

Recreation Plan for Spruce Mountain

By Larry Hyslop



A designated OHV route leading to Spruce Mountain

Elko County is becoming a focus for OHV use. The Internet carries glowing testimonials about the Spruce Mountain OHV Trail.

In 2002, the Elko Convention and Visitors Authority looked for areas to promote, public land that would draw visitors to Elko County. The next year, a grant from the Nevada State Park Division was used to develop the Spruce Mountain OHV Trail.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) did an Environmental Assessment, which was appealed by four identities, notably the Nevada Department of Wildlife. They were concerned about increased visitation since the mountain is a winter range and migration corridor for mule deer and a summer range for elk. A settlement agreement was reached stating although it is a recreation area, the BLM would continue to manage the area for multi-use, while educating the public about wildlife and cultural sensitivities.

This area, also known as hunting unit 105 and covering 464,000 acres, will become an Extensive Recreation Management Area. It will be managed for a wide variety of recreation opportunities and such management will address concerns such as historical, mining, private land, wildlife, Native American, cultural resources and visitor safety.

A travel network is being developed which will require a change in the Wells Resource Management Plan, created in 1985. It now states that most of the Wells Field Office is “open” to OHV use, meaning that OHV users can go anywhere.

The BLM plans to change the designation, only for the Spruce Mountain area, to “limited.” For reference, a “closed” designation would, of course, mean no OHV use. Limited use can be limited to only existing roads or only designated roads. It can also limit access to seasonal use or administrative use and the type of OHV use.

The BLM’s plan is to limit OHV use to designated roads. The routes inventoried cover almost 1,800 miles and the BLM does not foresee the need to close any roads. No changes will be made until an exhaustive public review and comment period. After meeting with the public, their concerns may end up with a few being closed. Some areas may need an OHV type

limitation. There will probably be some seasonal use limitations and perhaps administrative use, for example if a rancher needs access to a water feature but does not want the public driving on that road.

Tamara Hawthorne is the Elko District BLM, Wells Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner. She described how the Wells Resource Management Plan will be updated to manage recreation in the Spruce Mountain Area. Public scoping meetings will begin in August. A working group including members of the public will be created to look at plans and address concerns brought up in the meetings. A draft Environment Assessment will be prepared followed by more public meetings, before a final decision is made.

Such a process is always tedious and often contentious but the Spruce Mountain Extensive Recreation Management Area will provide enjoyment for Elko County for years to come.

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