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To the State of California OHV Grants Program:

Subject: Public Comment to Baldy/Mesa OHV Grant Requests

I write this letter as public comments and objections to some of the answers provided in to the OHV grant questionnaire for the below individual grant requests.

A. USFS Application for Trails/Staging Area Development

1. Response to Question #5 - Publicly Reviewed Plan

This answer is false and no points should be awarded. As has been very well documented, the USFS has been anything but transparent in planning and attempting to implement this plan. They have ignored all public input, including a petition signed by over 1,200 local residents. They dismissed all the concerns raised during the appeal period. They held secret meetings about the project and made very minimal outreach efforts to involve the community, all in an apparent effort to bring this project in "under the radar" of the local community. Regarding the very important historic Sanford/Mormon trail, the USFS has not consulted with any local, regional or national historians regarding their plan to bisect and isolate the trail with an OHV track. The documents referenced in the USFS response are self serving and conclusory, as has been previously documented by many who have voiced their objections to the project as planned.

2. Response to Question. # 9 – Motorized Access

This answer is false and no points should be awarded. The community's main concern is that the project **does not** provide access for non-OHV opportunities. No one is going to ride an OHV to go hiking, hunting or to ride a horse. This answer is absurd.

3. Response to Questions #10 – Public Input

This answer is obviously false and no points should be awarded. The record speaks for itself here. There was and is no real public input. ***The FS has continued to attempt to force this project through in an attempt to access state OHV funds,*** regardless of the impact on the community, habitat, environments and cultural resources.

4. Response to Question #11 – Partnerships

This answer is misleading at best and points should be reduced. There are no partnerships with any stakeholders to the project. The entities listed either have not been involved with the project or are beholdng to the USFS.

5. Response to Question #13 – Offsite Impacts

This answer is obviously false and no points should be awarded. The record speaks for itself as to the extensive documentation regarding the multiple offsite (as well as on-site) negative impacts of the project. The statement that "sound, fugitive dust and runoff are expected to be substantially reduced" has no basis in fact. The opposite will obviously occur with increased OHV use.

B. USFS General Application Requirements

1. Response to Question #7a – Prevention of OHV trespass

The application *admits that there will not be fencing* to prevent trespass into or from neighboring properties. This is a huge problem that the FS is well aware of and is well documented. *This is contrary to what the FS has advised some local residents recently. No wonder the local community is so distrustful of the FS*, they say one thing but are actually planning another.

2. Response to Question #7b – Prevention of OHV trespass

As written, this answer is false. There are virtually no patrols currently by the FS, which is why we have such a huge problem with illegal OHV use, illegal user-created trails and trespass of neighboring lands. The answer is written as if these patrols already exist, but they do not. *If they are planned as part of the project, there should be an ironclad written agreement as to what will be provided.* Otherwise, the FS will likely not follow through and this is all just fluff for the grant process. There should be no points awarded until this is clarified.

3. Response to Question #7c – Prevention of OHV trespass

No points should be awarded for this response because occasional barriers and so called "education programs" will not prevent OHV trespass from neighboring county and private lands *because those lands are immediately adjacent to the proposed OHV track.* There will be those (perhaps many) who will refuse to "go around the long way" to the dedicated staging area and will simply access the track wherever they can, endangering themselves and local residents. *This is one of the basic problems with this plan – it is too close to residential areas.*

C. USFS Ground Operations

1. Response to Question #2 – Failure to Complete

This answer is mostly false (OHV opportunity excepted) and points should be greatly reduced. It is obvious and well documented that the project will have a negative impact to cultural sites such as the Sanford/Mormon trail, increase trespass of adjacent public and private property, and the increased OHV use will harm the local species and other sensitive habitat.

Note- The FS states that ***"Failure to mitigate these impacts could result in temporary or permanent closures per the Forest Land Management Plan and its monitoring protocol."***

I suggest that if the FS can not, or simply refuses, to properly manage these public lands they ***should be temporarily closed*** until such time as the FS come up with a better plan than this ill-advised, poorly planned and obviously detrimental "money grab" of state OHV funds. The "secret" is no secret. ***It's just about the state OHV money, pure and simple.*** The OHV enthusiasts I have spoken to admit that the proposed course is not attractive from their perspective. At best, it is a short beginner's course. As such, it will invite going off-trail and creating illegal user-created trails. It seems to be a recipe for conflict, danger and disaster. The FS needs to come up with a plan that is attractive to both the OHV and the non-OHV community. This plan does neither.

2. Response to Question #2 – Public Input

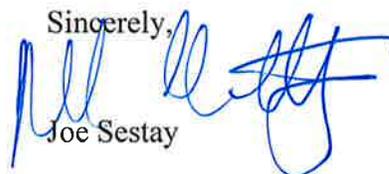
No points should be awarded. As has been well documented, the FS has gone out of its way to make this process as obscure and opaque as possible, holding secret meetings and/or not publicizing those meetings that were open to the public.

3. Response to Question #6 – Natural and Cultural Resources

This response is obviously untrue and no points should be awarded. First, there are no "riparian/wetlands areas" here – this is a desert. Nor are there any "alternatives to wet crossings." What "wet crossings" is the FS talking about? We all know that the project will not protect cultural sites and the local species will be negatively impacted by the increased OHV use.

4. Response to Question #8 – Motorized access

This response seems divorced from reality and no points should be awarded. First, there is no fishing, birding or rock climbing in this desert. Second, we were told by Gabe Garcia of the FS that camping was not allowed because of the fire danger. As to hiking and equestrian, the opposite is true, hence the fierce opposition by local equestrians, hikers and other non-OHV users

Sincerely,

Joe Sestay