

Piedras Blancas Light Stations Outstanding Natural Area Native Plant Restoration

Bakersfield Field Office

A small vegetative miracle is occurring at the Piedras Blancas Light Station thanks to the efforts of dedicated BLM volunteers, staff, and community involvement. When the BLM took over management of the Piedras Blancas Light Station in 2001 the site was covered with an almost continuous carpet of iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulus* and *C. chilensis*). More than 40 other species of non-native plants have also been identified (Figure 1).



Iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulus*)

The decision was made to eliminate non-native vegetation on the site and allow native plants to return. The procedures used vary. Where there are existing native plants we pull by hand, being careful not to disturb the ground because of archeological considerations. In areas where there is a solid monoculture of iceplant growing in dense accumulations an herbicide can be used, in accordance with BLM protocol (Figure 2).

Volunteers and staff have identified over 70 native plant species on the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Most survived under the iceplant or in pockets on the site. It has been rewarding to see how quickly native plants recover in areas where the non-natives have been removed (Native plant photos/before and after photos).

We are already seeing the benefits. There has been an increase in the number of birds using the native plant areas and an increase in the number and species of butterflies, moths, and other insects inhabiting the restored areas (Figure 3).

One of the huge successes at the Piedras Blancas Light Station involves the sensitive native plant species, compact cobwebby thistle (*Cirsium occidentale* var. *compactum* – CNPS List 1B.2, Rare, threatened or endangered in California and elsewhere). When the BLM took over in 2001 only 1 individual specimen was found. However, it is one of the first native plants to return to an area cleared of invasive non-native plants. Spring surveys in 2005 and 2006 yielded several hundred cobwebby thistle plants (Figure 4).

As of January, 2007 over 600 tons of dried iceplant have been removed. A total of over 18,000 volunteer hours have been logged in the effort, including around 1750 hours of outside community group assistance. It is with great appreciation that we thank all who have contributed their time and efforts.

Text: http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bakersfield/Programs/pbls/plant_restoration.html

Images: http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/bakersfield/Programs/pbls/plant_photos.html

Piedras Blancas Light Station Outstanding Natural Area Native Plant Restoration Photos



Figure 1. View looking west from top of the light tower, 2001. Iceplant!



Figure 2. Volunteers pull iceplant away from native plants.



Figure 3. White crowned sparrow on lupine.



Figure 4. *Cirsium occidentale* var. *compactum*

Before and after photos



Figure 5. The west tip of Point Piedras Blancas, March 2002.



Figure 6. The west tip of Point Piedras Blancas, April 2004



Figure 7. Along sidewalk to tower, December 2002



Figure 8. Along sidewalk to tower, April 2006

Native Plants



Dune buckwheat, *Eriogonium parvifolium*



Hedge-nettle, *Stachys bullata*



Seaside woolly yarrow, *Eriophyllum staechadifolium*



Seaside daisy, *Erigeron glaucus*



California poppy/seaside poppy,
Eschscholzia californica var. *maritima*



Coastal bush (tree) lupine,
Lupinus arboreus

