

Roads and wilderness

Public Forum Letter
Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 06/30/2007 11:23:27 AM MDT

The debate over wilderness designation can seem complicated, especially when RS 2477 road claims are raised as an issue.

The simple explanation, as described in a roundabout way by Kane County Commissioner Mark Habbeshaw (Opinion, June 24), is that some folks in southern Utah are opposed to wilderness, and to prevent wilderness areas from being designated they are trying to claim that "roads" exist everywhere. The problem is that some of the "roads" they say exist aren't roads at all. They are faint tracks in the desert or areas at the bottom of washes that can be traveled only by a four-wheel-drive vehicle. But they're not roads in the sense that they are maintained or frequently traveled. This is a convoluted and, as Mr. Habbeshaw correctly points out, expensive effort to stop wilderness designation, and Utah's taxpayers are footing the bill.

Furthermore, while we are endlessly quibbling about what is and isn't a road, the proliferation of unregulated off-road vehicle use across public lands is *creating* roads. If we think wilderness-quality land in Utah is worth protecting, we need to decide that now, before the land becomes riddled with ORV trails that turn into roads, and our amazing wild lands are lost forever to vehicles and development.

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