Wilderness Monitoring

Purpose

&

Techniques

## *A*

*Field*

# *Primer*

*CR; 8/03*

### INTRODUCTION

**Monitoring**

Monitoring is the systematic recurring inventory of a specified resource value. The purpose of monitoring is to provide information to answer a specific question.

#### Wilderness

Designated Wilderness may contain a wide variety of natural resource values [e.g., scenic and biological]. It is managed to provide for certain uses [e.g., primitive recreation] and prohibit other types of uses [e.g., motorized use]. The intent is to preserve and enhance the ‘wildness’ of the area.

The BLM administers 65 Wilderness Areas [3.7 million acres] in the California Desert Conservation Area [CDCA]. Linear disturbances from a variety of sources [ORV use, animal trails] are quite distinctive in the desert. Those that intersect wilderness area boundaries tend to invite vehicle use in wilderness, which is prohibited. Such use tramples vegetation, compacts oils, and retards re-vegetation processes.

The BLM uses several techniques to reduce the frequency of vehicle incursions on such linear features or wilderness ‘ways’. High quality maps, boundary signs, and informational materials help inform desert users of the location of wilderness boundaries and appropriate use. ‘Hard Barriers’ [e.g., boulders or gates], ‘Soft Barriers’ [restoration treatments], and a BLM Law Enforcement presence can contribute to reducing vehicle incursions.

**WILDERNESS MONITORING**

**IN THE CDCA**

#### The Questions

Where are linear features that intersect wilderness boundaries?

What is their condition?

Are they contributing to vehicle use in wilderness?

How are these features changing through time?

And - Recommend the management technique or combination of techniques that make those ‘ways’ and other linear features less inviting and reduce vehicle use in wilderness.

There are other resource issues and associated questions concerning wilderness management, but these must be clearly specified prior to designing and implementing a monitoring program.

**WILDERNESS MONITORING IN THE CDCA**

**Overview**

Before management techniques to reduce the incidence of vehicle use in wilderness can be applied, the ‘ways’ and other linear features in wilderness must be identified and documented by traveling around the wilderness area determining whether any potential access points enter wilderness. Once a site-specific treatment [generally signs and barriers] is completed, monitoring must continue to be performed routinely to verify that the treatment is still in good condition. That is, the same monitoring techniques and procedures are done on a systematic recurring basis to answer the original questions again. Such subsequent monitoring requires that the entire wilderness boundary be monitored.

##### MONITORING TOOLS

##### Focus on Restoration

###### Wilderness Monitoring Worksheet

The worksheet should be filled out so that the data collected will assist in future monitoring, new prescriptions, and treatments. The worksheet should be filled out in full. The first half of the sheet provides detailed information about the location of the way: wilderness, topographic map, UTM coordinates (NAD83CONUS), the way number, and a descriptive interpretation of its location. The second half of the sheet allows for a description of the way: length, usage, and potential restoration prescriptions. Other pertinent information can be entered on the bottom of the worksheet.

#### Photo Documentation

It is important that each time an intrusion is visited, information is gathered in a systematic method. In other words, the photos of the intrusion should be taken from the same location, in the same azimuth, and ideally with the same focal length. Ultimately, the photographs should look identical aside from any changes in the landscape.

For data collection, label the photograph with the date the picture is taken and the way number or some other system that links it with the corresponding monitoring worksheet

#### ‘Deep’ or ‘Core’ Monitoring

In order to determine the status of the wilderness as a whole, it is also important to determine the state of the wilderness core. Monitoring within the wilderness boundary has been titled deep monitoring and includes noting the destination of any intrusions, location of structures or man-made materials, overall condition of the land, flora and fauna, and any other significant information.

Photographs should include a date and location (preferably UTM’s in NAD 83). A brief narrative summary of findings is an appropriate form of documentation.

A critical point is that all information should be systematically identified spatially and temporally, so that if can be usefully related to past and future information.