



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 19, 2001

Contact: Joe Rosato (916) 324-1576
California State Parks
OHMVR Division
jrosa@parks.ca.gov

Hollister Hills SVRA to Gain Recreation Opportunity; OHV Commission Oks Increase in Wilderness Trespass Fines

The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission has approved two actions that will mean increased recreational opportunities at the popular Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA).

The Commissioners, in a 5-1 vote with one abstention, amended the Hollister Hills SVRA General Plan for the development of two parcels, the 1,570-acre Hudner property, and the 1,690-acre Renz properties and their subsequent development for off-highway vehicle use. Commissioners also approved a final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the project, required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Voting in support were Commissioners George Galvan, Judith Anderson, Daphne Greene, Michael Prizmich and Marge Sutton. Opposed was Commissioner Harold Thomas. Member Paul Spittler abstained from voting without comment.

Commissioners also approved the realignment of the 500-foot buffer between the SVRA and adjoining properties where no OHV recreation may take place. The vote was 6-1 with Commissioner Galvan voting no.

While the land acquisitions total 3,260 acres, only about 53 acres are impacted by OHV recreation.

The Commissioner's actions marked an important step in a planning and public participation process that began in 1992. That was the year a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division of California State Parks and San Benito County setting forth the specific terms and conditions for the acquisition, development and operation of the Hudner and Renz parcels.

The approved amendment includes two major components – a resource element and a land use and facilities element.

The resource element states the management directives or long-term policies to protect, restore and use resources based on an evaluation of existing natural resources, such as soils, topography, plants and wildlife, as well as the cultural, recreational and visual resources of the Hudner and Renz acquisition lands. The land use element identifies use areas, buffers and resource protection areas, while the facilities component identifies specific trail locations and types of facilities.

To encourage public participation throughout the planning process, the Hollister Hills Advisory Committee was formed to provide input. In addition, a public outreach program was developed. Under the MOU, the advisory committee will remain for five years.

On another issue, Commissioners approved a resolution proposed by Spitler supporting an increase in fines for the intrusion of motorized vehicles into Wilderness areas to \$1,000 for first offenses, with higher penalties for subsequent violations. Spitler said the fines are currently too low to serve as an adequate deterrent to intrusions, and in some areas range as low as \$50 per infraction. In addition to serving as a member of the OHV Commission and the OHV Stakeholders Roundtable, Spitler is executive director of the Davis-based California Wilderness Coalition.

The meeting was held March 16 in the San Benito County Board of Supervisors chambers in Hollister.

The Commission was created by the state Legislature in 1982 to allow public input and policy guidance for the OHV Program. Seven Commissioners are appointed to staggered, four-year terms. The Governor appoints three of the members, and the Senate Rules Committee and the Speaker of the Assembly appoint two each. The Commission membership represents a broad range of disciplines relevant to off-highway recreation – OHV recreationists, biologists, rural landowners, soil scientists and environmental interests.

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