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U.S. DEPT. OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
HOLLISTER, CA 95023

March 5, 2010

CCMA RMP/EIS Comments
Attn: Planning Coordinator
Bureau of Land Management
Hollister Field Office
20 Hamilton Court
Hollister, CA 95023

Re: Comments on CCMA Draft RMP Amendment and EIS

Please accept this document as official comments of the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) on the Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Clear Creek Management Area (CCMA). However, this document shall not preclude other individual AMA members, associated clubs or district organizations from submitting their own comments.

The CCMA is a unique place, and one that deserves proper management and staffing to ensure its continued operation. My personal visits to the CCMA in recent years (including an over flight of the area last year) have really helped to make clear the difficult management issues faced by the Hollister field office.

The lack of a visitor's center or other "official" entry station, on site full time staff or other official agency presence only adds to the public's perception that there is no long term commitment by the BLM to preserve their access. Instead a lone bulletin board in the first parking lot is all there is to welcome recreationists (and now a multi million dollar decontamination station) to this amazing area.

Before listing specific concerns and comments it should be clearly stated for the record that we fully support for the recent vote by the California OHMVR Commission that the BLM extend the public comment period for an additional 90 days. Over \$9 million dollars of OHV Trust Fund monies have been granted to the BLM to help manage the CCMA in recent years, and any request from a long time partner such as the OHMVR Commission should be taken seriously. The California OHV community is in fact being overwhelmed by a number of recently released federal planning documents and it is simply unfair for BLM to ignore these requests.

As your office is well aware, many of our bay area members and indeed thousands of our riders and clubs throughout northern California have used this unique facility for decades. In fact the Salinas Ramblers regularly hosted what was the longest running nationally sanctioned enduro at the CCMA for many years. Additional events at the CCMA hosted by other clubs and groups have a long-standing history and would be a huge loss to the surrounding area both socially and economically.

The BLM should also see fit to grant the requested time extension because of the many local and regional business impacts associated with the closure. Many area business owners were in fact largely unaware of DEIS planning process until very recently. This was confirmed to all who were in attendance at the February 22, 2010 economic impact meeting held in Hollister.

The financial repercussions from the current closure at the CCMA have been felt throughout the surrounding communities. Aside from the local motorcycle shops, numerous other local business owners, many of whom may have no personal interest in motorized recreation, expressed concerns with the effects they have experienced first hand.

Loss of revenue to local stores, hotels, gas stations and the carry-over effect created in these communities cannot be overstated. Likewise loss of income from ongoing projects at the CCMA, and the job losses directly and indirectly associated with them can only further compound the effects of this closure.

A full review and documentation of the economic impact this closure corresponds to must be undertaken. The fact that the BLM only saw fit to reach out directly to the business community less than 2 weeks ahead of the comment deadline was a serious oversight on the agencies part. These proprietors need time to fully articulate and document the financial effects they have experienced during the current interim closure. Equally important, this data will fully illustrate the future monetary impacts of a permanent closure of the CCMA would have on local businesses.

It is our contention that The DEIS is fatally flawed because it did not properly analyze the socioeconomic impacts to local and regional businesses including restaurants, motorcycle shops, hotels, sporting goods stores, gas stations, and grocery stores. This important omission must be addressed prior to a record of decisions being issued.

We further request that BLM formally announce its intent to re-initiate scoping, which must involve all affected organizations, private property owners and individuals. This should include a through analysis of an alternative that will

both maximize resource protection and recreational opportunities in the Clear Creek Management Area.

Specific Comments:

On numerous occasions the BLM staff has repeatedly and publically encouraged riders to request a major modification to or the creation of an entirely new trail system at the CCMA. It is well know that the Salinas Ramblers Motorcycle Club worked hard to formulate their draft alternative, incorporating their preferred management alternative. They did this both to assist the agency and better convey their desired management strategy in a comprehensive manner.

Serious consideration must be given to this proposal as it represents a good balance between protection of both specific areas and recreationists and providing sufficient recreational opportunities for the future. The BLM would indeed find wide spread support for this idea, however given that a "citizens pro-recreation alternative" has in fact been previously submitted and rejected (during the 2007 DEIS process) it is difficult to again request the recreation community put much effort into developing yet another alternative. Instead we request the staff revisit and reconsider the previously submitted documents (we can assist with providing another copy if necessary).

This "new trail system" idea, while encouraging, further illustrates the ongoing frustration felt by many who have tried to work with the BLM previously. A re-route of those trails that the agency feels present the highest potential for exposure should have been included in this document. Literally years have gone by yet this idea is no more developed than it was the last time the public was asked to be involved.

Creation of a viable, challenging and long term sustainable trail system at the CCMA has long been the goal of many in the riding community. Access to privately held lands, opportunities for other motorized recreationists as well as protection of the resources are all part of a well developed and managed facility, and something the public has repeatedly requested and demonstrated a willingness to support.

Indeed direct financial support (day use permits, annual passes and OHV grants) as well as volunteer efforts (such as fencing of threatened and endangered species) had been ongoing until the emergency closure was implemented. The agency has a ready partner but has simply not taken full advantage of the opportunity presented. As a result of this deficient process one or more viable, if not superior, alternatives have been omitted from the DEIS.

AMA believes an alternative can be crafted which better protects the CCMA's identified sensitive resources while preserving the world-class single-track trail riding opportunities. In principle, this alternative would provide for intensive management of vehicle access to the Clear Creek drainage, which has been recognized as presenting the greatest resource protection challenges, while allowing more flexible management of other less-sensitive areas.

In the current DEIS the BLM incorrectly asserts that OHV users would not be willing to use a wash rack at the agency's new decontamination center located at the main entrance to the CCMA. In fact it is our contention that the vast majority of riders would jump at the chance to wash off their vehicles before leaving the area. If needed, a study should be done to analyze user compliance with a wash rack facility before assuming and incorporating the idea that it wouldn't be utilized into any alternative.

Likewise if the plan for the newly constructed washout station had been fully presented to the public the BLM could have better utilized the facility as both a clean up station and welcome center for arriving visitors. The chance for agency staff to have a face to face conversation with riders and help explain any current issues facing the CCMA would only help the public to better comply with and understand agency management decisions and strategies. A valuable opportunity was lost when the decision to construct this expensive facility didn't include a welcome center component.

If the agency is serious about their desire to create a new system of routes one of the first issues it must address is the visitor use scenarios regarding time spent traveling on routes in the ACEC. The human risk analysis contains a number of flawed assumptions, such as stating the average speed dirt bikes travel on single-track trails is 15-20 mph. With the exception of a few national caliber riders few if any have ever maintained such speeds over any long time frame on single-track trails.

The DEIS is also flawed because it ignored the recent scientific work in process at the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response to create a new risk analysis methodology for chrysotile since there is a growing body of scientific opinion that chrysotile is not a significant public health risk. The BLM must analyze all currently available science before permanently closing CCMA to OHV recreation.

The EPA's sample collection script states: "The distance between riders varied depending on visibility, terrain, and safety considerations, with the ultimate objective to realistically simulate the behavior of recreational riders. The second and third trailing riders rode in the dust cloud of the lead rider, to the extent safe and practical." Incredibly this narrative does not match the BLM's ongoing 20-year educational outreach that instructs riders to not ride in another rider's dust cloud. Most, if not all, riders actually try to avoid riding in a dust cloud.

The EPA Risk Assessment is also fatally flawed because a majority of the samples were collected during dry periods when Clear Creek was in fact closed to the public. Also over use of Clear Creek Road during sample collection presents a major flaw in the riding simulation as it does not accurately represent the trail based experience the vast majority of riders come to the CCMA for. The vast majority of rider would in fact avoid the road as it lacks the very challenge they are seeking.

Safety concerns would in fact force riders to alter greatly their typical riding style (speed and distance between riders for example) when on the road due to potentially encountering larger vehicles. While it appears the sample includes a 30% road use average a more realists one would be less than 10% and as such could have had a major impact on sampling and test results observed.

The Purpose and Need in the DEIS notes the; "Changes in social and economic conditions in San Benito County, the San Joaquin Valley, and the entire State of California have led to increased demand for use of public lands for recreation and energy production as well as an increased awareness and social value placed on the cultural and natural resources in the Planning Area."

Recent public testimony at both the Economic impact meeting and the OHMVR Commission meeting illustrated that displaced CCMA OHV riders are now threatening to overcrowd other regional OHV areas that include the Jawbone OHV Area, Hollister Hills, Prairie City and Carnegie. A Cumulative Effect analysis must be included in this planning process.

Visitor surveys have shown that 80% of the past visitors at the CCMA were in fact motorcyclists yet the agency identified preferred alternative has no provisions for motorcycle recreation. This would represent a total reversal of the current and historical use at CCMA. The preferred alternative should include a similar motorcycle trail mileage to what was available before the emergency closure.

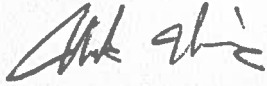
Conclusion

In closing we currently have no choice but to support alternative A as presented, but realistically would like to see the creation of a new hybrid alternative that both restores as many of the 270 miles of routes and approximately 450 acres of barrens previously utilized as well as creates new opportunities were feasible. Permitted OHV events must be allowed to continue.

If indeed a visitor health risk is identified by a new assessment or a review of the EPA's latest report, the BLM should use signs and educational outreach as a way to inform the public and allow them to make their own decisions rather than closing this important OHV area on a permanent basis. Other state and

federal agencies have utilized similar methods to both inform the public and minimize liability and there is no reason to discount the value of such efforts in this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Haris", is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

**Nick Haris
Western States Representative
American Motorcyclist Association**