

Memorandum

May 22, 2001

To: Desert Managers Group

From: Chair, DIRT Web Subcommittee Chair

Subject: Proposed changes to California Desert web site

The Desert Managers' primary public web site (www.californiadesert.gov) was launched in September of 1999 as one of DIRT's major outreach initiatives. Since that time it has averaged about 3,000-4,000 hits a month. In the fall of 2000, a new feature, the on-line magazine *Desert Voices* was launched.

At its last meeting the DIRT Web Team reviewed recent user statistics for the web site in some detail. While we have received some positive feedback about the site, there have also been a number of calls from people to provide more information.

The site use statistics point out a number of problems and show that some corrective action is necessary if the site is going to meet its intended purposes.

First off, we learned that of the 3,000 or so monthly site visits, fully 1/3 are leaving the site before the opening attract page of the raven and sand dune even finish loading. That means that about 1,000 people each month never get to the first information page. Once the users reach the first page another 500 were logging off without making any additional menu choices indicating that they weren't finding what they were looking for at that point and were backing out.

After two issues, there was almost no use of the *Desert Voices* on-line magazine. The few people who were looking at it were largely other government employees, not desert recreational users. Most of the site users were using the Trip Planning sections of the site. Virtually no one was making use of the other features such as the post cards or the Natural History or People sections.

We had quite a bit of discussion on how to address these problems and agreed to the following actions.

- 1) the raven/dune attract page will be dropped. Site users will be brought directly to the Trip Planning page.

- 2) Efforts will be made to make the buttons more identifiable as conventional buttons are on most web sites. Right now we think many people don't realize there is more information available.

3) Basic recreation information for each public lands recreation site will be provided based on the 17 points that the National Park Service has used for each national park unit on www.nps.gov. This will serve as the minimum baseline information that desert visitors will need to plan a recreational visit to desert public lands (facilities, fees, features, activities, etc.). This information has already been gathered for all the sites that each agency has chosen to feature.

4) Links to other public lands web pages will be brought up to higher levels of the site so that users can get to more information faster.

5) The content of the site will be improved. The Maps section, for example, will actually have maps, and many of the other sections will be rewritten to give the user more hard information.

6) The *Desert Voices* button will be made more prominent with perhaps an explanatory label to better inform users as to what kind of information is actually there.

7) The postcards feature will be dropped. No one was using it.

8) The use of the site will be evaluated further over the next 6-12 months for improvements in site usage. If there are still problems with unmet public expectations and low site usage, consideration will be given to a complete site redesign.

We are seeking the support of the DMG for making these changes. The Web Team welcomes feedback and suggestion about the web site. We want to make it a useful information tool for the public, and we welcome your ideas and help in making the needed improvements. The Desert Information and Resource Team (DIRT) has been briefed on these proposed changes and support them.

Please feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss this message or any other aspect of the www.californiadesert.gov site.

Thanks,

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