

ADDRESSES: Copies of the CCP are available on compact disk or in hard copy, and can be obtained by writing: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Attn: Yvette Truitt-Ortiz, Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87103.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Wayne A. Shifflett, Refuge Manager, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 109, Sasabe, Arizona 85633; phone 520-823-4251; or Yvette Truitt-Ortiz, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Planning, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87103; phone 505-248-6452; e-mail: Yvette_TruittOrtiz@fws.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A CCP is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*). The purpose in developing CCPs is to provide refuge managers with a 15-year strategy for achieving refuge purposes and contributing toward the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, consistent with sound principles of fish and wildlife science, conservation, legal mandates, and Service policies. In addition to outlining broad management direction on conserving wildlife and their habitats, the CCPs identify wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities available to the public, including opportunities for hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. These CCPs will be reviewed and updated at least every 15 years in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (16 U.S.C. 668dd *et seq.*), and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Dated: November 21, 2003.

Geoffrey L. Haskett,

Acting Regional Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[CA-660-04-1150-JP]

Restrictions on Use of Public Lands; California

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of closure.

SUMMARY: This notice closes to casual use certain public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, in order to prevent hikers and other visitors from accessing ridges that overlook bighorn sheep breeding pens on the property of the Bighorn Institute.

EFFECTIVE DATE: December 4, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Send inquiries or suggestions to the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, Palm Springs Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 690 W. Garnet, PO Box 581260, North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Danella George, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Manager, (760) 251-4800.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

On February 13, 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion (FWS-ERIV-3354.1), in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, addressing effects on the endangered Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) from a proposed joint trails and recreation use plan prepared by the City of Palm Desert and the Bureau of Land Management (the joint plan). As part of the proposed action, and consistent with the Biological Opinion, the City of Palm Desert (City) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) agreed to close portions of City and BLM-managed public lands to recreation and casual use to prevent hikers from accessing ridges that overlook bighorn sheep breeding pens on the property of the Bighorn Institute.

The population of bighorn sheep in the United States' Peninsular Ranges was listed as an endangered species on March 18, 1998. The Recovery Plan for Bighorn Sheep in the Peninsular Ranges, California, was issued on October 25, 2000. On October 25, 2000, the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument was established by an Act of Congress that was signed into law by President Clinton (Pub. L. 106-351). BLM completed the California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley Plan) on December 27, 2002. The Coachella Valley Plan covered portions of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountain National Monument and addresses recovery of the bighorn sheep.

Because bighorn sheep evolved with canine predators, they are particularly sensitive to the presence of dogs. This has created a conflict between bighorn sheep conservation management and recreational use of public lands. In 2000, BLM issued a temporary closure of public lands prohibiting dogs in designated critical bighorn sheep habitat, except in a few designated areas. Recreational hiking with dogs had been a popular use on City owned lands and public lands south of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument Visitor Center on Highway 74. This situation caused a conflict with the Bighorn Institute, a captive bighorn sheep breeding facility located north of the Visitor Center. The director of the Bighorn Institute expressed concern over the nearness of dogs south of the Visitor Center and requested that they be moved to a different location. BLM and the City proposed to construct a loop trail south of the Visitor Center that would be off-limits to dogs, and to construct an additional trail, open to hikers with dogs, on the west side of Highway 74 that would connect the City's Homme-Adams Park with the Cahuilla Hills Park. Dogs would be allowed on the Homme-Adams Park Trail and Cahuilla Hills Park Trail. Under agreements with the Bighorn Institute and the City, BLM proposed to discourage hiking access by reclaiming an unauthorized road and enforce a closure along the saddle immediately south of the BLM property line that leads to an overlook on BLM lands above the Bighorn Institute's sheep pens. The proposed action for trail realignments, new trail construction, and blocking access to the ridge overlooking the Bighorn Institute was analyzed under an environmental assessment (*Homme-Adams and Visitor Center Trail Loops, EA-660-03-08*). The BLM initiated consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on the effects of the proposed project on the endangered Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), on December 30, 2002. The Service issued a Biological Opinion based on the BLM and City environmental assessments, information in Service files, and on information and agreements obtained in meetings, telephone conversations, and e-mails prior to and during the consultation period. Under the Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion, and to meet the requirement of section 9 of the ESA, the BLM must take reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the impact of incidental take