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Tuesday, September 14, 2004

### Group demands Uinta to reopen trails [PDF](#) | [Print](#) | [E-mail](#)

CALEB WARNOCK - Daily Herald

Utah's largest advocacy group for motorized access to public lands is calling on Uinta National Forest officials to immediately reopen 20 miles of trails that have been closed to motorcycle use.

Managers of Uinta National Forest were ordered by the agency's Washington, D.C., office earlier this month to reopen the trails after an appeal by Utah Shared Access Alliance. The group said the closure was illegal because forest managers did not seek public input on the decision and the national appeals office of the Forest Service agreed.

Uinta National Forest officials on Tuesday defended their management plans for the forest and said it could be weeks or months before they reopen the trails in American Fork Canyon, which were closed to motorcycles last year.

When asked how soon the trails could be open, Uinta National Forest supervisor Pete Karp said it could take six days or six months because the agency would need time to review the order to reopen the trails.

In the meantime, signs at the trailhead near Tibble Fork Reservoir in American Fork Canyon will continue to warn against using motorcycles on the trail. The trails remain open to hikers, bikers and horseback riders.

"When we do agree on how to implement this decision, we will change those signs," Karp said. "Often these things take time."

Mike Swenson, executive director of the Utah Shared Access Alliance, called on forest managers to open the trails immediately.

"It is kind of sad because these agencies are able to do these illegal closures and then use the management process to keep them closed," he said. "They should open those trails immediately."

The closure was part of a new 10-year management plan for the forest, Karp said. The Forest Service received three official protests to the plan, and all the protests were dismissed except the decision to close the trails.

"I think our folks did a very good job working with a variety of interested groups in preparing this plan," Karp said. "Not everyone agrees how the forest should be managed. What one person thinks is great, another person disagrees with."

Uinta National Forest spokeswoman Loyal Clark said the decision to close the trails to motorcycles was a result of concerns that the motorcycles were damaging the area and putting hikers and others at risk.

Karp said forest managers still want the trails closed and the agency will look into what needs to be done to make the closure legal, including allowing public comment on the plan.

The number of people using trails in Uinta National Forest has "exploded" over the past decade, Clark said. With more people on the trails, it has become more dangerous to mix motorcycles and hikers, bikers and horses.

But Swenson said closing a trail because it is popular is bad management.

"We have a big problem with that," Swenson said. "When the agency closes trails because they are overused, where are displaced motorists supposed to go? They go to another trail, and then that trail is more heavily used, and then



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(forest managers) say they are going to close that trail too because it is used too much."

Forest officials had originally proposed to close 35 miles of trails to motorcycles, but reduced that to 20 miles after protests from members of the public, Karp said. When trails are closed to motorized vehicles, the Forest Service has no policy to open other trails to motorcycles in exchange.

Members of the Utah Shared Access Alliance have said the closure is unfair because \$100,000 of state off-highway vehicle grant money had been put in improving the trails. Karp said he had no knowledge of such a grant being used in the area. State officials could not be reached for comment.

Uinta National Forest has about 600 miles of trails, half of which are open to motorized vehicles.

Caleb Warnock can be reached at 344-2543 or cwarnock@heraldextra.com.

*This story appeared in The Daily Herald on page D1.*

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