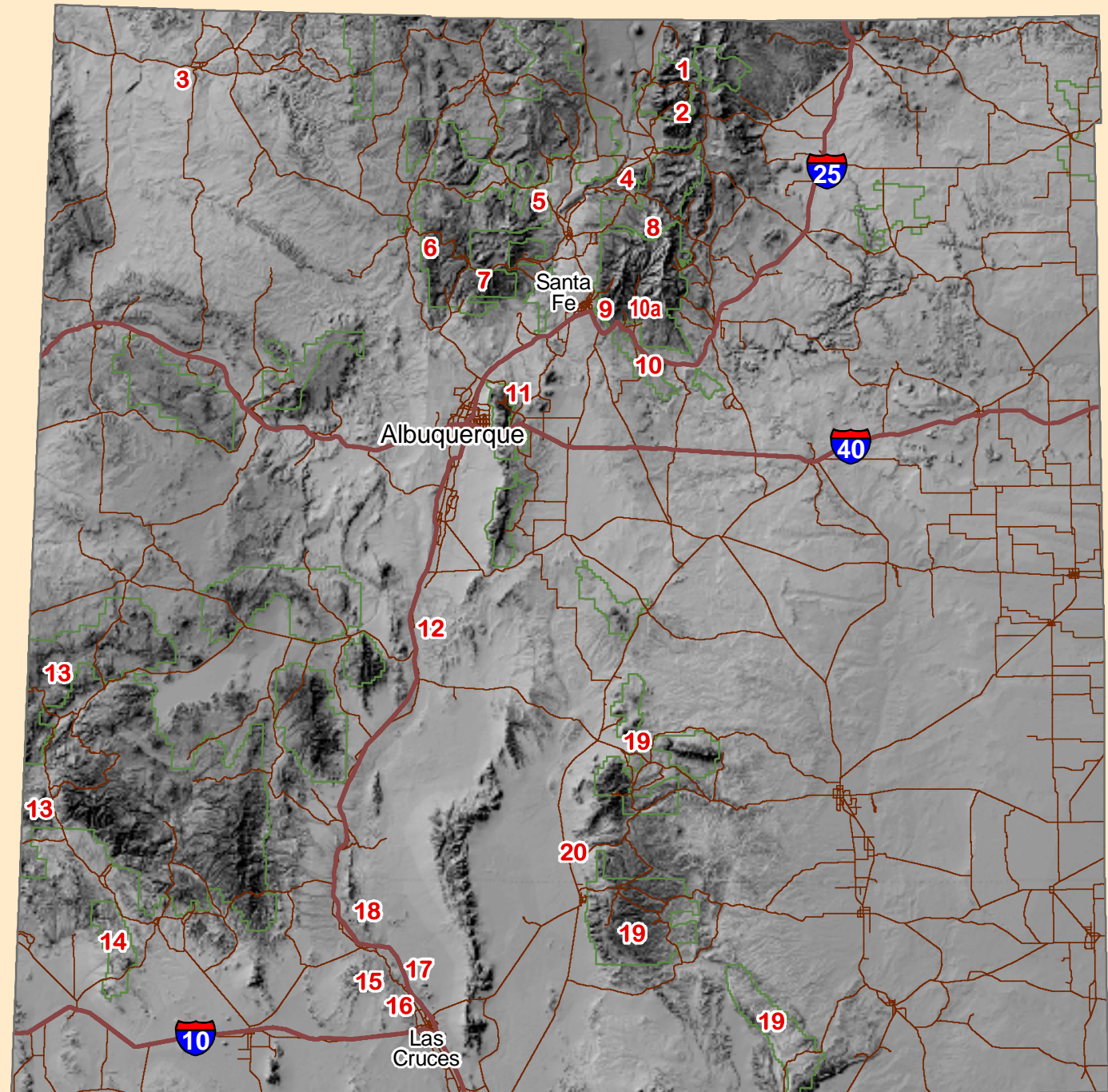
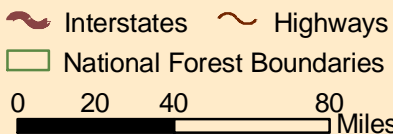


# OFF-ROAD VEHICLE DESTRUCTION ZONES



Shaded relief: Kurt A. Menke, GISP, BirdsEyeViewGIS.com  
 Cartography: Michael Scialdone, Dec 10, 2007

## LEGEND



- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Red River                       | 11. Sandia Mountains                 |
| 2. Middle Fork Road                | 12. Quebradas                        |
| 3. Farmington area                 | 13. San Francisco River (2 sections) |
| 4. El Palacio                      | 14. Burro Mountains                  |
| 5. Northern Jemez Mountains        | 15. Broad Canyon                     |
| 6. San Pedro Parks Wilderness area | 16. Robledo Mountains                |
| 7. Southern Jemez Mountains        | 17. Doña Ana Mountains               |
| 8. Northern Pecos Wilderness       | 18. Caballo Mountains                |
| 9. Cañada del Los Alamos           | 19. Lincoln National Forest          |
| 10. Glorieta Mesa & La Cueva (10a) | 20. Coyote Canyon                    |

# The Off-Road Vehicle Epidemic

Since the 70's, off-road vehicle use has been an increasing problem on our public lands. Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck summed up the environmental consequences in 1999: "New and less expensive technology allows people to get to areas previously unreachable to motorized vehicles... In the process, unplanned and unauthorized roads and trails are created, sensitive wildlife habitat is disrupted, erosion is accelerated, and water quality is degraded."



Along with environmental degradation, ORV use conflicts with other users of public lands. The noise, dust, and fumes of ORVs are inherently at odds with quiet recreationists and local private landowners. Litter is more abundant where ORVs travel. ORV use endangers other public land users.

In New Mexico, the ORV epidemic is spreading to all corners of the state. Not too long ago it was concentrated in places like Red River, but now the rumbling motors and blighted hillsides that go with ORV use are everywhere. This document highlights known problem areas. If you know of an ORV destruction zone not listed here, please contact Michael Scialdone with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance at 505-843-8696, or e-mail [scial@nmwild.org](mailto:scial@nmwild.org). Digital photos that you can share are especially helpful.



# STOPPING OFF-ROAD VEHICLE ABUSE! *HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED.*

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## The National Forest Travel Management Rule

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In response to the growing off-road vehicle (ORV) problem in our National Forests, the Forest Service put forth the Travel Management Rule (TMR). The TMR is a public process that will determine which routes and trails ORVs will be allowed to use in our National Forests. These routes will be published on a Motor Vehicle Use Map readily available to the public. The process will bring uniformity to National Forest rules for ORVs, which can vary widely from one National Forest to another. The map will replace the current system of "Open Unless Posted Closed" to one where ORV users will have to educate themselves on which trails are open. With minor exceptions, cross-country travel will be banned.

Each National Forest in New Mexico (Carson, Cibola, Gila, Lincoln, and Santa Fe) will go through its own TMR process. Check their websites for current information (type in the name of your local/favorite National Forest and 'travel management rule' to any search engine and the page should come up readily).

To get involved contact Michael Scialdone by phone at 505-843-8696 or email: [scial@nmwild.org](mailto:scial@nmwild.org).



## 1) Red River

This area has long been a recreation destination in New Mexico. In recent years, increased ORV use has resulted in resource damage, disturbance of quiet recreationists, and significant conflict with local homeowners. Recently, the conservation group Amigos Bravos received money through a Clean Water Act grant to work on restoration of the Upper Red River Watershed. A crucial piece of this work is closing off illegal routes to lower sedimentation run-off in the river. The grant is also used to pay for a Forest Service employee, who patrols the area, enforces existing regulations during the summer season, and educates motorized users on where they are allowed. Although it is a large area to cover, having the Forest Service's presence has made a huge difference in making sure that the regulations are followed. This is being hailed as a working example for other public lands agencies.



*Ted Wimberly's stick marks where the plane of the Middle Fork Road was before ATV use destroyed the road. Repairing this kind of damage is very expensive.*

## 2) Middle Fork Road

Middle Fork is an old road that leads to a beautiful alpine lake. For decades, people have enjoyed driving to this lake for picnics, fishing and camping. ATVs changed the nature of the visit to this area, as Middle Fork suffered from added speed, cut corners, and a significant increase in use. Consequently, this caused massive erosion and rutting of the road, making it a public safety hazard. It was eventually closed to motorized access. Thousands of dollars have been spent to fix the road, but it remains off-limits as a plan is developed for its use. Strong pressure is being put on the Forest Service to re-open the road to ATVs even though this would clearly create the same problems again.

### 3) Farmington

Driving up the escarpment of Highway 371 as it heads south from Farmington, one is treated to views of the San Juan Mountains towering over the San Juan River. In contrast to this natural beauty, the dunes show ORV tracks – effects of an “ORV sacrifice zone.” Sand dunes are a unique ecosystem unto themselves, but unfortunately they are magnets for ORV use. In many areas that have been hit hard by ORVs, the managing agency simply declares the land open for use in hopes that by giving them a destination, other areas will be left alone.



*Besides the visual blight, ORVs are destroying the vegetation that is anchoring this sand dune. This will increase particulate pollution in the area.*



*Image not of El Palacio*

### 4) El Palacio

Dubbed “Fun Valley,” this area of volcanic badlands has become a target for ORV users. Its nickname denotes a free-for-all attitude and the numerous scarred hillsides attest to this. Through its Resource Management Plan Revision, the Taos District of the BLM is trying to reign in these abuses and limit use to designated routes. Education and enforcement will be key to making this plan work, but funding for such efforts is elusive at best.

### 5) Northern Jemez Mountains

The stretch of Highway 84 from Española to Abiquiu has become rather famous for the ATV scarred hills that blight the view. Responding to complaints, the Forest Service has put through a Closure Order. They have increased signage and installed gates. However, without the funds to properly patrol the area, the Forest Service has not completely closed off the area, fearing that the gates will be destroyed.

*Right: This is one of many scarred hillsides along Hwy 84. In response to this senseless destruction, the Forest Service has a closure order in place, but lack the budget to enforce it.*



## 6) San Pedro Parks Wilderness Area

This area has become a favorite for ATV users, inevitably displacing other quiet users of the National Forest. Wilderness trespass is an on-going problem.



## 7) Southern Jemez Mountains

Dirt bikers have created numerous unauthorized trails with no regard to resource issues or consideration of private property owners. Locals who have tried to put up signs and close off illegal routes have been threatened and harassed. Since law enforcement is lacking, renegade dirt bikers are further emboldened. Additionally, streams in the area have populations of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout, a species the state is actively trying to preserve and re-introduce. Sediment run-off from badly carved and unmaintained dirt bike trails is hindering the success of this species.



*With their knobby tires designed to grip and their powerful engines, dirt bikes can quickly destroy a trail.*



## 8) Northern Pecos Wilderness

Despite regulations closing routes to motorized use, ORVs commonly prowl the Pecos Wilderness. The Forest Service has tried to gate these illegal routes, but lack the budget needed, and as a result, have to rely on volunteer service projects to block them. A group of dirt bikers was recently photographed near Jicarita Peak in the Pecos Wilderness. Not having to worry about law enforcement, they rode directly past a “No Motor Vehicles” sign. They had planned to travel across the Wilderness, but turned around when some horse riders approached and talked to them.



*Above: Dirt bikes in the Pecos Wilderness. Left: Volunteers assist the Forest Service by installing guard rail to keep ORVs off illegal routes.*



## 9) Cañada del Los Alamos

Behind this small community, ATV users are over-running the National Forest. Residents have organized and declared to the Forest Service their want for the area to be closed to all ORV use. Through the Travel Management Rule, the Forest Service has responded by proposing to close the spider web of ORV routes, and only leave one main road open to a trailhead. The recurring problem of lack of money for enforcement and closures may make this merely a paper exercise.

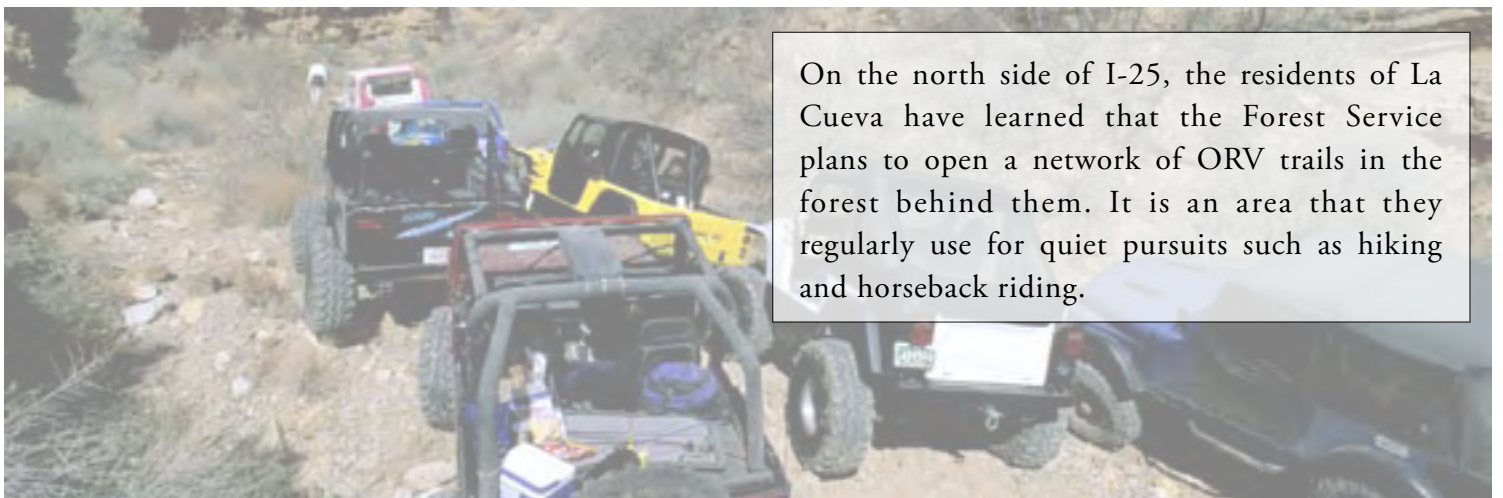
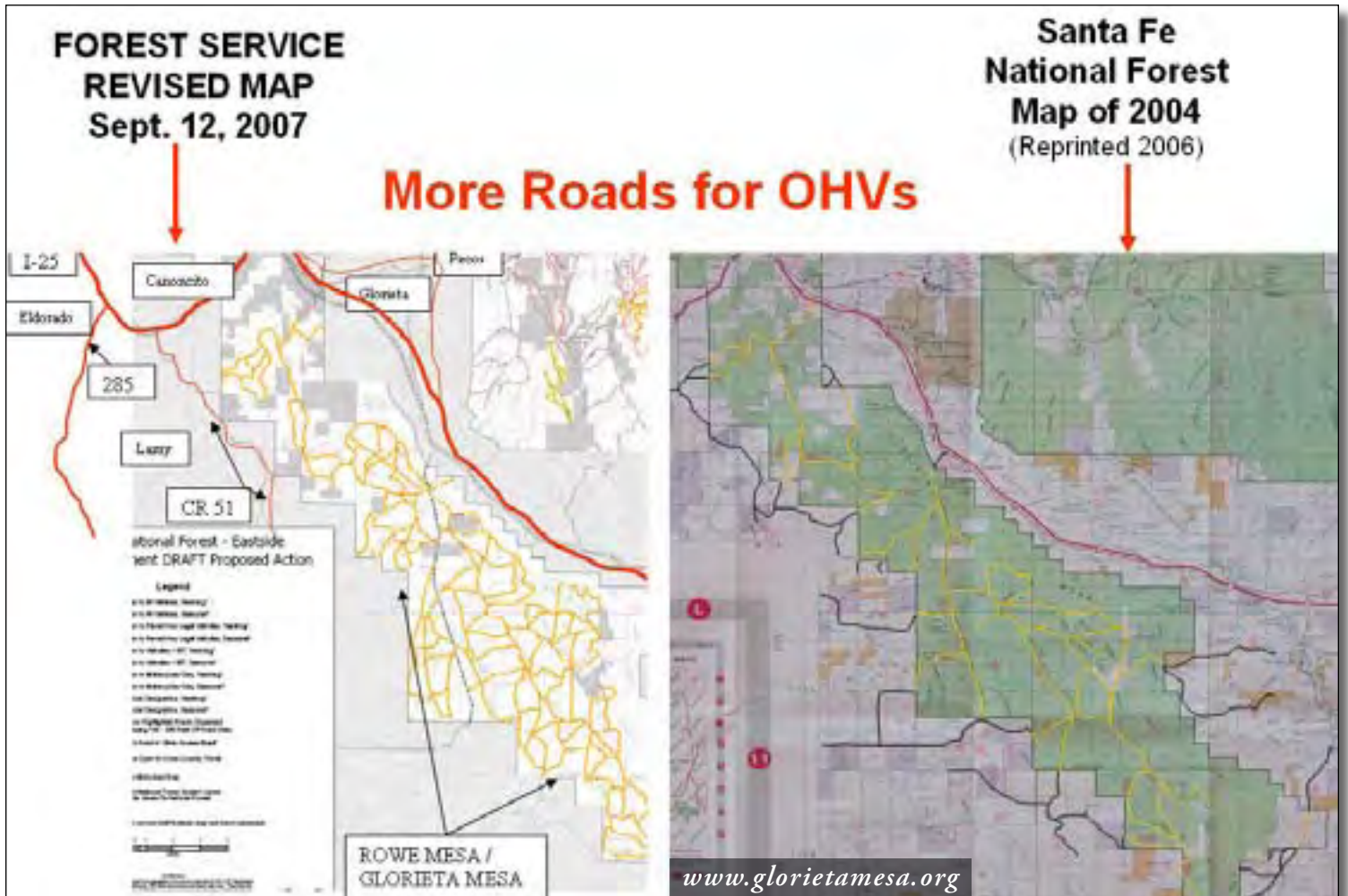


*Right: Berms like this are ineffective against ATV use. Illegal use continues.*

## 10) Glorieta Mesa — 10a) La Cueva

This mesa is part of a generally undeveloped landscape that connects the Sandia Mountains through the Galisteo Basin to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Through the Travel Management Rule, the Forest Service is turning this beautiful, quiet mesa into an ORV playground. The mesa has a high road density and the current proposal

is to leave most of it open – a small step forward from the original plan, which left the entire mesa open to cross-country travel! Local citizens concerned about what living near an “ORV playground” would do to their qualities of life have begun organizing to fight the current proposal. The map here is from their website.



On the north side of I-25, the residents of La Cueva have learned that the Forest Service plans to open a network of ORV trails in the forest behind them. It is an area that they regularly use for quiet pursuits such as hiking and horseback riding.

## 11) Sandia Mountains

On the northeast side of the Sandia range, one finds canyons that surprise visitors with their wildlife, springs, and riparian vegetation. This area is a natural corridor for wildlife. From here they can head east to the protected Ortiz Mountains and then north to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Rock-crawlers (modified ORVs) have taken to making these canyons a play area. Through the Travel Management Rule, the Cibola National Forest wisely chose to leave these canyons closed to motorized use. How the Forest Service will enforce this closure is yet to be seen.



*Even the hearty juniper tree, able to root directly into rock, couldn't withstand the use of rock crawlers once they 'discovered' the area.*

## 12) Quebradas

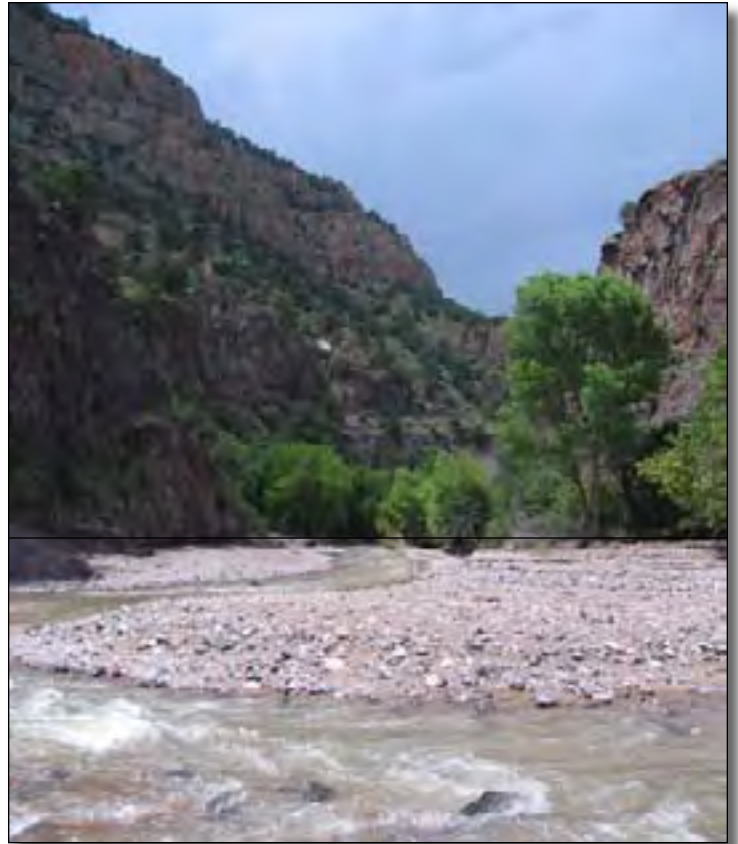
This area, near Socorro, is a series of colorful sandstone and limestone mesas with a back-county scenic byway crossing through it. Unfortunately, ATVs took over an area known as Gordy's Hill. Through their Resource Management Plan Revision, the Socorro BLM is making this a sanctioned ORV play area. They have made ORV riders part of the process, having them GPS every trail and help make the decisions about which routes to keep open. This "buy-in" will hopefully have the effect of keeping ORVs in their designated areas and policing themselves. This is a positive and creative way to deal with ORVs, but the challenge of enforcement for those who stray the course remains an issue.

*In the foreground, a "Road Closed" sign is a small deterrent in the effort to curtail unauthorized creation of pioneered routes.*



### 13) San Francisco River

This amazing “little” river carves some extraordinary canyons as it winds along the western border of New Mexico. It is a viable riparian area in an otherwise arid environment, and endangered species like the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher live in the river corridor. Despite this, ORVs declared the river bottom their own, though their careless use. Partial closures by the Gila National Forest have not fully worked to protect the river bottom.



*Above: Wildlife thrives because of the San Francisco River in this desert environment. Left: ORVs running through this space destroy riparian vegetation.*

### 14) Burro Mountains

This small mountain range near Silver City is criss-crossed with ORV trails. ORV users, especially those on ATVs, have blazed paths down canyons leading to the Gila River. Springs in these canyon bottoms have been trampled and local landowners have complained of noise pollution. A proposed ATV Jamboree occurred in the Burro Mountains despite hundreds of protests.



## 15) Broad Canyon

This is the major drainage for the Sierra de las Uvas; it is rich with archeological and biological resources. For ORVs, the canyon bottom is a place to test man and machine. Conservationists have rallied to get Broad Canyon designated as Wilderness to send a clear message that this should remain a place of natural beauty.



*Rock-Crawlers that can navigate this type of terrain leave considerable physical and ecological footprints.*

## 16) Robledo Mountain

The Las Cruces BLM worked with ORV users to develop a series of canyons of varying technical difficulties for their exclusive use. Not content with this, the ORV users lost their case when their claim that the route had been in use for over 100 years was unsubstantiated. They continue to fight any proposed conservation efforts, including a National Monument designation for unique paleontological resources and proposals to designate Wilderness (even though this would exclude their official area).



*Despite efforts by the Las Cruces BLM to accommodate, ORV users pioneer illegal routes across the landscape near Robledo Mountain.*

## 17) Doña Ana Mountains

ORV scars mar what is otherwise a scenic view along I-25 north of Las Cruces. The land is owned by New Mexico State University, which is unable to keep ORVs out of the area. The university has discussed trading the land with the BLM, which has the expertise needed to manage ORV recreation. However, the BLM lacks the funding required to tackle its current ORV problems. If acquired by the BLM, this issue must be addressed.



## 18) Caballo Mountains

Rugged and remote, this mountain range is increasingly being targeted by ORVs. Not content to stay on the already numerous routes in the range, they are running up canyon bottoms and pioneering routes along ridges. Most of the range is managed by the Las Cruces BLM, which is already stretched thin trying to manage the abundant ORV use in their district.



## 19) Lincoln National Forest

Through its 1988 Resource Management Plan, the Lincoln National Forest wisely put in place a ban on cross-country travel, limiting motorized travel to existing routes. Despite their forward thinking plan, resource damage and conflicts with land owners and quiet users have become commonplace due to the huge increase in ORV use in recent years. The Travel Management Rule will give the Lincoln an opportunity to address these conflicts, but lack of funding for enforcement might hinder their attempt.



*Above: Differential uses create varied problems. Here, motorbikes installed a river crossing intended for a single-track trail, then four-wheeled ATVs bypassed the bridge and are degrading the stream bank. Right: Illegal cross-country travel.*



## 20) Coyote Canyon

The Coyote Hills are just north of Tularosa and the main drainage that carves through them is aptly named Coyote Canyon. Springs keep almost 1½ miles of the canyon bottom wet year round; cattails and willow line a lush riparian zone that stands in contrast to the surrounding Chihuahuan Desert. Unfortunately, a main dirt road runs right up the canyon bottom for its first mile. Where the canyon widens, the road leaves the stream bottom and crosses it intermittently. Instead of following the road, ORVs stay in the stream bottom, trampling the riparian vegetation. This is a clear example of the damage that can be done through careless ORV use.



## Contacts and Resources

If you are having problems with off-road vehicles or for more information on how you can get involved, contact Michael Scialdone at the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance office in Albuquerque at 505-843-8696, or e-mail [scial@nmwild.org](mailto:scial@nmwild.org).

Please visit the following websites:

*<http://www.endangereearth.org/orv>*

*<http://www.wildlandscpr.org>*

*<http://www.nmwild.org/campaigns>*

*[www.glorietamesa.org](http://www.glorietamesa.org)*

*[www.newmexicoplan.org](http://www.newmexicoplan.org)*

For the Travel Management Rule, each National Forest in New Mexico has information on their website:

Carson NF - *[http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel\\_mgmt/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt/index.shtml)*

Cibola NF - *<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/cibola/travel-management/index.shtml>*

Gila NF - *<http://www2.srs.fs.fed.us/r3/gila/travel/>*

Lincoln - *<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/lincoln/projects/TMR/index.shtml>*

Santa Fe - *<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/sfe/travelmgmt/index.html>*

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