

2006

## Oliver Ranch Science School Complex & Wild Horse and Burro Facility: Annual Progress Report, Year Ending June 30, 2006

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## **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT**

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Year Ending June 30, 2006

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 2005-June 2006**

#### **Core Group Coordination**

Over the past year and a half, 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. The documentation from meetings is provided electronically to all core group members on a monthly basis.

In Year 2 of the project, agendas and minutes were produced for Core Group meetings on July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18, and December 6, 2005, and January 17 and March 21, 2006. The Bureau of Land Management has elected not to hold any meetings since March 2006 but hopes to schedule at least one in Fall 2006.

### Historical Documentation

In addition to providing detailed minutes, the university 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 an archival 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 RRDLC 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. It, too, is posted on the website and is regularly updated as the project progresses.

Each of these products has been provided with previous quarterly reports.

### Coordination of Public Meetings

In January and April 2006, the university was asked to plan several public hearings on behalf of BLM. The January open house was intended to provide a general overview of the project to the Las Vegas community. We reserved a meeting room, developed a mailing list, and created a flyer, before being informed by BLM at the last minute that the hearing was being cancelled for unspecified reasons.

At the March 21, 2006, Core Group meeting, the BLM announced that it was going to proceed with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, apparently as a result of findings contained in the Environmental Analysis (EA) report completed by Otak, Inc. As part of the EIS process, the university was asked to plan the first of several proscribed public hearings in either April or May. We again reserved a meeting room and began preparations for the public notice, but that meeting, too, was ultimately cancelled for unspecified reasons. Since May 2006, we have intermittently been put on alert by the BLM Project Coordinator to be ready to reschedule the EIS public hearings, but as of the writing of this report the EIS still has not been formally noticed as required by federal regulations and, thus, the hearings cannot yet be scheduled.

As a result of the delays, which pushed the planned public hearings past the original ending date of the university's task agreement (June 30, 2006), the agency received approval from the state office to extend the task agreement through December 31, 2006, in the hopes that the university will be able to assist with meetings, public hearings, and outreach activities during Fall 2006.

## **Qualitative Summary: Subtask 1**

A continuing frustration of the university and the Core Group during the second year of the cooperative agreement has been a general lack of information about key meetings held by the agency on such issues as water, power, rights of way, budget, school operator, etc., as well as a lack of inclusion in these meetings. It is difficult for the university to assist the agency with project coordination and public outreach when the cooperator is not fully in the loop. The

university often learns about new developments only when they are announced to the Core Group.

Since March 2006, the project effectively appears to be completely stalled (with the exception of continuing work on the architectural drawings). Little information is forthcoming from the agency except for routine reassurances that all is proceeding well.

## **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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 2005-June 2006**

### **Curriculum Framework**

The area in which the university has made its greatest contribution to the Oliver Ranch project during the term 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 that would closely tie it to the objectives of the area-wide Conservation Education and Interpretation strategic plan funded by another SNPLMA Conservation Initiative proposal. We also produced a written rationale for the curriculum design that addressed the mission statement of the BLM, the objectives of the CE&I strategic plan, the mission statement of the RRDLC, and the needs of the Clark County School District. This document ensured all stakeholders moved toward the same vision. Finally, Dr. Klockow developed a timeline for development of the curriculum and a process by which “strands,” or lesson plans, were created.

All of these products were previously submitted with quarterly reports and will be compiled into a curriculum binder for the agency at the close of this task agreement.

### **Ecosystem Science Curriculum**

When the university entered the project in June 2004, a decision had already been made to create an inquiry-based curriculum designed around “essential questions,” and an Educational Programs Committee, chaired by Dr. Paul Buck of the Desert Research Institute, was completing work on the Ecosystem Science curriculum. A total of eight science strands were completed by the

committee in calendar year 2004 – four in Physical Science/Geology and four in Biology/Ecology. This curriculum was developed by teachers in the Clark County School District along with researchers from the Desert Research Institute. The finished product will be included in a aforementioned curriculum binder at the close of this task agreement.

#### Core Curriculum

Upon the commencement of this task agreement, the university's Education Curriculum Coordinator began developing the broader core curriculum in concert with the BLM and other stakeholders. The core curriculum 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.

As documented in our Year 1 Annual Report, in 2004-05 the university guided the development of five desired common experiences in consultation with the Core Group

- Cultural Connections
- Green Building Technology
- Historical Figures
- Night Sky
- Wild Horse & Burro.

In Year 2 (2005-06), small working groups of stakeholders were assembled to complete essential questions and lesson plan activities for these 5 core topics. Work on the core curriculum was fully completed in Year 2 of the task agreement and all materials will be provided as a formal product to the Bureau of Land Management when the final close-out report for this project is submitted.

#### American Indian Correlations

As noted in the university's last quarterly report, in Fall 2005 a meeting was held with agency personnel and a Southern Paiute tribal leader to discuss a strategy of how to best integrate the American Indian perspective within the core curriculum. Based on that meeting, in Spring 2006 the Education Curriculum Coordinator formed a work group comprised of local American Indian schoolteachers, which correlated and integrated the Native American perspective throughout the curriculum by editing and revising lesson plans in each of the five core topic areas. This work was completed as of April 2006 and has been fully incorporated into all lesson plans.

#### Integration with BLM Mission

At the request of the agency, the university ensured that the core curriculum was correlated to appropriate aspects of the Bureau of Land Management's overall mission. The intent was to ensure that the school operator would be provided with tools to address the agency's mission. This work, which was conducted in collaboration with local BLM personnel, was completed in Year 2 of the task agreement (*see enclosed*).

#### Curriculum Pilot Workshops

In Year Two of the task agreement, the Education Curriculum Coordinator assembled a team of local schoolteachers and university personnel to create and conduct piloting workshops for both pre-service UNLV students and novice Clark County School District teachers. Five pilot workshops were conducted at Spring Mountain Ranch State Park and the Oliver Ranch site to a total of 55 local teachers on the following dates:

February 23, 2006 – Wild Horse & Burro  
March 18, 2006 – Science curriculum  
March 25, 2006 – Science curriculum and Historical Figures curriculum  
April 1, 2006 – Science curriculum  
May 6, 2006 – Historical Figures curriculum

The workshops were provided as a graduate-level course (CIG 600) for in-service teachers. At these workshops, local schoolteachers modeled the lesson plans and provided valuable feedback. Samples of the lesson plans for the Wild Horse and Burro session, the Science I and II sessions, and the Historical Figures sessions are provided with this report.

The purpose of the curriculum piloting was to ascertain if it was valid and useful to teachers and could be implemented as intended. To assess the effectiveness of the piloted curriculum, UNLV's Center for Assessment and Evaluation -- under the direction of Dr. Gregory Schraw and Dr. Lori Olafson of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction -- developed an assessment instrument to measure the validity of the curriculum and the teachers' response to it.

### **Qualitative Summary: Subtask 2**

The university's involvement in Subtask 2 has been especially rewarding and productive over Years 1 and 2 of the task agreement. The agency gave the university a large degree of autonomy to move forward with curriculum development based on the agreed upon rationale and framework. The curriculum was developed through an extremely collaborative, inclusive, and open process. By all reports, the agency and the various stakeholders have been pleased with the curriculum products, and we believe they

We believe we have produced a substantive body of work that will provide the agency, the eventual school operator, and community partners with a very good foundation for delivering effective environmental education to local schoolchildren. This foundation includes:

- A curriculum design rationale and framework.
- Sample 1-day, 3-day, and 4-day operational schedules.
- Core curriculum lesson plans in 5 topical areas, making full use of the campus property and facilities.
- Correlations to the BLM mission in each of the 5 topical areas.
- Correlations to American Indian customs and traditions in each of the 5 topical areas.
- Summary results and recommendations from teacher evaluations of the core curriculum.

### **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 2005-June 2006**

During Year 1, 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 was hired.

As delays in hiring an operator became an ongoing problem, the university and the agency began discussions about modifying the task agreement to permit the use of Subtask 3 funds toward Subtask 2, for the purpose of conducting the curriculum pilot workshops. The CESU Research Coordinator authorized this action to be undertaken at the local level, and the appropriate paperwork was signed by the BLM Las Vegas Associate Field Manager, Angie Lara, and by Project Coordinator Michael Reiland in December 2005.

In May 2006, the university was informed by a new contracting officer in the Nevada State Office that a formal modification to move funding between subtasks should have been processed through the state office. The appropriate paperwork was submitted in May 2006 and approved in June 2006.

### **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. The agency had concerns about allowing the university to do so, as it was thought, at that time, to be a potential bidder to operate the school. However, delays in issuing a Request for Proposals for an operator revealed serious deficiencies from having no business plan in place prior to the issuance of an RFP. We believe the development of an overall financial framework would have assisted the agency in better understanding critical elements about the operation of the facility and would have led to a more comprehensive and informative 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 2005-June 2006**

#### **Website**

As reported in the Year One Annual Report, the university created the RRDLC website in October 2004. The initial steps we took were to ascertain the federal regulations related to agency websites and where the project site could be housed. As noted under Subtask 1, the university began developing historical and factual documents for the website and discussed the look and feel of the site with the agency project coordinator. The university's web specialist devised a sitemap and then completed the design and content for agency approval. The website was ultimately housed on the BLM-Las Vegas Field Office site, due to federal regulations. Unfortunately, because of legal challenges concerning the federal BLM website, public access to the Las Vegas Office site – and, by extension the RRDLC site – was curtailed for much of the duration of this task agreement. When public access to the website was restored in early spring, the university provided updated website information to the project coordinator for uploading to the BLM-Las Vegas site. Unfortunately, since March 2006 this information has not been uploaded by BLM and, thus, the RRDLC website information currently available to the public remains outdated.

#### **Community Outreach**

In January 2004, at the direction of the agency, UNLV began work on a written plan to define Subtask 4 outreach efforts. Following numerous drafts, a plan was approved by the agency in May 2005. In Year 2 of the agreement, the university had hoped to begin executing some of the priorities in the outreach plan. Unfortunately, most of the outreach efforts the university has proposed were put on hold by the agency, primarily due to the continuing uncertainties about the viability of the project and when to go public with it on a broader scale.

One pertinent example was the effort to produce a newsletter-brochure about the project as a general information piece for Las Vegas residents. This one project took more than 9 months to receive review and approval from BLM personnel, after which the agency asked that it not be distributed.

The lack of outreach products has created somewhat of a vicious circle with respect to the RRDLC project as a whole. The Las Vegas Field Office Manager commented on a lack of formal



buy-in to the project – both from local residents as well as the Clark County School District – when he spoke at the March 18 Core Group meeting, but the community has not been informed enough about the project to elicit the grass-roots support that would assist the agency in its efforts to complete the project.

To date, community outreach efforts remain stalled based on the continuing uncertainties about the project.

#### Fund-raising

The Red Rock Interpretive Association was designated as the 501-c-3 organization of record to accept donations for the RRDLC project. The university compiled a great deal of general fund-raising information, surveys, and data for the Southern Nevada region, but neither the agency nor the Core Group have been willing to move forward on private fund-raising until critical issues – such as water source, operator, and EIS – have been settled satisfactorily. As with the community outreach component, this hesitancy to move forward on fund-raising and visibility among the business/corporate community, in our view, has not helped the project overall.

One example of this was manifested in the feedback from potential operators to the Request for Information (RFI) the BLM issued in January 2006. The RFI makes clear that any operator of the RRDLC will be responsible for raising substantial private funds for basic operational needs of the school. Given this serious constraint, it is difficult to make the project attractive to potential operators when no groundwork has been laid for private fund-raising within the local community. If, however, a potential operator were to submit a bid knowing that one or more major corporations were behind the project with pledges of cash and/or equipment, it would undoubtedly change the desirability of the project from an operator's viewpoint.

### **Qualitative Summary: Subtask 4**

Although some positive gains under Subtask 4 were made during the first year of the task agreement, the university has experienced frustration in Year 2 with respect to executing community outreach efforts. A critical roadblock has been the number of continuing unresolved project issues (water source, operator, EIS) that have negatively affected the agency's willingness to move forward with public outreach. Yet, as noted above, the hesitancy has – in our view – hurt the project overall because it has led to too little information about the project being made available to the local community. We believe this project could have sold itself very effectively and garnered increasing public support, as nearly everyone involved to date believes it to be a project that would add real value to the education of local schoolchildren.

With the exception of forward movement on the architectural drawings, as near as the university has been informed the project appears to be solidly stalled due to unresolved project issues and a lack of support from national BLM. As a result, the university has been unable to make further progress on Subtasks 1 and 4. Subtask 2 is completed and Subtask 3 was eliminated.

We stand ready to assist the agency with further project coordination and public outreach through the end of this task agreement (December 31, 2006), when and if we receive the go-ahead from the Las Vegas Field Office.

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Margaret Rees, Ph.D.  
Principal Investigator