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Off-roading may be restricted near Moab

By **Joe Bauman**

Deseret Morning News

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2 comments

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A new Bureau of Land Management proposal would sharply limit off-highway vehicle travel through the 1.8 million acres the agency controls in the vicinity of Moab.

The proposal is among actions the BLM supports in a new draft resource management plan and environmental impact statement for the Moab Field Office region. The area includes 1.5 million acres in Grand County and 300,000 acres in San Juan County.

The document, which will be available for public comment for 90 days, is expected to be finalized and to go into effect in December.

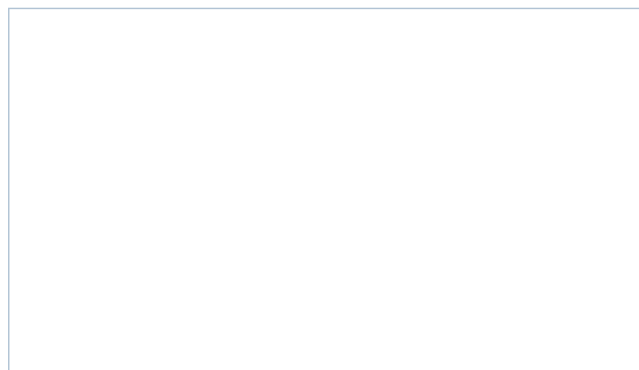
Substantial changes could be made by then, said Shelly Smith, acting field manager of the BLM Moab Field Office.

The plan would replace one that was issued in 1985, which underwent some amendments. The new draft focuses on four alternatives: (A) no changes from present management; (B) oriented more toward protection of wilderness values and nonmotorized recreation; (C) the BLM's preferred plan; and (D) oriented more toward oil and gas development, and vehicle-based recreation.

Alternative C attempts to strike a balance, Smith said.

"Now, it doesn't mean that everyone can do everything, everywhere," she added during a meeting Monday with Deseret Morning News editors and writers.

Story continues below



The region has become a magnet for recreationists, she said. BLM land there drew 2 million visitors in 2006, around the same number as visited the world-famous Arches National Park near Moab.

Important changes are proposed in vehicle management. Present rules allow off-highway vehicle travel across 620,212 acres. On nearly 1.2 million acres, OHV travel is limited to existing roads and trails, while 5,062 acres are closed to OHV travel.

Under the conservation-oriented option B, 437,424 acres would be closed to OHV travel. about 1.475 million acres would limit ORVs to designated routes

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and cross-country travel would be banned throughout the region.

The BLM's preferred option, alternative C, would close 339,298 acres to OHV travel, limit OHV use to designated routes on almost 1.5 million acres and open 1,866 acres to cross-country travel at White Wash Sand Dunes.


Alternative D, which favors oil and gas production and motorized recreation, would close 57,351 acres to OHV travel, allow OHVs on nearly 1.8 million acres of designated or inventoried routes, and open 3,064 acres at White Wash Sand Dunes and the Airport Hills to cross-country travel.

Another category that may brew up controversy is oil and gas development. Areas open to standard oil and gas lease stipulations presently cover 1,038,344 acres; under B, this would drop to 264,344; under C, it would be 427,273; and with D, it would be 797,031 acres. Other designations also would have changes.

The draft has undergone four years of preparation. During scoping meetings, members of the public and interest groups expressed their preferences concerning mineral extraction (mostly oil, gas and potash), wildlife, grazing, recreation and sites with wilderness qualities that are not part of wilderness study areas.

Pertinent reports, both the draft plan and supporting studies, are available online at blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/moab/planning.html. The site explains how to submit comments — either in person at meetings, through mail or electronically. Comments will be accepted until Nov. 30.

E-mail: bau@desnews.com

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