

How to keep your trails open

You can make all the difference. By Chris Horgan

It saddened me to read the account of the forced decommissioning of a Forest Service road in Northern California "Your Trail Next" by Sylvia Milligan (*RANGE*, Spring 2005). Apparently the old road was serving as a trail while quietly returning to a natural state. It was being enjoyed by the public and the closure prevented that use. Trees were unnecessarily cut, a firebreak was lost and sections of trail bulldozed, causing damage to the watershed.

From the article it appears that no one contacted the local Forest Service office about this.

Here are some suggestions that you can use to help keep your trails open:

QUESTION TRAIL CLOSURES

Ask under what authority a trail has been closed. Ask to see the documents supporting the closure. Ask to see the public process documents that reviewed the closure options. Forest Service should have posted NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) notices in the papers and had a public comment period.

In many cases where trails are closed you can get them reopened just by asking. It is illegal to close a trail without the above unless it is a temporary closure for health, safety or resource damage.

If you get no response when you ask questions or feel you are being trivialized, then write a letter to your district ranger and politely ask the same questions. If you get no response or an inadequate response, write a letter to your Forest Supervisor. If that does not work, write to the regional office. If that does not work, contact elected officials, usually your senator.

MEET WITH LAND MANAGERS

Get to know the managers at your local Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management offices. These are the folks who make decisions on what roads and trails to keep open. They are far more likely to keep a trail open if they know you are using it and why. Perhaps it is part of a loop, or goes to a point of inter-

est, or just is a great trail.

Get to know your District Ranger who makes the final decision, but often is too busy to be able to get out in the field and see things for himself. Be his eyes and let him know what you are seeing on the trails and why the trails need to be kept open.

JOIN A CLUB OR FORM A CLUB

You have a greater chance of being heard if you are a group instead of one person. You can bring to the table many positives in terms of added volunteer hours and public cooper-



PHOTO COURTESY STEWARDS OF THE SEQUOIA

Stewards of the Sequoia questioned the closure of the trail pictured here along with eight other closed trails in Sequoia National Forest. Working in conjunction with the Forest Service, all the trails were reopened when it was found they had been closed without proper process and for no justifiable reasons.

ation. However, some land managers may be skeptical and not very responsive to your needs. Do not let it stop you. Keep trying. If you are not in a club you can still follow these suggestions. One person speaking up in your area can make a big difference.

JOIN AN ORGANIZATION

This will increase the clout of these groups and that means keeping trails open.

In California, a good group to join would be CORVA (California Off Road Vehicle Association). Nationally, the Blue Ribbon Coalition is a good multi use group.

ADOPT A TRAIL

Organize volunteer days through your local land manager on the trails you enjoy. Make sure that all of your volunteer trail work hours are documented by your land manager and appear in the official year-end reports giving your group credit.

Better yet, adopt a trail. This normally entails doing two days of trail work on it each year with your group. Make sure you get credit for this in the year-end report. This not only keeps the trail in better condition, but is documented proof that you care about a trail. This makes it far less likely that the trail will be closed.

MEET ELECTED OFFICIALS

Meet your elected officials and let them know that you care about your trails and that they should too if they want your vote. Tell them about yourself, your family and your recreation. Tell them of the need to keep trails open and that opening more trails will reduce the impact on the land and provide recreation for families and children. Tell them if you have a good working relationship with your land managers. If not, tell them your land manager is unresponsive and you want your elected official to look into trail closures or blocking of volunteer efforts. The squeaky wheel often gets the grease.

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This may seem like a lot of work to keep your trails open. Regrettably, it is necessary because there are some people who are actively working to close our trails to multiple use. Do not get discouraged. Just do what you can to keep your trails open and speak up when there are closures or proposed closures. You can make all the difference.

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