

KANAB MANAGEMENT PLAN FAVORS ORVs, DISCOUNTS WILDERNESS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The Bureau of Land Management released its Final Resource Management Plan (“RMP”) for the half million-acre Kanab Field Office on July 18, 2008. The plan will have a 30-day “protest” period ending August 18, 2008. BLM made only minor modifications from the Draft plan that was released last October, resulting in a final plan that offers woefully inadequate protection for wilderness-quality landscapes (roadless areas) and opens the floodgates to escalating off-road vehicle use.

The Kanab Field Office lies on the southernmost border of Utah, just north of Arizona. Side-by-side with the magnificent Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the scenic landscape of the Kanab Field Office has its own impressive wonders. From the brilliantly-hued Vermilion Cliffs and White Cliffs that rise behind the town of Kanab, to the unique Coral Pink Sand Dunes and Moquith Mountain Wilderness Study Area

(WSA) where towering ponderosa pines grow in undulating waves of salmon-pink sand dunes, to the cottonwood and willow lined desert riparian oases along the East Fork of the Virgin River and Kanab Creek—these are “national park quality” lands that are being managed with few protective measures. In addition to the scenic beauty of the area, prehistoric cultural resources abound, although BLM has inventoried only 10% of these lands for cultural resources.



The White Cliffs in the Upper Kanab Creek proposed wilderness. © Ray Wheeler.



Parunuweap Canyon. © James W. Kay.

ORV Damage Will Continue Under the BLM’s Plan:

Area within the jurisdiction of the Kanab Field Office has long been the scene of ORV damage, and BLM officials are all too willing to look the other way as places like the Moquith Mountain and Parunuweap WSAs suffer soil erosion, scarring, loss of native plants and water quality degradation. The fact that the BLM’s own data show greater use of the area for non-motorized recreation than for ORV use (a 4:1 ratio) highlights the BLM’s extreme and unreasonable bias towards designating roads and ORV trails.

The plan:

- Designates 1,401 miles of ORV routes.
- Designates 118 miles of ORV routes in areas the BLM has determined have wilderness character (i.e., are roadless).
- Designates ORV routes in BLM roadless areas such as Vermillion Cliffs, Upper Kanab Creek, Canaan Mountain, Parunuweap Canyon and Moquith Mountain WSA.
- Threatens water quality and quantity by allowing ORV use in fragile stream areas like the East fork of the Virgin River and Upper Kanab Creek.
- Puts irreplaceable prehistoric archaeological arti-



facts at increased risk by designating ORV routes without completing surveys to determine the location and extent of archaeological artifacts, culturally important sites, or the impact of ORVs on these irreplaceable resources.

Wilderness Preservation Completely Overlooked

- While BLM found that 89,780 acres still have wilderness character, the plan would manage only 27,720 acres for their wilderness character—a mere 5% of the lands managed by the Kanab BLM.
- The plan designates ORV routes in all the areas BLM found to still have wilderness character—even in the areas identified in the plan to be managed to protect their wilderness character.
- Even the BLM’s finding that 89,780 acres still qualify as wilderness neglects the fact that 132,000 acres have been inventoried as roadless and wilderness quality by the Utah Wilderness Coalition and are included in America’s Redrock Wilderness Act.
- BLM’s plan allows 1,000 acres of the Moquith Mountain WSA to be used as a cross-country ORV recreation area—unnecessarily putting at risk the sensitive plant and invertebrate species that have been found in this area.



The Elkhart Cliffs in the Upper Kanab Creek proposed wilderness. © Chris England.

Plan Ignores Climate Change

Climate change will cause devastating long-term impacts to public lands if the BLM continues to ignore the issue. Under the course now charted by BLM, we can expect:

- Unprecedented, larger, hotter wildfires across the public lands;
- Hotter, drought conditions overall;
- More rain, less snow and earlier runoff will make it harder to manage water;
- More erosion, more dust storms, decreasing air quality;
- More exotic, invasive plant species like cheatgrass, which spread wildfires;
- Extreme pressure on water resources, including riparian areas which harbor 80% of wildlife habitats;

There are things we can do to minimize these impacts. According to a June 20, 2008 EPA study, which reinforces finding by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the U.S. Geological Survey, they include:

- **Leaving the soil intact** to the maximum extent possible. Just as the massive “sodbusting” on the Midwest plains led to the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, the devastating erosive impacts of off-road vehicles, roads and other developments will create dust storms throughout the west.
- **Protecting high-value areas, including lands that are relatively pristine now** and where existing levels of biodiversity are high—including riparian areas and other water sources.

The Kanab plan includes 1,401 miles of newly-designated ORV routes—with no mention of resulting impacts in an era of global warming.

The Kanab plan only makes a bad problem worse. Instead of actively working to minimize the impacts of climate change, BLM’s inadequate plan would leave a Dust Bowl for the 21st Century.