



**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division

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**OFF-HIGHWAY MOTOR VEHICLE RECREATION COMMISSION  
Hesperia, CA**

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**STAFF REPORT:** Education, Interpretation, and Outreach Program

**STAFF:** Heather Holm, Interpretation & Education Division Chief

**SUBJECT:** 2023 Annual Commission Report

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**Summary**

The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division provides a progressive statewide education, interpretation, and outreach program with a focus on safe, lawful, and responsible off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation. The 2023 Education, Interpretation and Outreach report focuses on programs and projects, program changes, and partnerships with other state park units and the OHV community to reach a broad audience.

This year marked the first time since the COVID-19 restrictions of March 2020 that the State Vehicular Recreation Areas (SVRAs) and the Statewide Outreach and Education Program were able to offer a full range of opportunities for the public. Park interpreters, rangers, seasonal staff, volunteers, and OHV community members worked together to provide the public with engaging education and interpretation programs. Outreach events continued to create opportunities for engagement at a variety of venues that include OHV events, sports events, county fairs, community events, safety fairs, youth events, school programs, and career fairs.

Weather proved to be a major factor in the interpretation contact numbers for 2023, as winter storms fully or partially closed many SVRAs, particularly Carnegie and Hollister Hills, for lengthy periods. Summer monsoons and a rare hurricane also had an impact on the Southern California SVRAs.

Along with weather closures, this year also proved to be very challenging for interpretive staffing for the Division and SVRA programs, affecting the number of interpretive programs that were presented. The headquarters-based Statewide Outreach and Education Program went through major staffing changes this year, including vacancies at the Interpreter III (supervisory) and Interpreter I positions. Programs continued with the assistance of the OHMVR Division and Interpretation & Education Division staff. A new State Park Interpreter I for the statewide program was hired in December and is currently in training. Hollister

Hills, Ocotillo Wells and Heber Dunes SVRAs also have vacant State Park Interpreter I positions but were still able to deliver respectable interpretive program numbers through the hard work of small, but mighty teams of seasonal staff.

## Discussion

### Statewide Outreach Team

The year 2023 marked the 15th anniversary of the OHMVR Division's Education, Interpretation, and Outreach Program. This year saw the Sacramento-based Statewide Outreach and Education Program team re-envision and expand upon some its crowd-favorite activities, as well as embark on some new interpretive programming and messaging.

The statewide outreach team collaborated with Park Operations and the Division of Boating and Waterways to participate at the International Sportsmen's Expo Youth Fair in January 2023. Staff were able to provide activities for youth and families to explore outdoor recreational activities while learning about safety and resource protection. The OHMVR Division display area featured a new remote control Jeep program utilizing smaller vehicles which gives staff the ability to teach Tread Lightly! principles of recreating responsibly and environmental stewardship when there is limited space. This staple program of the Division Outreach team has been hugely popular with kids and adults for the last 12 years.



The hands-on wildlife discovery program utilizing skulls, scat, fur, and taxidermy specimens to explore characteristics of mammals continues to be very popular at all Outreach events throughout the year, including multi-day experiences such as the King of the Hammers Off-Road Race in February and the Nevada County Fair in August. The addition of prehistoric skulls allowed for opportunities to interpret the similarities and differences of wildlife seen in various OHV areas.

The interpretive staff also presented new programs relevant to OHV recreation and resource management through a pilot program using the PORTS: Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students® program. This allows any classroom with internet access to interact in real time with a park interpreter, giving staff the opportunity to promote and support the OHMVR mission of providing balanced and sustainable OHV recreation. They also produced several OHV safety related videos that were pushed out across State Park and OHV community social media channels.



## Prairie City SVRA

It was a very busy year for the Prairie City interpretive staff, as their visitation increased with the closure of Carnegie during a portion of winter and spring. The park was able to hire an interpretive Senior Park Aide, which allowed for an increase in the number of events and projects for the outreach team to accomplish this year. Prairie City hosts many park promoter-sponsored events throughout the year, allowing the interpretive staff to participate with an outreach booth. The staff also hosted park-sponsored events, including Safety Week activities, Visitor Appreciation Day, and the always popular Headlight Festival during the holidays, reaching 843 visitors.



Statewide, the SVRAs have made great strides in improving the visibility of park activities, resource projects and public meeting notifications using high-quality posts on different social media platforms. Prairie City staff has been posting about the park a minimum of four times a week on Facebook and Instagram, reaching an all-time high of 8,233 followers in November.

There have been several notable projects that have taken place this past year. One of the more unique community collaborations included an Eagle Scout project that delivered a brand new, portable remote-control crawler course and obstacles. This was used at the annual Visitor Appreciation Day event to educate the public about off-road driving techniques and responsibilities.



In August, during the 56<sup>th</sup> annual Cal4Wheel Sierra Trek in the Tahoe National Forest, the staff helped with the Micro-Dyce competition. This was a collaboration with TreadLightly! and Oregon based remote control crawler aficionados who spearheaded the first competition of its kind at the event. Also, new Hangtown entrance banners were designed, printed, and showcased at the annual Hangtown Motocross Classic event. One of the more creative projects we've seen at the SVRAs is the OHV Safety Week Art Installation which highlighted the events of the 2023 theme using expired motorcycle helmets to encourage riders to Be the Off-Road Hero. During these events the staff was able to educate 1,778 attendees.

During California State Parks Week (June 14-18) the "Explore and Discover Urban OHV Culture" event provided free off-highway vehicle safety lessons and tours of Prairie City SVRA in recreational off-highway vehicles (ROVs) and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). The event provides an opportunity to those new to OHV recreation or those who do not have access to the equipment, to enjoy and learn about the urban OHV experience and opportunities at Prairie City SVRA. The tours featured a 10-minute safety presentation followed by a 30-minute tour of the park in an ROV or ATV with experienced instructors and tour leaders. PCSVRA partnered with CA AdvenTours for guided ATV tours, Recreational

Off-Highway Vehicle Association (ROHVA), and the OHMVR Division for ROV tours. The event addressed both the "Explore New Experiences" and "Celebrate Community and Culture" themes of State Parks Week. The staff was able to engage with 1,266 park supporters during this and other park supported events.

### Carnegie SVRA

The Carnegie SVRA interpretive program started 2023 dealing with a series of atmospheric river events causing massive flooding and closing the park for 100 days. However, by the close of the year, the interpretive program was going strong.

During the closure, the interpreters kept the public updated about storm damage repairs being made utilizing videos posted on social media. The storms were quite a setback for the interpretive program, especially during the height of red sticker season.

When the park reopened in April, the interpretive team was able to put together a Visitor Appreciation Day. CORVA, Hayward Motorcycle Club, Railtown Off-Road, interpretive staff from the OHMVR Division, and Riders Recycle all came together to pull off a fantastic event at the end of red sticker season.



The staff was able to develop a brand-new drop-in Junior Ranger geology program with the help of Carnegie's Environmental Scientist who is a trained geologist.

During the down time of the park closure, the interpretive team created four new interpretive panels on Carnegie's industrial history associated with the Carnegie Brick and Pottery Factory. By the summer, the panels were placed in the original cultural Carnegie townsite, brick factory and lime kiln.



By fall, the interpretive program was in full swing, with an information station at the beginning of each month, roving, drop-in junior ranger programs, history ride, and safety week activities. An outreach booth was also staffed during the three hill climb events and included a Birds of Prey theme, a pumpkin carving and bug craft close to Halloween, and a booth during Safety Week with a remote control Jeep course teaching Tread Lightly! safety principles.

Carnegie was also able to participate in Livermore's Truck or Treat event in October. The interpretation team brought coloring sheets on tarantulas and scorpions to pass out to the attendees. The outreach booth was well attended, with about 1,500 people passing through.



For the first time ever, the interpretation team provided an in-park school program to three third grade classes that traveled to Carnegie from the same school. The program included a talk on animal adaptations and a hike in the creek area using taxidermy, pelts, skulls, tracks, and scat activities to keep them engaged. The interpretation team hopes to continue the school programs at Carnegie.

The Carnegie staff joined the Tracy Parade of lights and entered a decorated vehicle that had dirt bikes as reindeer and a side by side as a sleigh. They won 2<sup>nd</sup> place in their category! Carnegie SVRA will also host its first annual light parade this year, where visitors will be encouraged to decorate their vehicles and go on a ride in the valley.



Our volunteer program added two more people to the trail maintenance team. They do amazing work for the park!

Carnegie interpretation team had a challenging year but was able to closely connect with the local communities and increase our program numbers.

### Hollister Hills SVRA

During the winter when the park was closed due to storm damage, the Hollister Hills interpretive staff presented several school-age related programs, including Jr. Rangers and bird and wildlife-themed programs outside the park. The staff also traveled to the local schools, libraries, and local events during the year to present resource preservation-oriented programs including the STEAM fair, National Night Out, and Kids in the Park in Hollister.



The team presented a variety of different programs in the park, such as wildflower hikes on Mother's Day, guided nature hikes during State Parks Week in June, and outreach booths in the park on opening day of red sticker riding and during the Clean Wheeling event. The tradition of a Hollister Hills SVRA



float at the San Benito County Fair in October proved to be popular activity, with over 1,500 visitors to the float and booth.

With the help and support of the California Outdoor Recreation Foundation (CORF), a fundraising partner with the OHMVR Division, Hollister Hills SVRA received a grant from Parks California which allowed for participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Adventure Pass Program. They offered special beginning motorcycle safety classes for 4<sup>th</sup> graders and their families for free, with all motorcycles and all safety gear provided to the students. Nine families participated in the classes and the kids were excited to learn a new sport. All the students passed the course and were eager to return to the park to practice their new skills. Lessons included learning about motorcycles and how to operate them safely, with Tread Lightly! principles integrated into the program. Hollister Hills was the only SVRA designated for the Adventure Pass Program, and it was a great success.



CORF received a grant from the Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative which further enhanced the program by allowing for the purchase of a new Yamaha 125 motorcycle for the training classes. The grant also provided buses for two 4<sup>th</sup> grade groups to come to the park for nature hikes and interpretive activities in November, as well as additional funding for new safety gear for our classes. This was a groundbreaking program which will continue into 2024.

### Oceano Dunes SVRA

The Oceano Dunes SVRA interpretive staff focused on roving interpretation through the spring and summer months, reaching about 650 people. Roving interpretation allowed staff to interact with SVRA visitors on a more informal level by answering their questions about beach safety, tides, ohv rules and regulations, and educating about important park resources such as the Pismo clam. It has been extremely rare to find a legal-size Pismo clam, but over recent years staff have begun to see a comeback! Many longtime SVRA visitors were excited to see their return and have enjoyed the opportunity to harvest the clams and have family clambakes once again. Most of the Pismo clams you see along the shoreline at Pismo State Beach and Oceano Dunes SVRA are undersize clams, with a diameter less than 4.5 inches. To combat illegal take and educate our visitors on the clam population, the Pismo Clam Outreach Team, comprised of Docents and park staff, was very active again this year. A team training was held in Spring 2023 with an informative presentation given by Derek Stein, CDFW biologist.





Interpreters had a great time teaming up with environmental scientists, park rangers, and lifeguards to participate in several community outreach events throughout the year, such as Law Enforcement Night at Farmer's Market San Luis Obispo, the Pismo Beach Clam Festival, and Sheriff's Family Day.

The Oceano Dunes District Visitor Center was open six days a week and hosted about 5,000 visitors. Pop-up exhibits were displayed throughout the year with themes such as rider safety and migrating whales, along with fun activities such as a park-wide scavenger

hunt. The Visitor Center and adjacent walking trail around the Oceano Lagoon is where the popular Chumash Education program is hosted weekly. Through this program, about 1,150 third grade students visited the park. Thanks to the Central Coast State Parks Association, we were able to offer reimbursement for school bus fees incurred for field trips to the park.



### Hungry Valley SVRA

For the first three months of 2023, the park was nearly continuously closed due to constant storms. Staff posted park updates via Facebook and Instagram and kept engagement up with a series called "Tow Truck Tuesday" highlighting the precarious situations OHV users find themselves in with active comment engagement detailing how to get out of and, more importantly, avoid such situations. Other social media posts detailed the dangerous conditions within the park and explained why our terrain experiences flashfloods and unpredictable "mountain weather." The most successful posts concerning 4-wheel drive operation and a search for the owner of a lost muffler garnered 36,000 and 42,000 responses respectively.



On weekends as the park opened, the staff did "roving interpretation" at the campgrounds and staging areas, offering safety tips, park information, and answering questions about the park resources. Hungry Valley SVRA was also represented at two spring nature festivals: the Wind Wolves Preserve Nature Festival and the annual Earth Day celebration with the Kern River Parkway Foundation in Bakersfield. The Hungry Valley SVRA table at each event was the most popular, engaging with 100-300 people every day. The interpretive staff also assisted with six local career day events promoting the appealing career pathways within California State Parks.

Hungry Valley SVRA hired two new seasonal staff members during the summer which allowed for greater school and community outreach, along with regular interpretative programs. In July and August, the new team hosted two 3-day Junior Ranger programs at the Frazier Park Kern County Library branch. Every day between 8-13 children attended,

learning about a range of topics including geology and earthquakes, snakes, arachnids, and light.



A highlight of the year occurred in October when southern California experienced a partial eclipse. The local Ridge Route Museum offered to cohost a solar eclipse program with Hungry Valley SVRA interpretation team. Staff brought their Celestron telescope with a sun filter for the lens to

automatically track the sun while staff explained how it worked. Following the eclipse, staff took the telescope into the different park campgrounds, allowing park visitors to see the sunspots.

Hungry Valley interpretive staff worked with the local Frazier Mountain High School Future Farmers of America (FFA) group to pilot a new program called Mountain Mechanics. Working with FFA students from grades 9-12, they taught students the basics of vehicle maintenance and road/trailside emergencies during a five-month period. Students learned about proper safety equipment, the importance of vehicle maintenance, tire changing and jacking basics, and snow chain installation. Park maintenance staff also participated, discussing their job duties, how to properly tie down OHV equipment on a trailer, and gave a tour of the park maintenance shop to the group. The program ended with a series of fun relay races that incorporated everything the students had learned during the program and a tour of the park. It was considered by all to be a huge success.



The interpretive staff ended the year in style by participating in the Frazier Park Holiday Parade and Festival held in December. The team decorated their work truck in festive style, with Santa on a motorcycle in the truck bed. It was a great way to end a very active year.

### Ocotillo Wells SVRA

2023 was a challenging year for staffing at Ocotillo Wells, but they have built a team of enthusiastic seasonal employees to assist with interpretive programming. Recruitment efforts continue to fill the permanent interpreter positions.

This past year saw the return of many programs that were not available during the prior seasons due to COVID-19 restrictions. One standout event was City of El Centro's Trunk or Treat that took place in October. A team of interpretive staff and state park rangers attended the event, which provided a great opportunity to distribute safety handouts and discuss what our SVRAs provide to the public. Nearly 3,000 children and parents attended this amazing event.





In addition to interpretive programming, the interpretive team has worked closely with law enforcement to spread the word about the Whip & Flag requirements for ROVs. Posters, signs, and flyers were designed to reach the public throughout the park. Safety messages are posted on all park restrooms throughout the season, and the whole Ocotillo Wells staff has worked to get the message out through direct public contact using small, well-designed information cards, and creative social media posts which stress the need for this safety equipment.

At the Discovery Center near the main entrance to the park, interpretive staff interacted with 4,685 visitors, giving out park and local information, providing informative talks, and discussing ways to protect the flora and fauna of the park. The team also took the scat, skulls, furs, and information station out into the park, meeting with 3,623 visitors at mobile interpretive setups that are always well received. This program is so successful that during the day of November 23, 2023, with the increase in the number of interpretive staff, they were able to educate 1,896 people. Outside of the park boundaries, 1,858 interactions occurred at public outreach events, such as the annual Tierra del Sol event in March. There were also 254 participants in the midweek School Programs and the weekend Junior Ranger program.



The staff is excited to onboard the incoming new permanent interpreters to continue building new and engaging programs which will help visitors understand the unique environment that is Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

### Heber Dunes SVRA

Heber Dunes SVRA is currently in the process of hiring a permanent State Park Interpreter I. Interpretive efforts have been focused on providing static messaging for visitors. This included messaging for Whip & Flag requirements for ROVs and distribution of OHV Safety Week Messaging. ASI classes regularly make use of the training course at the park.



Interpretive staff were able to work with City of El Centro's KYOTES (Keeping Youth on Track Education Safety Mini-Bikes Program) during one of their training sessions. Staff were on hand to reiterate safety messaging and the incredible opportunities that riding can provide.

Heber Dunes SVRA is excited to recruit a permanent Interpreter to continue building programs.

**Commission Action**

For information only.

**Attachments**

None