



Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District
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August 19, 2008

Attn: Russ Scofield

A main goal of the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District is to coordinate and further efforts to control the spread of exotic and invasive plants throughout the Mojave Desert. Land management agencies, for whom land stewardship and protection of natural resources are main objectives, know that the spread of invasive plants is a major threat, whether the issue is displacement of native ecosystems, the proliferation of plants that increase the spread of wildfire, or toxicity to wildlife. Some weed species have already spread to such an extent that control is unlikely, but control efforts for less-widespread species are likely to have lasting positive effects and result in the conservation of treasured resources. Through this letter, it is our hope to foster improved cooperation among agencies affiliated with the Desert Managers Group so that together we may more effectively target those invasive plants for which control is achievable to reduce their impacts on key resources.

Several invasive plant species threaten natural resources in the Mojave Desert, but Sahara Mustard, Halogeton, and tamarisk are three whose control (or eradication, in the case of Halogeton) can benefit from enhanced cooperation by members of the Desert Managers Group. For example, the spread of Sahara Mustard poses a significant risk to the Kelso Dunes, a signature site in the Mojave Desert. This invasive exotic has already displaced the native vegetation on sand dunes in Anza-Borrego State Park. What used to be carpets of beautiful spring wildflowers at some sites in Anza-Borrego are now dense monocultures of two feet high, dried and brown, interlocking mustard plants. It is important for the Desert Managers to understand the severity of this threat to the Kelso Dunes, for sandy sites are the preferred habitat of this plant.

Last winter, a population of Sahara Mustard (approximately 3000 plants) was located precariously close to, and upwind from, the Kelso Dunes. Seed production from this population is poised to spread throughout the foredune area of Devil's Playground and throughout the Kelso Dunes. Although a small portion of this mustard population was eliminated in time, a great many plants could not be removed and produced and released seed simply because inter-agency cooperative measures were not in place to quickly and fully address the issue at the time. Judging from the monsoonal rains falling on the area this summer, another major germination of Sahara Mustard can be expected this fall. Nonetheless, with a timely, well-planned, and determined control effort this threat can be abated. Without such an effort, however, Kelso

Dunes may go the way of infected dunes in the Anza-Borrego area and Sahara Mustard may become the cheat grass of the East Mojave.

Several tasks are necessary for cost-effective prevention of resource degradation by Sahara Mustard invasion. As a first step, key resources must be identified and weed-maps for strategic upwind areas created. Appropriate treatment, whether by mechanical or chemical means, is the ounce of prevention that is worth the pound of cure when it comes to protection from weed invasion. Much progress toward control and/or eradication can be achieved by agencies sharing data, streamlining administrative tasks, and joint work projects.

Protection from these invasive plants at key natural areas can be accomplished and jurisdictional boundaries should never be an obstacle for achieving these ends. The Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District thus encourages all DMG agencies to actively redouble their efforts to work together to face the threat posed by Sahara Mustard and other invasive weeds to natural resources as only fully cooperative efforts will have any real chance of success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuck Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chuck Bell, President
Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District