

## Work study nears on munitions cleanup

As the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers moves closer to releasing a work study that will detail plans for a potential cleanup of a formerly used defense site near Borrego, new funding has become available that would put that plan into action.

The Corps has earmarked an additional \$700,000 to pay for the first steps in field work targeting munitions cleanup of the Borrego Maneuver Area that could follow a \$400,000 feasibility study expected this May.

The funding announcement was made during a Feb. 15 technical planning meeting held

at Palm Canyon Resort. Major property owners, such as representatives from Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and Ocotillo Wells Vehicular Recreation Area, as well as staff from the state Department of Toxic Substances Control attended the meeting to hear a series of presentations by the Corps and its private contractors.

The BMA, originally identified as 256,000 acres, has grown to include eight separate sites including parts of Clark Dry Lake, areas in Military Wash, park property bordering S22 See *MILITARY*, Page 39

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east of Clark Dry Lake and Benson Dry Lake, now the site of the Ocotillo Wells airport.

The former military barracks area once called Camp Ensign is also included in the study. Camp Ensign was located on property that now encompasses Borrego Springs Resort.

Sites in need of munition cleanup within each area will be identified in the study. Options range from doing nothing, to posting signs, to surface or subsurface removal. Military records show there is little chance that munitions were used at Camp Ensign.

A final proposed work plan is scheduled to be released at a public meeting May 24 in Borrego Springs. A 45-day public comment period on the work plan will follow its release. Right-of-entry will be requested from property owners before site surveys can begin. If such access is granted, the study could start as soon as this fall.

During recent site visits, Corps personnel and contractors found examples of military remnants on the properties. A stop in Military Wash revealed debris from 100-pound practice bombs, 20 mm projectiles, and 5-inch rocket warhead fragments. Visits to areas called Winona No. 1 and Winona No. 2 northeast of Ocotillo Wells revealed similar practice-bomb fragments and rocket debris.

The Corps also invited stakeholders to share concerns about cultural and environmental resources on the lands in question. Surveys could include dragging magnetic devices behind off-road vehicles, foot surveys with metal detectors, or a new concept — moving equipment across study areas with the help of horses.

The goal of the study will be to narrow down the total acreage that needs to be cleared of munitions.

Jim Dice, a senior environmental scientist for the Colorado Desert District of State Parks, attended the session to get more information about how the study would be carried out. But, specific details regarding how the land would be checked for munitions won't be released until the work plan is finalized.

"Having somebody look at these areas is certainly a good idea," Dice said. "What we have are questions regarding the methodologies that could impact the vegetation or the terrain."

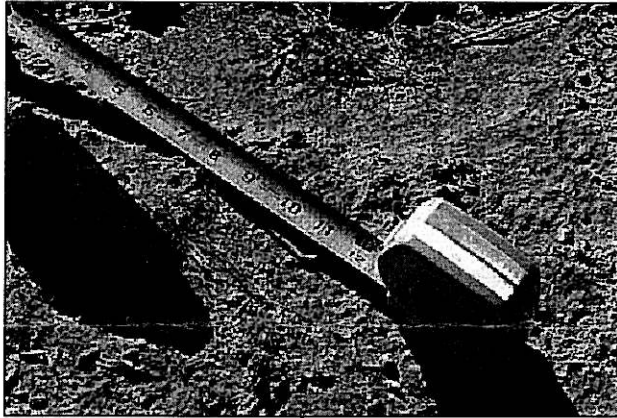


PHOTO courtesy of ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
DEBRIS from a practice bomb is measured during a brief site survey of land encompassing the Borrego Maneuver Area, acreage formerly used by the Department of Defense for military training near Borrego Springs.

Dice and OWSVRA Environmental Scientist Eric Hollenbeck came up with at least four rare or endangered plants that live in the target areas. They also mentioned prairie falcons, shrikes, Peninsular bighorn sheep and several lizard species as needing to be taken into consideration before

habitat is disrupted in any way.

"At one point they requested to use helicopters that would drag a magnetometer," Hollenbeck said. "We couldn't agree to that because of the amount of soil and dust that would be kicked up."

David Lawhead, the Colorado Dis-

trict's environmental coordinator, said State Parks had hoped that the Carrizo Impact Area would be studied as a first priority for cleanup. But the Corps ranked Carrizo lower on their list because of its remoteness and its current status, closed to the public.

Larry Sievers of the Corps addressed the Carrizo Impact Area during the Feb. 15 meeting and said current planning calls for a site inspection next year with a remedial investigation and feasibility study scheduled for 2016.

He said the total cost to clean up the Carrizo Impact Area is estimated at \$40 million, compared to the Corps' annual cleanup budget of \$9 million. However, as progress is made with the Borrego Maneuver Area, the Carrizo Impact Area could get helped along, he said.

"Carrizo could be moved up if it's found that it could be cost-effective to use the study from BMA and apply parts of that work to Carrizo," Sievers said.

The Carrizo Impact Area is located in the southern portion of ABDSP.

A Web site detailing public information about the BMA study is located at [www.borregosprings-mmprp.org](http://www.borregosprings-mmprp.org).