

Access, with limits: OHV users should accept, respect new BLM rules

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Off-highway vehicle enthusiasts should be happy with the Bureau of Land Management's new rules governing their use of 148,000 acres of open space around Factory Butte in Wayne County.

But, not surprisingly, they aren't.

Leaders of Utah Shared Access Alliance, the state's largest OHV organization, believe the restrictions are too confining and vow to challenge them in court. Their complaint seems groundless, as federal law requires protection of endangered species, and the areas totally off-limits to OHV riders comprise habitat of the Winkler and Wrights Fishhook, two endangered cacti already significantly damaged by OHV use.

Environmental groups are satisfied with the rules, even though a 2,600-acre "play area" will remain open to unrestricted cross-country OHV use and 220 miles of designated roads and trails will be open to OHV riders.

The BLM's rules represent a good compromise, keeping open the most popular OHV recreation area and many miles of trails through the badlands that are adjacent to Capitol Reef National Park and include many spectacular vistas and iconic landmarks.

In its plan to educate OHV riders about staying on trails and off restricted areas, the BLM should include information that explains why two cactus species are important enough to warrant protection from humans.

The Endangered Species Act recognizes that when a particular species dies out, the loss erodes the ecosystem that has sustained it and threatens other species that are interconnected and whose well-being depends on the health of all the others. The ecosystem at Factory Butte is not, as Shared Access Alliance says, a "barren moonscape," but home to a variety of plants and animals.

If OHV riders fail to adhere to the rules and stick to the trails and designated play area, they should be cited. Factory Butte, a symbol of the battle between environmental advocates and avid motorized recreationists, is a good place for the federal agency to show it is serious about enforcing its rules.

The BLM's restrictions are justified. If OHV riders refuse to recognize the rules and understand the reasons for them, the next step should be to close the entire area to OHV use, and the BLM should not hesitate to take it.