

From: "Randy Burleson"
To: "Sue McConnell" <smcconnell@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 4/1/2009 5:28 AM
Subject: Comments in Context, and Commitment to Cooperate
Attachments: ole0.bmp

Ms. McConnell,

I fully understand that the Regional Water Quality Board needs to take complaints and reports seriously, but please consider the sources of these comments and the agendas behind them. Radical anti-OHV activists have been actively targeting Rubicon for years, refusing to share the Winter Wonderland around Loon Lake in the winter... and it truly is a Winter Wonderland for ALL users, whether they run on fuel or granola! More OHV-ers run the trail in the summer season, but year-round, this is a fabulous recreational resource!

I look forward to working with the Regional Water Quality Board to provide context and information for the more than 20 miles of granite and forest trail that is the Rubicon Trail. With almost half of the trail on solid granite, the trail is sturdy and robust, but there are indeed short sections of the trail which need work - and this is exactly why volunteers and businessmen have been working with agencies to mitigate trail concerns for many decades. Before 2000, these volunteers were generally affiliated with an organization like Jeep Jamboree or Jeep Jamboree, USA, but some were affiliated with private property owners or user groups like the California Association of 4WD Clubs. Since 2001, individuals, club members, businesses, and private property owners have banded together under the lead of Friends of the Rubicon or the Rubicon Trail Foundation, working even more closely with the agencies to improve the trail. Our commitment shows in the tens of thousands of hours of volunteer dollars and hours that are spent on the trail each summer.

It is simple to select the worst pictures from thousands of frames, to take them out of context, and to add deceiving captions - but harder to zoom out and look at the big picture of the trail, and take these occasional reports from a handful of persistent anti-OHV activists in appropriate context, but this is what we need most from the Regional Water Quality Board. We need you to tour the whole trail on the ground and see the full context with your own eyes, and we need you to follow up with agency partners like County of El Dorado to see the sweeping, obvious trends of improvement. A fair bit of data has been gathered over the years, and carefully selecting a subset of it can paint an ugly picture, even though when broadly overviewed it, it is tough NOT to see the multiple and various improvements of conditions on and near the Rubicon.

We need to work together as partners to work through misinformation to get to the actual facts in their actual context. I am entirely certain that if we get a fair review of the facts, we'll have another hundred years of responsible motorized access to the Rubicon Trail - we have nothing to hide, since the Rubicon is much improved, is undergoing further improvements, has even more improvements in plan, and we have a great working relationship with multiple partner agencies to continue to make it even better. The obvious truth is that restricting Rubicon will have the effect of restricting volunteers, which will delay improvements... and that this would be a bad for the resource and potentially damaging for the waters of the state. Let's work together to allow continued responsible use, without loading up users or agencies with onerous and unnecessary restrictions and requirements.

Rubicon is a century-plus old highway over the Sierra Nevada, and while it compares perhaps easily to Henness Pass and Mormon Emigrant Trail, it is more rugged than either, and is open for year-round travel more similar to US-50 or I-80 (but without the snow removal!). This trail is an important part of California's historic and social context, and is well worth the fight to keep open as it has always been, as a rustic, year-round recreational challenge, and a gateway to the crest of the Sierra.

I believe that the Rubicon County Road is being operated above the standard of similar county and forest roads, and I look forward to helping correct any misunderstanding that the Regional Water Quality Board may have otherwise.

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Randy Burleson
President, Rubicon Trail Foundation