



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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**OHMVR COMMISSION MEETING
on ZOOM**

February 26, 2021

STAFF REPORT: OHV Interpretation and Education Report
STAFF: Stacey Yankee, Division Chief of Interpretation and Education
SUBJECT: OHV Interpretive Engagement during COVID-19

Summary

During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to traditional ways of interpretive and educational engagement with park users and stakeholders who recreate with off-highway vehicles. Interpretive staff in state vehicular recreation areas (SVRA's) had to pivot from in-person and hands-on engagement to digital interpretive content. Even though parks and state facilities had closed to the public during stay at home orders, the public still wanted up-to-date information about safety measures in parks, plans for re-opening the SVRAs and interpretive and educational opportunities for learning about their favorite state parks.

As the interpretive staff at Hollister Hills SVRA wrote in their report, "Now, more than ever, it has become clear what a key piece interpretation plays in collaborating efficient and informative ways of disseminating information to the public.'

Digital interpretive content for the OHV community took many forms throughout COVID-19 including live streams and uploaded video content to Facebook, creation of videos placed on YouTube, Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students PORTS programs including on-demand and home learning programs, augmented reality educational platform tools, Agents of Discovery, Flipgrid and Padlet content created for school educational learning. Virtual programming also included Junior Ranger, Little Ranger, Mini Ranger, campfire programs and statewide interpretive special events. The ability of the interpretive staff to uniquely change their program offerings to provide continuous service to the public, shows the professionalism of state park interpreters in the OHV program and their commitment to engage the public.

Carnegie SVRA interpretive staff wrote in their report, "During this time, interpretive content turned virtual through the creation of videos. Many of the videos created were

uploaded to Facebook, in order to connect with our visitors regarding current happenings in the park.”

While some outreach programs and special events took place at the beginning of the year, prior to COVID-19, many others had to be cancelled. Later in the year, some smaller events with limited capacity were allowed in a few SVRAs while following safety precautions put in place for COVID-19.

Preparations also began during the summer of 2020 with hopes for in-person engagement for the 50th Anniversary of OHV in 2021. While the celebration will still continue, much of the public engagement will be through implementation in the SVRAs.

There is much hope that in-person interpretive programs and engagement will resume in some capacity during 2021. Until that happens, digital interpretive platforms will continue to engage and educate the OHV stakeholders and users of our SVRAs.

Discussion

Prairie City SVRA

Adaptability, collaboration, creativity, and an enthusiasm for developing new skills were critical elements of Prairie City State Vehicular Recreation Area’s (PCSVRA) success in overcoming the obvious challenges of helping the public forge meaningful connections to natural, cultural, and recreational resources in the era of COVID-19.

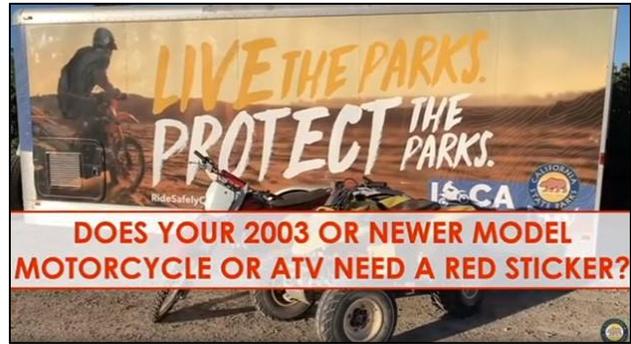


In consultation and collaboration with staff from multiple program areas across the Gold Fields District, PCSVRA’s interpreter reached 24,300 existing and potential visitors through its official [Prairie City Instagram](#) page. Promoting safe recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting rare vernal pool ecosystems, and educating visitors on red sticker riding season were just a few of the topics addressed in these videos and posts. Best of all, the response to this content from the park’s diverse community of OHV recreationists was overwhelmingly positive!



PCSVRA’s interpreter also worked collaboratively with park rangers and environmental scientists to develop park signage aimed at educating visitors on a 4x4 area improvement project. The outdoor areas around the Environmental Training Center, including the two training ranges and shade ramadas, were utilized by both special event promoters and Department staff to provide various socially distanced OHV training programs involving 10 or fewer people total.

In October, the permanent State Park Interpreter I position was filled and the management and maintenance of the Environmental Training Center (ETC) equipment fleet became a focus for fall.



Carnegie SVRA

Carnegie SVRA received a new State Park Interpreter I in February 2020.

Before the statewide stay-at-home order, there was a volunteer special event for planting trees. About 20 volunteers participated, donating about 100 volunteer hours and planting over 100 trees. The park held another volunteer event in November with appropriate COVID-19 restrictions in place. This event had a smaller group of 12 volunteers, who donated about 48 hours to open some areas of the park which were closed due to fire recovery.



Carnegie SVRA was closed for about a month during the statewide stay-at-home order. During this time, interpretive content turned virtual through the creation of videos. Many of the videos created were uploaded to Facebook, in order to connect with our visitors regarding current happenings in the park. Many of the videos were about trail maintenance and current projects with the forestry staff working to open certain parts of the park.

Two videos were created focused on the early history of the park including coal mining and brick making. These videos were uploaded to Flipgrid with the hope of sharing the local history with educators. The video on the Brick & Pottery Factory received many positive reviews from visitors when it was also posted on Facebook. Carnegie SVRA participated in the statewide Great Virtual Halloween Spectacular with other parks from the Mount Diablo district by creating a video about tarantulas.





The park's website was also updated with more information about the facilities at the park. Coordination with the park aides at the park kiosk has also helped bridge the gap with Spanish speaking visitors by creating English and Spanish brochures. Time was also spent on housekeeping, updating interpretive panels near the restrooms and fire safety awareness for the park.

Future plans include connecting with local schools to create in-person programs such as riding tours and Jr. Rangers.



Hollister Hills SVRA

This past year was challenging and at times an uncertain year for many California State Parks and State employees. However, just as we have seen perseverance across the nation, Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) has also persevered and continued to provide exemplary public service and put forth outside-the-box park programming.



Now, more than ever, it has become clear what a key piece interpretation plays in collaborating efficient and informative ways of disseminating information to the public. With the oversight of many social media platforms, in-person communication, and telephone answering, interpreters regularly communicate the State Parks message. This year Hollister Hills SVRA interpretation staff worked hand-in-hand with visitor services (Rangers) to get accurate information to the public as the COVID-19 pandemic found the state park system changing in unprecedented ways.

Until deemed safe, in-person park programming is on hold. Virtual programming has become the new normal and many parks scrambled to catch up with other parks or districts which already had an established virtual presence. Hollister Hills SVRA embraced this new programming method and completed a total of 12 videos with another 4 videos in production and plans for an additional 4 videos. New and unique ideas led the interpretive team to create a stop animation geology video, a November series on cooking with OHV related safety messages, and a 'spooktober' series of tree preservation messages placed throughout the park. The tree preservation message culminated in a video, in which trees that met an early demise released hauntings unto the public.



Outside of our growing video production company, interpretation staff at Hollister Hills SVRA also focused on panel production. Staff created and installed various information panels including:

- Welcome panel for our Nature Area (non-motorized),
- Campground panels (2) in the Upper Ranch (4x4)
- Gate panels for Mudstone Ranch (non-motorized) that interpret our symbiotic relationship with cattle grazing.

Although 2020 found many parks postponing or cancelling annual events, Hollister Hills SVRA was able to reorganize and offer two of our fall 4x4 oriented events. In September, we offered a self-guided Geocache Bash in which single household units or families were able to come to the park and partake in the GPS scavenger hunt. In late October we held the Annual Clean Wheeling event in which we had 28 participants, who drove throughout the Upper Ranch collecting trash. For this event we required all preregistered participants to provide a signed one-day volunteer form before being admitted to participate.



Hollister Hills SVRA was fortunate to be able to continue to participate in some annual city and county outreach events during 2020 which were well-organized and safe events. Two events attended were the Treat Street and Lights on Holiday Parade. It was a morale booster for both our staff and the public to see Hollister staff in attendance and participating at these events.



Additionally, Hollister Hills SVRA was among some of the first parks to re-open to the public in May, which made many park visitors happy, as they arrived in large numbers. It was during this re-opening time that interpretation staff were integral in helping visitor services staff implement their re-opening plans.

Oceano Dunes SVRA

At the start of 2020, interpretive staff at Oceano SVRA began incorporating Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students (PORTS) programming into our schedule. We were able to boost the program topics offered within our District, as we developed more digital lessons while adapting to the changes that came with the pandemic. “Discovering the Dunes” is our program available through the PORTS On-Demand Programs for Oceano Dunes SVRA. We also participated in the PORTS Home Learning Programs with a variety of topics and activities, including a reading on the shoreline of the popular Dr. Seuss book, “Clam I Am”.



Beyond PORTS programming, we also took our Chumash education program digital, offering weekly distance learning opportunities where kids could learn about Chumash culture, Chumash games, and join interpreters on a virtual tour through the park. Chumash education content was also featured in the dual language Junior Ranger program that we collaborated on with the statewide interpretation team. We had a blast taking our traditional park

programs digital as well! We offered virtual Junior Ranger, Campfire and Little Ranger programs throughout the year.



To accompany all of the digital lessons, we utilized the online education platforms Flipgrid and Padlet, and enhanced the content on our YouTube channel. Flipgrid is an international online platform used in classrooms. Flipgrid displays short, informational videos on a wide range of educational topics. Some of our topics include dune formation, native plant species, native invertebrates and native mammals. Padlet is an online bulletin board where information can be posted in the format

of videos, educational website links, and various documents. There we posted our augmented reality coloring sheets which teach about the Western snowy plover as well as OHV safety gear. We included links to our Padlet, Flipgrid, and YouTube channel in program confirmation emails to teachers, during PORTS programs, and on ending slides to Home Learning Programs. Our goal is to provide teachers with as many resources as possible to assist them during these times of digital learning.

One other way we were able to bring our visitors virtually into the park was with Agents of Discovery. Normally, when you play Agents of Discovery you have to be on location, but the app was updated to include options for game play from your home as well! We advertised the game to our visitors and noticed that our Oso Flaco Lake location was seeing an increase of users. We continue to add content to our game locations to engage visitors in a new and fun way during the park closures.



Our park faced a lot of uncertainty this year. Though we encountered many trials, we made it through stronger as a program and as a team. We are looking forward to the coming year and cannot wait to bring back our events and regular park programming and see everyone on the beach with their friends and families.

Hungry Valley SVRA

To commemorate Hungry Valley State Vehicular Recreation Area's 40th anniversary in April 2020, the park launched a cell phone-based augmented reality game titled "Discover Hungry Valley". This was done through the Agents of Discovery cell phone app. At the park, users were able to search for challenges and answer questions about safety, the park's flora, fauna, and history. The game's avatar, named Secret Agent Sage, is dressed in riding gear including a helmet, gloves, boots, long pants, and jersey. This game compliments another cell phone app, Geocaching, to encourage visitors to explore the park and learn about Hungry Valley.

Hungry Valley State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) saw an increase in visitors including first-time visitors over the past year. As a result, interpretive staff launched a “Know Before You Go” campaign to help visitors prepare themselves for riding in the park. Staff recorded videos of the camping facilities, day use areas, and some of the trails within Hungry Valley SVRA to allow first-time visitors to make preparations before visiting the park. This campaign also included safety messaging in an effort to help keep the public safe while visiting the park.



The park’s social media campaigns were very successful in growth and outreach this year. Hungry Valley SVRA’s Facebook followers saw a yearly increase of 27%. Instagram followers jumped by 19% over a one- year period. Park staff used social media to inform visitors of on-going safety messaging related to the COVID-19 pandemic and OHV recreation at Hungry Valley SVRA.

Ocotillo Wells SVRA

The interpretation staff at Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Area (OWSVRA) started the year with numerous outreach programs at schools in under-served communities. During the one-hour program, students discover the animals that call the desert their home, and the adaptations these animals have developed in order to survive the extreme summer heat and lack of water. The fearsome taxidermy badger is always a highlight of each visit. At the end of the session, the students are given the opportunity to draw their very own animal, which must have at least two special adaptations to help it survive in the desert.



Until the COVID-19 temporary closures, the interpretation staff continued the always-popular weekend pop-up programs at the famous riding destinations in the park. Popular topics included desert riding safety and safety gear, gnarly prehistoric animals of the past, adaptations of desert animals, and the popular solar telescope and solar oven. Three different Junior Ranger programs were also offered, beginning with kids ages 3-6 in the Mini Ranger program.





The park also held its annual Geology Daze festival. This event draws hundreds of visitors who have a chance to discover the various geologic forces that have sculpted our landscape, including flash floods, wind erosion, earthquakes, the story of the rock cycle, and a chance to compare the geology of OWSVRA with other planets. The highlight of every Geology Daze event is the Borrego Rock and Gem Club, who cut open open geodes and sliced other rocks.

During the extreme heat of the summer months, up to 120°, few visitors come to the desert. During this time the interpretation staff had the opportunity to replace many of the interpretive panels at the popular riding destinations in the park.

The interpretive team also plays an important role in keeping our park visitors up-to-date on the park's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes social media and web based efforts, deploying and maintaining park signage, making personal contact with visitors, as well as creating new Radio Rock-o-tillo content.



Heber Dunes SVRA

Heber Dunes SVRA is a day-use park and is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The season for Heber Dunes is typically the fall, winter and spring due to the extreme summer temperatures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the interpretive staff from the Ocotillo Wells District again played a critical role in distributing bi-lingual COVID-19 safety information to our visitors.



OHV Interpretation and Education Outreach Team

Prior to COVID-19 stay-at-home procedures, the OHV Interpretation and Education Outreach Team attended several special outreach events dispersing OHV brochures and providing in-person engagement with the radio controlled (RC) off-road course and hands-on learning with the Scat, Skull and Fur Program.



The first event of the year was the Sportsman Expo, where interpreters handed out OHMVR brochures educating visitors about local and state-wide SVRA's. At the January 2020 King of the Hammers event, the outreach team provided education to the public through using several programs including the RC course on TREAD-LIGHTLY principles and the Scat, Skull and Fur program educating the public on wildlife found throughout the state. The outreach team interpreters went to Tierra Del Sol and helped interpretive staff at Ocotillo Wells SVRA with educating the public about local geology and pre-historic animals. February 2020 was the last in-person outreach event before COVID-19. It took place at Tahoe National Forest where interpreters provided OHV brochures to the public, as well as educated the riders about disposing of waste properly. In total 4,842 contacts were served in-person during the

beginning of 2020 by the Interpretation and Education Outreach Team prior to COVID-19 and the shut-down of large scale special events.



Transitioning into the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, the interpretive team focused on creating digital educational content to the public through use of an educational platform called Flipgrid and various social media sites. Using Flipgrid, the outreach team created content such as learning about the native wildflowers residing in each of the SVRAs throughout the state. A video was also produced promoting riders to wear proper safety gear and to practice the buddy system by encouraging children to create their own safety pal at home. While Flipgrid focused on reaching out to schools, the social media platforms were used to provide information to followers, including which parks were open to the public, safety messages during COVID-19 and proper social distancing practices. Safety videos were also created and filmed at Prairie City SVRA by the Outreach Team.

These videos were shared on social media to teach riders how to properly shift their bodyweight on an all-terrain vehicle and how to gear up for safety as an OHV rider. The interpreters also celebrated Women's History Month by highlighting women OHV riders

on social media, including an interview with a woman staff member from the grants section in the OHV Division.

The Interpretive and Outreach Education Team was involved in “OHV Turns 50” committee work throughout 2020, including interpretive theme development and research, prototype designs for stickers and patches, pilot projects for public engagement such as the OHV and Me Project and Agents of Discovery, committee meetings with the Communications Division and meetings with SVRA interpretive staff in the field.

Commission Action

None

Attachments

None