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December 2016 Monthly Report

**California Department of Fish and Game Commission: (Flat-tailed horned lizard)** Big news of the month is the Fish and Game Commission declined to accept the petition from Center for Biological Diversity to list the flat-tailed horned lizard as a California State endangered species. The topic is off the discussion table for the time being. As the issue has been floating around for over 18 years, there is expectation this is a temporary set back for CBD. It is good news as it clears the way for Ocotillo Wells SVRA to again host events as per the original intent of the SVRA.

**(Wolf)** The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has released the Conservation Plan for Gray Wolves in California (Part 1 and Part 2). Wolves returning to the state and the plan addresses important concerns regarding the presence of wolves, including conflicts with livestock and the maintenance of adequate prey sources for wolves, other predators, and public use.

There are two small wolf packs documented as existing in the northern part of the state.

**BLM:** BLM is proposing to withdraw the lands within the boundary of the DRECP from location and entry under the Mining Law of 1872, for 20 years, subject to valid existing rights. The withdrawal does not apply to the mineral leasing, geothermal leasing, or material sales laws. The segregation is intended to preserve the status quo while the proposed withdrawal process is under review.

The Record of Decision for the DRECP, signed on September 14, 2016, described the BLM's intent to begin the withdrawal process within 90 days of signature. The purpose of the proposed withdrawal is to protect conservation lands that provide important protections for biological and cultural resources from the adverse impacts of mining.

The BLM will host public meetings to gather scoping comments related to the withdrawal process. During the scoping period, written comments about the proposed withdrawal will be accepted from all concerned individuals, tribes, agencies, and organizations. Scoping comments will be addressed in a scoping report that will be prepared as part of the environmental analysis.

This action has been expected and is the beginning of defining how the lands set aside for “conservation” will be managed. Within this exercise, many existing routes will be reviewed and some may be proposed for closure.

We are awaiting the release of the BLM route analysis to determine the existing “ground disturbance” in the affected area. The discussion will move forward with caveat that overall disturbance will be capped at 2% value. The analysis is expected to be complete April-June 2017 timeframe.

**California Department of Parks and Recreation: (Hungry Valley SVRA)** California State Parks has started a public process to update the General Plan for Hungry Valley State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA). The General Plan Update will provide a comprehensive management plan that will guide the future of Hungry Valley SVRA for the next 20 to 30 years.

**State Parks Transformation and OHMVR Renewal:** At the recent OHMVR Commission meeting in Holtville, the topic of transformation was addressed and public comment was accepted.

In my public comment, I applauded the efforts of the Director and cautioned that many of her proposals deal with personnel issues that have yet to be vetted through state civil service protections and the representative union. Watching Director Mangat's reaction to my comment told me I hit a very sensitive point. This is a positive I see for the program. State Parks is required to accommodate the employees whether the program exists or not. The "transformation" process is faltering and may prove difficult to maintain a separate OHMVR identity. Boating and waterways face a similar dilemma; except, that commission is more focused on concessionaire operations than user recreation base.

In short, OHMVR program faces a serious challenge that becomes apparent when you step out of the weeds and review it from a broad, high level view. While the program does not rely on general fund revenues, pressure on general fund revenues will trigger more "takes" to align fuel tax funding to address broader state-wide transportation issues.

The state issues of transportation, water, energy and immigration are going to be major competition for re-authorization of the program. Senate Bill 1 and Assembly Bill 1 have been introduced in the new state legislative session. Both bills propose significant changes to the fuel tax distribution to the detriment of the OHMVR program.

A key point in this discussion is where OHV recreation occurs; which is federal managed public lands. State and federal policy are in agreement about the importance of water; not necessarily the same priorities for water allocation. State policy is leaning towards electric vehicles with annual mileage caps/taxes for fossil fuel based motor vehicles.

Cal4 and other state OHV organizations are committed to achieving a re-authorization of the OHMVR program.

State Parks “transformation” moves forward and will have an impact on the future of the OHMVR Program.

**Political stuff:** January 3, 2017 is the beginning of the 115th U.S. Congressional Session. This session begins with a GOP majority in the House of Representatives, U.S. Senate and the Office of President.

The past eight years have produced many actions that have had a negative impact on access to public lands. The speculation is that many policies of the past will be rescinded. Nothing will be known until 1) after January 20th when the new Administration assumes the power of government, and 2) appointed Department Heads are confirmed and begin to implement the Administration's agenda.