

(received via e-mail)

From: Sheila Whitmore
To: <smcconnell@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 3/2/2009 12:06 PM
Subject: Support for the Rubicon Trail Cleanup and Abatement Order

I am writing 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 Eldorado County Department of Transportation.

I have been a seasonal resident of the Georgetown area for several years. I realize the importance of the Jeeping events to the area (revenue for local merchants, restaurants, etc), but I also see first hand a lot of the harm on our public land and watersheds that is done by the off roaders, both on the trail and off the trail. I see not just the litter and erosion near their trails and runways, but throughout the entire forest. It is evident especially during the Jeepers Jamboree that many are disrespectful and do not clean up after themselves and do not follow laws. I realize that this may be a small percentage of them, but the destruction by just a few can have long reaching effects on the fragile ecosystem that makes up the Rubicon divide. I am pretty sure that the USFS doesn't have the funding to be policing the entire area throughout the season, and the "self-policing" by the off-road groups does not seem to be effective.

I am concerned about the destructive and unchecked off-road vehicle use resulting in ongoing resource damage on the Rubicon Trail. 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 impact 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.

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.

Sheila Whitmore