

A Summary of Non-compliance on Coastal Commission Issues at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area



For 38 years, the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area has been out of compliance with its Coastal Development Permit, which required designation of a permanent entrance and staging area within 18 months of the SVRA receiving its permit in 1982.

Over the course of those 38 years and two separate access studies, no less destructive means of OHV access to the ESHA has been found. Just as there is no non-destructive OHV activity possible in ESHA, there is no non-destructive OHV access to ESHA.

For 32 years, it has failed to conform with San Luis Obispo County's Local Coastal Program, which requires designation of 580 acres of County-owned land within the SVRA as a buffer between the riding area and the Dunes Preserve.

“Interim” vehicle limits were set 19 years ago and have never been adjusted— part of the failure to conduct a carrying capacity study to determine how many vehicles the dunes ecosystem can withstand without long-term damage.

For 17 years, DPR has refused to heed the advice of the scientific subcommittee of its Technical Review Team to study the potential benefits of year-round closure of the SVRA's snowy plover nesting area to vehicle traffic.

For a decade and counting, DPR has disputed the findings of a peer-reviewed study commissioned by the SLO County Air Pollution Control District which found that dust plumes that blow off the dunes and create hazardous pollution levels for down-wind residents -- victims of the worst air quality in the country -- are largely the result of off-road vehicle activity.

Over the last 18 months, DPR has missed four promised deadlines for delivery of a completed Public Works Plan to the Commission's Executive Director.

Through the summer and fall of 2020, DPR engaged in significant grading activity at the ODSVRA without obtaining or seeking a Coastal Development Permit for this intensified use, in direct violation of the Coastal Act.

The clock has run out. The Coastal Commission should take action to implement all 15 of the permit amendments and a 5-year phase out of OHV activity in the ODSVRA, as proposed at the commission's July 2019 meeting.

The Commission should also inform State Parks that, as a condition of approval for their Public Works Plan, they will be required to update their general development plan for the ODSVRA to recognize and implement the buffer status of the La Grande Tract in acknowledgment of that designation in the County's Local Coastal Plan.

The Commission's required inclusion of a 5-year phase out of OHV activity in the Public Works Plan must include a specific time frame, with specific benchmarks and dates demonstrating how and when OHV activity will be scaled back and finally cease, with a date certain for an end point, and an understanding that this end point will not be changed, whether or not DPR has successfully met all benchmarks in the program timeline.