

Recreation Plan – Proposal for El Paso Collaborative Access Planning Area, a Plan Amendment to the
California Desert Conservation Area Plan
For the Sonoran Institute

Public lands surrounding the Ridgecrest community possess many unique recreational opportunities located immediately adjacent to City of Ridgecrest and within east Kern County:

- The Spangler Open OHV area: about 60,000 acres; wide variety of riding opportunities, x-country play, estimate 1,000 miles of trails (single and 4WD), competitive events, staging areas, non-competitive group events, hiking, camping, equestrian, bouldering, paint ball, shooting. About 3-4 miles from center of City of Ridgecrest and services. There are at least 12 major roads and 12 minor trails that connect Ridgecrest to the Spangler Open Area through the Rademacher Hills trail network.
- Rademacher Hills Trail System and View shed: about 17,000 acres of open space/desert view shed surrounding Ridgecrest and Cerro Coso Community College. It provides a variety of recreation opportunities: hiking, jogging, horse-back riding, mountain biking, motorcycle and ATV trails, 4WD trails and 2WD trails, many lead to the Spangler Open OHV area. Some of the area is within the Ridgecrest City limits.
- El Paso Mountains: the area covers about 200,000 acres consisting of canyons, historic mining sites (Burro Schmidt, Bickel Camp, Mingus Meade, Dawson, and other historic cabin sites), prehistoric sites, paleo-fossil sites, geologic features, and rock hounding sites, wildlife guzzlers, wildflowers, El Paso Wilderness (Black Hills), and sheep grazing areas. Approximately 600 miles of trails; lots of access for high clearance 2WD, SUVs, 4WD, ATV, motorcycles, equestrian, mountain bikes, hiking, jogging, hunting, camping, non-competitive group events. Access from Hwy 14, 395, 178, Brown Road, and Garlock Road.

These areas are very popular with the recreating public. Opportunities to encourage growth of tourism, general recreation, special OHV events, and other commercial activities such as filming, sheep grazing, while supporting growth in Ridgecrest and sustaining the local economy is an important planning element.

The area also possesses many sensitive and important natural and cultural resources as recognized in California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) plan. These include a National Register District, a Wilderness Area, and habitat for the Mojave Ground Squirrel (MGS), Desert Tortoise (DT), and other sensitive species. There are private access needs, commercial operations (grazing, quarries, mining claims), permitted facilities (communication sites, transmission lines, air corridors, water tanks, guzzlers, stock ponds, others), and lands identified for disposal within the planning area.

The West Mojave Plan amended the CDCA and recognized the need to develop a proactive plan to provide adequate recreation opportunities to accommodate anticipated population growth in the Ridgecrest area. It is proposed that this will be accomplished through the collaboration of the BLM with local jurisdictions consisting of City of Ridgecrest, Kern County, others such as IWV Water District, Sierra Sands School District, Navel Air Weapons Station, and the general public.

Planning will identify recreation resources and opportunities which sustain and add to the quality of life of the Ridgecrest community; and which help sustain the local economy of the City of Ridgecrest and Kern County. Planning will also identify biological and cultural resource criteria. Planning will address routes and areas to be designated open, limited, closed following principles used in the West Mojave Plan as approved. Planning will address other factors which may serve the growth needs of the community such as school sites, water resources, flood control, ROWs, open space, including developed recreation needs (parks, golf course, motor cross track).

Planning Steps:

- Identify, inventory, and map recreation related resources within the planning area. Camping, hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, rock-hounding, wildflower, historic mining sites, hunting,

target shooting, and others (work with City, Kern County, Ridgecrest Steering Committee, local tourism and recreation businesses).

- Inventory sensitive and important biological resources within the planning area. Specifically: raptor sites; Townsend's big-eared bat; MGS, DT, Red Rock poppy and tarplant (endemic to the El Paso Mountains); others. Work with DF&G, F&WS, and others.
- Identify National Register of Historic Places, Historic District, Last Chance Canyon ACEC, historic sites which may be eligible for the National Register.
- Identify significant mining sites and potentially hazardous mine workings.
- Identify significant fossil-bearing units within the planning area.
- Inventory and map existing roads, routes, trails, paths, etc. using GIS. The goal is to get 100% inventory of regularly used roads, routes, trails, ways, etc. Work with County, OHV, Ridgecrest Steering Committee.
- Conduct inventory of cultural resources as per "Interim Management Program for Identifying, Evaluating, and Protecting Cultural Resources along Designated Routes of Travel in CDCA.
- Identify other resource uses such as mineral, sand and gravel, grazing, filming, which may be important to the local economy.
- Conduct public scoping to review resource data and gather public comments to help identify planning issues, and identify alternatives. Collaborate with City and County. Identify cooperators and stakeholders.
- Initiate formal consultations with Native Americans, SHPO, and other federal and state agencies.
- Evaluate public comments, gather any additional resources data, and evaluate input to identify planning issues and formulate alternatives. Collaborate with City and County, cooperators, stakeholders.
- Develop route designations proposals and alternatives.
- Conduct public meetings to gather comments on planning issues, alternatives, environmental concerns.
- Evaluate public comments and fine tune alternatives.
- Evaluate environmental impacts for NEPA.
- Conduct necessary consultations (SHPO, NA, F&W, DF&G, others).
- Finalize route designations and alternatives and NEPA.
- Release for public review.
- Address public comments and finalize DR and CDCA plan amendment.

Timeframes for Planning Phases

- Data inventories and identification of resources, including route inventory – 2 to 3 years, depending on available funding and resources.
- Scoping, evaluations, public meetings, and collaboration efforts (including route designation proposals – one year.
- NEPA analysis, public review, formal consultations – ½ year.
- Finalize DR and CDCA plan amendment – ½ year.
- Implementation.