

# Re-Opening of Clear Creek Management Area San Benito County, California

The Clear Creek Management Area (CCMA) will re-open to the public on March 15, 2014 after a nearly 6-year Resource Management Plan (RMP) process. This article describes the essential features of the approved RMP as they affect rockhounds within the so-called ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) which is essentially co-extant with the area of serpentine and related rocks which host the majority of collectible minerals in that area. On BLM maps the ACEC will be shown as a solid line encircling the serpentine zone and all of the routes discussed here. The "number of days" limits are derived from the EPA study and are based on the alleged health risks associated with the kinds of recreation we do in CCMA.

## Some basic overall points:

- First, off-road motorcycling is prohibited within the ACEC.
- Overnight camping within the ACEC is prohibited unless on private property with the permission of the owner.
- Camping is available at 3 campgrounds just outside the ACEC boundary (Live Oak, Jade Mill and Condon/County Line. Another is north at Laguna Mountain.)
- Access into the ACEC by vehicle is limited to 5 days per year and by permit only.
- At this time access is via the Clear Creek entrance (west) or New Idria entrance (NE) only. By Fall 2014 BLM intends to open another entrance from the Condon campground.
- Permits are issued to individual people, not vehicles, so everyone in the car needs a permit.
- Any permitted vehicle must be highway licensed, and most backcountry roads will require 4WD.
- Personal access to the ACEC by foot may be permissible to a maximum 12 days per year if you can hike into and out of the ACEC between dawn and dusk on each day.
- Permitting processes will be cumbersome, so allow adequate leadtime for application and mail delivery of permits from the Hollister office, or pick them up in person in Hollister.
- No permit issued by BLM implies BLM's permission to collect on private property or on any land (such as the San Benito Mountain Reserve) designated off-limits.

BLM visitor maps will designate two types of routes—public routes and so-called "back-country" routes, and each has its own permitting process.

**Public Route Permits.** All parties entering the ACEC by vehicle must obtain a public route permit. This permit will cost \$5/person and will eventually be obtained via [www.rec.gov](http://www.rec.gov). As of this date, the [rec.gov](http://www.rec.gov) link has not been set up, so temporarily these permits can be obtained only from the Hollister BLM office by phone or mail. A public permit entitles you to drive the "Scenic Loop" comprised of Clear Creek Road, the Ridge Road from the New Idria gate to the Joaquin Rocks gate and a loop that begins and ends on Ridge Road that most notably goes past the entrance to the benitoite mine. You are entitled to hike and collect on any BLM land that you can access by foot from any point on this Scenic Loop. Most of the collecting localities of interest to lapidarists are closely adjacent to the roads that make up the Scenic Loop, and if that is the case, you may have no need for a backcountry permit.

**Backcountry Permits.** Officially the backcountry routes are designated by BLM as "Closed/Admin" routes. Historically most of the mineral collecting localities for garnets, clinocllore, perovskite, chromite, artinite and other mineral specimens have required transit on one or more of these Admin routes to avoid a long and difficult hike. Under its "adaptive management" rules, BLM is making most of these routes available for limited access by rockhounds, hunters, botanists and others by means of a "backcountry permit". Such permits are in addition to the public permit and will always be obtained from the Hollister office, even after public permits become available online. Current plans call for no additional fee for a backcountry permit, but to obtain one, you must specify your collecting destination to BLM, and BLM will specify the routes you are permitted to drive on to get there. Information assembled from permit applications will provide BLM with guidance relevant to future route adjustments and route maintenance.

Based on recent discussions with BLM, most of the historically active mineral locations will be accessible; some clarifications are still in progress. Condition of Admin roads will be highly variable from the smooth and wide open R002 to the barely negotiable T169. The northern portion of R008 will probably continue to be off limits for a variety of reasons, as will R019 through the Atlas Superfund site. As a result of the latter, the White Creek area will be accessible only via an old ATV trail from the Ridge Road, making collecting there difficult. While the Clear Creek Mine sits astride the Scenic Loop, and lapidarists' needs may be fulfilled with only a public permit, mineral species collectors who want access to the upper workings should apply for a backcountry permit to drive on R004, R002 and/or R006. As with the public permits, you may collect on any BLM land to which you can hike from your permitted route.

This is intended as a quick overview of the new system. The official policies are set by BLM, and in the event of any question, check with the BLM website or the Hollister office.

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