



Desert-wide Cultural Resource Site Protection in the Mojave Desert

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Background:

Never has the concept of more with less been more applicable in regards to site protection than in the past few years. With global events having ever greater fiscal impact on Federal Land Holding agencies budgets, the ability to adequately protect cultural resources has become quite challenging. Consider that BLM, DoD and DOI are responsible for over 20 million acres of land within the Mojave Desert. It is interesting to note that as dollars for protection decrease, human population, representing the greatest threat to cultural resources, is increasing in the Mojave Desert, particularly in the last decade and greatly increased populations are predicted for the next several decades. Protection of cultural resources is a federally mandated requirement and must be performed. While each agency is currently implementing its own site protection measures with little inter-agency communication, the overall success of site protection within the Mojave Desert can most likely benefit from a comprehensive regional plan.

Objective:

There are four clearly stated goals of the present effort. First, determine the nature and severity of site protection problems within the Mojave Desert. Secondly, examine successful site protection programs within the United States. Thirdly, examine the data collected in the first two goals. Lastly, summarize the finding and make recommendations regarding the feasibility of developing a regional site protection plan for the Mojave Desert.

Summary of Approach:

The present study relies on data collected from agencies with jurisdiction within the Mojave Desert. A questionnaire comprised of eighteen questions was submitted to forty landholding agencies within the subject area. The results were entered into tables allowing for easy analysis and fulfilled the first of the objectives above. The second and third objectives were completed by conducting extensive internet research and visiting several libraries and repositories. The fourth objective was achieved by consolidating all of the collected data into a cohesive report which presents the information and makes recommendations.

Benefit:

Efficient use of resources to curtail negative impacts to sites has never been more important than during the current phase of budgetary challenges. The current effort represents the first necessary step in determining the extent of site protection shortfalls and problems experienced by individual agencies. Rather than agencies independently solving solutions to their site protection challenges, by communicating and sharing information, agencies can gain valuable insight into successful and failed attempts at site protection measures greatly reducing the number of times the wheel is reinvented. The benefit to the military is more efficient use of funds to remain compliant with Air Force, state and federal regulations. From a conservation standpoint the ultimate goal is to best protect the resource. By sharing information between agencies and having the ability to consult with experts in other agencies, the possibility of finding the best solution for a given problem is greatly increased and that ultimately serves the resource.

Accomplishments:

This effort has resulted in a report that details the results of the stated objectives. Unfortunately less than half of the forty potential agencies with interest in the Mojave Desert responded to the questionnaire (18/40). However, of the eighteen respondents it is quite clear that each agency is experiencing some degree of damage to their cultural resources. More importantly the survey found that of the eighteen respondents, fifteen felt that a regional site protection plan was needed to help combat these problems. The nationwide examination of regional site protection plans only found a few in existence and those were mostly ineffective. It was determined that resistance is generally encountered at the local level and is related to questions of jurisdiction, staffing and funding. It is ironic that these concerns are precisely what a regional site protection are designed to address.

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