

UMPQUA WATERSHEDS
CASCADIA WILDLANDS
WILDLANDS CPR
OREGON WILD
CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

December 7, 2009
For immediate release

Conservation Groups Bring Lawsuit to Protect Roadless Area from Off-Road Vehicles in the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area

Five environmental groups jointly filed a lawsuit today against the United States Forest Service to stop construction of a new road for off-road vehicles (ORVs) in the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area (Oregon Dunes). The lawsuit challenges the Forest Service's approval of the "Riley Ranch Access Project," which involves building a 14- to 24-foot wide motor vehicle route through the heart of both an Inventoried Roadless Area and a section of the Oregon Dunes that has long been closed to motor vehicle use. The groups are particularly concerned that the new road will exacerbate existing problems with unlawful ORV riding within the dunes' unique and highly sensitive habitats.

"The Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area is something to truly behold," says Josh Laughlin of Eugene-based Cascadia Wildlands. "We have a world-class treasure right here in our backyard that is being seriously damaged by reckless and illegal ORV activity. It is time to draw a line in the sand."

"Going to the Oregon Dunes is like stepping into another world," says Francis Eatherington of Roseburg-based Umpqua Watersheds. "Unfortunately, it's becoming rare to experience this incredible place without hearing the constant buzz of engines and seeing tire-tracks driven through sensitive and protected areas. Things have gotten out of hand, and the Forest Service isn't doing anything about it."

The Oregon Dunes is the most extensive and unique expanse of sand dunes along the Pacific Coast in all of North America. The area contains rare geologic features found nowhere else in the world, several "globally significant plant communities," five sensitive plant species, critical habitat for the snowy plover, a threatened shorebird, and amazing opportunities for hikers and bird watchers. The Oregon Dunes was established by an Act of Congress in 1972 for "public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment" and for "the conservation of scenic, scientific, historic, and other values contributing to public enjoyment."

"The Oregon Dunes already contain thousands of acres open to ORVs," says Noah Greenwald, endangered species program director for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Creating a new road in the roadless area is not necessary or in the public interest."

Since 2004, the Forest Service and County Sheriff have documented increasing "lawlessness" and "gang-like mentality" among groups of OHV riders within the Oregon Dunes. The rowdy culture has forced the Forest Service to conclude that it is unsafe for 3 or 4 armed law

enforcement officers, much less unarmed agency employees, to make courtesy or enforcement contacts, even during daylight hours.

"The Forest Service should not expand the motorized trail system unless it is able to protect the globally rare dunes ecosystems from the unlawful ORV use that is already going on," says Doug Heiken of Oregon Wild, "The Forest Service is unable to do their job now, yet they want to grow the problem by expanding the trail system in sensitive areas."

"The Forest Service needs to step up and give these serious issues the attention they deserve," says Sarah Peters of Wildlands CPR. "The Oregon Dunes should not be treated as if it is just for motorized users, but should be managed to preserve and protect wildlife habitat, as well as nonmotorized recreation opportunities."

The parties are represented in the litigation by Susan Jane Brown of the Western Environmental Law Center and Dan Kruse of Cascadia Wildlands.

For more information, contact:

Francis Eatherington, Umpqua Watersheds: (541) 643-1309

Josh Laughlin, Cascadia Wildlands: (541) 434-1463

Sarah Peters, Wildlands CPR: (406) 543-9551

Doug Heiken, Oregon Wild: (541) 344-0675

Noah Greenwald, Center for Biological Diversity: (503) 484-7495

Susan Jane Brown, Western Environmental Law Center: (503) 914-1323