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San Luis Obispo COASTKEEPER®



*Friends of Wild Cherry Canyon* 



March 19, 2019

California Department of Parks and Recreation  
Attn: Katie Metraux, Acting OHMVR Planning Manager  
1725 23rd Street, Suite 200  
Sacramento, CA 95816  
[info@OceanoDunesPWP.com](mailto:info@OceanoDunesPWP.com)

**Re: Pismo State Beach and Oceano Dunes SVRA Public Works Plan - Oso Flaco Campground and Public Access Project**

The organizations ECOSLO (Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo), Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club, American Woodland Conservancy, Morro Coast Audubon Society, Friends of Wild Cherry Canyon, and the San Luis Obispo Coastkeeper & Environment in the Public Interest are strongly opposed to the aspects of your Public Works Plan that seek to develop the Oso Flaco Lake area for off-road vehicle interests. Oso Flaco is the only truly natural area remaining within your park's unit. The rest of the State Vehicular Recreation Area's (SVRA) natural features, habitat value, and recreational opportunities for hiking, bird watching, native plant observation and nature immersion have already been adversely affected by the use of this area as an off-road vehicle park. Our organizations recognize the ecosystems of Oceano Dunes and our ocean, waves, and beaches as valuable resources. These resources should not be exploited for the financial gain of recreational activities that degrade the natural environment. For the following reasons, we oppose this project:

Inadequate Public Input. The process for public input, which is mandated by law, has been unduly restricted. The online comment form is inadequate. It only addresses four of the eight proposed projects under the PWP, and for each of those four, asks respondents to choose from a very limited selection of options (Concept A or B), with no mention of the option to simply comment without selecting a "preferred" project. This does not truly capture the essence of a public comment process. Additionally, there has been insufficient community outreach both with meetings and in public comment deadlines. No public meetings were held in communities adjacent to the Park including: Oceano, Nipomo, and

Guadalupe. Instead, public meetings were held miles away in Shell Beach, Arroyo Grande, and as far away as Tulare and Fresno.

The scoping period for the EIR for the PWP ended on June 9, 2018, prior to the release of information detailing the elements about the size, scope, intensity, maps, and quantitative information about the proposed project. The presentation from the May 2018 Scoping Meeting contained only two lines about the project, which is insufficient disclosure about the project details that are needed for the public to be informed and able to comment on the scope of the PWP EIR.

California Resources Code 14CCR 13353 requires that an alternative location be considered for any development plan under the PWP. However, no alternative locations have been proposed.

Biological Resources. The Oso Flaco Lake Natural Area contains habitat supporting numerous special-status wildlife and plant species, as well as several natural communities considered sensitive by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and protected as Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area (ESHA) by the California Coastal Act, and wetlands regulations.

Concept 1 proposes to provide off-road vehicle access, and access for the staging area and childrens' riding area by crossing a wetland area that drains into Little Oso Flaco Lake. Concept 2 proposes to provide vehicle access through this drainage to cabins and a campground, in addition to creating off-road vehicle access through the wetland and riparian areas within the Oso Flaco Lake basin. These areas are habitat for several special-status wildlife species, including the federally threatened California red-legged frog, the southwestern pond turtle, and the western spadefoot, which is under review for federal listing. Several bird species listed as CDFW Species of Special Concern nest in these areas. Riparian and wetland habitats are sensitive natural communities. Implementation of either of these Concepts would result in a loss of wildlife habitat and direct mortality to individuals located in these areas, and in a loss of these areas as important breeding and foraging habitat.

The project proposes to construct a new off-road sand highway through an area that currently consists of stabilized and vegetated dunes, eliminating natural habitat, potentially affecting numerous rare plant species, and increasing particulate pollution.

Increased human activity at Oso Flaco Lake would degrade wildlife uses of the site through disturbance, introduction of non-native species, noise, unauthorized collecting, and trespass into sensitive areas. Lighting for the campground, cabins, and maintenance facilities would affect wildlife habitat uses including breeding, foraging, and roosting. Water use for the campground, cabins and day use infrastructure would impact the depleted Nipomo groundwater basin and cause depletion of surface water resources that wildlife depend on. Increased traffic on local roads would cause mortality of wildlife, including California red-legged frog, southwestern pond turtle, and western spadefoot, as well as common species of mammals and reptiles. Spills of oil, gas and diesel would occur in the campground, staging and riding areas, degrading freshwater resources and potentially contaminating groundwater.

The noise and other types of disturbance caused by concentrating off-road vehicle activity adjacent to the aquatic resources of the Oso Flaco Lakes would influence foraging, breeding and migratory behavior of protected bird species. Indirect effects of the increased off-road vehicle area would affect a variety of plant and wildlife species.

Zoning. Converting agricultural land requires a zoning change and an amendment to the County's Local Coastal Plan, which must be approved by the California Coastal Commission. Everything in the proposed Public Works Plan must be consistent with the LCP. The conversion of ag land is controlled by Section 30242 of the Coastal Act, "Lands suitable for agricultural use; conversion":

*All other lands suitable for agricultural use shall not be converted to nonagricultural uses unless (1) continued or renewed agricultural use is not feasible, or (2) such conversion would preserve prime agricultural land or concentrate development consistent with Section 30250. Any such permitted conversion shall be compatible with continued agricultural use on surrounding lands.*

Campgrounds, roads, and vehicle staging areas for motorized recreation access are not in accordance with this policy.

Air Quality. It is unclear from the available PWP documentation what the expected net effect of project implementation on airborne particulate matter and other pollutants would be, either from the Oso Flaco project alone or all eight components of the PWP.

Passive Recreation. This proposal does not enhance passive recreation. The introduction of off-highway vehicle recreation causes all other passive recreational opportunities to suffer. While passive and active recreation provide some shared benefits, passive recreational opportunities offer the unique benefits of the protection of natural resources and the restoration of ecosystem services.

Coastal Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). We understand that several years ago State Parks began work on a Coastal Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to cover operations of several coastal parks in order to ensure take coverage. To our knowledge, this process has not been completed to date. A new HCP process has been embarked upon exclusively for the Oceano Dunes, Pismo State Beach, and Pismo Lake with a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in early 2018. We believe this must be discussed and addressed with the public as the PWP process unfolds.

Environmental Justice. We are very concerned about the environmental justice implications that have existed in Oceano due to the Pier Ave entrance - this community has long been economically depressed by the ODSVRA. This project would continue to impact the Oceano community members. There have been no independent studies of the economic benefits of the ODSVRA to the Oceano community. This community does not currently have a safe beach for non-motorized recreation, and this continues under the PWP. Residents of adjacent low-income communities would experience a disruption of environmental benefits, i.e., the ability to experience wildlife in a natural, "untouched" part of our community. The proposed plans, as stated earlier, would increase human activity, resulting in a disturbance and loss of wildlife. We also expect environmental burdens that

the community would have to endure, such as increased litter/pollution, noise, crime, erosion, and diminished air quality.

For several years. California State Parks has attempted to develop a southern entrance. The prerequisite for such efforts was an entrance that would have less environmental impact than the current one. Failing that, we did not support those attempts then and we do not support this attempt now. In conclusion, our organizations believe that Pismo State Beach and Oceano Dunes SVRA should refrain from pursuing any of the proposed plans for the Oso Flaco Lake area. We are happy to further discuss the contents of this letter and provide more information.

Kind regards,

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