

White Mountain's Furnace Creek Issue Summary and Update

County – Mono, California

Management – Ridgecrest BLM (CDCA) on lower portion, Inyo NF on upper portion

Summary: Furnace Creek is a perennial desert stream draining through the Congressionally-designated White Mountains Wilderness Study Area¹. **While Furnace Creek's wetlands have been protected from damaging off-road vehicle abuse for the last four years, the Ridgecrest Field Office of the BLM and Inyo National Forest are now moving forward with plans to construct a new road and OHV staging area in this unique desert canyon.** This action is not only fiscally irresponsible, but also a direct violation of numerous federal statutes, and a grave threat to the currently active White Mountains Wilderness proposal.

Background: According to the Inyo National Forest, a rarely used jeep track up **Furnace Creek Canyon "washed out in 1982...and has not been considered a system road since that time."**² However, the forced passage of off-road vehicles (motorcycles, modified jeeps, and 4-wheeled ATVs) up the canyon created severe damage to this rare desert wetland habitat. **The Inyo National Forest & BLM Ridgecrest closed Furnace Creek to recreational vehicle use in 2003 because "motorized vehicle use is causing significant impacts to riparian habitat and water quality. Consequently, the need for immediate agency action is of critical importance."**³

The BLM and Forest Service have produced a joint Environmental Assessment to determine the future of Furnace Creek. **This EA estimates that the purported Furnace Creek "Road" (see photo left) was used by less than a dozen people a year.** Despite over 7000 comments from the public opposing building, including the opposition of the California Department of Fish & Game, the BLM is moving forward with plans to build this unnecessary and damaging new road and ORV parking lot.



Imminent Threat of New Road Construction to Furnace Creek in White Mountains Wilderness Study Area– As of early February 2007, the BLM has indicated they are going to (1) amend their entire California Desert Conservation Area plan to allow construction of a new road in Furnace Creek and (2) **build a new road and off-road vehicle parking lot inside the Congressionally-designated White Mountains WSA.**

This new road construction not only threatens the health of this unique desert wetland, but **would cut a huge hole into the proposed White Mountains Wilderness**, the 2nd largest undesignated roadless area in the Lower 48.

At a time when Federal land managers are suffering from continued funding cuts and attempting to reign in out of control off-road vehicle abuse, it makes no sense to waste dwindling

taxpayer dollars on an unnecessary road that will "wash out time and time again."⁴

¹ White Mountains WSA was created in 1994 through the Desert Protection Act.

² Letter from Inyo National Forest to California OHV Stakeholders Group, February 23, 1999.

³ EA for the Proposed Interim Closure of Furnace Creek Canyon Road, March 7, 2003.

⁴ Letter from Inyo National Forest to California OHV Stakeholders Group, February 23, 1999.

Furnace Issue IN BRIEF

- **Unique** – Furnace Creek is rare desert wetland in America's highest desert mountain range.
- **Unnecessary** - Purported "road" up Furnace Creek represents less than .6% of the over 75 miles of road already criss-crossing the White Mountains.
- **Unjustifiable** – BLM and FS are proposing to spend upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a new road through a desert wetland to accommodate an estimated 12 people a year.
- **Unauthorized** – The BLM's proposed new road and parking area would be built inside the Congressionally-created White Mountain WSA, violate federal and state water quality laws and facilitate illegal route proliferation in the Forest Service's recommended White Mountains Wilderness.