

## Congress examines 'decades of off-road vehicle abuse'

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Congress seized a "rare opportunity" to address the "decades of abuse caused by off-road vehicles to public lands and ensure that visitors to the forest are not driven away by irresponsible off-road vehicle users," said Cyndi Tuell, Southwest conservation advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), held oversight hearings on "Off-highway Vehicle Management on Public Lands" June 5.

"We applaud the Senate's initiative in addressing the destruction that off-road vehicles cause to public lands. For decades, a lack of attention to this issue has resulted in a culture of acceptance of off-road vehicle damage, and this is a chance to change that," Tuell said. "Keeping motorized vehicles out of sensitive habitat and riparian areas must become a priority for land managers."

The Center for Biological Diversity testified at the hearing and also submitted written testimony.

As urban populations have skyrocketed across the nation, off-road vehicle use on public lands has also risen. The center is pushing for better management of national forests and public lands resulting in the preservation of quiet places to camp and hike for generations to come.

"If land managers fail to seize the opportunity to address the ongoing damage caused by off-road vehicles, including erosion, air and noise pollution, and habitat destruction, the ability of Americans to escape the everyday stresses of urban living will rapidly disappear. Those who enjoy hiking, camping, fishing and hunting and who seek the quiet solitude of the forest will be driven away by the noise and pollution of off-road vehicles," Tuell said.

In an attempt to rein in off-road vehicle damage and protect our natural resources and heritage, the U.S. Forest Service began a Travel Management process in 2005. This process forces the agency to decide which routes and areas will be open to motorized travel.

In Arizona and New Mexico, the center is currently working to ensure that the Forest Service will design plans that prioritize protection of our rivers, forests and endangered species from the ever-growing threat of unmanaged off-road recreation. These plans should be complete by late 2009.

Witnesses at the hearing included Nada Culver of The Wilderness Society and Brad Powell of Trout Unlimited. Henri Bisson from the Bureau of Land Management and Joel Holtrop of the U.S. Forest Service testified on behalf of public land agencies. Frank Adams testified for the Nevada Sheriffs' and Chiefs' Association. Greg Mumm and Ed Moorland represented off-road vehicle interests.