

Snakes in the Desert

The southwest desert is home to several varieties of rattlesnakes. The most common are the western diamondback, the Mohave rattler (AKA Mojave green), and the sidewinder. All of these are vipers – the animal uses venom injected during its bite to hunt its prey. This venom could be potentially lethal to humans and pets. These snakes are distinctive in that they all have a diamond shaped head, a narrow neck and a thick main body. Colors range from brown to gray to greenish tones, but sometimes buff in appearance. Blending with the surroundings favors survival. Lengths can vary between three and four feet. The rattles on the end of the tail (some times called "buttons") are a material similar to that of your fingernail. The rattling noise is caused by these buttons vibrating against each other and can sound like a buzz or steam being released under high pressure. These creatures are non-confrontational—if a snake is rattling, that means it senses you and is warning you off. As with any animal, if it is cornered or with its young, it will defend its territory. Ravens, hawks, owls, and other predators feed on snakes, therefore they avoid being out in the open as much as possible. Western diamondbacks prefer a rocky habitat with lots of holes and crevices. The other listed snakes prefer thick brush and grasses. Exercise caution when hiking around these places.

Co-existing with Snakes

Rattle snakes are amazing creatures. Though they are deaf, they have keen eyesight and sense of smell. They can sense vibrations on the ground to alert them of approaching prey. A pair of heat sensing pits located between their eyes and nostrils allows them to sense differences in temperatures of as little as a fraction of a degree. This in essence gives them vision even in total darkness. They can successfully hunt prey and avoid larger predators based upon their heat signature.

Snakes are generally active at night when temperatures are cooler. Being reptiles, they are most active between the temperatures of 70-90 degrees Fahrenheit from spring to late fall. Rattlesnakes hibernate during the cold winter months.

In spite of rattlesnakes' notoriety, they play an important role in the ecological system. For example they control various rodent populations such as mice, rats and even ants. Many people are surprised to learn that snakes can outrun a human. Speeds of up to 35 MPH have been recorded. Snakes can swim in water and can climb trees or walls to pursue prey. Caves, Burroughs, and mine shafts are favorite rattlesnake habitats.

Hiking in Snake Country

The venom produced by these snakes (actually a toxic saliva) is a complex mixture of enzymes. Mohave greens produce a neurotoxin which destroys nerves and nerve tissues. It's one of the most potent of rattlesnake venoms. The others produce a hemotoxin which destroys blood cells and tissues. These snakes strike their prey then follow behind until the victim expires. The snake then swallows the catch whole.

When in Snake Country:

Always be alert when traveling through thick brush or rocky Outcroppings.

Use a walking stick to check under brush or around crevices where recoiled snakes could lay.

Wear high-top boots or snake chaps if available.

Use care when moving piles of brush, logs and tarps.

Most people are bitten by either accidentally stepping on the snake or while trying to kill the snake. On average, about 20% of all bites inject venom. The best first aid in case of bites is to transport the victim to a first aid clinic or hospital as soon as possible.

CALIFORNIA

RATTLESNAKES

Wildlife Leaflet



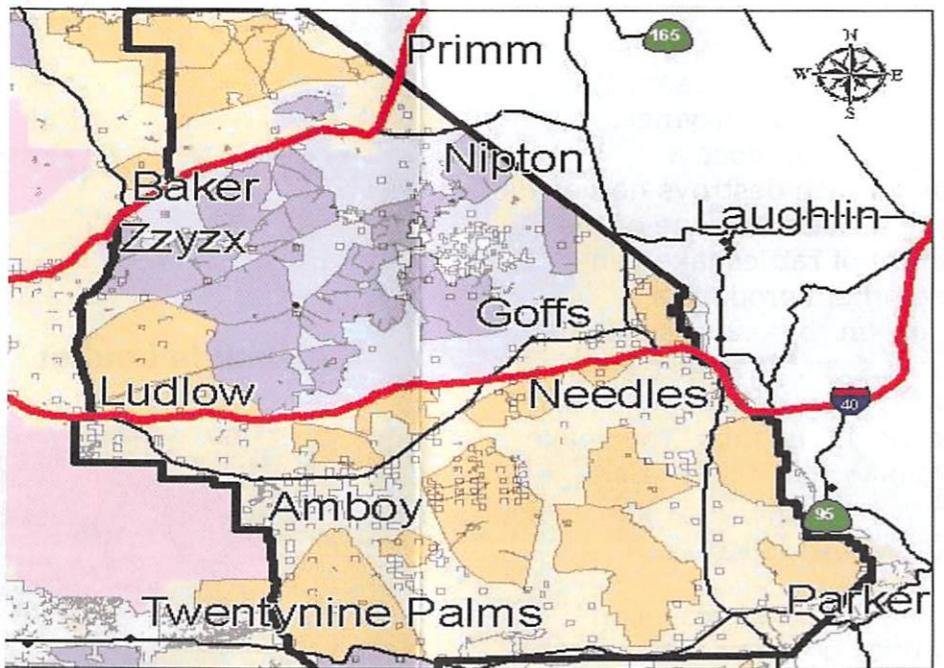
Needles Field Office
1303 South U.S. Hwy 95
Needles, CA 92363

Phone: (760)326-7000
Fax: (760)326-7099
www.blm.gov/ca/needles

Public Lands USA: Use, Share, Appreciate

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management





OHV Use

Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) provide fun, entertainment, and discovery. However, many of the desert's most attractive and fragile resources can be destroyed if vehicle access is not properly controlled. Resources, cultural and natural, can be unintentionally damaged or destroyed by uncontrolled vehicle use. We all have the responsibility for the proper use of vehicles, so please remember to TREAD LIGHTLY on public and private lands. Stay on open routes of travel.

NO CROSS COUNTRY TRAVEL

BLM/CA/GI-2009-016+8300

Please Be Advised

Military explosives can be found most anywhere in the desert. Large areas of the desert were and still are used for bombing ranges and maneuvers by the U.S. Armed Forces. There may be unexploded devices that can cause serious bodily injury or death if handled. Report any such devices to the Federal Interagency Communications Center toll free at (888) 233-6518 or call 911.

The Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center borders the western edge of the Needles Field Office Area of responsibility. This is a live bombing range. Do NOT enter the bombing range!

Desert Safety

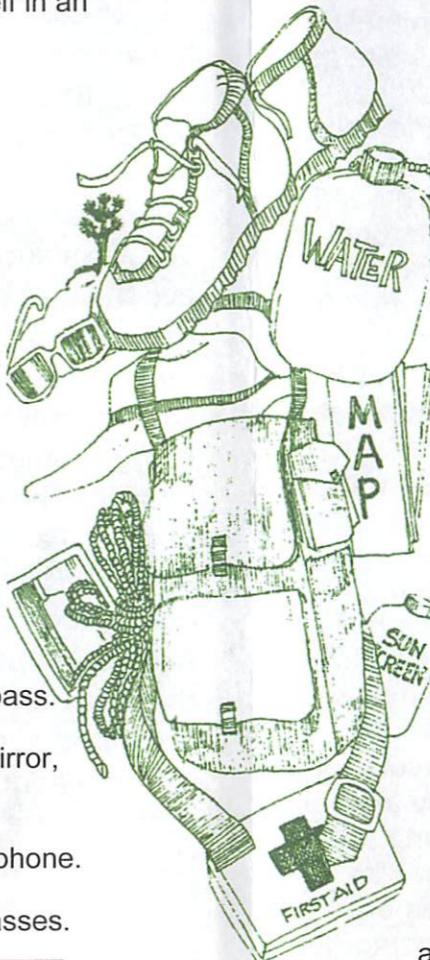
- Summer temperatures routinely exceed 110° Fahrenheit. Each year people are lost, injured, and sometimes die while visiting desert areas. Take precautions to prevent finding yourself in an emergency situation.

- Always tell someone your plans, or leave a visible note on the dash of your vehicle with your expected route, destination, and time of return. Stick to your itinerary.

- Carry plenty of water. Drink at least a gallon per day.

- Take food or snacks. In the heat, you may not feel hungry, but your body needs nourishment.

- Never go alone.
- Take a good map and compass.
- Carry a first aid kit, signal mirror, flashlight and matches.
- Take a CB radio or cellular phone.
- Wear sunscreen and sunglasses.



- Dress in light colored, loose fitting clothes. Long-sleeves, long pants, a hat, and sturdy shoes will help protect you from the sun, coarse volcanic material, and sharp, spiny vegetation.

- Bring a jacket with you, as evening temperatures may drop 30 degrees or more.

- Make sure your vehicle is in good working condition. Check your tires, spare tire, jack, lug wrench, and fluid levels.

Always start with a full tank of gas and try not to let it fall below half a tank before filling up again.

- If you are stranded, stay with your vehicle. Don't panic.

Your vehicle is easier to spot than a person walking. Lift your hood. Attempt to signal for help using a mirror or by using newspapers to make an X on the ground.

- Watch for snakes, spiders, and scorpions among the rocks.

News.bytes

Subscribe to News.bytes a FREE Weekly email Newsletter
www.blm.gov/ca

In Case of Emergencies
Contact the Federal Interagency Communications Center (FICC) at (888)233-6518 or call 9-1-1.