

		SUNDAY, July 22, 2007									
<input type="text"/>		<input type="button" value="Search"/>									
Home	News	Sports	Features	Entertainment	Business	Opinion	Close-Up	Obituaries	Classifieds	More Sites	Help Desk
Recent Articles											
<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Search"/>											
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Any Words <input type="radio"/> All Words <input type="radio"/> Exact Phrase											

[Click here to go back to search results.](#)

[Printer Friendly](#)

Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)

Date: December 15, 2004

Section: Nation/World

Edition: Final

Page: A16

Off-roaders win one, lose one in disputes over trail use

Public lands: Uinta Forest routes reopened; court rejects complaint over Box Elder closures

Joe Baird The Salt Lake Tribune

An off-road vehicle advocacy group has won one and lost one in an ongoing battle to maintain motorized access on Utah public lands. The **Utah Shared Access Alliance**, a coalition of off-highway vehicle (OHV) organizations, filed suit earlier this year to challenge the U.S. Forest Service's decision to close 23 miles of trails in Uinta National Forest, and declared victory Tuesday following the agency's recent decision to reopen most of those trails.

But the OHV advocates also suffered a setback Tuesday when a federal judge rejected their complaint against the Bureau of Land Management over off-road restrictions on public land in northern Box Elder County.

Shared Access Alliance attorney Paul Mortensen says the organization appealed to the Forest Service, then filed a suit against the agency last January after the agency closed 23 miles of trails to motorized use in the Tibble Fork area of American Fork Canyon. Shared Access was partially vindicated by a federal court ruling last September that forced the reopening of two trails, then won its Forest Service appeal, leading to access to all but one of the trails in question.

"What we found was that the Forest Service was quick to close these areas without considering where these [OHV users] were going to go next and without doing the proper analysis," said Mortensen. "It was never an environmental issue. We considered these trails a good example of educated [OHV users] doing it right. So this was a smack in the face. It's why we were indignant about it."

Uinta National Forest spokeswoman Loyal Clark said the original changes in trail use came about in the course of completing a broad forest revision plan. The plan won backing from Washington, she noted, but acknowledged that "site specific" trail closures needed to be accompanied by individual analysis. As a result, the trails were reopened -- but with a caveat.

"We've still got a problem with illegal user routes, where [OHV] users have developed trails on their own," said Clark. "Those routes we will continue to close, because they are impacting habitat and riparian areas. They're not part of the road inventory."

Shared Access was unable to make a similar case against the BLM.

U.S. District Judge Bruce Jenkins ruled that the agency took the required "hard look" at environmental impacts on the 180,000 acres of BLM land in the Grouse Creek Mountains and surrounding areas and made an appropriate decision to close about half the roads to motorized use in the area.

"Specifically, the BLM's Salt Lake Field Office documented evidence of proliferation of new [OHV] routes, damage and destruction of vegetation, increased soil erosion and a likelihood of damage to cultural resources," Jenkins wrote.

Mortensen says Shared Access may appeal the ruling.

"The big issue, from our standpoint, is that there's nobody out there," he said. "And they are again using their authority to take action without public comment. They're violating the land-use plan. You can find some scarring, but over the course of [180,000] acres, it just isn't there."

jbaird@sltrib.com

(c) 2004 The Salt Lake Tribune. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Media NewsGroup, Inc. by NewsBank, Inc.