



## Season dunes passes remain, but price rising

BY HILLARY DAVIS @YSHillaryDavis

2013-05-22 16:48:01



Season passes for the Imperial Sand Dunes will still be available for regular duners, but at a higher price, while the plan to increase the price for weekly passes remains unchanged, according to the Bureau of Land Management's updated plan for the off-roading destination.

Under the revised proposal, season passes would cost \$150 and could only be purchased off-site or online. Weekly passes to park inside the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) would cost \$35 if bought off-site or online, or \$50 if purchased on-site.

A new online exclusive would also allow duners to purchase a second weekly pass, good for a different vehicle in the same traveling party or for a different weekend, for \$25. If approved, this fee structure would go into effect for the 2013-2014 season.

Weekly permits currently cost \$25 (off-site) or \$40 (on-site), and a season pass goes for \$90 (off-site) or \$120 (on-site).

BLM spokesman David Briery said the decision to keep season passes was in response to feedback.

"We do plan to offer a seasonal permit at the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area again next year," he said. "The seasonal permit will remain in our suite of permit offerings as a result of input the past several months from representatives of Imperial County and local communities."

Land managers say a fee increase is necessary to maintain emergency medical services, search and rescue, law enforcement and infrastructure inside the 164,000-acre desert playground where off-roading is the most popular activity. It would be the first change to permit prices since 2004.

The BLM had previously proposed doing away with season passes. Officials were concerned that passes were being shared with people who haven't purchased one of their own.

Nicole Gilles, the Brawley-based executive director of the American Sand Association, said her organization still wants specifics on why any fee increases are justified. She hopes the full final draft will have more of that detail.

"I'm glad to see that they have decided to bring back the season permit," Gilles said. "However, our position remains the same, as far as any kind of a fee increase at all has to be substantiated by sound data, and at this point we still haven't received that data. So until we have something that substantiates the need for the increase, then we're not going to support it."

ISDRA is funded through a combination of appropriated federal funds, grants and user fees. User fees are by far the greatest component.

The BLM needs \$5 million a year to run ISDRA. About \$920,000 of that is federal funding and about \$430,000 is grants. Grants primarily come from California State Parks, but because it is uncertain year to year and has been dropping, it cannot be considered a reliable source of income. That leaves the BLM with an approximate fee revenue target of \$3.65 million.

But BLM data show visits have been dropping steadily since 2007, likely due to the weak economy and less disposable income. This decline in visitation, along with the shift to off-site permit sales, sent fee revenues from a 2009 peak of \$3.36 million to \$2.5 million in 2011. The off-site sales option was put in place with the goal of reducing on-site management costs and bottlenecks, partnering with neighbor communities and improving customer service.

The revised ISDRA business plan will be released for a public review and comment period on May 31. The plan will then come before the California Recreation Resource Advisory Council in August for approval. Comments can be emailed to [blm\\_ca\\_isdra@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ca_isdra@blm.gov).

*Hillary Davis can be reached at [hdavis@yumasun.com](mailto:hdavis@yumasun.com) or 539-6857. Find her on Facebook at [Facebook.com/YSHillaryDavis](https://www.facebook.com/YSHillaryDavis) or on Twitter at [@YSHillaryDavis](https://twitter.com/YSHillaryDavis).*

© Copyright 2013 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)