

# Public Disinformation

## How the Forest Service Encourages Illegal Off-Road Vehicle Use



Prepared by the Ogden Group of the Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club

August 2004

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## **Acknowledgment**

The volunteers of the Ogden Sierra Club would like to express their thanks to the U.S. Forest Service for its long-standing policy of openness and cooperation with concerned citizen activists. The staff of the Ogden Ranger District have been especially helpful in providing much of the information needed to write this Report. At a time when so many of the government's operations are being cloaked in secrecy, it is encouraging that the Forest Service still maintains such policies.

## Summary

This Report documents more than two dozen ways in which the Forest Service tolerates and encourages illegal off-road vehicle (ORV) use on its lands.

The examples cited lie within the Ogden Ranger District in northern Utah—formerly the back yard of Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, who previously served as both Wasatch-Cache National Forest Supervisor and Intermountain Regional Forester. Since becoming Chief of the Forest Service, Bosworth has repeatedly referred to unmanaged recreation as one of the “four threats” facing America’s National Forests.

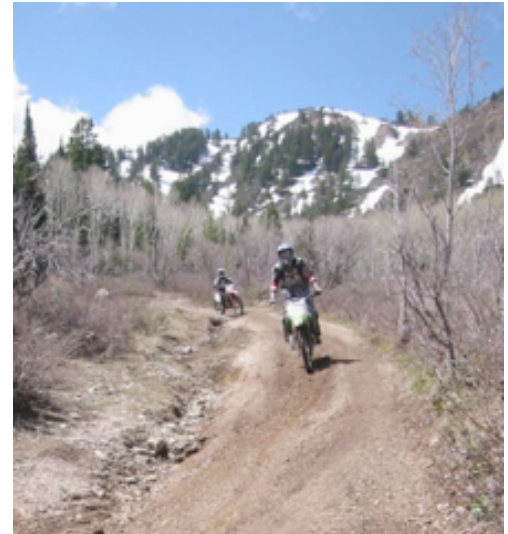
Staff of the Ogden Ranger District have encouraged illegal ORV use in the following ways, among others:

- Failing to post travel maps in convenient locations;
- Approving inaccurate travel maps showing closed routes as open;
- Failing to post closure signs in crucial locations;
- Posting inaccurate and misleading signs;
- Allowing dispersed campsites to become ORV play areas;
- Rewarding illegal activity by agreeing to open previously-closed routes to ORV’s.

As a result, the District has been managing approximately 50 miles of legally closed trails as if they were actually open to ORV use. (The photo above shows an example.) Consequences have included impacts on wildlife habitat, damage to watersheds, unsafe trail conditions, and loss of opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the Forest.

These management lapses are not due to lack of resources. In fact, the Ogden Ranger District spends thousands of dollars each year on ORV management. However, these management projects tend to be localized and sporadic, with very little attention paid to follow-up maintenance or public education. Forest Service staff are generally aware of these problems, but have failed to correct them. Possible explanations include bureaucratic inertia, pressure from ORV users, and a general distaste for rules and regulations. The fault lies not with a few individual employees, but rather in the general culture of indifference toward illegal ORV use that permeates the U.S. Forest Service (at least in Utah).

Solving these problems will be inexpensive but difficult. Forest Service districts should routinely check that posted maps and signs are adequate and consistent with legally adopted travel plans. The Forest Service administration should assess the extent of this problem nationally, and adopt stricter regulations on signing and dispersed camping. Environmental activists can play a significant role in reporting these problems and better educating the public.



## Background and Context

Current federal policy on management of off-road vehicle (ORV) recreation in America's public lands is based primarily on Executive Order 11644, signed in 1972 by President Richard Nixon. This Executive Order acknowledges that ORV use is "in frequent conflict with wise land and resource management practices, environmental values, and other types of recreational activity," and sets out a program of systematically determining where ORV recreation will be allowed and where it will be prohibited.

Needless to say, ORV management policies cannot be effective unless they are made known to the public. Accordingly, Section 5 of the Executive Order states as follows:

SEC. 5. Public Information. The respective agency head shall ensure that areas and trails where off-road vehicle use is permitted are well marked and shall provide for the publication and distribution of information, including maps, describing such areas and trails and explaining the conditions on vehicle use. He shall seek cooperation of relevant State agencies in the dissemination of this information.

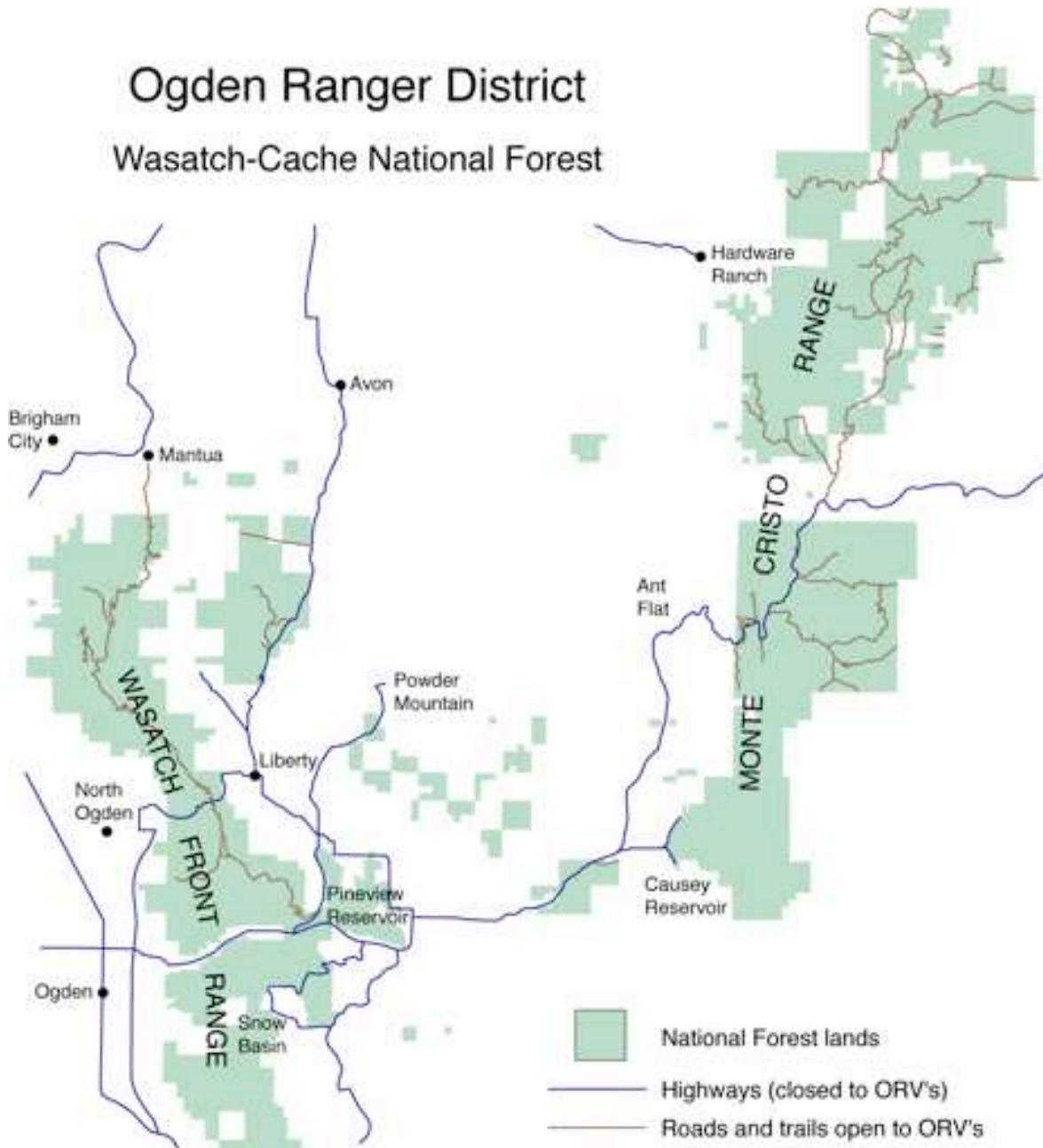
This Report is a case study of the implementation of the Public Information provision of EO 11644. The specific area chosen for this case study is the Ogden Ranger District of the Wasatch-Cache National Forest (WCNF) in northern Utah. The Ogden District is headquartered in the city of Ogden (pop. 70,000), 35 miles north of Salt Lake City.

Although the Ogden District includes only a tiny fraction of all the lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, it does have a larger (perhaps coincidental) significance with respect to ORV use. Ogden is the headquarters of the USFS Intermountain Region (Region 4). The current Regional Forester is Jack Troyer, who is also now serving as Team Leader of the Forest Service's ad hoc Off-Highway Vehicle Policy Team. This team recently drafted new proposed regulations on ORV management; public comments on the proposed regulations are currently being accepted. The current Chief of the Forest Service, Dale Bosworth, served as Supervisor of the WCNF from 1986 to 1990, and as Intermountain Regional Forester from 1994 to 1997. Since becoming Chief in 2001, Bosworth has repeatedly referred to unmanaged recreation as one of the "four threats" facing the National Forest system, and a priority for the Forest Service to address. Finally, Ogden is home to the offices of Tread Lightly!, a program to promote responsible ORV use that was started by the Forest Service but now operates as a private nonprofit organization.

The 167,000 acres of land managed by the Ogden District lie in the Wasatch Mountains, generally east and north of the city of Ogden. These federal lands have complex boundaries and are fragmented by large amounts of private land. To a first approximation, we can think of the District as consisting of two roughly equal halves: the rugged Wasatch Front Range immediately east of the urban boundary, and the forested plateaus and canyons of the Monte Cristo Range about 25 miles farther to the east.

In several ways, of course, the Ogden District is not a typical USFS ranger district. The close proximity of the cities of the Wasatch Front inevitably dictates that recreational uses of the Forest are dominant over the more traditional resource-extraction uses. Except for the most remote northeastern corner of the Monte Cristo Range, the entire District is closed to logging. Grazing allotments for sheep and cattle cover only about half of the District, mostly in the Monte Cristo Range. The demand for recreational opportunities, on the other hand, is intense throughout the District. Recreational uses include hiking,

mountain biking, drive-through sightseeing, ORV travel, camping, hunting, downhill skiing (at Snowbasin Ski Area), cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and boating (on Pineview and Causey Reservoirs).



Map of the Ogden Ranger District, showing highways and routes open to ORV's.

For approximately 20 years, the Ogden District has maintained an official “designated routes only” policy toward summer ORV travel.<sup>1</sup> Motor vehicles are required to stay on a system of designated

<sup>1</sup> Snowmobiling is permitted in the northern portion of the District’s Wasatch Front lands, and in nearly all of the Monte Cristo Range. The snow-free ORV season begins in April at the lower elevations, while the highest trails are usually blocked

routes, depicted on an official Travel Map. Currently there are approximately 130 miles of roads and trails in the District that are open to ATV's, and an additional 20 miles of trails open to motorcycles. These routes span most of the District, with the exceptions of the southernmost District lands in the Front Range (where the management emphasis is on developed recreation) and the southern end of the Monte Cristo Range (most of which is now a recommended Wilderness area). Off-route motorized travel is prohibited except to access dispersed campsites, which must lie within 150 feet of a designated route. The Travel Map in its current form was first published in 1988, and has undergone minor revisions since then. Documents dating from before 1988 allude to earlier travel maps, but the District has apparently not preserved copies of these travel maps so the early history of travel planning in the District is obscure.

There is no evidence that any elements of the current Travel Plan have ever undergone NEPA analysis in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Scoping Documents have been issued for several revisions to the Travel Plan since 1990, but these revisions were then categorically excluded from further NEPA documentation. The Environmental Impact Statements for the WCNF Land and Resource Management Plan, first adopted in the mid-1980's and revised in 2003, discuss motorized recreation in general terms but contain no site-specific analysis of its environmental impacts.

In July 2003, however, the Ogden Ranger District proposed a significant revision to its Travel Plan. Originally this revision was to be documented in an EA and implemented by spring 2004. As a result of scoping comments submitted by the Sierra Club and others, the Forest Service has recently announced that it will instead prepare an EIS on this project, and the anticipated decision date has been postponed until spring 2005.

This Travel Plan revision seems to be motivated in part by a much larger project: a major network of connected ORV routes in northern Utah known as the Northern Utah Trail System (NUTS) or the Shoshone Trail. Former Utah Congressman James Hansen introduced a bill in Congress to establish NUTS in March 2002, but the bill died in the Senate later that year. By then, however, the Utah State Parks Department had become a strong proponent of NUTS, as had the Forest Service, BLM, and other State agencies that managed the affected lands. (In January 2004, Chief Dale Bosworth told the *Ogden Standard-Examiner* that he would like to see ATV mega-trails similar to NUTS developed elsewhere in the National Forest system.<sup>2</sup>) "Phase 1" of NUTS, consisting of about 220 miles of ORV routes, was established by these agencies in fall 2003 without public notice or NEPA analysis. Because all of the Phase-1 routes were already open to ORV use, Phase 1 is essentially an attempt to promote ORV-related tourism in northern Utah and to lay the groundwork for later expansion of NUTS to include routes that are currently closed. Within the Ogden Ranger District, only the northern half of the Monte Cristo Range (the "Curtis Creek" area) is covered by Phase 1 of NUTS. However, it is no secret that NUTS promoters hope to expand the system to more than 500 miles of routes that would extend to the Wasatch Front Range, cross wide stretches of private land, and incorporate routes on federal land that are now closed.<sup>3</sup> Several of the proposed revisions to the Ogden Ranger District's Travel Plan would facilitate this expansion of NUTS.

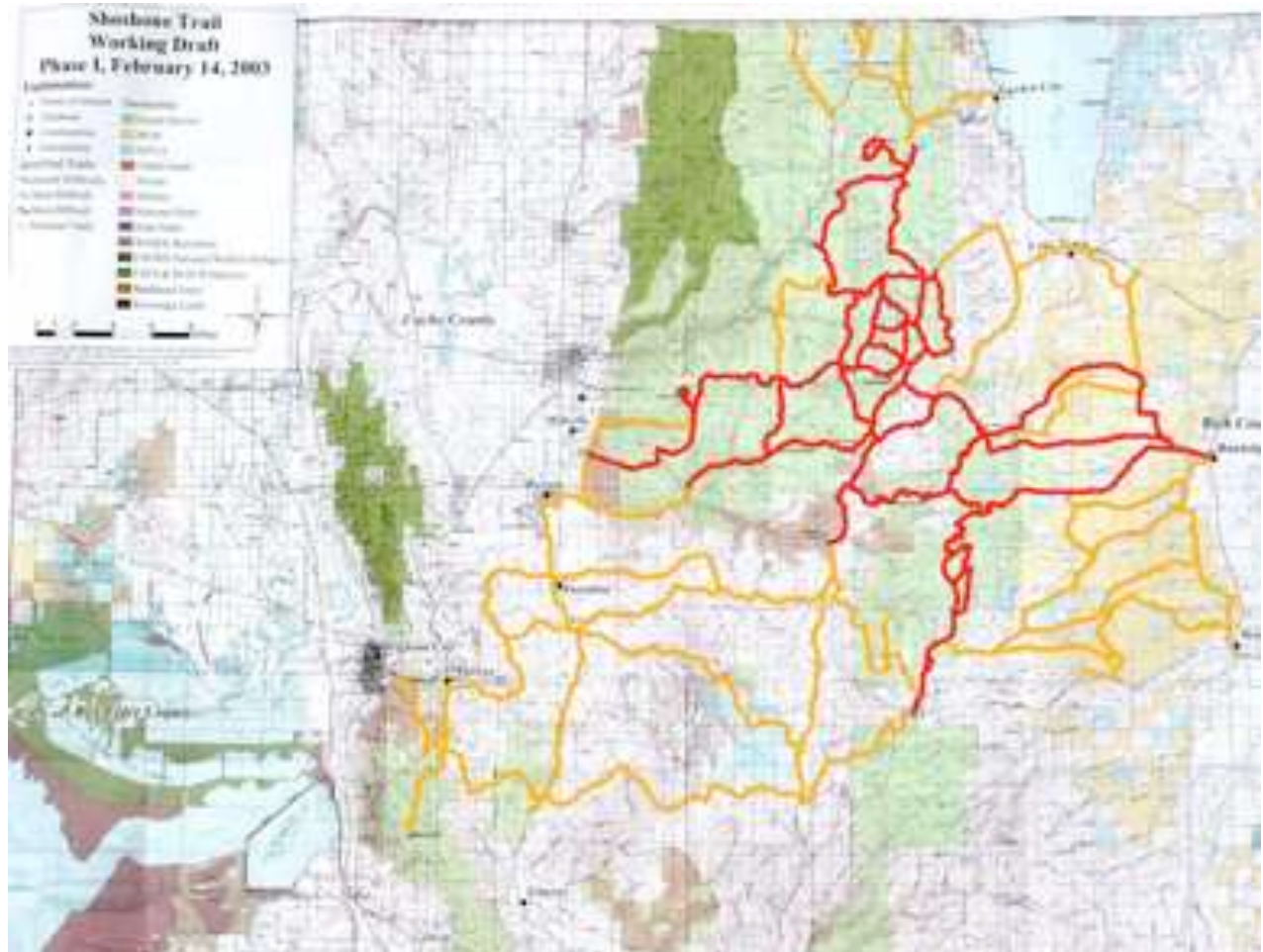
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by snow drifts until early July. The worst environmental damage by ORV's often occurs during the spring, when snowmobilers try to cross patches of bare ground and four-wheelers travel over mixed snow and mud.

<sup>2</sup> *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 14 January 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the article "Eight new eyes on Shoshone—or NUTS—off-road vehicle trail," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 26 May 2004.

Reacting to the NUTS proposal, volunteers of the Ogden Group of the Sierra Club began visiting affected routes and systematically documenting ORV management practices in May 2002. Our rate of work intensified in 2003 with the anticipated Travel Plan revisions and establishment of NUTS. As of this writing (August 2004), we have accumulated a database of over 1000 photographs, with GPS coordinates, showing ORV impacts and management practices in the Ogden Ranger District and immediately adjacent lands. We have also met and corresponded with Ogden Ranger District staff continually during this time, informing them of the problems we found.



This working draft map of the Northern Utah Trail System (NUTS, a.k.a. Shoshone Trail) was printed by the Utah State Parks Department in February 2003. The routes have been digitally highlighted for clarity. "Phase 1" routes are shown in red, while "potential trails" for future expansion of the system are in orange.

Although we were not surprised to discover a large amount of damaging and illegal ORV activity occurring within the Ogden Ranger District, we were quite surprised to discover so many ways in which the District's management practices and other actions have allowed, and even encouraged, this activity to continue. We are releasing this Report in the hope that it will play a role in improving Forest Service ORV management practices, both in the Ogden Ranger District and elsewhere.

## Inadequate ORV Management Practices

This section lists 27 ways in which ORV management practices in the Ogden Ranger District allow and encourage illegal motorized activity. The consequences of this illegal activity are described more fully in the following section; in brief, these consequences include fragmentation of wildlife habitat, damage to vegetation and watersheds, unsafe trail conditions for all users, and loss of opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the Forest.

Of course, the District also suffers from a good deal of illegal motorized activity that is entirely the fault of the motorists: riding past closure signs, vandalizing signs and barriers, and so on. Although such activity is also worthy of attention and concern, it is beyond the scope of this Report.

Most of the practices listed below are matters of on-the-ground management. For each of these, a photo is included to show an example. To save space in this Report, we have included only one photo to illustrate each type of management problem. It is important to emphasize, however, that very few of these problems are limited to a unique location. Our photographic database contains many examples that are not illustrated here. Readers who wish to see further photographic documentation are welcome to contact us.

### Travel Maps

Executive Order 11644 requires the Forest Service to distribute maps to the public showing areas where ORV use is permitted. The first eight examples show how the Ogden Ranger District has implemented this requirement.

**1. Travel Maps are not posted.** The Ogden Ranger District's ORV travel regulations are embodied in an officially published Travel Map. To view a copy of this map, however, ORV users must normally visit a Forest Service office and ask for one. Although bulletin boards have been constructed in most areas of heavy ORV use in the District, Travel Maps and ORV regulations are posted on very few of these boards.<sup>4</sup>

**2. The Travel Map is out of print at the peak of the ORV season.** For the month of June 2004 the Ogden Ranger District was out of copies of its Travel Map, waiting for the map to be reprinted.<sup>5</sup> Thus, no official Travel Maps were available, even from the District office, at the peak of the summer ORV season. There are no summer travel maps posted on the WCNF web site.

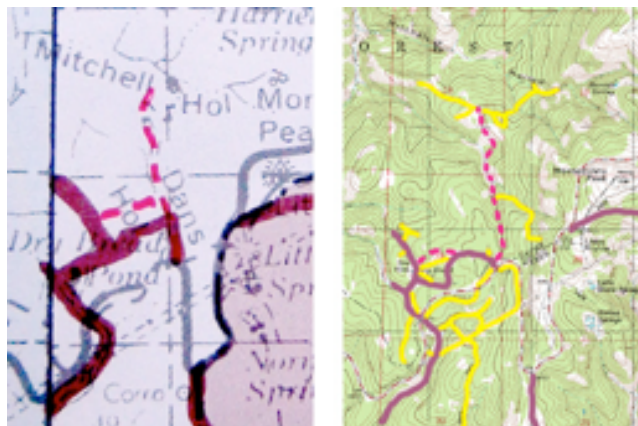


In mid-June of 2004, the bulletin board at Dry Bread Pond was blank except for two notices about someone's lost pet raccoon. Why no travel map posted in this hot spot of illegal ORV use?

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the summer of 2003, the only accurate Travel Map posted in the Ogden District was at Dock Flat, accompanied by a complete list of travel regulations. Bulletin boards at North Ogden Pass displayed incorrect maps, while boards at Public Grove (3), Dry Bread Pond, and the Monte Cristo campground provided no travel information.

<sup>5</sup> Rick Vallejos, personal communication to Dan Schroeder, 23 June 2004.

**3. The Travel Map is hard to interpret.** The official Travel Map is printed at a small scale (1:126,720), with open routes drawn in a careless way that often differs from their alignment on the ground. While it is almost always possible to determine from this map which routes are open and which are closed, doing so requires considerable effort and map-reading skills. Because a single map covers the Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts, the map is cumbersome to use and expensive to print despite its small scale.



Left: A small portion of the carelessly drawn Ogden Ranger District Travel Map, with open roads shown in brown and ATV trails in dashed red. Right: A topo map of the same area, showing the actual alignments of these open routes on the ground; routes that are legally closed are shown in yellow.

**4. Routes have been added to the Travel Map without public notice.** The legality of the Ogden Ranger District Travel Map itself is questionable, because since 1990 the Forest Service has added more than ten miles of routes to it without public notice.<sup>6</sup> Forest Service regulations require that the public be given notice of such revisions, with a chance to offer comments and a possibility of initiating an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Approximately 20 miles of routes in the District have been added to the map since it was first published in 1988, but formal notice was given for only about half of these additions. When the Sierra Club asked the former Ogden District Ranger about one of the undocumented additions, he explained that the routes had already existed on the ground and therefore "we just did it."<sup>7</sup>

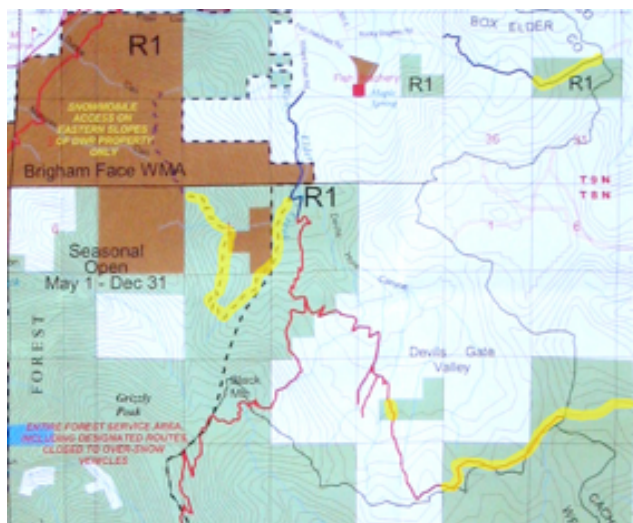
**5. The new published "ATV Trail System" map does not provide needed information.** The Utah State Parks Department, in cooperation with the Forest Service and other agencies, recently published an official map of Phase 1 of the NUTS/Shoshone mega-trail system. (The published map is titled simply "ATV Trail System.") These maps are now being posted at NUTS trailheads and distributed to the public. The maps highlight a number of recommended routes that are all legally open to motorized use, but provide no information on the status of the many connecting routes that exist on the ground, some open and some closed. The current printing of the map also lacks information on other ORV regulations, dispersed camping regulations, safety regulations, and "tread lightly" ethics.

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<sup>6</sup> The routes added without public notice are the Davenport Hollow road, the Tilda Spring and Boundary Spring ATV trails, the Mt. McKinnon road, and the last two miles of the route into Public Grove Hollow, ending at the Honey Bee Mine. A Freedom of Information Act request to the Forest Service failed to turn up any documentation of these additions.

<sup>7</sup> Randy Welsh, personal communication to Dan Schroeder, 1 July 2004.

**6. The Forest Service has approved an incorrect map published by local government.** Box Elder County, which includes an area of very heavy ORV use in the Ogden Ranger District, published its own Travel and Recreation Map a few years ago.<sup>8</sup> This map displays the emblems of the Forest Service and other governmental agencies, and the words “For sale by . . . U.S. Forest Service.” Forest Service staff regularly attended the meetings at which this map was developed. Yet the map shows three routes through the National Forest as open to motorized travel when in fact they are closed according to the official Travel Map. The County’s map also gives incorrect information on where dispersed camping is permitted within the National Forest.<sup>9</sup> An excerpt from the County’s map, showing one of the route errors, was displayed in 2003 by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) on bulletin boards on their adjacent land, with photocopies available for users to pick up. When the Sierra Club objected that these maps were incorrect, the DWR removed the maps from its bulletin boards (without replacing them with corrected maps) but the County kept distributing the uncorrected maps. Forest Service staff informed the Sierra Club in May 2003 that the County would soon correct the map, at least in a version on its web site.<sup>10</sup> A year later the web site did not exist, the uncorrected maps were still being distributed to the public, and a County official did not respond to an inquiry regarding when the errors would be corrected.<sup>11</sup>



This excerpt from the Box Elder County Interagency Travel & Recreation Map incorrectly shows several closed routes through National Forest lands (digitally highlighted in yellow) as open. The Forest Service participated in the preparation of this map and endorsed it with the USFS emblem.

**7. The Forest Service will not allow the Sierra Club to post accurate maps.** In May 2004 the Ogden Sierra Club published its own ORV travel maps covering the three areas of most intense ORV use in the Ogden Ranger District.<sup>12</sup> These maps contained the same information (for the areas covered) as the official Travel Map, and Forest Service staff reviewed them for accuracy. A local ATV dealer gladly agreed to distribute the maps to customers. However, when the Sierra Club offered to post its maps on some of the blank bulletin boards in the areas covered, the District Ranger declined to grant permission.<sup>13</sup> More than a month later, only one of the half-dozen bulletin boards in these three areas displayed any information on travel regulations.

<sup>8</sup> The map is undated, but was apparently first printed sometime between 2000 and 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The map states that “Camping on BLM lands, Forest Service lands, State Trust lands and Sovereign lands is permitted within 0.2 miles of roads authorized for motorized travel.” In fact, camping is allowed everywhere on Forest Service lands, but vehicles may be taken no more than 150 feet off a designated route to access dispersed campsites.

<sup>10</sup> Chip Sibbensen, email to Dan Schroeder, 29 May 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Email from Dan Schroeder to Garth Day, 4 June 2004.

<sup>12</sup> These maps can be downloaded from <http://utah.sierraclub.org/ogden/ORV/>.

<sup>13</sup> Chip Sibbensen, email to Dan Schroeder, 3 May 2004.

**8. Posted maps imply that nonmotorized trails are open to motorcycles.** One location where numerous signs have been installed and maintained is the trailhead parking area at North Ogden Pass, which provides access to both the northern and southern segments of the popular Skyline Trail. This trail is open to motorcycles, but both of its segments connect to other trails that are nonmotorized. The maps posted at the trailhead, however, do not distinguish between the motorized and nonmotorized trails; the motorcycle icon on each map seems to imply that all of the trails depicted are open to motorcycles. There are no signs at the trail junctions to imply otherwise, and an identical, misleading map is also displayed at one of the nonmotorized trailheads, in North Fork Park.



This map, posted at North Ogden Pass, correctly indicates that the Skyline Trail is open to motorcycles. However, the map also implies that several adjoining trails (digitally highlighted in yellow) are open, when in fact they are legally closed to motorized use.

## ORV Management Signs

Executive Order 11644 also requires that areas where ORV use is permitted be “well marked.” The next nine examples describe inadequate signing.

**9. “On road only” signs are misleading.** The most prominent ORV management signs in the Ogden Ranger District are all identical: Each displays icons for pickups, jeeps, ATV's, and motorcycles, followed by the words “Permitted on road only; drive carefully.” These signs seem to imply that motor vehicles may be used on any route that resembles a “road,” when in fact, many road-like routes near these signs are closed to some or all motor vehicles. In one location, one of these signs is displayed on a road that is open only to highway-legal vehicles, not ATV's and dirt bikes. These signs undermine any attempts to inform users that they need to consult the official Travel Map to determine where motor vehicles are allowed.



All of the road-like tracks behind this sign are actually closed to motorized travel.

**10. Other signs can also be ambiguous.** Trails that are open to ATV's and motorcycles are often marked with signs to which the Forest Service attaches appropriate stickers to indicate types of allowed vehicles. Some of these signs, but not all, also include stickers to indicate what types of vehicles are not allowed. By omitting the "not allowed" stickers from some of the signs, the Forest Service leaves room for doubt over whether motorcycle trails are open to ATV's, or whether ATV trails are open to larger vehicles.



Illegal ATV use is extremely common on the motorcycle trail that starts here, yet nobody has bothered to add a "no ATV's" sticker to the sign.

**11. National Forest boundaries are not always marked.** There are several locations in the Ogden Ranger District where motorized travelers have no way of knowing that they are even on National Forest land. By the same token, travelers often do not know when they have crossed onto private land.



This meadow lies on National Forest land, but no sign marks the Forest boundary on the road that accesses the area. To motor vehicle users, this is an unmanaged area where anything goes.

**12. Closure signs are set back from beginning of the closures.** Several travel routes in the Ogden Ranger District are signed as closed to motor vehicles, but the signs are set back a significant distance from where the closure actually begins. Such signs imply to users that the unsigned portion of the route is open to motorized travel. They also often create dead-ends where users are tempted, once pointed in a certain direction, to disregard the sign and keep going.



Closure sign on the Davenport Hollow overlook trail, set back nearly a mile from where the trail begins.

**13. Closure signs are posted along the margin of a closed route, but not along the route itself.**

When multiple routes branch off of a road or trail that is closed, it would be easier to simply sign the main route. Yet in some locations, the Forest Service has left the main route unsigned, implying to users that it is open, and placed closure signs along its margins.



This trail along the power line corridor at Monte Cristo does not appear on the Travel Map but is managed as open to ATV's. The inset shows one of several signs along the trail marking connecting routes as closed.

**14. Closed routes are deliberately signed as open.**

In two locations (both in the Monte Cristo area), routes that do not appear at all on the official Travel Map have been signed by the Forest Service as open to motorized use. The Sierra Club informed the Ogden District Ranger of these errors in writing on 8 July 2003, but the incorrect signs were still in place a year later.



This sign marks the Bluff Spring route as open to all vehicles, when in fact the route does not appear on the Forest Service Travel Map and is therefore legally closed.

**15. Administrative roads that lead to private land are unsigned.** Several closed roads in the Ogden Ranger District lead across the National Forest boundary onto private land within a mile or less. Typically these roads do not appear on the travel map yet they are unsigned and managed as open to public use. This is another practice that undermines the authority of the official Travel Map. It also encourages users to trespass on private property.



This closed but unsigned National Forest route crosses onto private land after 1/3 mile. ORV users regularly explore the route, trespassing in the process.

**16. Junctions and ends of routes are unsigned.**

The most obvious way in which the Forest Service can manage a closed route as open is to simply leave it unsigned. Typically an open route comes to an unsigned junction, and users have no way of knowing whether the adjoining route is open. Sometimes a route splits at a T or Y, where it is not clear which branch is the official continuation of the main route. And sometimes a route continues on the ground beyond the end of the open portion, yet the point of the closure is unmarked. While it might not be feasible to install a sign at every ambiguous location, the Forest Service could at least try to address the more egregious examples. If users were provided with official Travel Maps, or if accurate maps were posted at trailheads, the problem of unsigned routes would be much less serious.



Unsigned four-way junction along the Tilda Spring ATV trail. To remain on the legally open route, motorized travelers must make a right turn here. The trails leading straight ahead and to the left do not appear on the Travel Map, yet are apparently being managed as open.

**17. New user-created routes are not inventoried or signed.** The Ogden Ranger District does not routinely inventory its system of roads and trails to discover new user-created trails, nor does it sign these routes as closed in a timely manner.



A new user-created ATV trail, leading nowhere.

## Implementation of Recent Management Changes

The next three examples show how recent ORV management decisions have not been effectively implemented on the ground.

**18. Seasonal closures are not implemented.** The Forest Service recently installed several gates to close off the Public Grove area to motorized use during wet spring conditions when vehicles tend to do excessive damage to meadows. However, the seasonal closure has never been effectively implemented. A gap next to the main gate, intended for winter use by snowmobiles, allowed virtually all vehicles to bypass the gate until 2004. Now a barrier has been installed to block the gap, but the gates were simply left open during the wettest part of spring 2004. Elsewhere, spring season closures are needed but have not been enacted.



The gate at the base of the Liberty-Avon road, accessing the Public Grove area, stood wide open on this rainy Saturday in May.

**19. An emergency closure is ended before the condition is remedied.** In 2001, the Forest Supervisor signed an emergency order to close the two Jeep trails into Public Grove Hollow “until further notice,” due to severe damage to soils and vegetation caused by off-route travel. Although the damage continues and no formal "further notice" has been given, Forest Service staff have reopened the gate to one of the trails. When the Sierra Club inquired about this situation, we were told that reopening the gate constituted “further notice” and that the decision to do so had been delegated to low-level field workers.<sup>14</sup>



The damage at this site has recently gotten worse, because the emergency closure enacted three years ago is no longer being implemented.

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<sup>14</sup> Chip Sibbernsen, email to Dan Schroeder, 2 June 2004.

**20. A new snowmobile closure has not been implemented.** As part of the WCNF Plan revision process, a new snowmobile closure was adopted for the Ogden Ranger District beginning in the 2003-04 season. However, the Forest Service made no attempt to post the boundary of the new closure. Forest Service staff have claimed that a sign announcing the closure was posted on a board three miles below the boundary along the main access route, but we found no such sign on the board during two visits to the area during the peak snow season. Instead, the board displayed a copy of the obsolete travel map showing the now-closed area as open. Although we informed Forest Service staff of this problem after our first visit, they took no action to correct it until after the snow season was over.

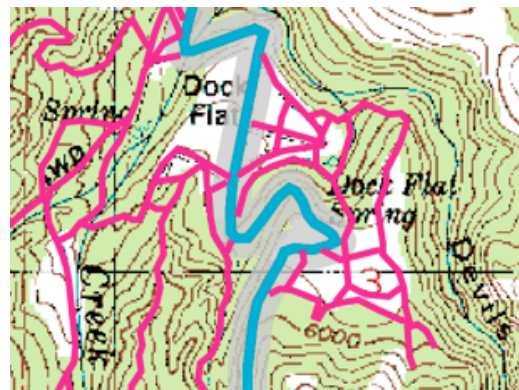


As of the 2003-04 season, the Willard Basin road and surrounding area are closed to snowmobiling beyond this point. The Forest Service has made no attempt to mark the boundary. Hundreds of snowmobile tracks continue into the closed area and up to the ridges in the distance.

## Dispersed Camping

Management of dispersed camping in the Ogden Ranger District has created a wide loophole in the “designated routes only” policy toward motorized travel.

**21. Dispersed campsites are tolerated beyond the 150-foot limit.** According to the official Travel Map, vehicles may be taken as far as 150 feet from any designated travel route for the purpose of accessing dispersed campsites. However, a very large number of well-established dispersed campsites in the Ogden District lie beyond the 150-foot limit. The Forest Service has made no attempt to close these sites. In two locations (Dock Flat and Dry Bread Pond), networks of dispersed campsites are so extensive that they can hardly be called “dispersed.”



The only open motorized route in the Dock Flat area is the Willard Basin road, shown here in blue. Vehicular access to dispersed campsites is limited to the gray-shaded area, within 150 feet of the road. The pink lines show the actual extent of routes used to access campsites.

**22. Vehicular play in dispersed camping areas is tolerated.** The larger dispersed camping areas in the Ogden District have become de facto ORV play areas, attracting riders who like to race around in small circles. When asked whether this activity was permitted as a form of “accessing” dispersed campsites, Forest Service staff gave contradictory answers.<sup>15</sup> There are no posted signs or regulations that explicitly prohibit this activity, even though permitting it was clearly not the intent of the 150-foot rule.<sup>16</sup>



ATV riders can often be seen racing around in circles through the Dock Flat dispersed camping area.

**23. The 150-foot limit on dispersed campsites is not publicized.** The rule stating that vehicular access to dispersed sites is permitted only within 150 feet of a designated travel route is published only in fine print on the official Travel Map, and posted in only one location<sup>17</sup> within the Ogden District--a location where anyone can see at a glance that the rule is not being enforced. Consequently, hardly any users are aware of the 150-foot rule.

## Interagency Cooperation and Law Enforcement

Complex land ownership patterns create a need for close cooperation between the Forest Service and state and local government. When it comes to ORV management, better cooperation is needed.

**24. Law enforcement is inadequate.** The Forest Service employs only one law enforcement officer to cover the entire Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts. While other National Forest staff are authorized to issue citations for illegal ORV use, they rarely do so. The State Parks Department and County Sheriffs often assist with law enforcement on National Forest lands, but their main emphasis is on enforcing vehicle registration and safety requirements, not on keeping ORV users out of closed areas. These other law enforcement officers are often no more aware of National Forest travel restrictions than typical users are. They do not hand out copies of the official Travel Map to users, nor does the Forest Service ask them to,<sup>18</sup> despite the language in Executive Order 11644 directing federal land managers to “seek the cooperation of relevant State agencies in the dissemination of this information.”

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<sup>15</sup> Rick Vallejos and Tom Scott, personal communication to Dan Schroeder, 18 March 2004.

<sup>16</sup> The 150-foot rule apparently originated in the 1987 WCNF Land and Resource Management Plan, which states, “Motorized vehicles are permitted within 150 feet of designated roads for camping and picnicking.” On the Ogden District Travel Map that was published the following year, however, this language was broadened to read, “Vehicles are permitted within 150 feet of designated routes for recreational purposes.” The 1991 revision of this map narrowed “recreational purposes” to “dispersed camping purposes,” but the 1997 revision again broadened the language to “access [of] dispersed camping areas.”

<sup>17</sup> The location is Dock Flat, where dozens of dispersed sites, all managed as open, extend nearly 1000 feet from the open road.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Bringhurst, personal communication to Dan Schroeder, 1 September 2003.

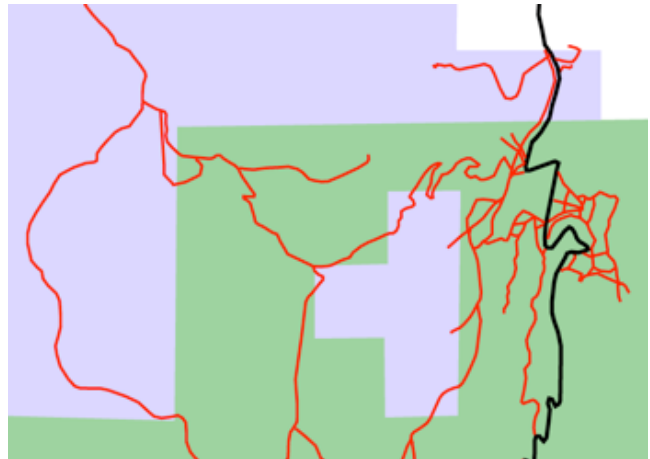
**25. Citizens have no way to report illegal activity.**

Unless a law enforcement officer happens to already be on the scene, there is no effective way for a citizen to inform the Forest Service of illegal ORV activity in the Ogden Ranger District. Reports sent to the District office after the fact are ignored, even when they are accompanied by photographs and license plate numbers. Neither the Forest Service nor the State Parks Department has been receptive to suggestions that there be a phone number to call to report illegal ORV activity, similar to the DWR's system for reporting poachers, or the BLM's system for reporting ORV violations in the San Rafael Swell.



Notices like this one appear throughout the San Rafael Swell, discouraging illegal ORV activity. The Forest Service has shown no interest in setting up a similar system for reporting violations.

**26. Ambiguous policies on state lands spill over to the National Forest.** The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) manage a number of tracts of land adjacent to the National Forest. As far as the Sierra Club has been able to determine, neither of these state agencies has written rules governing ORV use on its lands. Signing to regulate ORV use has been installed in only a few locations. The ambiguous policies of these state agencies spill over onto adjacent National Forest lands at the many locations where a route crosses between state and federal land and the boundary is unmarked.



National Forest lands (green) are interspersed with Utah DWR lands (blue) in the area south of Mantua. On the National Forest, all of the trails (red) are closed to motorized use. The DWR has no written policy for its trails, and has posted no signs in this area.

## Rewarding Illegal Activity

This final example is in a class by itself.

**27. Illegal activity is rewarded by proposals to open closed routes.** The Travel Plan revision currently proposed by the Ogden District would legally open approximately 25 miles of nonmotorized trails where illegal use is already occurring. Even to propose such an action sends the worst possible message to law-breaking ORV users: Ride this route often enough, and we'll eventually give in and make it legal.



ATV riders negotiate boulders blocking a trail clearly marked as closed. The Ogden Ranger District is now proposing to legally open this trail to ATV's.

## The Big Picture

Any one of the examples in the previous section, or even a few of them combined, might be little cause for concern. The full list of inadequate management practices, on the other hand, paints a picture of arbitrary and capricious disregard for the Forest Service’s obligation to protect our natural resources and provide the public with accurate information on ORV regulations. More often than not, the policy of the Forest Service toward illegal ORV use is essentially “don’t ask, don’t tell”: if users don’t ask where they’re allowed to go, the Forest Service doesn’t tell them. Possible reasons for this policy will be explored later in this Report. First, however, it will be useful to try to quantify the problem (or at least, a part of it), and describe some of the consequences.

Soon after the Ogden Sierra Club began seriously scrutinizing the Forest Service’s ORV management practices, we heard a Forest Service employee use the phrase “managed as open” to describe certain ORV routes that were closed according to the Travel Map. Keeping this phrase in mind, we have since discovered and mapped nearly 100 routes in the Ogden District, totaling approximately 50 miles in length, that can accurately be described as “managed as open” to ORV use, even though they are legally closed.



The Jeep trail from Public Grove Hollow to Devils Gate Valley has been closed on paper but managed as open for at least 16 years. Ogden District staff admitted this to the Sierra Club more than two years ago, but have taken no action to correct the problem.

The table below shows a breakdown of the total managed-as-open mileage by general area within the Ogden District. Although the total comes to slightly under 50 miles, the actual total is certainly greater than this because our field work does not include the northern half of the Curtis Creek area or a number of routes that can be accessed only through private land. Although we have prepared maps of the managed-as-open routes, the maps are not included in this Report because we do not wish to advertise the route locations to the general public.

<b>General Area</b>	<b>Miles of Routes “Managed as Open”</b>
Willard	13.2
Public Grove	9.6
Skyline	8.8
Monte Cristo	14.0
Curtis Creek	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.4</b>

Our criterion for calling a route “managed as open” is that an alert, law-abiding ORV user could travel the route from end to end without ever suspecting that it is legally closed. Thus, this category does not include routes that are signed as closed or blocked by obvious barriers, even when ORV use continues and the closure is unenforced. Nor have we included routes where signs or barriers are badly damaged (by weather or vandalism), so long as there is still some visible remnant to indicate an attempt on the part of the Forest Service to close the route. Routes whose only apparent purpose is to access a legal

dispersed campsite (within 150 feet of a designated travel route) are also omitted, as are fresh cross-country tracks not yet established as a lasting path, and routes that are now unused and becoming overgrown. In calculating the length of managed-as-open routes, we have omitted features that do not show up on 7.5-minute quadrangle maps, such as multiple braids, pull-outs, turn-arounds, and tight loops through camping areas.

Our inventory of managed-as-open routes is based upon our first field visit to each route during the snow-free season of 2002, 2003, or 2004. In most cases, whenever we discovered such a route, we immediately informed the District Ranger and his staff of the problem, in writing. We are pleased to report that since these initial visits, new signs and barriers have been installed to correct several of the problems. The Ogden Sierra Club does not have adequate resources to conduct follow-up visits to all sites during a short enough time interval to obtain a current snapshot of management practices as of August 2004. As a rough guess, we would estimate that about 40 miles of the routes in our inventory are still managed as open as of this writing.<sup>19</sup>

Since the Ogden Ranger District contains approximately 150 miles of roads and trails that are legally open to ORV use, one might wonder whether another 40-50 miles of managed-as-open routes makes a significant difference. We believe that the difference is quite significant, for the following reasons:

- Wildlife habitat in the Ogden District is already badly fragmented by legitimate roads and private property. Additional motorized routes further fragment the remaining roadless areas. Summer range for elk is especially threatened, as is habitat for sage grouse and Canada lynx.
- Vehicular activity destroys vegetation along routes. In at least one location this activity is disturbing a rare plant, Burke's draba, that is endemic to the Ogden area.
- Noxious weeds tend to invade the forest along roads and trails. Some of the worst examples of noxious weed invasion in the Ogden District coincide with sites of unmanaged motorized recreation. (Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth has identified noxious weed invasion as another of the "four threats" facing the National Forest system.)
- Managed-as-open routes tend to be steep and unmaintained. Runoff and erosion from compacted soils threatens water quality in nearby streams. Lack of maintenance results in route widening and multiply-braided tracks as users ride around obstacles.
- A proliferation of dispersed camping areas creates sanitation and water quality problems from improper disposal of human waste.
- Because they are more rugged than legitimate routes, managed-as-open routes attract a more aggressive group of ORV users who are less likely to tread lightly and obey posted restrictions.



The poorly managed ORV trails near Willard Peak are threatening a rare plant, Burke's draba, that grows here.

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<sup>19</sup> Much of the reduction in managed-as-open miles resulted from the construction of a single fence, described and pictured in the following section.

- The steepness and poor condition of managed-as-open routes makes many of them unsafe.
- Additional open routes create more potential sites where a careless visitor might start a wildfire.
- Law enforcement officers are already stretched too thin patrolling the District's system of legitimate ORV routes. They have no time to patrol dozens of additional miles of routes.
- Nonmotorized trails in the northern 3/4 of the Ogden District are scarce. By managing virtually all of these trails as open to motorized use, the Forest Service has eliminated many opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the Forest. Hikers, mountain bikers, and birdwatchers are being driven out of large areas.



This campfire was left smoldering by two young men who drove their pickup into this managed-as-open area. Wildfire danger was extreme at the time, and a total ban on fires was in effect.

- Failing to implement the legally adopted Travel Plan conveys to all users the message that the National Forest is a place where laws do not matter—anything goes.



The yellow flowering plant growing along this trail is dyer's woad, northern Utah's most notorious noxious weed.

## The Forest Service's Approach to ORV Management

Forest Service officials who read this Report will undoubtedly object, pointing out several significant ORV management projects they have undertaken in the Ogden District in recent years, and insisting that any remaining problems will be solved in the near future by the upcoming Travel Plan revision and the establishment of the NUTS/Shoshone ATV mega-trail. Although we cannot predict the future, we can examine past projects to get a sense of how the Forest Service approaches ORV management. While these projects have indeed been significant, they have also been localized and sporadic.

In one particular ORV hot spot (the Public Grove area), the Ogden Ranger District undertook an intensive program of signing, fencing, and revegetation between 1996 and 2002. This effort was apparently initiated and sustained by two Forest Service staff members who have since left the District. The project consumed many thousands of dollars, plus thousands of hours of staff and volunteer time. It was partially successful, but short-lived. By 2004 the signs had mostly vanished, the fences were in need of maintenance, and an emergency closure of a major ORV route was no longer being implemented. Even during the project's active years, the Forest Service made little attempt to sign routes in accordance with its official Travel Map.<sup>20</sup>

In 2002, the main focus of ORV management in the District shifted to another hot spot of illegal activity, the Willard Basin road. This management action may have been motivated in part by the renewed scrutiny that this area was then receiving, from the Sierra Club and the media, as part of the proposed NUTS/Shoshone trail. During the 2002 season, several shortcuts and minor ghost trails near the road were blocked off and revegetated, while a "permitted on road only" sign was installed at the start of a major network of unauthorized routes to the west of the road. The following year, after an ATV fatality on one of these routes and a critical front-page article in the Ogden newspaper, the Forest Service built a fence to block off this network of routes. Law enforcement officers have patrolled the road frequently during this time. As of June 2004, the principal remaining problem is that many dispersed



As recently as 2002, this bulletin board in the Public Grove area displayed an educational poster describing restoration efforts, along with a mostly accurate map and a copy of the emergency closure order. A year later, however, the board was blank.



After two seasons of scrutiny and criticism from the Sierra Club and the media, the Forest Service constructed this fence in November 2003, blocking off a large network of trails that had previously been managed as open.

<sup>20</sup> In particular, the main Liberty-Avon road, which is open only to highway-legal vehicles, still displayed a sign implying that ORV's were permitted. Also, no sign was ever posted near the Honey Bee Mine to indicate that the continuation of the Public Grove Hollow route is closed to motorized travel.

camping areas beyond the 150-foot limit are still being managed as open. Signing is also needed along the motorcycle trail that climbs from the road into Willard Basin, and in a few other spots.

In the Monte Cristo Range, many signs, gates, and barriers remain from what must have been a period of active ORV management a decade or two ago. Thanks to these efforts, several closed roads and trails that appear on old maps have completely disappeared. More recently (in 2001), a grant from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation prompted the Forest Service to physically close about five miles of previously managed-as-open routes that did not appear on the Travel Map. One method used to accomplish these closures was the felling of dozens of healthy trees which were left lying across the routes.<sup>21</sup>



Although most ORV users have never seen a copy of the official Travel Map, the Forest Service does routinely print thousands of copies of this map. They are distributed, free of charge, to tourists who stop at the Forest Service information center in downtown Ogden, and at a few annual events such as the Weber County Fair.

To keep motor vehicles off this mile-long segment of the Davenport Hollow overlook trail, the Forest Service cut more than 40 healthy trees and left them lying across the route.

Many of the remaining discrepancies between on-the-ground management and the official Travel Map would be eliminated by the currently proposed amendments to the Ogden District's Travel Plan. In other words, the staff of the Ogden District generally feel that their on-the-ground management is sound, so it is the map that needs to be "updated." The NEPA process for these amendments began with the issuing of a Scoping Document in July 2003, which described 28 specific proposed changes to the Travel Plan. These changes would close about seven miles of little-used motorized routes, construct about seven miles of new ATV trails, and open about 25 miles of existing nonmotorized routes (most of them already managed as open) to motorized use. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement analyzing the proposal is due to be completed in late summer 2004, and Ogden District staff have indicated that the list of proposed changes is likely to grow beyond the 28 that were presented in the Scoping Document. In any case, current on-the-ground management seems to be anticipating a number of Travel Plan amendments that have not yet undergone the environmental analysis required by law.

The Ogden District's long-term strategy toward ORV management seems to revolve principally around the NUTS/Shoshone trail. While there have been no formal announcements of the establishment of NUTS or how it will be managed, informal comments by Forest Service officials to the news media have emphasized how this project will enable the Forest Service to obtain funding from the State Parks Department for improved ORV management. Indeed, for the current season the Parks Department has provided funding for the Forest Service to hire two additional seasonal field workers who are patrolling ORV routes and monitoring ORV activity. This development is a significant improvement over the past, although the seasonal employees were trained and working barely in time for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday

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<sup>21</sup> These and other efforts to block motorized access have contributed to the effective elimination of maintained nonmotorized trails in the Monte Cristo Range (except near Causey Reservoir).

(several weeks after the start of the summer ORV season), and even they were not provided with copies of the official Travel Map. The apparent link between NUTS and this funding also begs a number of questions: Why was the establishment of NUTS an apparent precondition for the Parks Department to provide this funding, when the Parks Department has always been obligated to use a portion of ORV registration revenues to enforce ORV regulations throughout the State? Will the Parks Department continue to provide this kind of funding, even after the controversy over establishing NUTS has died down? If so, why is there no long-term written agreement to that effect? Even if this level of funding continues indefinitely, will it be sufficient to manage the large increase in ORV use in northern Utah that NUTS promoters are hoping for?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the long-term history of ORV management in the Ogden District shows a pattern of intense but sporadic actions centered on localized projects, rather than systematic, routine efforts to provide accurate information to the recreating public. Although the overall management situation has improved during the last few years, it seems likely that these improvements will continue only as long as District staff feel external pressure from citizen activists and the news media. The internal policies and practices of the Forest Service itself are not adequate to ensure that districts will make any serious attempt to effectively manage off-road vehicle use.



This fence around a former ORV play area is now falling into disrepair, threatening the success of the revegetation efforts within.

## Excuses and Explanations

The preceding sections of this Report have emphasized facts, but these facts cry out for interpretation. Why has the Forest Service been so ineffective at managing ORV activity in the Ogden Ranger District? Why were 50 miles of legally closed ORV routes in the District being managed as open when this study began? Why is the public information provided by the Forest Service on ORV regulations so inaccurate and incomplete? Let us consider several possible explanations.

**Lack of resources?** Forest Service officials readily offer this excuse at every opportunity, and at first it might seem plausible. After all, installing correct signs at every ORV route junction in the Ogden Ranger District would cost thousands of dollars. Hiring another law enforcement officer to patrol the District would cost much more. Budgets are tighter than ever these days, and managing ORV activity is less urgent than putting out wildfires.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, the “lack of resources” excuse simply doesn’t hold up. Most of the inadequate ORV management practices described in this Report could be remedied at little or no additional expense. Installing a correct sign in the correct location doesn’t cost any more than installing an incorrect or ambiguous or poorly located sign. Sending an employee out each spring to post a laminated copy of the Travel Map on each of a half-dozen bulletin boards would cost less than a hundred dollars per year. Withholding approval for the incorrect Box Elder County map, or allowing the Sierra Club to post accurate maps, would have cost the Forest Service nothing. Besides, the Ogden Ranger District has spent tens of thousands of dollars in the last few years on the ORV management projects described in the previous section. While still more money for ORV management could certainly help, the amount of money already being spent could yield enormous improvements, if it were spent more wisely.

**Vandalism?** It is fairly common to see vandalized signs in the Ogden Ranger District, so vandalism provides another convenient excuse for the lack of adequate signing. However, after repeated field visits over a period of more than two years, the Ogden Sierra Club has concluded that vandalism has played a negligible role (probably less than weather and normal wear and tear) in the management lapses documented in this Report. Vandalism cannot account for inaccurate maps, misplaced signs, or wide-open gates. Even where ORV users have clearly ridden around signs and barriers, the signs and barriers are almost always left intact. The most common type of vandalism is target shooting, which usually leaves signs standing and legible.



Though it has been used for target shooting, the sign at the start of the Mitchell Hollow ATV trail is still legible.

Vandalism probably causes more damage to Forest employees’ morale than to anything else. Seeing bullet holes in a new sign, or a gap cut through a new fence, must be discouraging. For the majority of ORV users who try to obey the law, however, even a vandalized sign or fence is still effective at conveying the information that the route is closed. Fear of vandalism is no excuse for failing to put up signs and barriers in the first place.

**Ignorance?** On a few occasions, Forest Service staff have told the Sierra Club that they were unaware of various on-the-ground ORV management problems. Undoubtedly they were telling the truth. Still, one has to wonder whether this ignorance is self-inflicted. The Ogden District employs 30 year-round staff and an additional 60 seasonal workers during the summer. A single individual could easily visit every ORV trailhead in the District in two days, and travel the full length of every open ORV route in two weeks. District employees already visit most sites of ORV use on a routine basis, so special trips to inventory the condition of trails and signs should rarely be necessary. Unfortunately, it appears that supervisors do not instruct field staff to observe or report ORV management problems. Furthermore, most seasonal workers are not familiar with the District's travel regulations.

Despite these bad habits, there is ample documentation to show that the Ogden District Ranger and Recreation Manager have long been generally aware of the management problems described in this Report. For example, a 1995 grant application, signed by the District Ranger, states that "Our present district signs are often missing, in poor condition, or are not in agreement with our Forest Visitor or Travel maps. This is causing serious management problems."

**Incompetence?** The management lapses described in this report would be easy to understand if Forest Service staff were unable to read maps, interpret regulations, and foresee the consequences of their decisions. The Sierra Club has seen no evidence of such incompetence. Rather, the staff of the Ogden Ranger District are experienced, well-educated professionals who capably handle a variety of other tasks that are much more technical and complex than disseminating accurate information on ORV regulations to the public.

**Other priorities?** Without question, the Forest Service must handle a huge variety of tasks and obligations besides ORV management. In the Ogden Ranger District, activities that compete for attention include wildlife monitoring, fire fighting, prescribed burns, grazing, hunting, road maintenance, nonmotorized trail projects, and developed recreation (camping, boating, and downhill skiing). Forest Service staff also spend a great deal of time doing paperwork such as grant proposals and NEPA documentation. Whether ORV management should be a high priority compared to these other tasks may be debatable. However, it is quite clear that the Forest Service itself considers ORV management to be among its highest priorities. The Ogden District has put considerable resources into the ORV management projects described in the preceding section, and is preparing to expend even more resources in the near future as it implements its proposed Travel Plan revisions and expands the NUTS/Shoshone mega-trail. At the national level, Chief Dale Bosworth has identified unmanaged recreation as one of the "four threats" facing the National Forests. Assuming that his awareness of this threat did not develop instantly upon his being named Chief, one has to wonder why Bosworth didn't make ORV management in his own back yard a higher priority when he was WCNF Supervisor (1986-90) or Intermountain Regional Forester (1994-97).

Even to the extent that ORV management has been a priority for the Ogden District, the public information component of this management has been badly neglected. Instead (as described above), the District has focused on repairing damaged roads, constructing physical barriers such as fences, and restoring vegetation in closed-off ORV play areas. It is ironic that while pursuing these relatively expensive projects, the Forest Service has neglected the much less expensive task of telling the public where ORV use is permitted.

**Inertia?** Doing nothing is always easier than doing something. Despite all their knowledge and skills, Forest Service decision makers rarely take action unless prodded to do so. Prodding can come in the

form of mandates from above, pressure from elected officials, negative publicity, the prospect of bringing in grant money, or plain old nagging (by private citizens, conscientious staff members, or Sierra Club volunteers). Until very recently, nobody prodded the Ogden Ranger District to publicize or enforce its own Travel Plan. When nobody complains, why change?

**Trying to please everyone?** Public opinion on ORV management runs the gamut from those who would like to see ORV use permitted on every square foot of the Forest to those who would like to see ORV's completely banned. Extremists on both sides tend to be the most vocal, and the Forest Service is caught in the middle. Being good bureaucrats, Forest Service officials may simply be trying to do their best to please everyone. The written Travel Plan leans toward pleasing the environmental activists who pay more attention to NEPA processes and written rules, while on-the-ground management leans toward pleasing the ORV users who pay more attention to actions than words.

Of course, this pragmatic approach of pleasing the public effectively negates any attempt at rational decision making based on scientific analysis.

**Rebellious tendencies?** We all want our freedom and autonomy; Forest Service employees are only human in this respect. Naturally, a field worker would rather make his or her own decisions about where to put signs than rigidly follow a rule written on a piece of paper by a bureaucrat in an office. By the same token, an office worker would rather simply make a decision than go through a lengthy NEPA process legislated in Washington. In the Ogden District, these natural inclinations are reinforced by the recent memory of a time when there were no written travel plans or NEPA processes. In short, it is still the culture among Ogden District employees to conveniently ignore rules and mandates when these conflict with their personal inclinations (and when nobody seems to be looking).

## **Assigning Blame**

It is not the intent of this Report to blame any particular individual(s) for the problems documented herein. While a particular field worker may have installed a particular incorrect sign, and a particular District Ranger may have endorsed a particular incorrect map, the total number of individuals who have played a role in creating and perpetuating these problems is too large to allow any one of them to take a significant fraction of the blame. (For example, the Ogden District has had three different District Rangers, plus one Acting District Ranger, over the last ten years.) Rather, it is clear that an atmosphere of indifference toward these problems permeates the Forest Service. Under such conditions, even the best-intentioned individuals can bring about only incremental changes.

Instead of asking who is to blame, let us ask who should take responsibility for solving the problem. The answer is that while virtually everyone in the Forest Service can make a difference, those in the highest positions can make the most difference. The following section describes how.

## **Recommendations**

The good news is that the problems documented in this Report can be solved without any significant monetary cost to taxpayers or the Forest Service. The bad news is that changing the culture of the Forest Service may be even more difficult than increasing its budget. Still, the solution plainly exists. Here are some things that the Forest Service and the environmental community can do to help.

### **Forest Service Districts**

- Post copies of the official Travel Map and ORV regulations at all ORV trailheads.
- Supply all Forest Service employees with copies of the Travel Map and ORV regulations.
- Train all field workers to routinely check that signing is consistent with the Travel Plan, and to report discrepancies and ambiguities to the District Ranger in writing. Fix incorrect and misleading signs immediately.
- Provide accurate travel maps and information on other regulations to ORV dealers, local newspapers, and state and county law enforcement officers.
- Institutionalize all of these practices so they become routine; do not depend on a single motivated employee and then do nothing after this employee moves on to another job.

### **Forest Supervisors**

- Direct all District Rangers to implement the suggestions in the previous list.
- Require that each District Ranger submit a brief annual report stating whether ORV-related signing is adequate and in compliance with the Travel Plan, and if not, estimating the number of miles of routes for which signing is inadequate.
- Establish a toll-free number that citizen activists can call to report illegal ORV activity, and an advisory committee through which citizen activists can help remedy inadequate ORV management practices.
- Ensure that accurate travel maps are available over the world-wide web.

### **Forest Service Chief Bosworth and the ORV Policy Team**

Strengthen the “Proposed Rule for Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use” to require each National Forest to:

- Allow ORV use only on routes signed as “open”; immediately prohibit motorized travel on unauthorized routes.
- Ensure that all signage is unambiguous and consistent with written travel plans.
- Adopt travel plans through legal NEPA procedures including site-specific environmental analysis.
- Limit the system of designated ORV routes to those that the Forest Service can afford to patrol, monitor, sign, and maintain.

- Designate a limited set of approved dispersed camping areas where vehicular access is permitted; prohibit all other motorized travel off of designated routes, including vehicular play in dispersed campsites.

### **Local Citizen Activists**

- “Take back our Forests” by visiting areas of ORV use, even if you prefer to recreate in quieter areas. Take others with you. Your very presence can deter illegal ORV activity.
- Document (with photographs and GPS coordinates) locations where management practices are not consistent with printed travel plans.
- Meet frequently with District Rangers or recreation managers to discuss ORV management problems and the needs of quiet recreationists.
- Work with local media to publicize management problems and the consequent environmental damage and user conflicts; for example, take a reporter on a tour of an ORV-impacted area.
- Assist the Forest Service in distributing travel maps, or, if they will not cooperate, print your own accurate travel maps and distribute them.
- Volunteer to help the Forest Service with needed signing and fencing projects.

### **Regional and National Environmental Organizations**

- Train local activists to carry out the suggestions in the previous list.
- Keep records of where these problems have occurred, and compile statistics to document whether efforts on the part of the Forest Service to solve these problems have been successful.
- Lobby National Forest administrators to adopt better policies, as outlined above.

