
State of California – The Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION



NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the
Heber Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area General Plan

AND

Announcement of a Public Scoping Meeting

Date: January 21, 2010

To: State Clearinghouse, Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and Interested Individuals and Organizations

Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Heber Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area General Plan

Lead Agency: California Department of Parks and Recreation
Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division
Ocotillo Wells District
5172 Highway 78
P.O. Box 360
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
Contact: Kirk Shea, State Park Superintendent II

Consultant: AECOM
1420 Kettner Boulevard, Suite 500
San Diego, CA 92101
Phone: (619) 233-1454
Contact: Joan Isaacson, Senior Project Manager

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), as Lead Agency, is preparing a General Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for Heber Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA). CDPR has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) pursuant to Section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. This NOP informs agencies and the public that an EIR is being

prepared to address impacts to the natural and cultural resources and the human environment from implementation of a proposed General Plan for Heber Dunes SVRA. Additional information about the Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan process, including documents synthesizing initial research and analysis, is available at the project website (http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=26033).

An NOP that included the Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan EIR was previously distributed on December 12, 2007, under the title, "Notice of Preparation: Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Truckhaven/Desert Cahuilla and Ocotillo Wells General Plan." The December 12, 2007, NOP announced preparation of one EIR for one General Plan that would have applied to the following three land management units:

1. Ocotillo Wells SVRA (approximately 85,000 acres)
2. Truckhaven/Desert Cahuilla area (approximately 12,000 acres)
3. Heber Dunes SVRA (approximately 380 acres)

CDPR subsequently determined that a separate General Plan and associated EIR would be prepared for each land management unit. Thus, this NOP informs agencies and the public that an EIR is being prepared to address implementation of the proposed General Plan for Heber Dunes SVRA. Separate NOPs will be issued for the following land management units: Truckhaven/Desert Cahuilla area and Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

The Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan project vicinity is shown in Figure 1. The project description, location, and possible environmental effects are discussed in this NOP.

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Please send your written responses, including the name of a contact person, to the following:

Contact: Kirk Shea, State Park Superintendent II
California Department of Parks and Recreation
Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division
Ocotillo Wells District
5172 Highway 78
P.O. Box 360
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
Phone: (760) 767-1329
Email: kshea@parks.ca.gov

PROJECT TITLE

Heber Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area General Plan

PROJECT LOCATION

Heber Dunes SVRA is an off-highway vehicle (OHV) park operated by the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (OHMVR Division) of CDPR. Heber Dunes SVRA is

located within unincorporated Imperial County, situated approximately 10 miles southeast of the City of El Centro. Heber Dunes SVRA is located south of Interstate 8, west of State Route 7, and near the border with Mexico. Heber Dunes SVRA encompasses roughly 343 acres of sand dunes within a region largely dominated by agriculture. Figure 1 shows the project vicinity.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The General Plan is the primary management document for each unit of the California State Park System, establishing its primary purpose and a management direction for its future. Heber Dunes SVRA was operated by the County of Imperial for more than 30 years. It was deeded to CDPR in 2007. Thus, OHMVR Division has initiated the process of preparing the first General Plan and an associated EIR for Heber Dunes SVRA.

Preparation of the General Plan is in its early stages, so ultimate land use and resource management provisions have not yet been determined. Initial General Plan research and analysis efforts have included existing conditions research, public outreach, and identification of issues and opportunities. Based on the results of this effort, Planning Alternatives were developed to illustrate scenarios for how Heber Dunes SVRA may be improved over the long term. A draft Preferred Alternative has been generated based on evaluation of the Planning Alternatives by CDPR staff and the public (see Figure 2). A Preferred Alternative is a conceptual land use plan that will be used to prepare the General Plan. Documents presenting a synthesis of initial General Plan research and analysis efforts are available at the Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan project website (http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=26033).

Planning Areas will be used in the General Plan to allow goals and guidelines to be developed that reflect area-specific conditions. Planning areas will be based on geographic relationships, resource values, management issues and goals, and visitor use and experiences. These goals and guidelines will guide park management and provide long-term direction for future facilities. Such facilities may include new parking areas or access points, park maintenance facilities and on-site housing, a park administration building and visitor center, interpretive kiosks, restrooms, picnic areas and ramadas, and trail corridors. As a first step toward identifying Planning Areas, preliminary Use Areas have been established as part of the planning process (Figure 2). The preliminary Use Areas are described below.

Park Housing Area

This area would include facilities to support on-site staff housing and oversight of the park.

Entrance Use Area

The focus of this area is to provide adequate circulation along the Heber Dunes SVRA entrance road, wayfinding assistance, and information about responsible OHV use.

Heber Beach Activity Area

Heber Beach would be separated from other uses to create an area suitable for social gathering and passive recreation. Features of Heber Beach may include shade structures, barbeque facilities, fire pits, passive recreational facilities such as horseshoe pits, walking paths, and a “slow riding zone.”

Eastern Recreation Area

New trail alignments may be created within this area to provide an interesting riding experience that capitalizes on existing topography and vegetation.

Welcome Area

The Welcome Area would provide a place for visitors to obtain information about Heber Dunes SVRA and would formally introduce the CDPR presence at Heber Dunes SVRA.

Claypan Recreational Area

The Claypan Recreational Area would be an “open riding and driving” area, meaning that no circulatory restrictions would be placed on riding within this area. Opportunities would also be provided for other compatible forms of recreation and social gathering.

Dunes Recreational Area

The Dunes Riding Area would be an “open riding and driving” area. Opportunities would also be provided for other compatible forms of recreation and social gathering.

Interpretive Exhibit Area

An interpretive exhibit would be established within this area to convey information about Heber Dunes SVRA’s natural and cultural resources.

Resource Management Area

This area has been identified as a Resource Management Area because it contains the highest quality creosote scrub habitat within Heber Dunes SVRA. Trail routes as identified within this area would be available for OHV activity. Focused creosote scrub management efforts could occur within this area.

Perimeter Trail Area

The Perimeter Trail Area would be established to preserve the existing route that visitors use to ride OHVs around the outer limits of Heber Dunes SVRA.

General Plan Topics

Topics that are being considered as part of the General Plan process include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physical, biological, and aesthetic resources
- Cultural resources
- Land use and facilities
- Visitor use and experiences
- Operation and maintenance functions
- Planning influences, such as regional population projections and public input

- Motorized and nonmotorized recreational trends, opportunities, and constraints
- Access and circulation
- Law enforcement and public safety
- Education and interpretation opportunities

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

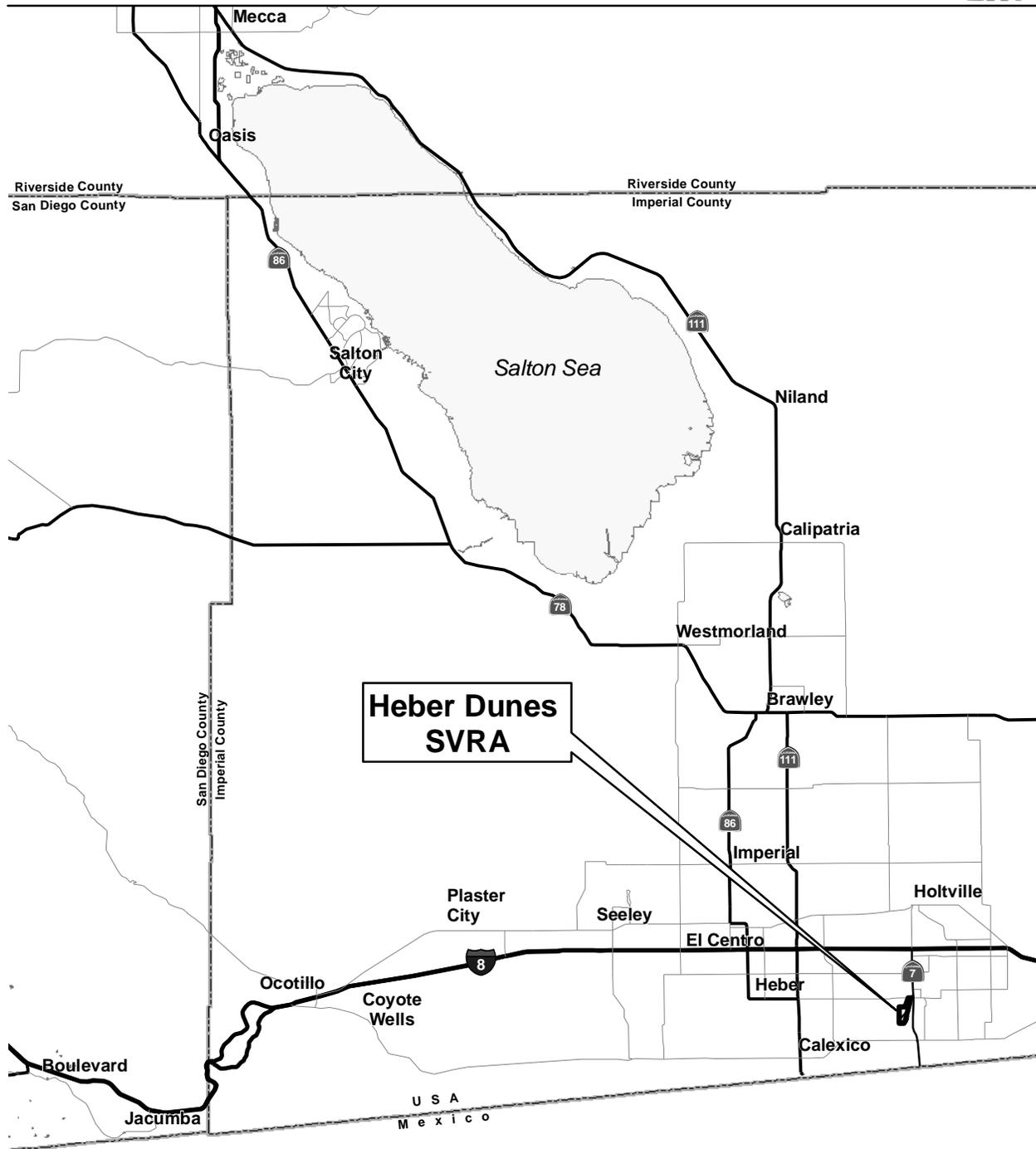
Although ultimate use areas and associated goals and guidelines have not yet been determined, generally expected types of environmental impacts that may occur as a result of implementation of the General Plan and continued recreational use of the property can be identified. Based on the resource characteristics of the project area and generally anticipated recreation uses, potential environmental effects that are anticipated to be addressed in the EIR include effects to the following resource areas:

- Air quality
- Biological resources
- Cultural resources
- Geological and paleontological resources
- Hydrology and water quality
- Land use and management
- Noise
- Public services and utilities
- Transportation
- Potential for global climate change effects

INTENDED USES OF THE EIR

CDPR will use the EIR to consider the environmental effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives when reviewing the proposed General Plan approval. The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission will use the EIR to support decisions made related to its respective administration jurisdictions. The EIR will serve as the CEQA compliance document for adoption of the General Plan. It will also serve as the programmatic environmental document that may be referenced in implementing future actions included in the General Plan. Subsequent project-level activities identified in the General Plan will be examined in light of the program EIR to determine whether an additional environmental document must be prepared prior to project approval and implementation (State CEQA Guidelines 15168[c]).

Attachments: Figure 1: Project Location Vicinity Map
Figure 2: Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan Draft Preferred Alternative



Source: California Department of Parks and Recreation 2007; ESRI 2003

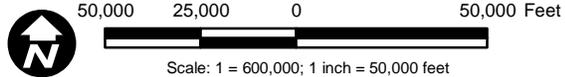
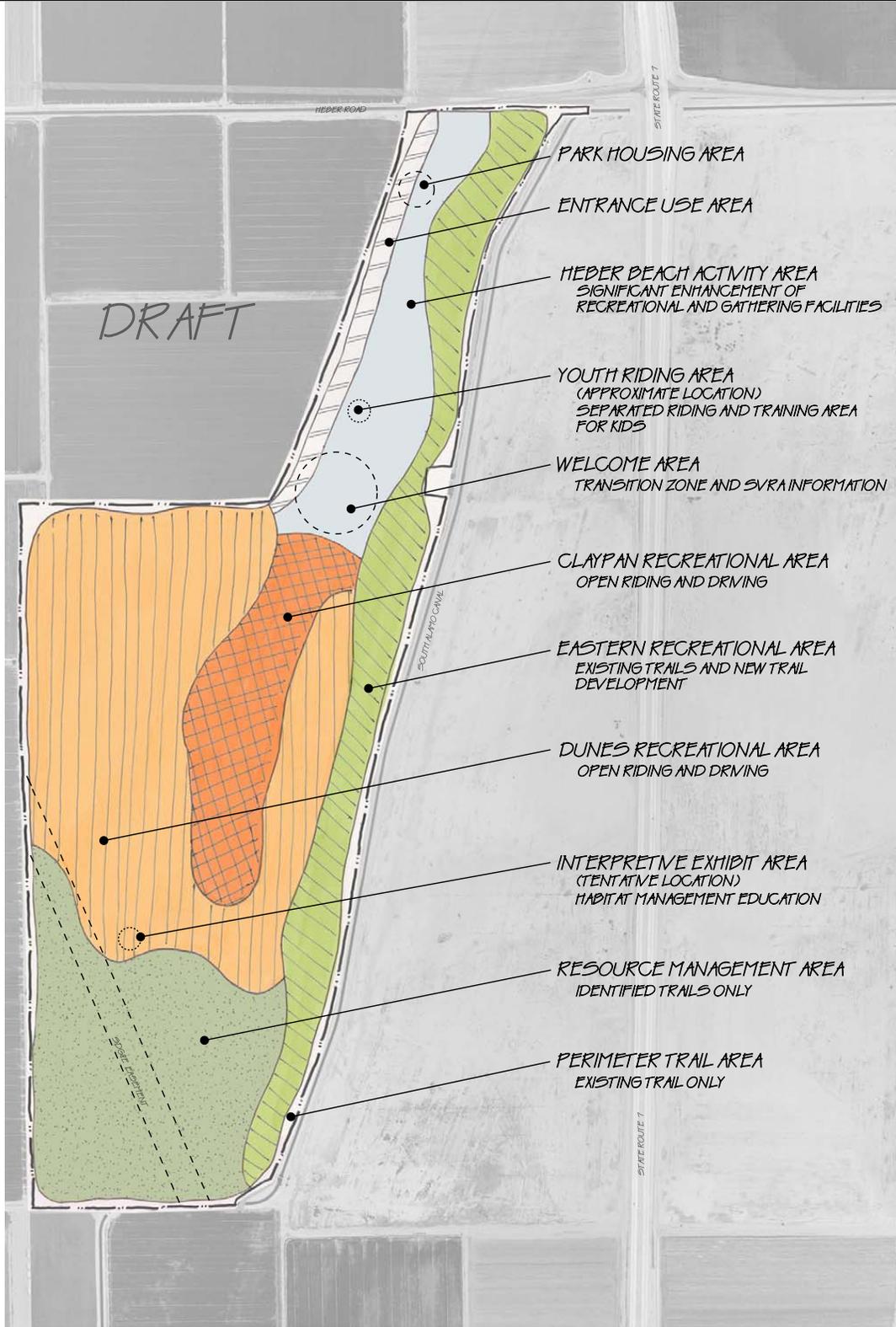


Figure 1
Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan and EIR
Regional Location Map



Source: AECOM 2010



0 600 1200 2400 FEET



Scale: 1 inch = 1200 feet

Figure 2
Heber Dunes SVRA General Plan and EIR
Draft Preferred Alternative