



MEETING SUMMARY

Recreation Management and Visitor Use and Needs at Silverwood SRA

Meeting Details

Date: 11 July 2017

Time: 10:00am

Location: Cottonwood Fire Station, San Bernardino National Forest,
Mountaintop Ranger District

Objectives: Gather information on recreation management and visitor use and needs at Silverwood Lake SRA

Attendees

Lisa McCandless, Stantec; Kirby Gilbert, Stantec; Mark Stamer, District Ranger; Robert Taylor, Forest Hydrologist & FERC IDT Leader; Jeremy Dorsey, Recreation Lead; Josh Direen, Assistant Forest Engineer; Clayton, Cottonwood Fire Station staff

Summary

The USFS does not own lands within Silverwood Lake SRA, but does have road segments that pass through portions of the Silverwood Lake SRA lands. The USFS also manages most of the land that surrounds the SRA, except those lands just north of the Lake. The adjoining San Bernardino National Forest Lands are within the Mountaintop Ranger District and are used for a variety of recreational uses, which are particularly well suited for OHV use. The USFS Cottonwood Fire Station responds to fire, safety or environmental-related incidents in and around Silverwood Lake SRA, and the USFS coordinates with Parks for some public safety and recreation management activities. The USFS District Ranger and staff from San Bernardino NF provided the following information and observations:

- The adjoining lands both east and west of Silverwood Lake SRA are used extensively for a variety of OHV uses including, jeeps, motorcycles, and other all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). However, some roads are signed to preclude vehicles with Green Stickers (vehicles that do not have a highway registration), meaning only street legal vehicles are allowed.

- USFS has only one staff member to maintain the OHV trails in the Silverwood area. OHV users are supposed to stay on designated trails, but user-made OHV trails are still created. The USFS tries to close them off where possible. A single staff member (OHV Technician) does all of the maintenance on these OHV trails, and can bring out as much as three truckloads of trash daily. This trash must be taken to a transfer station and fees are assessed via the USFS for this expense. It was mentioned that the trash that accumulates on FS road 2N33 can take up to one week to be removed (at three trips per day) by a designated staff member (OHV Tech).
- OHV use patterns are somewhat consistent and the trails are busy year-round. There is no particular high season. During winter, this area is popular as it does not get snowed out like other Forest OHV areas. Therefore, the USFS feels that this area is a unique resource, as its elevation is lower than many other OHV back country roads and trails in the San Bernardino National Forest.
- The USFS is concerned about the potential for fire starting on recreational lands around Silverwood Lake (both in Park and on USFS lands). There is particular concern in places like the Twin Coves area, which is near the Live Oak Landing boat-in site. In that location, OHV users and people who want to access the lake for free, often walk down to the shoreline and set up barbeques. The concern is that there are no hot coal and ash receptacles located in this area.
- It was noted that for the lands around the north side of the lake, Parks officials patrol and maintain the shoreline area by boat, and yet trash regularly accumulates on trails leading upslope and crossing onto USFS lands.
- The OHV area east of Silverwood is accessible from the Cedar Springs Dam access road and parking area, as well as from Miller Canyon (4wd only). This area includes Pilot Rock Ridge (2N33 road) and is a popular route used by a variety of OHV users.
- The OHV area west of Silverwood does not have a local staging or designated parking area near Silverwood Lake. This main OHV road, (2N47) crosses atop Cleghorn Ridge and is frequently used by jeeps, with most access coming in from Cajon Pass areas.
- Mark and Robert recommended that we get in touch with Greg Hoffman in the Supervisor's Office, he is an avid OHV user and knows some of the groups who are active in the area. This includes those in the Adopt-a-Trail program who could give us more insight regarding USFS lands and use at Silverwood Lake SRA (camping and/or day use).
- Clayton, who is stationed at the Cottonwood Fire Station, gave us an overview of typical traffic patterns on SR 138 and 173 near Silverwood Lake SRA. He noted how park users can often back up onto the highway when the Park is full or when waiting to get into the Park. He noted that many users do not stay in the shoulder

lane, which typically forms as a queuing area. During particularly busy times, a few users will remain in the main driving lanes, in order to ensure that other park bound motorists don't cut in line ahead of them.

- Mark Stamer recommended that we get about 20 years' worth of visitation records in order to see if we can identify changing trends in usage. They also recommended that we talk more to State Parks, specifically to Steve Hopkins, as he was a ranger at Silverwood Lake for over 20 years. Additionally, we should also talk to Ron Krueper, the retired Parks District Superintendent. Both of those individuals could help us identify trends in recreation use and changing needs at the Park. Furthermore, those contacts could help us get more information on the history of the Highway 138 and 173 back-ups. Ron Krueper also has historical knowledge of the managerial switch from Forest Service to State Parks.
- The USFS identified a contact for Caltrans to discuss highway use, management and parking issues – Manny Galareta.
- Clayton, who is the fire captain at Cottonwood Fire Station, stated that they respond to fire calls all around the lake. They are no longer called as a first responder to medical incidents within the Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area, but on occasion are called in, depending on the resource requests. They do respond to incidents on the highway.
- The USFS indicated that they were considering the possibility of relocating the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in the Cleghorn area near where it crosses Highway 138. In the location that it is currently in, which is within the flood plain of the West Fork Mojave River, the PCT can get washed out in storm events. There has also been a recorded sighting of the Arroyo toad in this reach. At this location, upslope of the side hill, and above the trail, Parks maintains a small shooting range. When in use, this shooting range can startle various PCT users who are not aware of the shooting range.
- There is not much equestrian use of the PCT, but the USFS suggested we contact Anitra at the PCTA to find out more. The Forest Service mentioned that equestrian users sometimes park on the side of Highway 138 and head south into the forest. FS has a staff member that is an avid equestrian user and they said that they will provide contact info for follow up. The Summit Valley Equestrian group was also mentioned.
- It was noted that Parks can limit recreational use in some areas if Bald Eagles are found to be nesting.
- Clayton described the recent evacuation of the Park over 4th of July, which was due to the fire along SR 138 that went into the Park. He noted that it was essential to have the ability to use the DWR administrative road near the outlet facility, in order to give park users on that side of the park an exit, and not just rely on the main entrance roads. There was more discussion about emergency

management needs and they noted that they have had multiple concurrent events like this in the past such as, when the Pilot Fire and Blue Cut fire burnt simultaneously. During this event, they first closed off I-15, and then SR 138, where many motorists had diverted to in order to avoid the first closure. When Silverwood Lake SRA is at capacity, there are serious concerns about evacuating people safely, while also trying to use the highway for fire emergency responders.

- The USFS has just finished building and re-locating an OHV staging area in Miller Canyon and plans to decommission and restore the older area that was close to East Fork, West Fork Mojave River.
- The Rim of the World Park District has received planning grant funds to build new bike trails and legalize existing trails on USFS lands, which will connect the Lake Arrowhead area with Miller Canyon and the forest routes south of Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area. It was mentioned that these funds were awarded through an Active Transportation Program and will provide connectivity for existing mountain biking and hiking trails.
- The area south of Sawpit leading up toward Crestline (Valley of Enchantment), is seeing an increase in mountain bike use (non-motorized areas, on both private and public lands).
- Miller Canyon is an area that has a unique array of biota, as it is an ecological transition zone between the higher mountains and desert areas below. This area is probably the most used area in the vicinity for wildlife viewing (particularly birding).
- Dispersed camping is allowed on USFS lands within the San Bernardino National Forest, and can result in “spill-over” campers who have been turned away from Silverwood Lake SRA when it is full. Dispersed camping is allowed along USFS roads as long as campsites are located at least 10 to 15 feet off the road. If Silverwood Lake SRA fills to capacity, campers turn to Mojave River Forks Park and after that fills up, some users will try to find USFS lands to camp on along the road system.
- Boaters have limited choices if Silverwood Lake SRA is full, as Lake Perris is 2 hours away and has had low lake levels in recent years. Arrowhead Lake is not open to the public. Big Bear Lake is often available, but many vessels require the adjustment of boat props, as they need to be at a different pitch due to the higher elevation conditions present at Big Bear Lake. Making such a change is not always simple and many boaters do not want to (or cannot) make these changes to their boats. Therefore, this can be a limiting factor to their ability to change plans on short notice and go to Big Bear Lake.

Action Items:

- USFS recommends our planned follow up with Anitra at Pacific Crest Trail Association
- Lisa and Kirby should do follow up interview with Steve Hopkins, one of the State Parks rangers, to get more information on long-term trends and changes in recreation uses and patterns of use
- USFS staff recommended trying to look at 20 year record and trends of visitation from State Parks
- Lisa and Kirby to make contact with Manny Galareta of Caltrans to discuss local SR 138 use, maintenance and management (check for any Rim of World Scenic Drive planning documents and more on the legacy or history of the scenic vista and other constructed pullouts). Also ask about the Tapestry project and any projections or concerns that they have.
- Robert to get us contact information for Ron Krueper, retired long-time ranger at Silverwood that Mark knew (or we can try to get his contact info from Steve Hopkins).
- Robert to get us contact information for follow up with Greg Hoffman in SO office on OHV user groups or key contacts and provide more context for OHV use in area including the adopt a trail program.
- Robert to get us contact information for Jeanette in SO office for follow up on equestrian uses on PCT and in the area.
- (Follow up with Robert regarding mention of a Dave Austin? ~ “Grass Valley”)