

Date: June 4, 2025

From: Will Harris

To: The California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission

For: OHMVR Commission meeting on June 12, 2025

Regarding: Reckoning with Neglect, Apathy, and Deceit

Dear Commissioners,

I have been to enough OHMVR Commission meetings to know that Oceano Dunes related issues have dominated the commission's time and attention for years. And I know many of the regulars attending these meetings are torn. They see what has happened at Oceano Dunes, how State Parks executives needlessly capitulate to the shifting accusations of the local San Luis Obispo County air district, and they shake their heads in disgust. Yet, at the same time, the issues and recreation areas these folks care about—OHV safety education, Carnegie, the Rubicon Trail, Clear Creek, Glamis, increased trail closures on federal land, etc.—do not get the attention they feel is necessary to affect desired recognition and/or change. Over time, they have grown resentful. For them, every minute the commission discusses Oceano Dunes is a minute given at the expense of their own cause. That resentment is understandable.

But successful resolution of their issues and concerns assumes these OHV stakeholders have an honest broker in State Parks. The Oceano Dunes saga, with State Parks's acquiescence and duplicity at every turn, demonstrates that they do not. It is emblematic of a root problem: State Parks as represented by its current management in Sacramento is not a reliable partner. Let me count the ways:

1. **Neglect.** The State Parks staff position of local leadership at Oceano Dunes, the District Superintendent, has remained vacant for more than 8 years. This negligence leaves both the park staff and the community adrift. It is a message that says neither are a priority. Excuses provided by State Parks Director Armando Quintero and Liz McGuirk, the Chief Deputy Director, that it is difficult to find a person with the right skill set, etc., ring hollow. Vacancies for far more complex jobs are filled everyday. Leaving this local leadership post open for nearly a decade is inexcusable.
2. **Apathy.** In 2021, the California Coastal Commission voted unanimously to eliminate OHV recreation at Oceano Dunes yet State Parks took no legal action in defense of the park. Thankfully, enthusiasts for the park—the Friends of Oceano Dunes and the American Sand Association—stepped up by filing suit against the Coastal Commission. The park enthusiasts prevailed: The Coastal

Commission exceeded its authority. Had the Coastal Commission's action been left unchallenged, the broader ramifications of their vote, the precedent set, would have impacted parks and camping areas up and down the coast. State Parks executives knew this yet chose to stay on the sidelines.

3. **Deceit.** As I informed the commission at its April 2, 2025 meeting, documents obtained from a public records request reveal that [State Parks intentionally suppressed published scientific findings](#) that would have benefited Oceano Dunes. The local air district has claimed since 2010 that airborne particulate matter (PM10) measured at the Nipomo Mesa, an area two miles east of Oceano Dunes, is dust from dunes disturbed by OHV recreation. An investigation by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography showed that only 14% of the Mesa PM10 consists of dust. The findings refute the air district's claim that OHV recreation at Oceano Dunes is the cause of particulate pollution on the Mesa. Yet rather than leverage the findings to exonerate Oceano Dunes, State Parks undertook a concerted effort to avoid reference to the Scripps work. And worse, knowing that the Scripps findings were bolstered by publication in an esteemed scientific journal, State Parks chose to suppress news of the publication.

Neglect, Apathy, Deceit. These traits are not confined to the shifting, shrinking boundaries of the OHV riding area at Oceano Dunes. They are within our State Parks system, a reflection of its current Sacramento-based management. If these traits are not confronted openly and ultimately resolved, any stakeholder seeking collaboration and partnership with State Parks is undertaking a fool's errand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Harris', with a stylized, cursive script.

Will Harris