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## Designating the dunes

### County hopes to turn part of area outside Nellis into new park

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If you follow Las Vegas Boulevard north, beyond the neon lights and suburban sprawl, even beyond Nellis Air Force Base, you will reach Nellis Dunes.

The actual dunes cover only a relatively small part of the 10,902 acres of open, rugged land stretching between Las Vegas Boulevard and Pabco Road, and from Nellis Air Force Base to Apex, the industrial area along Interstate 15. If you look east while heading toward Utah, you can see the steep hills crisscrossed with hundreds of dirt trails. If all goes according to Clark County's plan, about 1,000 acres of it will become the largest park in the county.

For decades, the dunes, which are under the control of the Bureau of Land Management, have been the playground of off-roaders, four-wheelers, hill climbers and other members off what is collectively called the OHV or off-highway vehicle community.

"People love it the way it is, and almost 9,000 acres would stay that way," said Michael Popp of the Clark County Department of Comprehensive Planning. "What we would do is clean it up, put some facilities out in the middle with a place to put trash, bathrooms and a flat place to park. We'd have some rangers out there to protect people from those who are being reckless and dangerous to themselves and others and make the place safe and enjoyable."

Popp noted that the area is a popular dumping ground for stolen cars and that the county has received numerous complaints of irresponsible OHV drivers racing in the dirt parking lot along Las Vegas Boulevard, endangering people unloading their own OHVs. The hill below the parking lot is littered with broken glass.

"If you come out here on any weekend, you'll see parents letting their kids ride without helmets or other safety gear," said Zack Livreri, president of the Motorcycle Racing Association of Nevada. "We want to teach them safety here because hopefully they'll take that out of the park, and when they go ride other places, it'll be ingrained in them."

Livreri is part of the 17-person Nellis Dunes Advisory Committee that is made up of members of the OHV community and representatives from local and federal government agencies, including the BLM, Clark County Parks and Recreation and Nellis Air Force Base.

The area that the county is talking about is a staircase-shaped section about a mile off Las Vegas Boulevard. The location was chosen to keep development off Nellis Air Force Base's flight paths.

"Portions of the Nellis Dunes were annexed by North Las Vegas in the early '90s, and in their master plan,

they have that section zoned for heavy industrial," Popp said. "That's the threat to Nellis Air Force Base. That part's right in their flight line."

Popp was quick to point out that annexing the property didn't make the city the owner, it only put the area within its political boundary.

The advisory committee includes Terri Robertson of the Friends of Gold Butte, who described herself as the group's resident environmentalist. Robertson was instrumental in getting Red Rock Canyon protected for future generations and is very enthusiastic about this project.

"It was such a new idea to people having the county take over something like this that there was quite an uproar against it initially," Robertson said. "I think it's just because they didn't understand that the county wanted to make sure that no buildings wound up out here, it wasn't developed and it continued to provide the opportunity that it does today."

Rumors abounded in the early days of the planning process. Weekend riders who declined to be identified said they feared that the entire area would be fenced off and an entry fee would be charged. Others said the county would be paving all the trails to keep down the dust. There is a grain of truth in some of the rumors, but Popp noted that the fence rumor is particularly unfounded.

"I can't even imagine what that would cost, and we never had plans to do that," Popp said. "I don't think the BLM ever had any plans like that, either."

The plans do call for paving to keep the dust down, but only in the parking areas along Las Vegas Boulevard and inside the county park. A paved loop road would provide access to the county park, but it wouldn't be blacktop. The county plans to use a system that mixes native materials with a bonding agent to create a surface with the same coloring and texture as the surrounding landscape, but as durable as a regular road.

"Most of the dust comes from the parking area at the moment," Popp said.

The 1,211-acre park would be a collection of mixed-use facilities, including specialized trails and tracks for various OHVs. There are trails in that section that follow the crest of the hills, and the tracks would be built in the valleys and gullies below. There would be usage fees for these, much like there are county usage fees charged to local softball teams in the valley's parks.

Currently, there are a few unofficial tracks scattered about the area, but the county contends that those are poorly engineered and not maintained or supervised, which leads to dangerous situations. Livreri pointed out an old track that was popular in the 1970s that is still used today.

"I've come out here and seen some riders going around it one direction and others going the other direction at the same time," Livreri said.

There are plans for RV parking and hookups so the area would not just be an amenity for the citizens of Clark County, but a destination for OHV enthusiasts from other places.

"We're not talking about a sea of RVs like some in town, just a few for special events and weekend OHV people," Popp said. "Typically, similar places have 50 to 100 hookups for power and utilities."

Popp explained that the proposed park would be for active recreation uses, while the remainder of Nellis Dunes would stay passive recreation under the auspices of the BLM, and would remain so in perpetuity.

"It's like in a city park; passive use is walking around, sitting on a bench or throwing a Frisbee," Popp said. "Active use is the baseball fields, basketball courts and the like. Those (approximately 9,000) acres will be

unrestricted passive use for folks that want to take their family out there, go ride trails and enjoy open land."

Popp is aware that the project is a huge undertaking, estimating that it could be as long as 20 years in the making. He also pointed out that funding such a project isn't something the county can do cavalierly. For that reason, the plan is for the park to be economically self-sufficient and not be paid for from a tax increase.

"We want to look at a completely sustainable park with economic support areas that the county and the BLM can develop," Popp said. "These would generate rent, and that, combined with user fees for things like a motocross track, would pay for the park."

Popp noted that among those economic support plans are green-energy facilities, such as solar arrays, that would be built out of sight from the riders.

"They wouldn't even know they're there," Popp said. "We're looking at renewable energy, green technology and things that can generate a long-term lease that we can use in return for development and operations."

It will take an act of Congress to pull it off. Specifically H.R. 765, "To establish the Nellis Dunes National Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation area and for other purposes." The bill, introduced by Rep. Dean Heller, R-Nev., currently is in committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Nellis Dunes Advisory Committee meets every other month to discuss its progress and work on plans for the park. The next meeting will be 6 p.m. Feb. 1 in the Joshua Room of the Clark County Government Center, 500 S. Grand Central Parkway. The meetings are open to the public.

For more information about the plan, visit [http://www.accessclarkcounty.com/depts/comprehensive\\_planning/nellis/Pages/nellisdunes.aspx](http://www.accessclarkcounty.com/depts/comprehensive_planning/nellis/Pages/nellisdunes.aspx) or call Michael Popp at 455-2312.

Contact Sunrise and Whitney View reporter F. Andrew Taylor at [ataylor@viewnews.com](mailto:ataylor@viewnews.com) or 380-4532.

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Top, Nellis Dunes Advisory Committee members Zack Livreri, left, and Ryan Arnold discuss an amateurishly constructed and unregulated motorcycle jump that they consider to be a potential danger at the dunes, Jan. 8. Left, a sign identifies the approximately 10,000 acres of open land located on the extreme northeast edge of the valley beyond Nellis Air Force Base as Nellis Dunes. Clark County is hoping to use a little more than 1,000 acres of the dunes to create a park for off-highway vehicle riders. Photos by F. Andrew Taylor/View



F. Andrew Taylor/View Although Nellis Dunes feels like a very different place from the city of Las Vegas, this Jan. 6 photo shows it's not that far away.



Top, Nellis Dunes Advisory Committee members Zack Livreri, left, and Ryan Arnold discuss an amateurishly constructed and unregulated motorcycle jump that they consider to be a potential danger at the dunes, Jan. 8. Left, a sign identifies the approximately 10,000 acres of open land located on the extreme northeast edge of the valley beyond Nellis Air Force Base as Nellis Dunes. Clark County is hoping to use a little more than 1,000 acres of the dunes to create a park for off-highway vehicle riders. Photos by F. Andrew Taylor/View