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Letters, Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Off-Road Closure Needed in Jemez

Thank you for covering some of the continuing developments in the Jemez regarding the closure petition and the issue of off-road vehicles. The reason for the closure petition is simply this: Off-road vehicle operators refuse to behave with respect and restraint regarding closed, restricted, and privately owned areas. This is not limited to a few bad apples, a few uneducated off-road enthusiasts; rather, it is an endemic situation with the majority of operators. The closure petition is required simply because the Santa Fe National Forest refuses to enforce and protect areas of restricted, and nonmotorized, designation.

Despite the disinformation and distortion campaigns waged by the Forest Service, off-road vehicle operators, and the industry they support, damage to the land, the water, and wildlife has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur unless something is done. This is not opinion; it is irrefutable fact.

The off-road vehicle community has had opportunities to present themselves in a positive, high-profile light, first, with Travel Management, then with the Tourism Department. In each case they chose denial and obstructionism rather than a proactive stance. Area residents have grown weary of the noise, fumes, and dust, of the lawless behavior that so often follows off-road vehicle use.

My hat is off to (Environment) Secretary (Ron) Curry and others who understand the essence of the situation is recreation vs. need. Present and future generations have a genuine need for clean air, water, and healthy land. Our wild lands are irreplaceable assets, critical for our rural and tourist economies, as havens of biological diversity, and bulwarks against the damaging effects of global climate change.

Seen in this light, the demands of the off-road community sound a lot like the rants of spoiled children, constantly whining for their next new toy. We can grow more adrenaline junkies, but we cannot grow any more land.

The closure petition is supported by a wide variety of people, with truly diverse interests. What binds this diverse group together is an unbridled love for our wild Jemez, and a desire to see it handed over to our children as the jewel that it truly is.

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