

## 14. **FOREST SERVICE:** Agency to review off-road plan near Grand Canyon (08/04/2009)

Eric Bontrager, E&E reporter

The Forest Service will re-examine plans for vehicle access on roads near the Grand Canyon in light of environmentalists' concerns about the proposal's hunting provisions.

Officials at Kaibab National Forest agreed last week to take a second look at its plan designating roads for off-highway vehicle (OHV) access in the Tusayan Ranger District, in particular looking at alternatives that would limit damage caused by the increased access for hunters in the forest south of the canyon.

The plan finalized in May reduced the number of accessible roads in the forest from 709 miles to 546 miles while adding 6 miles of previously unauthorized routes. The plan also allowed for limited use of motor vehicles off the trails to access camping corridors in the forest and to retrieve downed elk during hunting season.

But several environmental groups argued in an appeal this year that such an exemption would allow unfettered access for OHVs in the forest, damaging habitat of sensitive species like the mountain lion and northern goshawk.

"The Tusayan Ranger District's plan would have continued rather than curbed damage resulting from off-road vehicle use," said Cyndi Tuell, Southwest conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The groups argued that the management plan failed to comply with the federal Travel Management Rule, which requires the Forest Service to create travel plans through national forests that minimize vehicle impacts on natural resources, by not examining alternatives that would limit the impact that big-game retrieval may have on forest resources.

Donald DeLorenzo, acting deputy forester for the agency's Southwestern Region, said there were abundant opportunities for public comment and the selected alternative meets the objectives of the proposed plan. But he said the range of alternatives "did not address the main public issue of motorized big-game retrieval, and the analysis of the effects from big-game retrieval was not based on a consistent set of facts."

The order puts the forest's travel plan on hold and mandates a new alternative that doesn't allow motorized big-game retrieval. That new alternative must be evaluated before a new travel plan can be decided.

Last week, the Government Accountability Office found that agencies in charge of OHV access must change their planning, communication and enforcement efforts to limit resource damage that has increased on public lands from 2004 through 2008 ([Greenwire](#), July 31).

It also found that while agencies like the Forest Service had identified OHV use as one of the top threats to public lands, a lack of resources and funding has left them unable to fully respond to the issue.



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