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BLM starts to plan Table Mesa Recreation Area

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Babs Sanders and Bob Cothorn of Black Canyon City mark their concerns on a map at the recent BLM Table Mesa Recreation Plan meeting in Anthem. BBCCNews/Diana Baker

The Bureau of Land Management has begun the planning process for the Table Mesa Recreation area and wants the public's ideas about usage of the area.

More than 60 citizens attended the informational meeting Nov. 20 at Anthem Community Center.

The Table Mesa Recreation Plan area consists of approximately 8,000 acres on the west side of I-17 beginning south of Table Mesa Road and continuing north to Black Canyon City. It includes the Black Canyon Trail.

In recent years the area has become an ever-increasing public land usage concern. Some target shooters have endangered hikers, equestrians and OHV users. Some OHV users have cut wildcat roads through the desert or travel illegally cross-country.

The large amount of trash left behind has resulted in several volunteer cleanups of the area in recent years. Signs erected by the BLM are immediately shot up or disappear.

"This is a complicated area," said Steve Cohn, BLM Hassayampa Field Office Manager. "There are so many different issues and the BLM is entrusted to manage all aspects of the public lands.

"Unlike the Resource Management Plan that BLM recently released after a seven-year process, this plan is different. We want you the users and stakeholders of the land to shape the plan. The goal is to have a finalized Recreation Activity Plan/Travel Management Plan and Environmental Assessment completed by March 2009."

Users from all areas of concern attended the meeting, including some representatives of OHV and target shooting clubs and individuals concerned about horseback riding, hiking, mountain biking, mining and gold panning, ranching, rock crawling, hunting and cultural issues.

Everyone agreed that motorized and non-motorized trails need to be separate and that target shooting should be segregated to avoid endangering other public land users.

Other suggestions included: larger parking areas, more facilities, dumpsters, helicopter landing zone, more cell towers, more signage, more law enforcement and a fee station. Everyone agreed there should be no pavement and no lights.

Some users want the area left just as it is - "more facilities mean more people:" "We give up another freedom with a fee booth to go on our public land;" "Since funding is an issue for BLM - don't build - then you don't have to fund." "Why are OHV's allowed in the riparian riverbed area south of Black Canyon City at all?"

Kelly Porter of Bumble Bee Ranch expressed concern that development of the Table Mesa area will just send more people up to the Bumble Bee area.

Cohn said that the Bumble Bee area will be in the future recreational planning also.

"The BLM will listen to what the stakeholders want," Cohn said. "Maybe someday there will be a Friends of Table Mesa also."

Comment cards were available at the meeting or can be obtained at the BLM Phoenix District Office, 21605 N. 7th Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85027.

Those concerned may also email comments to Tom Bickauskas, Project Manager @ AZ_PDO_Routes@BLM.gov or contact Tom at 623-580-5502. The BLM would like all comment cards received by December 20.

Additionally information on the Table Mesa Recreation Plan can be found at the website www.az.blm.gov.

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