



Recapture Canyon ATV Trails System Environmental Assessment Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Recapture Canyon ATV Trails Environmental Assessment?

The BLM-Utah Monticello Field Office has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to analyze an application from San Juan County for an ATV right-of-way across public lands in Recapture Canyon. The EA analyzes the ATV ROW proposal's potential impacts to public lands and resources, as well as the impacts of five other alternatives. The BLM has released the assessment for public review and is seeking comments. Public comments on the assessment will be an important part of the BLM's decision making process regarding appropriate access to and use of public lands in the Recapture Canyon area. The public comment period ends October 24, 2016.

What is analyzed in the draft assessment released for public comment?

The assessment examines six alternative courses of action in detail. These alternatives range from granting the county's request for an 11.6-mile motorized-use trail system in the Recapture Canyon area to a "no action" alternative that would limit travel to existing routes in the area with no new right-of-way authorization or trail designation.

In 2007, the BLM closed a portion of Recapture Canyon to motorized use to prevent continued degradation of cultural resources. Why does the assessment consider an alternative that would allow ATV traffic in the canyon?

The 2007 restriction on motorized vehicles was established in response to damage from the unauthorized ATV trail construction and use. The purpose of the restriction was to "protect cultural resources that have been adversely impacted, or are at risk for being adversely impacted." Moving forward, the BLM will consider the impacts of San Juan County's right-of-way application and alternatives as required by NEPA.

What are the six alternatives that are analyzed?

The EA analyzes six alternatives that consider a broad range of possible recreational opportunities, including hiking, mountain biking, off-highway vehicle use, horseback riding and dispersed camping. The analysis considers other issues, including potential impacts of various alternatives to cultural resources and riparian habitat. Some alternatives include issuing a right of way to San Juan County, while others consider giving the BLM the responsibility for constructing, maintaining and monitoring trails. All six of the alternatives can be reviewed in depth online using the BLM's [ePlanning website](#) to access the draft assessment. Table 2.7 (page 51-52) of the EA has a summary of important elements of each alternative. Below is an abbreviated summary of the six alternatives.

- The first alternative is the proposed action, which consists of San Juan County's proposal to create 11.67-mile trail system designated for ATV use. Trails would be open for ATV, hiking, biking and equestrian use.
- A second similar alternative includes a few minor trail realignments to minimize impacts to cultural resources.
- A third alternative considers a 13.75-mile mixed-use trail system for motorized and non-motorized use but does not include a motorized trail in the bottom of Recapture Canyon. Under this mixed-use alternative, biking and equestrian travel would be allowed on portions of trails within the canyon, and hiking permitted throughout.
- A fourth alternative looks at designating 7.5 miles of proposed motorized trail solely on the upland mesa area west of Recapture Canyon, allowing for foot, equestrian travel within the canyon.
- The fifth alternative focuses on restoration of damaged sites and closing and reclaiming routes within the canyon. Access by foot or by horse would be allowed under this fifth alternative, but trails would not be maintained.
- The final alternative is the no-action alternative in which travel restrictions would remain in place, the canyon would be accessible by foot and horseback, and the area would be managed with motorized travel limited to designated routes.

Why has it taken the BLM so long to analyze the county's proposal?

Since the county's first right-of-way application in 2006 there have been revisions to the county proposal, development of a formal "consulting parties" Programmatic Agreement, and a delay while the BLM assessed damages resulting from the 2014 illegal ATV ride into the canyon—all of which has added time to the NEPA process.

What's a Programmatic Agreement?

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires the BLM to invite and consult with interested parties when a proposed project has the potential to negatively impact cultural and historical resources. When a project is particularly complex or the potential effects of a proposed project on resources cannot be fully determined, a Programmatic Agreement may be developed. The Programmatic Agreement identifies the actions that will be taken to meet consultation and compliance responsibilities or it may establish a process for meeting these responsibilities. More information about Programmatic Agreements is available in [The Citizen's Guide to Section 106 Review](#) available from the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation.

Did the May 2014 protest ride in the canyon prompt the BLM to finally complete this EA?

No. The BLM has been working with San Juan County on this proposed project since the county's first application in 2006. After the county revised its application in 2008, the BLM determined that the proposal could have potential adverse effects on cultural resources and initiated consultation, as required by the National Historic Preservation Act. San Juan County participated in this process before amending its application in 2012 to address adverse impacts. The BLM continued work on the proposal in light of the newly amended application before and after the 2014 ride.

Wouldn't allowing mountain bike use in the canyon cause the same kinds of impacts as ATV or motorcycle use?

The draft environmental assessment analyzes a number of potential effects from trail development for different uses. The width of trail required to adequately accommodate a mountain bike is significantly less than that needed for an ATV, and slightly less than a motorcycle. There are additional considerations such as noise and other potential physical disturbance differences associated with ATVs and motorcycles.

Does the draft EA contemplate closing existing routes in or around Recapture Canyon?

Yes. For all of the alternatives being considered, including San Juan County's proposal, there draft EA provides analysis of the potential impacts of closing certain routes and rehabilitating cultural resource sites impacted by existing trails. The draft EA also considers designating new routes in the Recapture Canyon area.

How will the BLM use public comments submitted on the draft environmental assessment?

Public comments will be given careful consideration by the BLM. Substantive comments may result in modifications to the analysis that was presented in the environmental assessment and as a consideration for potential development of a finding of no significant impact. A draft finding of no significant impact has also been prepared for public review.

When will a final decision be issued?

A final decision will be issued after all comments have been evaluated and any necessary adjustments are made and the consultation processes are complete.