

MINUTES
ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP
BORREGO SPRINGS INTERIM WATERMASTER
Meeting Conducted Virtually via GoToMeeting
Tuesday, September 26, 2023, 10:00 a.m.

I. Opening Procedures

- Andy Malone (Technical Consultant, Borrego Springs Watermaster) called the meeting to order at around 10:05 a.m. and welcomed all participants attending online.
- Mr. Malone confirmed that four of the six Environmental Working Group (EWG) members were present at the start of the meeting. Jim Dice and Danny McCamish arrived after the start of the meeting. Dr. Michael Wells was not in attendance. In attendance at the meeting were the following individuals:

Environmental Working Group Members	Jim Bennett, County of San Diego (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Jim Dice, Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center
	Jim Dax, Alternative Community Rep. (and Alternative Watermaster Board Member)
	John Peterson, retired County Groundwater Geologist, California Professional Geologist and Certified Hydrogeologist (and TAC member)
	Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks
Watermaster Staff	Andy Malone, Watermaster Technical Consultant (West Yost)
	Lauren Salberg, Watermaster Technical Consultant (West Yost)
Others Present	Travis Brooks, Land IQ
	Travis Huxman, University of California Irvine (UCI)
	Megan Lulow, UCI
	Stephanie Tillman, Land IQ
	Laurel Brigham, UCI
	Leanne Crow
	Nikki Fiore, UCI
	Rebecca Falk
	Shannon Smith, Rams Hill (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Rodney Smith, Rams Hill
	Gregg Macey
	Steven Allison, UCI
	Trey Driscoll, INTERA (and TAC Member)

I. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

II. Biological Restoration of Fallowed Lands

A. Task 2 - Existing Abandoned Farmland and Reference Natural Habitat, including research questions and methods (begins at 4:52 in the [meeting recording](#))

Megan Lulow (UCI) presented on Task 2 of the Restoration of Fallowed Farmlands project, which is focused on surveying and comparing a range of fallowed and natural reference sites. Dr. Lulow presented the guiding questions, study locations selected, and an update on the data collection process. Discussions, questions, and answers ensued amongst the meeting participants, which included:

- Increased vegetation and changes in the landscape have been observed since the occurrence of summer storms in Borrego.
- John Peterson plans to fly over the Coyote Creek area and capture the current extent of vegetation. He extended an invitation to the meeting participants to join in the fly-over.
- There was discussion on the use of aerial images and/or drone imagery to capture and track changes in vegetation.
- The proximity to Coyote Creek was part of the study design. Several agricultural sites are located within the floodplain of Coyote Creek, while other study sites are not. This will allow the project to compare areas in the floodplain to those outside of the floodplain.

B. Task 3 - Fallowed Farmland Brush Fence Study, including research questions and methods (begins at 38:39 in the [meeting recording](#))

Dr. Lulow presented on Task 3 of the Restoration of Fallowed Farmlands project, which is to conduct studies on the effectiveness of various restoration techniques to minimize airborne dust emissions (*e.g.* as sand fences) and promote revegetation of native plant species. Dr. Lulow described the proposed methods, including four proposed “treatments” for dust control, three of which are also designed to trap soil and create microsites for plant establishment. Discussions, questions, and answers ensued amongst the meeting participants, which included:

- The sand fence prototypes are designed for high-wind environments and are typically used in coastal environments. The design is expected to withstand the high winds in Borrego.
- The project team clarified that “cogen” is an abbreviation for “cogeneration” and is the combination of heat and power. There is a cogeneration plant (biomass powerplant) in Palm Springs that farmers in Borrego could sell their chipped wood to after removing orchard trees. This would divert the chipped wood waste from going into the landfill and would instead be used to generate electricity.
- John Peterson recommended to apply for a CEQA exemption under Class 7, Section 15307. Because UCI is a trustee agency, they could submit the declaration directly.
- Seeding will not be part of the methodology of this task. However, it could be included in the study design and performed if additional time or funding became available.
- Mitigating for invasive species is not part of the design study. Managing invasive species is considered a longer-term project but there will be discussions with the weed removal group in Borrego about access to the study area.

- The focus of this task is to collect baseline data, which will occur over a year-long period from Fall 2023 to Fall 2024. Data collected over this period will include (but is not limited to): measurements of wind, dust control effectiveness, and degree of plant growth.
- UCI is planning to perform demonstrations of different treatments with landowners and will open the invitation to members of the public in Borrego with permission of the landowners.
- Mr. Brooks and Mr. Malone finished the presentation on Task 3 by requesting that the EWG submit written comments or questions on the sand fence design to Land IQ by emailing Travis Brooks, tbrooks@landiq.com, and cc'ing Andy Malone, amalone@westyost.com by October 6, 2023.

C. Presentation of the Wildland Urban Interface Climate Action Network and Opportunities for Collaboration (begins at 01:28:46 in the [meeting recording](#))

Steven Allison (UCI) presented on the Wildland Urban Interface Climate Action Network (WUICAN), of which he is the Principal Investigator. WUICAN is a California grant funded program focused on community and university engagement to help different climate projects, such as groundwater stewardship. Dr. Allison described programs WUICAN is currently involved in throughout California, described the resources available to project partners, and discussed what a collaboration between the EWG and WUICAN would entail. Discussions, questions, and answers ensued amongst the meeting participants, which included:

- The next step to partner with WUICAN is to coordinate conversations and meetings between WUICAN staff and the Borrego community.
- WUICAN could also partner with the high school internship program.
- EWG members (John Peterson, Jim Dice, Jim Dax, and Jim Bennet) requested Dr. Allison give this presentation to the Borrego Springs Watermaster Board and requested that Mr. Malone add this as a recommendation in his report to the Watermaster Board.
- Mr. Brooks finished the presentation by stating that the next EWG meeting date is dependent on progress of Tasks 2 and 3. The next activity for the EWG will be a demonstration of the sand fences and other treatments given to landowners and members of the public in Borrego Springs.

III. Public Comments

Shannon Smith thanked the EWG for the meeting, expressed excitement about the projects discussed, and indicated that Rams Hill is happy to assist.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Malone adjourned the meeting at about 11:58 a.m.