

History of El Paso Collaborative Access Process (CAPA)

In 2002 and 2003, a series of meetings occurred between the BLM, the public, cities and counties regarding the West Mojave Plan (WEMO). These meetings were advertised in the Federal Register with adequate notice to local newspapers for the public to attend these meetings.

In March 2003, the El Paso Collaborative Access Process was established to assist BLM to identify public routes in the El Paso Mountains. This was due to the absence of real field data – an issue recognized by the public, city, county and the BLM. As a result, the El Paso Collaborative Access Planning Area (CAPA) was initiated. Pages 18, 19 and 20 of the 2003 Western Mojave Desert Off-Road Vehicle Designation Project documents covered the process.

As a result, a group of local citizens, at every BLM Ridgcrest Steering Committee meeting, called for the CAPA to start and be timely completed.

Before this could happen, a group filed suit against the BLM and the 2003 WEMO decision. The CAPA was put on hold (it is worth noting that, in the first court decision, the CAPA was recognized).

In 2011, the court decided that the entire West Mojave Route Designation process, as developed by the 2003 decision, is not valid. The court went further and required BLM to go back to the drawing board and complete the process by April 15, 2014. This puts at risk the CAPA process that was developed locally by citizens working with their government. After a year of debate, BLM solicitors stated that they would have the CAPA meetings. Once again, the local citizens have put ads in the newspapers and Swap Sheet, local radio stations to inform the public so that they will have a voice in this process.

A sustainable land management system in the California Desert must be developed by the citizens and be nurtured by the public - if it is to be successful. The CDCA Plan codified that and added that it is a responsibility shared by all citizens. The original decision for the Desert Plan states, “The congressional mandate was to provide for off road vehicle use where appropriate” and “neither does it provide an unlimited laissez-faire access program in which the uses are determined by the paths of least resistance.”

The challenge is the same as it was in 1981: how to strike the right balance between use and conservation of the desert resources without destroying the route network system that has been in place for 30 to 50 years.

The public, once again, is called upon to work with the BLM in establishing this route network once and for all. It is a commitment not only with the citizens, but also with our local representatives and the BLM to do the job right. Please come to the Saturday Morning meeting at Carriage Inn on November 17, 2012 and provide input.

These meetings should be used for public scoping. They should also better identify the history and alternatives.

