



Groups appeal Carson Forest travel plan

By J.R. Logan

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A coalition of environmentalists and sportsmen groups say unauthorized routes created by off-road vehicles in the Carson National Forest should not be added to the forest's inventory of official roads.

The assertion is part of an appeal filed earlier this month by the coalition opposing parts of a travel management plan issued by the Carson National Forest for the Camino Real District at the end of October.

The plan closes more than 157 square-miles of forest that was open to motor vehicle use, while adopting less than 5 miles of "user-created" routes as official forest roads.

The appeal filed by the various groups took issue with the addition of unofficial roads, arguing that the roads were not designed to prevent erosion or avoid impacting wildlife.

The appeal also accuses the Forest Service of showing favoritism to a small ski area in the Camino Real District. "The [Forest Service's] seeming bias towards the economic interests of Sipapu Ski Area and Summer Resort over clean water, wildlife habitat, and quiet recreation activities is not justified," the appeal reads.

Representatives of Sipapu expressed dissatisfaction when the plan was unveiled this fall, noting that the closure of certain routes would have a negative impact on their business.

The appeal was submitted by WildEarth Guardians of Santa Fe, with the Center for Biological Diversity, NM Sportsmen, Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico, and Carol Johnson, a member of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance Board of Directors and a former member of the New Mexico Off Highway Motor Vehicle Board.

Carson National Forest spokesperson Kathy DeLucas wrote in an email that forest supervisor Buck Sánchez will now have an informal meeting with the appellant. Three things could come from that meeting: The Forest could withdraw the decision; the appellant could withdraw their appeal; or the appellant could say there's no way we can agree so we want to move forward with the formal appeal process.

DeLucas said the formal appeal process then would go to the regional office in Albuquerque, and the Regional Forester decides how to move forward from there.

DeLucas said the WildEarth Guardians appeal was the only appeal the forest had received as of last week.