

MBCA News
Monday, May 12, 2014

Once again, lots to report to you. There were several community meetings in the past month, as well as MBCA's Landscape Tour.

The **2014 Landscape Tour** was bigger and we think even better with about 200 folks involved this year. Site hosts and volunteers were great MBCA ambassadors in our mission to promote water-wise and energy efficient desert living. Visitors were delighted, if a bit challenged when they couldn't work even more of the 24 sites into the day! The tour couldn't happen without the incredible dedication of the committee, especially chair Claudia Sall. The organizations that generously provided financial backing show us that the wider community recognizes the value of the Desert-Living Series. Thanks to all players in this wonderful event that promises to be an annual one for many years to come!

Deadline extended for the **2014 Essay Contest**. You have a few additional days, until this Friday, May 16th to submit a 150-300 word essay about your **Landscape Tour experience** to: mbconservation.org. We want stories from your perspective of the event: site host, volunteer, supporter or visitor. Winning entries prizes are significant: 1st place = \$200 gift certificate to Unique Nursery; 2nd place = \$150 gift certificate to Cactus Mart; 3rd place = \$100 gift certificate to Wind Walkers. Not only that, we'll publish the winning essay!

Mark your calendars to attend these upcoming events:

MBCA Board of Directors monthly meeting, second Thursday of the month, Yucca Valley Community Center, 5:00 -7:00 PM. All are welcome to attend what is always an information-packed meeting. Summer meetings: June 12th; July 10th; no August meeting (Board meets for an annual day-long retreat.)

Updates on posts from previous MBCA E-Blasts

1) **SPARC / San Bernardino County Partnership for Renewable Energy and Conservation workshop**, April 17, Yucca Valley Community Center.

SPARC was founded to provide a framework for renewable energy development while protecting communities and natural resources. SPARC will conduct a series of public meetings throughout the County this year. The April 17th workshop in Yucca Valley was the first of three,

the second round are tentatively scheduled for July-August and the third will be sometime the fall. SPARC was funded through a California Energy Commission (CEC) grant to the County and is mandated to have a certified EIR and General Plan Amendments in place by March 31, 2015.

About 60 residents attended the workshop eager to shape the drafting of the General Plan Renewable Energy Element (REE) for consideration by the San Bernardino Board of Supervisors. Thanks to our local groups BEAT (Basin Energy Action Team) and CDC (California Desert Coalition) for providing valuable background research and talking points in advance of the event.

The consultants running the meeting were impressed with the number of Morongo Basin residents in attendance and our depth of understanding about the issues. We educated them about the history of conservation planning in the region along with advise to where they could view the documents around this planning. Attendees clearly supported only rooftop solar. Some advocated that the solar moratorium be re-instated until the REE element was completed. It was clear after the SPARC workshop that the County has a steep learning curve in understanding the conservation commitments and history and the land use concerns and planning in the Morongo Basin.

BEAT, CDC, SOD (Save Our Desert) and MBCA share the vision of a plan that can redefine energy policy and promote incentives to enhance Distributed Generation and rooftop solar in one of the sunniest counties in the US.

Industrial scale renewable energy projects are not appropriately placed in the Morongo Basin. We encourage residents to continue vigilant in encouraging the County to become the national's leader in renewable energy while pioneering an appropriate, responsible and progressive energy plan. ***Please continue to register your positions and see others' on the SPARC Forum website: SPARCForum.org.***

2) **Morongo Unified School District** continues to explore the use for solar installations on its campuses. The MUSD Board committee that includes MBCA Directors Steve Bardwell, Ruth Rieman, Marina West and MBCA Board of Advisors' Frazier Haney are assisting in the preparation of an RFP (Request for Proposal) for the installation of solar for the MUSD. Expectations are that the RFP will be completed and ready for publication in the near future.

3) BLM & Marine Corps Ground Combat Center hosted meeting: *Land Use Changes in the Johnson Valley Area.* May 7, Yucca Valley Community Center.

The meeting was co-lead by a BLM representative and one from the Marine Corps. Plans for the unprecedented co-management by the public lands by the two organizations were outlined. Approximately 30 individuals were in attendance representing residents of Johnson Valley, the wider Morongo Basin, and off-road (OHV) enthusiasts from various locations throughout southern California.

Copies of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2014 were distributed. This Congressional legislation withdrew approximately 132,000 acres of public lands in the Johnson Valley area. Approximately 79,000 acres of that total have been reserved for exclusive military use and are now closed to the public; approximately 53,000 acres are reserved for public recreational use during 10 months of the year and military use during 2 months of the year. The NDAA designated an additional 43,000 acres be added to the 53,000 acres as the Johnson Valley OHV Recreation Area.

The purpose of the meeting was to share with the public that Congress has directed the establishment a Resource Management Group (RMG) consisting of representatives from the Marine Corps and the BLM to solicit information from relevant State agencies, OHV interest groups, environmental advocacy groups and others for consideration regarding management and facilitation of recreational use with the Shared Use Area. The RMG will meet annually and be responsible for informing the public when the Shared Use Area is open for recreation, and when it is closed for military use.

Focuses of the meeting were:

Timing of military exercises: The public will receive 12-18 month advance notice of military operations that will occur twice annually for 30 days at a time. BLM & MCGCC reps emphasized their commitment to receiving public input regarding the scheduling the timing of the Shared Use Area. They noted that, "There will be no perfect answer, but all information from stakeholders will be considered." Ultimately this will be the Marine Corps' decision.

Two 22-acre sized Marine Corps "Objective Sites" to be built in the "Shared Use Area": Locations will be chosen from three optional sites under consideration. The first RMG meeting will address these sites and seek information from stakeholder groups. The MC is considering

designing these sites so that they would not need to be closed to the public during shared use periods (as opposed to the option of closed to the public year-round.) They would be returned to their original state after military use and located in the same place every year. The audience was asked what they think about this idea and assured that no decision would be made until the first RMG meeting is held.

Maps showing boundaries of the "Exclusive Military Use Areas" within the Johnson Valley OHV Recreational Areas were provided. Johnson Valley residents were pleased to now have maps showing GPS data. The need for adequate signage along Military Use Area boundaries was noted by the audience and acknowledged by the BLM/MC reps. Residents also emphasized the need for additional signage to direct visitors off the highway to the main access points into the OHV Recreational Areas to avoid inadvertent trespass across adjoining private property. Audience members expressed interest in having a future meeting in Johnson Valley or Lucerne Valley, where residents are most impacted. They also requested the opportunity for tours of the changes to Johnson Valley, including the options for locations of the Objective Sites. BLM and MC reps agreed to these suggestions.

The RMG Charter is being drafted and currently under legal review. Once the Charter is signed, the RMG may officially commence. We'll keep you notified when RMG meetings are scheduled and their decisions are made public. BLM/MC promised to provide more advance notice of future meetings.

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Congratulations to MBCA Board of Advisors member and Lander's Honorary Mayor, **Mike Lipsitz** who was recently announced as Supervisor Ramos's Field Representative. A great appointment!

Thanks for your continuing interest and support! I would like to give special appreciation to new members and those of you who renewed your MBCA membership. We are making a difference, thanks to you!

Sincerely,
Sarah Kennington, President

Your 2014 MBCA Board
Sarah Kennington, President
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*MBCA advocates for a healthy desert environment
that nurtures our rural character, cultural wealth,
and economic well-being.*