

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS OFF-HIGHWAY MOTOR VEHICLE RECREATION DIVISION



Natural Resources • Cultural Resource • Management • Restoration

Natural and Cultural Resources

Protecting natural and cultural resources is an essential part of managing balanced off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation for long-term use. The Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division monitors the condition of resources at each State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) pursuant to Public Resource Code (PRC) Sections 5090.35(b)(1) and 5090.35(c) and the California Environmental Quality Act (PRC Sections 21000 et seq.). Cultural resources afford a high level of resource preservation and protection to comply with PRC Sections 5024, 5024.1(g), and 5024.5. In addition, ground-disturbing projects funded through the OHMVR Division Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program (Grants Program) have the same resource monitoring and soil conservation requirements as the SVRAs. ❖

Resource Management Program

Environmental scientists at SVRAs continually monitor the condition of soils, wildlife, and vegetative resources to determine if soil standards and wildlife habitat protection programs (WHPP) are consistent with the goals of the OHMVR program. The type of monitoring conducted can be specific to determine the condition of an individual species, or broad to assess the health of an ecosystem. Monitoring practices differ greatly from SVRA to SVRA depending on climate, topography, and geology, and



what species are present. Each SVRA developed WHPPs and prepare annual assessment reports to assist resource managers in maintaining and protecting current wildlife populations and to make informed decisions about an SVRA's individual habitat management needs.

Providing and maintaining long-term, sustained OHV recreation opportunities are dependent upon effective resource management practices. The OHMVR Division has monitoring programs in place to meet its mission and statutory requirements. Major programs include:

- effective trail layout, design, and maintenance;
- trail assessments and erosion control practices;
- stormwater management;
- air quality monitoring and dust control practices;
- ambient noise monitoring;
- invasive species management;
- monitoring programs that collect data on habitat, wildlife, vegetation, and fisheries;
- monitoring programs for protected species, such as flat-tailed horned lizard, California red legged frog, western spadefoot toad, California least tern, and western snowy plover; and,
- extensive restoration programs that preserve habitat, conserve soils, and protect water quality.

The OHMVR Division is able to meet its management goals through the combined efforts of staff, local and state agencies, and stakeholder groups. At several SVRAs, stakeholders from different interest groups form advisory committees to assist in restoration projects, review draft plans and projects; and make recommendations to park managers.

The combined experience creates a greater understanding for, and appreciation of, the complexities of managing an OHV recreation program in a regulatory environment. These collaborative efforts provide the OHMVR Division and Districts with information needed to make informed management decisions and keep the OHMVR Program sustainable for the long term. ❖

Habitat Restoration

From time to time, certain trails or riding areas may be fenced off or closed in an effort to protect wildlife and restore habitat. Areas are closed to OHV use using barriers, such as fences, brush piles and signage. Where possible, staff will construct or select well-designed trails through or around project areas for OHV use during restoration. These closed areas are often revegetated with native plant species in order to repair and rehabilitate areas.

Several SVRAs have established nurseries to grow native plants for use in restoration programs. Seeds are collected throughout the park to maintain genetic integrity. Over time, nursery programs produce thousands of trees, shrubs, and grasses to be used for projects within the park. Volunteers, science interns, and schoolchildren help collect seeds, propagate plants, and assist in revegetation efforts. ❖



Resource Management Areas

Hollister Hills SVRA and Carnegie SVRA established resource management areas (RMAs) within their units to better plan and implement management activities of areas that share common characteristics. For instance, Carnegie SVRA's RMAs are divided by sub-watersheds that connected to each other through a trails network. A RMA restoration project starts with a planning process that considers trail layout, connectivity, emergency access, user interest, enforcement, education methods, buffer zones, and project schedule. On-the-ground restoration work begins with identifying sustainable trails to incorporate into the RMAs trail network. Unsustainable trails, such as those identified as



erosive, are closed and restored. Staff are trained in proper implementation techniques and experienced restoration specialists supervise the work. Completed restoration projects in RMAs often show an increase in vegetation, more storm water friendly trails, and a reduction in overall trail length. ❖

Cultural Resource Management

Cultural resources can include archaeological deposits, historic buildings, abandoned mines, and historic orchards. Archaeological sites have the potential to provide an understanding of past cultures—where we come from and how we are all connected. Cultural resources are often fragile, non-renewable, and irreplaceable; once damaged their unique value to California's and our nation's heritage may be lost forever. Conducting cultural resource inventories is a critical tool for the OHMVR Division to identify cultural resources on land under its ownership, and occur in compliance with PRC Sections 5024 and 4024.1(g). OHMVR Division archaeologists implement several management practices to protect cultural resources that include:

- conducting thorough cultural resources inventories;
- evaluating identified cultural resources in terms of eligibility for listing on federal and state historic registries; and,
- consistent monitoring of significant historical resources.

OHMVR Division archaeologists rely on staff, archaeological volunteers from the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program, and Native American consultants in developing best management practices to protect cultural resources. ❖



Advisory Group

Oceano Dunes SVRA formed an advisory group, as part of a California Coastal Commission permit requirement, made up of stakeholders who actively participate in the adaptive management process involved in habitat conservation and park management. The stakeholder team consists of representatives from local governments, businesses, citizens, the California Coastal Commission, the OHMVR Division, OHV groups, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the environmental community.

OHMVR Grants Program

Ground disturbing projects that are funded through the Grants Program have the same resource monitoring and soil conservation requirements as projects at the SVRAs.



OHMVR Grants Program applicants must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and CEQA. Through the Habitat Management Program (HMP), applicants identify species of concern that exist in proposed project areas. The HMP identifies monitoring activities, risk analysis, and management action to address issues.

To qualify for funding, applicants with projects involving ground-disturbing activities must implement an HMP. The HMP requires applicants to identify special-status plant and animal species that could be at risk from OHV recreation and monitor for potential impacts to those species. As an adaptive management plan, the HMP includes management objectives and actions to address the risk, success criteria to gauge the effectiveness of each management action, and "triggers" for management



change. Once awarded, grantees also report on any management actions taken in response to monitoring results or to concerns raised by the public.

At the conclusion of the project agreement and before the project file can be closed, grantees must provide monitoring results to the OHMVR Division as part of their closing documents. The OHMVR Division created an internal procedure to assure compliance with this reporting requirement.

As an example, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Barstow Field Office

received a grant to enclose and restore a 5,000-acre area within the Juniper Flats Subregion that was damaged by unauthorized OHV activity. The grant increased the

amount of habitat for local wildlife, increased vegetative cover, and reduced the erosion potential for the area. The project also included signing of authorized riding areas and public outreach to let OHV enthusiasts know where it is legal to recreate.

Both the BLM and the United States Forest Service (USFS) have also been the beneficiaries of OHV Grants Program-funded restoration projects conducted by cooperating nonprofit organizations and educational institutions. State law allows nonprofit organizations and educational institutions to assist in restoration efforts with the land manager's approval. Since 2014, the Grants Program has awarded over \$11.5 million to nonprofit organizations and educational institutions for restoration projects on public lands in California.

OHMVR Grants Program Facts:

- Twenty-five percent (25%) of the funds appropriated by the Legislature for the Grants Program shall be expended for projects within the Restoration category.
- Since 2014, more than \$7.5 million in restoration grants have been awarded to the BLM and USFS.
- The USFS and BLM have been awarded approximately \$22 million in operations and maintenance grants for the care and protection of natural and cultural resources. ❖





Volunteers

Volunteers have been an integral part of the OHMVR Program since its inception. They represent a cross section of those who visit the SVRAs and contribute essential skills in support of natural and cultural resource management. Volunteers actively assist in habitat restoration projects, like during these tree-planting events. In addition, volunteers also collect native plant seeds and propagate plants, assist in monitoring efforts, and advise SVRA staff on sustainable trail design.



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