

Ride Responsibly

The desert is a delicate ecosystem. It can survive sparse water and intense heat but not the effects of human activities. Illegal and inappropriate OHV use has resulted in soil compaction, habitat degradation and fragmentation, and erosion. It can take the desert more than 100 years to heal from this damage. Please stay on designated routes or in approved washes. By using common sense and courtesy, following the laws and posted signs, you can help ensure that what is available today will be here to enjoy tomorrow. Find more information at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office and on kiosks throughout the area.



Help Protect Your Valuable Resources

- Drive only on designated routes and obey posted signs. Keep dogs on leash.
- Park your vehicle or set up camp in previously used or disturbed areas.
- Pack out trash. Waste takes longer to decompose in the desert, and also increases raven populations.
- Watch for tortoises on roads and trails, especially during and after rains.
- Look under your car before driving away. Tortoises rest in the shade of parked cars.
- Practice TREAD Lightly and Leave No Trace principles. Visit these websites for more information:

→ www.treadlightly.org

→ www.lnt.org

Bureau of Land Management

Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

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Off-highway Vehicles in the Chuckwalla ACEC

BLM

California • Palm Springs South Coast Field Office

Chuckwalla Area of Critical Environmental Concern

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) established the Chuckwalla Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect the federally listed threatened desert tortoise and 38 special status plant and animal species. This region historically contained some of the highest known densities of desert tortoises in California. In addition to its importance to the desert tortoise, this region contains some of the most diversified Sonoran Desert flora in California.

So What Makes This Place So Special?

The ACEC is in the heart of the Colorado Desert, a subsection of the Sonoran Desert that extends from the Colorado River west to the Peninsular Mountain Range and from the Mojave Desert south to the Mexican border. The area was formed by the merging of numerous alluvial fans, broad flat areas of sediment deposits flowing off nearby mountains. The ACEC was then carved by washes and embellished by vast stretches of desert pavement. The unique climate is warmer than most deserts and almost never frosts. In addition, the Colorado Desert experiences two different "rainy" seasons, one in late summer and one in winter. This unique combination of temperatures and rain events creates optimum conditions for many unique plants, including spring wildflowers and summer annuals, which in turn support unique wildlife.



Peninsular Desert Bighorn

We Call This Home

The Chuckwalla ACEC is the home of many unique species. It is a refuge for the threatened desert tortoise and the endangered Peninsular desert bighorn sheep. It is home to the rare 10-foot-high Munz's cholla cactus and the Mecca aster. It contains



Munz's Cholla

desert palm oases, found only in the Colorado Desert, which provide habitat for Western yellow bats, bobcats, and California king snakes. The oases and washes provide habitat for a variety of resident and migratory bird species not normally found in the desert, such as the Western screech-owl and the hooded oriole.

Desert Tortoise Facts (*Gopherus agassizii*)

Status: Threatened species

Lifespan: 80-100 years

Weight: 8-15 lbs.

Length (carapace): 9-15"

Height: 4- 6"

Mating Season: Aug.-Oct.

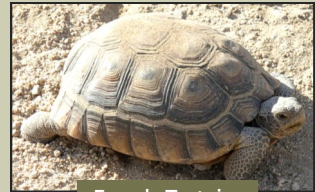
No. Of Eggs: 2-14

Sexual maturity: 10- 20 years of age

Incubation Period: 90-120 days

Typical diet: Herbs, grasses, and wildflowers

- Only about **five** out of every 100 hatchlings will survive to become an adult tortoise.
- For the first six to eight years, the young tortoise's shell is no thicker than your fingernail, and therefore, it is easy prey for many other desert animals, especially the raven.
- To survive in the desert, the tortoise estivates (remains underground in its burrow) during the hottest times of the day during the summer and hibernates (sleeps underground in its burrow) during the cold of winter.



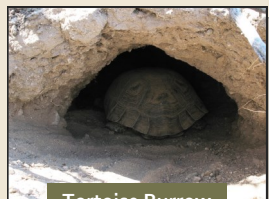
Female Tortoise

Protecting the Desert Tortoise

Desert tortoises were once abundant in the California deserts. Unfortunately their populations have declined 90 percent since the 1950s, mostly due to human activities. This has reduced or fragmented suitable habitat and led to increased roadkills, illegal collecting for pets, and predation, mostly by ravens. Tortoises are also vulnerable to diseases transmitted through releasing unwanted pets or human contact.

Tortoise Burrows

Tortoises can survive surface temperatures exceeding 140°F by retreating to underground burrows where temperatures remain at about 72° F year-round. The entrance to a tortoise burrow is shaped like a half-moon. They are most often found along a wash or under a bush. Tortoises spend about 95 percent of their life in their burrows, an adaptation to desert life. Driving off designated routes can crush these underground tortoises, their burrows and their food sources. Washes in the ACEC are closed to vehicular travel unless specifically designated as open.

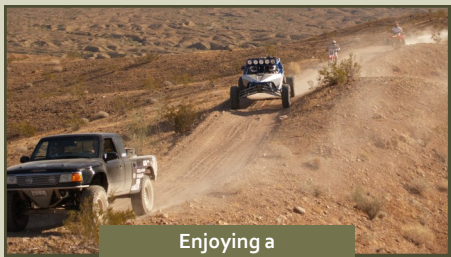


Tortoise Burrow

Chuckwalla Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Off-Highway Vehicles in the ACEC

The ACEC is designated as a Limited Use Area for off-highway vehicle traffic. This means that OHVs are permitted in the ACEC but must stay on designated routes or in washes specifically designated as open. Any wash in a Wilderness Area is closed, as well as additional closed-wash sections in the ACEC that are crucial desert tortoise habitat. It is your responsibility to know which washes are open. The map in this brochure is also posted on kiosks throughout the ACEC. More information can be found at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office.



Enjoying a Designated Route

Where can I Drive or Ride?

In the California Desert, all public lands are placed in one of three vehicle use categories:

Open Areas are open to vehicle use anywhere within the posted boundaries. Travel off established routes is permitted. There are **NO** open riding areas in the DWMA, SRMA, or Riverside County.

Closed Areas are closed to all motorized vehicle use, including Wilderness units, which are open only to hikers and horseback riders.

Limited Areas are open to motorized vehicle use but use is limited to *designated routes*, posted with the sign pictured here. No cross-country travel is permitted. The Chuckwalla ACEC and Meccacopia SRMA are limited areas.

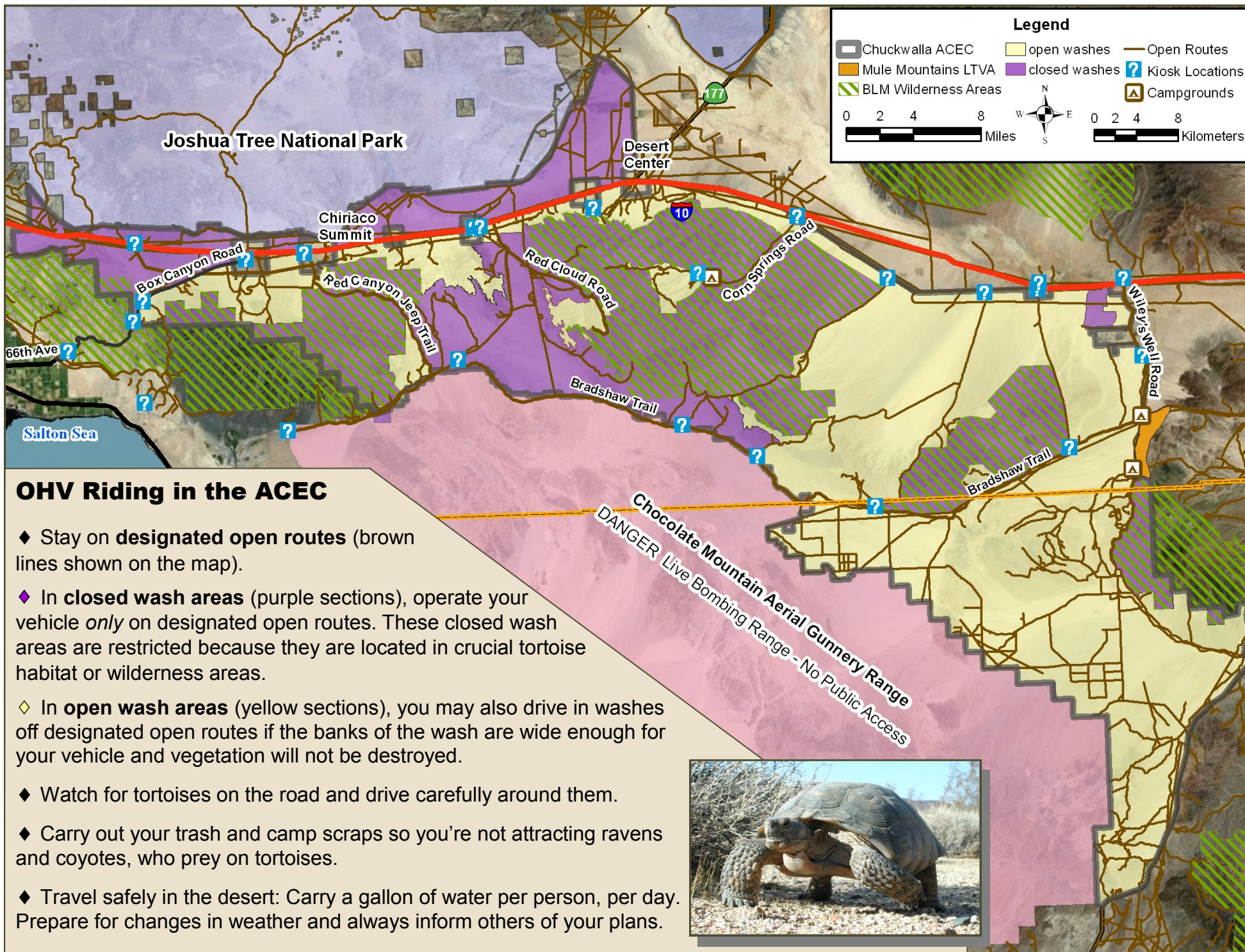


Within Limited Use Areas, routes of travel are designated as either OPEN, LIMITED, or CLOSED.

Open Routes are open to all motorized vehicle use, subject to posted restrictions such as driving only on designated routes. Examples are Red Cloud and Summit Road.

Limited Routes are designated routes open to motorized vehicle travel subject to certain use restrictions. The Meccacopia Trail is closed from June 1 to September 30 to protect wildlife access to critical water sources.

Closed Routes are closed to all vehicle use except for emergency or administrative use.



OHV Riding in the ACEC

- ◆ Stay on **designated open routes** (brown lines shown on the map).
- ◆ In **closed wash areas** (purple sections), operate your vehicle *only* on designated open routes. These closed wash areas are restricted because they are located in crucial tortoise habitat or wilderness areas.
- ◆ In **open wash areas** (yellow sections), you may also drive in washes off designated open routes if the banks of the wash are wide enough for your vehicle and vegetation will not be destroyed.
- ◆ Watch for tortoises on the road and drive carefully around them.
- ◆ Carry out your trash and camp scraps so you're not attracting ravens and coyotes, who prey on tortoises.
- ◆ Travel safely in the desert: Carry a gallon of water per person, per day. Prepare for changes in weather and always inform others of your plans.

