

December 31, 2007

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Dear Bureau of Land Management Personnel:

I have lived on Quartz Creek Road in Merlin, Oregon, since January of 1973, when I bought my property. Over the years, I have watched the beautiful and serene nature of my area become damaged by the actions of individuals who do not live here and who do not respect or acknowledge the integrity of the land or the welfare of the people who call it home. The individuals I am referring to are, namely, irresponsible operators of off-highway vehicles.

It is understandable, then, that I am very concerned about the Bureau of Land Management's long-range plan for OHVs in the Quartz Creek area. As noted in a December 15, 2007 article in the *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, "sales of all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles has [sic] skyrocketed" Sean Holtzclaw, owner of Oregon's Best Motorsports in Grants Pass goes on to say, "His and his customers' favorite spot to ride is Quartz Creek west of Merlin, one of the 13 proposed [BLM emphasis] areas ..." and that it is not unusual "to find at least 40 parked vehicles at various staging areas" (6A). I would like to add that such staging areas often are littered with beer cans, food wrappers, cigarette butts, and other refuse.

I must admit that my heart sank when I saw the color photograph accompanying the aforementioned article. It is no wonder Mr. Holtzclaw and others see Quartz Creek as their "favorite" off-roading spot, and I am sure many who have not been here will come now. The motorcyclist and four-wheeler depicted in the photo are riding along a trail overhung with firs and pines, a lovely forest setting that anyone would want to experience. Looking at the picture, one would think that Quartz Creek is an unpopulated sports enthusiast's dream, but it is a community, a neighborhood, made up of private and BLM land and populated by individuals who built homes and raised families, who are still raising families, and who want to hold onto the beauty and sense of peace that brought them here.

My neighbors and I no longer hike or ride horses up Quartz Creek to old logging roads as we did in the past. Target practice is a secondary sport for some off-road vehicle operators, an unnerving and potentially dangerous situation for walkers or riders. Also, it is terribly depressing to see how the already fragile banks of Quartz Creek have become more and more compromised because of all-terrain vehicles.

Traffic along Quartz Creek Road is another hazard for those of us who live along it. Careless drivers carrying their OHVs in the beds of their trucks or those pulling trailers tend to drive in the center of the road, even around corners, and at accelerated speeds. Two weeks ago, I barely avoided being hit by a pickup truck loaded with two motorcycles as I walked to my mailbox.

Please understand that I am not accusing all operators of OHVs of being irresponsible or reckless. I fully realize that there are many responsible individuals who appreciate and respect what the Quartz Creek area offers them, but it is difficult to contend with those who do not. Signs prohibiting off-road vehicles during the peak of the fire season often are ignored, and the threat of wildfires is a serious one. If we are to safeguard our homes and property from such fires, it is crucial that additional risks be avoided.

The negative impact of the BLM's proposal to turn Quartz Creek into one of its off-highway "emphasis areas" cannot be ignored. The threats of continued and heightened erosion damage and pollution of Quartz Creek are compelling ones, as are the growing problems with fire danger, traffic, noise, and litter, not to mention the decreased property values that would result from this plan. From my perspective, it is difficult to see how the BLM will be able to "manage" off-road use in the Quartz Creek area so that the safety of the people who live here will be secure and the integrity of the land protected.

When I speak with neighbors about the BLM's long-range off-roading plan, it is discouraging to hear the defeat and hopelessness in their voices. They feel that there is nothing they can do to avert what would be a devastating plan for our community, a plan that seems fraught with indifference for our welfare and that would forever alter what remains of the quality of life we sought when we moved here. It is not apathy that prevents my neighbors from making their opinions and concerns known, rather it is the belief that the BLM will prevail "no matter what." I suppose I refuse to resign myself to accepting a plan of action that I think is ill-advised and that will be detrimental to all who are involved.

In closing, I ask that you consider how you would feel if an off-road emphasis area were designated for your backyard.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeannette Cappella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

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