July 16, 2012

The Honorable Secretary Laird  
California Natural Resources Agency  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Honorable Secretary Laird,

I read with interest the letter dated June 8, 2012 from Assembly Member Joan Buchanan and Senators Loni Hancock and Mark DeSaulnier regarding the planned expansion of California State Park, Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA). On July 6th and 7th, I toured the park with state park staff and Mr. Mark Connolly, an adjacent land owner. With respect to those who have voiced objections to the Alameda/Tesla expansion, I am concerned the representatives may have only heard one side of the story.

During numerous visits to the park, I have had the opportunity to see and learn about many of the changes that have occurred at Carnegie SVRA. Many hill climb areas that were not sustainable have been closed, a restoration program has been put in place and projects completed, and cultural resources that have been identified have been protected. In addition, a detailed Watershed Study was completed that examined conditions in the existing park as well the Alameda/Tesla expansion lands and surrounding properties.

The OHMVR Division has stated their desire to model the expansion lands at Carnegie similar to those of Hollister Hills SVRA in San Benito County. Having visited Hollister Hills on two occasions, I have seen first hand the new trails only area, opened in 2006. This beautiful OHV park allows riders to access slightly over 3,000 acres, and upholds the highest standards of environmental sensitivity and protection while also providing world class recreational opportunity. The layout of the trails was designed to reduce impacts to the neighbors, naturally shed water to minimize erosion, and protect sensitive species. I would strongly encourage you and the representatives to visit and tour Hollister Hills to get an understanding of the vision for Carnegie SVRA.

Our State Parks possess many historical, cultural, recreational, biological and scenic resources. It is important to provide access to all Californians and not discriminate against those who want or need to access our lands with a motor vehicle. For many disabled Americans, it is the only way they can see the beauty of California.

Carnegie SVRA was purchased by State Parks in 1979 but has been an off highway vehicle location since the 1940’s. I understand there was a time when Carnegie was wide open with few restrictions. That was a long time ago and is not how it is operated today. Mr. Connolly wants the public to think that Alameda/Tesla lands will be wide open to OHVs, but nothing could be further from the truth. The Alameda/Tesla expansion will be designed from a clean slate as a trails only area, and operated in an environmentally sustainable manner.

I am deeply concerned that a number of individuals are making claims about OHV State Parks when they have never taken the time to visit or taken the time to meet/speak with staff to fully understand the park. I have made a concerted effort to meet with park staff as well as those opposed and in favor of OHV recreation. On Friday, July 6, 2012, I had dinner with Mr. Mark Connolly and his wife Celeste. Mr. Connolly stated that the OHV Division has been a complete failure in managing the SVRAs. I asked Mr. Connolly which SVRAs beyond Carnegie had he visited and his answer was none. This appears to be a
pattern from Mr. Connolly, in which he makes unsubstantiated statements with no evidence or proof, and seemingly no effort or desire to substantiate his declarations. I believe it is important to focus on the facts and avoid rhetoric and mistruths. All too often, members of various organizations such as PEER make claims about OHV State Parks but they have never visited or taken the time to speak/meet with staff to fully understand the park. I am concerned that a number of groups seem to prefer to issue ultimatums and launch lawsuits against the OHV Division, depleting valuable staff time and resources rather than trying to work together to solve disagreements. Ironically this negative approach removes the focus from park management improvements and the further development of the parks.

There are limited opportunities for OHV recreation in the Bay Area, and Carnegie SVRA provides an important destination for families and individuals to gather and enjoy OHV recreation. The vision for the new lands at Carnegie is similar to that of Hollister Hills. Under the leadership of former Deputy Director Daphne Greene, it was proven that new lands can be opened in a way that protects the environment and provides a world-class recreation opportunity. At a time when our economy is still struggling, the demand for OHV recreation continues to increase. A recent study at Oceano Dunes SVRA indicated the park brings over $100 million in revenue to the county per year. The expansion of the Alameda/Tesla lands in Carnegie SVRA will help the local communities at a time when it is most needed.

Secretary Laird, as we discussed when we last met, through hard work and dedication, the OHV Division has made great progress to ensure and manage responsible OHV use throughout California. I am troubled that a few individuals continue to attack Carnegie SVRA and have no interest in moving forward to allow the Division to meet its legislative mandate to increase opportunities for OHV recreation. The Alameda/Tesla lands were purchased well over a decade ago. The Park has done exhaustive studies and moved forward with projects to ensure water quality standards are met and species are protected. We need to support this effort for expansion to meet the need for increased OHV opportunities. The OHV Division has proven that it is a leader in the area of trail development and resource protection. We need to give them support and the opportunity to showcase their expertise at Carnegie.

I would be happy to join you or any members of the legislature on a tour of Carnegie or Hollister SVRA to better understand responsible OHV recreation and the vision for the future.

Sincerely,

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cc: Ruth Coleman, Director California State Parks and Recreation
John A. Pérez, Speaker of the Assembly,
Joan Buchanan, Assembly Member, 15th District
Loni Hancock, Senator 9th District
Mark DeSaulnier, Senator 7th District
Phil Jenkins, Chief, OHMVRD, California State Parks
Robert Doyle, General Manager, East Bay Regional Parks District