

Petition to Preserve Arch Canyon's Natural and Cultural Heritage Q&A

Q: What is the recent history of ORV use in Arch Canyon?

A: ORV use has been increasing in Arch Canyon. ORV user groups are targeting Arch Canyon as a place to hold ORV events (i.e. Jeep Jamboree, Jeep Safari, San Juan ATV Safari), and everyday use is increasing. BLM recently authorized trail construction work and ORV signs to be placed in Arch Canyon, encouraging ORV use.

Q: What is the legal basis for the Petition?

A: Two Executive Orders (Exec. Order 11644 issued by Pres. Nixon in 1972 and Exec. Order 11989 issued by Pres. Carter in 1977) which are codified in the Bureau of Land Management's regulations at 43 CFR §§ 8341.2, 8342 require that BLM take immediate action to protect the natural and cultural resources from adverse effects caused by ORV use, and to close the area to such use until the adverse effects have been eliminated and measures implemented to prevent recurrence of the impacts.

Q: Who are the petitioners?

A: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Navajo Utah Commission, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Far Out Expeditions, Wild Rivers Expeditions, Calf Canyon Bed & Breakfast.

Q: How long does BLM have to decide?

A: SUWA has requested that BLM respond to the Petition within 120 days.

Q: What if BLM denies SUWA's Petition?

A: SUWA will review BLM's reasons for rejecting the Petition and consider available legal options.

Q: Why is Arch Canyon important?

A: Ancestral Puebloans were likely attracted to the year-round water source in Arch Canyon and their subsequent settlement in the canyon left behind spectacular ruins that have captivated the imaginations of generations who have since come and marveled at the structures and rock art. Only a handful of the canyon's over 100 (estimated) archeological sites have been documented.

Q: What are the archaeological sites like now?

A: The cultural sites are in various stages of preservation. Some have been looted and vandalized, some have been inadvertently damaged, some have been damaged due to natural erosion, and some may appear as they did hundreds of years ago. Studies show that motorized access greatly increases the chances of intentional and inadvertent damages and vandalism to cultural resources.

Q: What did the recent riparian assessment conclude about the impacts of ORVs?

A: Riparian areas make up less than 1% of Utah's public lands, yet they support 75-80% of all wildlife. Arch Canyon is a rare perennial stream in Utah's arid canyon country in

southeastern Utah. The ORV route in Arch Canyon crosses the creek 60 times for a one-way trip (120 times for the round trip) to the US Forest Service boundary. While the BLM is allowing ORV use in this riparian area the Forest Service prohibits ORV use at its boundary to protect the cultural and natural resources.

The riparian assessment report documents that considerable adverse effects are occurring to the riparian system – the stream itself and the surrounding floodplain – due to ORV use. ORV use is wearing away streamside vegetation and the resulting bare soil is increasing sedimentation in the creek; ORV use is degrading stream banks to the point that the stream's natural meandering channel is being straightened causing significant adverse impacts at both high-flow and low-flow water levels.

Q: Are sensitive fish species impacted by ORV use?

A: Arch Creek supports three native fish species, including one state sensitive species. One or more of these fish are soon likely to be petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. One or more of these species may be relict species that are genetically unique from the larger gene pool due to its isolation (possibly millions of years) from the larger gene pool. Increased sedimentation and the lowered water table, among other impacts associated with the ORV use, significantly degrade the fish habitat

Q: Who are the experts?

A: Jerry Spangler conducted two on the ground surveys in Arch Canyon. Mr. Spangler is a registered professional archaeologist and is the Executive Director of the Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance. Mr. Spangler has been the principal investigator on numerous field research projects throughout the northern Colorado Plateau, including BLM-funded statewide research into vandalism of cultural sites and the development of public land management strategies to better protect cultural resources for future generations.

Charles Schelz conducted an on the ground riparian assessment of Arch Canyon and returned to assess the canyon's riparian system after the October 2006 floods. Mr. Schelz has worked for the past ten years as a biologist/botanist/ecologist in southeastern Utah, and has over 19 years of experience in designing and participating in long-term ecological monitoring of riparian areas throughout the Colorado Plateau and the western United States. Mr. Schelz has worked in several parks managed by the National Park Service and as a private consultant for the U.S. Forest Service.

Q: What should the BLM do to manage this Arch Canyon?

A: Based on the scientific reports and recommendations of the archaeological and riparian experts, BLM must prohibit ORV use in the Arch Canyon area to preserve the cultural resources and to protect and improve the riparian system. In addition, BLM should

- initiate a comprehensive survey to document the archaeological sites in Arch Canyon
- restore sections of Arch Canyon where ORV use has created areas susceptible to erosion, especially at the 60 route crossings
- conduct research on the fish in Arch Canyon, including comparative genetic studies.