Summary

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) often manages land adjacent to or near federal lands managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In some instances, state park lands are scattered within federal lands in a complex array of land ownership with different management policies. It can be very confusing to visitors when there are few visual cues on the landscape that indicate whether they are on state or federal lands. Land managers may also find it challenging to patrol and monitor lands that are interspersed over a large region. This is the case for three state vehicular recreation areas (SVRAS) – Hungry Valley SVRA, Ocotillo Wells SVRA, and Onyx Ranch SVRA. DPR, BLM, and the USFS have collaborated on a variety of approaches to provide consistent land management strategies. This staff report discusses the status of state and federal land management at these SVRAs.

Discussion

Hungry Valley SVRA

Hungry Valley SVRA manages 19,000 acres located in Los Angeles, Kern, and Ventura Counties near the communities of Gorman and Lebec adjacent to Interstate 5 at Tejon Pass. The Los Padres National Forest is adjacent to the west and the Angeles National Forest is adjacent to the south and east.

Currently, the area around the north SVRA entrance is owned by the USFS, but the SVRA operates the entrance station there through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Both agencies have collaborated on proposed land exchanges to create more logical boundary lines, increase connectivity, and provide DPR with land ownership at
this north entrance. DPR manages a plot of land disconnected from the SVRA to the southwest which has been proposed as a land exchange with the USFS; however, the subject property was appraised at a much less value than the USFS lands that host the north entrance area, and the exchange was not able to proceed.

**Ocotillo Wells SVRA**

Ocotillo Wells SVRA is located a few miles from the western shore of the Salton Sea. It is the largest SVRA in the State Park System with 55,687 acres. The BLM El Centro Field Office manages 1.4 million acres of public lands in Imperial and San Diego Counties; approximately 21,466 acres are within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Currently, the BLM El Centro Field Office manages resources under its jurisdiction within Ocotillo Wells SVRA under portions of two different land use plans: California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980) and the Western Colorado (WECO) Desert Routes of Travel Designations (2003) (BLM WECO Plan). As part of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP; 2015), BLM also published a Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in November 2015.

As part of the joint Ocotillo Wells Plan project, the agencies explored three potential approaches to manage the federal lands within the SVRA – MOU, land transfer, and lease options. Currently, DPR manages BLM lands through a MOU, most recently updated in 2008, that granted DPR surface management authority on BLM lands within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The MOU does not preclude using public lands owned by BLM for purposes other than OHV recreation. Land transfer and lease options are available through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act that allows the Secretary of the Interior to lease or convey public lands for recreational purposes under certain conditions. BLM and DPR are currently exploring options for land conveyance under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

**Onyx Ranch SVRA**

In December 2014, DPR acquired 50 privately owned parcels (approximately 26,000 acres) in eastern Kern County. It is the second largest SVRA and is adjacent to Red Rock Canyon State Park and is interspersed mainly with BLM lands under the jurisdiction of the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office. Jawbone Canyon Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Area and Dove Springs OHV Area are also adjacent to the SVRA. The property is laid out in a checkerboard fashion of mostly one-mile square parcels with BLM and private lands.

DPR and BLM are working towards developing consistent land management throughout public lands in this region. This includes consistent recreation access, law enforcement, and resource protection. DPR and the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office entered into a MOU in 2015 to share law enforcement duties and engage stakeholder groups on each other’s lands. DPR collaborated with BLM during the West Mojave Route Network Plan (WEMO) to ensure BLM and DPR routes were identified and their status updated.
In addition, DPR has started a Road and Trail Management Plan at Onyx Ranch SVRA to provide for trail and recreation access connectivity between BLM and SVRA lands.

Commission Action
For information only.

Attachments
Hungry Valley SVRA Map
Onyx Ranch SVRA Map
Ocotillo Wells SVRA Map
San Diego County Airport
Ocotillo Wells

Legend
- Ocotillo Wells SVRA Study Area Boundary
- Anza-Borrego Desert State Park
- County Boundary
- Truckhaven Geothermal Leasing Area

Ownership
- BLM
- CA Parks & Recreation
- County
- State Lands
- Private
- Highways and Freeways

Scale: 1 = 126,720; 1 inch = 2 miles

Source: California Department of Parks and Recreation 2009, 2010; SanGIS 2010; Imperial County 2009; ESRI 2009

Ocotillo Wells SVRA General Plan and EIR Working Paper #2

Note/Disclaimer:
All efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the data and information on this map; however, some information may not be accurate. California Department of Parks and Recreation and AECOM assume no responsibility for use of this information.

Figure 5

Land Ownership

December 2012