F. Recreation

This plan seeks to provide appropriate recreational experiences in the area while maintaining a suitable level of management and resource protection. In the past, recreation has been dispersed and varied. However, because of the need to protect the area's natural resources, the managing partners have agreed that recreational opportunities must be somewhat limited and designated to specific locations. When possible, recreational development such as full-service campgrounds will be encouraged outside of the CPNA.

Most of the recreation use in the CPNA is oriented toward enjoyment of the area's natural or historical resources. Opportunities for interpretation and development of related visitor services is outstanding and will be the primary focus of future recreational development. Currently, the area is visited by the public to view wildlife (especially the migratory bird populations), hunt, hike, horseback ride, experience the unique spring wildflower blooms and to see Painted Rock.

In the past, dispersed camping has been allowed in the CPNA and many visitors have elected to camp at various locations, in particular, at the KCL Ranch, the Selby Parking Lot, near Soda Lake, on the Caliente Ridge, in the MU Ranch and Padrone areas, and along the foothills of the Temblor Mountains. Hunters tend to be spread out at various locations in the CPNA, but primarily use the Selby Parking Lot because of access to the Caliente Range and its suitability for camping.

The Goodwin Education Center opened in December 1993 and offers several visitor services including interpretive exhibits, restroom facilities and organized tours. The Painted Rock parking area has a toilet, picnic table and parking for visitors walking the trail to the rock painting site. The Soda Lake Overlook offers a panoramic view of the CPNA and has two interpretive panels which describes some of the area's wildlife and identifies the mountains visible on the horizon. A toilet and information board are located at the overlook parking area. Toilets are also located at the Selby Parking Lot and at the KCL Ranch. There are no other developed recreational facilities within the CPNA.

Recreation use has been monitored by visitor registers, a traffic counter, visitor questionnaires and frequent interactions with visitors. Based on limited available data, the primary visitor attractions of the CPNA appear to be Painted Rock and spring wildflowers. Annual visitation from October 1992 through September 1993 was estimated to be 8,900 days (Recreation Management Information System [RMIS] data) a slight increase over the same time for the previous year. This estimate is probably conservative and more accurate visitor counts during the next few years will present a better representation of the area's actual use. Most of the people who visit the area reside in Southern California with a large number of visitors (about 16%) coming from San Luis Obispo County. A significant number of visitors have been to the area at least once previously, and many people return to see the wildflowers or to view the sandhill cranes.

Current use of the Carrizo is concentrated around Soda Lake, Painted Rock, Selby Parking Area, the southern portion of the Caliente Mountains and along the Elkhorn Plain. Seasonal use is dictated by the availability of wildflowers, location and abundance of sandhill cranes, weather, and availability of upland and big game. The highest visitation occurs in January, April, and September. Not surprisingly, the lowest visitation occurs during August when the summer temperatures peak.

Projected visitation is always a "best guess" scenario, but the managing partners expect that visitation will steadily increase. The Goodwin Education Center and the Watchable Wildlife Program, a coordinated effort throughout western states to promote wildlife viewing, increase visitation. Specific signage will be installed at some locations in the CPNA to call attention to viewing areas. Public access to Painted Rock is limited to guided tours from March 1 to July 15 to protect sensitive resources.

Access and vehicle travel routes will be designated for the CPNA with maps available to visitors. Many potential opportunities exist for equestrian and mountain bike use on designated roads and trails. Existing trails, such as the Caliente Mountain and Caliente Ridge trails, already offer scenic walks or rides.

1. Wilderness

With the Wilderness Act of 1964, Congress established the National Wilderness Preservation System. Such areas are federally-owned natural places where human influence is essentially unnoticeable. They have outstanding opportunities for solitude, or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation and often contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, scenic or historic value.

The Caliente Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (#CA-010-042) has been evaluated for wilderness characteristics and is still under congressional review. Containing 25,081 acres, it is located in the extreme southeastern portion of San Luis Obispo County, approximately 45 miles southwest of Bakersfield.

The topography is rugged, with steep canyons and high, sharp mountains and ridges. Elevation varies from 5,104 feet at Caliente Mountain (the highest point in SLO County) to 2,100 feet at the mouth of Post Canyon. Vegetation varies from dense chaparral and juniper along ridgelines to scattered shrubs and annual grasses in canyon floors.

The WSA, which includes a sizeable portion of the Caliente mountain range, has a high degree of natural character. Varied topography and dense pockets of vegetation in the area combine to produce outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation experiences. The area is within the historic range of the endangered California Condor, and recently re-introduced birds have been observed in the area.

The BLM Visual Resource Management System (VRMS) provides a method for analyzing and managing visual resources on public lands. The basis of the VRMS is an inventory of visual resources. The components of the inventory are determinations of scenic quality, numbers of viewers, public attitudes regarding maintenance or modification of the scenery, the distance from which areas are viewed, and the existence of special considerations such as natural area or wilderness designations. All of these components are identified in the Caliente RMP and used to determine VRM classification ratings ranging from highly valued visual resource lands (VRM Class I and VRM Class II) to the least valued lands(VRM Class IV). Each class has specific management objectives.

Because of the factors above, recognition of the Caliente Mountain WSA and the Natural Area designation, most of the region is considered to be VRM Class II. Most of the Temblor Mountain Range is VRM Class III and areas bordering the natural area are considered to be VRM Class IV.