

Monday, November 24, 2003

Road claims decision not addressed

Congress yet to clarify right-of-way rules for national parks roads

By KELLY DONOVAN

Staff Writer

BARSTOW — Weeks after the passage of a U.S. Interior Department spending bill, several environmental groups are still up in arms because a provision they'd hoped for wasn't included.

The California Wilderness Coalition and other groups are upset because the bill didn't address a matter they say could lead to more paved roads in the Mojave National Preserve, Death Valley and other national parks.

At issue is RS 2477, a mining law more than a century old that became an issue in January, when the Interior Department issued a disclaimer of interest rule pertaining to the law.

The new rule allows states, counties and private organizations to assert claims to right-of-way on federal land by submitting an application to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

San Bernardino County became the first county in the nation this spring to apply to the bureau for ownership of a road on federal land.

The county is seeking title to the 42 miles of Camp Rock Road between the Daggett area and Lucerne Valley.

That application, however, is the only such official request BLM has received in California so far, bureau spokeswoman Jan Bedrosian said.

Local governments are free to file applications under the disclaimer of interest rule, but the BLM is not processing them immediately, she said.

“BLM would simply hold their application, as they are with Camp Rock Road, and wait for guidance from Washington,” Bedrosian said.

BLM officials are hoping Congress will clarify the law, she said, and until then, it’s hard to say whether national parks would even be affected.

“The question of how that might apply to the Mojave National Preserve is quite premature,” she said.

Still, environmentalists are sounding alarm bells.

The Wilderness Coalition last month said in a news release that the public will see “thousands of miles of back-country trails given away to special interests who want to ‘un-protect’ the Mojave National Preserve” and other parks.

The new disclaimer of interest rule that put the law in the spotlight stems from a memorandum of understanding in Utah.

Local governments wanted to assert claims to roads there, so the Interior Department negotiated the memorandum of understanding with the state.

The agreement included a provision to protect national parks and wilderness areas stating that the department will not process disclaimer of interest applications in those locations, Bedrosian said.

Still, Scott Groene, staff attorney for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, is among the environmentalists disappointed that a proposed compromise to the rule died in a House-Senate conference committee.

He said the interests that led to the memorandum of understanding in Utah included a group of elected officials who simply dislike the concept of federally managed land.

“It has nothing to do with transportation,” Groene said. “It has to do with off-road vehicle groups or anti-wilderness forces.”

Planning commission to discuss tattoo license

At tonight’s Barstow Planning Commission meeting, commissioners are scheduled to discuss whether the city should revoke a local tattoo and body-piercing parlor’s permit.

Also on the meeting agenda is a request to set up a construction yard on the southeast corner of Lenwood and Jasper roads, and a request involving a possible relocation of Greyhound’s bus depot to Barstow Station.

The meeting will be at 7 p.m. at City Hall, 220 E. Mountain View.

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