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The Salt Lake Tribune

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Peace parley: Divergent interests converge in the forest

Tribune Editorial

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The popular notion is that passive-recreation lovers and off-road-vehicle enthusiasts are eternally at odds, like cats and dogs. In that light, a work detail in Millville Canyon near Logan last weekend was a mythbuster.

Assorted gearheads and treehuggers - environmentalists, hunters, horseback riders, birdwatchers, Boy Scouts, backpackers, all-terrain-vehicle riders and four-wheel-drive aficionados - worked side by side in the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest on a restoration project.

To what do we owe this surprise gathering orchestrated by the Bear River Watershed Council? A court order? Nope. It was a voluntary meshing of muscle and meeting of the minds, an acknowledgment that a mutual love of public lands and the great outdoors outweighs the difference of opinion on how those lands should be enjoyed.

It doesn't happen often enough. The animosity that too often lands the opposing interests in court are understandable, and perhaps unavoidable.

While bicyclists, birdwatchers, horseback riders and hikers go about their business unobtrusively, and say they leave nothing but footprints behind, those who take to the forests, deserts and plains on motorized machines disturb the silence and leave unsightly evidence of their passing.

Conversely, those who travel the public lands on their heels instead of wheels have access to every inch of ground and despair to share, to the chagrin of motorized users, who also pay their taxes and stake claim to the land.

The differences of opinion were laid aside last weekend, and the land they all love was the primary beneficiary.

To fight soil erosion and stream sedimentation caused by unauthorized OHV and ATV riding, the group constructed diversion "bars" to channel runoff away from the dirt roads. And to channel riders toward the canyon's 5.5 miles of legal roads and allow the illegal trails a chance to heal, they constructed roadblocks to deny access to the small minority of riders who flout the rules.

ATV and OHV enthusiasts used their vehicles to carry shovels and tools into the canyon, and the assorted groups with divergent interests gathered as one to restore damaged areas and assure, through cooperation and newly forged alliances, future access for all.

It won't signal an end to the conflict. But it's a good start.

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