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## Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)

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**Section:** Local

### Cacti to limit OHV use at Factory Butte

*Joe Baird The Salt Lake Tribune*

Concerns over the survival of a pair of imperiled cactus species will likely soon lead to emergency off-highway vehicle restrictions in the popular Factory Butte area of southern Utah. A petition filed by the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance last year to halt, or at least limit, OHV activity at Factory Butte has been largely dismissed by the Bureau of Land Management. But concerns raised by the environmental group over the fate of the endangered Wrights Fishhook cactus and the threatened Winkler cactus have resonated with federal land managers.

"We've got [OHV] conflicts where the country is open and people are running over and killing the cactus, so we probably will be looking at some kind of restrictions," Wayne Wetzel, associate manager for the BLM's Richfield Field Office, said this week. "It's not finalized, so we can't say at this point what they will look like. But it will probably be bigger than what the OHV groups want and smaller than SUWA wants it to be."

User conflicts at Factory Butte, pitting off-road enthusiasts against environmentalists and non-motorized recreationalists, have vexed federal land managers for years. Located in the middle of Wayne County, the region is renowned for its wide open badlands terrain and breathtaking vistas.

Currently, the entire Factory Butte area is designated "open" for motorized use. Restrictions will likely include a combination of an open play area of an as-yet undetermined size and some kind of designated route system.

OHV groups are unhappy about the pending change.

"What you have to keep in mind is that all the areas around Factory Butte have been closed," said Rainer Huck, founder of the **Utah Shared Access Alliance**, the state's largest OHV organization. "The question has always been 'Where can we go?' And the answer has always been 'Factory Butte.' This is the last place. If this keeps up, we'll end up like California, where only two percent of the public lands are open to motorized use."

Environmental groups, on the other hand, call the proposed restrictions long overdue - but are withholding further judgement until they see what restrictions BLM officials propose.

"Factory Butte is a special place, a magnificent landscape," said Steve Bloch, a SUWA attorney. "For years, the BLM has quite simply not stepped up to the plate and actively managed this area, despite what it acknowledges is out of control off-road vehicle use. We're disappointed the agency rejected our petition. There are many reasons we feel closure is appropriate; it tracks with federal laws and regulations. We only hope that when they do come out with the [restrictions] it will hew to the law."

BLM officials are unsure when a final decision will be made on the new restrictions, but indications are it could happen in the next few weeks. A longer process would then begin, focusing on implementing the new OHV rules.

SUWA filed a petition for emergency closures in the area last year, charging OHV activity has created a variety of adverse impacts over the 171,000-acre area - including erosion problems, health hazards from dust, degradation to riparian areas and a decline in water quality.

The BLM rejected all of those arguments in a response issued in April, but it acknowledged that the cactus issue was a concern.

Wetzel said the decision to impose restrictions came after further field analysis confirmed the problem.

Emergency off-road restrictions at Factory Butte would serve as a stop-gap while a new resource management plan for the Richfield Field Office is completed.

Once finished, the plan will guide BLM land-use decisions in the region for the next two decades.

In that sense, the emergency OHV restrictions could foretell what will eventually be implemented on a permanent bases.

"This is the direction things are headed [nationally]," said Frank Erickson, a BLM land-use planner in the Richfield Field Office. "It's going to be a big change on the ground. But we're trying to find a way to accommodate OHVs and still live up to our responsibilities."

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