

(received via e-mail)

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Subject: Support for the Rubicon Trail Cleanup and Abatement Order

I live seasonally in the Georgetown area working in the forest as a wildlife biologist. It seems everywhere I go in the forest I see impacts from off road vehicles. Hiking trails that are designated as non-motorized are continually getting abused and degraded by irresponsible OHV enthusiasts. Trails have become eroded, garbage and human waste have been improperly disposed of, trail signs have been defaced or destroyed, and the pleasure of quiet solitude in the forest has become disrupted to an intolerable level. This situation is not limited to the Rubicon Trail, but rather is a pervasive situation that exists throughout Eldorado National Forest. Trails and sensitive habitat are becoming increasingly destroyed. New, unauthorized OHV routes have mushroomed especially in the Rubicon Trail area, destroying fragile habitat. Something drastic needs to be done to change this situation.

I understand the value of the Jeepers Jamboree and other forms of mechanized recreation to the Georgetown area economy. It brings in a lot of money to the communities in the area. However, something needs to be done to change the destructive "recreational" activities that occur along routes such as the Rubicon Trail. Obviously self regulation is not working. Volunteer efforts to clean up after the Jeepers are inadequate. Their garbage is not limited to the Rubicon trail but is often found in great heaps all along the way to Loon Lake, wherever there is a spur road to turn off on and party. Off road vehicle use needs to be drastically cut back on the Rubicon Trail. A quota system similar to those employed for wilderness access or river rafting in some areas may likely be the best way to limit impacts while still allowing some vehicular use. It is a sensible compromise. Make them pay for off road access so funds can be generated to repair and maintain the trail. Additionally, there needs to be a greater law enforcement presence in areas used by both motorized and non-motorized users. It is pretty rare to find rangers along trails. Designated campsites near areas abused by off roaders are often staffed by concessionaires with no law enforcement authority. Fines for illegal use and illegal dumping need to be heavy. Permanent, heavy duty, destruction resistant signs need to be erected at all trail heads and many trail junctions stipulating what recreational travel uses are permitted and which are prohibited. Substantial barriers need to be erected to dissuade OHV users from utilizing areas that are off limits to their use.

Personally, I would not shed tear if off roaders were banned all together, but I can co-exist with them if they begin to act responsibly and respect the limits imposed on OHV use.

It is my hope that these suggestions are implemented as a result of the Cleanup and Abatement Order issued on January 23, 2009 by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board to the El Dorado County Department of Transportation.

I wish to express my support for the draft Cleanup and Abatement Order issued on January 23, 2009 by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board to the El Dorado County Department of Transportation. I am concerned about the destructive and unchecked off-road vehicle use resulting in ongoing resource damage on the Rubicon Trail and throughout the Eldorado National Forest. The Board must act to stop increased erosion, soil compaction, and damage to plants and animals. I support the Regional Board's effort to prevent this situation from worsening even further and believe that such actions are long overdue.

If adopted, the order would be a positive first step in addressing the off-road vehicle use that is degrading water quality in the area and threatening both human and environmental health, including the destruction of rare riparian habitat. A move to prevent these impacts is especially important because the lands surrounding the Rubicon include many national forest lands -- lands that belong to the public and make up our national heritage. These areas are being irreparably damaged by off-roaders who refuse to stay on the trail and the failure of the Forest Service to implement and enforce strong regulations.

I support the adoption of the Order and ask that its adoption be complemented by closure of the Rubicon Trail until such time as a full environmental review can be conducted and appropriate measures are taken to minimize impacts from future motorized use of the trail, if such use must occur. Even if the Regional Board determines that complete trail closure is not necessary at this time, at minimum the trail should be closed to all wet season use and any ongoing use should be limited to street legal vehicles in order to minimize erosion and subsequent waterway sedimentation. Wet season use of these fragile areas is particularly damaging and contributes heavily to the sediment discharge and non-street-legal vehicles tend to cause greater damage than street legal vehicles. These important interim measures will have immediate and noticeable benefits to the ecosystem and the water quality.

Off-road groups argue that they can police themselves and that a formal order is unnecessary because the environmental impacts of off-road vehicles can be mitigated by volunteer efforts. Efforts by volunteers to pick up their own trash are well-intentioned; however, these efforts cannot solve the problems caused by inappropriate use. Furthermore, self-policing and volunteer efforts have proven largely ineffective in preventing environmental damage and illegal behavior.

I commend the Regional Board and staff for your excellent assessment of the impacts on the Rubicon from off-road vehicle use and initiating the process needed to stop this damage from continuing. I also applaud you for finally taking action -- action that is long overdue -- and ask that the draft Cleanup and Abatement Order be formally adopted.

William Berigan