

Imperial Valley Daily Press

January 14, 2005

Voice: Edit lacked environmentalist viewpoint on tortoise ruling

Re: "Victims of environmentalists" on Monday:

We reject the I.V. Press uninformed attack against citizens' efforts for endangered wildlife recovery on public lands in Imperial County. Too bad the opinion writer didn't call us for our perspective.

The recent court ruling to protect the desert tortoise found that the Bush Bureau of Land Management was not managing critical habitat to recover the species. The court agreed with conservationists that the law says the government must do what it can to recover endangered species, not just keep them barely surviving. That makes sense.

Recovery of the desert tortoise is in everyone's best interest. Curbing off-road damage to critical wash habitat will help recovery. The court's decision was based on the law, public interest and the intent of Congress.

It was targeted and narrow and allowed BLM to keep open 1,700 miles of vehicle routes in the affected areas.

The denial and delay advocated by BLM and off-road lobbyists would only make tortoise recovery harder, increasing costs and land-use restrictions even more.

The opinion suggests that more off-roading will help the local economy. Will it? There's been a lot of off-roading in Imperial County for a long time and far too many people are still suffering. Sacrificing more desert public lands to off-road mayhem may make money for far-away off-road vehicle makers, but it would leave the county trashed and poor. Why isn't BLM looking to diversify visitation for true multiple uses instead of taking marching orders from off-road industry lobbyists who want only one use?

The current balanced 50/50 management at the Algodones Dunes works. It protects habitat and other uses and allows for lots of off-roading. We support it. BLM figures show that off-road use at the dunes has doubled since the 2000 habitat protection agreement was implemented, and now other people who don't off-road are being attracted to the dunes to spend money locally. What is the problem?

Finally, we do know Imperial County's lands and people and we are sincerely interested in their well-being. The center is gaining members and volunteers in Imperial County, people who care deeply about their lands and communities and don't want them trashed.

The conservation community wants balance and long-term sustainable management of public lands in Imperial County. It is the Bush administration and off-road lobbyists who want it all, and they don't care about you.

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