

Respect your natural areas & preserve your chosen sport!

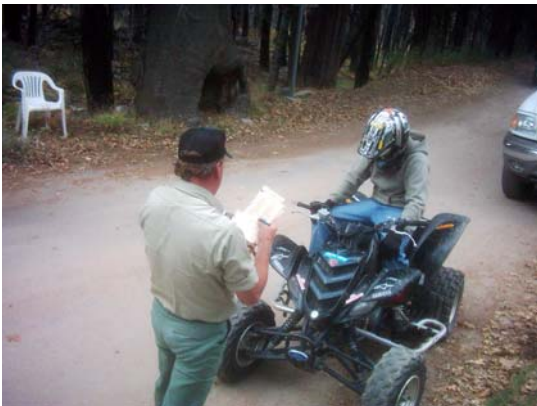
*by Benjamin vonDielingen
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I love living in the mountains. To me, the joy of living in the San Bernardino National Forest can be summed up in one word: freedom. Being high on a hill allows me to clear my head and reflect on those things that mean something special in my life. I'm sure many of you who live or visit up here can relate: the mountains offer us so many great opportunities and recreational activities.

Riding an OHV through the mountains on a beautiful day is just one way to experience such freedom. The way the wind hits you as you accelerate up a hill, the smell of chaparral, the taste of dust in your mouth, the way your machine becomes an extension of you own body – moving in synchronicity as you wind your way along the trail. This sense of freedom in nature is the reason many of us visit our public lands, but we must remember that with *freedom* comes *responsibility*.

Americans are, by nature, an independent lot, and those of us who enjoy recreating outdoors on public lands seem to be even more so. All week long, we face rules and regulations that society or work have thrust upon us, and when we get to have our fun, the last thing we want is someone telling us what we can and cannot do. What we have to remember, though, is that we are not the whole affair. Guidelines set forth by land agencies, such as the USFS, are not there to quash our fun, but rather to preserve the opportunity for others to enjoy the same sense of elation that we derive from recreating on our public lands. It is our responsibility – as enthusiasts of the forest – to follow these guidelines in an effort to allow future generations the same freedom we enjoy. To not do so is detrimental to our chosen sport and is also disrespectful to current and future users.

“I encourage people to recognize the diverse interests of people who visit this forest, and that we all have to be respectful of the rules,” says Jonathan Cook-Fischer, USFS Forest Protection Officer on the San Bernardino National Forest. “Public impression of a user group can be influenced by the actions of just one or two people. Ultimately, we have to be personally responsible for our actions in the forest.”



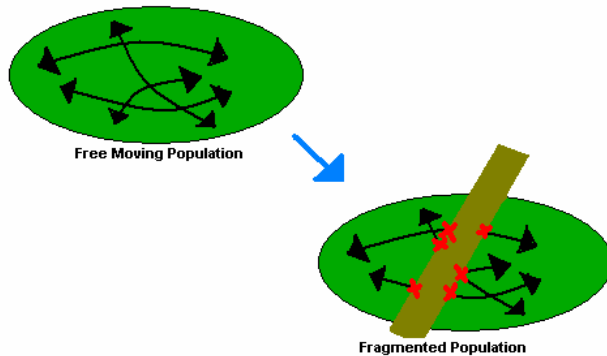
(USFS Ranger Greg Hoffman explains the difference in “Green Sticker” roads vs. “Street Legal” roads to a forest visitor)

I don't believe many of us set out to maliciously break the rules. Rather, we tend to rationalize an “occasional” lapse in judgment: we cut switchbacks because walking uphill along those windy trails is too exhausting; we ride out of our own neighborhood through sensitive and closed areas because it's easier than trailering our

bikes to a staging area; we fail to wash off our wheels when we get home because we're too tired, and the ballgame is starting in ten minutes. These events, in multitude, will surely destroy our freedom and privilege to recreate in the forest.

"It's simply irresponsible for us to ride off of designated routes," explains Russ

Ehnes, Executive Director for the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC). "Going off-trail can negatively impact sensitive soils and sensitive plants and animals. People need to trailer their vehicles to a staging area, even if the trail is only a few hundred yards from their house."



(Graphic showing habitat fragmentation caused by an altered landscape – courtesy of Chelsea Vollmer, USFS.)

Have you ever wondered how we found our ways to the places in which we live? Have you wondered about the layout of roads, and why they exist in one place instead of another? It's quite simple: Before supermarkets with readily available food and sophisticated road engineering existed, humans followed game trails. Over time, those well-trodden trails became paths, the paths became roads, and the roads became highways. In the 18th century, Daniel Boone led families through the Cumberland Gap along the Wilderness Road (an old buffalo path) which opened up the flow of settlers into the American West. In much the same way, taking your bike (4X4, horse, boots, etc.) off trail will leave a visible sign of someone passing that way. Another person following behind may see the trail, and follow. Soon, there is a new path through the forest where



one was not intended. As more people use the path, it will grow wider and more prevalent, altering the landscape in a way that may be detrimental to the environment.

(Different trails yield different opportunities. Here, hiker Mike Dufilho searches the trees for a woodpecker alongside a hiking trail in the San Geronio Wilderness area.)

"Everyone has their own reason to visit the San Bernardino National Forest," says Cook-Fischer. "If we're going to allow people to meet their expectations, we have to respect other users and the rules. That's not to say that the rules are set in stone; there are venues

where you can express your views."

We all have our own opinions of where we should and should not be allowed to recreate on our public lands. After all, we (as the public) own these lands. Luckily, the USFS gives us the opportunity to express our views regarding land use at public meetings such as those focusing on route designation or revising the Forest Use plan. This is an excellent venue for us as outdoor enthusiasts, to help shape the trail regulations affecting our public lands. We owe it to ourselves and our chosen sports to attend these meetings and make our opinions known, rather than ignoring the rules, and risk losing our recreational opportunities.

Finally, I encourage everyone reading this to do their part to help maintain our privilege to recreate on our public lands. You can do this by simply recreating in a responsible manner, or – if you want to be more actively involved – by joining one of the volunteer organizations on the forest such as the San Bernardino National Forest Association, Adopt-A-Trail clubs, or even by volunteering directly with the US Forest Service. These are *our* lands, after all; let's take care of them.

Benjamin vonDielingen works as the OHV Education Outreach Coordinator for the San Bernardino National Forest Association. He can be contacted at (909) 382-2872 or bvondielingen@fs.fed.us. The OHV Education Outreach Program is one of 6 programs managed by the San Bernardino National Forest Association. The mission of the program is to deliver an outreach program emphasizing ethics, safety, and interpretive educational information to all public land visitors and community residents, with a primary focus on motorized recreation. The San Bernardino National Forest Association exists to support the USDA Forest Service in carrying out its mission of caring for the land and serving people, and to bring people, partners and funding resources to important forest projects. SBNFA is a 501 (c) 3, nonprofit organization primarily funded by grants, sponsorships and private donations.