

4x4Wire.com

**PO Box 1057
Lakeside, CA 92040**

619-508-8840

C4WDA Natural Resources Consultant - John Stewart

Oct 30, 2016

NRC South Report for October 2016

Forest Service:

Recently the Los Padres NF issued a special use permit to a concessionaire to operate various campgrounds and day use areas on the Los Padres. That action did generate a few comments about lack of public review.

This paragraph from the Los Padres website is important:

The SUP will be issued for 52 developed recreation sites located on all five ranger districts of the Forest. The new SUP will replace six expiring permits and consolidate all concession sites under one permit. In April, Los Padres issued a prospectus seeking applicants for this SUP. Bids were considered, along with business plans, during the evaluation of proposals. It was determined that Parks Management Company submitted the strongest proposal for operating and maintaining Los Padres recreation facilities.

Basically, there has been existing SUPs for concession operation of campgrounds. This action brings all permits under one concession permit.

The appropriate contract vehicle was used to solicit and evaluate bids.

This type of action IS NOT subject to NEPA review as it is written into the existing forest plan as a "best management practice" for operation of campgrounds.

Now, should the concessionaire undertake work that would expand the campground or deviate from normal maintenance activities (rebuild/repave the entry), a NEPA analysis would be appropriate.

The “Enterprise Forest Plan” that covers the Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino and Cleveland NFs incorporated the decision to use concession operations for campgrounds where appropriate. To that extent, this action was put forth to the public when the plans were created about 15 years ago. The environmental impacts were addressed.

Additionally, Forest visitors parked in standard amenity recreation fee sites within the Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino and Cleveland National Forests must display a valid recreation pass beginning Saturday, September 10.

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) lists standard amenity fee sites as those that provide designated developed parking, picnic tables, toilet facilities, security, interpretive signs and trash receptacles. Many of these sites are located at major trailheads.

This action is a result of the settlement of a long-running lawsuit which blocked the implementation of those fees pending court review. That review is complete and the fees are being applied.

BLM:

The DRECP is lumbering along. At the October Desert Advisory Council (Oct 15), the new lead for the implementation of the DRECP was introduced. Russ Schofield is returning to the southern California BLM Desert District office to be the lead for implementing DRECP.

So, just what does “implement” mean? To put it in perspective, DRECP is an “overarching framework” that will establish the criteria for future planning efforts under the area of influence of the plan.

DRECP implementation is the first step. It will set criteria for analysis of “site specific” projects.

And, that begins to set the stage for a series of conflicting issues as the “implementation” of DRECP moves forward. Reality and theory are preparing to collide.

Therein lies a conundrum. Webster’s dictionary defines a “conundrum” as 1) a riddle whose answer is or involves a pun; 2) a question or problem having only a conjectural answer; and 3) an intricate and difficult problem.

DRECP defines “disturbance caps” with fixed percentage values. However, the application of the “disturbance caps” are unknown as they are numbers with no relation to reality of what is on the ground.

Currently, there is a WEMO travel planning that is meandering through a long and winding path of bureaucratic and legal obstacles.

WEMO is a site specific project and one to the types of plans destined to be analyzed under the “overarching framework” of DRECP criteria.

Therein lies a conundrum. BLM is just now “planning” on how to “implement” a process to define how “plans” are to be analyzed.

Problem is, WEMO is under court direction which may or may not provide interface with DRECP “guidance”.

So, let’s look at the “disturbance cap” issue. Routes of travel identified under WEMO are being analyzed for their “disturbance cap” impact. DRECP is awaiting the results of the WEMO analysis before applying that to the broader concept of the DRECP controlled planning area.

Now, the “disturbance caps” apply. That is known. But, do the existing routes provide a baseline for which additional disturbance is measured? What is the impact on a proposed renewable energy site “ground disturbance” with respect to routes of travel “ground disturbance”?

On the “bright side”, the Special Recreation Management Area within Ocotillo Wells SVRA is (or will be) formally transferred to the State with the completion of the Ocotillo Wells SVRA General Plan. Currently, the OHMVR Division manages the area under an MOU. Under a provision on the Recreation Public Purposes Act, that lean is being transferred to the State. However, geo-thermal development still is a possibility; however, it will come under a higher bar for approval.

In short, within BLM areas there are a number of unknowns that will take time to work through court review and administrative action.

Special Recreation Permits:

First, federal SRPs. BLM is in process of conducting a review of their permitting process with the objective of standardizing their permits across recreations modalities. They are beginning work on an on-line permit application process to simplify application.

The 180 day pre-event deadline still applies. And, increased emphasis is being placed on monitoring and completion of the post-event report. For event chairs, this means that post-event reports must be completed within a 2 week time after completion of event. BLM expects to finish their review and issue a draft document for public review late summer 2017.

Forest Service has also begun a permit review. Their first public meeting to begin the process was held in Denver in late September. That event generated significant discussion and future public meetings are planned around the country after they review the data from the first meeting.

Second, state SVRA SRPs. State Parks has receive many complaints about their permit process. The issue of permits is a major topic in the Transformation Plan meetings. Changes will occur. It is too soon to speculate in how the changes will impact OHV. I did comment at the recent OHMVR Commission meeting that Cal4 does host events within SVRAs and has a vested interest in working with the review as it progresses.

Climate Change:

For context, yes, the climate is in a continuous cycle of change. That change is good and bad. With that, I attended a Landscape Conservation Cooperative meeting in Monterey that brought four of the 21 LCCs around the nation together along with the Southwest Climate Science Center. Representatives from California Resources Agency, State Parks and Department of Fish and Wildlife joined a range of others from Alaska to Texas.

While many ideas were discussed, the common denominator is that federal planning efforts are required to address the impact of their actions on climate change. California Resources Agency is working on policy changes that will require all state actions to consider the impact on climate change. The train is loading and leaving the station.

What is clear after 2 and half days of discussion, no one has a clear idea of what it means or how to define impacts of actions on climate change. I did manage to put forth the idea of looking at the impacts of climate change in terms of how the changing variability will impact actions rather than how an action will impact climate change.

In short, there is a general acceptance that managing “change” by adapting to the change is more doable than trying to stop or alter the ill-defined and nebulous “change”.

If you want to know more about the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, visit their website at: <http://lccnetwork.org> and the Climate Science Centers website at: <http://www.doi.gov/csc>