



New city restrictions stop all uses on Friday

Heavy Penalties for Hogbacks Trespass

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Fines up to \$500 and up to six months in county jail await those who ignore the impending closure of the Hogbacks.

Starting Friday, the 563-acre area just east of Skyline Drive is off limits to all uses – from hiking to motorized vehicles – the result of a moratorium by Cañon City Council earlier this month.

Anyone caught on the property will face charges of third-degree criminal trespassing, which by state statute is a Class 1 petty offense with a maximum penalty of up to six months in county jail and a \$500 fine.

In preparation of the closure, about 500 feet of six-foot tall chain link fencing is being erected on Floral Avenue near the exit of Skyline Drive. The city also is working on appropriate signage to inform the public of the closure.

"I think word has gotten out there to our various user groups," City Administrator Steve Rabe said. "By the end of July, I don't think there will be anyone surprised."

Cañon City Police Chief Dan Shull said his department will give written warning to those found trespassing the first week, but after that, everyone found on the property will face the legal consequences.

"We purchased two motorcycles three months ago," Shull said. "These are dirt bikes that can be taken on-road and off-road. We can enforce the Hogbacks trespassing, plus put our guys on highways and in city parks."

Shull said two patrol officers underwent off-road motorcycle training earlier this week. The motorcycles were retrofitted with appropriate equipment, including handlebar protection and emergency lights.

"They'll be pretty visible," Shull said.

Rabe said the city has contacted the few private landowners left in the area to obtain written support of the trespassing enforcement.

"We're trying to get that to be seamless for us," Rabe said, so when trespassing cases go through the county court system, all appropriate permission is in place.

"This is not just against motorized usage," Rabe said. "There will be no hiking, sightseeing, dog walking or bird sighting." However, he urged residents enjoy to Skyline Drive by driving, biking or walking the road from the west entrance to the east exit.

"We're trying to educate as many people as we can," Shull said. "We'll put our officers up there as often as we can and work it heavily. My hope is that people will take this to heart and not create a problem."

With the new fencing and signs in place, Rabe said the area will be clearly marked as off limits.

"I think people will have to be really confused to not know they can't be there," Rabe said.

The closure of the Hogbacks is intended to be temporary. City Council is formulating language to put a ballot issue before voters this November to allow the area to be used as open space use. Following months of work, a council committee recommended to ask voters for such approval, as required by the City Charter.

The measure will not seek additional funding from the taxpayers; instead, improvements and amenities will depend on grants and other funding sources. However, if voters deny the open space use, the closure automatically will become permanent.

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