



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING STAFF REPORT COVER PAGE

JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa
Palm Desert, CA March 26, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: Colorado Desert District (CDD) Update

STAFF: Ray Lennox, District Superintendent
Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist

SUBJECT: Introduction to the CDD and Informational Update on
Native American Conservation Corps (NACC)

I. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

No action needed, information only.

II. BACKGROUND

Colorado Desert District Superintendent, Ray Lennox, and Senior Environmental Scientist Danny McCamish, will present a report that provides an overview of the Colorado Desert District and an update on ongoing projects throughout the district.

III. ATTACHMENTS

- Staff Report



STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort & Spa

Palm Desert, CA

March 26, 2025

STAFF REPORT: Colorado Desert District Update

STAFF: Ray Lennox, District Superintendent
Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist

SUBJECT: Introduction to the Colorado Desert District and Informational
Update on Native American Conservation Corps (NACC)

OBJECTIVE

Staff will provide a brief introduction of the Colorado Desert District (District) followed by an informational report on the Native American Conservation Crew (NACC) now in its fourth season.

INTRODUCTION

The Colorado Desert District is perhaps one of the most bio-diverse districts in the State Park System with two mountain park units with peaks up to 6,500' and one desert park unit totaling 655,000+ acres. The District is also in its fourth season hosting a Native America Conservation Crew program.

DESCRIPTION (REPORT / UPDATE)

Colorado Desert District Updates

The Colorado Desert District encompasses three diverse park units, spanning a total of 655,084 acres, offering year-round recreational opportunities. The District includes two mountain park units and one expansive desert park unit—Anza-Borrego Desert State Park—the largest state park in California. Approximately 77% of the District (505,803 acres) is designated as California State Wilderness (458,127.5 acres), State Cultural Preserve (46,197.6 acres), or State Natural Preserve (1,478 acres), ensuring the highest levels of land protection. Visitors can explore the District's remote landscapes through over 806 miles of unpaved roads and nearly 300 miles of trails. Notably, the entire backcountry of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is classified as a camping facility, allowing camping adjacent to roads where it does not impact native vegetation. During the right conditions, the District has seen breathtaking wildflower displays, ranging from high-elevation mountain meadows at 5,200 feet to vibrant desert blooms in

Anza-Borrego. Additionally, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park holds the prestigious designation as an International Dark Sky Park, offering unparalleled stargazing opportunities. It was also recently recognized as a Quiet Conservation Area by Quiet Parks International, highlighting its exceptional natural tranquility, particularly within its designated wilderness areas.

Ongoing Projects

- **Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) Investigation**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is conducting remedial investigations at six Formerly Used Defense Sites within Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. These studies assess the presence of military debris and potential hazards to staff and visitors. One of these locations remains closed to the public under Title 14, California Code of Regulation, Section 4604, due to safety concerns.

- **Anza-Borrego Foundation (ABF) Land Acquisition**

Since its inception in 1967, the Anza-Borrego Foundation has worked to acquire inholdings within Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, successfully adding over 54,000 acres to the park. Recently, in 2021, ABF transferred 17,597 acres to the park and is currently in the process of transferring an additional 3,156 acres.

- **Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Reforestation**

The 2003 Cedar Fire, one of California's largest wildfires at the time, burned 93% of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, significantly impacting the park's conifer forest. In response, the Colorado Desert District launched an ongoing reforestation project that started in 2007 to reintroduce native conifer trees across 2,530+ acres to facilitate long-term forest regeneration. By strategically planting in mosaic patterns, the project aims to restore conifer forests while reducing the likelihood of future catastrophic wildfires.

- **Native American Conservation Crew**

Now in its fourth season, the Native American Conservation Crew was initially launched as a two-year pilot program. The initiative supports regional forest management goals, reconnects Native American communities with their ancestral lands, and promotes Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Crew members receive training in wildland firefighting, forest fuel reduction, prescribed burns, and tree planting, equipping them with valuable skills they can bring back to their communities.

COMMISSION ACTION(S)

For information only.