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Friday, October 13, 2006

Utah off-roaders invite clash with BLM over access

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PAUL FOY - The Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY -- An off-road group plans to defy federal authorities Saturday by toppling a barricade and motoring along a southern Utah dirt road that was closed by the government three years ago.

Go ahead and ticket us, say the all-terrain vehicle riders, who are angry over the closing of public lands, most recently around Factory Butte, a monolith that towers over the San Rafael desert and harbors pockets of protected cacti.

They plan to shove aside a 10-foot barricade at the old Hidden Splendor uranium mine, where a mining road drops into spectacular Muddy River canyon.

The Bureau of Land Management will be ready -- even if rangers have to drive 2 1/2 hours to write tickets.

Richard Beardall, president of Americans with Disabilities Access Alliance, is looking for a crowd of off-roaders to drive a few hundred yards to the river and back.

They'll move the buck-and-pole barricade back into place after the protest, then accept citations that could run \$300 apiece, an event others plan to videotape.

Beardall "wants a ticket to make his point and go to court on the issue. He'll get a ticket," BLM field manager Roger Bankert said.

It's a protest against rules adopted in 2003 that limited travel on the San Rafael Swell, not the neighboring Factory Butte district where the BLM just last month banned off-roading from a 222-square-mile area.

But off-roaders are angry about that, too.

"We're preparing a lawsuit against it for federal court, and we already have Wayne County on board as a plaintiff," said Michael Swenson, executive director of the Utah Shared Access Alliance.

BLM officials say all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes still have a four-square-mile natural basin along State Route 24 called Swing

This story appeared in The Daily Herald on page A7.

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