Briefing Statement

Date: April 22, 2004

Title: USGS Publication Related to Vehicular Route Designation in the Mojave Desert

Background:
The number of vehicular routes in the Mojave Desert has increased substantially during the 1900s, especially during the past few decades. Many of these routes were created to provide access to mining claims, livestock watering sites, and recreation areas, whereas others were created by off-highway vehicle use. Often routes developed parallel to older routes as they became degraded from years of use. As a result, there are now many redundant routes serving the same purpose.

Land management agencies have developed route designation projects to reduce the number of vehicular routes in the Mojave Desert, consolidating them into a minimal network sufficient to provide access to various parts of the landscape. In many cases, there are site-specific reasons for closing a route, such as to provide additional protection for a sensitive cultural or biological site. In many other cases, the decision may be to choose which among multiple redundant routes should be closed.

In a publication, USGS will provide general recommendations related to the ecological vulnerability and recoverability of major landscape features to the effects of vehicular routes. These recommendations can be used along with other information to help land managers make appropriate route designation decisions. The focus will be on OHV trails, unimproved local roads, and improved local roads, which represent the typical vehicular routes that land managers deal with. The publication will describe the physical and biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns of major landscape features in the Mojave Desert. These landscape features differ significantly in their physical properties, and these differences influence the expected physical and biological effects of vehicular routes.

Draft Outline

- Introduction
- Differences among major landscape features (age, armoring, soil depth, etc.)
- Playas
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns
    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Valley bottoms
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns
    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Middle slopes/fans
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns

    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Mountains
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns
    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Dunes
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns
    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Riparian
    - Primary physical vulnerability/recoverability concerns
    - Primary biological vulnerability/recoverability concerns
- Summary and caveats

Next Steps:
Russell Scofield will coordinate among agency resource specialist to ensure the USGS will meet agency needs. USGS has requested a one-half day to full day meeting with key agency resource specialist to discuss agency needs.

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