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## Supervisors may question dunes proposed fee increases

By ALEJANDRO DAVILA

Staff Writer

12:07 AM PST, December 11, 2012

Whether to seek clarification and additional documentation explaining a proposed fee increase at the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area will be discussed by the county Board of Supervisors today.

The agenda item comes some four days after the comment period for the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area draft business plan closed. The draft business plan is the Bureau of Land Management document proposing the fee increase.

The proposed business plan calls for a permit and vendor fee increase for the 2013-2014 dunes season, with season visitor permits doubling in price from \$90 to \$180 and weekly permits rising \$25 to \$40.

Vendor fees would also go from having three price structures in place corresponding to the weekend, midweek or a major holiday, to a flat rate for short- and long-term vending.

“We are having trouble seeing exactly how they come up with these fees,” said Bob Ham, Imperial County’s intergovernmental relations director, adding he read the documentation and couldn’t find the kind of documentation that would justify an increase.

But the county isn’t necessarily against the fee increase.

“That is not to say that these fees are not an appropriate level to recover the costs needed to insure that the public health and safety is maintained at minimal acceptable levels in the dunes. We are simply pointing out that if this information is contained within the report, we cannot find it in a way that is readily and easily discernible,” reads the draft letter that the board could decide to forward to El Centro Field Office BLM Manager Margaret Goodro.

The letter also says the county is concerned the BLM wants to rely solely on user-fees as a way of maintaining public safety at the dunes. Moreover, with the approval of the board, the county could recommend the BLM to go back to the drawing board and rework the entire document in

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collaboration with the sheriff and other dunes partners.

When asked about today's agenda item, Goodro said, "We are happy to provide the information" the county finds necessary. "We would just like examples of what they are looking for," Goodro said.

She noted her office has had outreach meetings over the draft business plan for more than two years, recently gave a presentation to the board and also sent emails with talking points and specific information to board members. Moreover, the largest mass of sand dunes in the state has been running with a \$1 million deficit for years, said Goodro, who noted that if fees aren't increased, services will have to be reduced across the board.

"(We) can't continue to manage at that deficit," she said adding that services at the dunes are funded mainly by the federal government, which has been reducing grants, which aren't always awarded, and user fees.

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### **If you go**

What Imperial County Board of Supervisors meeting

When 8:30 a.m. today

Where 940 Main St., Suite 211, El Centro

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