

PRESS RELEASE

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Conservation Groups File Lawsuit to Protect National Parks From Harmful Off-Road Vehicle Use

Survey of Parks Reveals Extensive Damage from Off-Road Vehicles, Lack of Funding for Enforcement

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Bluewater Network, a division of Friends of the Earth; the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA); and Wildlands CPR today filed a lawsuit against the National Park Service and the Department of Interior in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., alleging that those agencies have failed in numerous ways to protect the National Park System against the extensive damage caused by all-terrain vehicles and other off-road vehicles in America's national parks.

The plaintiffs met with the Park Service in July 2004 and raised concerns about off-road vehicle damage in the national parks. The agency responded by conducting an internal survey of all national park sites. The 256 responses available to the plaintiffs demonstrate that off-road vehicles are causing widespread damage in America's national parks.

“Despite evidence of damage, the leadership of the National Park Service is simply proposing more studies of the problems caused by off-road vehicles in some parts of the National Park System and has refused to take any action elsewhere,” said Carl Schneebeck, public lands campaign director for Bluewater Network and a former Park Service ranger.

Park managers reported that off-road vehicle use is harming archaeological sites at the Grand Canyon; tearing up hiking/horseback trails at Olympic National Park; crushing animal burrows in Arches and Canyonlands national parks; and facilitating fossil poaching at Badlands National Park, as well as affecting the experiences of other visitors. Park managers at the Appalachian Trail reported that damage from off-road vehicles is the trail's “most pernicious” problem.

“Because of the damage off-road vehicles can cause to the natural wonders of the parks, the law expressly requires the agency to regulate the use of off-road vehicles,” said Robert Rosenbaum of Washington, D.C., law firm Arnold & Porter LLP, counsel for the plaintiffs.

In the Park Service's survey, many park managers reported having insufficient staff to monitor the impact of off-road vehicles on the parks and enforce park regulations.

“Due to lack of funding, many parks are struggling to enforce the rules on the books to protect the treasures in our parks and the safety and experiences of visitors,” said NPCA President Tom Kiernan. “In the meantime, the parks protecting our national heritage are being spoiled.”

Exacerbating this problem, the Department of Interior has proposed a draft revision of the parks' management policies. The draft weakens protections for parks and could lead to increased use of off-

road vehicles. The public can comment on the proposed changes to the Park Service's management policies over the next few months.

“National parks were created 100 years ago as preserves for our national heritage—not as playgrounds for off-road vehicles,” said Wildlands CPR Executive Director Bethanie Walder. “The existing policies to protect our parks must be upheld and enforced.”

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== A fact sheet about the National Park Service's survey of off-road vehicle use in the National Park System, a copy of the complaint, and other information is available online at:

<http://www.bluewaternetnetwork.org/npsorv>

== Preliminary analysis of the Department of Interior's proposed rewrite of the national park management policies is available online at:

http://www.npca.org/policyrewrites/management_policies_factsheet_10_27_05.pdf