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Salt Lake Tribune, The (UT)

Date: September 19, 2006

Section: Local

New rules restrict OHVs to smaller areas of Factory Butte

Joe Baird The Salt Lake Tribune

Posted: 12:08 PM- The Bureau of Land Management will publish new rules tomorrow for off-highway vehicle use in the Factory Butte area of southern Utah. In an action that has been expected for months, the BLM will implement what it calls "emergency restrictions" on the popular OHV destination in order to protect areas containing endangered Wrights Fishhook cactus and threatened Winkler cactus.

Factory Butte, located in Wayne County near Capitol Reef National Park, has until now been designated open for OHV use. Under the new rules, open motorized use will be limited to a 2,600-acre "play area" known as Swing Arm City, and 220 miles of designated roads and trails.

"This is going to change some things," Cornell Christensen, manager of the BLM's Richfield Field Office, said Tuesday. "But it's important to understand that we're not closing anything. We're restricting travel to designated routes and leaving an area open that most people use in the first place."

Factory Butte has evolved into the state's hot-button locale in the debate over motorized versus nonmotorized recreation in recent years. Both sides prize the region for its wide open, badlands terrain and sweeping vistas. The BLM's pending action will affect about 140,000 acres.

The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance petitioned the BLM for a more restrictive OHV plan last year, citing concerns over the cactus, and soil and water impacts due to motorized recreation. The agency rejected most of the petition, but launched an analysis of cactus habitat and found significant OHV-related damage to the plants.

"We're in a corner here. We have to protect those species by law," Christensen said.

OHV groups, particularly the **Utah Shared Access Alliance** (USA-All), the state's largest motorized recreation organization, have strenuously opposed the BLM's Factory Butte plan.

USA-All Executive Director Mike Swenson earlier this summer said his group found the agency's proposal "unsupportable," and told Christensen in a letter that the frustrated OHV users might have a difficult time adhering to the new rules.

Christensen called Swenson's stance "disappointing," but predicted most OHV users would find the new rules acceptable. The BLM, he says, plans an intensive education initiative over the next few years, and will upgrade Factory Butte visitor facilities, adding restroom and informational kiosks.

However, if it appears that the new OHV rules are not being followed, Christensen warned that the area could eventually be closed to all motorized use.

"That's not what we want," said BLM spokeswoman Adrienne Babbitt.

"We're doing all this to keep Factory Butte open."

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