



Ride with Respect
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Another year, and another couple-thousand hours of trail work is done by Ride with Respect (RwR).

Frankly, keeping public lands accessible and healthy can feel like beating your head against a rock in the trail. Sometimes the trick is to find the right tool, be it a pry bar or jackhammer. Other times it's best to go around the rock, or even go over it as a feature to meet the objective of a challenging trail. With the right set of objectives and methods in place, enhancing off-highway vehicle recreation becomes a simple matter of chipping away at it.

Perhaps the most effective way to chip in for Moab's motorcycle and ATV trails is through RwR. If you have yet to contribute in 2015, there's still time left to send your tax-deductible donation to Ride with Respect at 395 McGill Ave, Moab, UT 84532.

Fortunately, this year a hundred individuals have contributed their time or money to RwR, along with continued major support from Grand County, Utah State Parks, Colorado Trails Preservation Alliance, and Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative. New to this list in 2015 is the Rocky Mountain Adventure Riders who hosted their first Moab Rendezvous to raise \$10,000 for RwR.

After a bustling tourist season wound down this fall, several local businesses pitched in on the trail (see photo's). With their help, the top three areas that RwR focused on this year are highlighted below.

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SOVEREIGN TRAIL

Up to fifteen years of heavy use have taken their toll on parts of Sovereign Trail System. Through resources like the National OHV Conservation Council, we have learned how to make Sovereign more durable by realigning the trail, installing armored rolling dips, and merely marking the problem spots along with directions to bypass them.

Camping has become quite common in the area, and it calls for closer management. RwR's first step has been to define the boundaries of a camping zone along Willow Spring, Dalton Well, and Klondike Bluffs roads. Before designating the sites within that zone, we are developing a long-term vision for camping with SITLA and Utah's division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands.

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WHITE WASH

RwR improved several trails from White Wash all the way down to Dubinky Wash, where SITLA designated a singletrack and doubletrack as open for better connectivity and diversity of routes. For a new kiosk at White Wash, RwR drafted the text, map, and images for BLM to effectively reach an OHV audience. The text promotes a trail ethic through RwR's motto of caution, consideration, and conservation.

The largest project was at Cow Freckles Trail, where BLM provided the planning and even some of the physical labor to reroute the trail's midpoint away from a riparian area. Granted, the spring crossing was a highlight for motorcyclists, but it's also a scarce watering hole for many creatures, including bighorn sheep. The new route makes it easier to defend motorcycle access, and it lengthens the trail by a half-mile of rolling slickrock.

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ABAJO MOUNTAINS

Similar to the White Wash area, in the mountains RwR focused on rerouting Red Ledges Access Trail, this time to reduce the erosion caused by a steep grade. The USFS provided the planning as well as one week from an outstanding youth-corps crew called American Conservation Experience. On a rocky, rooty slope at over 9,000 feet of elevation, RwR spent several-hundred hours digging the new bench with a gentle grade and many undulations for rain to drain. The new route should still be fun for expert motorcyclists, while becoming a lot more manageable for intermediate riders as well as all kinds of non-motorized use.

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ADVOCACY

RwR developed presentations to the Grand County Council so it could propose a balanced package to representative Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz as part of the Eastern Utah Public Lands Initiative (EUPLI). In contrast to the top-down approach of a Greater Canyonlands National Monument, EUPLI asked each county for ways to protect natural resources, recreation opportunities, and economic developments that might be appropriate on public lands. The previous county council generated a set of reasonable alternatives in 2014, but RwR also supports the current council's proposal as the basis for legislation which could resolve some persistent controversies.

San Juan County generated a similar proposal for EUPLI. The 2015 proposal, as well as all three of the 2014 alternatives, would designate roughly one million acres as wilderness or national conservation area, including Cedar Mesa and the Abajos' southwest flank, which are full of precious archaeological sites. Despite these protections, a coalition including the region's Native American tribes have asked the president to proclaim a Bears Ears National Monument of roughly two million acres. The monument boundary would stretch from the area south of Moab down to Mexican Hat, then over to Lake Powell, and back up.

It encompasses hundreds of OHV trails, including all motorized singletrack and ATV trails on the Abajos' northeast peaks. In addition to Red Ledges Access Trail, RWR has spent 1,000 hours rerouting Robertson Pasture Trail, which is now the highlight of an annual mountain bike race. Trails like Red Ledges and Robertson Pasture would be closed to motorcycling by the Bears Ears proposal, which states, "Motorized vehicle use should be permitted only on designated roads." What about mountain biking? The Bears Ears proposal doesn't indicate what areas would be designated as wilderness, but Bears Ears is the successor of a proposal from the Utah Dine Bikeyah. A Utah Dine Bikeyah map clearly proposes the vast majority of its Bears Ears predecessor to be designated as wilderness, including Robertson Pasture and Red Ledges.

Why would a Native American group propose such a widespread ban on things like mountain bikes, chainsaws, and even hand carts that help hunters harvest their elk? For the past several years, organizations seeking to vastly expand wilderness have pumped millions of dollars into Native American education programs, and their investments appear to be paying off. The Bears Ears proposal only mentions such organizations by stating that, "Two major foundations have advised us that they have strong philanthropic interest in Bears Ears and will provide substantial funding for Tribal planning and management at the proposed Bears Ears National Monument." The proposal goes on to state that, while these foundations would fund the initial planning, the long-term tribal management should be paid for by the federal government.

Although these funding ties to wilderness expansion raise monumental red flags, that's not to deny the merit of Native American input to protect the artifacts of their ancestors. This is the sort of complexity that the EUPLI is attempting to address. There's never been a greater need for comprehensive legislation, or for responsible recreationists to stay involved. A Bears Ears or Greater Canyonlands monument would likely close Red Ledges, Robertson Pasture, and many other trails. Regardless of monument threats or legislative promise, RWR's work puts trails in better shape, and puts trail enthusiasts in better shape to promote their continued use.

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With the tools of trail work, education, and advocacy, RWR is chipping away to improve the condition of public lands. Each chip may be small, but it's adding up to a positive impact across the Moab landscape. Of the many people who visit, relatively few give back. To those proud few, we thank you for keeping RWR going strong.

Clif Koontz,
executive director

2015



Dale from Elite Motor-cycle Tours adds wings to cattle guard on Cow Freckles Trail.

Burke from Moab Moto Tours re-routes Red Ledges Access Trail.

Molly from Moab Adventure Center re-routes Red Ledges Access Trail.

Scott from Step Hideaway marks a 4WD trail west of Dubinky Well.

Jeff from Moab Friends For Wheelin' scouts with a bike provided by Moab Tour Company.

Miles from BLM clears a 4WD trail east of Dubinky Well.

Chris from Paradox Pizza patrols Sovereign Trail via sponsorship from Rocky Mountain ATV/MC.

