfortunately, state parks director Ruth Coleman has made a different decision for the Desert Cahuilla acquisition. Citing a 20-year history of use by OHVs (even though this use amounted to illegal trespass) and the difficulty of closing such a large, rugged area, Coleman has allowed it to remain open to OHVs, turning it into a *de facto* state-sanctioned open-play area despite the lack of a management plan.

This decision, coupled with an elaborate public celebration of the acquisition, has fueled increased OHV use of the area this season. Decades of illegal trespass have already damaged cultural sites and rare palm groves, and this destruction is now intensifying. Anecdotal reports by off-roaders that the area is more crowded than they've seen in the past, one report of 20,000 vehicles in the area over Thanksgiving weekend, and an official estimate of 500 campers over New Year's weekend, all show that the area's sculpted mud hills and irreplaceable archaeological sites are under unrelenting and devastating assault. A tour by DPC board members on January 13 confirmed these impressions: during a daylong outing to Palm, Coral and Verbena washes, we saw numerous jeeps carving



*Off-roaders carving new routes in the Desert Cahuilla badlands. Photo by Larry Hogue*

their way through the badlands, but not one ranger. The most devastating sight was recent dirt bike tracks scarring an ancient pathway and sleeping circles.

We are lobbying State Parks to reverse its decision and to close this land to off-roading while the management plan is being developed. So far, the department has not responded to these requests. We will stay engaged with the management planning process required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). State Parks is just beginning to survey the area's biological, cultural and fossil resources and to identify strategies for protecting the most sensitive sites, but a finished management plan could take years. In the interim, we will remain vigilant for any way we can protect this sensitive area. NEWS FLASH: On January 18, the DPC, along with the Center for Biological Diversity, filed for an injunction to stop a jeep rally in the area that was planned for the weekend of January 20-21. We'll let you know the result!

*Advocacy*

## COYOTE CANYON: OFF-ROADERS CONTINUE TO SEEK ACCESS

This past August, Judge Michael Orfield of San Diego Superior Court decided to allow the lawsuit to re-open the entire length of Coyote Canyon to vehicular traffic to continue. Attorney David Hubbard, who represents various off road groups and individuals who are pushing to have Coyote Canyon Road established as a public road, said that now the lawsuit has moved to the evidence gathering stage. The lawsuit was filed in November 2005. In August 2006, Judge Orfield rejected the California Department of Parks and Recreation's petition for dismissal. Though segments of Coyote Canyon in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park are open to vehicular traffic, State Park officials closed a 3.1-mile segment of the canyon to vehicles where the trail and creek overlap in a dense riparian habitat. The habitat, which is home to several sensitive and endangered species, was being badly damaged by vehicular activity and has made a remarkable recovery in the several years since its closure.

## MESQUITE FUND UPDATE

*The Desert Protective Council's Mesquite Fund, the result of our settlement in the Mesquite Landfill lawsuit, continues to do good work in Imperial County. Terry Weiner reports:*

### Education

#### **ANZA-BORREGO INSTITUTE PORTS PROGRAM**

With a grant of \$38,000 from the DPC for 2006-2007, the ABI's distance learning program continues to bring desert education from the studio at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park headquarters to classrooms throughout Imperial County. With able instruction from Interpretive Ranger LuAnn Thompson and staff, the program will introduce desert natural history to 2,000 Imperial County students during the 2006/07 school year. At the request of teachers, the program will expand into career outreach and desert ecology. This program has become a leader in this emerging field. DPC has also funded satellite equipment mounted on a 4x4 truck, which allows staff to take this program out of the studio and into the desert.



*Fifth-grade tent-campers enjoying the desert in Borrego Palm Canyon. Photo courtesy ABI.*

#### **ABI 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE ENVIRONMENTAL TENT CAMP**

DPC's increased grant amount of \$15,700 for 2006/07 will fund the attendance of 90 Imperial County students at the tent camp program. These fifth-graders will spend three days hiking, learning about the desert environment, and sleeping outdoors. For many, this is a first experience in a wilderness area. We are proud of our role in opening the eyes of these children to the wonders of the desert. The program has become hugely popular and is also receiving funding from AT&T, SDG&E and the Linnie Cooper, Copley and Foster Foundations. There will be nine camps in 2007 with 270 students expected to attend.

#### **IMPERIAL VALLEY COLLEGE DESERT MUSEUM**

The DPC is pleased to have contributed \$86,000 in matching funds to the Imperial Valley College Desert Museum Society in order to help complete the interior construction of this archaeological, cultural and all-around desert educational center in Ocotillo, California. Much of the final construction is completed and final touches are being put on the exhibits. The IVC Desert Museum Society is working with Imperial Valley College on staffing and management planning.

#### **JOURNEY FROM SPIRIT MOUNTAIN VIDEO**

DPC awarded \$30,000 to the Ah-Mut Pipa Foundation to produce a video telling the story of the journeys of the

native American Quechan tribes between the Colorado River and Spirit Mountain near Blythe, California. The video will include a history of the Quechan Tribe, interviews with tribal elders, and a performance of Lightning songs. It is due to be finished in early February. The DPC plans a "premiere" showing of the video sometime this spring.

### Advocacy

#### **CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**

The DPC has granted the CBD \$50,000 for 2007 to continue advocacy for endangered species in Imperial County. Attorney Lisa Belenky has been hired as legal counsel for the area.

Her work in Imperial County has included:

- Contributions to the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan lawsuit
- Communication with US Fish & Wildlife to ensure that critical habitat for the Peninsular Bighorn in

Imperial County was not eliminated during a recent review

- Comments on the inadequate Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the U.S. Gypsum expansion
- Efforts to protect the Desert Cahuilla Area (see page 2 for more details)

#### **SALTON SEA COALITION**

The DPC awarded \$30,000 to Defenders of Wildlife for the creation of The Salton Sea Coalition (SSC), a collaboration of a dozen conservation groups. The new group's mission is to address the survival of the Salton Sea and restoration alternatives as a result of the water transfer from Imperial County to San Diego. The group has four seats on the Salton Sea Advisory Committee and contributed to a set of alternatives to protect the values of the Sea. The group also conducted a public education campaign, created action alerts, and submitted its own comment letter on the Salton Sea EIR, to which DPC was a signatory.

#### **SUNRISE POWERLINK CAMPAIGN**

In order to continue the momentum of the campaign against the construction of a 500kV transmission line across Imperial County Desert and through Anza-Borrego State Park, the DPC has pledged \$75,000. Since the departure to Minnesota of Kelly Fuller, the Campaign's originator and main organizer, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club will be taking over all aspects of the campaign.

*Advocacy*

## **ONE THING YOU CAN DO TO SAVE THE DESERT: STOP THE SUNRISE POWERLINK!**

In addition to the well publicized threats (reported previously in *El Paisano*) that the Sunrise Powerlink poses to a large swath of deserts and mountains, habitat and cultural resources, and both public and private land in Southern California, an even more dangerous result lurks within this flawed power proposal: the spectre of a first-ever “de-designation” of wilderness for purposes of development. Such a precedent-setting move could be just what wilderness opponents have been hoping for.

According to Ryan Henson of the California Wilderness Coalition, “To my knowledge, never in American history has either state or federal wilderness been de-designated in order to allow development. Shockingly, this is precisely what is being considered for wilderness in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park to allow the proposed Sunrise Powerlink to be built!” What's at stake is far more than the roughly 75 acres of state-designated wilderness that would be impacted by this proposal to provide a second transmission line from Imperial County to San Diego. Wilderness, both state and federal, was meant to be preserved “in perpetuity.” If a simple request to the state’s Park and Rec Commission is enough to remove this legislative protection, then no wilderness in the country is safe from development or conversion to other uses.

In our view, no level of infrastructure need justifies ruining views in California's flagship desert park or threatening the sanctity of wilderness designation. But worse, according to the Utility Consumers' Action Network (UCAN), the Sunrise Powerlink is unnecessary for San Diego's power needs.

You can help stop the Sunrise Powerlink by attending two meetings on Thursday, February 8, or by writing letters opposing the project.

**CPUC Hearing**, Feb. 8, 2:30 p.m., Borrego Springs Resort, 1112 Tilting T Drive, Borrego Springs.

(This is just one of a series of hearings throughout San Diego and Imperial Counties. See [www.dpcinc.org/alerts](http://www.dpcinc.org/alerts) for the full list.)

**California State Park and Recreation Commission** special meeting, Feb. 8, 7 p.m. Borrego Springs Resort.

### **WRITE LETTERS TO:**

#### **Billie Blanchard, Project Manager**

California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco, CA 94102  
fax: 415 703 2200  
email: [bcbl@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:bcbl@cpuc.ca.gov)

#### **SDGE Sunrise Powerlink**

Attn: Jim Avery, Senior Vice President  
8330 Century Park Ct., CP31D, San Diego, CA 92123

#### **Bobby Shriver, Chair**

CA State Park and Recreation Commission  
P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001  
[Lnaastro@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Lnaastro@parks.ca.gov)

#### **Senator Christine Kehoe**

2445 Fifth Ave, Suite 200, San Diego, CA 92103  
[Senator.kehoe@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.kehoe@sen.ca.gov)

#### **Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny**

637 Third Ave., Suite C, Chula Vista, CA 91910  
[Senator.ducheny@sen.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.ducheny@sen.ca.gov)

In your comments, please state that 1) this project is unnecessary from an energy supply standpoint; and 2) if the project is to be built, it must avoid Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, both state and federally designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, inventoried roadless areas, and other sensitive lands. Both State Parks and the Parks Commission have made strong statements against the Powerlink, so we should both thank them and encourage them to continue their opposition.

### *Stewardship*

## **TWO OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE AND RESTORE THE IMPERIAL COUNTY DESERT**

Craig Deutsche and the Sierra Club's California/Nevada Desert Committee are offering two opportunities for desert enthusiasts to give something back to the places we love.

**Feb. 24-25: Coyote Mountains Cleanup and Hike.** On Saturday, the group will assist BLM Wilderness Resource Specialist John Johnson in cleaning up a large trash dump just south of the Coyote Mountains Wilderness (north of the town of Ocotillo). Time permitting, the group will also place signs and restore or disguise illegal routes. Saturday night, the group will carcamp at the edge of the wilderness. Sunday will offer a purely recreational hike into the wilderness area itself. This will be a rugged cross-country ramble of between 5 and 10 miles, depending on the group's interest and energy.

**Late March (rescheduled from Feb. 3-4): North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area.** On Saturday the group will assist BLM natural resources specialist Erin Dreyfuss with a seed inventory in the sand dunes. This will involve counting seeds on the surface and sifting the sand to find what's below the surface. Saturday night, the group will carcamp on the eastern edge of the wilderness. On Sunday, the group will hike six to eight miles in the area east of the dunes to monitor a number of wildlife guzzlers.

For both outings, sign up with leader Craig Deutsche by calling 310-477-6670 or use [deutsche@earthlink.net](mailto:deutsche@earthlink.net).

**NEWS ABOUT OUR MEMBERS**

**IN MEMORIAM -- MARY ANN HENRY**

Mary Ann H. Henry of Ridgecrest, CA, died on August 11, 2006. She lived a full life of 88 years. After finishing a BS in Nursing from University of Washington in 1942, she and her husband Ronald moved to Cincinnati, and then moved to China Lake/Ridgecrest in 1947, where they helped build that community almost from its inception. She helped raise three children, supported the Girl and Boy Scouts, was a homemaker, and was the wife of a research scientist. Her hobbies included piano playing, weaving, camping and reminding authorities of their responsibilities.

Mary Ann developed a keen interest and love of the beauty, natural history and silence that she found in the expanses of the Mojave Desert and southern Sierra Nevada. She educated herself on the flora of these regions and became a respected amateur botanist who shared her knowledge, passion and joy with many others. She was a tenacious and prodigious campaigner to protect and defend the area, writing hundreds of letters in the process, always speaking her mind, and always thanking others. One of her lasting contributions was to help get wilderness protection for three areas in the Southern Sierra, as well as help place the Eureka Valley Sand Dunes into Death Valley National Park. Mary Ann and her husband Ronald received the highest award from the Kern-Kaweah chapter of the Sierra Club. As a fellow of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS), she did botanical work that was instrumental in establishing Eureka dunes as a botanical preserve; a 10-year study of flora of Short Canyon to make it an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); and a multi-year study of Eureka Dunes Grass.

In addition to active participation in the Desert Protective Council, she was active in the Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Desert Tortoise Preserve, the Maturango Museum, as well as other church, cultural and professional groups in Ridgecrest. Memorial services were held on Saturday, September 23, 2006 in Ridgecrest, CA. Donations in lieu of flowers can be sent to: Maturango Museum Docent Program, 100 E. Las Flores Ave, Ridgecrest, CA 93555; or to California Native Plant Society Education Fund, 2707 K Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816.

For further information contact her son: Robert R. Henry 10512 17th Ave NE Seattle, WA 98125. Phone: (206) 367 7481 (home); (206) 372 7464 (cell). E-mail: lafrh@earthlink.net .

**HOWARD WILSHIRE** (a DPC Advisory Panel member) has a new book coming out, along with co-authors Jane E. Nielson and Richard W. Hazlett. Entitled *Losing the West*, the book “summarizes the dominant human-generated environmental challenges in the 11 contiguous arid western United States—America’s legendary, even mythical, frontier.” You can read more about the work in progress on the website: [www.losingthewest.com](http://www.losingthewest.com).

**BILL BROYLES** is co-editor of a new desert book, *Dry Borders: Great Natural Reserves of the Sonoran Desert*. According to its publisher, University of Utah Press, “This evocative and informative excursion into the Sonoran Desert along the U.S.-Mexico border brings to life the beauty of a spare and seductive terrain, telling the stories of the people, plants, and politics that layer a landscape in need of understanding and protection.”

**KEEP YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN DPC CURRENT**

Membership in the Desert Protective Council is based on a January 1 to December 31 term of membership. If you are a life member you do not need to renew. However, we are always receptive to gifts to keep our projects going. Many of our members, life and regular, are most generous, and your gifts help ensure that DPC remains a strong voice for conservation in all of our deserts.

Much of our current activity is based on projects in Imperial County, as required by the settlement of the Mesquite Mine lawsuit. Since we engage in many other projects and issues outside of Imperial County, we keep nonrestricted donations in a separate account for use in more general desert issues.

**DESERT PROTECTIVE COUNCIL, INC. NEW AND RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Enclosed is my remittance of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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**FAVORITE DESERT PLACES:  
NORTH ALGODONES DUNES WILDERNESS**

*By Larry Hogue*

A haven of silence and beauty surrounded by the noise and zooming vehicles of the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, the North Algodones Wilderness offers a chance to experience this largest of North America's dunes systems without the devastating presence of OHVs. Located east of Brawley, CA, and bounded on the south by Highway 78, this 32,000-acre wilderness offers pristine dunes, such unique plant species as dune sunflower and sandfood, and, in a good rain year, abundant spring flowers.

A good family hike is an out-and-back from Ted Kipf Rd. (shown on newer maps as Niland-Glamis Rd), which runs along the eastern edge of the wilderness. Find this graded dirt road west of the railroad tracks and behind the stores of Glamis. Park well north of this off-roaders' mecca to get away from the din of ATVs. Then walk one to two miles across gravelly flats to get to the dunes themselves. This approach offers kids a chance to search for the camouflaged flat-tailed horned lizard, as well as remnants of General Patton's World War II-era maneuvers.

Next come the low foredunes and a lush microphyll woodland fed by runoff from the Chocolate Mountains to the east. These waters collect here where the dunes make a kind of dam. This is an outstanding birding area, and in a good rain year the spring wildflowers, especially the mallows, are spectacular.

The low dunes are a good place to track burrowing fringe-toed lizards, which often leap out of the sand at a hiker's approach, then bury themselves again a dozen yards away. This is a good stopping point if you just want a taste of the dunes. Kids and others with lots of energy will love scrambling up the steep, eastward facing "slipfaces" of the main dunes (as much as 200 feet tall), then sliding back down.

A vehicle shuttle makes longer, one-way, or overnight trips possible. Once, I set up a solo shuttle by hiding a mountain bike in a wash off of Ted Kipf Rd., then parking my truck at the Cahuilla Ranger Station just off Highway 78. Traveling by night, I used a GPS unit to navigate back toward the bike. Lit by a near full moon, the dunes took on an ethereal quality, and finding my way was easy. I walked north first, always climbing the dunes' more gentle west-facing slopes, and staying as high as possible. Then I descended eastward into the foredunes, where I bedded down for the remainder of the night. Rising early, I walked in darkness to the bike, then cycled by first light back to my truck.

For more info on accessing the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness, or about free dunes hikes on Feb. 10 and March 17, call the Bureau of Land Management at (760) 337-4442 or visit [www.blm.gov/ca/elcentro](http://www.blm.gov/ca/elcentro). All vehicles parking anywhere in the dunes management area must pay a \$25 fee (good for 7 days).

*Do you have a favorite spot in our southwestern deserts?  
Write to tell us about it!*



**P.O. BOX 3635  
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