



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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**OHMVR COMMISSION MEETING
Sacramento, CA**

May 20, 2022

STAFF REPORT: OHV Interpretation and Education

STAFF: Peter Ostroskie
State Park Interpreter III
OHV Interpretation and Education Outreach Program Manager
Interpretation and Education Division

SUBJECT: OHV Interpretive Engagement in the SVRAs During 2021

Summary:

During 2021 COVID-19 still had an impact on the state vehicular recreation areas (SVRA) parks and programs. As the year progressed, park visitation and interpretive engagement increased as visitors and volunteers reunited with the SVRA parks and staff for recreation and exploration. Many interpretive projects in the various SVRA parks were completed and staff stayed engaged with their visitors through social media, videos, home learning programs, PORTS, Junior Rangers, in-person programs, special events, community events and volunteer programs.

The OHMVR statewide Interpretation and Education Outreach Team hired a new State Park Interpreter III OHV Program Manager, Peter Ostroskie, who brought a new perspective not only to the statewide team but to the interpretive field staff at the SVRA parks.

Discussion:
Prairie City SVRA



Back on Track was 2021's theme, highlighting the return of the park unit's special events. Park's Interpretive programming, race promoters and local businesses, once again, sponsored events previously postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This included the presence of Parks Interpretation at forty-four events, making 1,277 contacts. Special Events included: Clipped in Races Mountain Bike Series, All Star Karting, American Quarter Midget Association (AQMA), NorCal Rock Racing (NCRR), Battle Born Motocross (BBMX), Rep Racing (PCMX), NorCal

RallyCross, Hangtown Motocross Classic (Pro Motocross), Valley Off-Road Racing Association (VORRA), Dirt Diggers North Motorcycle Club (DDNMC), Sacramento Pacific International Trials Society, and MetalCloak (4x4 Jeep Customizations).



Parks Interpretation staff brought back several favorite programs for visitors including Visitor Appreciation Day, Sacramento Valley Astrological Society Star Party, and the Headlight Festival. In addition, the rollout of the brand-new (May & Oct) OHV Safety Week campaigns.

The implementation of a planned social media schedule on Instagram and Facebook (established 3-5 weekly posts schedule/content) along with some YouTube,

dramatically increased followership, impressions, and engagement. Posts included photos and video footage of park resources, visitors recreating, safety messaging and racing highlights at special events. In 2021, there were 203 posts which attracted a total of 3,000 followers on Instagram and 6,500 on Facebook, doubling the number from the previous year.



Highlights from both OHV Safety Weeks at Prairie City SVRA:

YouTube Video: [Know Before You Go – Supplies with Ranger Beam](#)

Social Media: [Prairie City SVRA Facebook](#) and [Prairie City SVRA Instagram](#)

Upcoming Events: [Prairie City SVRA Events](#)



Outreach booth in Main Staging Area



Youth with a dirt bike safety manual next to Prairie Bear

Carnegie SVRA

The interpretive program for Carnegie SVRA in 2021 grew each month as staff added some in-person programs, new volunteers for the park, and attended some outside special events.

The in-person programs included the information booth, Junior Ranger programs, riding tours, and roving interpretation, which started at the beginning of Red Sticker season in October. The information booth next to the park store, allows visitors access to maps, brochures, safety information, park updates, and to ask questions. The booth is set up at the beginning of each month and has about 10 – 30 visitors stopping in for information about the park.



Instead of having kids dropped off for a Jr. Ranger program, interpretive staff set up a Junior Ranger interpretive table as a pilot program, so kids could drop in during a 2-hour period. There were a variety of themes covered including: Safety, Wildlife, Archeology, and many others.



This set-up allowed kids to ride on their own time and when they took a break they dropped in and learned more about the park. Two pilot Junior Ranger tables happened in 2021, which were successful with about 10 to 30 kids dropping by and this interpretive program shows promise for next year.



As the interpretive staff learned to ride, they have been able to rove around the park and connect with visitors. A great strategy to get visitors' attention was to give out stickers (the Carnegie sticker made for OHV's 50th was especially popular!), which can lead to an interpretive moment. Roving was also helpful in gathering pictures of visitors, so we can showcase more visitors on our social media. While roving, interpretive staff have been able to connect with about 150 visitors last year.

The interpretive staff have also tested out two successful riding tours, where visitors can learn about the history of Carnegie's Brick and Pottery Plant that existed over 100 years ago in the park. About 10 people turned up for both events. While this riding tour was easy, the interpretive staff hope to improve their riding skills to lead family rides on more popular trails in the park.



With the lifting of Covid restrictions, the Carnegie interpreter attended special events in other OHV parks including the OHV 50th celebration in Hungry Valley and helped with Prairie City's Visitor Appreciation Day. Carnegie was also able to put on a small special event for the rededication of their California Historical Landmark that had

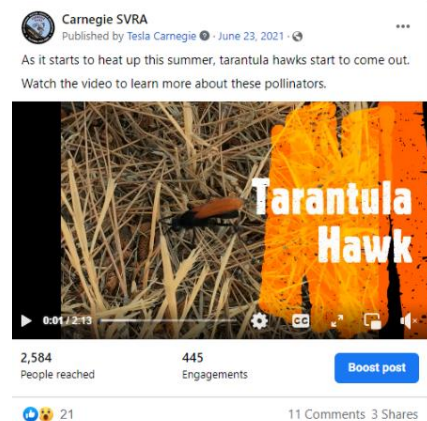
been updated for the OHV 50th Anniversary. Interpretation provided several activities for that event with the making of mini-Carnegie bricks being the most popular along with the first history ride.





“Sunday is for the Visitors” posts.

In 2021 Carnegie obtained an Instagram account for the park to use, along with an already established Facebook account. Through these two sites staff made “Weekend Reports” every Friday to update visitors on information about trails, tracks, camping, and closures. Staff also educated the public about wildlife in the park through our “Wildlife Wednesdays” posts. Staff also started showcasing more visitors on the park social media pages by sharing visitor pictures on the



One of the most educational videos Carnegie interpretive staff put on Facebook was the video about the parks Resource Management Areas and how they combat erosion with sustainable trails which helps improve water quality. This is a complex issue for the park that the interpretive staff are educating riders about.



In 2021 Carnegie doubled the number of park volunteers by recruiting new trail patrol volunteers and creating a new volunteer trail maintenance program. While the volunteer program is still small, the goal is to continue to expand it each year and increase small special volunteer days, such as one last Spring where riders took down fencing that had

protected a rehabilitated area after a recent fire.

The interpretation staff at Carnegie are taking steps to educate and inspire visitors about the park. In 2021 staff were able to add more consistent in-person programs than the park had in previous years, and the hope is to continue to add more as the interpretation staff at Carnegie increases. Next year, the goal is to connect interpretive park programming with local schools.



Hollister Hills SVRA

This past year included change and adaptation for Hollister Hills along with the rest of the world, as we entered year two of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Interpretation team has spent the last two years adjusting, thinking creatively, and staying proactive. To summarize 2021, staff reopened programming including our previous annual events, added a new special event, installed three interpretive panels, painted a massive mural, reorganized the volunteer program, reopened and



taught ATV courses for the public, staff and other agencies and increased our online presence.

Staff started out 2021 with the park being closed. During this closure, staff focused on a variety of projects. Senior Park Aide, Kaelin O'Hare installed a 3-part welcome panel to the 4x4 Upper Ranch entrance, helping provide direction to park visitors at this unmanned entrance. She had been working on this project for almost a year. She illustrated, designed, managed fabrication, and installed this completed project in January 2021. In spring, staff focused on producing interpretive videos and maintaining accurate and prompt public communications regarding the pandemic induced capacity restrictions. In April, capacity restrictions were removed, and programming opened in May, with one of the busiest months at the park. Staff hosted the first annual Safety Week event in celebration of the OHMVR 50th Anniversary, which included Junior Ranger Riddle Rides and safety talks.



June 1st was the end of Red Sticker season at Hollister Hills SVRA, but this didn't mean that staff slowed down. The Interpretation team switched focus from the OHV community to the non-motorized community, providing guided hikes in Mudstone Ranch (the dedicated hiking, bicycling, and equestrian area). This included Sunday Sunset Strolls and Full Moon Hikes. Park projects continued with this year's big task to repaint a faded mural. For the past 30 years, a large mural has welcomed visitors to Hollister Hills SVRA on the front of a large barn, reassuring them they had found the park. In June two members of the Hollister Hills Interpretation team, Elise Fleishman and Kaelin O'Hare, started this massive project. They scraped and power washed the old paint off, primed, transferred the new mural, painted, and varnished the new mural in November.

October 1 was the opening of Red Sticker Season at Hollister Hills SVRA, and the interpretation team was happy to resume "normal" programming. Staff hosted the annual Geocache Bash in September, hosted a booth at Red Sticker Ride Day, hosted a booth at the local San Benito County Fair, attended and hosted a booth at the OHMVR 50th anniversary event at Hungry Valley, hosted the annual Clean Wheeling 4x4 trash pickup, hosted Creatures of the Night Halloween special event, hosted two holiday hayrides, and built a float and participated in the two annual local holiday parades.

Last year also marked the reorganization of the volunteer program. With recent staff changes and the effects of the pandemic, the volunteer program needed some care and attention. Interpreter I, Elise Fleishman, led the volunteers with support from Ranger staff hosting the first volunteer meeting and the first volunteer work party in a few years. This reunited our volunteers and reengaged them with the park.

Senior Park Aide Justin Olschowka led the interpretation team this year and kept the social media presence actively serving thousands of people who watch the videos. Social media continues to be one of the interpretation staff's greatest outreach tools. A video that is only a couple minutes long can take anywhere from 40-180 hours to

create, but it can reach thousands of people. Check out the park's YouTube channel @Hollister Hills SVRA.

Interpretive Programming for Hollister Hills in 2021 included: 16 Videos, 12 Guided Hikes, 6 Guided Rides, 4 Safety Talks, 2 Campfires, 66 4x4 Spill Kits handed out, 3 Outreach Events, 5 Special Events (Safety Week, Geocache Bash, Red Sticker Ride Day, Clean Wheeling, Creatures of the Night), and 2 Classroom visits.

There was a total of 2,642 in-person contacts AND 34,226 digital contacts via social media videos. *Plus 2 holiday parades that staff create floats for and participate in that have around 12,000 people in attendance.



Oceano Dunes SVRA

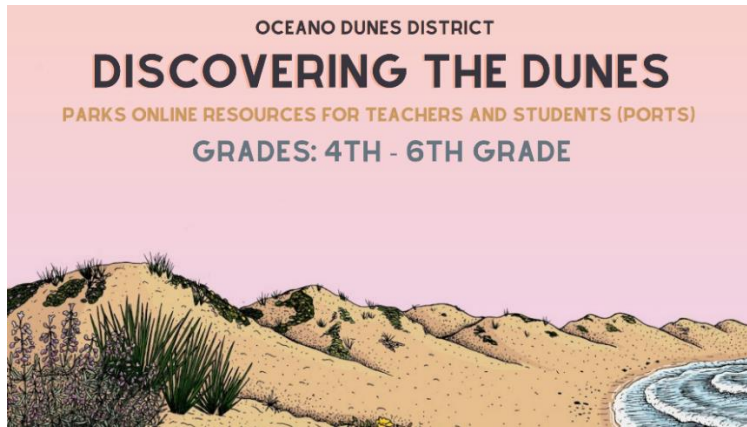
With in-person school programming still on hold in 2021 at the Oceano Dunes District, interpreters continued to provide digital learning experiences to teachers and students through virtual field trips. These digital learning experiences were part of the statewide PORTS program. PORTS programs at Oceano Dunes District focused on the natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The Discovering the Dunes PORTS Program was frequently requested among teachers and reached 1,694 students.

The distance learning program brings the coastal dune habitat right to the classroom. Programs are hosted live in the dune environment where students learn about dune formation, the rock cycle, animal/plant adaptations, habitat and wildlife management programs, and recreational opportunities at Oceano Dunes SVRA. Curriculum shared during the program aligns with 4th through 6th-grade NGSS standards and can be adapted to meet NGSS standards for lower elementary, middle, and high school grade levels when needed.



Curriculum development for this program was a collaborative effort by the Oceano Dunes District interpretive team. The team worked together in creating digital resources for this program which includes wildlife videos, informational slides, and photos of dune wildlife and plants.

The Discovering the Dunes PORTS Program was a popular program with teachers, and early in the school year was fully booked. To meet requests, Home Learning Programs were available throughout the year, and interpreters recorded full-length programs.



Three recorded dune programs are available to view at any time for elementary, middle, and high school educators on the District's YouTube Channel.

As the Oceano Dunes District looks to return to in-person school programming, the Discovering the Dunes program will continue as a PORTS program due to the remote access of the dune habitat.

Hungry Valley SVRA

State Park Interpreter I, Callista Turner was hired in May 2021. This started an increase in interpretation within the park, which was limited during Covid. After being hired for less than a month, Callista started public programming on Memorial Day weekend passing out stickers, coloring books and maps in the campground and opened the activity center for arts and crafts. In June, Interpreter Callista conducted 3 summer school programs with Gorman Elementary School. Highlights included create-a-bat activity, owl pellet dissection and native poppies and flowers, with some take home poppy seeds.

On July 4th the Tumbleweed Fire begin at Interstate 5 and crossed the frontage road into the park. It burned 868 acres. Then on July 31st, the Hungry Fire started within the park and burned over 300 acres of native grasslands management area.

September started the budding relationship between Hungry Valley SVRA and the Kern Fire Safe Council. Interpreter Callista Turner developed a webinar and a 2 day in classroom school program with the Council which will launch in 2022.

On October 6th, a group of the Hungry Valley SVRA staff put on their safety gear and were trained on how to operate a ROV safely. Instructor SPPO Brian Lincoln taught the group and was assisted by SPPO John Staffel. All staff members had plenty of hands-on training and left the class more knowledgeable,

On October 9th Hungry Valley SVRA hosted the 50th anniversary celebration of OHV. Interpretation staff from statewide OHV parks came out and set up informational booths to showcase the parks. Very strong winds forced the staff to take down their booths a couple hours early, but many were impressed, and the Interpreters had a chance to meet each other and exchange ideas.

In October, November and December, Hungry Valley SVRA hosted weekend arts and crafts for kids and curious adults.

On November 1, 2021, Lori Wear was promoted to State Park Interpreter III in the Great Basin District. Her understanding of rules and regulations of State Parks, her knowledge of interpretation, exhibits, and the area, plus her willingness to go above and beyond made her a wonderful addition to the staff.

On November 27th the local Pine Mountain Club community hosted a craft fair. Interpreter Callista Turner represented Hungry Valley SVRA by bringing children's crafts to the event. The population of craft tarantulas and rattlesnakes in Pine Mountain Club exploded after the event. At least 350 contacts were made at the craft fair booth.

Given the quantity of fires over the summer, Interpreter Callista Turner started working on a combination in classroom and potential PORTS home learning program about fire ecology. The program will launch in 2022 once the program has been fine-tuned and all the supplies purchased.

Hungry Valley was slated to participate in the First Day Rides on Dec 31st and Jan 1st, but due to a very strong snowstorm on Dec 30th, the trails were too snowy and slick to safely lead a tour. Instead, the Interpreter went campsite to campsite and handed out stickers and activity books.

Ocotillo Wells SVRA

Despite the challenges presented during the ongoing pandemic, the Ocotillo Wells District Interpretive Team continued to play an important role in keeping visitors up to date with current park information, as well as creating quality opportunities for visitors to discover and connect to the park and its resources. These efforts were achieved in a variety of ways this year including wayside exhibits, visitor center operations, and in-person programming.

One project completed this year was the replacement of several interpretive panels throughout the park. From *Movie History* to *Oil Exploration*, and *Gnarly Beasts of the Past* to *OHV Riding Safety*, these panels play an important role in sharing information with visitors in a variety of park settings.

The park's Discovery Center reopened this past riding season and park staff was excited to welcome visitors back! Each week, hundreds of visitors stopped by for information about the park, to pick up an updated map, and to learn what's new in the park... Once in the Discovery Center, visitors continued to be treated to a variety of hands-on exhibits which tell the many stories of the park. The Discovery Center has proven to be a great starting point for the visitors, as they start their desert adventure.

The interpretive team was also excited to, once again, provide in-person interpretive programs when health guidelines allowed. Although limited this season, staff were able to set up pop up exhibits at the popular riding destinations. These exhibits greeted visitors with a variety of desert animals (live scorpions, taxidermy mounts, and life-sized

replicas) as well as knowledgeable interpreters to guide them through their adventure. Staff also offered Junior Ranger programs on select weekends. These programs have a long-tradition, and our visitors were excited to see their return!

As staff plan for the upcoming year, they look forward to being able to once again offer the variety the interpretive programs the visitors have enjoyed over the years, including the annual events such as the Halloween Spooktacular and Hot Stars Astro Fest, as well off-road tours just to name a few.

OHV Interpretation and Education Outreach Team

The OHMVR Interpretation and Education Team hired a new Program Manager for the statewide team, Peter Ostroskie. Peter has been an interpreter for the Interpretation and Education Division, along with working in the field at Prairie City as an OHV interpreter. Peter also brings interpretive experience from the National Park Service. The statewide team, along with many OHV field and Division staff, were very excited to have Peter start his new position.

The OHMVR Interpretation Team has been working this past year on an upcoming PORTS program. PORTS (Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students) ® Program is a FREE distance learning program with California State Parks. The program is called Live Drive (subject to change) and it will focus on how off-highway vehicles can be used as vessels to take visitors to the many different biomes in California. This program will take place at the Environmental Training Center at Prairie City SVRA and will utilize the ecosystem trail that features the different biomes in California. The two interpreters will ride a UTV through the trail making stops in each biome to talk about the plants and animals that reside in those locations, and why each are important to their native ecosystems. Students will also be learning about vehicle checks, appropriate ways to cross obstacles, and TREAD lightly principles. The program will be offered to classrooms in Spring 2022.



The Interpretation Team posted interpretive content on the OHMVR Division's social media sites including Facebook and Instagram engaging with visitors across the state. Many posts increased visitor awareness about the various sections of the OHMVR Division and involved the interpretive staff coordinating research and development of the content with a variety of staff disciplines, in addition to safety weeks messaging, special holidays and promotion of OHMVR Commission Meetings.

Staff participated in large public outreach events such as the Nevada County Fair, coordinating with various interpretive district staff as well as pop up events in the National Forest OHV trail areas.

The very popular Tread Lightly Course with the remote-control vehicles was redesigned, along with a new smaller course created to accommodate smaller booth sizes at public events. Smaller remote-control vehicles compliment the new course, allowing for an easier configuration and convenient portability.

