

Recreation forum draws two dozen residents

RISHI DAULAT Free Press Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, November 8, 2010 7:49 am

ELKO — Prohibition of riding ATVs cross country on public lands in Elko County by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. National Forest Service was a contentious issue at the Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group's recreation forum on Thursday night at the Elko Convention Center.

The concern was brought up by Randy Brown, Elko County natural resource manager, who specifically asked, "Does the BLM and U.S. Forest Service plan to close public lands to ATV use anytime a police (officer) catches someone destroying land and cites them? I understand that there are 10 percent of people who do destroy the land on their ATVs but the other 90 percent of the people who are good stewards shouldn't be punished for that 10 percent."

Gar Abbas of the U.S. Forest Service was the only one to address Brown's question and he said, "It's an impossible balance and we are always going to please some and not please others. We have programs available to teach people about proper riding. From what I know, we haven't ticketed anybody in Elko County for off-road travel in a couple years."

The panel consisted of eight representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Nevada Department of Wildlife, South Fork Recreation Area, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Elko County.

Along with the prohibition of cross country ATV-ing, the topics of questions included access to the Ruby Mountains, climbing and hiking on unmarked trails, keeping fossils/arrowheads found on public land and the noxious weed problem.

Most questions were directed at the Forest Service. Ruby Mountains and Jarbidge district ranger Abbas did his best to answer audience members.

"I was glad to be able to address the public's concerns," Abbas said. "I just felt bad for some of the agencies because they drove a long way to be part of the forum panel but didn't have many questions to answer."

Steve Lewis, an extension educator in Douglas County, facilitated the forum. Though the audience had plenty of questions and concerns for the panel in the first hour, Lewis did ask primer questions to the panel for the last half hour of the meeting. About 25 people showed up for the forum. The Stewardship group plans to host three recreation forums per year starting next year.