

Clear Creek Management Area: A Special Place

Clear Creek Management Area is like no other place in this country or perhaps on this planet. The diversity of habitat and its rugged topography account for its beauty and uniqueness. Its wide elevation range beginning at 1830ft, climbing to high as 5241 ft, and the different soil types allows this area to take its place among the world's most diverse and special areas. Clear Creek is an area where rare serpentine endemic plants such as the San Benito evening primrose and Rayless layia thrive and where many animals that are listed under special status such as the California Condor or the Longhorn Fairy Shrimp call home. It is an area that has been called literally or figuratively home by legions of miners and recreationists over the years. Many who venture into Clear Creek agree that its unique characteristics make it an unique and special place.



California Condor, Photo by Gavin Emmons.

National Treasure

As early as 1906, there were efforts to make Clear Creek a national forest. On October 26, 1907, just over 140,000 acres was set aside as the San Benito National Forest. It became a division of the Monterey National Forest and had one ranger assigned to it. The primary reason for establishing a National Forest was for the "protection and sale of timber" according to early reports by the Forest Assistant. The demand for lumber in the area was high. For example, the New Idria Quicksilver Mine, the largest mine in the Clear Creek area, was a major consumer of lumber in the new National Forest. Timber was used to build mining shafts and to fuel furnaces to process cinnabar essential to produce mercury important in gold dust recovery. The National Forest was short lived, however. Within a few years, the land reverted back to the public domain and into the General Land Office (GLO), which eventually became the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Although the National Forest did not last long, the geologic and mineral significance of Clear Creek has persisted.



Logs purchased by the New Idria Quicksilver Mine from the National Forest ~1910. Photo by USFS.



Serpentine soil barrens are characteristic of the Clear Creek landscape. Photo by BLM.

Geologic Paradise

Looking at the geology of the Clear Creek Management Area (CCMA) one can't help but notice the unique landscapes and the unusual minerals exposed in the rocks. Rising up like a rock-iceberg in a sea of sedimentary sandstones and shales – the New Idria Block of serpentinite provides a dramatic change in scenery due to the differences of the rocks themselves. They are the result of the collision of the rocks that make up the seafloor to our west, with the rocks of our continent to our east. The denser (heavier) rocks of the seafloor were pressed down under the less dense (lighter) rocks of the continent. The rocks in the New Idria Block were less dense than the rocks that were over and around them – thus they rose up through the rocks similar to ice floating to the top of your glass of drinking water. Because the rocks in the New Idria Block are relatively soft, they became highly fractured and sheared with their journey upward. Within these fractures and shears found in the rock, abundant fissures of friable asbestos formed. Due to the broken up nature of the rock, this friable asbestos weathers out of the rock due to wind and weather. The poor nutrient and high metal content of the serpentine makes it difficult for plants to establish. Sparse vegetative cover, in combination with a steep, erosive landscape results in the distinctive white, blue, and rust colored barrens. Therefore these areas appear as moon-scape barrens. In 1984, approximately 30,000 acres was designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to recognize the unique vegetation and forest types associated with these serpentine soils.

Hobbyists who enjoy collecting gems and minerals are drawn to CCMA by the presence of over 150 semi-precious mineral and gemstones that formed along and within the rocks of the New Idria Block. The more experienced collectors recommend that you look near rocky outcrops and stream channels for a chance to see these minerals. Please be mindful of existing mining claims when looking for minerals of your own.



CCMA is recognized as one of the most highly mineralized areas in California. Jadeite (seen above) is one of the many minerals found here. Photo by Dave Dyet.



A US quarter shown for scale showing just how easy it is to miss seeing a San Benito evening Primrose. Photo by BLM.

Recovery Area

Out of the characteristic serpentine soils of Clear Creek grows a surprising number of plants. Serpentine soils contain low levels of nutrients and high levels of heavy metals such as nickel making it difficult for plants to survive. Plants that live in this harsh environment are known as local serpentine endemics and are very distinctive in their ability to adapt to extreme soil conditions and some are models for scientific research on plant evolution. One such plant is the San Benito evening primrose. Only 10 populations were known when the species was first listed as threatened in 1985. Significant new habitat discovery in 2010 yielded more than 400 new populations. The San Benito evening primrose is on its way towards recovery. For those wanting to see this unique plant, follow Clear Creek Road (BLM R1) to the first bend northeast of Staging Area 2. Between the road and the creek is a post labeled "31100". Please do not remove the post, but look closely and you may see this tiny rare plant. It blooms in mid-April.



Snow highlighting Clear Creek's beauty. Photo by BLM.

Human History

Before the Spanish explorers and settlers began to settle the Clear Creek area, Native Americans were present in the region. They lived, hunted game for food, quarried minerals for tools and pigment paint, camped for short-term and long-term intervals, harvested plants for food, fuel, and medicines, and conducted socio-religious ceremonies that maintained their cultural identity. Descendants of those groups use Clear Creek in the same way as their ancestors. Other groups have historical ties to the Clear Creek area such as gem/rock collectors, naturalists, miners, hunters and motorized recreationists. The less visited traveler can feel the same tug of this area as those who have been here before by seeing the serpentine barrens, the Coulter pine trees or the many birds and plants that dot the landscape. It is a place that is special; a place of exceptional importance for its history, its geologic values, recovery of special status species and to the people who visit.

Camping

Three campgrounds provide camping opportunities for the Clear Creek Management Area outside of the Serpentine ACEC: Oak Flat and Jade Mill near the entrance off Clear Creek Road and Condon Peak on Coalinga Road. Oak Flat and Condon Peak campgrounds were established as a result of 2010 ARRA (American Reinvestment and Recovery Act) funds and each have six campsites. Each campsite is equipped with a picnic table and fire ring. There is one vault toilet restroom at each campground. Campsites can accommodate full-sized RVs as well as tent camping. The Jade Mill Campground offers 13 campsites and all of the same amenities. There are no hook-ups or water in any campground. Camping in these campgrounds require a \$5 per week vehicle fee and is limited to 14 days within any 28-day period at a particular site on all BLM public lands. Dispersed camping opportunities are available outside of the Serpentine ACEC.

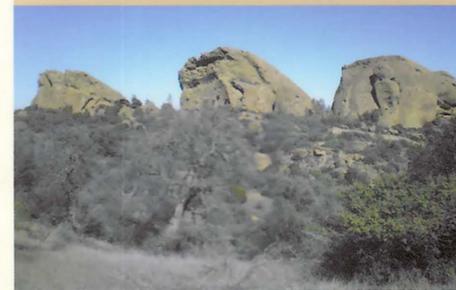


Wild Pig. Photo by BLM.

Please practice Leave No Trace® principles when visiting all public lands.

Hunting and Shooting

Hunting opportunities on BLM public lands within the Clear Creek Management Area consist primarily of upland game birds, wild pig, deer and varmints. All hunters must follow California Department of Fish and Wildlife's rules and regulations. Shooting is prohibited within 150 yards (450 feet) of any developed area (including campgrounds), toward occupied private lands or within 1/4 mile of Clear Creek Canyon Road (BLM R1).



Joaquin Rocks from below. Photo by BLM.

Joaquin Rocks

Also known as Three Rocks, people have made Joaquin Rocks a destination for hundreds of years. Named after Joaquin Murietta, the rocks were thought to be a hideout (and some say location of his hidden treasure) of California's most famous bandit of the 1800's. The three distinct rocks tower over the landscape and offer spectacular views of the San Joaquin Valley below. Spending some time hiking around the rocks is sure not to disappoint. A 6 mile round trip moderate to strenuous hike is required in addition to permits to go through the Clear Creek Serpentine ACEC. Temperatures can get hot in the summer and chilly to cold in the winter. Plan ahead including bringing your own water. For more information, visit our website at www.blm.gov/ca/hollister or call our office at 831-630-5000.

America's Great Outdoors



Bureau of Land Management
Central Coast Field Office
940 2nd Avenue
Marina, CA. 93933
Phone: (831) 582-2200

San Luis Reservoir State
Recreation Area
31426 Gonzaga Road
Gustine, CA 95322
(800) 346-2711

Los Gatos Creek County Park
46240 Los Gatos Creek Rd.
Coalinga, CA 93210
(559) 600-3004

Little Panoche Wildlife Area
5 miles W of Hwy 5 and 30 miles W of Fire-
baugh, on the southern side of
Little Panoche Rd
CA Dept of Fish and Game
(209) 826-0463

Mendota Wildlife Area
3 miles S. of Mendota near
Whites Bridge
CA Dept of Fish and Game
(559) 655-4645

Pinnacles National Park
5000 Highway 146
Palo Alto, CA 95043
National Park Service
(831) 389-4485

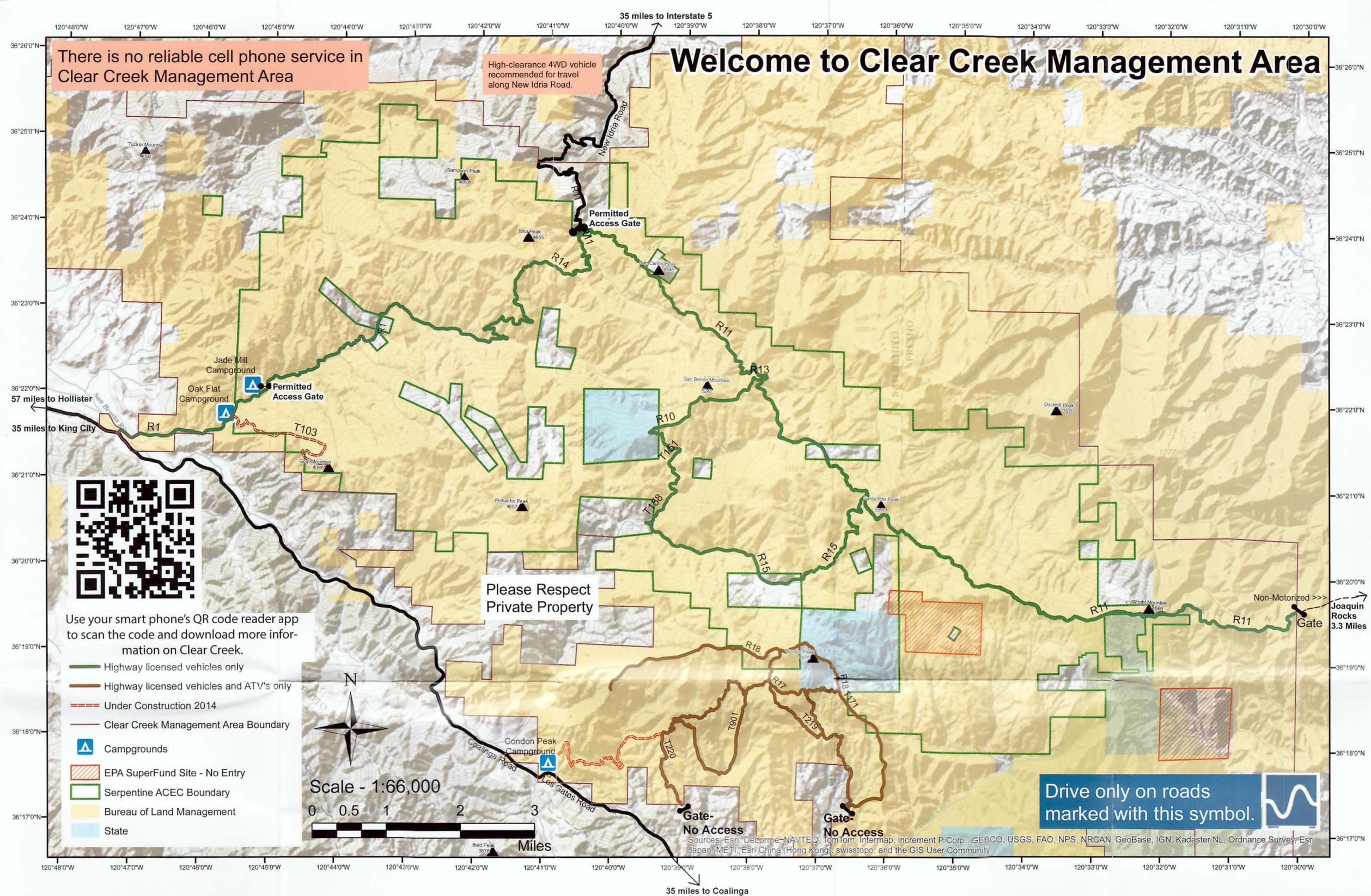
Other Local Resources

Clear Creek

BLM

Hollister Field Office





CCMA Rules and Regulations

- Vehicles only allowed on designated open routes. All other areas are closed. Open routes are signed with brown fiberglass trail markers and labeled with blue stickers (seen above on map).
- Roads have two-way traffic. Reduce speed and use caution when approaching blind corners. Stay to the right, be alert and be prepared to yield the right of way at any time.
- No shooting is allowed within ¼ mile of Clear Creek road.
- No overnight stay allowed in the Serpentine Area of Critical Environmental Concern.
- Leave the area clean—"Pack it in, Pack it Out."

ASBESTOS ALERT

The risk of exposure to airborne asbestos exists within Clear Creek year round. Visitors should take measures to reduce exposure to dust while in the area. Children are most at risk from exposure. Recommendations to reduce exposure include: avoid the area during dry or dusty conditions, avoid opening vehicle doors until visible dust has cleared, keep windows closed and ventilation on recirculate, wash vehicles before returning home, launder clothing separately, and use a HEPA vacuum to clean vehicle interior. Please think twice before bringing your child.

- The Ten Essentials**
- Packing these items whenever you venture into the backcountry, even on day hikes or drives, is a good habit to acquire. Yet you'll probably never fully appreciate the value of the Ten Essentials until you *really* need one of them.
1. Map
 2. Compass
 3. Sunglasses and Sunscreen
 4. Extra Clothing
 5. Headlamp/Flashlight
 6. First Aid Supplies
 7. Fire-starting Material
 8. Matches
 9. Knife
 10. Extra Food & Water

- STAY OUT, STAY ALIVE**
- Every year, dozens of people are injured and killed while exploring or playing on mine property. Hazards are not always apparent in abandoned mines. Some of the hazards include:
- Vertical shafts can be hundreds of feet deep and may be completely unprotected, hidden by vegetation or covered by rotting boards.
 - Horizontal openings may seem sturdy, but rotting timbers and unstable rock formations make cave-ins a real danger.
 - Lethal concentrations of deadly gases can accumulate in underground passages.
 - Unused or misfired explosives can become unstable and deadly.
 - Excavated vertical cliffs in open pit mines and quarries can be unstable and prone to collapse.
 - Hills of loose material in stockpiles or refuse heaps can easily collapse.

Restriction on Lead Ammunition

In order to prevent the accidental poisoning of California condors, lead ammunition has been banned for most kinds of hunting.

- Leave No Trace** (www.lnt.org)
- As more people use public lands, LEAVE NO TRACE® guidelines become even more important for outdoor visitors. Leave No Trace is a plan that helps people to be more concerned about their environment and to help them protect it for future generations. Leave No Trace applies in the more visited areas as much as it does in the less visited areas.
1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
 2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
 3. Dispose of Waste Properly
 4. Leave What You Find
 5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
 6. Respect Wildlife
 7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

RULES REGARDING FIRE USE

Campers are required to have a FREE California Campfire Permit for any fire OUTSIDE of designated fire rings. Permits can be obtained from the Hollister Field Office and are generally not issued during the dry season (summer). Additional requirements include carrying water and a shovel to make sure the campfire is dead out before leaving the area. Never attempt to build a campfire during a windy day or leave the campfire unattended.



Be safe on Public Lands

Each year, marijuana gardens are responsible for tons of trash on public lands. Discarded batteries, fertilizer and other items pollute the water table and kill local flora and fauna. Law enforcement officials are active throughout the year eradicating gardens and providing for public safety.

Beginning in March or April, illegal marijuana cultivation begins on public lands through the state and continues September/October.

The most notable signs of illegal cultivation activity on public lands are the sudden change in vegetation, the appearance of plant rows, and black plastic water lines.

If you come across any of these signs, **leave the area immediately** and call BLM Hollister Field Office number listed below.

U.S. Bureau Of Land Management
 Hollister Field Office
 20 Hamilton Court
 Hollister, CA 95023
 (831) 630-5000
www.blm.gov/ca/hollister