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NRC South Report for December 2018

**Bi-State Sage Grouse** - Recreational organizations have filed a lawsuit challenging restrictions on permits for motorcycle and other vehicle events within the range of the Bi State sage grouse. The grouse is a "distinct population segment" within the larger range of the Greater sage grouse, an iconic bird of the high desert lately distinguished by high controversy over its status and continuing management.

The lawsuit focuses on changes made by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest as part of a settlement with special interest led by the Center for Biological Diversity. Under the settlement, the Forest Service agreed that motorcycle or other off-road vehicle events would not be authorized on routes passing within 4 miles of grouse breeding sites at any time of day between March 1 and June 30.

The lands affected by the event stipulations are in northeastern California and northwestern Nevada. The Plaintiffs in the lawsuit are the Sierra Trail Dogs Motorcycle and Recreation Club, the Pine Nut Mountains Trails Association, the American Motorcyclist Association District 36, California Four Wheel Drive Association and the BlueRibbon Coalition.

This lawsuit is focused on technical and legal aspects concerning administrative overreach in setting policy at the demand of special interest parties by extending closure distance and dates without supporting scientific data.

Still to be determined is the overall status of planning documents covering the Greater Sage Grouse within the 10 western states. The Bridgeport and Black Rock Desert are areas of most impact to California OHV affected by any of the sage grouse planning efforts.

**BLM Desert Advisory Council** - The DAC met December 14-15 in Ridgecrest for the first time in almost a year. The primary agenda item of interest was the update of the Western Mojave (WEMO) Route Network Project. The WEMO discussion has been under court oversight for several years and has repeatedly missed court assigned deadlines. A new timeline was announced with the anticipated release of the WEMO Travel Management and Land Use plan Amendment for the region.

If this schedule holds, the plan will be released in April 2019 with a 30-day protest period and a 60-day "Governor's Review" period. The final documents (Travel Management Plan and LUPA) are expected to be released as final Records of Decision in October 2019.

As part of the process, a draft “Historic Trails Context Study” is expected to be released in January 2019.

Now, for the rest of the story...

The current “government shutdown” pending approval of agency spending bills has many government employees on furlough with only “essential” employees being requested to work, without pay. There is a possibility that the April 2019 release date could be delayed. Stay tuned for updates...

**Inyo NF** - Inyo NF has completed their final Forest Plan revision. I submitted objections on behalf of Cal4Wheel on the final document. I have been notified that my objections were deemed to have merit and have been invited to an “Objection Resolution” conference to be held in Bishop (January 15-17). As this is an official Forest Service meeting, due to the on-going government shutdown, the conference schedule may be delayed. Stay tuned for updates...

Looking forward to 2019:

**State of California** - A new State Senate and State Assembly have begun a 2-year session. A new governor will take office on January with a task of submitting a Governor’s Budget to the Senate and Assembly on January 10.

That budget will provide a roadmap of what to expect for the next two years. Early indications the upcoming session will be heavy on renewable energy, climate change and increased state welfare programs. Within the mix is the California State Parks “transformation” progress. The OHMVR Division has been “absorbed” into State Parks and many changes have begun that will have an impact on the OHMVR Program. Here is where the Governor’s Budget will provide some insight as to priorities for State Parks.

Of interest is how much will be allocated to the OHMVR “Green Sticker” Grants Program? This program provides funding for many projects throughout the state the benefit OHV recreation. Also of interest is the amount of funding to move forward long stalled planning effort; especially in Ocotillo Wells SVRA, Red Rock Canyon SP, Prairie City SVRA, and the new Kern County additions (adjacent to Red Rock Canyon SP).

**Federal Agencies** - The current government shutdown may impact the ability of the Federal Agencies (BLM and Forest Service) to complete their Green Sticker grant applications. This could impact the ability of the agencies to provide for trail and campground maintenance, wild-fire recovery efforts, law enforcement, and a number of other activities associated with keeping trails open.

And, Congress begins its 2-year 116th session on January 3, 2019. With the House of Representatives in control of spending priorities (and reviewing initial agenda releases), public lands management for recreation is not high the priority list. Renewable energy, climate change, social-welfare, and congressional investigations are at the top of the priority list.