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Environment

Ancient canyon closed to ATVs

Riders have caused severe damage near sensitive 8,000-year-old Anasazi archaeological ruins

By **Patty Henetz**
The Salt Lake Tribune

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All-terrain vehicle riders have done so much damage to a canyon near Bluff that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management has closed it indefinitely to motorized travel to protect 8,000-year-old Anasazi ruins.

Nick Sandberg, acting BLM Monticello field office manager, said Wednesday that as of today, motorized vehicles would be banned from 1,871 acres of Recapture Canyon just below the Recapture Dam near Blanding.

The area currently is designated as open to cross-country off-highway vehicle travel. But OHV use has increased dramatically since the BLM's 1991 management plan, and cultural resources are in jeopardy, Sandberg said.

The BLM will hold open houses in Monticello and Blanding next week to explain the decision to the public. But already, San Juan County Commissioner Lynn Stevens says the closure is a good idea, at least until the BLM figures out what to do to fix the problem.

Stevens toured the area last month on a trail Sandberg said appeared to have been built without a permit.

"I saw a trail that was, what I would call, too close to one particular archaeological site that certainly has the potential for causing damage," said Stevens.

The trail is eight or nine miles long. It could be rerouted in some areas, but not in all the places it comes too near Anasazi sites, Stevens said.

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Road to ruin

Part of Recapture Canyon is being closed to OHV use to protect Anasazi ruins from OHV damage.



The Salt Lake Tribune

Sandberg said the ancient remnants are mostly ruins that include habitations, storage pits and refuse dump areas.

Some of the habitations are high on the canyon walls, mostly out of the way of damage. But those on the canyon floor could be destroyed due to the increase in ATV traffic.

The closed area will be marked by signs.

A single BLM law enforcement officer will be available to patrol for violations.

Meanwhile, the BLM will study impacts to the sites. Sandberg said he could recall only one other such action in the region, an area west of Bluff, that also was closed because of ATV overuse.

Stevens noted that the Recapture Canyon area now closed hasn't been thoroughly surveyed for cultural resources. "It may be they need to keep it closed long-term," he said, adding that the best solution would be for the BLM to figure out how to fix the problem and then re-open the canyon.

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