



GRAND CANYON
TRUST

Background on Powell Ranger District Motorized Travel Plan



*Casto Canyon and Casto Bluff Roadless Areas and Mt. Dutton,
© Tim Peterson, flown by LightHawk*

The Powell Ranger District of the Dixie National Forest is home to some of southern Utah's most prized elk hunting and iconic scenery like Red Canyon, the Sunset Cliffs, the Paunsaugunt Plateau, Casto Canyon, and Mount Dutton, which was named for USGS surveyor Clarence Dutton and whom Wallace Stegner called, *"the first literary tourist in a country where tourist travel has become the number one business."*

Now, on the doorstep of Bryce Canyon National Park, the Dixie National Forest is proposing to undo much of the good work they accomplished in their 2009 motorized travel plan decision. The 2009 plan took positive steps to protect stunning wilderness-quality roadless areas and high-quality hunting and fishing from the damage done by decades of irresponsible off-road vehicle use. The Powell Ranger District proposes to re-open roads, which in many cases have been closed, blocked, ripped and re-vegetated. That's right - they want to re-build and re-open roads and motorized trails that had been closed following five years of public involvement and careful study.

While the proposed action (PA) would close just over 9 miles of routes, it would open almost 50 miles of routes to all vehicles and an additional 34 miles to ATVs and side-by-side four-wheelers. Of that mileage, the proposed action seeks to open more than 25 miles of routes to motors in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) that have been closed since the 2009 Motorized Travel Plan (MTP) decision was signed.

Worse, the Forest Service wants to reward irresponsible ATV use by opening a user-created route across unstable soils on the side of the Sunset Cliffs and convert the steep, unstable non-motorized Mud Springs trail to an ATV route. They also want to open more of the district's flagship non-motorized trail, the Grand View Trail, to ATVs.

You can help ensure some of southern Utah's most beautiful canyon and mountain scenery and best back-country hunting stays intact by submitting your detailed comments **by February 20th**.

Some route-specific comments to make in your letter:

1.) While we support some of the changes in the proposed action that are resource-related re-routes and legitimate corrections to small errors made in the 2009 MTP, such as making sure routes to overlooks and appropriate dispersed campsites are open, creating new redundant motorized trails and re-opening miles of routes that have been closed, ripped, re-seeded and rehabilitated is irresponsible and threatens the integrity of the 2009 Motorized Travel Plan decision while shortchanging the public's five-year planning and involvement investment in that decision.

2.) Keep roads and trails in the Casto Canyon, Deer Creek, Red Canyon North and Fishhook Inventoried Roadless Areas off limits to motorized use to protect quality deer and elk hunting and the wilderness character of these outstanding areas. Routes that should not be opened in the decision that have been proposed for motorized use are:

- Casto Canyon IRA: PA#s: 2,3,5, 16, 89, 94 (the non-motorized Mud Spring Trail), 159, 182
- Deer Creek IRA: PA#s: 10, 163, 164
- Red Canyon North IRA: PA#: 192 and near the IRA in citizen-proposed wilderness: 29, 115,115.1,115.2
- Fishhook IRA: PA#s: 204, 205, 216

3.) The PA seeks to convert the steep, unstable Mud Springs non-motorized trail to an ATV route (PA# 94). The Rocky Ford ATV trail, already designated, is a better way to get from the Circle Valley to the top of the plateau. The Mud Springs trail must remain a non-motorized trail.

4.) The PA seeks to open part of the non-motorized Grand View Trail (PA #144, from the town of Alton, Utah, to the top of the Sunset Cliffs) to ATV use. No easement currently exists through an active coal mine to access the trail, but ATV users have been riding this route up the side of the Sunset Cliffs illegally across unstable soils for more than a decade. The decision must not reward deviant behavior by opening this route to ATVs.

5.) The PA seeks to open a route through the citizen-proposed Sunset Cliffs Wilderness (PA #215) to construct another trailhead at the Grand View non-motorized trail. The route should remain closed to motorized vehicles, as ample trailheads already exist on the Grand View Trail.

6.) The PA also seeks to open a section of the Grand View Trail in the Fishhook IRA to ATVs (PA#216), an action which would invite further unauthorized ATV incursions on the district's flagship non-motorized trail adjacent to Bryce Canyon National Park. Further incursions into Bryce Canyon National Park should also be avoided by keeping PA#s 204 and 205 closed to motorized use.

7.) The PA seeks to open many routes designed for occasional administrative use to the public. While infrequent administrative use can be appropriate, there is no resource need to invite the

general public to use these routes whenever they like. If a route has a legitimate administrative need (e.g., fire management), it should remain classified that way, not open to unrestricted public use.

8.) Instead of investing limited planning and implementation resources into re-opening routes that have been closed for only six years, the Powell Ranger District should focus its efforts on legitimate corrections to the travel plan to better serve the public. The Forest Service can do so by finishing implementation of the 2009 plan and further managing the limited non-motorized opportunities on the district, paying particular attention to halting unauthorized motorized use on the Grand View Trail.