

Baltimore Sun

Federal rules limit expansion of roads

No editor from The Sun contacted the Department of the Interior before the editorial "Parting shot" appeared March 24. The editorial apparently overlooked the fact that the guidelines in the memorandum issued by Interior Secretary Gale A. Norton relate to the management of existing roads, not to "upgrades" of paths and trails into "major thoroughfares." Far from providing "implicit assurance" that such upgrades could occur, Ms. Norton explicitly stated just the opposite, declaring that the law "does not give either the holder of a right-of-way or the department authority to expand the scope of a right-of-way beyond the established right-of-way as of the date of repeal of the statute or reservation for public use of the lands."

The Sun's editorial board may wish Congress had not granted the public these rights. But neither it nor the secretary has the authority to ignore the laws passed by Congress and interpreted by the courts.

However, the secretary did direct the department to be sure its administration of these laws "upholds the department's right and obligation to protect the underlying and surrounding federal lands it manages, paying particular attention to the effects of right-of-way use in sensitive areas such as units of the National Park System, units of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and congressionally designated wilderness or wilderness study areas."

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