



# The Sacramento Bee

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## Off-road routes may be closed to protect tortoises

*The Associated Press*

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LOS ANGELES -- Two popular off-road vehicle routes in the Mojave Desert may be closed to protect the desert tortoise habitat.

The Center for Biological Diversity protested a 2008 decision by the Bureau of Land Management to open the off-road vehicle routes in Kern County. Last week, a judge for the Department of Interior's Interior Board of Land Appeals upheld the group's appeal.

Ileene Anderson, a spokeswoman for the center, said she hopes it means the roads will be closed soon to protect the imperiled desert tortoise. Desert tortoise populations have declined in recent years and are now protected under federal and state endangered species law.

The group filed its appeal after the agency decided to open the roads in connection with a plan on managing the desert that had been struck down in federal court last year.

"We were thrilled that the judge saw that there were problems with how this was all implemented," Anderson said.

Bureau of Land Management spokesman John Dearing said his office has not received the decision and would not comment.