

KING RANGE

NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE AUGUST 2003

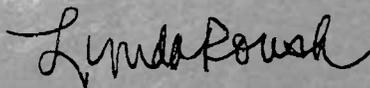
A RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE KING RANGE NCA

Greetings from the Lost Coast!

Since the initial public workshops last fall, the BLM has been reviewing your suggestions and ideas to craft a vision and management strategy to guide stewardship of the King Range NCA over the next 20 years. Rugged natural beauty, open space, and solitude – these are just some of the extraordinary qualities of the King Range that people treasure and want to conserve. Other top priorities mentioned include ecosystem restoration, fire management, community collaboration, and managing the growing numbers of visitors.

With this early public input, the BLM has developed several scenarios that could be used to guide management of the King Range NCA in the future. Each of these scenarios takes a different approach to addressing the many thoughts and concerns voiced at the scoping workshops, while meeting the laws and policies that guide BLM management of the area. The BLM is introducing the scenarios in this edition of the planning update to keep you informed of progress on the effort.

Over the next few months, the BLM will be further refining these scenarios and preparing a Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for public review in the fall. At that time, the BLM will also host another round of public meetings to discuss the draft Plan and get feedback. With your input, the BLM is confident that the Plan will be a sound guide for achieving the vision and conserving the best of the King Range NCA for years to come! Thank you,



Lynda Roush
Arcata Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management



A VISION EMERGES

From public comments shared during last fall's scoping process, a vision for the future of the King Range NCA has begun to emerge. An overwhelming majority of people cited the area's primitive, undeveloped quality as its most unique and valuable asset – and one that they want to see protected over the next 20 years and beyond. While there were specific suggestions for improvements to recreation facilities, trails, roads, etc., they were generally qualified with the caveat that they be low-impact, limited in number, and unobtrusive in the landscape. The opportunity to “escape from civilization” and experience solitude in this rugged environment is also a quality that many want to see preserved.

Other top priorities are ecosystem restoration, especially related to watersheds, fisheries, and native species, as well as fire management, which continues to be a key concern for local residents. Many people identified increasing numbers of recreational visitors and their effect on the King Range as a major concern – worrying that the area will be “loved to death.” Some suggested finding ways to disperse visitors throughout the King Range NCA, or using backcountry permits to avoid crowding of popular areas such as the Lost Coast Trail. As education programs form a vital link between the King Range and local communities, many voiced interest in learning more about the area's natural resources from BLM interpretive programs and suggested tapping local volunteers to help expand these programs and develop new teaching modules for area schools. Community outreach and involvement was also something that many said they'd like to see BLM continue – working collaboratively on management issues and ensuring that local community character is maintained.

This is just a short summary of some of the key scoping comments received during the meetings in the fall of 2002, from the “Visioning Worksheet” and via mail, e-mail, and phone. You may view the full Scoping Report by visiting our website or contacting our office to request a copy (see back page).

See Vision - Page 2 -



VISION (continued)

After the scoping period, the BLM received letters requesting that Black Sands Beach be re-opened to off-highway vehicles (OHVs). The decision to close the beach to motorized use was made in 1998 and involved an extensive public comment process. This decision was upheld by the Eastern District Court of California and, although currently under appeal before the Ninth Circuit Court, remains in effect. Therefore, this issue will not be addressed in the King Range Management Plan update.

During the scoping period, numerous commenters expressed interest in reintroducing elk to the northern part of the King Range. In discussing this possibility with the California Department of Fish and Game, the BLM learned that the department is not considering elk reintroductions at this time due to concerns of bringing in disease from out-of-area animals. Also, the existing reintroduced herds are naturally migrating into suitable habitat, with elk from the Prairie Creek herd spreading as far south as Carlotta. If suitable habitat exists, it is likely that elk will eventually move into the northern part of the King Range NCA on their own.



To guide future uses and management in the King Range NCA, the plan will define three management zones. The zones reflect the existing character and management goals for different parts of the King Range NCA. They are intended to identify the types of activities that are most appropriate in each area, as well as the level and types of environmental protection and enhancement measures desired.



BACKCOUNTRY ZONE

This is the rugged primitive coastal area where visitors would have opportunities to experience solitude and quiet in this unique primitive environment. Most of this zone is in the King Range Wilderness Study Area. BLM would conduct management and maintenance activities using the “minimum tool” concept (most activities completed using hand tools and non-mechanized equipment). The primary activities in this zone would be non-motorized recreation, environmental restoration, and protection of primitive qualities.



FRONTCOUNTRY ZONE

This zone contains most of the roads, recreation sites and trailheads in the King Range. It would be managed to allow for a variety of uses, including motorized recreation (scenic driving, car camping, RVs), harvesting of some forest products such as beargrass and fuelwood, and preventative fuel load and fire management activities to reduce destructive wildfires and protect adjoining private lands. BLM management and maintenance activities would be more intensive in this zone and would include use of mechanized vehicles, tools and equipment in managing visitor facilities, and restoring ecosystems. Most of the ecosystem and habitat restoration projects would occur in this zone.



RESIDENTIAL ZONE

This zone recognizes the highly developed Shelter Cove neighborhood in the southern part of the NCA. Public lands in this zone would provide for the most intense public uses and highest level of facility development of the three zones while providing coastal open space for the growing community of Shelter Cove.



These management zones will make it easy for community members and visitors to understand how and where they can do the things they like to do in the King Range NCA. Many other allowable uses and management actions in the alternatives being considered for the Management Plan Update are specific to each zone, while others apply to all zones.

RIVERS RUN WILD AND SCENIC



As part of this planning process, BLM is required to conduct an inventory of King Range NCA streams that may be eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. The designation recognizes rivers and creeks with unique or outstanding natural and scenic values and provides a high level of protection to maintain their special qualities and keep them free-flowing for present and future generations to enjoy. After the inventory is complete, the BLM will make recommendations about their suitability for designation and to analyze them in the Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. While the Management Plan may contain recommendations for Wild and Scenic River designations, Congress makes the final decision on which rivers or segments of rivers will be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Property owners and people living within a Wild and Scenic River corridor would be able to use their property as they had before the designation. Land management protections would apply only to public lands.

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN



As part of the planning process, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, or ACECs, may be designated where special management attention and limits on allowable uses are required to protect historical, cultural or scenic values, natural resources or processes, or human life and safety. BLM is exploring special environmental areas, features or ecosystems within the planning area that might be appropriate for designating as ACECs. Members of the public may also nominate ACECs to BLM for consideration (contact us for more information). There currently is one ACEC in the King Range NCA – the 655-acre Mattole Estuary ACEC – which protects significant archaeological sites, a fragile sand dune ecosystem, riparian areas and associated wildlife in the Mattole Estuary and coastal strand south to Sea Lion Gulch. The Mill Creek Watershed is being considered by BLM as a possible ACEC. The ACEC would include all BLM managed lands within the watershed. The goal would be to establish special management measures to protect the water quality of this important anadromous fish stream and cold water tributary to the Mattole River, as well as to protect the area’s low elevation old-growth Douglas fir forest.

PARTNERS IN PLANNING - HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Thanks to all who have been participating as community partners in this planning process. Over 120 people attended the scoping meetings hosted by BLM in the fall of 2002 to kick off the planning process and provide early public input to craft a long-term vision for the King Range NCA. In addition, over 100 letters, e-mails and “Visioning Questionnaires” were received from people in the local area and across the country. From these creative ideas, the BLM has begun outlining several potential alternative management scenarios to be explored in the Draft Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Thank you for this important input!

Upcoming opportunities for public involvement will be in late fall, when the Draft Resource Management Plan and EIS will be released for public review and comment. During this time, the BLM will also host another series of public meetings to answer questions and hear your comments. Of course, you will also be able to submit written comments. In the meantime, the BLM would be happy to speak to your community group about the plan update and opportunities for involvement. Please call Bob Wick, Plan Coordinator, at (707) 825-2300 or Gary Pritchard-Peterson, King Range Manager, at (707) 986-5400 to set up a meeting. We look forward to seeing you and hearing from you as the plan begins to take shape!

SUMMER IN THE KING RANGE

Humboldt State University students are out on the Lost Coast Trail this summer conducting a Backcountry Visitor Study for BLM. In the study, similar to one conducted in 1997, students are asking backcountry visitors about their perceptions of conditions on the Lost Coast, problems and management needs, and, in particular, they are determining trends in visitor perception of crowding, resource problems and other social aspects. Our goal is to learn how the BLM can improve its management of the increasingly popular Lost Coast Trail corridor.



Other noteworthy events this summer include BLM-led holiday weekend interpretive walks, the installation of new interpretive panels at Black Sands Beach, Abalone Point, Hidden Valley Trailhead, and the Cape Mendocino Lighthouse in Shelter Cove.

CONTACT US!

If you have questions or comments about the Management Plan update process or would like to get on the mailing list, please contact:

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For general information about visiting the King Range NCA, please call 707.986.5400

VISIT OUR WEBSITE!

www.ca.blm.gov/arcata/king_range.html



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Design by

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