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# The Salt Lake Tribune

TUESDAY, September 9, 2008

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## Open invitation: BLM Monticello plan invites destruction of relics

Tribune Editorial

Article Last Updated: 09/08/2008 06:49:19 PM MDT

The Bureau of Land Management under the Bush administration is trying to make a clean sweep of it before President Bush leaves office, issuing management plans for Utah public lands that favor all-terrain vehicles and energy development over wildlife, water, scenic beauty and archaeological treasures.

Ancient Anasazi ruins in the Monticello area - 1.8 million acres in San Juan and Grand counties - would be especially hard-hit, and could even be destroyed by the BLM plan for that area.

The agency wants to swap the current designation of "areas of critical environmental concern" that now protect Cedar Mesa, Dark Canyon and Butler Wash for a new label: "special recreation-management areas." The change would invite more ATV riders, along with more hikers and cyclists, some of whom are environmentally conscious and others who behave irresponsibly, even criminally.

The BLM says it can better enforce rules prohibiting human contact with the remains of Anasazi dwellings and relics under the new designation. That's ludicrous. The BLM has one enforcement officer for the entire Monticello region. Inviting more visitors and making it easier for looters and vandals to find the ruins, without beefing up enforcement, sounds a death knell for these archaeological treasures.

The BLM seems oblivious to the value and unique nature of these ruins. In its single-minded focus on opening up all public lands - even those that are

home to irreplaceable artifacts - to motorized recreation and development, it is willing to sacrifice other values that are important to Americans.

The agency insists it can educate visitors about the fragility of the ruins while allowing them free rein to run roughshod over the area. Nonsense.

Education is vital, but it must be accompanied by strict rules to protect what cannot be replaced and some better means of enforcement than what now exists.

The proposed rules allowing people access to nearly all parts of these areas is an open invitation to looters, vandals and ATVs who only want to

leave their mark or take souvenirs and care little about the land and its cultural history.

If this plan is adopted, the next Congress and president should act immediately to reverse it.

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