



southern  
utah  
wilderness  
alliance

July 1, 2014

Director Neil Kornze  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C Street NW, Room 5665  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Kornze,

We are writing to you in support of BLM's efforts to meet the challenges of managing our public lands and cultural heritage, especially in response to the recent opposition to the agency's authority to protect them from unlawful trespass, vandalism, and destruction. We write with great concern about the ongoing issues and the recent event in Recapture Canyon, located on public land in southeastern Utah.

On May 10, San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman led dozens of anti-federal government protesters driving off-road vehicles (ORVs) past BLM signs prohibiting

ORV use into Recapture Canyon. Although there are approximately 4,000 miles of designated routes open to ORV use on public lands in San Juan County (2,820 miles managed by the Monticello field office and another 1,000 miles managed by the Moab field office), Commissioner Lyman said he was leading the illegal ORV ride to protest the “jurisdictional creep” of the federal government and the notion that the BLM “arbitrarily shut down a road in San Juan County.”

Far from an arbitrary action, BLM’s 2007 closure of the trail to motorized vehicles was based on evidence that the illegally constructed ORV trail and subsequent ORV use were causing adverse effects to the canyon’s prehistoric cultural resources. These cultural resources include numerous sites that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Although BLM prosecuted the illegal trail builders, the potential for adverse effects to cultural resources, including permanent loss of these ancient treasures, resulting from any ORV use has not been eliminated. Thus, pursuant to federal law, BLM must continue to maintain the ORV closure, and must not grant a right-of-way to the county. As emphasized by the Hopi Tribe, continuing to protect these invaluable resources should be paramount – including through more lasting management decisions.

Granting a right-of-way to the county for the illegal ORV trail in Recapture Canyon would send a message loud and clear that vandalism, illegal trail construction, bully tactics, and other unlawful behavior will be rewarded. Such reckless public land management decisions would result in more vandalism to archaeological resources and encourage the construction of additional illegal motorized trails on our public lands.

We urge BLM to adhere to federal law and protect our public lands and its resources by: 1) Maintaining the ORV closure and denying the county’s right-of-way proposal for the illegal trail in Recapture Canyon; 2) Complying with the agency’s federal travel planning regulations and not abdicating its responsibilities by giving rights-of-ways to counties; and 3) Fully prosecuting those that violated BLM’s closure order.

We appreciate the immense challenges and strain that these recent events have brought to an already challenging mandate for the BLM, and want to express our support and readiness to assist in any way with continuing to safeguard our shared heritage for future generations of people who cherish our public lands.

Sincerely,

Scott Miller, Senior Regional Director  
The Wilderness Society

Sharon Buccino, Director Land and Wildlife Program  
Natural Resources Defense Council

Tim Wagner, Our Wild America Campaign  
Sierra Club

Bill Hedden, Executive Director  
Grand Canyon Trust

Shelley Silbert, Executive Director  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Scott Groene, Executive Director  
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance