

# LETTERS

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## ***Why brag about breaking ORV rules intended to protect wildlife habitat?***

*Dear Editor,*

I just could not resist answering the letter from Steve Justham in last week's (June 12) *Tribune* re. ORV riding.

Mr. Justham should already know why ORV/ATV/UTV use has been excluded from the proposed recreational uses in the Teanaway Community Forest. In short, *Too Many Violators!* He even admitted riding in the "now called Teanaway Community Forest for over 35 years....nothing in the last 40 years has stopped us ORV users from riding in this area". Well, somehow he avoided bumping into me out there - or, maybe he's one of the yahoos that ran when they saw me coming. I wonder why someone would brag about breaking the rules and then want to be included in future plans?

During the past 35-40 years, prior to the State taking over management of the Teanaway, the land was privately owned by Boise Cascade, then US Timberlands - American Forest Land Company. During that private ownership ORVs (non-street legal vehicles) were never allowed on the land, not to mention the County roads. You see, I also have a long history here as the Upper County Game Warden for 26 years. When I transferred here in 1985 the ORV problem was rampant. Burlington Northern - Plum Creek Timber Company was so fed up with the problems in the Bullfrog, slag piles, and Cle Elum Ridge, that they worked with Kittitas County Sheriff's Office and the Prosecutor's Office to prohibit 2, 3, and 4 wheeled ORVs from their lands.

At some point in the early 90's the Department of Wildlife instituted the "Green Dot Road Management Plan" on the Wildlife Areas. Under this program motor vehicles, including non-street legal ORVs, were allowed to ride on roads marked with green dots. All motor vehicles were prohibited from roads and trails without green dots. This was done to protect wildlife habitat from the devastation of off road vehicle travel. It did not work and is still not working due to serious lack of respect for rules. Mr. Justham may know of the "Tank Meadow" area on the LT Murray Wildlife Area, near Sky Meadows development. This once-beautiful hillside meadow, meant to be wildlife habitat, is nothing but an ugly eyesore; cut to shreds by illegal ORV trails. I lost track of how many tickets we Fish & Wildlife Officers wrote to people violating the ORV and Green Dot rules in that area. I had many a wild chase, too, with people trying to get away. I remember one guy who took off and crashed. After the hospital released him he went to jail for "felony eluding a law enforcement officer."

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Back to the Teanaway. Two former employees of the timber companies, Jim Taasevigen, Boise Cascade, and Gene McDonald, AFLC, and I used to patrol the closed roads in an effort to control the illegal ORV traffic. Simply put: the landowners *Did Not Want* ORVs, or other vehicles, using their roads - their land, their rules. The Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) worked out a road management agreement with Boise, and later AFLC. The companies would designate closed roads, all of which were closed to ORVs, and WDFW (mainly me) would enforce the rules. Road management agreements with WDFW were intended for the main purpose of protecting wildlife and their habitats. A huge amount of my time working the Teanaway was spent catching and citing illegal ORV users. Also, I blocked hundreds of illegal trails and posted thousands of signs. Everyone knew better, how could they not? That's why they ran. Possibly Mr. Justham had the pleasure of meeting me out there, or maybe racing away from me. Maybe not. It seems the odds, over that many years of getting away with it, would have caught up with him.

Regarding the ORV/ATV/UTV's on County roads issue, I feel it will be a big mistake. There will be people riding on the roads that just can't help themselves and they will cause problems. Those vehicles just were not built for on-road use. Regarding ORV use on Forest Service lands - the Cle Elum Ranger District has many miles of great trails for two-wheeled ORVs. The Sasse Mountain trail system is great. But, driving up through that area I've seen illegal activity everywhere, hillsides cut up, obviously closed (gated/bermed) roads heavily used, non-street legal ORV/ATVs on, and off, the public roads, shortcuts on hillsides. The riders who want to be able to use the Teanaway have a terrible track record and need to do a better job of policing their ranks before being considered credible.

In a perfect world, eh?

*Sincerely,*

**Steve Rogers** - retired Fish & Wildlife Officer