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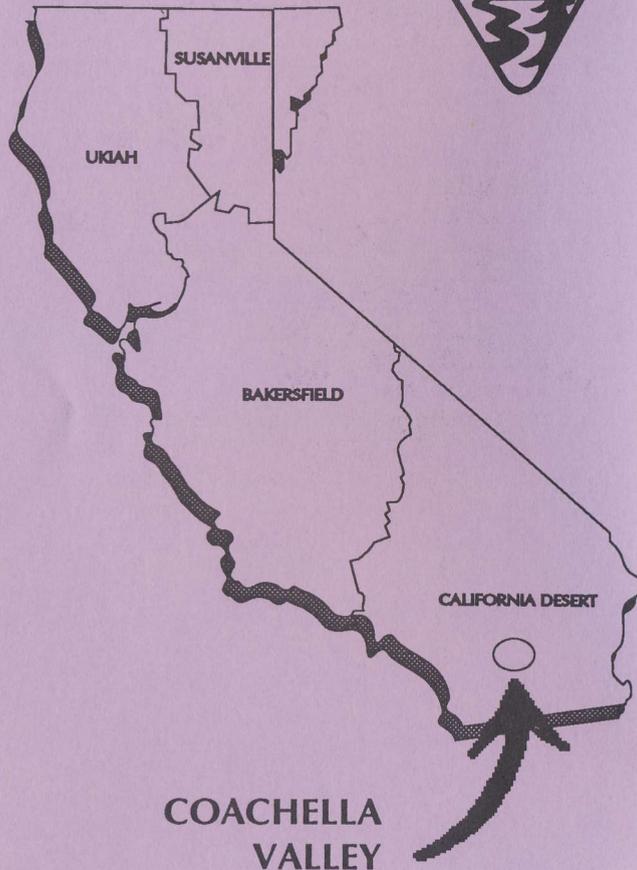
OF THE

*Coachella  
Valley*



# BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

## DISTRICTS



## WELCOME

### To the Public Lands in California

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the public lands in California under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and particularly to the Coachella Valley.

Statewide, BLM is responsible for more than 17 million acres of surface lands as well as 47 million acres of subsurface minerals. BLM-California also has jurisdiction over another 1.5 million acres in northwestern Nevada.

Most people don't realize it, but almost half of California is Federally owned. National Forests account for 20.4 million acres; BLM public lands 17.2 million acres; National Parks 4.6 million acres; military lands 4 million acres; and another 1 million acres managed by other Federal agencies.

This large percentage, combined with a rapidly growing population now exceeding 30 million people, makes public land management a complex, highly visible operation. The challenge is to balance the tremendous need for resources with the State's strong public environmental ethic.

Today, you will be visiting an area where these conflicts are being positively resolved: the Coachella Valley. This land management showcase clearly illustrates what can be done when all interests cooperate toward a balanced outcome.

I hope you enjoy the day and find the trip informative. I'm sure your visit will help you better understand the public land challenges facing BLM in California.

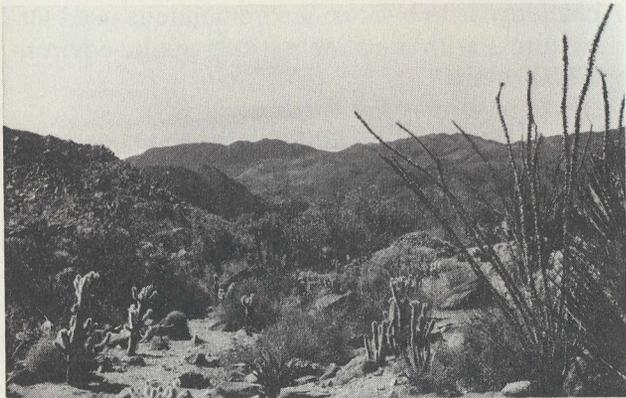
*Ed Hartey*

# THE COACHELLA VALLEY

The Coachella Valley . . . a mecca for visitors tired of the ravages of winter, a jewel for golfers and tennis players, the ultimate in elaborate hotels, a retreat for the rich and famous. But it is also the location of some of the best scenic and recreational values found on Public Lands in California.

The valley, encompassing 10 cities, is home for about 100,000 permanent residents. An estimated 1.75 million people visit the area each year, mostly during the winter months. From the snowcapped peaks of the Santa Rosa Mountains to the palm-lined ponds at Dos Palmas, the Coachella Valley offers a wide variety of sights and experiences for the visitor. And it also offers some of the best examples of cooperation between diverse levels of government, private interest groups, and the public, all working together to maintain these values for future generations.

The Bureau of Land Management joins with The Nature Conservancy, local communities, Native Americans, and a myriad of others to welcome you to the Coachella Valley. We hope you enjoy your visit here and gain a new perspective on the extensive natural resource values this area offers.



*The scenic backdrop of the Coachella Valley*

# Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area

Jutting skyward 7,000 feet above the Coachella Valley, the Santa Rosa Mountains are a true desert mountain treasure. From the creosote bush shrub community on the desert floor, to hidden palm oasis woodlands, up to conifer-capped peaks, the Santa Rosas are a unique blend of plants, animals, and topography. Boulder-strewn rockscapes are sliced by deep canyons and shallow drainages where perennial springs support numerous palm oases. These waterholes are key habitat features for the Nation's largest herd of peninsular bighorn sheep. The endangered desert slender salamander occasionally can be found darting across the rocks in the area.

The Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area was designated by Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan on March 31, 1990, to recognize and protect these outstanding scenic, wildlife, recreational, open space, cultural, and wilderness values.



*Agave plant  
in the Santa  
Rosas*

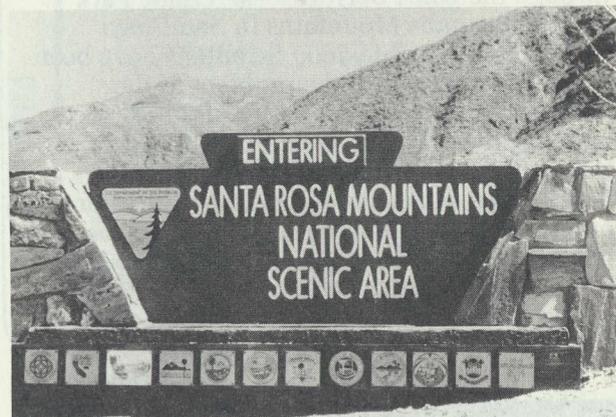
Man has been drawn here for centuries, as documented by the pot shards, petroglyphs, remains of ancient Native American villages and, more recently, a rock house built in the 1920's. The mountains remain of particular importance to the Cahuilla (pronounced Kah-wee-ah) Tribe, whose people still live in and around the area. Today, visitors can enjoy abundant opportunities for low impact recreational activities such as hiking, bird watching, nature study, horseback riding, and photography. An extensive trail network consisting of aboriginal pathways and constructed trails is available for hiking and equestrian use.

The area also includes a 47,000-acre BLM-administered Wilderness Study Area that has been recommended to Congress as suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. If designated, the acreage will round out a 270,000-acre tri-agency wilderness block administered by the Bureau, the Forest Service, and California State Parks.

The Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area is a complex system of many ownerships and jurisdictions, a situation that demands coordinated and cooperative land and resource planning. Joining BLM in pursuing National Scenic Area designation for the area were the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians, the California Department of Fish and Game, the County of Riverside, and the Cities of Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, La Quinta, Indio, Indian Wells, Desert Hot Springs, Coachella, and Cathedral City.

These entities, along with cooperators such as The Nature Conservancy, University of California, Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, Living Desert, Bighorn Institute, and others, are working together closely to develop a management philosophy and plan for the area that will protect wildland values on the public lands administered by BLM and ensure coordination concerning the use of development of private lands within the area.

*Directions: To drive through the Scenic Area, take Highway 74 (the Palms to Pines Highway) from Palm Desert. A new Santa Rosa Mountains National Scenic Area visitor center will soon be built along this road. Hiking and equestrian trail access points are located along the northern flank of the Santa Rosas between Palm Springs and La Quinta.*



*More than a dozen cooperators help BLM care for the Santa Rosa National Scenic Area*

## **Desert Slender Salamander**

The desert slender salamander (*Batrachoseps aridus*) was discovered in 1969 by a California Department of Fish and Game warden as he dug out a small waterhole for bighorn sheep at an oasis on the lower desert slopes of the Santa Rosa Mountains. It apparently has been isolated from other slender salamander species for hundreds of thousands to several million years, and is a relic from wetter geologic epochs. This relatively small (less than 4-inch) salamander requires a constantly moist environment for survival and generally lives in canyons where water seeps from the walls. The species was listed as endangered by California in 1971 and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1973.

## Peninsular Bighorn Sheep

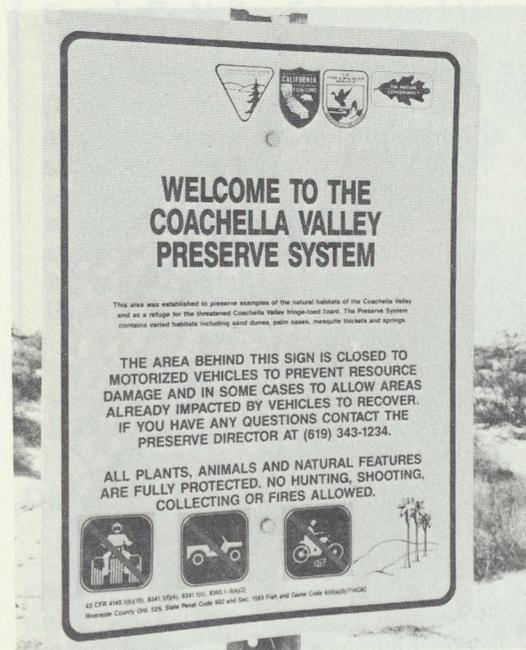
The Santa Rosa Mountains are home to an estimated 350 peninsular bighorn sheep, the largest concentration of this majestic animal in the world. Its range stretches from the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains south through the Anza Borrego Desert State Park and the Jacumba Mountains in San Diego County into Baja Mexico. Scientists have been searching for clues to the problem of the extremely high lamb mortality of these animals, listed by the State of California as threatened, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered. The peninsular subspecies is one of three subspecies of bighorn; the other two are the Nelson's and California bighorn sheep.

*A bighorn ram*



## Coachella Valley Preserve

This 13,000-acre site is the last undisturbed watershed in the Coachella Valley and provides excellent wildlife habitat, particularly for the endangered Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard. The Preserve is jointly owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy, BLM, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation, with TNC serving as the coordinating agency.



*Activities in the Preserve are carefully managed to protect the natural values*

At the heart of the Preserve is the spectacular Thousand Palms Oasis, fed by continuously flowing waters seeping along the San Andreas fault. The oases support more than 1,200 native California fan palms, the second largest grove in the State. In contrast to the oases are the blow-sand fields, critical for the survival of the fringe-toed lizard as well as other wildlife and plant species. For thousands of years, particles of sand from the nearby San Bernardino Mountains and Indio Hills have been washed and blown into the Coachella Valley, thus forming the dune systems that encompass some 200 square miles.

Inhabited first by Native Americans, and still used by members of the Cahuilla Tribe, the Euro-American history of the area begins in 1906, when Louis Wilhelm traded two mules and a wagon for 80 acres of Thousand Palms Canyon. Rapid development of the Coachella Valley resulted in the eventual destruction of major corridors of wildlife habitat.



*A close-up look at a Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard*

In 1983, The Nature Conservancy took the lead in bringing together all the parties to develop a habitat conservation plan that would ensure preservation of the endangered Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard while allowing development of parts of the species habitat for human use. The result has been hailed as a model for resolving the classic confrontation between preservation and development.

Land acquisitions in the area have been made through a combination of BLM land exchanges and purchases using the Land and Water Conservation Fund, private donations, and a \$600 per acre mitigation fee paid by local developers. About 95 percent of the Preserve is now owned by one of the cooperating agencies.

*Directions: Take Interstate 10 to the Washington Street exit (about 12 miles east of Palm Springs). Go north on Washington to Thousand Palms Road, turn right, and watch for signs to the Preserve on your left. The Preserve is open 7 days a week; telephone (619) 343-1234.*

## Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard

The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) is specially adapted to live in an environment of wind blown sand. Its body shape — wedge-shaped nose and fringed toes — allow it to “swim” through loose sand to escape predators or the heat of the desert surface. Insects and some plant material in the blow-sand ecosystem provide food for the lizard.

The Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard was listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species in 1980.

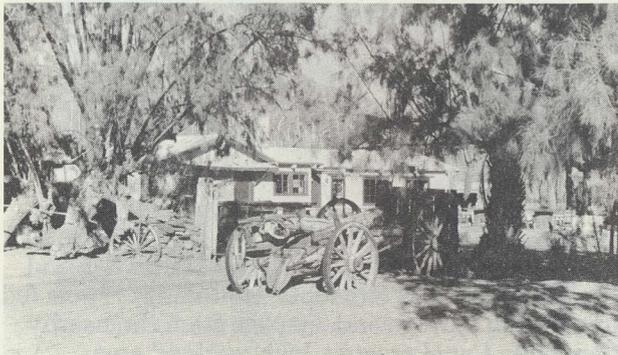
## Dos Palmas

Not just two, but hundreds of fan palms sway in the breezes under bright blue skies at this unique oasis tucked between the Salton Sea and the Chocolate and Orocochia Mountains. Pools fed by artesian springs and seepage from the nearby Coachella Canal create a lush wetland area providing outstanding habitat for threatened and endangered species as well as more common birds and animals.



*Artesian pools at Dos Palmas*

In thick stands of cattails, the elusive and endangered Yuma clapper rail builds its nest, while in the warm waters of the pools, the desert pupfish, a relict species from the Pleistocene era, greets you in hopes of finding food. The black rail (a State threatened species), leaf-nosed bat, prairie falcons, flat-tailed horned lizards, and Colorado Valley woodrats all find Dos Palmas an ideal home. Orocochia sage (*Salvia greatai*), listed as rare and endangered by the California Native Plant Society and a candidate for Federal listing, also can be found in the area.



*The Rancho Dos Palmas*

The beauty and fresh water resources of the area attract not only wildlife species but man as well. The oasis was inhabited for centuries by the Cahuilla Indians. In the 1860's, the St. Louis-Los Angeles line of the Butterfield Stagecoach made regular stops at the Dos Palmas Oasis, the only fresh water hole between the Colorado River and Indio. During the early years of World War II, General George S. Patton lived at Dos Palmas for a time while establishing his Desert Training Center to prepare troops for the invasion of North Africa.

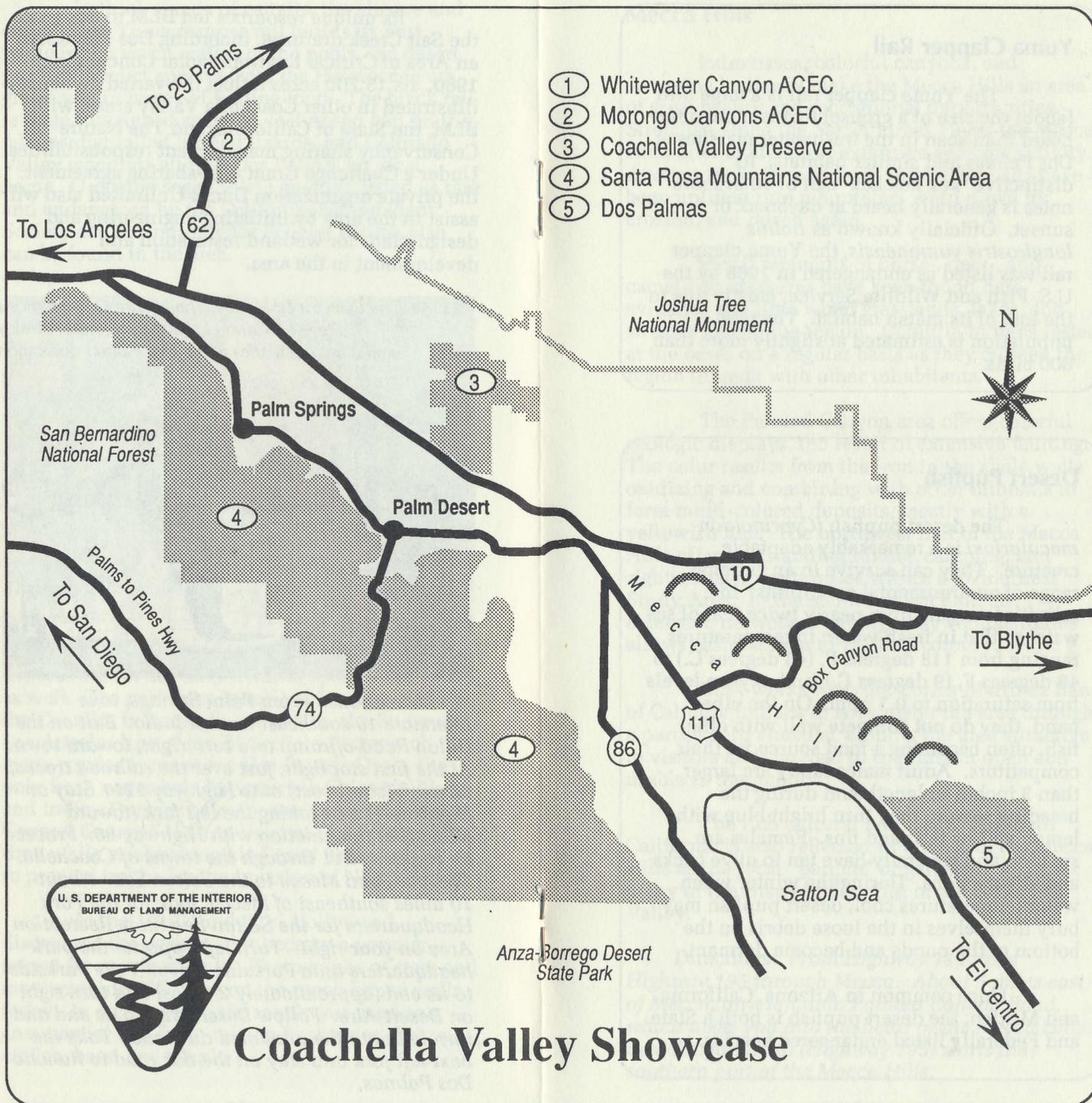
In the 1940's and 50's, Hollywood discovered the oasis, and it became a popular retreat for movie moguls. Photographs of stars and moviemaking still hang on the ranch house walls today. In recent years, the ranch was used as a commercial fish farm, raising freshwater shrimp, catfish, bass, and tilapia.

Its unique resources led BLM to designate the Salt Creek drainage, including Dos Palmas, as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in 1980. Its 15,700 acres reflect the varied ownership illustrated in other Coachella Valley areas, with BLM, the State of California, and The Nature Conservancy sharing management responsibilities. Under a Challenge Grant cost-sharing agreement, the private organization Ducks Unlimited also will assist in the area by initiating engineering and design plans for wetland restoration and development in the area.

*BLM State Director Ed Hastey, The Nature Conservancy's Steve McCormick, State Sen. Robert Presley and other dignitaries at the Dos Palmas dedication*



*Directions: From Palm Springs, take Interstate 10 southeast toward Indio. Exit on the Dillon Road offramp and turn right, toward town. At the first stoplight, just over the railroad tracks, turn left (southeast) onto Highway 111. Stay on Highway 111 by taking the left fork (toward Niland) at the junction with Highway 86. Proceed on Highway 111 through the towns of Coachella, Thermal, and Mecca to the Salton Sea. About 10 miles southeast of Mecca, look for the Park Headquarters for the Salton Sea State Recreation Area on your right. Turn left opposite the park headquarters onto Parkside Drive. Take Parkside to its end (approximately 2 miles) and turn right on Desert Aire. Follow Desert Aire to its end and turn left onto the unnamed dirt road. Take the next left fork and stay on the dirt road to Rancho Dos Palmas.*



# Coachella Valley Showcase

## Yuma Clapper Rail

The Yuma clapper rail is a large bird (about the size of a grouse) that is more often heard than seen in the freshwater marshes at Dos Palmas and similar habitats. Its distinctive "kek kek kek" call of 10 or more notes is generally heard at daybreak or sunset. Officially known as *Rallus longirostris yumanensis*, the Yuma clapper rail was listed as endangered in 1966 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, mostly due to the loss of its marsh habitat. The total population is estimated at slightly more than 600 birds.

## Desert Pupfish

The desert pupfish (*Cyprinoldon macularius*) is a remarkably adaptable creature. They can survive in an extreme range of environmental conditions: in salinities ranging from nearly twice that of sea water to that in fresh water; in temperatures ranging from 113 degrees F. (45 degrees C.) to 48 degrees F. (9 degrees C.); and oxygen levels from saturation to 0.1 ppm. On the other hand, they do not compete well with other fish, often becoming a food source for their competitors. Adult males rarely are larger than 3 inches in length and during the breeding season, they turn bright blue with lemon yellow tails and fins. Females are smaller, and generally have tan to olive backs and silvery sides. During the winter when water temperatures cool, desert pupfish may bury themselves in the loose debris on the bottom of the ponds and become dormant.

Once common in Arizona, California, and Mexico, the desert pupfish is both a State and Federally listed endangered species.

## Mecca Hills

Palm oases, colorful canyons, and sweeping badlands make the Mecca Hills an area of great beauty and recreational opportunities. Stretched along the San Andreas Fault, the Mecca Hills offer evidence of extensive geologic activity. Ancient rocks formed from seabed deposits have been uplifted into mountains, worn down by erosion, and raised again.

Fossil remnants of horse-, deer-, and camel-like creatures have been found here, evidence of a time when grasslands, lakes, and streams graced the region. Cahuilla Indians rested at the oases on a regular basis as they crossed the region to trade with other inhabitants.

The Painted Canyon area offers colorful geologic displays, the result of extensive faulting. The color results from the iron in the shale walls oxidizing and combining with other minerals to form multi-colored deposits, mostly with a yellowish hue. The northwest half of the Mecca Hills offers outstanding hiking, camping, and sightseeing opportunities within a Wilderness Study Area. In the southwestern half, an extensive network of off-highway vehicle routes allows easier access to the backcountry.

BLM works with the Torres-Martinez Band of Cahuilla Indians to administer the area through a partnership aimed at keeping the area attractive to visitors and the road to the canyon open and usable to the public.

The rich cultural heritage of Southern California is also reflected in the use of the Mecca Hills as the local "parque" or gathering place for many of the Hispanic families of the Coachella Valley.

**Directions:** *From Highway 111, take Highway 195 through Mecca. About 5 miles east of Mecca, turn left onto Painted Canyon Road, which takes you into the heart of the Mecca Hills. Box Canyon Road (Highway 195) skirts the southern part of the Mecca Hills.*

## Patton Camps

In the earliest days of World War II, when this Nation was thrust into the greatest global conflict the world has ever seen, the virtually uninhabited deserts of California and Arizona became a combat training ground for the young troops and raw recruits who would carry that early training on to victory in the sands of North Africa, the mud and mire of Europe, the ice and snow of Alaska, and even into the Pacific jungles.

A site near Shavers Summit (now known as Chiriaco Summit) between Indio and Desert Center was selected as the headquarters of the Desert Training Center. This site, called Camp Young, was named after Lieutenant General S.B.M. Young, the Army's first Chief of Staff, who once campaigned in the California Desert.

One of the first units transferred to the Desert Training Center, the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, recorded in its official history:

"Camp Young was the world's largest Army post and the greatest training maneuver area in U.S. military history. Eighteen thousand square miles of nothing, in a desert designed for Hell."

Major General George S. Patton, Jr., came to Camp Young as the first Commanding General of the Desert Training Center. His first orders were to select other areas within the desert that would be suitable for the large-scale maneuvers necessary to prepare American soldiers for combat against the German Afrika Korps in the North African desert. Ten other camps were established from near Boulder City, Nevada, on the north, south to the Mexican border, east to Phoenix, Arizona, and west to Pomona, California.

After General Patton was detailed to North Africa, the camps continued to operate under several different commanders. During this time, the name of the training center was changed to the California-Arizona Maneuver Area.

Twenty separate divisions, consisting of more than one million men, trained there. When the direction of the war shifted to the Allies' favor in 1944, the camps, plagued by a shortage of supplies and equipment, were closed, thus ending the largest simulated theater of operations in the history of military maneuvers.

Today, little remains except the remnants of white rocks that once lined the streets of the camps where hundreds of youngsters grew up in 13 weeks and went on to make a grateful Nation proud. Contour maps, stone altars, and rock insignias are still found at some of the camps, but the constant forces of nature are slowly and inexorably reclaiming the desert's own.



*One of the rock insignias that remain at Patton's camps*

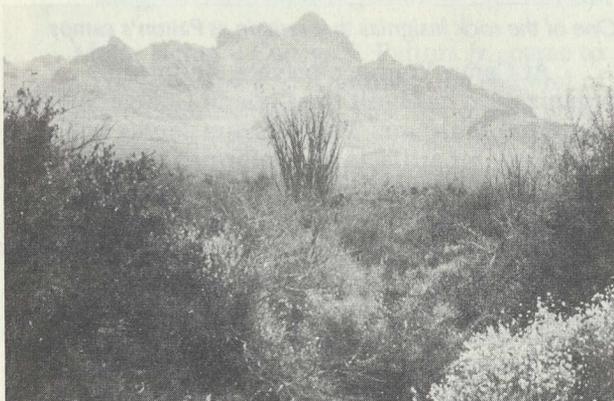
At Camp Young, a private, nonprofit organization has built the General George S. Patton Memorial Museum. The museum serves as a repository for artifacts and information related to the Desert Training Center. BLM supports this effort and is assisting the General Patton Memorial, Inc., by providing technical information and general support. The Bureau also has prepared an interpretive plan for the California-Arizona Maneuver Area with the goal of maintaining the present condition of the camps and eventually restoring many of the remaining features.

*Directions: From Palm Springs, take Interstate 10 east to the Chiriaco Summit exit. Turn left, cross over the freeway, and turn right on the frontage road. The museum is on the left.*

## Chuckwalla Bench

Often referred to as "The Bench," this scenic plateau of bajadas (raised plains of merging alluvial fans), washes, and desert pavement is located between the Chuckwalla Mountains and the Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range. One of the best examples in California of a diverse Colorado Desert plant community, the Chuckwalla Bench was designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern by BLM in 1980. It also provides important desert tortoise habitat, and the Bureau is acquiring additional land within the area to ensure continued protection for the threatened species.

The total area covers 92,000 acres; about 59,000 acres are BLM public lands. These lands are home to 158 plant species, including nine different species of cacti. The foothills provide excellent habitat for bighorn sheep, burro deer, and a rich variety of migratory and resident birds.



A scenic view of Chuckwalla Bench ACEC

The Bradshaw Trail (named for explorer William Bradshaw) skirts the southern boundary of the Bench. Once an Indian trail, it became a stagecoach route to transport mining equipment and supplies from the Colorado River overland. Used extensively between 1862 and 1877, the trail ran from Dos Palmas through the Chuckwalla Valley to end at Bradshaw's Ferry on the Colorado River. Reduced gold output and the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad track to Yuma, Arizona, spelled the end for the stagecoach route, but the trail is still used today by recreationists.

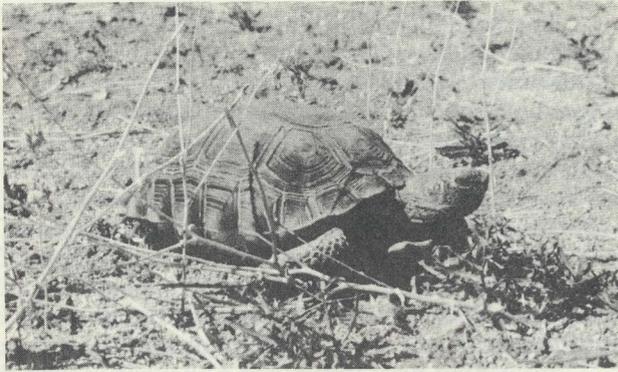
The Nature Conservancy has been an active partner with BLM in acquiring lands within the Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical Environmental Concern. More than 60,000 acres of private lands have been identified for acquisition to preserve this valuable habitat. Through land purchases and exchanges, more than 19,000 acres have been acquired to date. Much of the funding resulted from the combined efforts of many groups like The Nature Conservancy, Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, and Defenders of Wildlife, all of which worked with Congress to help obtain Land and Water Conservation Fund monies.

*Directions: From Interstate 10, take the Red Cloud Mine Road exit. Go south to the Bradshaw Trail and turn east to follow the southern boundary of the Bench.*

*Or, from Highway 111, turn east on Parkside Avenue, directly opposite the entrance to the Salton Sea State Recreation Area. Turn east onto the Coachella Canal access road. About 8 miles further, the Bradshaw Trail begins.*

### Munz Cholla

Chuckwalla Bench is home to a "forest" of Munz cholla (*Opuntia Munzii*), a rare 6- to 15-foot high cactus tree. Dense spines cover its branches. It lives only in the gravel or sand of washes and canyons in the desert and between 500 to 1,000 feet elevation. Current populations are found in the Chuckwalla Bench and Chocolate Mountains.



*A desert tortoise surveys his habitat*

## Desert Tortoise

For three million years, the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) has survived and adapted to varying climates in what is now the California Desert. Officially named as California's State reptile, the tortoise now faces a myriad of problems and has been listed as a threatened species by both the State and Federal governments.

With its distinctive high-domed shell and elephant-like legs, the desert tortoise is a well known and much loved resident of the region. It lives in burrows under the ground much of the year, emerging in the spring and after the rare rains during the summer and fall to find food and water.

Diseases, loss of habitat, predation, collection, and vandalism have caused dramatic declines in desert tortoise numbers. In the Chuckwalla Bench, a shell disease has caused significant trouble since 1982, with an estimated 50 to 60 percent loss of tortoise populations. BLM is funding research into the cause and possible treatment of the disease.

Please help the desert tortoise survive! Enjoy them from afar, and be particularly careful when driving to avoid crushing them or their burrows.

## Indian Canyons

Indian Canyons is a highly valuable archaeological and recreational site currently owned by members of the Agua Caliente Cahuilla Indians and other private landowners. This complex of five scenic canyons located off South Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs is the ancestral home of the Agua Caliente Indians who allow public tours through the area. The most famous of these canyons is Palm Canyon, officially recognized as having the highest concentration of palm trees in the world. Nearby Andreas Canyon has the second highest number of palms, while Murray Canyon is fourth. Palm Canyon is popular for hiking or horseback riding, while the nearby Trading Post offers refreshments and Indian pottery, baskets, and weavings for sale. In addition to the scenic beauty, all the canyons contain special desert wildlife viewing opportunities as well as significant archaeological values, including ancient Cahuilla rock art. BLM manages its adjacent public lands in a manner to ensure protection of this unique area.

## Whitewater Canyon

Whitewater Canyon cuts through the rugged southeastern tip of the San Bernardino Mountains just north of San Geronimo Pass. Between the steep canyon walls of crumbling stone flows the Whitewater River, following a boulder-strewn alluvial fan that stretches 8 miles southeast toward the city of Palm Springs. Whitewater Canyon is ecologically significant because it is situated in a transitional zone where the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts meet coastal habitats. This blending of different climatic influences has created diverse flora and fauna within the canyon. These unique qualities are protected through BLM's 1981 designation of the 12,100-acre Whitewater Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The ACEC lies within the Whitewater Wilderness Study Area recommended by the BLM and the President for designation as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

## Morongo Canyons Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Lush vegetation, perennial streams, singing birds . . . this is the California Desert? Yes, it's another of the Desert's special areas: the Morongo Canyons Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The centerpiece of this ACEC, covering Big and Little Morongo Canyons, is the Big Morongo Preserve. The Preserve is well known as an excellent birding area, where year-round residents share their treasure with migrant and vagrant species as well.

As the waters of Big Morongo Creek reach the canyon, hard rock layers force them to the surface in a series of perennial springs, then they disappear into sandy soil further downstream. Some of the oldest rocks in California are found here, dated at almost two billion years. These former granitic rocks have been altered by heat and pressure to form gneisses and schists today.

Tall trees — mostly cottonwoods and willows — grow here due to the high water table and contrast with the surrounding desert slopes. Wooden walkways allow the visitor to meander through the riparian area and enjoy the scenery. Trails begin from the parking lot kiosk and allow access to the 6-mile length of the canyon.

Several rare or unusual species nest at the ACEC, including the least Bell's vireo, brown-crested flycatcher, Lucy's warbler, summer tanager, and vermilion flycatcher. Bighorn sheep venture down from the hillsides to water in the canyon, and other mammals such as raccoons, bobcats, coyotes, and kangaroo rats call the area home. A wide variety of lizards and snakes are found here (even the California tree frog!), as well as invertebrates such as butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies. No wonder BLM has designated Morongo Canyons as a Watchable Wildlife Area!

For many centuries, Big Morongo Canyon was used by the Morongo Band of Serrano Indians as an easy route between high and low deserts, where water was available, game plentiful, and the grade gentle. The Serranos (Spanish for "mountain people") were the last Native Americans to occupy the canyon. About 1908 the Serrano moved to the Morongo Indian Reservation. A series of ranchers lived in the canyon until 1968 when 80 acres were sold as a partial gift to The Nature Conservancy by J. L. Covington. San Bernardino County obtained 160 acres of adjacent lands to the north soon afterward, and with The Nature Conservancy formed the Big Morongo County Wildlife Preserve.

In 1982, the BLM designated almost 3,700 acres of surrounding ridge and canyonlands as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. The remaining section of private land was donated by ARCO's Four Corners Pipe Line Company to The Nature Conservancy in 1989, which then conveyed it to BLM. The BLM is seeking to acquire additional adjacent lands to enlarge the natural complex. Currently, the area is managed in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, which provides an on-site steward and docents to lead public tours.

*A family explores Big Morongo Canyon*



*Directions: From Palm Springs, take Interstate 10 west to its junction with Highway 62, the "Twentynine Palms Highway." About 10.5 miles north on Highway 82, turn right on East Drive (watch for signs to Covington County Park). After about 200 yards, turn left into the Big Morongo Canyon Wildlife Preserve. The Preserve is open 5 days a week and closed Mondays and Tuesdays; telephone (619) 363-7190.*

## Least Bell's Vireo

This small, gray songbird prefers streamside habitats in Southern California, such as that found in the Morongo Canyons ACEC. A common sight in the early 1900's, the least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) was designated an endangered species by the State of California in 1980 and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1986. Loss of habitat due to expanding human populations is cited as the primary cause for the decline in this migratory species, which winters in Mexico, primarily in Baja California. In addition, an expanding population of brown-headed cowbirds, who remove the vireo's eggs from its nest and replace them with their own, also has contributed to the vireo's decline.

## Vermilion Flycatcher

Big Morongo Preserve is home to one of the rare populations of vermilion flycatchers (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) away from the Colorado River. These 6-inch birds favor habitat near water in desert country and build their nests in the limbs of mesquite, willows, and cottonwoods. Males feature a crown, throat, and underparts in flaming vermilion, contrasting with dark brown upper parts and tail. Females are brownish gray with a white, narrowly streaked breast and pinkish or yellow lower belly.

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- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers 17.2 million acres of public land in California (17% of the State) and 1.5 million acres of Nevada land.
- It also has responsibility for about 47 million acres of subsurface mineral resources representing 47% of the State.
- The BLM balances the management of public lands and resources so that they are considered in a combination that will best serve the American people.
- By Congressional direction, BLM manages the public lands under the multiple use concept that includes environmental protection, resource development and recreation.

United States  
Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

For more information, contact the BLM's  
Palm Springs/South Coast Resource Area Office  
63-500 Garnet Avenue, N. Palm Springs, CA 92258  
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