

# **NOTICE OF PREPARATION**

To: State Clearinghouse  
Responsible Agencies  
Trustee Agencies  
County Clerks  
Interested individuals and organizations  
Federal Agencies

## **Subject: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of the Eastern Kern County Acquisition Environmental Impact Report (EIR)**

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, 1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95816, will be the Lead Agency for the Eastern Kern County Acquisition EIR. The purpose of this NOP is to invite comment on the scope and content of the environmental review which is germane to the proposed project.

Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §15082 (b), you have 45 days from the date of receipt of this NOP to respond. **Responses must be received by 5 pm November 11, 2012.** Please send your responses to Mr. Dan Canfield, Planning Manager, at the address shown above or to [dcanfield@parks.ca.gov](mailto:dcanfield@parks.ca.gov). Agency responses should include the name of a contact person at the agency.

All interested individuals, organizations, and agencies are encouraged to attend EIR scoping meetings to be held at the following locations:

**Tuesday, October 16, 2012**

**Ridgecrest, CA**

**6 pm – 8 pm**

Carriage Inn

901 North China Lake Boulevard

Ridgecrest, CA

**Wednesday, October 17, 2012**

**Lancaster, CA**

**6 pm – 8 pm**

Oxford Suites

1651 W Avenue K

Lancaster, CA

**Additional project information** is available on the OHMVR Division Website:

[www.ohv.parks.ca.gov/ohv-ceqa-notices](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov/ohv-ceqa-notices)

**Project Title:** Eastern Kern County Acquisition

**Project Applicant:** California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division

**Project Location:** Eastern Kern County west of State Route 14 between the cities of Mojave and Homestead (near Ridgecrest). See attached project location map (Figure 1).

**Project Description:**

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division is proposing to acquire up to 60 privately-owned parcels (approximately 28,500 acres) in Kern County, California, from Renewable Resources Group (Renewable Resources) (Figure 1). The parcels are within an area frequently referred to as the Onyx or Rudnick Ranch (note however that the town of Onyx is approximately 20 miles northwest of the project area). The parcels are largely interspersed with lands owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Figure 2). The checkerboard of public and private lands results in roads and trails between BLM parcels often traversing private lands. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation occurs on many of the Renewable Resources and BLM parcels, largely on designated roads and trails.

The EIR for the proposed purchase will examine the direct and indirect environmental impacts associated with: 1) purchase of the parcels by the OHMVR Division from Renewable Resources, and 2) use and management of the parcels for ongoing recreation and resource protection prior to adoption of a general plan. A general plan is not part of the current CEQA process. Preparation and approval of a general plan is a separate action from this project and would be subject to separate environmental review.

The majority of the acreage to be purchased is located within the Jawbone-Butterbredt Area of Critical Environmental Concern (JBACEC) located in the western Mojave Desert. This area is the transition zone between the West Mojave Desert bioregion and the Sierra Nevada. A few parcels in the northwest project area are within the Sequoia National Forest (Figure 2). Lands proposed for acquisition also include the following areas of interest: Butterbredt Springs and springs within Alphie Canyon, which provide important habitat, and lands within the Jawbone Canyon Open Area (Figure 3). Open areas are the only areas where motorized travel is not restricted to designated roads and trails. One parcel borders the Dove Springs Open Area, and two parcels border Red Rock Canyon State Park. A number of parcels support intermittent channels, with some subject to flash floods under a 100-year storm event. Many parcels, especially to the east, are crossed by existing designated routes for both street-legal and non street-legal vehicles. The Pacific Crest Trail traverses the northern and western project area, and the Los Angeles Aqueduct traverses several of the easternmost parcels.

In addition to their recreational and scenic value, these private lands contain important springs, riparian areas, cultural sites, and other sensitive resource areas. Acquisition of these parcels would provide better overall management of the area as it would allow land managers complete access to those lands to manage and support the recreational uses, protect sensitive resources, and restore and rehabilitate damaged areas.

The OHMVR Division in consultation with BLM would determine the most effective way to manage the parcels using resources available from both agencies. The OHMVR Division has started discussions with BLM regarding future management. The OHMVR Division has also been working with the BLM to develop data on existing resources and management considerations.

If the OHMVR Division acquires the parcels, some management changes may occur due to operational, resource, or other management needs, but no changes significantly affecting the amount, type, or location of OHV recreational activities are proposed. No expansion of open riding areas is proposed. Upon acquisition, the OHMVR Division would begin to provide resource and visitor services via rangers, environmental scientists, and maintenance staff, which is not occurring on the private parcels.

Anticipated activities would fall into five broad categories: visitor activities, general maintenance and operations, natural and cultural resource management, special projects, and special events. The following summarizes the activities that would occur on the parcels:

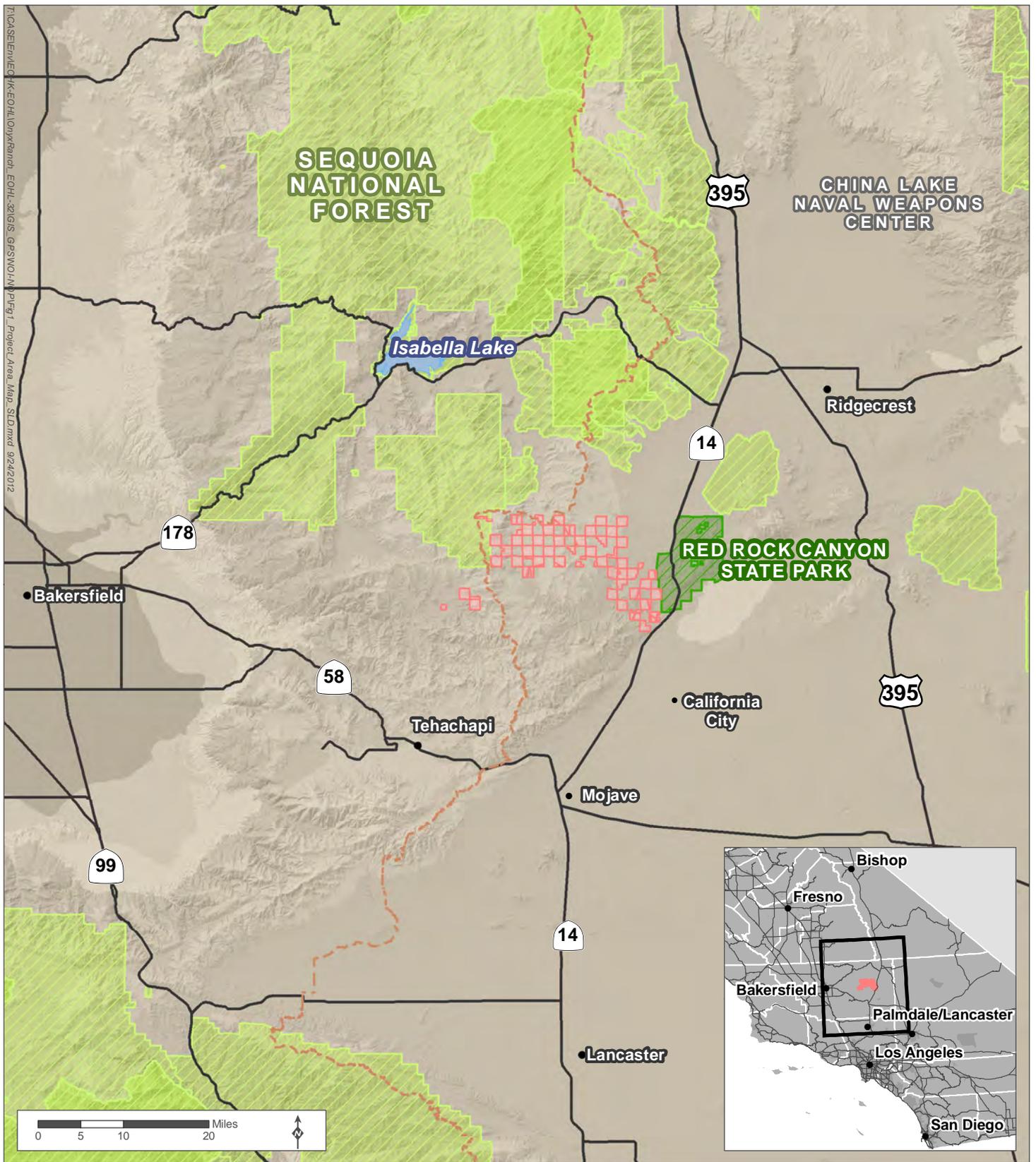
- Ongoing visitor activities would include motorized vehicle use in the open areas and on designated routes outside the open areas, picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, bicycle riding, wildlife viewing/birding, and camping. Camping would be allowed throughout the OHV use area with motorized access restricted to designated routes except in open areas. Dogs would continue to be allowed.
- Maintenance and operations would include garbage pick-up, facilities maintenance, signing, fencing, and ongoing maintenance of trails and access corridors. General park operations would include patrols, public safety and law enforcement, medical aid, and emergency response to law enforcement and medical aid calls. The frequency and extent of these services would be expected to increase under OHMVR Division management as BLM staffing of the area is limited.
- Natural and cultural resource management activities would include installing and maintaining sensitive habitat protection fences, installing and maintaining other closure area boundaries signs and fences, wildlife species monitoring and management, habitat monitoring and management, vegetation management, exotic pest plant removal, and restoration planting. The frequency and extent of these services would be expected to increase under OHMVR Division management as BLM staffing of the area is limited, plus such activities are generally not conducted on the private parcels.
- Special projects are those that are not considered routine but are required to solve a facilities problem, such as installing restrooms or ensuring ADA compliance. The only such projects anticipated upon acquisition and prior to adoption of a general plan would be minor in scope. Public Resources Code section 5002.2 (c) does not allow any development that results in the permanent commitment of unit resources without a general plan.
- Special events could include organized group activities such as recreational events (including OHV competitions, organized trail rides and poker runs), tours for large groups interested in the project area, and media events that draw an unusually high number of people to the park unit and/or congregate people in confined areas. Such

activities are subject to the issuance of Special Event Permits, which are themselves potentially subject to separate CEQA review.

**Environmental Review:**

In accordance with the requirements of CEQA, the OHMVR Division has determined that an EIR for the proposed project should be prepared. Potential adverse impacts relate to air quality, biology, cultural and natural resources, geology and soils, hydrology, noise, recreation, and traffic. Further refinement of the scope of the technical issues to be addressed will occur during the CEQA process, including input received in response to this NOP.

Signature:  Date: 9/26/12  
Title: Acting Chief OHMVR Division



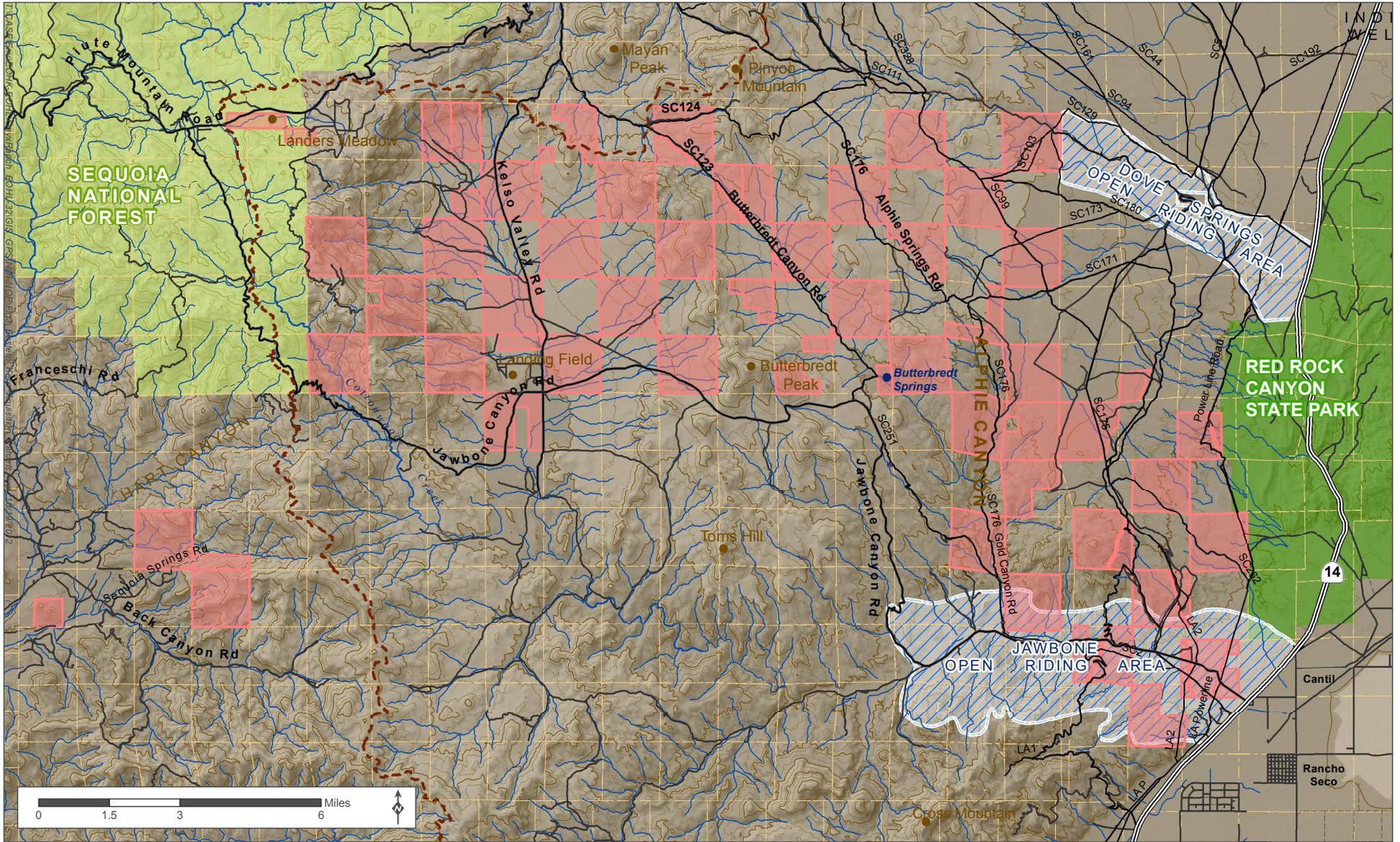
Source: BLM, ESRI, CA State Parks

- Major Roads
- - - Pacific Crest Trail
- Project Parcels
- ▨ US Forest Service
- ▨ California State Parks

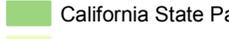
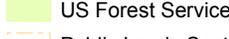
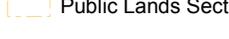
**Figure 1 Project Location**

*Eastern Kern County Acquisition NOP*





Source: Bureau of Land Management, CalTrans, TRA, Kern County, California Department of Recreation

-  Highway 14
-  Local Roads
-  Unpaved Roads
-  BLM Designated Routes
-  Pacific Crest Trail (USFS 2008)
-  Open Riding Area
-  California State Parks
-  US Forest Service
-  Public Lands Sections
-  Re Nu



**Figure 3** Eastern Kern County Acquisition Parcels