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No management plan: BLM makes gift of land to off-roaders, drillers

Tribune Editorial

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It's an off-roader's dream: a federal management plan making nearly 2 million acres of public land a playground for off-highway vehicles.

The Bureau of Land Management's proposal for the BLM lands in six Utah counties is also a gift tied with a big red ribbon and handed to oil and gas developers.

But it can hardly be called "management," especially the type of multiple-use management and land conservation the BLM is charged to provide for the Western lands owned by all Americans. By opening up 90 percent of the area to OHV use and 80 percent to drilling, the plan effectively excludes quiet recreation - mountain biking, hiking and backpacking - and sacrifices scenic vistas, wildlife habitat, and cultural treasures including archaeological ruins, relics and rock art.

This is not multiple use, but an attempt in the waning months of the Bush administration to remove public lands protections. The BLM, in approving this management plan for the Richfield area spread over Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane counties, has taken the side of motorized recreation and energy development in the battle for some of the last untrammeled open spaces in the state.

The BLM is saying it will not protect endangered species and wilderness-quality areas from irresponsible OHV use that has already scarred public lands, caused erosion, disturbed the migratory habits and habitat of

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wildlife and dirtied creeks and streams. It will not limit the destruction of Richfield-area public lands caused by energy developers who cut roads, haul equipment and erect drill rigs on some of the most scenic places in Utah.

The plan would diverge from the BLM's own policy by allowing OHVs in areas of Factory Butte now closed by the BLM to protect two endangered plant species. The normal procedure would prevent reopening the area until the plants have rebounded, but this management proposal is anything but normal.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires the BLM to "sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." This plan ignores that mandate.

The mountains, rivers and forests comprising 2 million acres will be taken over by noisy, exhaust-spewing OHVs and greedy energy developers, eliminating the possibility that their wilderness qualities could be preserved for future generations. To them, we'll be known as the idiot generation.

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