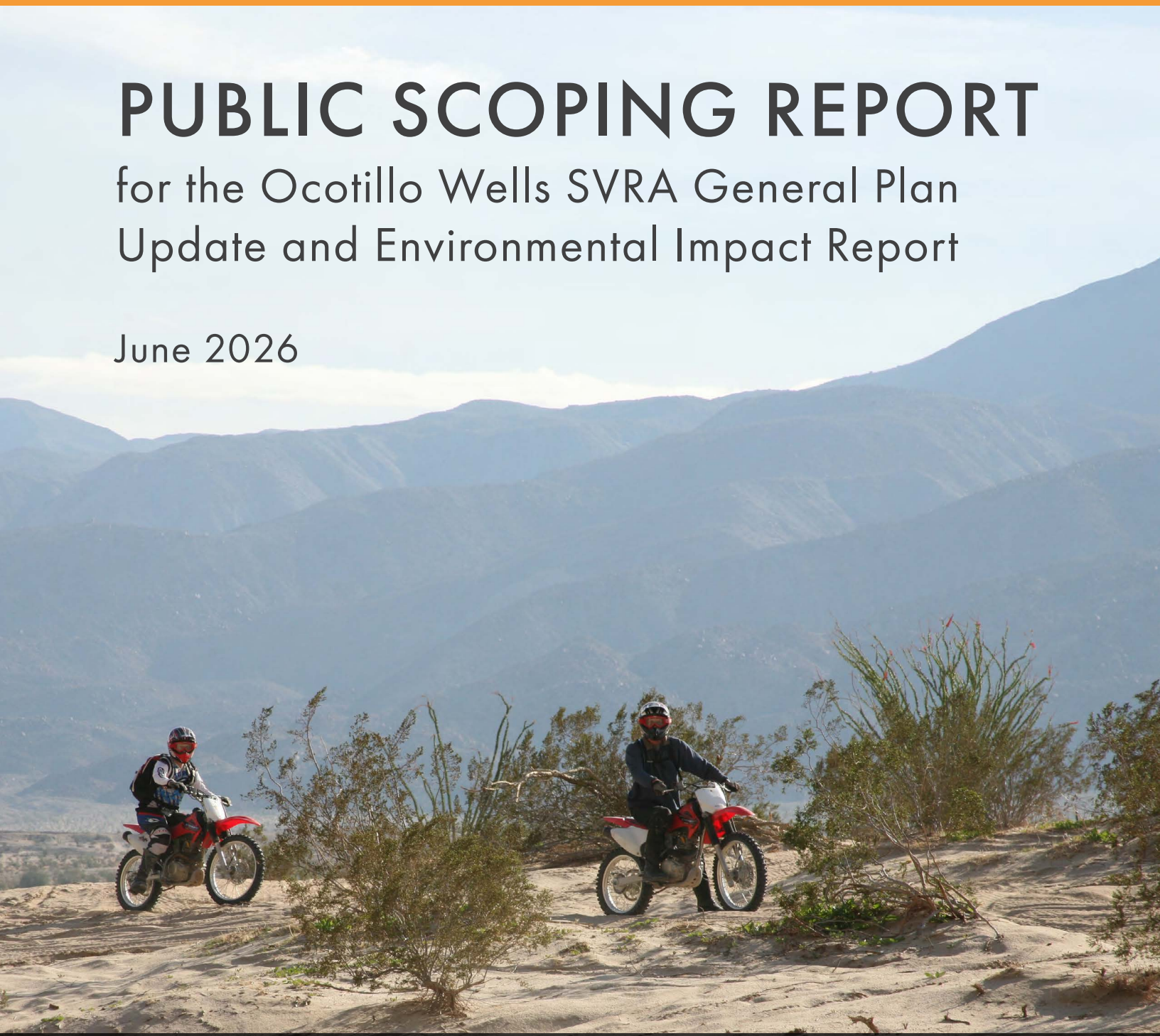




PUBLIC SCOPING REPORT

for the Ocotillo Wells SVRA General Plan Update and Environmental Impact Report

June 2026



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Introduction

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division (State Parks) published a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Ocotillo Wells SVRA General Plan Update (General Plan Update) on February 20, 2026, initiating a 30-day scoping phase that officially concluded on March 23, 2026.¹ The scoping phase meets the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) public involvement requirements for the preparation of an EIR. In alignment with these requirements, public scoping for the General Plan Update focused on gathering input from the public and stakeholders on the environmental issues to be analyzed in the EIR. The scoping phase supplements the numerous outreach efforts completed previously for the project, which consisted of public workshops, surveys, stakeholder interviews, fact sheets, and a project website with opportunities for online input. These prior outreach efforts have helped to define the Preferred Alternative and shape the direction of the General Plan Update.

REPORT FOCUS

This report summarizes viewpoints, concerns, and suggestions expressed by community members, stakeholders, and other interested parties through input received during the NOP scoping phase. Key insights concerning recreation, resource protection, public safety, park operations, and interagency coordination will help guide the EIR's analysis and development of the General Plan Update.

Moreover, the report underscores State Parks' commitment to facilitating a transparent and inclusive planning process, where public and stakeholder input helps to inform agency decision-making.

ABOUT OCOTILLO WELLS SVRA

Ocotillo Wells SVRA is a premier destination for off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation in Southern California. The roughly 85,000-acre SVRA is located approximately 90 miles east of downtown San Diego along Interstate 8 in eastern San Diego and western Imperial Counties. The park provides unique experiences for OHV recreationists, including distributed and trail riding across magnificent desert landscapes, which boast a wide variety of terrain types and topographic features. OHV exploration and recreation have occurred on lands comprising Ocotillo

Wells SVRA since the 1940s, and many visitors have a long tradition of riding and camping here with family and friends. The area was formally established as a State Vehicular Recreation Area in 1976.



¹ A request for extension was received and granted for one commenter through April 3rd, 2026.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The proposed General Plan Update, which is considered the proposed project for purposes of CEQA, establishes the long-range purpose and vision for Ocotillo Wells SVRA and would update the current General Plan adopted in 1982. The purpose of Ocotillo Wells SVRA is to provide a destination for high-quality OHV recreation in a unique desert environment. The General Plan Update identifies three recreation zones, each with different characteristics, activities or allowable uses, resources, and related management mandates. The plan would also provide land use guidance for camping, concessions and special events, visitor services and operation facilities, and resource management in the SVRA.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND SCOPING SUMMARY

In compliance with CEQA, the NOP scoping phase for the Ocotillo Wells SVRA General Plan Update EIR included a 30-day public comment period, from February 20, 2026 to March 23, 2026. The intent of the NOP scoping phase is to gather public and stakeholder input on the scope of potential environmental impacts to be studied and addressed in the EIR. The EIR will integrate input received during scoping to ensure all potential environmental impacts are considered.

The NOP was published to the State Clearinghouse on February 20, 2026, which began the scoping phase and 30-day comment period. It was also filed with the

San Diego County Clerk-Recorder's Office. An email blast providing notification of NOP availability was sent on February 20 to a comprehensive distribution list, including regulatory agencies, local organizations, counties and cities, and members of the public. Letters were mailed to contacts on the distribution list when email addresses were unavailable. Also on February 20, the NOP was posted to the project website, which featured an interactive public comment form, allowing visitors to easily provide feedback during the 30-day comment period.

Additionally, the NOP was published via newspaper ads in the Imperial Valley Press on February 17, and in the San Diego Union Tribune on February 18.

The NOP is included in Appendix A.

PROJECT WEBSITE

The project website, <https://planocotillowells.org/>, was originally launched in 2010 and maintained for nearly a decade as public input was collected and the project underwent various iterations. Following a pause in project planning, it was officially re-launched in early 2026.

The website serves as a central hub for project information. Designed for accessibility and ease of use, it is updated regularly and includes project details, developments, timelines, documentation, and information concerning opportunities for public engagement.

Summary of Comments Received

This section provides a summary of comments received from the public and stakeholders during the NOP scoping phase. The EIR will consider all formal comments submitted relevant to environmental issues associated with the General Plan Update. Comments concerning non-environmental issues will be considered during development of the General Plan Update.

The comments received during public scoping encompass a variety of themes and topics, ranging from environmental impact concerns to recreational use of Ocotillo Wells SVRA and overall park management. They will help guide the project’s next steps, particularly in refining the EIR’s focus and ensuring that the project development aligns with both regulatory requirements and community expectations. Comments will not be formally responded to; however, the input received will be considered during preparation of the EIR and General Plan Update. All formally submitted comments are available in Appendix B and summarized in Table 1 below. The comments received in writing are considered part of the public record under CEQA.



Table 1. Formal Public Comment Summary

Commenting Entity (Agency/Organization/Individual)	General Theme of Comment(s)	Date
Jeff Radke, Individual (Comment Form)	Requested creation of more trails and recreation areas; concerned that closures would result in overuse and erosion of open trails	March 2, 2026
Tim Thomas, Dirt Devils of Southern California (Comment Form)	Supported maintaining recreational access and keeping land open for OHV use while promoting responsible trail and environmental management	March 2, 2026
Beverly Jean Mangimelli, San Diego Four Wheeler, (Comment Form)	Protecting off-road recreation areas	March 2, 2026
Alisa Allen, Individual (Comment Form)	Requested creation of a designated VHF emergency radio frequency in areas with limited cell service	March 2, 2026
Charlie Willard, Individual (Comment Form)	Inquired about permitted events in Truckhaven north of S-22	March 3, 2026

Summary of Comments Received

Commenting Entity (Agency/ Organization/ Individual)	General Theme of Comment(s)	Date
Bo Neece, Tierra Del Sol 4x4 Club, San Diego Off Road Coalition (Comment Form)	Inquired about permitted events in Truckhaven north of S-22	March 3, 2026
Kuuipoaloha P Lawler, San Diego Off Road Coalition (Comment Form)	Expressed concerns about potential loss of open riding areas due to habitat/resource protection, increased regulation, designated trails, and event or access restrictions	March 4, 2026
James Rue, Individual (Comment Form)	Supported educational adventure trails with signage and guides to encourage more mindful use of the park	March 5, 2026
James Konugres (Comment Form)	Requested that Ocotillo Wells SVRA remain open to public recreation.	March 7, 2026
Vanessa Perez, Senior Mineral Resources Engineer, California State Lands Commission (Email)	Requested clarification of section, township, and range of Commission-owned lands	March 13, 2026
Kim Freeburn, Environmental Program Manager, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Comment Letter)	Requested that the EIR thoroughly analyze direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the General Plan Update on biological resources, emphasizing species-specific concerns, survey protocols, and example mitigation measures	March 18, 2026
David P. Hubbard, Gatzke Dillon & Balance LLP, EcoLogic Partners (Comment Letter)	Requested EIR analyze the effects of management practices on available riding areas, trail connectivity, and riding opportunities; regional demand and visitation trends; organized events; infrastructure needs; emergency access and safety; and land use compatibility as it relates to OHV access	March 19, 2026
Ed Stovin, President, San Diego Off Road Coalition (Email)	Advocated for OHV access by limiting new infrastructure, restrictions, fees and concessions while keeping dispersed camping and maximizing motorized recreation in the SVRA	March 22, 2026
Kimberly Dodson, Branch Chief, California Department of Transportation (Comment Letter)	Requested that the EIR analyze impacts within Caltrans jurisdiction, specifically SR-78/SR-86; consider nearby transportation projects; and coordinate with Caltrans during the review process	March 23, 2026
Lisa Belenky, Senior Counsel, Center for Biological Diversity (Comment Letter)	Expressed concerns about OHV impacts on biological resources, air quality, soils, water quality, cultural, and paleontological resources; adequacy of CEQA review; accuracy of baseline information for environmental data; consideration of a reasonable range of alternatives to reduce impacts; and the potential need for Habitat Conservation Plans	April 3, 2026



KEY ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING SCOPING

This section highlights substantive environmental issues that were identified through the scoping process, via written comments from agencies, stakeholders, and the general public. It does not summarize the most frequent comments, nor does it identify all issues that will be analyzed in the EIR. Instead, it identifies a cross-section of key issues relevant to the CEQA process.

The EIR will address the full scope of environmental issues required by CEQA and will not be limited to the those identified through the scoping process. The complete record of comments compiled in Appendix B will be considered for their applicability in defining the range of actions, in relation to the potential avoidance or reduction of environmental impacts, or as mitigation measures.

Comments related to planning issues that are not relevant to the CEQA process (e.g., future park management, facilities use, etc.) are also summarized below for informational purposes.

Air Quality

Concerns relating to air quality focused on evaluating fugitive dust and other emissions generated by off-highway vehicle activity in the context of an impaired air basin. Comments and correspondence on prior park planning documents, such as the Soil Conservation Plan and Dust Control Plan, were cited as needing to be addressed in the EIR.

Biological Resources

The need to balance OHV use with wildlife protection was a primary concern. Recommendations included ensuring the project considers wildlife movement, reducing impacts of OHV use on wildlife, and protecting sensitive habitats. Various special-status wildlife and plant species were cited as management concerns. These include the flat-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*) and Peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*). Additionally, the need for detailed analysis in the EIR of the potential impacts on habitats and ecosystems was emphasized. Comprehensive biological surveys and inventories were requested for the EIR, along with inquiries about habitat conservation plans for special-status species that may be harmed by OHV use.

Cultural, Tribal, and Paleontological Resources

The importance of protecting historical, paleontological, and cultural resources in the SVRA was noted, with specific focus on the Desert Cahuilla Prehistoric area. It was emphasized that sensitive resource areas should be protected in future planning decisions, and a comprehensive baseline of resources should be established to inform land use decisions. Paleontological resources were also identified as potentially vulnerable under existing and proposed management conditions.

Land Use and Planning

Some comments requested that the General Plan Update avoid recommending area or trail closures. Others requested transitioning from open riding to trail riding only. It was requested that existing trails continue to be maintained and open to OHV access. The importance of aligning trail restrictions and management with adjacent areas, such as BLM lands and Anza-Borrego State Park, was also mentioned.

Public Services and Recreation

The importance of balancing conservation efforts with maintaining OHV access was highlighted. Commenters expressed the need for existing trails to stay open and available for use, and recreational impacts from closures to be assessed. The need to maintain open riding areas was emphasized by several commenters. Limited new infrastructure was requested or cited as necessary, such as new trails and access routes.

Transportation

The need to consider the effects of the General Plan Update on the state highway system was emphasized. Appropriate permitting and environmental studies are needed for any projects within Caltrans jurisdiction, and nearby planned highway projects should be considered in the EIR.

ISSUES UNRELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Comments received that were outside the scope of the EIR included the following topic areas and general themes:

- Some patrons travel from throughout the state to enjoy Ocotillo Wells SVRA for training and recreation. It was expressed that areas like Ocotillo Wells SVRA aid in appreciation of the unique desert landscapes in California. Multiple comments were received highlighting the benefits of recreation in the SVRA.
- The importance of maintaining the recreational experience for various off-road enthusiasts was stressed. The project should address the diverse needs of users, including those affected by trail closures or changes in available roads and trails.
- Two inquiries were submitted regarding allowing permitted events in the Truckhaven 4x4 Training Area.
- A request was received to establish a designated VHF radio frequency for coordination of emergencies.
- A request was made for “adventure trails,” which could highlight some of the scenic and interesting areas throughout the park. These could be ride-in or walk-in, and occasionally have scheduled rides with park guides.
- A route was suggested for improved access to the northern end of the SVRA for safety and law enforcement purposes.
- A request was received for details on parcels owned by the California State Lands Commission within the SVRA.

