

BRIEFING STATEMENT

Date: September 12, 2002

Title: USGS Recoverability and Vulnerability of Desert Ecosystems Project (RVDE)

Issue: DMG support and feedback to the RVDE program

Background:

In 1998 the USGS embarked upon a multi-year, interdisciplinary study of the recoverability and vulnerability of the Mojave Desert. The study, originally dubbed *Where Desert Meets the City* (attachment one) has evolved beyond the Mojave and is now called *Recoverability and Vulnerability of Desert Ecosystems* (RVDE). The original concept of the RVDE was supported by the DMG. However, when the RVDE FY2000 workplan (attachment two) was drafted, both the Desert Lands Restoration Task Force (DLRTF) and Science and Data Management Team (SDMT) had serious concerns with the project's direction. Some of these concerns were:

- ☛ Many of the questions posed by the RVDE workplan were redundant of previous research that was unrecognized in the workplan
- ☛ Rules or models developed in one part of the desert could not be accurately extrapolated throughout the region as the workplan indicated
- ☛ The final product would not relate to real land management decisions
- ☛ Some of the questions posed by the DLRTF were not being considered (SDMT 1999).

The original concept of RVDE was to provide the science and create models and GIS layers that would predict an area's vulnerability to disturbance and the potential for recovery. RVDE could be used as a module to a decision support system (DSS) that could be used in the siting of facilities, rights-of-way, visitor activities, or other disturbances. It could also be used to predict the necessity of active versus passive restoration techniques and the degree of active restoration required for certain types of sites or disturbance.

Regardless to the DLRTF and SDMT concerns, RVDE was never fully funded in spite of a DMG funding initiative. Because of the funding difficulties, USGS' vision for RVDE was never fully reached. USGS has been able to continue the program on a limited basis using base funding.

Current Status:

USGS has conducted research throughout the Mojave to investigate many of their originally posed questions. In August, USGS hosted a peer review of the current status of RVDE in Menlo Park. Scofield (BLM), Everly (DoD), Essex (DoD), Hughson (NPS), and Weigand (BLM) attended this review. Hughson and Weigand participated in the peer review panel.

Many of the originally proposed models have been created. The models' accuracies have not been fully validated however. Additional research is needed to validate models, continue to current investigations, and initiate investigations on additional questions.

In order for USGS develop products that are relevant to land managers, it is critical that the DMG provide coordinated feedback to RVDE. The RVDE coordinators seem open to this feedback.

Proposed Actions:

1. A small ad hoc workgroup be formed to provide land manager feedback to RVDE. Suggested members are: Scofield (BLM), Weigand (BLM), Kenna (BLM), Hughson (NPS), Rodgers (NPS), Collis (Edwards), Evans (MGAGCC), and Everly (DoD).
2. Hold an informal workshop between RVDE scientist and land management resource specialist. This should be a two-way sharing of information that includes a briefing on current RVDE science as well as agency resource management needs.
3. Invite the USGS to provide a brief on the current RVDE status at the December DMG meeting in Needles.
4. Propose to USGS that the DMG's RVDE ad hoc workgroup serve as a sort of oversight committee to RVDE. This will ensure that RVDE remains focused on agency land management needs while still providing the science necessary to meet RVDE and USGS goals.

References:

SDMT 1999. Review of Mojave Desert Ecosystem Science Program FY200 Workplan: *"Recoverability and vulnerability of desert ecosystems."* 2nd Revision, received September 8, 1999. Desert Managers Group, Science and Data Management Team

Contacts:

Russell Scofield, Restoration Coordinator - 760-365-0955

Clarence Everly, DoD Coordinator - 760-255-8896

Debra Hughson, MOJA Science Advisor - 760-255-8826