

The Sacramento River Bend Proposed National Recreation Area Questions and Answers

The Sacramento River Bend Outstanding Natural Area (ONA) is being considered as a potential National Recreation Area (NRA). Often, a Federal designation creates concerns with local residents about what it will mean to them, their lifestyle or property values. This information addresses some of those concerns.

What is the Outstanding Natural Area (ONA)?

An ONA is a BLM designation signifying that the area contains regionally important or sensitive resources deserving special attention or management. The designation is administrative only and carries no special funding or protection other than the emphasis provided by the managing office. An ONA is designated through BLM's Resource Management Plan (RMP) process. The Sacramento River Bend ONA was designated by BLM's Redding RMP of 1993.

What is the National Recreation Area (NRA)?

NRA's are designated by Congress and authorized by the President by enacting a law. NRA's recognize specific BLM-managed public land as deserving special management. Unlike some other Congressionally designated units, no pre-existing legislation mandates specific management requirements for an NRA. Each NRA will be managed according to the unique requirements and specifications of the enabling legislation. NRA's remain multiple-use public lands with management emphasis on the important resource(s) that led to the designation.

What happens after designation as an NRA?

When an NRA is established by Congress, the legislation directs BLM to develop a management plan for the public land within the NRA boundary. The planning process would include significant public input via public meetings, briefings, letters, etc. BLM would use the input from the public, agencies and organizations to establish permitted uses, management practices and management objectives within a specific plan for the NRA. It is unlikely that major changes in current permitted/prohibited activities would occur due to the NRA designation and management plan. What will likely occur with the NRA designation, however, would be increased levels of management attention, visitor services and visitor use within the area. Increased visitor use is expected due to national recognition and inclusion on various maps, books and brochures.

Is there a reason for the timing of the designation proposal?

Several things have aligned to make this a good time to propose an NRA designation.

- 1) Due to BLM's success in acquiring land within the ONA, primarily through land exchanges, there are now approximately 17,000 acres of contiguous public land that allow landscape - scale resource and recreation management.
- 2) The population of Red Bluff, Redding and the adjoining areas has grown tremendously and will continue to do so. A prime example is the Del Webb Corporation plans for a 2,800-unit development only 3 miles west of the ONA. Continued population growth will place more pressures on the public land. BLM must respond and manage those lands accordingly.
- 3) The popularity of the ONA with the public has grown significantly over the past few years. The increased use requires commensurate levels of management of the land.

What would happen to livestock grazing?

When current grazing leases are renewed, they are evaluated for consistency with BLM standards and guidelines. If a change is needed in season of use, number of Animal Unit Months (AUM's), location or type of improvements, riparian protection, etc, those changes are made at the time of renewal. Other changes that would affect the lessee can be made at other times with a two-year notice. Since the BLM already uses the standards and guidelines prescribed for grazing leases, it is unlikely that any grazing use would change as a result of the NRA designation. Any changes to livestock grazing would likely occur with or without an NRA designation.

Could I still hunt?

Currently, hunting for legal game during legal seasons is permitted on public land within the ONA. The exceptions to this are in established day-use areas as well as other areas that are prohibited as a result of state law. It is highly unlikely that an NRA designation would change the hunting of legal game.

Could I target shoot?

Presently the ONA is closed to target shooting with the exception of a ½ section (320 acres) south of Battle Creek accessible on Spring Branch Road. Current policy also restricts paint ball guns to target shooting areas. With the increased use of the ONA area for horseback riding, hiking, mountain bikes, sight-seeing, etc, the use of the public land for target shooting has come under increasing scrutiny. This scrutiny will continue with or without an NRA designation. Increased conflict between other recreation users and target shooting could lead to further restrictions of target shooting regardless of NRA status.

How about camping, horseback riding, hiking and biking?

The appropriateness of these uses is determined through planning processes for specific areas, trail segments, etc. Through the NRA planning process, various uses and combinations of uses will be examined and the impacts estimated. Based on the impacts, decisions would be made on which uses to allow. Presently these uses are permitted (with minor exceptions) and would likely continue to be permitted following the NRA designation and planning process. An example of a non-permitted use is camping in a designated day-use area.

Currently, there are no campgrounds in the ONA. Campgrounds could be considered during the NRA planning process. The BLM has been requested by several user groups to provide primitive campgrounds along the main roads as well as back-country locations.

Currently there are no identified conflicts between equestrians, pedestrians and mountain bike riders in the ONA. In the foreseeable future we do not anticipate any segregation or limitation of these uses but this would be determined in the NRA planning process.

Could I drive off road?

Vehicle use is currently limited to designated routes only. No cross-country travel is allowed. An NRA designation would not change this. Through the NRA planning process one of the issues would likely be public access and whether more motorized access is needed (opening existing roads that are currently closed or the construction of new roads). Regardless of the outcome of that issue the area will remain closed to off-road motorized vehicles.

Would public access improve?

Current public access is very good in the ONA. Additional funding associated with an NRA designation would allow for further development of river and trail access points and parking lots, as well as signage. This would likely be one of the issues developed through the planning process.

Would water rights be affected?

Water right issues would not be affected by an NRA designation.

How about my personal property rights?

An NRA designation is intended to perpetuate multiple use of the public land. It does not affect ingress or egress to private in-holdings and does not affect what private land owners can do with their property. The NRA would have no negative impact on private land or property rights. Landowners that share access routes with BLM may experience increased traffic on the roads due to the possibility of higher levels of use. However, this increased use will likely occur with or without a national designation.

Will there be an entrance fee?

The current draft legislation does not cover the charging of an entrance fee to enter the NRA. The BLM has no plans to charge an entrance fee now or in the future, with or without a national designation. The BLM does currently charge a fee for commercial activities, large organized events and rights-of-ways and this would continue under an NRA designation. If a campground is ever built there would likely be a daily camp fee.