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Oliver Ranch Science School Complex & Wild Horse and Burro Facility: Annual Progress Report, Year Ending June 30, 2005

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ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Year Ending June 30, 2005

Assistance Agreement Number FAA010017

Task Order Number FAF040019

Oliver Ranch Science School Complex & Wild Horse and Burro Facility

Task 1: Project Coordination

Assist in project coordination between numerous stakeholders such as the Clark County School System, Desert Research Institute, Community College of Southern Nevada, UNR Cooperative Extension, Nevada State College, local museums, state parks, non-profit organizations, federal agencies, and the public to ensure appropriate educational curricular activities and venues are provided for in the conceptual design of the School and the Wild Horse and Burro facility where appropriate as well as assist in the NEPA process as needed. The activities will be conducted at least in part by university faculty, staff and students as part of the university's research, teaching, and service mission.

Deliverables: The project coordinator will meet regularly with the Oliver Ranch committees, the Line and Space design team and NEPA team to assure modifications in design or curriculum that are necessary and appropriate are incorporated throughout the process of developing the facility. These activities will be recorded and provided to BLM in quarterly reports.

Year-To-Date Progress: June 2004-June 2005

Core Group Coordination

Over the past year, Public Lands Institute staff have participated in every meeting of the Red Rock Desert Learning Center core group as well as every sub-committee meeting and committee chairs' meeting. The university began setting the Core Group agendas and providing detailed minutes as of May 2004 and has continued to do so each time the Core Group meets. In many instances, the university has also produced minutes of subcommittee meetings when the committee chair was unable to do so. Examples include the Fund-raising and Partnerships Committee, the Operations Committee, and the NEPA Committee. The documentation from meetings is provided electronically to all core group members on a monthly basis.

To date, there has been positive feedback from the Core Group on the university's communication and coordination efforts. Two examples include:

"There sure has been a huge improvement in the quality of the notes and

communications since your arrival!”

“Oh, kudos and 'wow!' re: your notes, minutes, comments about the Oliver Ranch facility. I've seen more write-ups from you in the last two weeks than in the years that the project has been underway. Fabulous. Absolutely fabulous. Please continue this practice.”

Historical Documentation

In addition to providing detailed minutes, the university has created hard-copy and electronic files for each meeting to establish and preserve a more formal historical record for the project. The files include attendance records and copies of the agenda, minutes, and all meeting handouts, which are referenced in the minutes and can be reproduced for anyone who needs a copy.

The university also examined the entire existing historical documentation for the Oliver Ranch project dating back to its inception in 1999. This involved conversations with BLM staff, interviews with key community members, and collection of relevant materials. The materials were summarized into a historical project timeline and verified with BLM staff and core group members. This document has been uploaded to the RRDLG website and has been useful as background for public information about the project. The project history continues to be a living document, with new milestones added on a monthly basis.

Similarly, the university compiled a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document for the project website. The FAQ provides core group members with a common, agreed-upon response to questions that may be posed by the community at large. As further public outreach about the project is undertaken, the FAQ will serve as a blueprint for standard “talking points” for public presentations to civic groups and other organizations. The FAQ, like the historical timeline, provides the public with basic information about the project. It, too, is a living document that changes over time as the project progresses.

Project Oversight & Coordination

Another coordinating effort the university has undertaken is a comprehensive listing of feedback and concerns that have arisen since the project’s inception. This effort seeks to guide the BLM in developing an ongoing tracking mechanism for the resolution of project issues and is a result of feedback received from Core Group members. A tracking mechanism is typically standard in construction management as a means to document and follow progress on project decisions over time. Unfortunately, this project has lacked any ongoing, comprehensive record of decisions made, which has led not only to redundant discussions (where topics are revisited multiple times because no one knows a decision has been made) but also to a feeling among some Core Group members that their input has not been considered, because they do not see actions connected to it.

The university urged the development of a project tracking mechanism in a meeting with the RRDLG project manager and the assistant field office manager on April 27, 2005, and the agency agreed to develop a matrix. By May 5, 2005, the university had provided BLM with a comprehensive listing of project concerns and feedback (developed through an exhaustive review of Core Group and committee minutes) from which the matrix could be formulated. This information was disseminated at the May 17, 2005 Core Group meeting to see if any additions were necessary. The project manager used that information to complete a tracking matrix, which was distributed at the August 16, 2005 meeting.

For the past year the university has had active representation on the BLM's Building Committee for this project. The representative – David Frommer of the UNLV Planning and Construction Department – has been a valued and trusted contributor to the project, according to the agency.

Qualitative Summary: Subtask 1

A frustration of the university and the Core Group during this first year of the cooperative agreement has been a general lack of written documentation for agency meetings and project materials held outside the Core Group meetings. The university often learns about new developments only when they are announced to the Core Group, despite frequent contact with the project coordinator. While we acknowledge the agency may have valid reasons to avoid written documentation in some instances, it has led to a practice of oral history on a very complex project, which has made it difficult for the university to more fully assist in project coordination as called for in the cooperative task agreement. We believe it would be advantageous to the success of the project to establish more proactive communication between BLM and UNLV regarding processes, planned meetings, and project scheduling. Such communication would be typical of cooperative agreement partners rather than contractors.

Task 2: Educational Curricular Coordination

Provide educational thematic and curricular coordination between numerous stakeholders such as the Clark County School System, Desert Research Institute, Community College of Southern Nevada, UNR Cooperative Extension, Nevada State College, local museums, state parks, non-profit organizations, federal agencies, and the public and help develop a written curriculum that synthesizes the input of these stakeholders. In addition, suggest other compatible uses for the School including but not limited to science and educational research. The activities will be conducted at least in part by university faculty, staff and students as part of the university's research, teaching, and service mission.

Deliverables: The Educational Curricular Coordinator will provide educational themes and activities for 5th grade outdoor environmental curriculum appropriate for the School in quarterly progress reports. The coordinator will collate the curricular contributions of the stakeholders identified for this subtask and attempt to synthesize these into an overall curriculum for 5th grade environmental sciences to be based at the school. Visitation to other similar outdoor schools will be included and their curriculum incorporated into the reports as appropriate.

Year-To-Date Progress: June 2004-June 2005

Curriculum Framework

The area in which the university has made its greatest contribution to the Oliver Ranch project during year one of the agreement has been in the coordination of the curriculum. Our curriculum coordinator, Dr. Jeanne Klockow, began by devising an overall framework for the curriculum, to tie it to other Conservation Initiative (CI) projects being funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, one of which calls for the creation of an Environmental Education

Strategy for all of southern Nevada. Dr. Klockow's framework ensures that the RRDLIC curriculum will complement the objectives of the area-wide strategic plan.

Dr. Klockow also authored a rationale for the curriculum design that addresses the mission statement of the BLM, the objectives of the SNPLMA Education in the Environment initiatives, the mission statement of the RRDLIC, and the needs of the Clark County School District. This document assists in keeping all stakeholders moving toward the same vision.

As part of the overall curriculum coordination, Dr. Klockow developed a timeline for development of the curriculum and a process by which "strands," or lesson plans are created.

Science Curriculum

When the university entered the project in June 2005, a decision had already been made to create an inquiry-based curriculum designed around "essential questions," and the Educational Programs Committee was completing work on the science (ecosystem) curriculum. A total of eight science strands were completed by the committee in calendar year 2004 – four in Physical Science/Earth Science and four in Biology/Ecology. This curriculum was developed with the assistance of teachers in the Clark County School District along with researchers from the Desert Research Institute.

Core Curriculum

While the Educational Programs Committee continued its work on the ecosystems curriculum, Dr. Klockow began coordinating the development of the broader core curriculum in concert with the BLM and other stakeholders. First, the university guided the development of eight desired common experiences in consultation with the Core Group – Understanding Ecosystems, Sustaining Health Ecosystems, Geology, Wild Horse & Burro, Historical, Cultural, Night Sky, and Green Building Technology. This became a critical blueprint by which the architects could complete schematic design, allowing them to adequately address all foreseeable venues that would be needed to deliver the curriculum.

Once those experiences were identified, the university created a prioritized timeline for writing curriculum for each area. To date, through the assistance of small working groups of stakeholders, work is 100 percent complete on the wild horse and burro curriculum and is 90 percent complete on the historical curriculum. The remainder of the core curriculum will be completed in year two (cultural, night sky, and green building technology). Each of these curricular strands is – like the science curriculum – modeled around essential questions that students and teachers will answer through on-site activities.

Daily Schedules

Another important consideration for the design and operation of the desert learning center was to ascertain whether the curriculum could reasonably be accommodated in a four-day/three-night schedule, as originally envisioned. The university thought it was equally important to see how the curriculum might translate into schedules of varying lengths, in order to provide a potential operator with maximum scheduling flexibility. In year one, the university completed the outlines for the following daily schedules:

- 4 days/3 nights
- 3 days/2 nights
- 2 days/1 night
- Single-day excursions

While these schedules are not intended to force a particular scheduling philosophy on the school operator, they serve as an important guidepost in assisting the agency and the Core Group to determine if adequate plans have been made for circulation of students around the site, safety and security, recreation, and other concerns. The additional scheduling options have also been useful in discussions with the Clark County School District, because it has an interest in having more fifth-grade students experience the center than would be possible with solely a 4-day/3-night option.

Curriculum Coordination

Because of the number of education programs the university has underway across several SNPLMA Conservation Initiatives, the university formed a Curriculum Advisory Team of local teachers and agency personnel to review and advise us on the curriculum our staff is writing for various SNPLMA projects – including Oliver Ranch, Forever Earth, Discover Mojave Outdoor World, and others. UNLV’s Curriculum Advisory Team has representatives from groups that are not currently represented on the RRDLC Educational Programs Committee, including home-school teachers, charter school teachers, private school teachers, and local museums – all of whom are important constituents for SNPLMA place-based education initiatives.

As Dr. Klockow produces curriculum with the RRDLC working groups, the UNLV Curriculum Advisory Team is asked to provide feedback along with the Educational Programs Committee. This further ensures a broad spectrum of community input and buy-in into the center’s curriculum.

Qualitative Summary: Subtask 2

The university’s involvement in Subtask 2 has been especially rewarding and productive over Year 1 of the task agreement. The agency has given the university a large degree of autonomy to move forward with curriculum development based on the agreed upon rationale and framework. The agency did request – as curricular strands are developed – that the university ensure the BLM mission is adequately addressed in each strand. In response, Dr. Klockow has involved agency staff from a variety of divisions in the review of curriculum as strands are drafted.

Both the agency and community stakeholders appear to be very happy with the direction and pace of the curriculum development. Dr. Klockow provides a progress report at each Core Group meeting and ensures that the members receive written documentation at each step in the process. Thus, the curriculum is being developed through an extremely collaborative, inclusive, and open process.

Task 3: Operational Analysis

Provide coordination for the business model with curriculum development to elucidate the potential operations and maintenance cost and projected revenues for the School as the design evolves and potential funding sources are more predictable. The activities will be conducted at least in part by university faculty, staff and students as part of the university’s research, teaching, and service mission.

Deliverables: The tasked coordination will be developed as the curriculum and design evolves. These plans will include estimated operational and maintenance costs and projected revenues. Progress on these business plans will be submitted in quarterly

reports to BLM and will be prepared at least in part by university faculty, staff and graduate and undergraduate students.

Year-To-Date Progress: June 2004-June 2005

On September 2, 2004, the university sought further clarification from Project Coordinator Michael Reiland about what the agency wanted completed under Subtask 3. The university offered to develop a framework of basic structural elements for a business plan that could be included with the proposed statement of work for an operator, but the project coordinator directed the university to take no action in this area until an operator is hired. At that time, he viewed the university's role as coordinating the operator's business plan with the school curriculum and ensuring that each supports the other as the project moves forward.

Qualitative Summary: Subtask 3

The university believes it could have made an important contribution to the project had it been allowed to lend its expertise to providing a framework for a business plan, by working with faculty in the College of Business. The agency had concerns about allowing the university to do so, as it may be a potential bidder to operate the school. However, we believe the development of an overall financial framework, containing comprehensive budgetary categories required to operate such a center, would assist the agency in understanding critical elements about the operation of the facility that should be answered in advance of issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Task 4: Community Coordination

Provide community outreach coordination to the public and facilitate collaborative processes with the Oliver Ranch committees including but not limited to the core committee and its designated subcommittees as outlined in the current BLM Oliver Ranch minutes. This role will include the calling of meetings, development of meeting agenda, recording and distribution of minutes, meeting facilitation, and other communication and coordination as needed for the smooth functioning of the Oliver Ranch committees. This service will be provided at least in part by university faculty, staff and students as part of the university's research and service mission.

Deliverables: Community outreach activities will be recorded and reported quarterly. These may include over the two years public Web page development, printed brochures, public forums, radio and television spots, school visitations, and establishing a mechanism for accepting donations.

Year-To-Date Progress: June 2004-June 2005

Website

The university began working to create the RRDLC website in June 2004, soon after commencement of the task agreement. The initial steps we took were to ascertain the federal regulations related to websites and where the project site could be housed. As noted under Subtask 1, the university began developing historical and factual documents for the planned website and discussed the look and feel of the site with the project coordinator. The university's web specialist devised a sitemap and then completed the design and content for agency approval.

The university learned that the RRDLC website was to be housed on the BLM-Las Vegas server, and the site went live in October 2004. Unfortunately, because of legal challenges to the federal BLM website, public access to the RRDLC site has been curtailed for most of the year. As a result, there has not been an accessible site for the Core Group or the public to visit for information about the project.

Community Outreach

Over the past year, the university took a number of steps toward implementing community outreach. Informational flyers about the RRDLC project were distributed at the Clark County Farm Festival in September 2004 and at the Summerlin Earth Faire in April 2005.

Beginning in September 2004, the project coordinator and the university began the first in a series of general presentations about the project to various groups in Southern Nevada, including the Local Partners Group, comprised of numerous stakeholders from local, state, and federal government who are working on various SNPLMA projects; the Southern Nevada Environmental Education Committee; the Environmental Law Society; the Outside Las Vegas Foundation; the River Mountain Trail Partnership; Friends of Red Rock Canyon; and the BLM Mojave South Resource Advisory Council.

In November 2004, Michael Reiland was interviewed about the project for an article in *Architectural Digest* and Nancy Flagg and Dr. Margaret Rees were interviewed for a taped segment on the UNLV-TV show *Academic Café*, which airs in the Southern Nevada metropolitan area on Cox Cable channel 70.

In January 2004, at the direction of the agency, UNLV began work on a written plan to define Subtask 4 outreach efforts. The university was instructed not to produce any further communication products until the plan was approved by the agency's public affairs officer. Unfortunately, between January and May 2005 the plan went through numerous drafts before it finally met with acceptance by the public affairs officer. Since May 2005, the university has started to implement the plan in collaboration with the agency. Both a marketing specialist and a public relations firm will assist with RRDLC outreach efforts in Year Two.

Fund-raising

During the past year, the Red Rock Interpretive Association was designated as the 501-c-3 organization of record to accept donations for the RRDLC project. To date, unsolicited cash donations total \$25,100 and an in-kind gift of a greenhouse have been received. In June 2004, the university began discussing potential fund-raising contacts with well-connected individuals in the non-profit fund-raising field. Although a great deal of information, surveys, and data have been collected by the university, the Fund-Raising and Partnership Committee has not taken any initial actions toward a fund-raising plan. The committee chair believes that fund-raising should wait until the project is farther along and critical issues – such as water source, operator, and EA – have been settled satisfactorily.

Qualitative Summary: Subtask 4

Although some positive gains have been made under Subtask 4 during the first year of the task agreement, the university has experienced some frustration in trying to execute a broader array of community outreach efforts. Much of this has to do with the complex and time-consuming approval process required by the agency and a lack of timely response by agency personnel. We

have been informed that materials about the project require approval not only by the local agency but also by the state BLM office. This cumbersome process does not provide the flexibility needed to produce collateral material in a timely manner.

A second, critical roadblock has been the number of unresolved project issues that have made it difficult to initiate public outreach. For example, the fact that the water source for the project remains unresolved, along with an environmental assessment that is not completed and delays in selecting an operator, make it very difficult to move forward with public communication about the project, because these are three essential questions that cannot yet be answered. The university continues to try to work around these matters where possible, but the effective timing of public outreach remains a concern.

A third issue hampering effective outreach is the fact that – as noted under Subtask 1 – project decisions are sometimes made by the agency that can affect public communication, yet the university does not learn about them until after the fact.

The university will redouble its efforts to resolve these issues as outreach efforts intensify in Year Two. We believe the outreach plan for Subtask 4 will serve as an effective blueprint for these efforts, while knowing that flexibility will be important as aspects of the project change over time.

Submitted by: _____

Margaret Rees, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator