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## 'Mad Max on Meth' at Algodones Sand Dunes

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Over 200,000 off-roaders mobbed the Algodones (Imperial) Sand Dunes over the thanksgiving holiday. At least six people were killed in off-roading incidents in Imperial County, including a five year old boy. The environment, air, and endangered species habitat were trashed.

Hospitals in Imperial and Yuma County were overloaded. Imperial County Deputy Coroner Henry Proo called it "the worst weekend I have ever seen." (Yuma Sun, Nov 27).

Despite all the death and environmental destruction, the Bush Interior Dept. is still aggressively pushing to expand off-roading at the dunes by reversing a five year old conservation agreement.

"What doesn't BLM understand about Glamis? Despite spending millions of dollars out there, an irreplaceable national landmark is being destroyed, children are being killed, mayhem continues, and BLM acts like everything would be just hunky-dory if they could just have more off-roaders out there. It's madness!" said Karen Schambach, California Director of

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. PEER represents the concerns of many affected Interior Dept. biologists and staff.

On Wednesday, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will reconsider an off-road industry demand to end Endangered Species Act protection for the Peirson's milkvetch, an endangered attractive flowering plant found only at the Algodones Dunes.

Off-road industry lobbyists pushed for the de-listing before, but just last year FWS biologists said it was not justified. But this spring, Bush Interior Dept. political appointee Julie McDonald took a trip to the dunes with off-road lobbyists to discuss ending Endangered Species Act protection for the milkvetch.

Several months ago, the Center filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking details of McDonald's trip, but Interior has not released the records. US Rep. Bob Filner, who represents Imperial County, has been asked to investigate.

"The Algodones Dunes are a fragile and scenic place being sacrificed to 'Mad Max on meth' mayhem. People and the environment are being killed out there due to Bush administration and industry anti-conservation ideology, and it has to stop." said Daniel R. Patterson, a Desert Ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity who formerly worked with BLM in the California Desert Conservation Area.

A federal court recently ruled that the flat-tailed horned lizard must be considered for Endangered Species Act protection in part due to off-roading damage in Imperial County.

In addition to the Peirson's milkvetch, the desert tortoise and dozens of endemic dunes plants and animals are imperiled by extreme off-roading at the Algodones Dunes. Hikers, birdwatchers, photographers and other people are displaced from the dunes by hordes of off-roaders and related dangers.

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