

News Release



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California State Parks
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California Coastal Commission to Consider Visitor Use at Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area

A proposal by California State Parks to institute interim vehicle use limits and establish a Technical Review Team to review data at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area will be heard at the February 14 meeting of the California Coastal Commission

The Commission meeting is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. and will be held at Embassy Suites, 333 Madonna Road, San Luis Obispo. No specific time is scheduled for discussion of the Oceano Dunes issue.

At issue is a proposed amendment to an existing coastal development permit that would institute interim vehicle use limits at the Oceano Dunes SVRA, formerly Pismo Dunes SVRA, and establish an interagency Technical Review Team to act as an advisory body to the ODSVRA Superintendent.

Vehicles have been driven on the beach at Oceano for at least 70 years. Prior to the 1980s, vehicles were operated on the entire 16 miles of beach from Pismo Beach to the north to Mussel Rock in San Barbara County to the south. Now, street-legal vehicles are allowed on about five miles of the beach south from Grand Avenue in the City of Grover Beach. OHVs are restricted to about three miles of the beach. The most southern and eastern portions of the SVRA are closed to vehicle use. State Parks' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division began active management of the SVRA in 1982. The SVRA encompasses 3,590 acres and includes about six miles of sandy beach; about 1,500 acres are available for OHV use.

The SVRA is a popular destination. Attendance figures for 2000 show there were more than 1.2 million visitors, including 686,997 day use visitors, 189,328 campers and 366,328 walk-in visitors. Figures show there were 365,079 vehicles, 77 percent of which were street legal vehicles and 23 percent were OHVs.

The recreation area is home to a number of sensitive threatened or endangered species. The OHMVR Division, which oversees Oceano Dunes and other SVRAs in the state system, believes that management actions must assure the survival of these species.

Coastal Commission staff is recommending interim limits of 3,000 street-legal vehicles per 24-hour period, 1,000 camping units (defined as one street-legal vehicle that enters the park under its own power), and a total of 2,000 off-highway vehicles per day. In addition, allowances may be made during an initial three-year period for street-legal and off-highway vehicle limits to be exceeded only during the four major holiday periods of Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day and Thanksgiving, in order to conduct a comprehensive monitoring and comparative analysis of historical levels of visitor uses and impacts during these highest attendance periods.

According to the Commission staff report, a means to evaluate visitor impacts and management effectiveness is critical to the establishment of interim vehicle use limits. The permit amendment proposed by State Parks would establish an interagency/stakeholder Technical Review Team for Oceano Dunes.

The Technical Review Team, which would be reviewed after three years as to its overall effectiveness, would review and consider data gathered from ongoing studies, as well as consider long-term trends on environmental condition and visitor use within the park, and would provide recommendations to the District Superintendent at Oceano Dunes. TRT membership would include representatives from the Coastal Commission, San Luis Obispo County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, an elected official from a local community, as well as representatives of local business, off-highway enthusiasts and environmental interests.

The TRT would be part of an adaptive management process that oversees on-going monitoring of both environmental and use trends in the park for the purpose of supporting decision-making about such things as total day and overnight use in the park. The staff report said such a process would allow for adjustments, based on what is learned over time, in not only allowable use limits, but other critical management concerns of the park as well.

“Rather than rely on a fixed number for day and overnight use, this approach provides a procedural framework for responding to changing environmental conditions and increases the overall success of management activities,” according to the report.

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors has endorsed and recommended the adaptive management approach contained in this proposal. The California Coastal Commission hearing and approval of the proposed amendment will be a critical step in assuring that responsible, data driven, objective management practices are employed in determining visitor use limits at Oceano Dunes. Sound management practices ensure both the health and vigor of the environment and the future of off-highway motor vehicle recreational use at Oceano Dunes.

The Oceano Dunes issue was originally scheduled to be heard at the Commission’s January meeting in Southern California. However, it was moved to the February meeting in San Luis Obispo because of the proximity and interest in the nearby Oceano Dunes.

The Coastal Commission staff report on the proposed permit amendment may be viewed on the Commission’s website at www.coastal.ca.gov Further information about Oceano Dunes SVRA is available on the SVRA website www.oceanodunes.com and may be also obtained by contacting the Oceano Dunes District Office at (805) 473-7230, or the OHMVR Division at (916) 324-4442, 1725 23rd Street, Suite 220, Sacramento, CA 95816.

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