

# Prairie City State Vehicular Recreation Area Road and Trail Management Plan

## Public Workshop #1 Summary



Prepared for  
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California State Parks Attendees	Ascent
Steve Hilton, Gold Fields District Superintendent	Adam Lewandowski, Project Manager
Peter Jones, Sector Manager	Jessica Mitchell, Senior Environmental Planner
Jim Micheals, Senior Park & Recreation Specialist	Paul Kronser, Planner (Virtual)
McKenzie Boring, Environmental Scientist	Angela Khermouch, Designer (Virtual)
Taylor Espenshade, Environmental Scientist	
Lora Caldwell, Environmental Scientist	
Joleen Ossello, State Park Interpreter	
Meghan Sullivan, Senior Environmental Scientist	
Tony Guzman, Supervising Ranger	
Jason Spann, Associate Landscape Architect	
Noelle Breitenbach, Staff Park & Recreation Specialist	
Sammy Reyes, Park and Recreation Specialist (Virtual)	

## 4 SUMMARY

### 4.1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Steve Hilton, Gold Fields District Superintendent from California State Parks, welcomed participants, shared introductory remarks, and provided a brief overview of the meeting's purpose. Peter Jones, Sector Manager for Prairie City SVRA, provided an overview of the meeting agenda and introduced the project team.

### 4.2 PRESENTATION

Following the welcome and introductions, the project team presented background information and context, existing conditions, future opportunities and constraints that may impact or influence proposed improvements at Prairie City SVRA, and the role of the RTMP at Prairie City SVRA. These topics are summarized below.

#### 4.2.1 Project Background and Context

Taylor Espenshade, Environmental Scientist at Prairie City SVRA, presented an overview of Prairie City SVRA, the General Plan, previous RTMP efforts, and goals of the RTMP moving forward. Taylor summarized how the RTMP will guide future development, operation, and maintenance of the road and trail system.

#### 4.2.2 Planning Process and Schedule

Adam Lewandowski from Ascent provided an overview of the planning process and schedule, work and analysis done to date, and the milestones anticipated through completion and approval of the RTMP.

### 4.2.3 Existing Conditions, Opportunities, and Constraints

Following the overview of the planning process and project schedule, Adam presented a map of the existing conditions and parkwide routes throughout Prairie City SVRA and identified key opportunities for motorized and non-motorized trail connections, additional uses, and other improvements throughout the park.

Before transitioning to the question-and-answer and open-house portion of the meeting, Adam identified ways for participants to stay informed and future opportunities to provide feedback and input into the RTMP. Opportunities for engagement include a user survey open through August 15, 2023, and future workshops and pop-up events.

### 4.2.4 In-Person and Virtual Open House

To allow meeting attendees to provide feedback both in-person and virtually, the project team had placed boards around the room that contain opportunity and constraints maps for each of the specific zones of Prairie City SVRA. At each of these stations, California State Parks and consultant team staff were present to gather input from meeting attendees through using post-it notes to document comments and questions specifically related to the zones being displayed. For the virtual attendees, an only virtual white board was used and members from both California State Parks and the consultant team facilitated discussions with those attending virtually, adding comments and questions to the white board that contained a parkwide opportunities and constraints map.

## 4.3 THE COMMENT SUMMARIES FROM PUBLIC WORKSHOP INPUT

The following bullets summarize the comments received during the question-and-answer and open house portion of the workshop where participants interacted with project team members to ask questions and provided feedback on opportunities and constraints at the Prairie City SVRA. The following comments are from the in-person discussions and feedback received from the public in the virtual setting:

- ▶ Provide clarity on which uses at Prairie City SVRA would be paid for through the OHMVR Trust Fund and how non-OHV would be funded.
- ▶ Desire to complete restoration projects that also provide users with recreational opportunities including Coyote Gulch.
- ▶ Expand the MX practice track.
- ▶ Improve conditions and regularly scheduled maintenance of the MX practice track.
- ▶ Consider communicating about practice track conditions on the website or on social media so that visitors know ahead of coming out to the park what to expect, like a ski hill snow report.
- ▶ Desire to improve safety and monitoring of the use of side-by-sides (also called utility vehicles [UTVs], recreational off-highway vehicles [ROVs], and recreational utility vehicles [RUVs]).
- ▶ Potentially impose speed limits for certain uses in specific areas for safety and dust abatement.
- ▶ Consider requiring vehicle flags and separation of uses to improve safety and reduce conflicts between high speed ROVs and other uses.
- ▶ Increase proximity between different types of user groups, which would help alleviate conflicts between vehicles that are traveling at different speeds.

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- ▶ Make programmatic improvements through this planning process that address existing safety concerns so that Prairie City SVRA is welcoming and inviting to all park visitors.
  - ▶ With a foreseeable increase in residential development near the park, there was public support for making sure any proposed land use changes consider (or mitigate) noise impacts.
  - ▶ Interest was shown by the public to either independently or through collaboration with California Off-Road Vehicle Association (CORVA) to create a nonprofit cooperating association that could help raise funding for improvements and organize and support volunteer activities at Prairie City SVRA.
  - ▶ There was public support for increased staffing and funding to assist in maintaining the park on a more regular basis.
  - ▶ A request to expand the MX practice track was discussed and has received 185 signatures. The proposed layout was presented, expanding the track to the northeast out into that empty field, not encroaching on the ATV track that's to the north. With the MX practice track appearing to be the most heavily used facility at the time of the meeting, the commentor described that if it were to be expanded, it would be safer because it would spread people out more.
  - ▶ Comments were made regarding the use of side-by-sides and the impact it has throughout the park. Multiple reports of small children driving them at dangerous speeds, that have come close to causing harm to other users.
  - ▶ A comment was made about the condition of trails by the big track and the need for trail improvement.
  - ▶ Participants in the virtual setting discussed the option of potentially connecting to the Deer Creek Hills Preserve to the south and/or to the new hiking trail along the American River that non-motorized users could potentially access.
  - ▶ There was a discussion regarding the future uses for the pit area and the potential for use of by side-by-sides which would allow for high speed ROV use and potentially reduce conflicts in other areas. Other potential uses discussed were the creation of a directional track as well as trails that take advantage of the topography (i.e., not just a perimeter loop).
  - ▶ A comment was made regarding potential directional changes for certain tracks containing side-by-sides and HOVs to maintain the quality of dirt.
  - ▶ A question was asked regarding the increased use of ROVs throughout the park and potential other options besides segregating use areas, with the requirements for vehicles to have flags for improved visibility and/or creating parallel trails for motorcycles and ROVs.
    - Response: There is a current challenge with ROVs being given access to every zone that have capabilities to achieve high rates of speed in rough terrain so a challenge of the RTMP is to better control uses and make it safer for the public.
  - ▶ A request was made by a participant to give more control to the users on what happens at the park and stated current activities are not conducive to having a good time with crowds impacting the visitors from afar.
  - ▶ A comment was made on how ROVs are the fastest growing segment and there needs to be a way to manage them with potential for a specific location within the park.
  - ▶ A request was made to convey ideas to the OHMVR Commission and for the public to participate in future meetings to provide feedback and make suggestions to see the park succeed.

- ▶ There was a discussion around the need for a buffer due to future housing developments being constructed and Prairie City staff confirmed this kind of defensive planning is being investigated to have a way to insulate park noise from impacting nearby residences.
- ▶ A question was asked on how nearby developments were made aware of the uses that occur at Prairie City SVRA.
  - Response: Prairie City staff notified meeting participants that when a notice of Environmental Impact Reports are released, comment letters are submitted notifying developments of the SVRA and impacts from its uses.
- ▶ A comment was made that due to heavy rainfalls from last season, many park users were unable to use the facilities and preferred to provide feedback on current operations and how things could be improved through distribution of pamphlets containing what can and cannot be done at the park.
- ▶ A participant discussed that users are not coming out and speaking up and focus should be on gathering feedback from the current users on how to improve the park.
- ▶ A Prairie City SVRA park staff member discussed the addition of sound monitoring over the past three years on the Ehnisz property and in Zone 4 which are continuously running and have shown that noise levels have not exceeded levels of the county noise ordinance.
- ▶ A comment was given regarding protecting the perimeter of the park and opposition to using OHV funding to create buffers for areas that potentially could be commercially developed.
- ▶ Potential nonmotorized uses were discussed and comments were made in regards to funding those types of facilities and potentially offering up buffer areas for these uses. Participants compared it to Mammoth Bar with the potential for users to park outside of the park, not paying fees, and using facilities.
- ▶ A comment was made regarding track maintenance and how it can be dangerous at times due to lack of maintenance, watering and grooming and how it is deterring users to other OHV areas including Marysville or Mammoth Bar at Auburn State Recreation Area.
  - Response: Park staff responded that regular maintenance is on the schedule, but staffing constraints and other priorities cause it to be done less consistently than desired. With current available funding, new staff will be needed for future park improvements and maintenance.
- ▶ A participant stated that associations (e.g., Friends of group) can have a lot of impact on how Prairie City SVRA is developed, similar to how the Hollister Hills Off Road Association worked closely with Hollister Hills SVRA.