

## Sand to Snow Special Recreation Management Area

### RMA/RECREATION MANAGEMENT ZONE (RMZ) OBJECTIVE(S) DECISIONS

#### RMZ LIST WITH DISTINCTIVE USES AND OVERVIEW

1. Big Morongo Canyon Preserve ACEC - The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve is located in the Little San Bernardino Mountains adjoining the west boundary of Joshua Tree National Park. The Preserve is south of the town of Morongo Valley and north of Desert Hot Springs in both San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. The Preserve encompasses 240 acres of San Bernardino County Regional Park lands and over 30,000 acres of public lands managed by BLM to retain its outstanding natural and scenic values as well as recreational opportunities within a preserve environment. This area is characterized by steep canyons, rugged terrain and a desert oasis. The area is especially high in natural diversity due to its location within a transitional zone between coastal California, Sonoran/Colorado Desert, and Mojave Desert Ecosystems. The Preserve includes an internationally recognized desert oasis and marsh that is one of the 10 largest cottonwood and willow riparian habitats in California. Visitors to the Preserve enjoy hiking along the many trails observing wildlife, especially birds as this site is an internationally recognized birding site.
2. San Gorgonio Wilderness – The San Gorgonio Wilderness was designated through the passage of several wilderness laws including the 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L 88-577), the 1984 California Wilderness Act (P.L. 98-425) and the 1994 California Desert Protection Act (P.L. 103-433). Currently, the total acreage for this wilderness is 96,593, with 39,233 acres managed by the BLM. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) transverses the wilderness in a north-south direction. Whitewater Preserve, a Wildlands Conservancy managed site located near the southern end of the wilderness, provides a key entrance point to both the wilderness and the PCT.

**Objective Statement:** Designate this area as a Special Recreation Management Area. To preserve the nationally significant biological, cultural, educational, geological, historic, scenic, wilderness, and recreational values at the convergence of the Mojave and Colorado Desert and the San Bernardino Mountains; and to secure the opportunity for present and future generations to experience and enjoy the magnificent vistas, wildlife, land forms, and natural and cultural resources.

**Activities:** The primary activities for the Sand to Snow SRMA are hiking (both in the Preserve and on the PCT) and wildlife watching (particularly birds). This SRMA provides other primary activities such as primitive camping, equestrian use, wildlife and wildflower viewing, sightseeing, hunting, photography, picnicking, and stargazing.

**Experiences:** Enjoying the closeness of friends and family; increased independence/autonomy by accessing a backcountry wilderness area; experiencing solitude; developing skills and abilities; escaping urban areas without having to travel very far from civilization; enjoying the scenic quality of the natural landscapes

**Benefits:** Personal benefits include opportunities to enjoy the closeness of friends and family by escaping the stress of an urban environment, greater self-reliance as they explore a primitive wilderness area, improved outdoor skills, and the overall enjoyment of nature. These things help visitors feel more

connected to the land, both physically and spiritually. Families and friends use these areas to enjoy quality time together in a natural setting with relatively easy access to vast natural landscapes. Additionally, people enjoy access to hands-on environmental learning which occurs at both the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve Education Center and the Whitewater Preserve facilities. Economically, the area provides a positive contribution to the local communities found within the Coachella Valley as well as surrounding communities such as Morongo Valley, Desert Hot Springs, and Yucca Valley. Visitors use these communities for food, gas, and other supplies before venturing into remote areas. Environmental benefits include an increased awareness and protection of natural landscapes which can lead to a reduction of negative human impacts such as litter, vandalism, unauthorized OHV trails, etc.

### **RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS (RSC) DESCRIPTIONS**

The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve ACEC is characterized by steep canyons, rugged terrain and desert oases. The area is especially high in natural diversity due to its location within a transition between the Mojave and Colorado Deserts. The Preserve includes an internationally recognized desert oasis and marsh that is one of the 10 largest cottonwood and willow riparian (stream) habitats in California. It is also identified by the Audubon Society as one of the most important avian habitat areas in California.

The San Gorgonio Wilderness is the climax region of the San Bernardino Mountains in Southern California. Located on the San Bernardino National Forest approximately 75 miles east of Los Angeles, the Wilderness receives approximately 200,000 visitors per year. Its 58,969 acres harbor two small lakes, meadows, streams, 100 miles of trail, densely forested northern slopes, and rugged terrain. Elevations range from 4,400 feet to 11,499 atop namesake Mt. San Gorgonio.

#### **RMZ: Big Morongo Canyon Preserve ACEC**

**Physical Components:** This SRMA has qualities of the landscape fitting the Front Country Classification. The main entrance to the Preserve is located adjacent to Covington Park and is within ½ mile from Highway 62 in the town of Morongo Valley. The main body of the Preserve contains a large informational kiosks and many trails which branch out over the landscape. Many of these trails are handicap accessible boardwalks and observational decks. There are flush toilets available near the large parking lot. Small interpretive signs can be found along the trails

**Social Components:** Each year, thousands of visitors (roughly 60,000) flock to the main Preserve for bird watching hikes and educational studies. Most of the people that visit the Preserve arrive in small groups. While many of these groups eventually congregate together to go on the bird watching hikes, individual group size is still smaller than 6 people

**Operational Components:** Access to the main body of the Preserve is located off of East Drive, a paved road. Also, visitors to the southern end of the ACEC can use Santa Cruz Road in Desert Hot Springs. All of the maps and kiosks are located at the main Preserve. There is a large, walk through informational kiosk leading to the boardwalk. Also, there are two resident volunteer docents and several other volunteers available for answering questions. There are several signs located throughout the main body of the Preserve which detail the various restrictions (e.g. no horse riders, no camping, etc.)

## RMZ: San Gorgonio Wilderness

**Physical Components: Remoteness:** – This SRMA has qualities of the landscape fitting the *Back Country Classification*. The wilderness is proximate to Highway 62 as it runs through Morongo Valley. Also, access at the southern portion of the wilderness is via the Whitewater Preserve. Naturalness is one of the key components of a wilderness area. The San Gorgonio Wilderness is dominated by landform features that include rugged mountains and the Whitewater River and Mission Creek drainages. With the exception of the remnants of a few old 4x4 roads and grazing allotment structures (e.g. drift fences), the vast majority of the wilderness retains its primeval character. The only designated hiking trail within the wilderness is the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT). Structures are a prohibited use per Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577).

### **Social Components:**

Visitors to this wilderness would most likely encounter people on the PCT, especially on the section of trail immediately adjacent to the Whitewater Preserve. However, visitors to this rugged wilderness have an overwhelming sense of solitude. Most people visiting the wilderness arrive in small groups. With the exception of the small section of PCT noted above, there is little to no evidence of use.

**Operational Components:** Most visitors enter the wilderness via the Whitewater Preserve or by travelling north on the PCT from Interstate 10 (Cottonwood trailhead). Both hikers and equestrians use the trails. There are no maps or brochures available on site. BLM staff is rarely present to provide assistance. With the exception of some wooden posts delineating the PCT, there are no interpretive or other visitor regulation signs installed within the wilderness.

## MANAGEMENT ACTIONS & ALLOWABLE USES

**Recreation and Visitor Services Program:** Camping limited to fourteen days within a twenty eight day period, except within the main body of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve where camping is not allowed. The discharge of firearms is prohibited within the main body of the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve; however, hunting is allowed further south in the undeveloped region of the ACEC. Off highway vehicles, dogs, fires, and horseback riders are not allowed in the main body of the Preserve either; however, these uses are allowed in the undeveloped portion of the ACEC. Within wilderness areas, certain uses, such as motorized equipment and/or mechanized travel, are prohibited per Section 4 (c) of the Wilderness Act (1964). Hunters must comply with CA DFG laws and regulations for all areas open to hunting. Manage all routes of travel as open, limited or closed, as designated in the Local TTMP.

### **Acres by Alternative on BLM Lands:**

No Action	Preferred Alternative	1	2	3	4
0	115425	41419	41039	41420	41039

### ***Other Programs:***

**Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail** - See National Scenic and Historic Trails CMA.

Continue with agency natural resource multiple use management practices within the area. Allow all types of activities to occur within the area, except those with unacceptable safety concerns or degrade the environment. Developed recreation sites are withdrawn from mineral entry

Manage all routes of travel as open, limited or closed, as designated in the Local TTMP.

Renewable energy development is not an allowable use in SRMAs due to the incompatibility with the values of the SRMA. Two exceptions to this management action are: 1) geothermal development is an allowable use if a geothermal-only DFA overlays the SRMA designation and complies with a “no surface occupancy” restriction; and, 2) in the Preferred Alternatives if a DRECP variance land designation overlays the SRMA, renewable energy may be allowed on a case-by-case basis if the proposed project is found to be compatible with the specific SRMA values.

**Visual Resource Management:** There are two VRM classes established for this area:

Class I – The objective of this class is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This class provides for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and should not attract attention. Class I designation is primarily reserved for wilderness (e.g. San Geronio Wilderness) and wilderness study areas.

Class II – The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Big Morongo Canyon Preserve ACEC is classified as Class II.

### **IMPLEMENTATION DECISIONS:**

#### 1. Management

1. Continue existing management of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and ACEC
2. Coordinate land use programs and objectives with the Nature Conservancy and San Bernardino County Regional Parks for adjacent lands
3. Manage as Congressionally designated wilderness

#### 2. Administration

1. Manage as VRM Class I and Class II
2. Draft Wilderness Management Plan

#### 3. Education

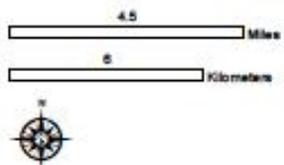
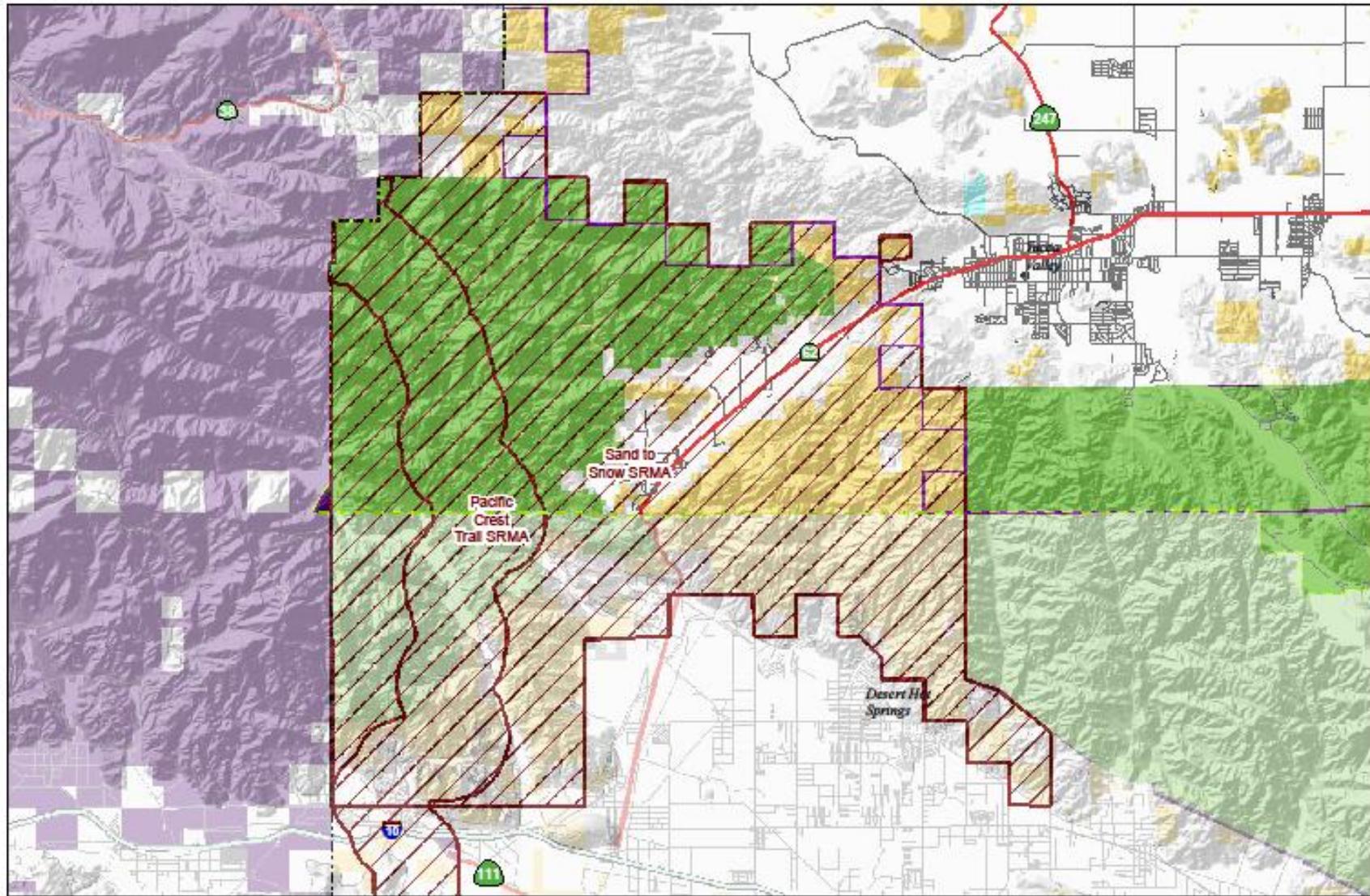
1. Create interpretive brochures, maps, etc. for the lower portions of the ACEC
2. Promote volunteerism/friends group for the area
3. Continue working with Wildlands Conservancy on the America’s Great Outdoors initiative

An activity level plan would be developed to identify and designate current and future recreational opportunities, appropriate facilities to provide for and manage the proposed uses, parameters for streamlined Special Recreation Permitting of recreation events, staffing and funding needs, parameters for facility and road/trail maintenance, partnerships, possible recreation fee considerations, and an implementation schedule.

**Mitigation:**

1. Maintain through traffic motorized route network connectivity with roads and trails leading into and through the Sand to Snow SRMA.
2. Manage renewable energy development on adjacent and nearby lands to avoid traffic conflicts with visitors & permitted uses.

# Sand to Snow SRMA



## Preferred Alternative SRMAs and ERMAs



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Prepared by BLM California State Office



### ACEC Layers

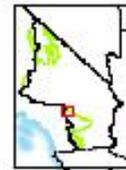
- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

### Land Status

- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

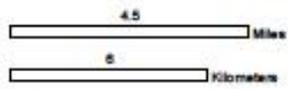
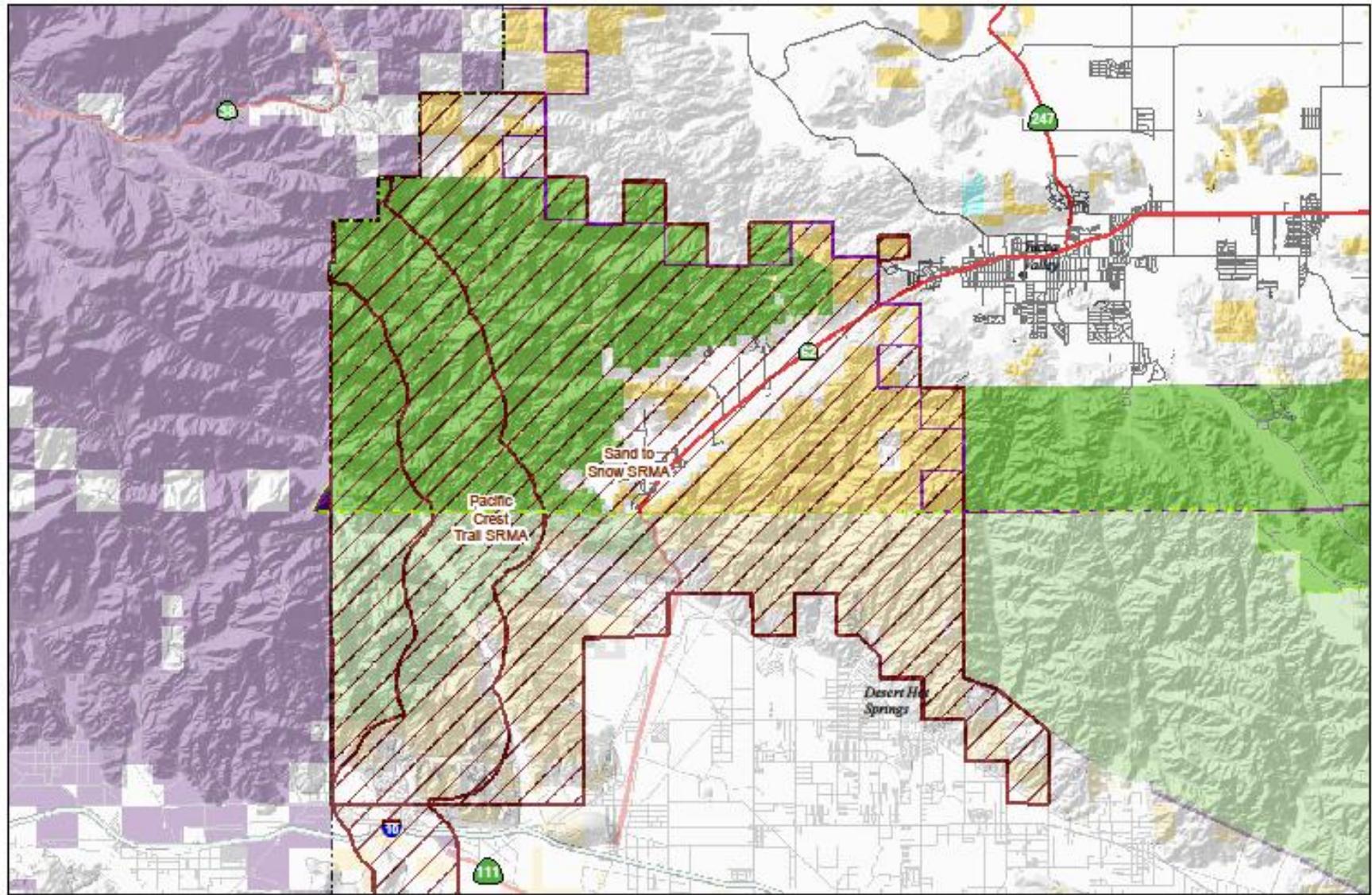
### GTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



The information and maps shown on this system should be used for planning purposes only. It should not be the sole source for determining map boundary locations.

# Sand to Snow SRMA



## Alternative 1 SRMAs

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### ACEC Layers

- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected

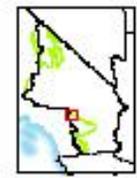
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

### Land Status

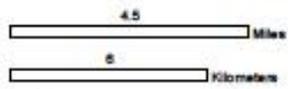
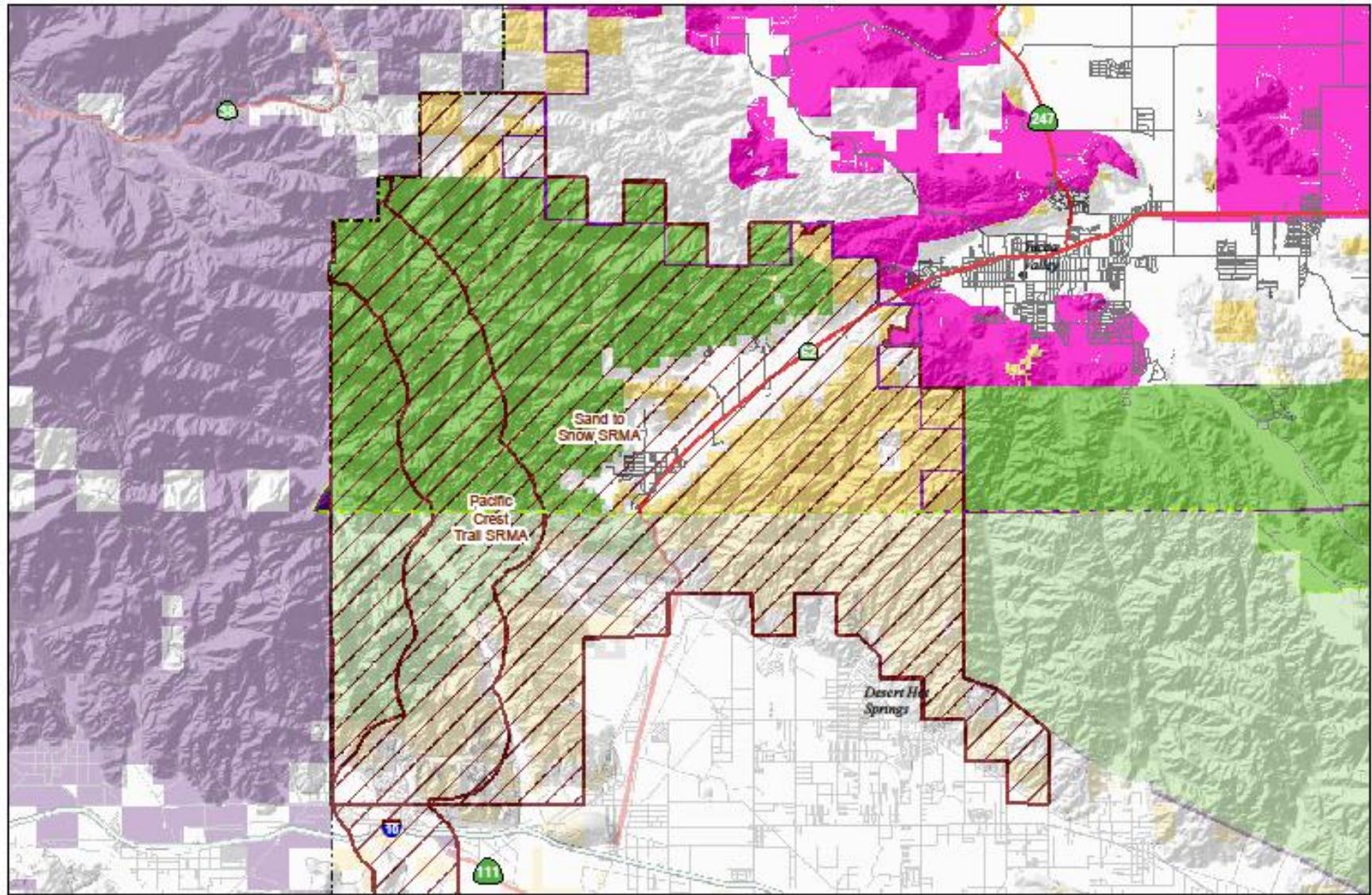
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

### OTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



# Sand to Snow SRMA



## Alternative 2 SRMAs

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### ACEC Layers

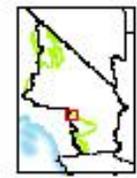
- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

### Land Status

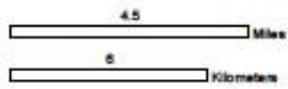
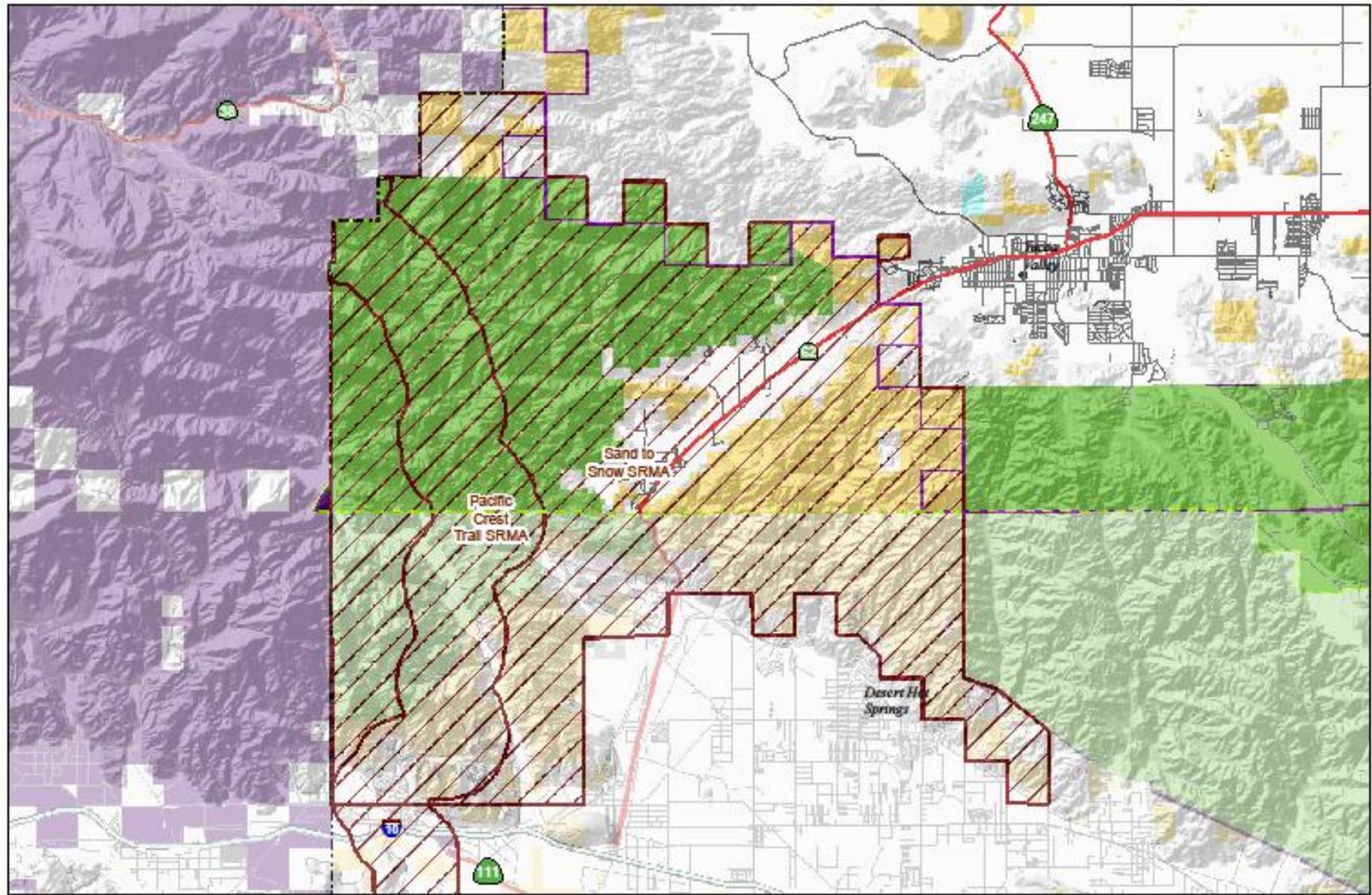
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

### OTLP

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



# Sand to Snow SRMA



## Alternative 3 SRMAs

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Prepared by BLM California State Office



### ACCEC Layers

- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

### Land Status

- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

### OTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy

