

Freeman Property (Truckhaven/Desert Cahuilla)

Informational Update #1 (April, 2008)

By California State Parks

Pertaining to the management and general planning efforts underway for the property referred to as the “Freeman Property”

Purpose

State Parks has received a number of responses from the public that include many thoughtful comments, concerns, interests, and insights into the Freeman Property and issues surrounding the planning for its current and long-term use and management.

The purpose of this first Update is to provide information to the public concerning the current status and future direction of the planning efforts underway for the Freeman Property as well as the Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Areas (SVRA) general planning efforts.

State Parks is in the early stages of the planning process and this Update is the first of several intended to be issued as the process unfolds in order to provide interested individuals, organizations, and stakeholders with information about the planning process, including intended opportunities along the way for public participation.

This information and future updates will be posted on the State Parks website at: www.parks.ca.gov (go to General Plans and then under General Plans in Progress link, http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21312) or www.ohv.parks.ca.gov (go to Planning and then under General Plans link).

If you have questions or comments, please direct them to:

freemanpropertyinfo@parks.ca.gov

Responses to your questions will be posted to the Freeman website or answered in the next Informational Update, depending on the nature of the question.

Status to Date

Resource surveys and inventories: Since acquiring the property in August of 2006, State Parks with either its own staff or through independent contractors has begun the

survey efforts needed to identify past and current uses and the presence and location of sensitive plants, wildlife, paleontological resources as well as cultural resources. Several additional contracts are in the process of being awarded with work to begin shortly.

Interim management, operation, and enforcement: State Parks, through its staff at both the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA), has been coordinating their efforts to identify immediate threats to sensitive natural and cultural resources, take steps to provide protective measures and patrol the lands to provide for resource protection, public safety and private property protection upon request. State Parks' staff is in contact with interested groups and individuals and comments may be addressed to the website as well. Information from the public and the resource surveys is used to help identify areas where immediate enforcement and other protective measures are needed pending the development of long-term management measures and solutions for the property through the planning effort. These efforts will continue to adapt and improve as State Parks gathers more information from its surveys and from the public and as it gains in experience with the properties.

Planning contracts: Additionally, State Parks has selected a contractor to carry out the planning effort for three of the State Park properties in the region: the Freeman Property, Ocotillo Wells SVRA, and Heber Dunes SVRA. As soon as the contract is approved, EDAW will begin work on the processes that will be needed to carry out the planning efforts for these properties. The first phase of the EDAW contract will be to review existing information as well as information from the surveys underway and to establish the work plans for each of the three separate planning efforts at the Freeman, Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes properties as discussed more fully below.

CEQA process: Finally, State Parks commenced in a more official sense the planning process by issuing and filing in December 2007 a Notice of Preparation required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Responses have been received and evaluated.

An Outline of the Planning Process

As a result of the efforts to date, State Parks has developed the planning process in a little more detail. When the planning contract with EDAW is effective, EDAW will begin its work to develop the separate planning processes for each of the three properties in greater detail, including the processes for public participation.

In anticipation of EDAW coming on board, State Parks has reached the following conclusions in order to provide guidance to the process:

Planning area focus: Planning for the three park areas: Freeman Property, Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes will proceed as three separate processes focused on those three areas.

- The Freeman Property will have its own unique separate planning process in light of its unique status of geological, natural and cultural resources and its history of motorized vehicle use.
- Ocotillo Wells will result in an update and amendment to the existing General Plan for the SVRA, which is many years old.
- Heber Dunes, as a new unit to the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Program, will result in a new General Plan for the SVRA .

As each of the areas will have their own separate processes; they may or may not be conducted strictly parallel with one another in time. This will depend on the ability to establish and have staffing available for the three planning teams. In any event, cumulative and interface effects of uses on one property as it affects another or affects adjacent lands will be analyzed. Ultimately, an objective for the Freeman Property and the Ocotillo Wells SVRA is that the planning efforts will converge for CEQA purposes so as to allow for concurrent public review of the environmental effects of the planning results for each area.

The Freeman Planning Process

The Freeman planning process will proceed in three steps:

Step 1. Discovery/Project Definition Step

As noted when the property was acquired, given its unique status with regard to sensitive natural and cultural resources, the ultimate use, protection, and operation/management of the property cannot be anticipated until the property is adequately surveyed, inventoried, and appropriate science applied to determine the level of resource protection that may be necessary.

Thus, this step, referred to as the discovery or project definition step, will involve the resource surveys of plants, wildlife, paleontological, and cultural resources and the application of current best science to define lands requiring resource protection and

conservation. Additionally, this step will produce an inventory of existing motorized vehicle use to establish recreational demands and conflicts with areas defined for preservation and conservation.

In the results of this step, land areas will be defined and delineated for resource protection and conservation and/or for appropriate vehicle recreation and visitor serving facilities. The final product of this step will be a more refined project definition that will be used for steps two and three; general planning and environmental evaluation pursuant to CEQA.

Step 2. General Planning

This step will involve the administrative and programmatic planning needed to define the available alternatives, policies, management requirements and operational measures that will provide for long-term conservation, recreation, and operation of the lands defined in step 1.

This general planning step will also involve public participation to receive comments for desired policies and practices for resource protection, recreation and visitor serving facilities.

The result of this general planning step will be the selection of the preferred alternative for conservation, recreation, management and operation of the lands. In addition, planning recommendations will be made at this step concerning the final classification of the lands for operational purposes and the organizational entity or entities within State Parks most appropriate for long-term management and administration of the lands.

Step 3. Environmental Analysis

This step will result in the more formalized analysis of the environmental impacts of the preferred alternative selected for the conservation, management and operation of the lands. Although each step will involve inventorying, evaluating and planning for resource and environmental protection and conservation, this step will bring the environmental analysis together into the form required by CEQA and, if and as needed, the National Environmental Policy Act. It is at this step that mitigation measures or policies are developed and formalized and a monitoring plan developed for any impacts that exceed levels of significance established for the defined project. Further, this step will provide appropriate analysis of cumulative effects and interactions among the other planning efforts.

What Happens Next?

Ongoing - Land, resource and use surveys, inventories, and mapping will continue on the Freeman Property.

April/May 2008 - The contract with EDAW will be finalized. EDAW will begin planning more detailed processes for the planning efforts.

June/July – Public information update on the planning processes.

August/September – Work plans for the planning processes will be prepared and the contractual scopes of work for the three separate park areas will be finalized and the EDAW planning contract updated to proceed with the three planning efforts.

Please let us know at the address listed above if you would like mailed or e-mailed notice of informational updates and upcoming events.

We look forward to making this process as meaningful as possible for all of you who have provided your comments and concerns to date and wish to continue to be involved with the planning process.

Thank you.

California State Parks