

APPENDIX E

Major Themes from Initial Public Outreach Discussion

Major Themes

The major themes presented here were initially identified during initial public outreach activities associated with the General Plan Update (January 2010 - May 2011). The content provided below was extracted from Working Paper #1: Major

Themes from Initial Public Outreach, which is available at www.PlanOcotilloWells.org.

Major Themes

List of Major Themes

- A longtime tradition of riding and camping with family and friends
- A convenient escape
- The unique freedom of open riding and camping
- Maintaining access to SVRA riding opportunities
- Appreciation for diversity of OHV recreation
- Support for multiple recreation opportunities
- Appreciation for desert environment and natural resources
- Encouraging responsible OHV use and a responsible environment
- Balancing need for enforcement with valued visitor freedom
- Enhancing emergency response
- Diversity in views of environmental and cultural resource protection
- Additional facilities and services
- Connection to local community

The following themes emerged from the initial public outreach activities. For a complete understanding of the range of issues raised, please refer to the input documentation in Appendices A, B, C, and D. This input will be considered by the project team when completing early project research and preparing the General Plan and EIR.

A longtime tradition of riding and camping with family and friends

Many visitors pointed to tradition and familiarity as key reasons for visiting Ocotillo Wells SVRA. More than half of the participants have been visiting the SVRA for longer than 10 years. For many visitors, camping and OHV riding with family and friends at the SVRA has been a multi-generational tradition spanning more than 50 years. Some participants pointed to fond memories of OHV riding from their youth as a reason to keep the tradition of visiting Ocotillo Wells SVRA alive. Tied to these discussions were comments about passing on this tradition to children and grandchildren. According to some OHV users, familiarity with the area also provides a sense of security because they feel they are less likely to get lost.

Participants also noted that the SVRA is often used as a central meeting point for family and friends to get together on weekends and holidays. Many visitors point to a family-friendly environment as one of the main reasons they choose to visit Ocotillo Wells SVRA in place of other OHV recreation areas. Many parents value that the SVRA is a family-friendly place for children to ride and experience the outdoors.

A convenient escape

Many OHV enthusiasts indicated that one of the main reasons for coming to Ocotillo Wells SVRA is the relative closeness of the park to their homes in San Diego, Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange counties. Some visitors mentioned that Ocotillo Wells SVRA is closer to home than other OHV recreation areas, and that the close proximity to home offers them a quick escape from their daily lives. A small percentage of visitors travel to the SVRA from other areas of California or from other states.

Many people also commented that they enjoy retreating from the city to experience the natural desert landscape and weather. Participants noted that the desert feels a world away from everyday worries. According to some OHV enthusiasts, Ocotillo Wells SVRA is popular because it has warmer winter weather compared to other Southern California OHV recreation areas, such as those in the high desert. The beauty of desert sunrises, sunsets, and storms was popular with many respondents.

Visitors cited easy access from paved roads, such as County Route 22 (S-22), as another reason they visit Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Although some visitors said that it is easy to get trailers and campers in and out of Ocotillo Wells SVRA, it was mentioned that the condition of the Marina Drive entrance from State Route 86 to the area north of S-22 made access difficult for large RVs and trailers.





The unique freedom of open riding and camping

Many visitors are drawn to the unique freedom that Ocotillo Wells SVRA offers to openly camp and ride throughout the SVRA. In particular, many visitors valued camping “wherever you want” and “the openness of the area.” Participants also mentioned that the large SVRA size and riding area allow for extensive exploration and adventure riding.

Maintaining access to SVRA riding opportunities

Many participants expressed concern about potential loss of riding opportunities, which some feared could result from closure of the SVRA, a reduction in its size, or closure of riding areas. Many visitors appreciate the large area of the SVRA, which provides room to ride and explore. Some participants did not feel comfortable visiting during busy weekends or holidays due to increased crowds.

Participants also cited concerns over whether protection of natural and cultural resources could result in the loss of riding opportunities. Some visitors worried that alternative energy development could further reduce available area for OHV recreation within the SVRA. Many visitors would also like to see the SVRA expand to include additional riding opportunities on adjacent land. Some participants expressed disappointment that, subsequent to the passage of SB 855, some of the lands of the former Freeman Property were acquired by the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and are no longer accessible for OHV recreation.

Areas in the SVRA that have been closed to riding were frequently raised in discussions. Many riders feel that OHV riding opportunities are being lost throughout the state, and they would like to see re-opening of closed areas at Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Other visitors do not necessarily want to see closed areas reopened to riding, but would like any closed areas to provide signage with information about why the area is closed. For example, if an area is closed to protect sensitive habitat, some visitors would like this information included in signage.

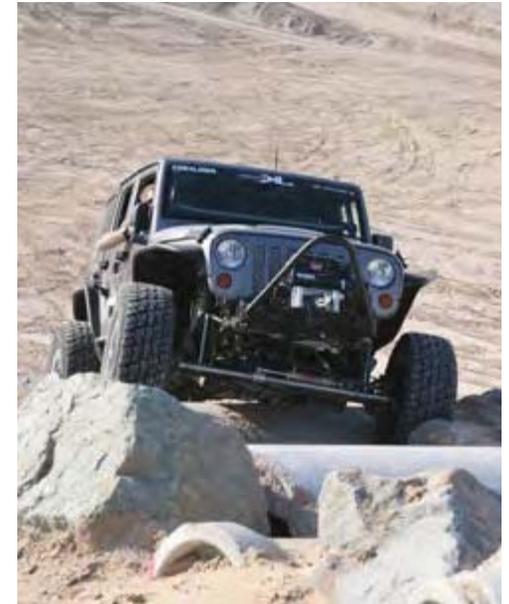


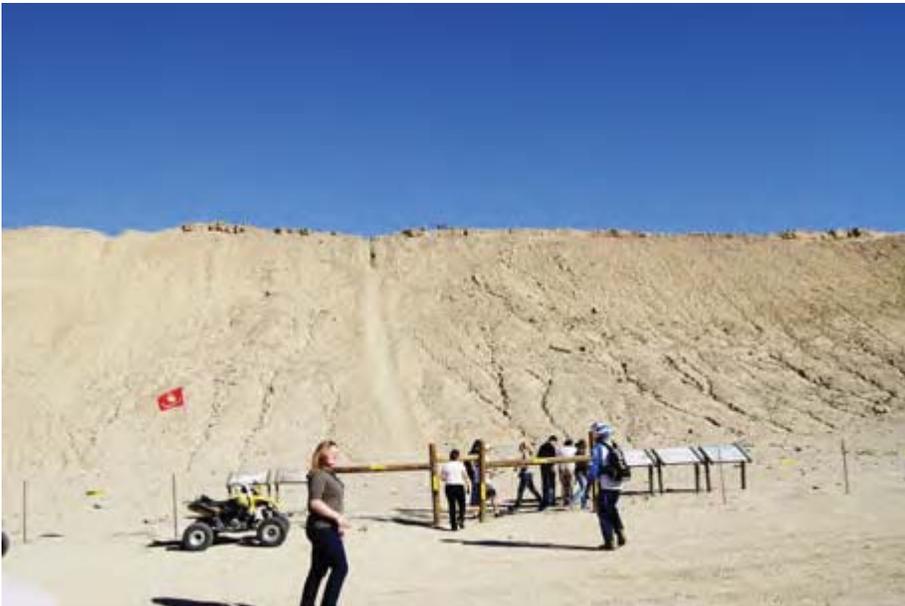
Appreciation for diversity of OHV recreation

One of the strongest recurring themes was an appreciation of the diversity of OHV recreation within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The varied terrain (such as mud hills, technical rock riding, and washes) provides opportunities for a range of skill levels and OHV interests. Due to this variation in terrain, different areas of Ocotillo Wells SVRA offer different OHV opportunities. For example, visitors who ride motorcycles and quads prefer the south and central areas of the SVRA, while visitors who like slower, more technical riding tend to drive trucks or jeeps north of S-22.

Visitors use the trail network to access destination landmarks, washes, and challenging terrain throughout the park. Visitors commented that some of their favorite destinations and trails in Ocotillo Wells SVRA are Pumpkin Patch, Shell Reef, Devil's Slide, Blowsand Hill, Gas Domes, Artesian Well, Cahuilla Trail, and Cross Over Trail. Visitors cited Dusty Mountain, Truckhaven Trail, the Phonebooth, the Four Palms, the Fire Hydrant, the Street Sign, the Tetherball/The Arches, and the washes as their favorite destinations.

There was widespread enthusiasm for events at the SVRA, including group-sponsored events, volunteer clean-ups, organized rides, and educational opportunities. Events such as the "Roughneck Rendezvous" geocaching event, the CORVA Truckhaven Challenge, Treasure Trails events, and TDS Desert Safari were favorably received by many park enthusiasts. Participants also suggested that the event permit process be streamlined to make it easier for applicants.





Support for multiple recreation opportunities

Although the most popular activity among visitors is OHV recreation, most survey participants mentioned that they also take part in other activities while visiting Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Common activities include camping and picnicking, spending time with family or friends, geocaching activities, relaxing, socializing with other visitors, and observing the natural landscape and desert environment. Some participants also enjoyed photography, stargazing and astronomy, mountain biking, hiking, and playing with remote-controlled cars.

Appreciation for desert environment and natural resources

Many participants indicated that visits to Ocotillo Wells SVRA had contributed to the development of a strong land ethic within their families and groups of friends. These concepts included “treading lightly,” picking up litter, respecting the SVRA regulations, and appreciating the natural desert landscape. Many participants expressed that they like to discover and observe the natural resources found at the SVRA, such as geological formations, plants, and wildlife. Some visitors participated in organized clean-up events.

Additionally, the SVRA’s education and interpretive program is particularly popular with families. Many parents enjoy taking kids to interpretive events at destinations such as the Pumpkin Patch and Shell Reef. Participants noted that adults and children alike appreciate the programs that focus on respecting the desert and keeping it clean for future generations. Many visitors have learned about desert geology and plant and wildlife through the SVRA’s interpretive programs.

Encouraging responsible OHV use and a responsible environment

One of the strongest recurring themes that surfaced during the visitor surveys was the issue of public safety. Overall, many visitors feel that safety conditions at Ocotillo Wells SVRA are better than at other OHV parks in the area. Families stated that they were drawn to Ocotillo Wells SVRA because the riding environment is safer for their kids. At the same time, visitors would still like to see safety improvements made during the park's General Plan Update process.

Of particular concern was irresponsible OHV use, such as speeding, drinking, drug use, and lack of sufficient safety training. Participants also raised concerns regarding unsafe or disrespectful behavior by other visitors, such as OHV riding at fast speeds through popular camping areas. Other safety concerns include the lack of clear, durable wayfinding signage along trails; theft and vandalism; and crowded conditions during holiday weekends. Some visitors also indicated that areas that are closed to riding are sometimes difficult to see when riding, which creates hazardous riding conditions. Signage and fencing with greater visibility was suggested. Some participants also expressed safety concerns resulting from OHV use near highways and major roads.

In addition, the importance of OHV education was frequently raised during outreach activities. Suggestions for OHV education centered on riding and safety training for novice riders, responsible riding in and around the camping areas, and first aid outdoor skills.





Balancing need for enforcement with valued visitor freedom

Many visitors appreciate the ranger presence at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, and note that the SVRA feels safer and more family friendly than other OHV recreation areas in the region. Some visitors would like to see an increased ranger presence to ensure that visitors continue to behave responsibly. Many participants suggested that additional enforcement at camping areas and heavy traffic areas—especially during busy weekends—would further improve public safety. However, some visitors feel that enforcement efforts are somewhat heavy-handed and take away from the feeling of freedom.

Enhancing emergency response

Additionally, participants suggested that more resources (e.g., staff, equipment, and educational programs) be provided to improve emergency response services at the SVRA. Call boxes were suggested to help visitors access emergency services. Other participants suggested the development of a ranger station on the north side of Ocotillo Wells SVRA to help reduce emergency response times to this area. Emergency responder suggested the creation of a central response network and a greater use of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between agencies to increase coordination efforts.

Diversity in views of environmental and cultural resource protection

The majority of visitors are aware of the natural and cultural resources within Ocotillo Wells SVRA. Resources most commonly cited were the geological formations at the Pumpkin Patch, Gas Domes, Shell Reef, and Calcite Mines; the natural beauty of the desert landscape; and the geological history of the area. Many visitors were also aware of native plants and wildlife in the SVRA. Many participants expressed interest in learning more about the park's natural resources, and suggested that all closed off areas provide informational signage explaining the natural resource.

Opinions on the appropriate level of natural and cultural resource protection ranged from aggressive protection to no additional resource protection measures. Overall, most visitors acknowledged the importance of balancing environmental and cultural preservation and OHV riding opportunities. Some visitors felt that closing parts of the park to conservation would unfairly minimize the space designated for OHV riding, while others stressed the importance of preserving the flora, fauna, and cultural resources of the SVRA by closing areas or limiting open riding. Some participants clarified that they are not opposed to all OHV-related development, but would like natural and cultural resource preservation to be considered when planning this development. Other participants felt that resource protection should be limited to the much larger Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.





Some participants expressed concern over the potential contributions of OHV activity to dusty conditions and poor air quality, particularly for areas downwind of riding and for events, which draw high numbers of visitors. Other participants commented that wind should be considered for its potential contribution to dusty conditions, and expressed doubts that OHV activity contributes to dusty conditions.

Several specific comments were provided regarding cultural resources management. Some stakeholders expressed concern over the potential for recreation to affect cultural resources, including previously unidentified sacred sites and burial grounds. Potential disturbance to human remains were of particular concern to some stakeholders. Suggestions were made that some areas with known cultural resources be closed to riding to protect these resources. Some participants would like to see Native American tribal representatives involved in information generation and cultural resources management decisions. Additional suggestions included ensuring that tribal perspectives are included in educational and interpretive programming.

