

### 7.3.3.2 Public Use and Trails Management on Reserve Lands within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area

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State of California  
Fish and Game Commission  
Initial Statement of Reasons for Regulatory Action  
Public Use of Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands  
May 2013

#### Attachment 14

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the planning process for public use and trails management. The MSHCP, however, can only provide authorization for impacts to Covered Species for those portions of trails and any other compatible uses on non-federal lands. BLM is pursuing a Section 7 consultation for the components of the coordinated plan on federal lands. On other federal lands, the USFS will determine whether public use and trails management will require consultation with USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the FESA. State of California lands within Magnesia Spring and Carrizo Canyon Ecological Reserves are subject to decisions made by the State.

Impacts to Covered Species associated with the public use and trails management plan (“Trails Plan”) described in this section are authorized upon issuance of the Permits. For existing trails in bighorn sheep habitat, this authorization applies only to those trails specifically listed in Section 7.3.3.2.1, Elements 1 and 2.

In order to illustrate the entire public use and trails management plan, the text and maps in this section do not distinguish between trail segments on non-federal and federal lands. The names of all the trails, both on federal and non-federal land, are provided in the lists below for informational purposes to provide context for the reader. Actions that apply only to federal lands are not described in this section. The public use and trails management plan for federal lands within the Reserve System is described and analyzed in the EIR/EIS, along with several alternatives.

#### \* 7.3.3.2.1 Trails Management Program

The trails management program in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area has adopted an Adaptive Management approach with an emphasis on research. The Trails Plan will initially focus on multi-agency scientific data gathering to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep health, behavior, habitat selection, and long-term population dynamics. The overarching goal of this research program is to obtain empirical data from the Plan Area to guide trails management. The basic research questions relate, in part, to the proximate response of bighorn sheep to recreation disturbance: for example, “*Is there evidence of bighorn sheep*

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*avoiding recreational trails? What is the relationship between distance of sheep to disturbance and their response? What is the current distribution of bighorn sheep home ranges relative to trails? If sheep avoid trails, what levels of human use and which trail characteristics (e.g., elevation, viewshed, terrain roughness, visibility, and slope) are associated with trail avoidance?"* Other questions that would require a longer time frame would include: *"What effect does recreation have on persistence of bighorn sheep populations?"* and *"What effect does recreational trail use have on connectivity among bighorn sheep populations?"* The research program is discussed further in Element 2 of the trails management program below.

This research program will be coordinated with monitoring of human trail use, and will be integrated with educational and public awareness efforts, and other trail management prescriptions. The trails management program is composed of eight elements, which are described below. In addition, the public use and trails management plan addresses other public access issues, such as dogs and cross country travel, in Section 7.3.3.2.2. The eight elements, detailed in the following sections, are summarized here: (1) use of existing trails, which will remain open all year, except for manipulation of use levels on some trails may occur as part of the research program; (2) initiation in Plan year 1 of a research program designed to ascertain bighorn sheep response to, and any significant adverse impacts from, recreational trail use in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains. This research may include manipulation or limitation of use levels or closures on selected trails as an element of the study design to address specific hypothesis-based research questions; (3) gathering of data on human trail use, primarily on trails within sensitive bighorn sheep lambing habitat and other trails as appropriate. A year-round mandatory self-issue permit system for selected trails, and other methods as appropriate, will be part of the human use monitoring program. Ongoing monitoring of bighorn sheep populations will be expanded to include regular monitoring of the distribution, abundance, recruitment, survival and cause-specific mortality of bighorn sheep throughout the Plan Area; (4) closure of three trails from June 15 through September 30 to minimize the potential impediments for access to water by bighorn sheep and other wildlife during the hot season; (5) deferral of construction of new trails, pending the results of the initial research program, monitoring of trail use, and monitoring of bighorn sheep populations; (6) implementation of a public awareness and education program; (7) annual review of the effectiveness of the public use and trails management program, including results of monitoring, research, and trail management prescriptions. This annual review will consider prudent management actions, including potential trail closures, in response to scientific data or sheep population declines below identified threshold levels; and (8) rerouting and decommissioning of trails to protect sensitive resource values, pending results of the research program.

Due to specific resource concerns associated with the Art Smith Trail and the Mirage Trail, management actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery were addressed separate from the Trails Plan and have been initiated prior to issuance of the Permits. These actions include rerouting the easternmost segment of the Art Smith Trail to incorporate the southern Schey Trail; restricting access to Dead Indian Canyon and the decommissioned segment of the Art Smith Trail; constructing the Hopalong Cassidy

perimeter trail; closing the upper portion of the northern Schey Trail; providing an alternate access to the Mirage Trail; closing the upper Mirage Trail; and implementing an education, signage, and enforcement program to support these actions. Environmental documentation for, and approval of, these actions are separate from the Trails Plan.

A Reserve Management Unit Plan (RMUP) will be prepared within 3 years after Permit issuance (See Section 6.2) for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area (Reserve Management Unit 6). This RMUP will include public use and trails management. A sample Memorandum of Understanding is provided in Appendix III to describe potential interim management of the Conservation Area pending approval of the RMUP. This sample MOU among the Wildlife Agencies, BLM, and the CVCC describes the roles and responsibilities of these agencies in implementation of the Trails Plan, including monitoring, enforcement, and research.

**(1) Trail Management Program Element 1: Trails Open All Year**

The following trails within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat will be available for year-round non-motorized use subject to annual review and modification as described in Element 7 below. As part of the research program, some of the trails listed below may be subject to manipulation of trail use levels--including increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether--to determine the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep. Selected trails that will be the initial focus of the research program are listed in Element 2 below.

➤ *West of Palm Canyon*

- Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
- North Lykken Trail
- Skyline Trail
- Museum Trail
- South Lykken Trail
- Picnic Table Trail

➤ *South Palm Springs*

- Araby Trail
- Shannon Trail
- Berns Trail
- Garstin Trail
- Henderson Trail
- Alexander Trail
- Goat Trails

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- Eagle Canyon Trail (not including portions of trail on Indian Reservation land)
- Wild Horse Trail
- Clara Burgess Trail
- Fern Canyon Trail
- Vandeventer Trail
- Hahn Buena Vista Trail
- Dry Wash Trail
- Dunn Road (Note: A portion of this trail is currently closed to public access where it crosses private lands in Section 5, T5S R5E.)
- Dry Wash to Vandeventer Trail connector
- Thielman Trail
- Palm Canyon Trail
- Indian Potrero Trail
- Potrero Canyon Trail

➤ *Cathedral City / Rancho Mirage*

- Cathedral Canyon Trail
- Bighorn Overlook Trail
- Mirage (“Bump and Grind”) Trail below its intersection with the new perimeter trail (Hopalong Cassidy Trail) that connects with the Homme-Adams Park/Cahuilla Hills Park trail system.

➤ *Palm Desert / Indian Wells*

- Art Smith Trail from the Art Smith Trailhead to the Hopalong Cassidy Trail
- Hopalong Cassidy Trail
- Eisenhower Mountain Trail (access through *The Living Desert*)

➤ *La Quinta*

- Bear Creek Canyon Trail north of its intersection with the Bear Creek Oasis Trail
- La Quinta Cove to Lake Cahuilla Trail (includes the Morrow Trail and a portion of the Boo Hoff Trail)
- Guadalupe Trail
- Boo Hoff Trail

➤ ***Southern Santa Rosa Mountains***

- Cactus Spring Trail
- Martinez Canyon Trail

➤ ***U.S. Forest Service lands***

- The use of trails on Forest Service lands is subject to existing regulations, policies, and land management plans.

➤ ***Perimeter and other new trails***

- Once constructed, any perimeter trails approved by the Plan will be compatible activities.

Figure 7-11 depicts Peninsular bighorn sheep habitat, the existing trails open all year, new and perimeter trails to be deferred under the Plan, and trails addressed separate from the Plan. Figure 7-12 depicts trails with special management prescriptions, including trails that are subject to the self-issue permit program, that are also the focus of the research program, as described in Element 3, and trails subject to the hot season closure described in Element 4. Figure 7-15 depicts the anticipated changes (reroutes, new trail construction, trail closures) to the trails from the Art Smith trailhead in Palm Desert to the lower Mirage Trail in Rancho Mirage. As previously indicated, these specific management actions to benefit Peninsular bighorn sheep recovery are addressed separate from the Trails Plan and will be initiated prior to issuance of the Permits.

**(2) Trails Management Program Element 2: Research Program**

A focused research program to evaluate the effects of recreational trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep within Essential bighorn sheep Habitat in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains will be initiated during Plan implementation in year one, if this program has not already been initiated. This research will address the proximate response of bighorn sheep to recreation disturbance as well as broader questions about the population-level effects and impacts to long-term persistence of bighorn sheep. A separate research program focusing on the effects of recreational trail use on captive bighorn sheep is also proposed.

This research program may require manipulation of use levels on trails. Manipulation could include increases, decreases, or prohibitions of use altogether on one or more trails, while simultaneously monitoring responses of bighorn sheep. Manipulated trail use will be based on a research study design focused on addressing specific research questions related to the impacts of trail use on Peninsular bighorn sheep (see Section 8.5.1). The research study design will determine which trails, if any, would be subject to manipulation of use levels. Data gathered from this research program will be used as the basis for future trails management decisions. Implementation of the research program will be coordinated with the Trails Management Subcommittee.