

May 5, 2007

Public Comment Carizzo Plain National Monument Management Plan

My name is Michael Long. I live in Taft, California where I own a small business, publish a weekly newspaper, and serve as the President of the Taft Chamber of Commerce.

I want to publicly thank the BLM, the Carizzo Plain Monument Staff, the Friends of the Carizzo, the Carizzo Plain Advisory Board, the City of Taft and the Taft Chamber of Commerce for their recent agreement designating Taft a Gateway Community to the Carizzo Plain and for providing for a Carizzo Plain Visitors Center in Taft.

This agreement is a good example of cooperation between many different groups working together to enhance opportunities for visitors to the national monument. Taft is proud to be affiliated with this beautiful natural resource and looks forward to working with these and other groups to preserve and protect this natural resource for visitors and local residents.

Our recently opened Carizzo Plain Visitor's Center located at 400 Kern Street in Taft is one of the benefits of this agreement to the visiting public. The Visitors Center, located in the Taft Chamber of Commerce, is open 5 days a week and serves as a resource to those having questions, looking for brochures and map, or seeking directions to the Monument.

As a Gateway Community, the Taft community realizes its importance as a visitor serving area near the Carizzo. Today we are exploring ways in which we can study and take advantage of the economic benefits of our proximity to the national monument. The City of Taft and the Taft Chamber of Commerce is working together to recruiting new visitor serving businesses – hotels, motels, and restaurants – to locate in Taft and serve those who come for day trips to the monument. Overnight lodging, restaurants and RV parks are the ideal businesses required to support visitors to the Monument at the same time affording West Kern County the opportunity to provide jobs and economic development to our communities. With an existing population of nearly 18,000, Taft and the surrounding communities are ideal areas for locating these visitor facilities outside of the monument.

My hope and the desire of others in our community is that one day a new larger Carizzo Plain Visitor's Center be located in Taft that houses an interpretive center, a full sized replica of painted cave and repository of the local history of the indigenous people, the natural resources and pioneers who later settled in the Carizzo.

As the BLM and Carizzo Plain staff study and take public comment on the future management of the Carizzo Plain, I wish to offer these additional comments:

1. I encourage you to consider establishing more Gateway communities on the eastern side and western side to help promote BLM priorities.

2. Promote educational outreach in surrounding communities, through the local elementary, Jr. and High school districts, and strongly recommend that you take advantage of Taft College facilities and consider establishing a program or department at Taft College that acts as a center for the study and education of the Carrizo Plain for the benefit of natural history and science students.
3. Explore the paving Soda Lake Road, and when you do, consider whether the dust produced by Soda Lake Road traffic harms the eco-system of the Carrizo.
4. Explore using more free and volunteer labor for park maintenance by encouraging volunteers and work-campers, and perhaps establish a small RV park outside Carrizo (California Valley) for workers to live in, And Explore the use of low and minimum security federal prisoners from the Taft federal prison.
5. Encourage the Gateway communities to establish visitor facilities such as RV parks, hotels, and restaurants to support Carrizo visitors so they don't necessary have to stay on the Carrizo.
6. Address the lack of cell phone reception, public bath rooms along Soda Lake Road, and limited or non-existent visitor serving facilities near the monument such as a gas and automobile service stations.

Thank you for this opportunity to addresses these issues and allow our comments to be part of the future management plan of the Carrizo Plain National Monument.

Michael Long
P.O. Box 207
Taft, CA 93268